

Some remarks on composition and meaning of Jb 38:39–39:30

There is no more intense dramatic moment in the book of Job than that signaled by the words «Then, Yhwh answered Job out of the whirlwind» (Jb 38:1).¹ Job has both sought and, more than all dreaded this specific confrontation with God (9:14-20.32-35; 13:3.15-24; 23:3-7.15-17; 31:35-37). In several chapters, his words have strongly exposed the inadequacies of the traditional «consolations of religion» articulated by the friends (3–27; 29–31). Job characterized God as unjust, capricious, and savagely violent (9:17-20.24; 10:4-7.16-17). However, he has always refused to completely abandon his belief that God will ultimately turn out to be a God of justice who acknowledges Job's claim of innocence (16:18-22; 19:25-27; 31:35).

Unexpectedly, God's answer comes as a complete overturning of these expectations and, in a certain sense, a frustration of the desire for an explicit reply to Job's own words. Yhwh's defense seems to operate from the assumption that Job is innocent but ignorant («Do you know...?» 38:4-5.18.21.33; 39:1.2). The formal relationship between Job and Yhwh, in this context, apparently is not primarily that of Creator and creature but one of adversary and accuser. God as the adversary at law (31:35) seems to assume the offensive in his defense against Job's accusations (38:2-3; 40:2). Rather than indulging Job's obsession with his own integrity, he seems to force Job to come to terms with God's integrity as Creator of a complex world.²

Many scholars recognized that God's frustration of expectations is strategic. Some inclusively defend that the very obliqueness of the speeches is part of the way they function as an answer, coming to strikingly different conclusions about the meaning of the divine speeches and thus the nature of that reorientation.³ Recently, other authors launch other possibilities of reading, focused on the beauty of such literary structures and their imagery.⁴ These scholars suggest that the divine speeches are not primarily about the bullying power of God but about

¹ See C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections», *The New Interpreter's Bible*, IV (Nashville, TN 1996) 595.

² See E. GOOD, *In Turns of the Tempest: A Reading of Job with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); D. PENCHANSKY, *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990); J.A. CLINES, «Deconstruction the Book of Job», in *What Does Eve DO to Help? And other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield 1990) 118.

³ See N. HABEL, *The Book of Job* (London 1985) 517-574.

⁴ See C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job», 605-612; C. L. PATTON, «The Beauty of of the Beast: leviathan and Behemoth in light of Catholic Theology (paper presented to the Old Testament Biblical Colloquium, Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri, February 1999); E. SCARRY, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1999); K.M. O'CONNOR, «Wild, Raging Creativity. The Scene in the Wirlwind (Jb 38–41)», in *A God So Near*, FS P.D. Miller (eds. B.A. STROWN – N.R. BOWEN) (Eisnbrauns, Winona Lake, IN 2003).

the potent beauty of God's creation and even of the human being himself (as Job).

Personally, I defend that a study of the composition of these speeches is required to affirm or to develop these positions. Since these speeches formed a text of three long chapters, I decided to begin studying the composition of some units. From Jb 38:39 the challenging questions of Yhwh turn from the cosmological universe to the animal kingdom, bringing together different aspects of this hidden wisdom in creatures of the wild.⁵ The present work focuses its attention on the composition of the unit 38:39–39:30, which I consider a «sequence».

The LION and the RAVEN wait	to find a prey for their young	38:39-41
The time of the MOUNTAIN-GOATS and the DEER giving birth		39:1-4
The freedom of the WILD-ASS , the WILD-DONKEY and the WILD-OX		39:5-12
The wing of the OSTRICHES or the pinion of the STORK cannot rejoice		39:13-18
The HORSE does not fear the war		39:19-25
The FALCON and the EAGLE move higher	to find a prey for their young	39:26-30

The sequence begins with a passage (38:39-41) centered on the image of concern the Lion and the Raven have to find a prey for their young, and proceeds with two sub-sequences (39:1-12; 39:13-25). The first sub-sequence (39:1-12) is composed of two passages (1-4; 5-12). The first passage (1-4) brings up two other animals (the Mountain-goat and the Deer) suggesting Job's incapability to know the time of their giving birth, and the second (5-12) presents three wild animals (Wild-ass, Wild-donkey, Wild-ox) to underline God's power to give them space and freedom. The second sub-sequence (39:13-25) is also composed of two passages (13-18; 19-25) that confront Job with two opposed and complementary aspects of nature. In the first passage (13-18) Job is

⁵ For other authors that share this division of the Divine speeches, see N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 527; J.E. MILLER, «Structure and Meaning of the Animal Discourse in the Theophany of Job (38,39–39,30)», *ZAW* 103 (1991) 418-421; C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job», 605-612.

confounded by the foolish behavior of the Ostrich, explicitly qualified as deprived of wisdom (13-18) and in the second passage Job is challenged with the conduct of the Horse, that full of might and majesty does not fear war and death (19-25). The sequence ends with a passage also focused on other two animals (Falcon and the Eagle) and on their ability to find a prey for their young (39:26-30).

