

The World Turned Upside Down: A Comparative Study of the “Topsy-Turvy Motif” in Egyptian
and Northwest Semitic Texts

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Abstract

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Middle Eastern Language and Cultures

For decades, scholars of the Hebrew Bible and Egyptian texts have identified occurrences of a textual motif using various terms: “topsy-turvy,” *mundus inversus*, “world upside down,” “social woe,” “national distress,” pessimistic texts, and so on. This study offers the first fully comparative analysis of the motif. It is also the most comprehensive and interdisciplinary to date. In it, I collect and analyze a number of texts from ancient Egypt and the Levant, define the topsy-turvy motif, identify its characteristics, and elucidate its function in the texts in which ancient scribes deployed it.

Dedication

In loving memory of Pa (1949-2020),

who taught me to wonder.

who knows if the moon's
a baloon... where
always
 it's
 Spring)and everyone's
in love and flowers pick themselves

—E. E. Cummings

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1 Introduction

“The things of this world can be truly perceived only by looking at them backwards.”

—Balthasar Gracian¹

1.1 The Need for Precision

The goal of this study is simple: to 1) define the topsy-turvy motif (henceforth TT motif), 2) identify its characteristics, and 3) elucidate its function in the texts in which ancient scribes deployed it. This study’s impetus is the gap between the abundance of scholarship that *refers to* the motif (by various terms) and the lack of precision in those references. Thus, for decades, scholars have identified occurrences of the motif without having formal criteria with which to distinguish it. Additionally, they have used this term to refer to disparate textual phenomena. This study offers the first fully comparative study of the TT motif, which in turn produces a firmer definition.

Previous discussions have occurred primarily in the context of two corpora: ancient Egyptian texts and the Hebrew Bible. I focus on these in my study because of the previous academic discourse. That said, I do examine several occurrences in other Northwest Semitic texts.

¹ Cited in Barbara A. Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series, 16; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 13.

I should mention that these are far from the only contexts in which the motif occurs. In fact, the TT motif is pan-Near Eastern, at the very least. Beyond Egypt and the Levant, I have noted occurrences of the TT motif in a variety of texts, including Sumerian (Enki and Ninhursanga, Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta, and the Lament for Sumer and Urim), Babylonian (Hymn to Inanna), Assyrian (Esarhaddon’s Succession Treaty), Hittite (Birth Ritual KUB XXXIII.67), Aegean (Works and Days), and even as far afield as Sufi Poetry (Bullhe Shah)—to name just a few! I have also observed a number of occurrences in the Levant that fall outside the temporal boundaries, such as Second Temple Jewish texts and early Christian texts. In fact, I often opt for a New Testament example when explaining my research: πολλοὶ δὲ ἔσονται πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι καὶ οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι “Yet many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Mark 10:31), because of its familiarity and simplicity. However, I do not delve into these many literatures in the present study; all will need to be incorporated into later research.

1.2 The Study of Motifs, Method, and Overview of the Study

I begin by situating the discussion of the TT motif in the more general study of motifs in ancient literature. Shemaryahu Talmon’s contributions to this area loom large. In his *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible*, Talmon defines a motif as such:

[A] literary motif is a representative complex theme that recurs within the framework of the Hebrew Bible in variable forms and connections. It is rooted in an actual situation of an anthropological or historical nature. In its secondary literary setting, a motif gives expression to ideas and experiences inherent in the original situation and is employed by the author to re-actualize in the audience the reactions of the participants in that original situation. The motif represents the essential meaning of the situation, not the situation itself. It is not a mere reiteration of the

sensations involved, but rather a heightened and intensified representation of them.²

He goes on to describe four primary categories of motifs in biblical literature:³

1. Anthropological (those concerning relations between individuals)
2. Sociological (those concerning group relations)
3. Theological (those concerning divine-human relations)
4. Transmutable (those that can serve within all of the above contexts)

One of Talmon's vital points regarding motifs is that they are not solely, or even primarily aesthetic devices, helping to improve the literary value of a piece (though, of course, they do).⁴

Therefore, the study of such motifs in any text is not only an exercise in reading texts as literature; they are also an avenue to understand more fully the thought of the authors' societies (what Talmon often calls the "ideonic universe"), and sometimes also the authors' deviation from societal and theological norms, acting as a sort of "pressure valve" to allow for heterodox release.⁵

It will become clear below that the motif falls clearly under the fourth category of "transmutable." It occurs in a huge variety of contexts in Egyptian and Levantine texts, spanning from the cosmological to societal. This means that a deeper understanding of the motif will produce a deeper understanding of the ideonic universes of ancient Egypt and Israel.

² Shemaryahu Talmon, *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), pp. 4-5.

³ Talmon, *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 8-9.

⁴ Talmon, *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 23.

⁵ Talmon, *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 7, 11.

A brief note on the method of this study may be useful. John Barton describes a “certain circularity” in the discernment of textual genres: “Our initial judgment about genre and our initial attempt at exegesis play back and forth on each other and are mutually corrective.”⁶ Similarly, studying a motif is an art; there is no formulaic, step-by-step approach that will produce a certain result. The study of motifs must be done in much the same way: reading, observing, rereading, and correcting one’s observations. In short, this has been my methodology. There is no methodological means to circumvent lengthy time in texts and their commentators, nor a static or absolute way to characterize what makes a motif what it is. The chapters to follow will present my own reading of the relevant corpora in relation to previous studies.⁷

To put the cart before the horse: at the end of my investigation, I define the TT motif as a motif of radical transformation by reversal, replacement, (in)action, negation, or destratification in poetic texts that aims to affect reality by its performance.

1.3 Chapter Overview

In the next chapters, I submit a selection of exemplary TT passages. I begin with a survey of the history of scholarship on the topic (Chapter 2). Then, I analyze the Egyptian texts (Chapter 3), and afterward proceed to Northwest Semitic texts, predominantly the Hebrew Bible (Chapter 4). I conclude by offering a formulation of what characterizes the TT motif, its particular features, devices and other motifs that often accompany it, and the contexts in which it is found,

⁶ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*, Revised and Enlarged ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 18.

⁷ I discuss in my conclusion (5.1.1) my reason behind excluding some texts that bear some resemblance to the TT motif.

including historical and generic (Chapter 5). I include a chart of TT variations in the Hebrew Bible and the devices and ideologies present in them (Appendix 1). Additionally, I include a discussion of the motif in the history of biblical interpretation (Appendix 2).⁸

⁸ All translations throughout the study are mine unless noted otherwise.

2 Survey of Related Literature



For in it, the things said are but repetitions (*Kh.* 1.3).

יש דבר שיאמר ראה-זה חדש הוא
כבר היה לעלמים אשר היה מלפננו

Is there anything about which one can say,
“Would you look at this! That’s novel!”

It already has been, in ages past, which were before us (*Qoh* 1:10).

2.1 History of Scholarship

2.1.1 Studies Relating to the Motif

Much scholarship has been quite limited in its attention to literary motifs until recent decades. This is especially the case in Egyptology, because of its longtime enamorment with historical reconstruction and textual editions. Thus, most studies of Egyptian TT texts in the first half of the twentieth century employ the texts for historical purposes. An example of this is Alan Gardiner’s *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage* (1909).⁹ Like much of his other work, Gardiner’s conclusions held influence for decades afterwards, including his conclusions that *Ipuwer* was not prophetic, lacked messianism, and that one could locate a real situational referent in one of the Intermediate Periods. Perhaps also curtailing further literary studies was Gardiner’s appraisal of

⁹ Alan H. Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden, Pap. Leiden 344 Recto* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1909).

the text as “...sterile in imagination and lacking in genuine poetic beauty.”¹⁰ This is but one example of many that shows that what some have come to call the “TT motif,” was unrecognized as a motif for a long time.

Salomo Luria was the first scholar to publish a rejection of a direct historical referent for the motif of “social revolution” (1929).¹¹ In it, Luria compares *Ipuwer* cross-culturally with other TT texts and considers social phenomena of inversions within celebratory contexts. The first descriptors of a literary device of bizarre inversions appears in this article:

Die für uns interessanten Züge dieser Set-Zeit sind folgende: die Fremden und die Missetäter herrschen im Lande mit ihrem Führer als König an der Spitze; die Weiber, die Tiere und die Pflanzen sind unfruchtbar; die Kraft der Obrigkeit ist nichtig, und die Gesetze gelten nicht.¹²

More particularly, Luria notes such characteristics as present in one of our quintessential texts, *Ipuwer*:

Alle kennzeichnenden Züge der oben besprochenen Gruppe sind hier in typischer Form vorhanden: die Abschaffung der Gesetze, die Zerstörung der Verwaltung, die Unfruchtbarkeit der Weiber, das Umkehren der sozialen Verhältnisse, so daß das Unterste oben, das Oberste unten wird usw.¹³

Luria’s study is on social inversions, first and foremost, and so it attempts to differentiate the realistic, “historical” elements from the “absurd.”¹⁴ The result is a demonstration that a text

¹⁰ Gardiner, *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*, p. 17.

¹¹ Salomo Luria, “Die Ersten werden die Letzten sein,” *Klio* 22 (1929), pp. 405-31.

¹² “The features of this Seth-time that are interesting for us are the following: the strangers and the wrongdoers rule in the country with their leader as king at the head; the women, the animals and the plants are infertile; authorities’ power is null, and the laws do not apply.” Luria, “Die Ersten werden die Letzten sein,” p. 407.

¹³ “All the characteristic features of the group discussed above are present here in typical form: the abolition of laws, the destruction of administration, the infertility of women, the reversal of social relations so that the lowest becomes higher, the highest lower, etc.” Luria, “Die Ersten werden Die Letzten sein,” p. 409.

¹⁴ Luria, “Die Ersten werden Die Letzten sein,” p. 414.

such as *Ipuwer* does not reflect a contemporaneous (or at least recent) situation, going against the grain of twentieth century Egyptology that focused on the exploitation of literary texts for the sake of uncovering history.

Wilhelm Mülmann was the next to address the topic (1961).¹⁵ Mülmann identifies a concept that occurs in the mythic, spiritual conceptualization of a wide array of people: the world upside down.¹⁶ It is characterized by two types: that of the elite, and that of the common people. The elite-centric form is met with lament; the other with jubilation.¹⁷ This latter kind he associates with the biblical prophets and poets.

The 1970's brought about a sudden rush of major developments. Miriam Lichtheim's prominent anthology (first published in 1973) followed Luria's work and brought the idea of "national distress" as a primarily literary *topos* into the mainstream Egyptological discussion.¹⁸ She explains that the texts cannot fulfill this function as later compositions reflecting on an "intellectual problem that became a literary topos."¹⁹ Thus, the motif "required no specific factual basis but merely the general phenomenon of civil disorders that could, and did, break out periodically."²⁰ Lichtheim describes the theme by means of its two focal points:

¹⁵ Wilhelm E. Mülmann, "Das Mythologem von der verkehrten Welt," in Hans-Jürgen Andreß, Daniela Grunow, Thomas Schwinn, eds., *Soziologiegeschichte im Spiegel der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie: Neue Folge der Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* (Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 13; Köln Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1961), pp. 614-624.

¹⁶ Mülmann, "Das Mythologem von der verkehrten Welt," pp. 614-615.

¹⁷ Mülmann, "Das Mythologem von der verkehrten Welt," pp. 618-619.

¹⁸ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1973). Lichtheim cites Luria's article, noting that it "did not receive the attention it deserved" (p. 135).

¹⁹ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 1st ed., p. 139.

²⁰ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 1st ed., p. 139.

Two major topics make up the theme of “national distress.” The first is the infiltration of the Delta by Asiatics; the second is civil war among Egyptians. This second topic is described by means of three *topoi*... all of which are loaded with hyperbole: indiscriminate bloodshed, indifference to suffering, and the reversal of the social order, by which the rich become poor and the have-nots become the masters.²¹

Despite its broad appeal, Hans Goedicke remained unconvinced of Lichtheim’s claim (1977).²² He asserts, “To invent an ‘artificial gloom’ to develop a literary topos of ‘national distress’ without factual cause would have struck any contemporaries as rather odd and would have made the king appear a liar...” and he adds that it seems unlikely that “it would be treated as a literary fiction by ancient Egyptians.”²³ He did not consider the similarities between the description of the “collapse of social order” between *Neferti* and *Ipuwer* to be necessarily significant.²⁴ Without the *topos*-framework, Goedicke goes to great lengths to connect scenarios that the text describes with a twelfth-dynasty historical setting.²⁵

By and large, Luria and Lichtheim’s overlapping theses concerning the motif seem to have convinced most. By 1988, Odette Renaud said that the topic of Egypt’s demise was “un sujet purement littéraire...”²⁶ Such a concept is often a given in more recent scholarship.²⁷ A perfect example is Vincent Tobin’s introduction to *Ipuwer* (2003):

²¹ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I*, 1st ed., p. 144, n. 9.

²² Hans Goedicke, *The Protocol of Neferyt (The Prophecy of Neferti)* (Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies, 10; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

²³ Goedicke, *The Protocol of Neferyt*, pp. 5-6.

²⁴ Goedicke, *The Protocol of Neferyt*, p. 19.

²⁵ Goedicke, *The Protocol of Neferyt*, pp. 24-37.

²⁶ Odette Renaud, “Ipouer le mal-aimé,” *Société d’égyptologie Genève* 12 (1988), pp. 71-75.

²⁷ See, for example, Roland Enmarch’s statements about Middle Kingdom “pessimistic texts”: “This is a period where surviving evidence indicates Egypt was at peace and prosperous, suggesting that the terrible state of the land being lamented is a literary construct. The laments seem to have been appreciated by the Egyptians as an artistic exploration of their fears and concerns for the cohesion of their society, whilst simultaneously highlighting the manifest imperfection of lived experience even when that society is ordered and stable.” Roland

The text may be said to fall into the general category of “national calamity” literature, a format based on a reflection of the postulated upheaval which took place during the First Intermediate Period. In all likelihood, however, this setting is used here as a literary device in order to present a treatise describing the dramatic contrast between a situation of order and one of disorder, Ma’at as opposed to Isfet.²⁸

Contrary to Goedicke’s historical approach that sought to identify contemporary inspirations for Neferti’s complaints, most contemporary scholars locate the thematic motivation in a certain woeful residue that remained from the widespread upheaval in the First Intermediate Period. This is rightly so, as thematic similarities abound between these texts and those of First Intermediate Period biographies.²⁹ The similarities demonstrate “...just how deeply the experience of the First Intermediate Period affected the Middle Kingdom Egyptians’ collective consciousness and their views on social and political relations.”³⁰ That it was mainly elite, court-centric culture that suffered during this period, while most of the population thrived (as Stephan Seidlmayer evidences), illuminates something else about the Egyptian topsy-turvy texts that already should be obvious: their concern is a disorder that affects the elite.

Friedrich Junge’s continued the literary analysis of TT texts, as opposed to mining them for historical data (1977).³¹ Toward this end, he says, “Des weiteren muß der Abstand vom

Enmarch, “Middle Kingdom Literature,” in Alan B. Lloyd, ed., *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World, Ancient History, 12; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 663-676. See also Ludwig D. Morenz, “Literature as a Construction of the Past in the Middle Kingdom,” in John Tait, ed., *‘Never Had the like Occurred’: Egypt’s View of Its Past*, (Encounters with Ancient Egypt, 8; London/Portland, OR: UCL Press Institute of Archaeology, 2003), pp. 101-117 (esp. 108-112).

²⁸ Simpson, William Kelly, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 188-189.

²⁹ Stephan Seidlmayer, “The First Intermediate Period,” in Ian Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 135.

³⁰ Seidlmayer, “The First Intermediate Period,” p. 136.

³¹ Friedrich Junge, “Die Welt der Klagen,” in Jan Assmann, Erika Feucht, and Reinhard Grieshammer, eds., *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur: Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1977), pp. 275-284.

tatsächlichen Erlebnis schon deswegen groß sein, weil die Klagen in den Texten bewußt als literarische Mittel eingesetzt sind.”³² Noting the lack of any stable place of “complaints” across Egyptian texts, Junge concludes that pairs of opposites are the only recurring principle, resulting in the literary form of the “Chaosbeschreibung.”³³ In other words, “complaints” do not constitute a genre, but are a device that the Egyptians used cross-generically. Regardless of how much they reflect the real experiences of their authors, they are all *topoi* representing a dramatic inversion from the order promised by the Egyptian throne.³⁴

Barbara Babcock’s edited volume, *The Reversible World*, was a substantial step forward in considering the TT motif in a cross-disciplinary manner (1978).³⁵ Her introduction to the volume brings together literary theory, anthropology, and art history to illuminate “symbolic inversion.” Babcock’s definition of the term is a keystone that later studies cite often:

“Symbolic inversion” may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political.³⁶

The *topos* of the “world upside down,” or *mundus inversus* (Babcock uses both terms alongside symbolic inversion), allows its user to discuss that which is not (or not yet)—often through humor and irony.³⁷ Drawing upon observations from psychology, she suggests that

³² “Moreover, the distance from the actual experience must be great, because the laments in the texts are deliberately used as literary devices.” Junge, “Die Welt der Klagen,” p. 276.

³³ Junge, “Die Welt der Klagen,” pp. 277-278, 280. He states, “Das einzige immer wieder auftretende Prinzip ist das des Gegensatzpaares” (The only recurring principle is that of pairing opposites, p. 278).

³⁴ Junge, “Die Welt der Klagen,” p. 282.

³⁵ Babcock, *The Reversible World*.

³⁶ Babcock, *The Reversible World*, p. 14.

³⁷ Babcock, *The Reversible World*, pp. 16-17.

“such laughter-producing ‘topsyturvydom’ is an attack on control...” and it is through the power of negation via inversion that culture frees itself from the prohibitive “thou shalt not’s.”³⁸

Expressions of the world upside down confirm a culture’s norms *by confusing* them, and blur the lines between what is, what could be, and what should be.³⁹

Jan Assmann soon after examined many texts and related iconography through the lens of royal rhetoric, apocalypse, and wisdom literature (1983).⁴⁰ Following Luria and Lichtheim, he reads the texts as a type of “dogmatic fiction,” conjured for the purpose of ritually creating a past disaster for the king to dispel for the sake of *mꜣꜥ.t*. He ascertains the dual function of the TT:

Sie kann die bestehende Ordnung sowohl relativieren als auch verabsolutieren. Sie führt einmal vor Augen, dass alles auch anders möglich ist, und macht andererseits klar, dass es anders nicht geht, sondern dass die Umkehrung der Ordnung dem Zusammenbruchs des Lebens gleichkommt.⁴¹

Through the accessibility of Lichtheim’s compendium and the sudden rise in studies related to the *topos*, the concept of a motif of “national distress” became available to those outside the field of Egyptology. One of the most significant contributions to the topic, and the

³⁸ Babcock, *The Reversible World*, pp. 17-21.

³⁹ Babcock, *The Reversible World*, p. 29 (emphasis original).

⁴⁰ Jan Assmann, “Königsdogma und Heilserwartung. Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten,” in David Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1983), pp. 345-377; Jan Assmann, “Literatur und Karneval im Alten Ägypten,” in *Karnevaleske Phänomene in antiken und nachantiken Kulturen und Literaturen*, Siegmund Döpp, ed. (Stätten und Formen der Kommunikation im Altertum, 1; Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1993), pp. 31-57. Assmann attempts to connect these to the late Egyptian Homecoming Festival of Tefnut, but ultimately admits that such a link is impossible to prove.

⁴¹ “It can both relativize and absolutize the existing order. It shows that everything is possible differently, and on the other hand it makes it clear that there is no other way, but that the reversal of order is tantamount to the collapse of life.” Assmann, “Literatur und Karneval in Alten Ägypten,” p. 42

first to treat the subject directly in biblical studies was Raymond Van Leeuwen (1986). His thesis is worth quoting at length:

...the several images that make up this small poem are instances of a widespread ancient Near Eastern *topos* that can be formulated negatively to depict a chaotic world upside down (WUD) or positively to depict a messianic or utopian situation where the present chaotic world will be overturned, that is, restored to its right-side-up state. Prov 30:21-23 will thus be seen to make a serious sociopolitical statement, one that promotes a royal hierarchical view of society. Since the social order is seen as a hierarchical unity, inversions in the realm of women, or in male-female relations, are of grave import.⁴²

Thus, Van Leeuwen recognized two variants of the TT motif: a negative, dystopian one, which contrasts (and sometimes presages) a positive, utopian one. Aside from this, two key points that Van Leeuwen established are that “cosmic and social worlds are seen as correlate and impinging upon each other,” and “a relatively wide repertoire of images is available to the poet for insertion into the cosmic or social slots of the *topos*.”⁴³ The first claim brings to mind Talmon’s motif categorization, and suggests that the TT motif often belongs to the transmutable type that transcends a divide between individual, corporate, and divine realms. The second suggests that the ancients were aware enough of this motif that they could identify its shared imagery and deploy it as a recognizable device, clueing the listener/reader to the scribe’s intent.

Van Leeuwen’s contribution also elucidates that the motif is not genre-dependent or genre-determined.⁴⁴ This is important because sometimes (and especially across disciplines) the borders between genre, theme, motif, type-scenes, and *Leitworten* can blur into one another.

⁴² Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986), p. 602.

⁴³ Van Leeuwen “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” p. 603.

⁴⁴ Van Leeuwen “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” p. 603.

Additionally, one must avoid defining a genre based on the presence of a particular motif. On the topic of themes and motifs in laments, Adele Berlin advises caution:

*These shared themes and motifs are not specific to the genre of laments... all too often the lament genre is defined, at least in part, by the presence of these motifs. This, in turn, muddies the waters in discussions of the origin and development of the lament genre.*⁴⁵

This means that one must look beyond a single specific genre to examine the TT motif and avoid reading the motif as comprising its own genre.

Van Leeuwen's study notwithstanding, biblical scholars mostly have been satisfied to categorize texts as belonging to such a thematic variety. In almost every case, a commentator will reference the same Egyptian texts,⁴⁶ cite a few lines, and then give a very brief description of the motif. Unlike many other discussions of themes and motifs in a comparative context, biblical scholars have done little toward comparing the ideologies represented in the (dis)similarities of the motif's deployment in these two societies. Thus, study of the TT motif largely has been limited to simple identification.⁴⁷

Michael Fox's work on Qohelet is one exception that expands our thinking on the motif. In *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (1989), he argues for the translation of הַבָּל as "absurd" (in

⁴⁵ Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 28 (emphasis original).

⁴⁶ That is, the *Neferti*, *Ipuwer*, and *Khakheperreseneb*.

⁴⁷ A full list would be unwieldy, but for a few examples, see Michael V. Fox, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (The JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), p. 68; Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible, 18B; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 652, 874; Delbert R. Hilers, *Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 85-86; Thomas Kruger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary on the Book of Qoheleth*, O.C. Dean Jr., trans. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 184; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible, 18C; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 325.

the sense of Albert Camus’ technical use of the term) and observes that “Absurdities are a favorite theme of the Egyptian ‘Prophetic Lament’ genre.”⁴⁸ He cites *Neferti* and *Khakheperreseneb* as examples of such, noting that “In these works, however, the absurdities currently dominant will be overcome by a ‘messianic’ restoration of order.”⁴⁹ Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg similarly connect the motif to expectations of a future ruler that would set the world straight again (as found in Isa 3, 11, and 24).⁵⁰ For Fox, then, the key ingredient in TT texts is not the reversal itself, but the *result* of the reversal: an ill-fittingness and insult to rationality—the absurdity of a skewed world.

Richard Parkinson further advanced the conversation by highlighting some features of TT texts. Parkinson locates their inspiration in funeral elegies, highlighting the similarity in their “strong antithesis between ‘then’ and ‘now’, between the ideal and the actual, between what should be and what is, as manifested in social change” (1997).⁵¹ He cites the inscription of Neferhotep’s Tomb (TT49) as an example (albeit one from a later date).⁵² He adds, like Tobin

⁴⁸ Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 71; Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1989), p. 32. Fox began his argument for the “absurd” in Qohelet in Michael V. Fox, “The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986), pp. 409-427. He carried the argument forward in his rewritten Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010). The argument was challenged by Mark Sneed, “הבל as ‘Worthless’ in Qoheleth: A Critique of Michael V. Fox’s ‘Absurd’ Thesis,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136 (2017), pp. 879-894, wherein Sneed argues that Fox failed to recognize the topsy-turvy motif (p. 883). Fox responded in Michael V. Fox, “On הבל in Qoheleth: A Reply to Mark Sneed,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138 (2019), pp. 559-563.

⁴⁹ Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, p. 32. *Khakheperreseneb* has no hints of restoration at the hands of any leader, so Fox corrects this statement in his updated *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, p. 33, in which he also draws up *Ipuwer* as an example of pessimistic absurdity.

⁵⁰ Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 263-265.

⁵¹ Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, 1st ed. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 167.

⁵² See Figure 3. See Section 4.2.6 for the text and translation.

would a few years later, that the dualities like *mꜥ.t* versus *isf.t* and Egyptians versus foreigners that are expressed throughout the lament are characteristic of Egyptian thought.⁵³

Diane Flores addressed the topic from a new viewpoint through the analysis of Egyptian iconography (2004).⁵⁴ She draws attention to images from ostraca depicting unusual animal activity, such as cats herding ducks, mice invading cat fortresses (while riding pharaonic chariots), cats serving mice, animals performing music, and so on.⁵⁵ Because of the number of recurring type-scenes, she states that satire is likely not the main purpose of most of them (although some may have been humorous); they may have served, rather, as visual cues of folk narratives and fables (oral ones thus lost to us today).⁵⁶ Flores discusses many type-scenes that maintain popularity and reproduction well into Late Period Egypt in household settings. Most of the images are bizarre enough to consider in light of discussions of the TT motif, but most notable are those wherein the prey (e.g., mice) become anthropomorphic overlords of their predators (e.g., cats). These images may reflect a desire of the common people to rise above the elite—a visualization of the “everyman’s dream,”⁵⁷ through the “upsetting of the natural order.”⁵⁸ This would then indicate a non-elite deployment of the TT motif, which is a rarity in ancient Egypt. It is a powerful one, at that, as the type-scenes are strikingly similar—but with a new “species” in charge.

⁵³ Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, 1st ed., p 132.

⁵⁴ Diane Flores, “The Topsy-Turvy World,” in Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch, eds., *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, (Probleme Der Ägyptologie, 20; Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 233-255.

⁵⁵ For two examples, see Figure 1 and Figure 2.

⁵⁶ Flores, “The Topsy-Turvy World,” pp. 234, 240, 252.

⁵⁷ Flores, “The Topsy-Turvy World,” p. 237.

⁵⁸ Flores, “The Topsy-Turvy World,” p. 234.

Paul Kruger published two articles in 2005 in which he discussed the motif from new perspectives. He drew attention to the bizarre, upturned nature of the existence of those in the underworld.⁵⁹ Examples of such symbolic inversion, which Kruger calls *mundus inversus* (following Babcock), include: the darkness and silence of the place, the backwards, miserable practices of those who reside there (e.g., eating spoiled food or one's own excrement), and a literal upside down spatial orientation. Kruger continued this inquiry through a more anthropological approach in connecting the helter-skelter underworld to ritual practices of mourning in ancient Israel.⁶⁰ He explains that "...life after death is in many instances the direct reverse of ordinary life. And since rituals of mourning are so closely associated with the phenomenon of death, it is not unexpected that such rites most often display similar symbolic inversions."⁶¹ These inversions (such as self-inflicted pain/discomfort, nakedness, and temporary renunciation of rank) allow the ritual participant to take part in the liminality experienced by the recently deceased.