1. THE LION AND THE RAVEN WAIT (38:39-41)

This passage is composed of a part with a single piece of two bimember segments (39-40) and one trimember (41). God takes the word to challenge Job to demonstrate his capacity to supply the nutritional needs of wild creatures.⁶

+ ³⁹ hātāšûd	L ^F LABÎ'	tārep
– w ^e ḥayyat	k ^e pîrîm	t ^e mallē'
– ⁴⁰ kî-yāšōḥû	bamm ^e	‘ônôt
: yēšbû	bassukkâ	l ^e mô-'āreb
+ ⁴¹ mî yākîn	LĀ'ŌRĒB	šêdô
– kî-y ^e lādāyw	'el	y ^e šawwē'û
: yit'û	liblî-'ōkel	

+ ³⁹ Can you hunt	for the LION	prey
– or (with) living	the whelps	fill?
– ⁴⁰ When they crouch	in dwellings,	
: waiting	eagerly	in their lair?
+ ⁴¹ Who prepares	for the RAVEN	his provision
– when its fledglings	to God	cry out
: wandering	without food?	

The author opens the sequence with a direct challenge to Job given by the use of the Hebrew interrogative form *hā* attached to the second masculine singular form verb *šwd* («can-you-hunt» *hātāšûd*). The first pair of animals to be introduced is the lion and the raven. The first two segments (39-40) fix attention on the lion, as a wild animal known for its vigor and ability to survive by itself. The third segment (40) introduces the raven; a big black bird that cannot be seen from a distance. Contrary to the lion, the raven can be easily tamed, despite being mischievous and sly and regarded as a bird of evil and mysterious character. The mention to these two different animals places a parallel between the lion and the raven as vigorous and astute animals that ultimately, in their fragility, can only depend on God for their surviving. Job is incapable to hunt

⁶ This aspect acquires special relevance if we remember Job's accusation of God's relentlessly hunting him down like a lion (10,16); or Job's bitter complaint that God did not even acknowledge his cry for litigation (19,7).

them. Posing this argument, the author seems to suggest that the motif of divine providence for wild animals has its implied counterpart in God's concern for life that Job is incapable of sharing.

2. SECRECY OF TIMES AND FREEDOM (39:1-12)

Then, the author concentrates his attention on two important aspects of God's governance of wild creatures. These two aspects are clearly settled on the two passages that formed a sub-sequence: the first passage (1-4) that focuses on God's singular knowledge to know the times (5-12), and the second on a unique power to give freedom (5-8).

2.1 THE TIME OF THE MOUNTAIN-GOATS AND THE DEER GIVING BIRTH (39:1-4)

The first passage is formed of one part with two pieces (1-3; 4). Both pieces seem to suggest God's singular capacity to know a particular time: the time of giving birth.

+ ¹ hāyāda'tā :: ḥōlēl	'ēṭ 'AYYĀLŌṬ	ledet tišmōr	YA'ĀLĒ-SĀLA'
:: ² tišpōr + w ^e yāda'tā	y ^e rāḥīm 'ēṭ	t ^e malle'nā lidtānā	
- ³ tikra'nā - ḥēblēhem	yaldēhen t ^e šallahnā	t ^e pallahnā	

.. ⁴ yaḥl ^e mū .. yāṣ'ū	b ^e nēhem w ^e lō'-šābū	yirbū lāmō	babbār

+ ¹ Do you know :: The writhe	the time of THE DEER	of giving birth have you observed?	THE MOUNTAIN-GOATS?
:: ² Have you counted + Do you know	the months the time	of their pregnancy? of their giving birth?	
- ³ When they crouch - their pain,	their young they get rid of.	to deliver	

.. ⁴ Are healthy .. go out	their young, and not come back	grow strong to them.	with corn

The author introduces two more pairs of animals (1-3): the mountain-goat and the deer. In contrast with the first pair introduced in the first passage of the sequence (the lion and the raven 38:39-40), these two animals are known as shy and elusive creatures of the mountains. The author repeats the verb «to know» (*yḏ'*) in the first two segments (1-2), directing his words to an understanding that should include a knowledge. A special pattern of procreation is well established

that is hidden from humans. Only God, as their unseen midwife, tends to the needs of some animals during their difficult period of gestation, birth and delivery (3). The two explicit references to the word «time» (‘*ṯi*’) inserts the key motive of this passage, indicating how God’s design knows the time of the most remote and mysterious aspects of wild animals.⁷ The second piece (4) completes this idea of knowing «time», adding the aspect of gratuitousness. These two shy animals give birth, but despite all their efforts, once their young grow they let them go freely, embracing another special «time». Through these images, God seems to call Job to understand the human incapability to control the regular times in the natural cycle of wild nature, of which the time of wild animals giving birth is only an example.