Soon after, Kruger was the first to summarize thoroughly studies in inversion in the ancient world (2006).⁶² Here, he discusses two more areas in which the ancients employed *mundus inversus*: constructions of "otherness" and critique of society. The former is concerned with defining one's own social group via differentiation from another (e.g., urban societies critiquing nomadic lifestyle as "backwards." "Otherness" is a mental framework as home in the

⁵⁹ Paul A. Kruger, "Symbolic Inversion in Death: Some Examples from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near Eastern World," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26 (2005), pp. 398-411.

⁶⁰ Paul A. Kruger, "The Inverse World of Mourning in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblische Notizen* 124 (2005), pp. 41-49.

⁶¹ Kruger, "The Inverse World of Mourning in the Hebrew Bible," p. 43.

⁶² Paul A. Kruger, "The World 'Topsy-Turvy' and the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures: A Few Examples," *Anthropology Southern Africa* 29 (2006), pp. 115-121.

ancient world as the modern.⁶³). The latter has much in common with Van Leeuwen's positive and negative variants of the TT motif. Likewise, Kruger sees two variations of the motif's strategy:

1. "[T]o depict negatively a world in which everything is turned upside down in a socio-religious sense, or..."
2. "[T]o propagate in a positive fashion a future messianic or utopian age, where the contraries of life will finally be reconciled."⁶⁴

Additionally, he agrees with Mühlmann in seeing two distinct intended audiences. Dystopia serves the elite, who desire to maintain the status quo, while utopia lends hope to those on society's lower rungs.⁶⁵ Kruger sees this division as manifest in the dystopian descriptions of Egypt's *Neferti* and *Ipuwer* in contrast to utopian ideals as found in Israel's Isaiah and Hannah.

Alec Basson applied previous insights to biblical texts in two articles on the Psalms in 2007 and 2009.⁶⁶ He argues that the Psalmist deploys the *mundus inversus* motif so as to invoke Yahweh's justice, drawing attention to the cruelty of their backwards situation (God's rejection of covenantal principles, the violation of holy places, etc.). The Psalmist activates the very same

⁶³ For a counterargument against "otherness" as the norm in the ancient world, see Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Martin Classical Lectures, 11; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011). Gruen's thesis is that "ancient societies, while certainly acknowledging differences among peoples (indeed occasionally emphasizing them) could also visualize themselves as part of a broader cultural heritage, could discover or invent links with other societies, and could couch their own historical memories in terms of a borrowed or appropriated past" (pp. 3-4).

⁶⁴ Kruger, "The World 'Topsy-Turvy' and the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures: A Few Examples," p. 119.

⁶⁵ Kruger, "The World 'Topsy-Turvy' and the Ancient Near Eastern Cultures: A Few Examples," p. 119.

⁶⁶ Alec Basson, "'Only Ruins Remain'. Psalm 74 as a Case of *Mundus Inversus*," *Old Testament Essays* 20 (2007), pp. 128-137; Alec Basson, "Two Instances of *Mundus Inversus* in Psalm 113," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30 (2009), pp. 1-14.

motif to praise Yahweh's restorative power and his ability to reverse the fortunes of the needy, forming a microcosm of utopia within individual lives (an example of Talmon's anthropological category).

Roland Enmarch links the TT motif with the text of *Ipuwer's* central burden, that is, theodicy (2008). The poem achieves this through what Enmarch calls the "inverted world motif," which "challenges royal ideology at least as much as it formulates theodic issues."⁶⁷ Thus, in Enmarch's reading, *Ipuwer's* description of the world upside down is a harsh critique of God's negligence and failure to uphold order within his creation (and a critique of the king and his administration, by extension).⁶⁸ Commiseration with the elite accompanies the critique, however.

In summary, he describes *Ipuwer*:

...not as a fierce, uncompromising protest to king and god about their justice, but rather as an extreme poetic exploration of the problems inherent in the gap between ideology and the imperfection of lived experience... *Ipuwer's* pessimistic description seems to ask 'What if it were otherwise?', looking at a faultline in the Egyptian ideal by portraying at great length an anti-ideal, dystopian world of perfect misery, enabling dark fears to be artfully expressed without undermining core cultural beliefs.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Roland Enmarch, *A World Upturned: Commentary on and Analysis of The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 55-57.

⁶⁸ The lost portions of *Ipuwer* (perhaps a frame tale?) make the overall meaning entirely unknowable. One can imagine the narrative being set in the distant past, and thus legitimizing the current administration, or perhaps the performative context of *Ipuwer* would have been something like the New Year festival, giving allowance for a carnivalesque performance (Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, p. 59).

⁶⁹ Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, p. 64.

2.1.2 Other Relevant Studies

2.1.2.1 Studies in Utopia and Dystopia

Scholars working on topics related to the TT motif unintentionally have illuminated much about the subject. Ehud Ben Zvi's edited volume, *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, is one significant example of this in that many of its essays address questions of the function of TT texts (since u/dystopian contexts are flush with the motif).⁷⁰ Several essays in this volume relate closely to the topic of *mundus inversus* (including those of Jack Sasson, Steven Schwitzer, Matthew Neujahr, and Ben Zvi.). I now address each in turn. Sasson submits three types of "utopian contexts" present in Mari Texts: 1) mythological (past Edenic Golden Age; this type is often characterized by negation of current ills that had not yet come to be [e.g., absence of predatory hunting]), 2) heroic endeavors, and 3) treaties. His insight into the function of dystopia in laments is insightful:

...this literature was above all prophylactic, in that it liturgically sought to avoid duplication of devastation, real or imagined, that overtook communities...The sharper the discord between what used to be and what has become, the more urgent the appeal to avoid its stimulation or recurrence.⁷¹

Schwitzer's, deriving insight from utopian theory (a particular methodology of literary criticism) demonstrates that rather than a forecast of the future, u/dystopian literature serves to reject the current state of things, whether by proposing a "*better alternative reality*," or by

⁷⁰ Ben Zvi, Ehud, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 92; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2006).

⁷¹ Jack M. Sasson, "Utopian and Dystopian Images in Mari Prophetic Texts," in Ben Zvi, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, pp. 30-31.

exaggerating or fixating on a society's "baser" elements.⁷² Neujahr highlights the messianic aspect of utopian texts, whether by necessitating a future ideal leader or legitimizing a current leader (or the current leader's royal lineage).⁷³ Ben Zvi's own contribution considers the function of utopian visions. He speaks to the function of utopianism:

...utopian images not only convey hope, but communicate to, and socialize people into positions of estrangement and critique from reality. Utopia is precisely not what is but what should, and in the discourses of Yehud, mainly what will be. As the readers imagine and partake vicariously in these utopian worlds, they certainly felt and were supposed to feel estranged from their present situation. Moreover, the very portrayal of an imaginary ideal world carries a critique and ideological rejection of the present conditions.⁷⁴

2.1.2.2 Studies in Apocalypticism

Moving from u/dystopian studies, another overlapping field of inquiry is that of apocalypticism. Space does not allow a full summary, but the category necessitates brief consideration. As early as 1925, Chester McCown compared Egyptian and Israelite materials through this lens, defining "apocalyptic" as:

...a type of thinking and writing which criticizes present evils and promises future improvement, all under the guise of denunciations and predictions that are usually based upon supposedly supernatural visions and revelations... They are of two classes: (1) works which are indirectly apocalyptic in that they criticize contemporary society, but without

⁷² Steven James Schweitzer, "Utopian and Utopian Literary Theory: Some Preliminary Observations," in Ben Zvi, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, p. 23 (emphasis original).

⁷³ Matthew Neujahr, "Royal Ideology and Utopian Futures in the Akkadian *ex eventu* Prophecies," in Ben Zvi, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, pp. 41-54.

⁷⁴ Ehud Ben Zvi, "Utopias, Multiple Utopias, and Why Utopias at All? The Social Roles of Utopian Visions in Prophetic Books within Their Historical Context," in Ben Zvi, ed., *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, p. 59.

prediction of improvement, and (2) works directly apocalyptic, combining denunciation with predictions of eventual betterment.⁷⁵

Such a definition might be (and likely ought to be) critiqued as too broad. But as a starting point, it alerts the reader that “apocalyptic” may be one category to keep in mind in the pursuit of the TT. Assmann argues that apocalypticism is a theme that occurs within and without prophetic texts, often for the sake of propaganda.⁷⁶ John Collins’ definition narrows the focus of the apocalyptic genre by noting its revelatory nature (as divine-human communication), unveiling a “transcendent reality.”⁷⁷ Because of the bizarre nature of reversals that constitute the TT motif, one should consider apocalypticism as one possible framework—especially regarding the “right-side-up,” utopian variant. Jan Bergman, however, cautions against a wholesale reading of Egyptian apocalypse in Middle Kingdom texts because there are several elements often missing (e.g., a clear divine-human communication, eschatological emphasis).⁷⁸ He tentatively suggests Jonathan Smith’s category of “proto-apocalyptic” as a more accurate designation for these earlier Egyptian materials.⁷⁹

2.2 Terminology, Texts, and Characteristics

As seen above, three Egyptian texts constitute the foundation for discussion of the TT motif: the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, *Prophecies of Neferti*, and *Complaints of Khakheperreseneb*.

⁷⁵ Chester C. McCown, “Hebrew and Egyptian Apocalyptic Literature,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 18 (1925), p. 368.

⁷⁶ Assmann, “Königsgodma und Heilserwartung,” pp. 361, 369-370.

⁷⁷ John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), p. 9.

⁷⁸ Jan Bergman, “Introductory Remarks on Apocalypticism in Egypt,” in Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, pp. 51-60.

⁷⁹ Bergman, “Introductory Remarks on Apocalypticism in Egypt,” p. 55.

However, the name for the concept originates outside of Egyptological circles. Those working with Egyptian materials connect the content and style of the texts by using terms such as “social woe/upheaval/anarchy,” “lamentation,” “absurdity,” “national distress/calamity,” “cynical song,” and “pessimistic meditation.”⁸⁰

Biblical scholars also have used a variety of terms for what is essentially the same referent. These include “topsy-turvy,” “world upside down,” “absurdity,” “*mundus inversus*,” and “pessimistic” texts/literature.⁸¹ However, like any technical term, not all uses of these refer to the specific motif in discussion.⁸²

The reason this is important is that one could peruse studies produced by Egyptologists or biblical scholars and find divergent terms, and yet upon close reading, each field has many similar findings and uses of their preferred terminologies. That is to say, a lacked of shared

⁸⁰ John L. Foster, “Wisdom Texts,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Donald B. Redford, ed., Vol. III (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 503-507; Fox, “On הבל in Qoheleth,” p. 562; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, pp. 32-33; Goedicke, *The Protocol of Neferyt*, p. 4; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA/London: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 134-145, 139, 145, 149; Morenz, “Literature as a Construction of the Past in the Middle Kingdom,” pp. 108-109; Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 132-133, 144, 166-167; Donald B. Redford, “Ancient Egyptian Literature: An Overview,” in Jack M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Vol. IV (New York: Scribner, 1995), pp. 2233-2234; Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 66; and Seidlmayer, “The First Intermediate Period,” pp. 134-135; Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, pp. 188-189, 214.

⁸¹ Basson, ““Only Ruins Remain,”” pp. 128-37; Basson, “Two Instances of *Mundus Inversus* in Psalm 113,” pp. 1-14; Fox, “On הבל in Qoheleth,” pp. 559-563; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 652; Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, pp. 29-51; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 31-32, 325; Kruger, “Symbolic Inversion in Death,” pp. 398-411; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 31-32, 155, 325; Sneed, “הבל as ‘Worthless’ in Qoheleth,” p. 883; and Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” p. 602.

⁸² For example, Duane Garrett uses the term “topsy-turvy” to describe how unfitting it is form the religious elite to be acting immorally in Amos 5: “The overall message is that this is a tospy-turvy world, in which wrong behavior and concepts about God are substituted for what is right.” Duane A. Garrett, *Amos: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), p. 139.

nomenclature should not dissuade one from interdisciplinary research. In fact, it affirms the need for interdisciplinarity and a shared vocabulary across disciplines.

2.3 Reflections Regarding Previous Scholarship

Having surveyed the relevant studies, a few observations and several questions present themselves. First, many of the studies present two main variants of the motif—a negative, dystopian form, which highlights current societal problems or forewarns those which might come to pass, alongside a positive, utopian type. For consistency and clarity, I will refer to these as “world upside down” (based on Babcock and Van Leeuwen), and “world right-side-up,” while maintaining terms such as “TT,” “*mundus inversus*,” and “social inversion” to discuss reversals of both varieties (simply for the sake of variation; to my mind, the terms are synonymous).

Second, the functions that scholars have assigned to the motif vary widely. It seems to me that the proposed purposes relay more about the scholar’s own field and assumptions than they do about any function inherent to the motif. For example: Luria’s “social revolution” bears little resemblance to Enmarch’s theodicy. Whether or not the motif even *has* one inherent function is something I examine below.

Third, there remains an astonishing lack of clarity as to what *does* and *does not* constitute “TT.” For many, the category appears so broad as to encompass anything outside of a rigid, day-to-day norm. For instance, if ritual lamentation is a real-life, embodied practice of *mundus inversus* (as it is for Kruger),⁸³ then what would one call it when these practices are *themselves*

⁸³ Kruger, “The Inverse World of Mourning in the Hebrew Bible.”

reversed.⁸⁴ One could argue that the absence of lamentation is the true inversion from cultural expectation. One must always ask, “Which way is up?” A couple uncertainties contribute to this directional disorientation:

1. How abnormal must something be to be “upside down”? Does a cat waiting on a mouse really constitute the same *topos* as a person fasting in grief? Or should one differentiate between full reversals and mere off-kilter-ness?
2. Is there a typical form in which the “motif” occurs? Must a transformation occur from one state of being to another, or does a subject’s opposite necessitate mention? (For example: must the rich *become* poor? If so, must the poor *also* become rich?).

Lastly, there is a dearth of true comparison between the deployment of the motif in the hands of its two most noted users: the scribes of Egypt and Israel. The only discussion of the kind is an assertion that Israel preferred the utopian visions, while Egypt preferred dystopian. The first half of this assertion relies on highly selective data; the second half lacks meaning until a study accomplishes an in-depth assessment.

Moreover, the available treatments leave one with an abundance of questions: how similar is the usage of the motif? Does it hold the same function in each culture? Does the emergence of the motif in Israel represent influence, or are these two strains of a pan-cultural concept? Egyptologists rightly observe the foundational Egyptian worldview in the motif: the binary opposition of *mḥ.t* and *ʿsf.t*. But does such a dualism exist in the ancient Israelite

⁸⁴ As they are in 2 Sam 12:19-23, wherein David’s servants are perturbed that he failed to observe the standard mourning rituals, asking him, “What is this that you have done? When the child was alive, you fasted and wept, (but now) that the child has died, you get up and eat food.”

mindset(s)? If not, what Israelite mentalities *do* the motif support? Such questions are those that I address in the study that follows.

2.4 Next Steps

Therefore, there arises a need for greater clarity in terms, characteristics, and function(s). In his study of the presence of the motif in Prov 30:21-23, Van Leeuwen states that “A comprehensive treatment of this topos in the Bible and the ancient Near East remains to be written.”⁸⁵ Since then, scholars have accomplished much toward a fuller analysis. Yet in my perspective, much remains elusive about the motif. This is likely due to a lack of directness and comprehensiveness—and so a direct and comprehensive treatment is exactly what this study sets out to accomplish. I shall now turn to the texts and then consider what characteristics constitute the motif.

⁸⁵ Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” p. 602, n. 13.

3 Egyptian Texts



iw-ms b' hr msnh mi ir nhp

Truly, the land spins round like a potter's wheel (*Ipuwer* 2.8).

3.1 Introductory Comments

There are a number of Egyptian texts that deploy the TT motif. Foremost among them are three that scholars have discussed at length: the *Prophecies of Neferti*, the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, and the *Complaints of Khakheperreseneb*. The first and second use the motif at length. A brief examination of the last of these, *Khakheperreseneb*, will show that it shares little with the others beyond broad thematic similarities. Citing every passage from *Neferti* and *Ipuwer* would become unwieldy and nearly result in an analysis of the texts in their entirety, since the TT motif is so dense throughout. Instead, I offer representative passages from each that summarize the themes, form, and function of the motif in these texts. Subsequently, I will add several passages from other Egyptian texts that employ the motif.

Throughout my analysis, I pay special attention to literary devices that accompany the TT motif. This is in part because these devices will help illuminate the function of the motif. It is also because discussion of such craft in Egyptian texts is often lacking. I agree with Parkinson's observation: "Despite the undeniable advances in Egyptology over recent decades, I doubt that we have yet fully found a style or language with which to talk about Ancient Egyptian poetry *as*

poetry, and our editorial practices can often remain quite traditional.”⁸⁶ Thus, in my discussion of the motif, I do my best to keep in mind the ingenuity and, more crucially, performative power of the texts.

3.2 “Canonical” Texts

3.2.1 *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*

Dating *Ipuwer* presents an acute challenge. This is in part due to its broken beginning and end.⁸⁷ Gardiner’s estimation that the text must be reflecting on either the First or Second Intermediate Period (from the sage’s contemporaneous perspective) has held a long influence.⁸⁸ In more recent decades, scholars have tended to place the text in the late Middle Kingdom, without a specific recent historical referent. On dating, Donald Redford argues that “...the historical milieu of the piece clearly points to the period between Pepy II and the rise to power of the 11th Dynasty for its formulation.”⁸⁹

Throughout *Ipuwer* are many quintessential instances of the motif. Renaud identifies the type of discourse used: “le discours de l’exaspération.”⁹⁰ The imagery is rich, with a high density

⁸⁶ Richard Bruce Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A Reader’s Commentary* (Lingua Aegyptia Studia Monographica, 10; Hamburg: Widmaier Verlag, 2012), p. ix, emphasis mine.

⁸⁷ We know *Ipuwer* only through a single papyrus, P. Leiden I 344. The lack of other copies may be an accident of the archaeological record’s arbitrary preservation, rather than an indication of its unpopularity. On its reception (or lack thereof), see Roland Enmarch, “The Reception of a Middle Egyptian Poem: The Dialogue of *Ipuwer* and the Lord of All in the Ramesside Period and Beyond,” in M. Collier and Steven R. Snape, eds., *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen* (Bolton, England: Rutherford Press Ltd, 2011), pp. 169-75.

⁸⁸ Gardiner, *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁹ Redford, “Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times,” p. 66.

⁹⁰ “The discourse of exasperation.” Renaud, “*Ipuwer le mal-aimé*,” p. 72.

of literary flourishes. Of the orator’s first speech, Parkinson observes a device that highlights the progressive undoing of the world: “...some verses repeat individual words from the preceding stanza or are linked by association of ideas to produce a magnificently strong impression of the world spiralling out of control.”⁹¹ This is all to say that *Ipuwer* is a masterful text. Its thoroughgoing use of the TT motif shows this.

Here I discuss passages thematically, highlighting some of the more prevalent topics in the text, including the divine, nature and the cosmos, the ritual system, ethical behavior, and socio-economic concerns.

3.2.1.1 The Divine

iw-ms t3w hr dd ir...⁹² i-rh.n=i ntr tni k3=iry=i⁹³ n=f
iw-ms m3t ht t3 m rn s.t pwy isf.t pw ir=sn hr grg hr s.t

Truly, a hot-tempered person speaks: “If... I knew where God was, then I would act for him.” Ma‘at is throughout the land (only) by this name of hers; yet it is Isfet that they do (by) trusting in her (*Ipuwer* 5.3-4).

hnmw hr im.t hr wrdw=f

Khnum grieves on account of his weariness (*Ipuwer* 5.6-7).

The fact that the hot-tempered person is the one who desires to act piously is a subtle use of the TT motif. This individual informs the readers that divinity has faded from human view in some fashion. Then, the scribe mentions the absence of Ma‘at (the goddess and the idea) and the people’s active participation in propagating chaos. A few lines later, *Ipuwer* points out that

⁹¹ Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems*, p. 167.

⁹² I use elipses to mark portions that are too broken to translate.

⁹³ *k3* may mark the parenthetic future. Otherwise, it is the particle *k3*, which “...marks a statement with verbal or non-verbal predicate as the future result of some preceding actions,” James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), p. 217.

women have become infertile due to Khnum’s sorrow. It is ironic that people are no longer crafted on Khnum’s wheel, since *tʿ hr msnḥ mi ir nḥp* “the world spins round like the potter’s wheel” (2.8).

There are very few direct references to divinities for most of the oration. Ma‘at, Ptah, Khnum, and perhaps Khenti appear briefly. However, after the turn to wisdom (10.12ff), when Ipuwer reminds the listener to *shʿw* “remember” all the good, divinity appears frequently. The term *ntr* “god” at least ten times after this section, and likely several more times that are lost to us in broken fragments. Before the turn to wisdom, the word occurs only five times—and this is spread across a far lengthier portion of the text. This emphasizes that the gods have removed their blessing from Egypt.

3.2.1.2 Nature and the Cosmos

iw-ms ḥm.wt wšr n-iwr.n tw n-ḳd.n ḥnmw m-ʿ šhr.w tʿ

Truly, the women are infertile, and no one conceives,
Khnum no longer fashions because of the conditions of the land
(*Ipuwer* 2.4).

iw-ms itrw m snfw swri tw im=f

Truly, the Nile is blood, (yet still) one drinks from it (*Ipuwer* 2.10).

iw-ms dšr.t ḥt tʿ spʿ.wt ḥbʿ(=wi)

Truly, the desert is throughout the land, and the nomes are laid
waste (*Ipuwer* 3.1).

iw-ms [nh].wt ski(=wi) gn.w wn=w(i)

Truly, the sycamore trees have perished, and the branches have
been stripped (*Ipuwer* 4.14).

The disorder of the cosmos beyond human intervention is far less a concern for Ipuwer than for Neferti (see 3.2.2 below). Ipuwer is concerned with nature as it relates to human society, and the imagery deployed all shares the theme of infertility. The most striking of these is the

bloody Nile, perhaps the line of this text most cited for its resonance with biblical Exodus traditions.⁹⁴ Why blood? One should refrain from explaining presence not for any naturalistic reason, like muddy water of red clay. Rather, the scribe “dwells on the most appalling thing that a watersource can run with, and not on a real event.”⁹⁵ Blood simply is the most disturbing replacement for the liquid of the lush, life-giving Nile.

3.2.1.3 The Ritual System

Another area of deep angst for Ipuwer’s audience is the unraveling of the ritual system and above all its secrets. This trope is unique to *Ipuwer*, showing its author’s greater concern for cultic matters.

hr tw ḏd=tw *wʒ r s.t štb.w.w*
mk sw m-^c hm.w sw *mī rh.w sw*

One speaks,⁹⁶ saying, “May the place of divine secrets fall!”⁹⁷
 Look! It is (now) in possession of the ones ignorant in it, as if they
 were those who are knowledgeable in it (*Ipuwer* 4.7-4.8).

Much like the trope of foreigners “infesting” Egypt, the concern here appears to be that those who are not elites trained in ritual are invading the holy places, carrying their ignorance with them. Those *hm.w* “ignorant ones” act as if they are *rh.w* “sages.”

iw-ms hn.t ḏsr.t šd(=wī) sš.w=f *shʒ(=wī) s.t štb.w wn.t*
iw-ms hkʒ.w shʒ=w(i) šmw shnw *snhʒ.wt hr shʒ=s{.t} in rmt*
iw-ms wn(=wī) hʒw *šd(=ti) wp.wt=sn*

⁹⁴ See Enmarch, “The Reception of a Middle Egyptian Poem.”

⁹⁵ Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, p. 39. He also notes that the drinking of the blood may adhere to a cannibalistic trope to disturb the listener further (pp. 78-79).

⁹⁶ Parenthetic *hr* for “says he.”

⁹⁷ Or perhaps instead of *wʒ*, one could read *hrw-r* “as well as the place of divine secrets.” Either way, the saying is difficult.

Truly, concerning the sacred chamber: taken/read out are its writings. Laid bare are the place and the secrets of the sanctuary. Truly, the spells are revealed, *šmw*-incantations and *šhn*-oracles have been frustrated because of their mention by people. Truly, offices are opened, and their inventories taken (*Ipuwer* 6.5-7).

The concern with commoners seizing ritual material for their untrained use continues. Ipuwer here spells out exactly the kinds of texts he fears falling into common hands: *hkʒ.w*, *šm.w*, and *šhn.w*. By using these terms, the scribe exhibits his own learnedness. He demonstrates his erudition by utilizing *šdi* as a unidirectional polyseme: the writings are stolen and their secrets read out and revealed. “Taken” parallels “laid bare,” while “read out” anticipates “spells.” Both meanings make sense in the context. I contend that the polysemy conveys the chaos of the situation and destabilizes the listener/reader.

He does not clarify what is dangerous about this situation. Three options occur to me: 1) the spells are potent weapons that the uninitiated can now use in dangerous ways, 2) power is redistributed from the elite, or 3) the disclosure of the divine secrets renders them powerless, invalidating them. A combination of any of these is possible, but unfortunately Ipuwer’s anxieties remain elusive.

iw-ms hwrw spr r ʿ psd.t *shʒ=w šsm pf mʿbʒ*

Truly, a poor person arrives before the place of the Ennead. revealed is that guidance of the (House of the) Thirty (*Ipuwer* 6.11).

mtn šd=w(i) krh.t m tph.t=s *shʒ.w sštʒ.w n(w) nsi.w(i) bi.t.w(i)*

Behold, the Serpent has been removed from its pit, and the secrets of the Kings laid bare (*Ipuwer* 7.5-6).

The invasion of the unfit into sacred spaces continues in these passages and others. The *krh.t* “Serpent” intrigues. It would appear to be a sort of serpentine goddess that the people have removed in order to access royal-divine information. The easy removal of a guardian figure

highlights the absurdity of the whole situation. Everything is helter-skelter, including the failure of the divine protectors.

These passages draw attention to the scribe’s acute anxiety concerning ritual hierarchy. When he imagines the world at its worst, he envisions the distribution of ritual texts and divine secrets to the masses. I suggest that his concern is that the ritual text is one means of restoring order, and thus by their dissemination and being lost to the common folk, the ritual restoration of peace would also vanish. Chaos has come, and the temple system has lost its weapons against it.


3.2.1.4 Ethical Behavior

One of the more consistent expressions of the TT relates to human behavior (perhaps terms like “morality” and “ethics” imposes too much modern thinking onto the text).

*snfw m s.t nb.t n-n{h}*⁹⁸ *n m.t* *wnhy.t hr dd n-tn im s.t*
iw-ms m.wt šš.wt krs=w(i) m itrw
nwy m hš.t hpr is w‘b.t m nwy.w

Blood is in every place, and no one escapes death.
 The death shroud speaks, (but) no one approaches it.
 Many dead have been sunk in the river;
 The water is a tomb, as the grave turns into waters (*Ipuwer* 2.6-7).

The scribe conveys transformation by inaction and negation, mainly by highlighting the lack of burial and mortuary practice. The life-giving Nile has become the place of the dead. Blood maintains its disturbing presence in the text. As is known from the abundance of mortuary texts and material culture, life after death in ancient Egypt is fundamentally tied to correct burial and funerary ritual. The people’s negligence to bury their dead and honor their memory is tragic

⁹⁸ Gardiner, *Admonitions*, p. 25, “The verb *nkšn* (or *kšn*?) is probably corrupt; a similar word occurs in 4, 2. In both places the emendation  would be suitable.” Gardiner emends *nkšn* as *nhw* “loss, lack.” Other options include *nh* “to escape (death),” or perhaps the less intrusive emendation of *nkw.t* “moisture.” The latter makes the sentence grammatically challenging, but connects more closely with the abundance of blood.

and wrong. In this way, the scribe extends the chaos from this life into the realm of the blessed dead—even they cannot escape the transformations taking place.