2.2 THE FREEDOM OF THE WILD-ASS, THE WILD-DONKEY AND THE WILD-OX (39:5-12)

The second passage is composed of two parts (5-8; 9-12). The author focuses his attention on the human impossibility to give freedom to or to domesticate the wild animals, suggesting that as a very unique gift God has to give.

First part (39:5-8)

+ ⁵ mî-šillah + ûmōsrôt	PERE’ ‘ĀRÔD	hopšî mî pittē ^a ḥ
: ⁶ ’āšer-šamtî : ūmišk ^e nôtāyw	‘ārābā m ^e lēḥā	bêtô

+ ⁷ yišḥaq : t ^e šû’ôt	lahāmôn nôgēs	qiryâ lō’ yišmā’
+ ⁸ y ^e tûr : w ^e ’aḥar	hārîm kol-yārôq	mir’ēhû yidrôš

+ ⁵ Who gave + and the bonds	the WILD-ASS (of) the WILD-DONKEY,	freedom, who loosed
: ⁶ to whom I gave : and who has as his habitat	the wastelands the salt plain?	as his home,

+ ⁷ He scorns : and the shouts	the turmoil of the taskmaster	of the town, he does not hear.
+ ⁸ He roams : and for	the hills anything green	for his pasture he seeks.

⁷ We can see that in the large section of God’s Speeches (38,1–40,6), the author takes special care to emphasize that God’s design includes a special knowledge of «places» (38,12); «limits» (38,10) and «ways» (38,19-20); see N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 545.

This first part (39:5-8) is composed of two pieces, each with two bimember segments (5-6; 7-8). The first segment (5) sets a parallel between the wild-ass and the wild-donkey as two animals of natural freedom. The emphasis is placed on God as the one who gives freedom to the wild-ass. The second segment (6) continues the theme of freedom, through the image of the impossibility for the human being to loose the bonds of the wild-donkey. However, the suggestion again is that this capacity is something only accessible to God. God is the subject, leaving no doubt of his supremacy in the action of giving. Curiously the author mentions two special places where these animals experience freedom: the «wastelands» (*ʿārābā*) and «salt plain» (*m^elēḥā*); places that apparently and effectively seem to be the most inhospitable places on earth, suggesting that through God's divine providence, these wild animals are able to find sufficient pasture to survive; where domesticated animals would probably die. The second piece (7-8) underlines the freedom in which these animals live. The singular form of the personal pronoun «he» in the two segments suggests that the same attitude can be attributed to both animals (wild-ass and the wild-donkey). Both can laugh at human beings imprisoned in cities; both live free from the orders of taskmasters, wandering as they please and being nourished; a freedom that they enjoy under God's eyes and grace.

Second part (39:9-12)

+ ⁹ ḥāyō'beh : 'im-yālīn	RĒM ʿal-'ābūsekā	ʿobdekā	
+ ¹⁰ ḥātiqšor- : 'im-y ^e šaddēd	RĒM ʿāmāqīm	b ^e telem 'ahārehkā	ʿābōtō

+ ¹¹ ḥātibṭaḥ-bō :: w ^e ta'āzōb	kî-rab 'ēlāyw	kō ḥō y ^e gî'ekā	
+ ¹² ḥāta'āmīn bō :: w ^e gorn ^e kā	kî-yāšūb ye'ēsōp	zar'ekā	

+ ⁹ Is willing : Will he lodge	the WILD-OX beside your manger?	to serve you?	
+ ¹⁰ Can you bind : Will he harrow	the WILD-OX the valleys	with his ropes behind you?	in the furrow?

+ ¹¹ Can you rely :: and leave	on his massive to him	strength, your toil?	
+ ¹² Can you trust him :: and your threshing-floor	to harvest gather?	your seed,	

The second part (39:9-12) is also composed by two pieces, each with two segments (9-10; 11-12). The first segment of the first piece (9) shows a reverse of the theme found in the previous unit (39:5-8), introducing the wild-ox as an animal that human beings can envy because of his glorious freedom. This freedom is now focused on the impossibility this animal has of ever being willing to serve human beings. The second segment (10) continues this idea, affirming that despite all humans' efforts to domesticate him for their own ends, the wild-ox can act or be liberated only by a particular force: God. Surprisingly, the challenge is not if Job has the strength to force the wild ox to serve him, but if he is able to make him willing to serve him submissively, following him across the rough terrain of a valley (10). This challenge reaches the high point of absurdity in the second piece (11-12), when Job is asked if he is able to transform the wild-ox into a reliable servant, able to do the work of his human master: harvest his grain and take it from the threshing floor for storage.⁸

The passage (39:5-12)

⁵ Who gave the **WILD-ASS** freedom, and the bonds (of) the **WILD-DONKEY**, who loosed?

⁶ To whom **I gave** the wastelands as *his* home, and the salt plain as *his* habitat.

⁷ **He** scorns the turmoil of the town, and the shouts of the taskmaster *he* does not hear.

⁸ **He** roams the hills for his pasture, and for anything green **he** seeks.

⁹ Is the **WILD-OX** willing to serve you? Will *he* lodge beside your manger?