ḥwī s sn=f n m(w).t=f išt pw ỉry.wt

A man strikes his brother, (the one) of his own mother. What is this that has been done (*Ipuwer* 5.10)?

ḥms tw ḥr bʿ.wt r ỉi=tw ḥʿwy r ỉ.t ʿtpw=f

nḥm nt.t ḥr=f ḥnm=w m sh.t n.t ḥt ḥdb=w m nf

One sits in the bushes for a night-traveler to be brought, so as to take his load. That which he has is taken. He is made to experience beating by a stick. He is killed in wrongdoing (*Ipuwer* 5.11-12).

Crime has also infested the world beyond ritual. Violence is the main problem. It manifests in the most disconcerting ways, directed toward loved ones (one’s own brother, 5.10), and the vulnerable (one who travels in the dark of night, 5.11). The former is so unjust that the scribe breaks into a rhetorical question: “What is this...?” The latter sets up a progression: the criminal seizes his belongings, beats him, and then kills him. The scribe fronts the *nḥm* “seizing” of his possessions before the violence to draw attention to how unnecessary the violence is, since the man has already taken the stuff. This makes up a miniature inversion. Where one would expect killing and then stealing, the opposite progression takes place.

3.2.1.5 Socio-Economic Concerns

By far the most prevalent expression of the TT in *Ipuwer* is that relating to socio-economic reversals. He spends great lengths of his oration lamenting the downfall of the powerful and the upward mobility of the impoverished. Of course, this relates to *Ipuwer*’s elite status and prejudice. The methods by which the scribe expresses transformation include reversal (the most common when relating to societal transformations) and negation. Replacement is implicit, but not directly stated.

iw-ms šps.w m nḥw.wt šwš.w.w ḥry(.w) ršw.t
nīw.t nb.t ḥr imi dr=sn kni.w m m-‘=n

Truly, the nobles are in lamentations, (but) the poor possess joy.
Every town says, “Come on! We shall expel the powerful from our
midst” (*Ipuwer* 2.7-8)!

iw-ms sš s... sš=f ḥpr(=w) ms nb.t=f m sš ḥm.t=f

Truly, the son of a man... lacks his recognition, (for) the son of his
wife has become the son of his slavewoman (*Ipuwer* 2.14).

[mn]ḥ.w r ḥḥ.w n ḥm.wt šps.wt ḥt tš
nb.wt pr.w ḥr dd ḥš n=n wnm.t{i}=n

Expensive (jewelry) is around the necks of slavewomen. Riches
are throughout the land,⁹⁹ (but) the Ladies of the houses say, “If
only we had things which we (could) eat” (*Ipuwer* 3.3)!

Most notably, in many TT passages in the socio-economic category, the concern is twofold: the powerful will fall and the less fortunate will rise. Both shifts are necessary ingredients in the TT “recipe.” *Ipuwer* acts as if *everything* is bad for *everyone*, even while making statements like *šwš.w.w ḥry.w ršw.t* “the poor possess joy” (2.7-8). On top of this, some of the reversals are self-contradictory. How can riches be abundant in the land, yet the (formerly) rich be on the brink of starvation? Such paradoxes are the stuff of *Ipuwer*’s imagination, and perhaps they align with the scribe’s intentions. The absurdity helps to disorient the listener. Enmarch discerns these contradictions, noting that *Ipuwer*’s genre

frequently requires opposing, contradictory, ironic and allusive themes that defy simple analysis... Doubt, equivocation, lack of simplicity, and colouring of ideology are markers of literature in all cultures, and qualifications and unresolved complexities of this sort are characteristic of Middle Egyptian pessimistic literature.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Or, “Delicacies were throughout the land.”

¹⁰⁰ Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, p. 60.

Throughout the work, the scribe uses repetition with variation. Stock phrases do not appear on multiple occasions, but *Leitwörter* like *špss* “rich,” *šwšw* “poor,” *nb* “master,” and *hm* “servant” occur frequently, often in parallel with their opposites.

iw-ms kd.w k.w¹⁰¹ m ihwt.yw wn.w m dp.t ntr nḥb(=wi)...

Truly, the pyramid builders entered into (the status of) tenant farmers. Those who were in the barque of God are now yoked (*Ipuwer* 3.6).

iw-ms wr.w ḥkr.w ḥr swn šms=tw šmsw.w

Truly, the princes are starving to death, (but) the followers are (now) followed (*Ipuwer* 5.2).

These lines continue the transformation by reversal. The first two (3.6 and 5.2) articulate the fall of the mighty and rise of the lowly. One can see the dividing line between “high” and “low” society in the Egyptian mindset in interesting ways; for example, the *kd* “builder” is upperclass (otherwise the reversal does not obtain).

mtn wš šn(w) iwti-mrht=f ḥpr m nb ḥbb.wt ḥnti.w ndm

mtn-iwti pds=s m nb.t štp gmḥ(t) ḥr=s m mw m nb.t ḥḥ

Behold, the hair-perished one who had no oil has become the owner of vessels of myrrh.

Behold, she who had no coffin is (now) the owner of a chest; she who spotted her face in the water is (now) the owner of a mirror (*Ipuwer* 8.4-5).

This last passage is noteworthy in multiple ways. First, it is one of a series (beginning at 7.12) of TT lines that front “positive” reversals. In this lengthy section, bald men obtain oil, poor folk harps and mirrors, butlers servants, and so on. It follows another TT section (7.1ff) that fronts the downfall of the mighty. Thus, the very structure of 7.1-8.5 is itself in the form of a reversal. In the first section, the well-off (in whatever way) precedes the ones who will replace

¹⁰¹ So Enmarch, who translates *k m* as “train in.” Gardiner reconstructs this as *kd.w [mr.w ḥp]r* “pyramid builders have become...”

their position in some way; in the second, the lesser folk are the first to appear—and sometimes their previously-powerful predecessors do not exist at all. The scribe has written them out of the text. Lines 8.4-5 above illustrate this.

3.2.1.6 Summary of *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*

Above, I briefly examined several passages throughout *Ipuwer* that characterize how the scribe utilizes the TT motif. Unfortunately, its broken nature makes the function of the text uncertain. But one can ascertain some aspects of its purpose based on the clear position of the writer, whom Renaud describes as a typical elite:

L’auteur était probablement un aristocrate ultra-conservateur, un nostalgique du passé, très attaché aux traditions; un noble imbu de ses privilèges, qui fantasmait la brutalité et l’impiété de la populace avec une virulence obsédée...¹⁰²

One should expect as much, considering what we know of literacy and scribal education in Egypt; a writer is by default an elite. As Karel van der Toorn says: “Literacy in Egypt... was a mark of the elite.”¹⁰³ Thus, *Ipuwer*’s writer deploys the motif consistently to flaunt his own elite status (his erudition) and to maintain the status quo in defense of that same rank. He aims to demonstrate that the distribution of power is as it should be. Though this is not all the text aims to accomplish. Clearly, there are cosmological themes relating to the nature of chaos and theodicy. However, those sections (especially the Lord of All’s response to Ipuwer’s orations) do

¹⁰² “The author was probably an extremely conservative aristocrat, nostalgic for the past, very attached to traditions; a nobleman full of his privileges, who fantasized the brutality and impiety of the commonfolk with an obsessed virulence.” Renaud, “Ipuwer le mal-aimé,” p. 72.

¹⁰³ Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 67. This may have changed slightly during the New Kingdom Period, toward a “meritocracy” (p. 68).

not deploy the TT motif like the sections that I have analyzed above.¹⁰⁴ Ipuwer's connection to the lament genre through its theodic themes is important for consideration of the origins of the TT motif (see 3.3 Funerary Texts below).

As a summary, consider Renaud's recognition of a denser, more radical form of the TT motif than seen in any of the texts that follow below:

Chacun a relevé dans les Admonitions le thème (commun à bon nombre de cultures) du monde à l'envers. Mais l'auteur ne se contente pas d'égrener des antithèses telles que "les nobles dames sont en guenilles, les servantes portent des bijoux". Il radicalise cette thématique de manière absolue: tout est sens dessus dessous, tout est anormal.¹⁰⁵

3.2.2 The Prophecies of Neferti

Neferti is far easier to date than *Ipuwer*; the *ex eventu* prophecy of "Ameny" is a clear indication of its composition during the days of Amenemhat I (12th Dynasty).¹⁰⁶ The narrative itself placed in the time of Snefru (4th Dynasty). Assmann's view represents something of a consensus, placing the work in the category of Middle Kingdom reflections on the First Intermediate Period in the form of cultural memory.¹⁰⁷ However, earlier scholars who saw the

¹⁰⁴ Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, discusses the poem as theodicy at length in his introduction.

¹⁰⁵ "Everyone has noted in the *Admonitions* the theme (common to many cultures) of the world upside down. But the author is not content to simply recite opposites such as 'noble ladies are in rags, maidservants wear jewels.' He radicalizes this theme in an absolute way: everything is upside down, everything is abnormal." Renaud, "Ipuwer le mal-aimé," p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ See Goedicke's discussion of the occasion for the composition: *Protocol of Neferyt*, pp. 6-14. Goedicke suggests that "Neferyt" is the very same author as that of the *Instructions for Merikare* (pp. 17-18). See also the foundational Georges Posener, "Littérature et politique dans l'Égypte de la XII^e dynastie (la Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 307; Paris: Honoré Champion, 1956), pp. 21-60.

¹⁰⁷ Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), pp. 106-110. He uses the term "codified memory" to convey the idea.

text as more firmly historical also perceived its literary character. For example, Goedicke noted that there is “considerable artistry” in the work in the form of “puns and parallelisms.”¹⁰⁸

Toward the beginning of Neferti’s performance, one encounters the first of many TT passages:

*mk rf (nn)-wn wr.w m shr.w nw tʃ
 ỉrỉ.wt m tm.t ỉr(.t) šʃʳ rʳ m grg*

Look, indeed, the great ones are not among the governance of the mind of the land.

The things that were done have been undone. May Re begin to create (*Nef* 22)!

Here, the motif takes the form of two negations. The “great ones” have disappeared and the divine order (“the things that were done”) has begun to unravel. Thematically, one might note that it is the absence of authority that characterizes the world in disarray; the *wr.w* “great ones/princes” are gone, and Re no longer *grg* “creates” (one can surmise based upon the petition for him to do so). The lack of authority does not only cause the ordered world to grind to a halt—it begins to recede into the uncreated chaos. One can read the last clause in another way, hinging upon another of *grg*’s meanings: “falsehood.” In this way, it means “the day begins in falsehood,” i.e., one’s daily routine begins with a deceitful act.

3.2.2.1 Ethical Behavior

Several passages throughout Neferti highlight humanity’s moral depravity, or at least ethical numbing:

*sbt tw m s(b)t n mr nn rmw tw n m(w).t
 nn sđr tw hkr n m(w).t ỉb n s m sʃ=f đs=f*

¹⁰⁸ Goedicke, *Protocol of Neferyt*, p. 20.

nn ir tw s3m(.t) min ib stni.n hr=s r 3w
 hms s r k'h=f s3=f ky hr sm3 ky

One will laugh in laughter concerning pain/ailment; there is no one weeping about death.

No one will sleep, since he is starving to death. A man's heart is only for his own protection (lit. "back").

No one makes their hair disheveled today, for the heart has abandoned it altogether.

A man sits down and turns his back (while) another kills someone else (*Nef* 41-44).

Negation and inaction convey these transformations. The passage utilizes several tropes to relate the direness of the situation: starvation, insomnia, illness, death, and murder. Despite these tragedies, there are none who care; everyone is either too exhausted or too selfish to lift a finger. People turn a blind eye on wrongdoing. In fact, no one even laments the situation (disheveling of hair). Thus, *Neferti* conveys how thoroughly upturned the world has become by showing humans at their worst. People do what they should not, and fail to do what they should.¹⁰⁹

3.2.2.2 Socio-Economic Concerns

The upturning of the social hierarchy is another thematic thread in *Neferti*, yet less pronounced compared to *Ipuwer*:

di=i n=k hry r hry phr.ti m s3 phr h.t
 'nh tw m hr ntr
 iw hwrw r ir.t 'h' wr.t r... r hpr(.t)
 in šw3w.w wnm sn.wt b3k.w bh k3=w(i)

I will give to you the lowly lifted up; the one who will turn the back will turn the body.

One will live in the necropolis.

And the humble is to acquire riches, whereas the great one is to become...

¹⁰⁹ This relates to many TT passages in the Hebrew Bible, wherein particular offices fail to perform their fundamental functions (e.g., the corruption of the priesthood, lying prophets, etc.).

And then the poor will eat food offerings; the slaves of forced labor will be exalted (*Nef* 55-57).

Reversal is the mechanism of transformation in this passage. The scribe accentuates the lifting of the *hry* “undermost,” to become *hry* “uppermost” using paronomasia. *hr ntr* “necropolis” adds to this.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the scribe highlights semantic opposites and exchanges through paronomasia: *hwrw* “the humble” contrasts *wr* “great” (through *w* and *r*), and the *b3k.w* “slaves” are *k3* “lifted” (through *3* and *k*). The consistent paronomasia highlights the scribe’s competence and his conscious use of the motif.

3.2.2.3 Nature and the Cosmos

A great number of passages throughout *Neferti* emphasize cosmological elements that have gone awry. The primary tropes at play here are the failure of bodies of water and the sun’s darkening:

iw itrw šw nw km.t d3=tw mw hr rd.wy
tw r hhy mw n h'.w r skd.w=f
w3.t=f hpr=ti m wdb iw wdb r nt.y mw

The river of the Blackland is empty/dry.¹¹¹ The waters are crossed on foot.

One has to seek water to sail ships.

Their path has become a riverbank, and a riverbank into that which is water (*Nef* 26-28).

hd(=wi) hm n3y n bw nfr(.w) n3 n š.w k'hw
wn.yw hr wgs.w wbnw hr rm.w 3pd.w

¹¹⁰ By this point, the phonemes represented by *h* and *h* had largely—but not completely—merged. If they were still distinct, they were similar enough to evoke one another. See James P. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Phonology* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 56, and Carsten Peust, *Egyptian Phonology: An Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language* (Monographien Zur Ägyptischen Sprache, 2; Göttingen: Peust & Gutschmidt, 1999), p. 117.

¹¹¹ *šw* can mean both “empty, lacking,” and “dry.” Thus, this is a case of multidirectional polysemy. The meaning “empty” parallels the preceding line, *nn sr.n=i nt.t n i* “I have not foretold that which is not coming” in its negation. “Dry” anticipates the water and ship terms that follow.

Destroyed indeed are those good things of the good place, those of pools and fishponds.

That is, those where there are fish-gutters, shining with fish and fowl (*Nef* 30-31).

iri.wt m tm.t ir(.t) šꜣ rꜥ m grg

The things that have been done have been undone. O, may Re begin to create (*Nef* 22, cited above).

itn ḥbs=w nn psd=f mꜣꜣ rḥyt

nn ꜣnh=tw ḥ(b)s.w šnꜥ

wn.in=s ḥr(.w) nb.w id(=w) m gꜣw=f

The sundisk is hidden and will not shine so that the common people may see.

No one will be vitalized when covered by a storm cloud.

It is that all the faces are stupified (lit. “deaf”) in their lack (*Nef* 24-26).

iw rꜥ iwd=f sw rmt

wbn=f wn wnwt nn rḥ tw ḥpr mtrt

And Re separates himself from the people.

May he shine when it is the hour. One does not know whether midday will come about (*Nef* 51-52).

The failure of the Nile appears here again as a TT trope. The scribe portrays the cosmic alteration in more economic terms (trade and the fishing industry). He does so through negation (of water, fish) and reversal (of the dry land and river). A more plentiful trope is that of the luminaries’ darkening.¹¹² Such a thing spelled disaster to the Egyptian mind. The sun being hidden by a cloud equates to the people being cut off from the source of life itself. Such a concept pervades all of Egyptian history, but finds its most potent visual expression in the iconographic works of the Amarna Period. There, often the Aten (*itn*, the same sundisk in l. 24) extends its rays as hands holding ꜣnh-signs, thus revitalizing to the royal family with divine life.

¹¹² This trope was pervasive in Egyptian thought, and so occurs in a great number of other Egyptian texts. It also makes its way into some passages in the Hebrew Bible that describe judgment upon Egypt. See Safwat Marzouk, *Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel* (Forschungen Zum Alten Testament, 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), pp. 194-200.

The removal of this life source is the epitome of a world gone awry. Such a thing could not happen by accident, and so in Neferti, the sun’s disappearance is the manifestation of divine abandonment (“Re separates himself from the people” [l. 51]).¹¹³ His return and its timing are entirely uncertain.

3.2.2.4 Summary of *The Prophecies of Neferti*

All these TT passages aim to create a sense of need for a great authority who will rise up and reverse the chaos that has infected the land. The true climax of the text arrives in the shape of a king, “Ameny,” in strikingly messianic terms (e.g., *sʾ n s* “the Son of Man”¹¹⁴ [Nef 61]). He ushers in a new age characterized by order:

iw mʿ.t r i.t r s.t=s isf.t dr=ti r rw.ty

And Maʿat is to return to her throne, and Ísfet has been driven out of the Double Gates (Nef 68-69)!

The surrounding passage makes several allusions to elements found earlier in the text, reversing them back to their rightful place. For instance, *nn rdi.t hʿy ʿm.w r km.t dbh=sn mw mi shr.w sš.w* “Then the Asiatic will not be permitted to descend to the Blackland, (rather) they will beg for water as is right for beseechers” (Nef 66-67)—effectively overturning the “rampaging” of the Asiatics (Nef 49) and their “descent to the Blackland” (Nef 32-33).

Thus, Neferti as a unified text both *contains* a smattering of TT passages throughout *and is itself* composed in the form of an inversion (chaos → order). With this in mind, I assert that the text as a whole performs the inversion that it describes. That is, the performer (say, the lector-

¹¹³ Connections in the Hebrew Bible of the TT and divine abandonment motifs will be explored below.

¹¹⁴ Of course, “Son of Man” adds to the messianic hue only when read through an anachronistic lens (i.e., Christian). It is nonetheless interesting that the Egyptian scribe would use the phrase in a charged messianic context (e.g., the establishing of a name for all eternity [linear and cyclical]).

officiant) reads through the extent of the chaos, acknowledging that the world is not as it should be. Parkinson comes to a similar conclusion in stronger theological language: “In this respect the fictional poet—and by extension the actual one—assumes the royal role as a god who restores order and recreates the world.”¹¹⁵ Yet when he comes to the arrival of Ameny in the text, he overcomes the chaos through the reading of Ameny’s accomplishments. He becomes an agent of order through the performance of the text. If this is a case, then the function of the text is far greater than mere propoganda for Amenemhat and the 12th Dynasty.

3.2.3 The *Complaints of Khakheperreseneb*

Unlike *Neferti*, *Khakheperreseneb* has no clear historical anchor. Most scholars date the text to the late Middle Kingdom.¹¹⁶ Boyo Ockinga places this text in the early Middle Kingdom, arguing that it precedes and perhaps directly influences *Ipuwer*—doing so by trusting the scribes claims to innovation.¹¹⁷ A central idea in *Khakheperreseneb* is that the past was better than the orator’s present.¹¹⁸ The scribe refers to an idealized golden age to critique the current state of things: *hpr.w hr hpr nn mi snf dns rnp.t r snw.t=s* “Tranformations are taking place; it is unlike last year. The year is heavier than its predecessor (lit. ‘companion’)” (*Kh.* r. 10). This lamentation creates the opportunity for the scribe to utilize the TT motif (*Kh.* r. 10-12):¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ R. B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London/Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010), p. 199.

¹¹⁶ Richard B. Parkinson, “The Text of ‘Khakheperreseneb’: New Readings of EA 5645, and an Unpublished Ostrakon,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 83 (1997), p. 55.

¹¹⁷ Boyo G. Ockinga, “The Burden of Kha’kheperre’sonbu,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 69 (1983), p. 93.

¹¹⁸ Ockinga represents the opposite view, claiming that Khakheperreseneb’s genius was in having “rejected the venerated tradition of imitating the forefathers” (p. 93).

¹¹⁹ I use the text from Parkinson, “The Text of ‘Khakheperreseneb’.”

rdi=tw mʒ˙t rw.ty ʾsf.t m hnw sh hnn=tw shr.w ntr.w
wni=tw mhr.w=sn wnn tʾ sny-mn.t irtyw m s.t nb.t

Maʿat is put outside, (but) ʾsfet in the midst of the council.
 The plans of the gods are confounded; their ordinances are neglected. The land is continually (in) calamity, mourning is in every place (*Khak* r. 10-11).

hr nb twt hr iw.w šfy.t rdi=w sʾ r=s
tkk(=wi) nb.w sgrw nhpw hr hpr r˙ nb
hr tnbh r hpr.t di=i r hr=sn

Every face alike is subject to injustices. The back is turned on respect. Violated are the lords of silence, (yet) early mo(u)rning comes about each day. The face turns away from that which is happening, (but) I shall give a speech concerning them (*Khak* r. 12).¹²⁰

In these passages, the scribe characterizes the negative transformations using the usual tropes of injustice, mourning, disrespect for authority, and so on. Of all the Egyptian texts that deploy the motif, this one is the least specific. For example, the divine ordinances are confounded—but how? How is that confounding expressed society? The details of the situation do not seem important, at least when set against other pericopes from *Ipuwer* and *Neferti*. Rather, Khakheperreseneb deploys the motif in generic form, for a short section of the text, to serve a goal quite different from the other two.

The scribe deploys the TT motif once more in a later stanza:

dd hr=i m dd n=f hr ib ny=sny hrw

The ones who commands becomes the one commanded, (but) both their hearts are content (*Khak* v. 2-3).

¹²⁰ One can read *nhpw* “early morning” also as an infinitive *nhp* “mourning.” Coincidentally, the polysemy works well in English, too (mo[u]rning).

This transformation-by-reversal is the quintessential form of the TT motif. This adds to the sense that the scribe understood how to deploy the TT motif effectively, but chose to do so only succinctly when it served his larger goal.

3.2.4 The *Debate Between a Human and His Ba*

In the *Debate Between a Human and His Ba*, the section characterized by the refrain $\underline{d}d=i$ $n\ m\ \underline{m}i$ “with whom shall I speak today?” (103-130) describes a TT world in which no one is trustworthy. The TT motif drives the entire section. In this context, the motif functions as fodder for the lament; because the world is so awful, life is not worth living.

The primary types of transformations here are negation and reversal. Notably, these transformations are limited to the social realm. Nature and the cosmos operate as normal (presumably). The crisis is limited to humanity, but notably pervades all humanity. It is the most consistently universalizing of all the human’s speeches, and the monotony serves the function of the poem and to express “the pervasiveness of horror.”¹²¹ The following passages are a brief sampling of this pervasive horror.

$b\underline{t}.w$ ¹²² $m\ \zeta\ \underline{i}b$ $sn\ irr\ \underline{h}n\ \zeta=f\ \underline{h}pr.w\ m\ \underline{h}fty$

The forsaken becomes a close friend; the brother with whom one did (things) becomes an enemy (*Debate* 113-115).

$\zeta wn-\underline{i}b.w$ $s\ nb\ \underline{h}r\ \underline{i}tt\ \underline{h}.t\ snw=f$

Hearts are rapacious; every person takes his companion’s possessions (*Debate* 105-106)

$nn\ m\ \zeta.ty.w$ $t\ \underline{s}p(=wi)\ n\ \underline{i}r.w\ \underline{i}sf.t$

¹²¹ Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, p. 163, n. 28.

¹²² On \underline{i} in place of t , I follow the suggestion of James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 351.

There are no just people; the land is abandoned to those who do injustice (*Debate* 122-123).

Like Khakheperreseneb, the human refers to the past in idyllic terms, and blames the situation in part on people's failure to recall the Edenic past (*n šḥ.t[w] sf* "Yesterday is not remembered" [115]). The solution to all these complaints, as it appears in the human's concluding remarks, is death. Death provides rest and direct access to the divine. Divinity indexes the opposite of all the untrustworthy individuals above. Parkinson explains that in death, the human "no longer lacks an interlocutor, but when dead will be able to speak to the Sungod, who now is not a hostile force..."¹²³

3.2.5 The *Eloquent Peasant*

It is no surprise that one observes the TT motif in the speeches of the *Eloquent Peasant*. In the second address of the clever orator, a lengthy section utilizes this device skillfully (B1 128-139). A shorter passage in the sixth speech also employs the device (B1 279-281). It is one among many that he utilizes to make his point. Of course, this fits the peasant's character—his eloquence is what makes the story work. But it also fits the purpose of the scribes. Parkinson observes in the peasant's speeches

a rapid play of ideas and a high level of imagery, with frequent repetition of keywords, syntactic patterns (such as a series of negative constructions), motifs of imagery, and heightened recollections of earlier phrases. These features increase the forcefulness of the petitions.

The TT motif is fitting for the theme of the story (justice must be served) and for the display of the peasant's—and by extension the scribe's—astounding excellence. Parkinson notes that the introductory words to this section fit a particular form of discourse marked by a "series of

¹²³ Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*, p. 164, n. 40.

strongly contrasting descriptions.”¹²⁴ In other words, this section’s first lines distinguish it as the TT motif:¹²⁵

mk mʕ.t wth=s hr=k nš=t(i) m s.t=s
sr.w hr ir.t iy.t tp ḥsb n md.(w)t hr rdī.t hr gs

Look! Maʕat flees from under you, expelled from her place/throne.
 The officials do harm. The standard of speech is now lopsided
 (*Peasant* B1 128-129).

In these first lines, the absence of justice and truth is combined with divine abandonment, in that Maʕat actively leaves the people (in particular, the elites whom the Peasant addresses). Her expelling creates the occasion for the TT motif. Parkinson notes that *ir.t iy.t* “do harm/cause trouble” (which occurs again in l. 134) contrasts *ir.t mʕ.t* “do justice” that occurs on multiple occasions in later sections.¹²⁶ Reversal and (in)action are the main markers of the transformation that ensues:

rdī ḫw hr gʕ.t hr tʕ srf hr rdī.t nšp=tw psšw m ʕwnw
dr sʕr m wd ir.t=f dmi m wdnw=f ḥsf iw hr ir.t iy.t

The one who gives breath suffocates on the ground.
 The breather (now) is made to pant. The abritrator is predatory.
 The one who drove away need commands its making. The
 town/harbor is its own flood. The repeller of wrongdoing does
 harm (*Peasant* B1 131-134).¹²⁷

Tobin notes that “These two lines are a reference to Osiris as the giver of the winds and of breath,” which indexes “the confusion of justice which the peasant laments.”¹²⁸ Those who

¹²⁴ Parkinson, *Peasant: Commentary*, p. 106.

¹²⁵ Text from Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1991). In my analysis of the *Peasant*, I rely heavily on Parkinson’s grammatical discussion in his commentary.

¹²⁶ Parkinson, *Peasant: Commentary*, p. 107.

¹²⁷ I take “suffocates” from *gʕw* “be constricted.” *srf(w)* and the whole clause remains unclear. Parkinson 2010 translates as “he who breathes calm,” and Tobin as “he who refreshes the nostrils.” I think there may be a connection to *srf* “heat,” but the meaning is uncertain.