¹⁰ Can *you* bind the **WILD-OX** with ropes in the furrow? Will he harrow the valleys behind *you*?

¹¹ Can *you* rely on his massive strength, and leave to *him* your toil?

¹² Can *you* trust him to harvest your seed, and gather your threshing-floor?

The passage (39:5-12) appears at linguistic level united by the reference to the three similar wild animals – wild-ass, wild-donkey and wild-ox – specifying that although living in the wild realm these animals live under a kind of divine providence; the very same providence able to uphold their freedom. In the first part (5-8) this freedom is expressed by the way these wild animals have to be involved in their own survival (5-6) and in their independence (7-8). Despite having «wastelands» as their home and «salt plain» as their habitat they do not complain of this hardness as a cosmological or providential abandonment. Rather, the author makes clear that they even scorn the life in the towns and the shouts of the taskmaster. They learn how to find their pasture, their way to survive. The second part (9-12) specifies that this freedom does not even admit

⁸ This supposed challenge of God to Job of the possibility to domesticate and humanize the wild ox anticipates God's challenge for Job to control Behemoth and Leviathan (Jb 40,15). Some other authors see in the specific use of the verb «to trust» (*'mn*) a certain veiled irony, since Job has asserted that he did not «trust» God, once in court with him, would ever heed his questions (9,16); see N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 545.

any kind of slavery, either animal (9-10) or human (11-12). The emphasis falls on the absolute impossibility of domesticating these wild creatures. The author knows that the hallmark of domestication is the exchange of food for service, yet this is what he evokes as an absurdity. Domestication involves domination (10) and trust (11-12). These categories so evocative of Job's cultural world break down when confronted with the wild-ox. The author seems to desire, through God's words, to confound Job's customary ways of thinking.

2.3 THE SUB-SEQUENCE (39:1-12)

The two passages of the sub-sequence (39,1-12) are centered on two particular dimensions of God: the unique capacity God has to know the times of the natural cycles, even the most hidden and concealed realities (1-4), and the extraordinary way God provided free life to the whole world, here exemplified in the abilities and strength of wild animals (5-12). God challenges Job to face him as a God of knowledge and powerful freedom, completely unreachable to Job. These two dimensions reveal themselves very pertinent as an answer to some words Job has spoken.

¹ Do you *know the time* of the **MOUNTAIN-GOATS** giving birth?
The writhe of the **DEER**, have you observed?
² Have you counted the months of their pregnancy?
Do you know the time of their giving birth?
³ When they crouch to deliver their young, their pain, they get rid of.
⁴ Their young are healthy, grow strong with corn, go out and never come back to them.

⁵ Who *gave the WILD-ASS freedom*, and the bonds (of) the **WILD-DONKEY**, who loosed?
⁶ To whom I gave the wastelands as his home and the salt plain as his habitat?
⁷ He scorns the turmoil of the town, and the shouts of the taskmaster he does not hear.
⁸ He roams the hills for his pasture, and he seeks for anything green.
⁹ Is the **WILD-OX** willing to serve you? Will he lodge beside your manger?
¹⁰ Can you bind the **WILD-OX** with ropes in the furrow? Will he harrow the valleys behind you?
¹¹ Can you rely on his massive strength, and leave to him your toil?
¹² Can you trust him to harvest your seed, and gather your threshing-floor?

Job has accused God of relentlessly hunting (*šwd*) him down like a lion (10:16). He had complained bitterly that God did not even acknowledge his cry (*šw'*) for litigation (19:7). Job had objected that God not only fixes the life span of mortals, but fills that brief period with excessive hardship (7:1-3). To these words, Job receives, as an answer, the certainty of the divine providence even for the wild animals – a certainty that assures the counterpart in God's concern for human life. God's peculiar knowledge implies a very special care for life.

Job had expressed also a certain envy about the freedom the sufferer can expect in the land of the dead, far from the oppressive presence of God (3:17-19), envisaging sheol as a place where the slave is free (*ḥopšī*) of his master, where prisoners (*'sr*) are loosed from imprisoning bonds and no longer hear the voice of the taskmaster (*nogēš*) (7:1-2). Ironically, while Job longs to be free from God, the wild animals' freedom is a freedom from human beings who enslave, not from God (5-8). Maybe, this is why it is possible to see in the laugh of the wild-ass the finger that points to the absurdity and ignorance of Job's words. There is a knowledge and freedom that is a gift from God, manifested in his intangible divine providence. Job is challenged to choose to believe in this gift or to remain in the absurdity of his words.

3. FOOLISHNESS AND IMPRUDENCE (39:13-25)

The second sub-sequence (39:13-25) alternates the theme of God's knowledge and favor with what we may consider an irrational behavior in nature. This subsequence is also composed of two passages (13-18; 19-25) focused on two complementary aspects: to be deprived of wisdom (13-18) or to be full of might and majesty (19-25).