¹²⁸ Tobin notes this in Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, p. 31, n. 16.

once were essential helpers in society (the giver of breath, need-expeller, arbitrator) have either fallen on bad luck or become wrongdoers themselves. The town becoming a flood recalls Nilotic failure passages from *Ipuwer* and *Neferti*, and also the line *gr m iwḥ* “silence is the flood” from the latter.

The peasant continues on in a similar fashion after a brief interruption. The core of the TT motif ends with a rhetorical question: *i tr gm=k rk n=k* “O, please, have you found (something) for yourself?” This phrase is notoriously ambiguous, resulting in various translations.¹²⁹ Yet it clearly marks a break in the speech wherein the Peasant addresses the elite in a more direct fashion, drawing attention to the point of his speech. This is an opportunity to consider how the TT motif functions. Here, it becomes a weapon wielded by the vulnerable to call out the powerful and their hypocrisy. The transformations that the Peasant describes are so black-and-white that one can only insert oneself into the speech as the disadvantaged or those taking advantage. The motif radicalized reality into the extremes of right and wrong. This is fitting, considering the dualistic lens through which Egyptians often viewed the world.

¹²⁹ Tobin: “Do you see herein anything referring to yourself?” And Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940-1640 BC*: “Do you not profit yourself thus?” but *Peasant: Commentary*: “Shall you then profit yourself?”

3.3 Other Texts

3.3.1 Funerary Texts

Parkinson shows a thematic affinity between these well-known Egyptian texts and tomb elegies, such as Theban Tomb 49 as an example, which reads:¹³⁰

<i>p3 ʃ3 rmt</i>	<i>tw=k m t3 mrr w^c</i>
<i>p3 mr wn=f rd.wy=f r ʃ sm</i>	<i>inq(.w) mr(.w) dr.w</i>
<i>p3 ʃ3 p3q.t mr wnhw</i>	<i>sdr m sfh n sf</i>

The one who was abundant in people: you are (now) in the land that loves solitude. The one who loved to open his legs to walk is gathered up, bound up, and ended. The one who was abundant in fine linen, loved clothes, rests in yesterday's scraps.¹³¹

This text has a great deal in common with the texts examined above. It is highly formulaic; the initial *p3* “the one” marks each line, followed by the reminder of the beautiful past and the tragic reality of the present. So the funerary formula may be one of the factors contributing to the idealization of the past in the TT motif. A lament must appeal to the past, and so the TT motif must do the same. Indeed, this connection to mortuary texts is extremely important. For it is this type of lament that evolves into the fuller literary form, but also likely grew out of more positive affirmation texts found on funerary stele and in tombs like Ankhthifi's:

“I gave the hungry bread and clothing to the naked, I anointed the unanointed, I shod the barefoot, I gave him a wife who had no wife... All Upper Egypt died of hunger. Everyone ate their children. But never did I permit it to happen that anyone died of hunger in this nome.”¹³²

¹³⁰ See Figure 3.

¹³¹ Text from Erich Lüddeckens, “Untersuchungen über religiösen Gehalt, Sprache und Form der ägyptischen Totenklagen,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Instituts für Ägyptische Altertumskunde in Kairo* 11 (1943), p. 112. See Figure 3: Tomb of Neferhotep (TT49). Eighteenth Dynasty.

¹³² Trans. Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), pp. 100-101.

Thus, I suggest that we can observe a development that results in the TT motif: funerary affirmations → (reversed for grieving) funerary lamentations → (impersonalized) cosmic and societal lamentations.

3.3 Conclusions

The connection between divine abandonment and the TT motif underscores an important point. In the Egyptian texts, the world goes helter-skelter by way of divine *inaction*. It does not seem to be the case that the gods cause these reversals. Rather, the world returns to a state of chaos when they desert, in a sort of entropy (e.g., Ipuwer's Lord of All has failed to act in some way). This contrasts strongly with the logic of the biblical texts and their universalizing tendencies, to which I turn next.

4 Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Texts

וכתתו חרבותם לאתים וחניתותיהם למזמרות
לא־ישא גוי אל־גוי חרב ולא־ילמדו עוד מלחמה

They will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning blades;
Nation will not lift up a sword against nation,
And they will not study warfare any longer (Isa 2:4).

4.1 Introductory Comments

As I made clear above, biblical scholars have never collected every instance of the TT motif nor comprehensively analyzed it. The same is true of Northwest Semitic materials more broadly. For the present chapter, I collect every instance of the motif from the Hebrew Bible and discuss it. Scholars have pointed out some of these; most of them they have not.

Because dating biblical texts is quite thorny, I have opted to proceed canonically through the Hebrew Bible in its Tanakhic arrangement. This allows me to focus on the form and function of the motif without concerns about redactional layers. Later in the chapter, I deal with two inscriptions and two passages from the Ugaritic corpus.

As with the Egyptian material, I will pay special attention to the textual devices that accompany the motif. They are many and varied: polysemy, paronomasia, geminate clusters, inversion of word pairs, chiasm, and so on. All these devices establish the learned intentionality of the Levantine scribes who deployed the motif.

4.2.1 The Former Prophets

4.1.2.1 Samuel

1 Sam 2:4-8

קִשַׁת גִּבּוֹרִים חֲתָּוִים וְנִכְשָׁלִים אֶזְרוּ חֵיל:
שְׂבִיעִים בְּלֶחֶם נִשְׁכָּרוּ וְרַעֲבִים חֲדָלוּ
עַד־עֲקָרָה יִלְדָה שְׂבִיעָה וְרַבַּת בָּנִים אֲמַלְלָה:
יְהוָה מִמִּית וּמַחֲיֶה מוֹרִיד שְׂאוֹל וַיַּעַל:
יְהוָה מוֹרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר מִשְׁפִּיל אֶף־מְרוֹמָם:
מִקִּים מַעֲפָר דָּל מֵאֲשַׁפֵּת יָרִים אֲבִיוֹן לְהוֹשִׁיב עַם־נְדִיבִים
וּכְסָא כְבוֹד יִנְחֹלֵם כִּי לַיהוָה מִצְקֵי אֲרָץ וַיִּשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם תְּבַל:

The bow of heroes is shattered, and those who stumble gird up with power.

The satiated have (now) been hired out for food, and the hungry have fattened up.

Until the infertile has borne seven, and the one abundant with sons has dwindled away.

Yahweh brings death and life, pulls down (to) Sheol and raises up.

Yahweh dispossesses and enriches, abases and extols,

He raises the poor from dust, from waste piles he lifts the needy to make them sit with nobles, and has them inherit a throne of honor.

For the pillars of the earth belong to Yahweh, and he has placed the world upon them.

Several devices add to the force of the poem. In these lines, form follows content,¹³³ in that the reversal of “strong” and “weak” itself inverts its ordering: strong, weak, strong, weak, but then *weak, strong*.¹³⁴ Thus, as one hears Hannah’s song, one experiences the world turning

¹³³ On this phenomenon in biblical texts, see Gary A. Rendsburg, “Form Follows Content in Biblical Literature,” in Peter Machinist, Robert A. Harris, Joshua A. Berman, and Nili Samet, eds., *Ve-’ed Ya’aleh (Gen 2:6): Essays in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Edward I. Greenstein*, Vol. 1 (Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, 5; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2021), pp. 559-578; and Gary A. Rendsburg, *How the Bible Is Written* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), pp. 539-549.

¹³⁴ Noted by Tania Notarius, *The Verb in Archaic Biblical Poetry: A Discursive, Typological, and Historical Investigation of the Tense System* (Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics, 68; Leiden/Boston: Brill,

upside down. The scribe performs the inversion through the *form* of the text in addition to its meaning.

Additionally, the poet utilizes paronomasia throughout the song. It contrasts the previously שְׂבֵעִים “satiated” with the infertile woman (in addition to its formal counterpart, the hungry) who will bear שִׁבְעָה “seven” through parasonance. The visual level is even more effective in the pre-Masoretic text. Hannah shows that the חתת “shattering” of the heroes’ bows is Yahweh’s doing in that יַחַתּוּ מְרִיבָיו “he will shatter his enemies” (1 Sam 2:10). The גְּבָרִים “heroes” will not be victorious, כִּי־לֹא בְּכַח יִגְבֵּר־אִישׁ “for a man will not prevail by his power” (1 Sam 2:9). The choice of the bow befits the context, as the weapon often indexes masculinity and virility, the perfect pairing with the reversal of fertility that follows.¹³⁵ The reversal of fortunes also alludes to Hannah’s own situation more directly: the קִשָּׁת evokes her own dismal state קִשְׁת־רוּחַ אֲנֹכִי “I am burdened of breath” (1 Sam 1:15), a puzzling idiom that does not occur elsewhere in the Bible. There is further paronomasia in the מ, ש, and פ between מְשַׁפֵּיל and מֵאֲשַׁפֵּת.¹³⁶ The hungry הִדְלוּ “fatten up,” while God מֵקִים מֵעֶפֶר דָּל “is raising the needy from dust” (1 Sam 2:8), connected by the ד and ל.

חַדל can mean “fatten oneself” or “cease,” depending on whether one derives the root from initial *h* or *ḥ*. I propose that this generates polysemy. Clearly “fatten” is to be preferred for its cheerfulness, fitting with the rest of the passage more closely. The writer invites us to ponder

2013), pp. 252-253. Notarius explains the reasoning to be that “the speaker is particularly interested in emphasizing that the barren woman gives birth,” on account of Hannah’s own plight in the narrative. If so, it does not rule out the additional motivation I suggest here.

¹³⁵ Harry A. Hoffner, “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966), p. 329.

¹³⁶ A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 38.

both meanings, imagining that perhaps the hungry have come to an end, with the shocking realization that the opposite is true. They are now well-fed. Thus, polysemy and paronomasia both serve as tools to enact the TT motif in this passage—this applies many other passages below.

The song continues to demonstrate the TT nature of Yahweh’s dealings in the world through merism. Death and life come about through his hand. When a poor person ascends the social ranks, it is Yahweh who has done it. By drawing on the image of the pillars, the song alludes to God’s power, wisdom, and mysterious reasons for his actions (cf. Job 9:6, 26:11).

The Song of Hannah faces forward toward the monarchy, tying together Samuel’s thematic threads. Thus, Hannah’s reversal is futuristic and somewhat utopian in nature, envisioning the world right-side-up. She celebrates the social inversion.

2 Sam 22:28

וְאַת־עַם עָנִי תוֹשִׁיעַ וְעֵינֶיךָ עַל־רָמִים תִּשְׁפִּיל:

An oppressed people you will rescue,
but your eyes are upon the exalted, you will abase.

This line is in keeping with the ethic explained across the Hebrew Bible, especially the Psalms. God raises up those who are low and brings down those who are high. Since it is standard fare in the Hebrew Bible, the reader can lose the sense of reversal at work. This can especially be the case when English translations opt for “humble” (עָנִי) and “haughty, proud” (רָם), which connotes a moral element.¹³⁷ This passage has a doublet in a slightly different form in Psalm 18 (see below).

¹³⁷ See JPS 1985, NRSV, ESV, NIV, NASB, NET, etc., which all include at least one of these translations.

4.2.2 The Latter Prophets

4.2.2.1 Isaiah

Isa 2:4

וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבוֹתָם לְאֵתִים וְחַנְיֹתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמְרוֹת
לֹא-יִשָּׂא גֹי אֶל-גֹּי חֶרֶב וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה

They will beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning blades;
Nation will not lift up a sword against nation,
And they will not study warfare any longer.

Some form of this passage reoccurs in Micah and Joel (see below). Directionality of influence is difficult to determine between Isaiah and Micah.¹³⁸ Isaiah deploys the device through the transformational ל. The first line contains an abundance of the consonant ת (seven times), serving an onomatopoetic function.¹³⁹

There is also a double polysemy in this passage.¹⁴⁰ One can read חֶרֶבָתָם “swords” also as “plows,” and מִזְמְרוֹת “pruning hooks” also as “spears.” Scott Noegel draws attention to the performative effect of this device: “In the process of grasping the polysemy, the weapons are transformed.”¹⁴¹ An additional polyseme may be present in לָמַד “learn.” As seen in the word מִלְמָד “ox goad,” (Judg 3:31), the sense of the verb may have more literally been used to “spur

¹³⁸ For the discussion, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible, 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 190-191.

¹³⁹ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 26; Sheffield, England: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1984), p. 236; also noted by Scott B. Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Ancient Near East Monographs, 26; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2021), pp. 60-61.

¹⁴⁰ Shira J. Golani, “Swords That Are Plowshares: Another Case of (Bilingual) Wordplay in Biblical Prophecy?” *Biblica* 98 (2017), pp. 432-433; Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 191.

¹⁴¹ Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 191.

on.”¹⁴² Thus, one could read this to mean that warfare will not be the subject of study in the Isaianic utopia, and additionally, “they will not *provoke* warfare anymore.”

The temporal setting of this prophecy is quite clear: וְהָיָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים “And it shall happen in the last days” (Isa 2:2), only slightly distinguished from the more common “on that day.”¹⁴³ The utopia-by-negation device emerges in the lines that directly follow.

Isa 3:4-5

וְנָתַתִּי נְעָרִים שָׂרִיָּהֶם וְתַעֲלוּלִים יִמְשְׁלוּ-בָם:
וְנָגַשׁ הָעָם אִישׁ בְּאִישׁ וְאִישׁ בְּרֵעֵהוּ
יִרְהָבוּ הַנְּעָרִים בְּזִקְנֵי וְהַנְּקִלָּה בְּנֹכְבָד:

And I will appoint youths as their princes, and mischief-makers will rule over them. And the people will be oppressed, one the other and each his neighbor. The youth(s) will abuse the elder, and the dishonorable the honored.

Transformation in the form of reversal pervades this passage. It is highly reminiscent of many Egyptian passages examined above, in the upending of social order and maltreatment of the other. This is the result of Yahweh removing מִשְׁעָן וּמִשְׁעֵנָה “support (upon) support” (3:1) from Judah. Now, he promises to continue upending the city by placing troublemakers in positions of power, where they can abuse the people, including the elder and honorable person. These are the ones who had held power in the past.