3.1 THE WING OF OSTRICHES OR THE PINION OF THE STORK CANNOT REJOICE (39:13-18)

The first passage (39:13-18) is considered by several authors as a masterpiece of «poignant» poetic writing.⁹ It is composed of one part composed with two pieces (13-15; 16-18). The first piece (13-15), composed of three segments, begins with God's calling Job's attention to the absurdity of expecting the wings of the ostriches or the pinion of the stork to rejoice (13). This absurdity is also emphasized with the mention of the stupid carelessness the ostriches manifest with their eggs, leaving them on the open sand, readily accessible to predators, as if they were of no value to her (14). Job must regard the ostrich as a heartless stupid creature without the natural instinct of other birds. (15). The second piece (15-18) formed also of three segments, continues to develop these arguments. The first segment (16) picks up the theme of the carelessness of the ostriches. The feminine form of the verb *qšh* (*hiqšīah* «she is cruel») explicitly qualifies this carelessness as cruelty. Without explanation, the ways the ostriches behave are portrayed as being deprived of an instinctive wisdom, given by God's design to the natural world (17). It is possible to suspect, here, in the ostriches' lack of natural «discernment» a warning call that God gives to Job not to behave in the same way.¹⁰

⁹ See N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 546.

¹⁰ This mention to Job looks pertinent, since Job had earlier queried the way that God had decreed «portions» of fate from his exalted height above (31,2); a question to which God had replied by asserting that some creatures have no «portion» of wisdom.

+ ¹³ k ^e nap- . 'im-'ebrâ	R^FNĀNĪM HĀSĪDĀ	ne'ēlāsâ w ^e nōṣâ
+ ¹⁴ kî-ta'āzōb . w ^e al-'āpār	lā'āreṣ t ^e ḥammēm	bēṣehhā
+ ¹⁵ wattiškah . w ^e ḥayyat	kî-regel haśśādeh	t ^e zûrehā t ^e dûṣehāz

- ¹⁶ hiqšîḥ .. l ^e rîq	bānehhā y ^e gî'āh	l ^e lō'-lāh b ^e lî-pāhad
- ¹⁷ kî-hiššāh .. w ^e lō'-ḥālaq	'ēlōah lāh	ḥokmâ babbînâ
- ¹⁸ kā'ēt .. tišḥaq	bammārôm lassûs	tamrî' ûl ^e rōkbô

+ ¹³ Can the wing . the pinion	of the OSTRICHS of a STORK	rejoice, or (their) plumage?
+ ¹⁴ When she leaves . and upon dust	on the ground warms (them),	her eggs
+ ¹⁵ forgetting . or a wild	that a foot animal	may tread on it crush it?

- ¹⁶ She is cruel .. as for nothing	to her chicks her labor goes	as if they were not hers, caring little.
- ¹⁷ For has deprived her .. and (gave) no share	God to her	of <i>wisdom</i> in <i>understanding</i> .
- ¹⁸ Yet, when .. she laughs	up on high at horse	she soars, and his rider.

3.2 THE HORSE DOES NOT FEAR THE WAR (39:19-25)

The second passage (39:19-25) is composed of three parts (19-20; 21-23; 24-25). The author now directs his attention to the horse as an animal that suggests a magnificent figure. In the first piece (19-20), God challenges Job's ability to give strength to or cover the neck of a horse with such a flowing-mane (19). This challenge goes on with the images of his jumping or the splendor of his snorting, suggesting a majesty and a strength that only God can give (20).¹¹ The second piece (21-23) underlines the might and strength of the horse adding the detail of

¹¹ The author has already mentioned these images of great might in 12:13; 26:14 and of a terrifying voice in 9:34; 13:21. See the similar images used in the psalms to describe God: Ps 104:1; Hab 3,3.

the way he faces the clash of weapons (21). The third segment (23) completes this development citing some more aspects of the horse's strength.

+ ¹⁹ hāttîṯēn : hāṭalbîš	LASSÛS awwā'rô	g ^e bûrâ ra'mâ	
+ ²⁰ h ^e tar : hôd	'îšennû nahrô	kā'arbeh 'êmâ	

:: ²¹ yahp ^e rû – yēšē'	bā'ēmeq liqra't-nāšeq	w ^e yāšîs	b ^e kōah
:: ²² yišhaq : w ^e lô'yēhāt : w ^e lô'-yāšûb	l ^e pahad mipp ^e nê-	ḥāreb	
:: ²³ 'ālāyw – lahab	tirneh ḥānît	'ašpâ w ^e kîdôn	

+ ²⁴ b ^e ra'aš : w ^e lô'-ya'amîn	w ^e rōgez kî-qôl	y ^e gamme'- šôpār	'āreš
+ ²⁵ b ^e dê : ûmērāhōq : ra'am	šôpār yārîah šārîm	yō'mar milhāmâ ût'rû'â	he'āh

+ ¹⁹ Do you give : and cover	to the HORSE his neck	strength, with flowing-mane?	
+ ²⁰ Do you make him leap : The splendor	like a grasshopper? of his snorting	(inspires) terror.	

:: ²¹ They dig – go out	in the valley to the clash	and he exults of weapons.	with strength,
:: ²² He laughs : he is not : he does not recoil	at dread; shattered, before the sword.		
:: ²³ On his back – the flashing	rattles spear	the quiver, and javelin.	

+ ²⁴ Trembling : and he does not believe	and impatient, the blast	he swallows of the horn.	the ground,
+ ²⁵ At each : and from afar : the thundering	horn-blast he scents of the commanders	he neighs the battle, and the blast of war.	exultantly,

Nothing intimidates this horse, even the rattles of the quiver or the flashing spear and javelin. Rather, the reference to all these weapons of war insists that, far from intimidating the horse, they arouse in him a greater fury and excitement. The description of the horse's strength continues to be developed in the third piece (24-25), particularly in the image of «swallowing the earth». The images are not exactly of courage, but of something more radical, as the image of unrestrained eagerness at the smell of battle and the sound of the trumpet suggest (25). This horse is described as a warrior-god poised for battle.¹²

3.3 THE SUB-SEQUENCE (39:13-25)

- ¹³ Can the wing of the **OSTRICHES** rejoice, the pinion or the plumage of a **STORK**?
¹⁴ When she **leaves** her eggs on the ground and warms (them) upon dust,
¹⁵ **forgetting** that a foot may tread on it or a wild animal crush it?
¹⁶ She is cruel to her chicks as if they were not hers, caring little if her labor goes for nothing.
¹⁷ For **God** has **deprived her of wisdom**, and (gave) her no share in understanding.
¹⁸ Yet, when she soars up on high, she laughs at **HORSE** and his rider.

- ¹⁹ Do you give to the **HORSE strength**, and cover his neck with flowing-mane?
²⁰ Do you make him leap like a grasshopper; the **splendor** of his snorting (inspires) terror.
²¹ They dig in the valley and he exults with **strength** go out to the clash of weapons.
²² **He laughs at dread**; he is not shattered, **he does not recoil** before the sword.
²³ On his back the quiver rattles the flashing spear and javelin.
²⁴ Trembling and impatient, he swallows the ground; and he does not believe the blast of the horn.
²⁵ At each horn-blast he neighs exultantly, and from afar, he scents the battle, the thundering of the commanders and the blast of war.

The two passages that formed the sub-sequence (39:13-18; 19-25) appear strongly combined in the connection the divine speeches establish on two different ways nature can be. One is exemplified in the image of a foolish ostrich who abandons her eggs on the ground without any care, ignoring the natural instinct of protection (13-18). The other is specified in the strength and might of the horse, described as a warrior-god poised for battle (19-25). Even in different ways, both the ostrich and the horse show a lack of concern for consequences. As the ostrich feels no «anxiety» (*phd*) for the eggs that might be crushed and «laughs» (*shq*) at horse and his rider pursuing the hunt (18), so the horse laughs at fear (*lphd*) as it charges into the midst of flailing weapons.

The ostriches have beauty but no sense, are deprived of wisdom and have no understanding. She is the exception which proves the rule (the normal portion of instinctive wisdom appropriate to flightless birds). Each creature apparently had

¹² Like God ('el) the horse possesses the great might (12:13) of a warrior (Jdg 8,21). His snort is no mere whinny; it is a blast full of «majesty»; a quality which characterizes God when he appears in theophanic glory.

an allocated «portion» (*ḥlq*) of natural «discernment» (*binâ*) to enable procreation and preservation. The image of the ostriches' lack of discernment and wisdom seems to challenge Job, who had earlier queried the way God had decreed portions of fate from his exalted height above (31:2). The biblical author places in God's mouth a reply, asserting that in fact some creatures have no portion of wisdom. Job apparently seems to behave as one of them, unless he will demonstrate otherwise.

In the complementary description of such a strong and mighty horse that «laughs at dread» and «does not recoil before the sword», Job is decried not only in his wisdom and understanding, but also criticized in the way he throws himself into his unrestrained search for answers (6:11-12; 9:12.19; 10:4.7-9).

4. THE FALCON AND THE EAGLE MOVE-HIGHER (39:26-30)

The sequence ends with a passage (39:26-30), formed of two pieces (26-27; 28-30), focused on two other animals (Falcon and the Eagle) and in their ability to find a prey for their young.

+ ²⁶ ḥāmibbīnātkā :: yiprōš	<i>ya'āber-</i> <i>k^enāpō</i>	NĒṢ l ^t ēmān
+ ²⁷ 'im-‘al-pīkā :: w ^e kī	<i>yagbīah</i> <i>yārīm</i>	NĀŠER qinnō
-----	-----	-----
– ²⁸ <i>sela'</i> + 'al-šen-	<i>yīškōn</i> <i>sela'</i>	w ^e yitlōnān ūmeṣūdá
– ²⁹ miššām + l ^m mērāḥōq	<i>ḥāpar-</i> <i>'ēnāyw</i>	'ōkel yabbīṭū
– ³⁰ w ^e eprōḥō + ūba'āšer	<i>y^e'al'ū-</i> <i>ḥālālīm</i>	dām šām hū'

+ ²⁶ Is it from your understanding :: spreading	<i>soars</i> his wings	the FALCON to the south?
+ ²⁷ If you open your mouth, :: when	does <i>move-higher</i> raise	the EAGLE , his nest?
-----	-----	-----
– ²⁸ (On) <i>a rock</i> + upon the tooth	dwells of <i>a rock</i>	and abides, and stronghold.
– ²⁹ From there + from afar	he searches his eyes	food, detect (it).
– ³⁰ Even his young + where	drink the slain are,	-blood; there is he.

Unexpectedly, from the majesty of a horse, God's questions move to the mystery of birds («falcon and eagle»). In the first piece (26-27), God challenges Job to answer if he can be the reason for the falcon's soar, or if he can move the eagle higher (26-27). The second piece (28-30) describes these two animals as the opposite of the ostrich (13-18), they live and make their nests in places inaccessible to predators (27-28), suggesting they are guided by a special natural wisdom (29-30). The horizontal imagery of great distance evoked in the spreading wings of the falcon (26) makes an extraordinary parallel with the vertical imagery of great heights, where the Eagle raises his nest or dwells (27-28). The term «slain» (*ḥālālīm*) is used almost exclusively of humans in biblical Hebrew.¹³

In the most disconcerting way, God challenges Job to reveal his wisdom and his capacity to exercise it. What is too wonderful for human beings and beyond their insight and power of command is nevertheless part of God's design. Job is called to look to his own battle, not from the human perspective of victory or punishment, liberation or oppression, but with the eyes of an Eagle who is able to find nourishment in the battle (30).

5. THE SEQUENCE (38:39–39:30)

The sequence appears very well composed. In fact, turning from the cosmological universe to the animal kingdom, God tries to focus Job's attention on different aspects of his hidden wisdom in creatures of the wild. However, God's words establish a very curious dynamism, placing in the two extreme passages the suggestion of Job's incapability to provide for or to understand life (38:39-41 and 39:26-30). In the center of the sequence, composed of two sub-sequences (39:1-12 and 39:13-25), the author identifies two important features that envisage a remarkable answer to some of Job's earlier questions: the first focused on the certainty that God has a knowledge of times and a power to give freedom (39:1-12); and the second on the possibility nature has to be deprived of wisdom, although possessed by strength or might. (39:13-25).

The dynamic that sustains the text exhibits a God that talks through the metaphor of the wild world, however not to inform Job about this specific world, but, through its beauty and magnificence, to reorient Job's argumentation and convictions. The author of the book of Job, and behind him the wisdom thinking, insists on clarifying a crucial difference between God and human beings, as exemplified in Job.¹⁴ Job's questions and request for a direct dispute with God

¹³ See P. DHORME, *A Commentary on the book of Job*, Nashville 1967, ²1984, 613.

¹⁴ See N. HABEL, *The Book of Job*; C. NEWSOM, «The Book of Job», 608: «First, as 38,4-38, all but one of the individual sections in 38,39–39,30 are introduced by the familiar rhetorical questions that serve to point out the limits of Job's knowledge and ability, while underscoring God's power and wisdom».

had insisted on a common ground unachievable and, in a certain sense intolerable. As the wild creatures, it is proper to human beings to be creatures not the Creator; to have a knowledge and power as gifts received from God.

38,³⁹ **Can you** hunt a prey for the **LION** or (with) sustenance the whelps fill,
⁴⁰ when they crouch in dwellings, waiting eagerly in their lair?
⁴¹ Who prepares for the **RAVEN** his provision
 when its fledglings to **GOD** cry out wandering without food?

39,¹ **Do you know** the time of giving birth of the **MOUNTAIN-GOATS**?
 The writhe of the **DEER**, have you observed?
² Have you counted the months of their pregnancy?
 Do you know the time of their giving birth?
³ When they crouch, their young to deliver, their pain they get rid of.
⁴ Are healthy their young, grow strong with corn go out and never come back to them.

⁵ **Who gave** the **WILD-ASS** freedom, and the bonds (of) the **WILD-DONKEY**, who loosed?
⁶ To whom I gave the wastelands as his home and the salt plain as his habitat?
⁷ He scorns the turmoil of the town, and the shouts of the taskmaster he does not hear.
⁸ He roams the hills for his pasture, and for anything green he seeks.
⁹ Is willing the **WILD-OX** to serve you? Will he lodge beside your manger?
¹⁰ **Can you bind** the **WILD-OX** with ropes in the furrow? Will he harrow the valleys behind you?
¹¹ **Can you rely** on his massive strength, and leave to him your toil?
¹² **Can you trust** him to harvest your seed, and your threshing-floor gather?

¹³ **Can the wing** of the **OSTRICHES** rejoice, the pinion of a **STORK** or (their) plumage?
¹⁴ When she leaves on the ground her eggs, and upon dust warms (them),
¹⁵ forgetting that a foot may tread on it or a wild animal crush it?
¹⁶ She is cruel to her chicks as if they were not hers, as for nothing her labor goes caring little.
¹⁷ For **GOD** has deprived her of *wisdom*, and (gave) no share to her in *understanding*.
¹⁸ Yet, when up on high she soars, she laughs at **HORSE** and his rider.

¹⁹ **Do you give** to the **HORSE** strength, and cover his neck with flowing-mane?
²⁰ Do you make him leap like a grasshopper? The splendor of his snorting (inspires) terror.
²¹ They dig in the valley and he exults with strength, go out to the clash of weapons.
²² He laughs at dread; he is not shattered, he does not recoil before the sword.
²³ On his back rattles the quiver, the flashing spear and javelin.
²⁴ Trembling and impatient, he swallows the ground; and he does not believe the blast of the horn.
²⁵ At each horn-blast he neighs exultantly and from afar he scents the battle;
 the thundering of the commanders and the blast of war.

²⁶ **Is it from your understanding** soars the **FALCON** spreading his wings to the south?
²⁷ If you open your mouth, does move-higher the **EAGLE** when raise his nest?
²⁸ (On) a rock dwell and abide upon the tooth of a rock and stronghold.
²⁹ From there he searches food; from afar his eyes detect (it).
³⁰ Even his young drink-blood; where the dead are, there is he.

Apparently, the animals are presented not as they used to be traditionally perceived in human perspective, but in ways that challenge human perspective: their secrecy, their freedom, but also their foolishness and imprudence. This aspect is well underscored in the two central subsequences that opposed the

secrecy and freedom (39:1-12) to foolishness and imprudence (39:13-25). However, each of these animals is wild as well as a beautiful creature, exuberantly alive, also briefly and splendidly referred to in the extreme passages (38:39-41; 39:26-30).

In these passages, the author suggests that Job, who shares the cosmic habitat with these wild creatures, has nothing to do with their care and feeding, supposing that the same can be argued about God, mainly if we consider that the ability of something is not the primary issue behind God's questioning. Even if the several questions may imply that God can know and does know and Job does not, the focus of all sequence (38:39 – 39:30) is on these animals as unbounded, fearless and beautiful and in the fact that each one follows its own way, which Job cannot know or control. The emphasis is on the divine creativity more than on Job or God's capability or not to control this wild realm. This understanding is also confirmed by the very discrete direct references to God or to Job (38:41; 39:17), moving us from a dispute between Job and God to a rhetoric strategy that affirms the abundant and fecund life that is able to live under God the Creator's gift, although foolish or imprudent.

The dynamism of this disposition permits us to draw a structure of type ABB'A':

A	Waiting for life The LION and the RAVEN wait to find a prey for their young	38:39-41
	B Secrecy and freedom of life There is a time for the MOUNTAIN-GOATS and the DEER giving birth There is a freedom for the WILD-ASS, the WILD-DONKEY and the WILD-OX	39:1-12
	B Foolishness and imprudence of life The wing of the OSTRICHES or the pinion of the Stork cannot rejoice The HORSE does not fear the war	39:13-25
A'	Moving higher for life The FALCON and the EAGLE move higher to find a prey for their young	39:26-30

CONCLUSIONS

As helpful as similarities with other texts and genres may be, the most important clue to the way the divine speeches attempt to change Job's perceptions is found in the sequence of themes and images in the speeches themselves. The composition of Job 38:39–39:30 suggests that the animals chosen, almost all belonging to the hostile and alien realm of the wild, evoke in Job emotions of ambivalence: threat and wonder. They move him,

imaginatively, from places of secure boundaries to places where boundaries are exposed.

Through these words, Job acquires an expanded vision of his place in the world that transforms him. God focused him outward, challenging him to a relinquishment of his imaginary position at the center of the world, creating in him a sharpened attentiveness necessary also for recognizing true injustice and for opening himself to the mystery of God as Creator. This emphasis on a new understanding as a new vision is marvelously expressed in Job's final words «But now my eyes see you» (42:5). To understand the secrecy, freedom or power of wild life does not explain Job's suffering but it does transform him in the way he sees it or understands it.

In conclusion, we may say that in a world where paradox and incongruity seems to be part of its design, there are no simplistic answers to the many questions human beings have. In divine speeches, each animal survives because another creature dies, and everything operates within the eternal constraints of his design. There is no mechanical law of reward and retribution operating in such design. The composition of the text here presented, strongly focused in different aspects of the wild realm, and illustrates how God challenges Job to have the discernment necessary to keep this paradoxical world in balance. Job's complaint that the innocent suffer unjustly is never refuted. It stands side by side with the words of God as part of the paradox of that design. God's enigmatic design throws Job back into a bewildering world of wonder. In fact, remarkably in that world Job reluctantly forgoes his demand for litigation and accepts God's design, difference and knowledge (42:1-6).

Luísa Maria VARELA ALMENDRA