The rhetoric of the passage is made especially effective by its last two words וְהַנְּקִלָּה בְּנֹכְבָד “the dishonorable (will abuse) the honored.” Not only do these terms highlight the reversal in their apparent meaning, but even their roots, קלה/קלל “be small, light, insignificant”

¹⁴² HALOT, 531, s.v. לַמַּד.

¹⁴³ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 190.

and כבד “be weighty, honored, substantial” contrast one another. It is ironic that the “light” rise to the top of the social hierarchy, while the “weighty” sink to the lowest rung to endure abuse. Once again, it is worth noting that Yahweh directly initiates the transformation.

Isa 3:24

וְהָיָה תַחַת בְּשֵׁם מִקַּיִה יְהוָה וְתַחַת חֲגוּרָה נִקְפָּה וְתַחַת מַעֲשֵׂה
מִקְשָׁה קָרְחָה וְתַחַת פְּתִיגָל מְחַנְגֶּרֶת שֶׁק כִּי־תַחַת יָפִי:

And instead of perfume, there will be a rotten stench,
and instead of a sash: a cord,
and instead of a hair ornament: baldness,
and instead of a robe: a garb of burlap.
A brand instead of beauty.¹⁴⁴

In this passage, the transformation contrasts what is lost with its inferior replacement. Bad has replaced good, rather than a transformation *into* something new. Replacement is another form of the TT motif. The things lost are all lavish goods and amenities. The things gained evoke lament and destruction.

The abundant repetition of תַחַת “instead” conveys a downward trend by its spatial meaning “below.” The utilization of gender-matched parallelism “to reinforce antithesis or contrast” adds to the spiraling effect.¹⁴⁵ The prophet presents each step down the “ladder” as a good thing lost, followed by the bad thing gained. The last items occur in reverse order (the bad precedes the good). Thus, in the last proverbial rung, the pattern is itself reversed, connoting the completion of the reversal of fortunes. J. J. M. Roberts summarizes: “The transformation of

¹⁴⁴ For “ornament,” מִקְשָׁה “a wrought metal work.” As for “brand,” here I read with the MT as כִּי from the root כוה “scorch.” Alternatively, 1QIsa(a) IV 1. 2 adds בַשֶּׁת, thus rendering “shame instead of beauty.”

¹⁴⁵ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 125-126.

perfume to stench, elaborate hairdos to baldness, riches to rags—all of these simply illustrate how Yahweh will turn these women’s beauty into their shame.”¹⁴⁶

Isa 11:6-9

וְגַר זֵאֵב עִם־כֶּבֶשׂ וְנִמְר עִם־גְּדִי יִרְבֹּץ
וְעֹגֵל וְכַפִּיר וּמְרִיא יַחְדָּו וְנֹעַר קֶטֶן נֹהֵג בָּם:
וּפְרָה וְדָב תִּרְעִינָה יַחְדָּו יִרְבְּצוּ יְלִדֵיהֶן וְאַרְיֵה כִּבְקָר יֹאכַל־תְּבֹן:
וְשִׁעֲשַׁע יֹנֵק עַל־חֹר פֶּתֶן וְעַל מְאוּרַת צִפְעוֹנָי גָּמוּל יָדוּ הַדָּה:
לֹא־יִרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכֹל־הָר קִדְשֵׁי
כִּי־מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת־יְהוָה כַּמַּיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים:

And a wolf will dwell with a lamb, and a leopard shall lie down with a kid, and a calf and a lion and a yearling together; a little boy leads them.

And a cow and a bear will graze; their offspring will rest together. And a lion will eat straw like the cattle. And a baby shall play over a serpent’s hole, and a weaned child shall put his hand in a viper’s hole.

They will not do wrong, and they will do violence on my entire mountain of holiness, for the land will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, like the waters cover the sea.

This passage depicts transformation via (in)action and destratification.¹⁴⁷ The vivid imagery has afforded it a rich reception history.¹⁴⁸ In essence, predatory non-human animals have changed their behavior to become more peaceful on account of their newfound knowledge of the deity.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), p. 65.

¹⁴⁷ Obviously, if a reversal took place, the vision would not be quite so idyllic—carnivorous lambs and calves do not exactly belong in a utopia.

¹⁴⁸ See the Appendix for a discussion of its history of interpretation.

¹⁴⁹ Many interpreters have gone to great lengths to explain that animals are not imagined to *actually* have knowledge of the divine. But these interpretations do not account for a varied ways that wild animals display divine knowledge in the ancient Near East. At a recent Society of Biblical Literature conference, J. Blake Couey argued that in some biblical passages, animals do indeed display knowledge (even theological knowledge). His presentation, “Animal Cognition in Isaiah” (Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, 2022), will appear in a forthcoming book. See also Scott B. Noegel, “From Ape to Zebra: On Wild Animals and

A few structural reversals are worth noting. Like in Hannah’s song, the weaker overtake the strong: wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, but then *calves*, lion and yearling. In the following stich, the bovine animals form a chiasm around the predators: cow, bear, lion, and cattle.

Isa 14:13-15

וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ
הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶעֱלֶה מִמֶּעַל לְכוֹכְבֵי-אֵל אֲרִים כְּסֵאִי
וְאֲשֵׁב בְּהַר-מוֹעֵד בִּירְכָתִי צְפוֹן:
אֶעֱלֶה עַל-בְּמֹתֵי עֵב אֲדַמָּה לְעֵלְיוֹן:
אֲדָ אֶל-שָׂאוֹל תּוֹרֵד אֶל-יְרֵכְתִי-בּוֹר:

And you, you said in your mind,
“I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above El’s
stars!
I will sit on the mountain of council, on Saphon’s summit.
I will ascend over the high places of cloud, I will resemble Elyon!”
But rather, to Sheol you are brought down; to the distant part of the
Pit.

The מְשָׁל over the Babylonian king’s fall has drawn much attention throughout the history of biblical interpretation. In recent decades, scholars have attended to its form. Gale Yee reads the poem as a taunt song, a parody of a dirge (comparing its features to that of 2 Samuel 1).¹⁵⁰ Yee observes parody in the “incongruity between form and content.”¹⁵¹ Chris Franke continues this line of thought.¹⁵² She argues (through connections with Deutero-Isaiah) that the poem establishes a pattern of national fall as a foil for the rise and redemption of Zion.

Taxonomy in Ancient Israel,” in Raija Mattila, Sanae Ito, and Sebastian Fink, eds., *Animals and Their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2019), pp. 95-133.

¹⁵⁰ Gale A. Yee, “The Anatomy of Biblical Parody: The Dirge Form in 2 Samuel 1 and Isaiah 14,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988), pp. 565-586.

¹⁵¹ Yee, “The Anatomy of Biblical Parody,” p. 566.

¹⁵² Chris A. Franke, “Reversals of Fortune in the Ancient Near East: A Study of the Babylon Oracles in the Book of Isaiah,” in Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 214; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 104-123.

Jacqueline Vayntrub has considered the form and function of a מִשָּׁל in comparison with a קִינָה, using Isaiah 14 as a case study:

The *mashal* maps out cause and effect. In a similar fashion, the *qinah* explains cause and effect, but does so with respect to the failure of actors within their presumed categories... As they are presented in the biblical texts, the *mashal* and the *qinah* uniquely share a particular speech-performance frame, “to speak out a *mashal*,” and “to speak out a *qinah*...” Beyond this, both speeches make use of rhetorical questions, a strategy that allows the speaker to move toward the generalizing claims characteristic of both speech types.¹⁵³

In this way, Isaiah 14 displays features of a קִינָה, the “proper discourse of failure.”¹⁵⁴ In a way, *lex talionis* and irony inform the rhetoric. Part of this discourse clarifies the king’s intentions (to rise to godly heights) and the rejection and inversion of those intentions (the descent to ungodly depths). Such is an instance of TT, in that what looked to be going up was ultimately going down. The scribe uses ancient clusters broken up from their stereotypical pairing (like יִרְכָתִי-צָפוֹן).¹⁵⁵ This may rhetorically highlight the unfulfilled longing of the king through the subversion of expectations—another instance of structural means to accomplish the TT motif. Isaiah utilizes the direct quote for biting irony: the internal thoughts and pride of the king proved to be his downfall. Only by inviting the hearer into the “inner-world” of the king can they truly appreciate the dramatic reversal of fortunes.

¹⁵³ Jacqueline Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on Its Own Terms* (The Ancient Word, 2; New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 145-146.

¹⁵⁴ Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, p. 147. For example, the poem mostly follows the קִינָה meter. Gee, “The Anatomy of a Biblical Parody,” p. 576.

¹⁵⁵ On the idea of “clusters,” see Jonas C. Greenfield, “The ‘Cluster’ in Biblical Poetry,” *Maarav* 5–6 (1990), pp. 159-168.

Isa 14:30

וְרָעוּ בְּכוֹרֵי דָלִים וְאַבְיוֹנִים לְבִטַח יִרְבְּצוּ
וְהַמְתִּי בְרָעַב שְׁרִשְׁדָּה וְשִׂאֲרֵיתָךְ יִהְרָג:

And the firstborn of the poor will graze,
and the destitute will lie down in security.
Yet I will cause your root to die,
And your remnant it will kill.

Continuing the oracles against the nations, Isaiah here contrasts the Philistine elites (recently freed from the “rod” who struck them) with the poor.¹⁵⁶ God will reverse their situation by killing off the Philistine descendants, all the while providing for and protecting the poor. The contrast is striking: the poet deploys the term בְּכוֹר with inverted connotations. It is usually positive, especially in an elite context (such as Isaiah’s Philistine addressees), but here it marks the poorest of the poor. The destitute will רָבַץ “lie down,” while the Philistines will lie down figuratively in death. The presence of the דָּל and אֲבִיוֹן primes the reader to see רָעַב as “hungry,” but the poet subverts expectations—it is בְּרָעַב “by means of famine” that God will bring death to the root. The subversion of expectation obtains the TT motif as reality.

Isa 29:14

לִבְּנֵי הַנְּגִי יוֹסֵף לְהַפְלִיא אֶת־הָעַם־הַזֶּה הַפְּלִיא וּפְלִיא
וְאַבְדָּה חֲכָמַת חֲכָמָיו וּבִינַת נְבִנָיו תִּסְתָּתֵר:

Therefore, look! I am again working a wonder with this people,
strange and wonderful:
The wisdom of sages will perish, and the understanding of those
who understand will hide itself.

The preface of this reversal is notable in that it describes the type of action that brings about the reversal. It is through God לְהַפְלִיא “working a wonder” that the characteristic qualities of sages and discerners vanishes. Isaiah highlights this through the threefold repetition of the root

¹⁵⁶ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, pp. 220-228.

פלא in the a-line. הַפְּלִיאָה reminds the reader of Isa 28:29, the conclusion of an oracles against Ephraim, which reads: הַפְּלִיאָה עֲצָה הַגְּדִיל תּוֹשִׁיָה “He makes counsel wonderful, he magnifies prudence.” Such a summary exists “to justify the apparent illogic of divine judgment” on Yahweh’s own people, and the allusion here hearkens back as a reminder that God would indeed oppose his people by destroying their wisdom.¹⁵⁷

The strangeness of the loss of these qualities presents itself through shared roots and prosopopoeia. The חֲכָמִים “sages” cease to be sages by the loss of חֲכָמָה “wisdom.” Likewise, the נְבִנִים “understanding ones” lose their בִּינָה and thus their standing as discerners. The qualities themselves are active participants in God’s wonder-working, taking part through their perishing and hiding.

Isa 29:17-19

הֲלוֹא-עוֹד מְעַט מְזֶעַר וְשָׁב לְבָנוֹן לְפָרְמֶל וְהַפְּרָמֶל לִיעַר יִחְשָׁב:
 וְשָׁמְעוּ בַיּוֹם-הַהוּא הַחֲרָשִׁים דְּבַר-יִסְפָּר וּמֵאֶפֶל וּמֵחֹשֶׁךְ עֵינָי
 עוֹרִים תִּרְאֶינָה:
 וְיִסְפוּ עֲנָוִים בְּיְהוָה שִׂמְחָה וְאַבְיוֹנֵי אָדָם בְּקֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִגְלוּ:

Is it not just a bit, a short (time) until Lebanon turns back into an orchard, and the orchard/Carmel is considered a thicket? And the deaf people will hear on that day the words of a scroll, and from gloom and darkness the eyes of blind people will see!
 And the afflicted will add to joy in Yahweh, and the destitute of humanity will rejoice in Israel’s Holy One.

A few lines later, the motif continues. It begins with a rhetorical question, expecting an affirmative response. In this way, it connects with the passage directly above. Isaiah describes a

¹⁵⁷ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, p. 369.

confounding of those who are wise and proceeds to bewilder them further by questioning and describing seemingly impossible new realities, but now with optimism.

The use of **שוב** implies a *return* to a previous ecological condition—one wilder and more lush with vegetation. A past golden age (perhaps one before humans affected their environment, or a more recent one before Sennacherib’s campaigns) is the mold for the future utopia.¹⁵⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp observes a pattern here wherein imminent ecological reversal “leads by analogy” into eventual transformations of the eschaton.¹⁵⁹ However, it seems that Isaiah imagines the restoration of human conditions to be contemporaneous with the natural renewal (note the deictic **בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא** “on that day”). The utopia-by-negation device follows this passage, wherein tyrants and scoffers are no more.

Isa 30:2-3

הַהֹלְכִים לְרִדְתַּת מִצְרַיִם וּפִי לֹא שָׁאֵלוּ לְעֹז בְּמַעְזוֹ פְּרַעֲהַ וְלַחֲסוֹת
בְּצֵל מִצְרַיִם:
וְהָיָה לָכֵם מַעְזוֹ פְּרַעֲהַ לְבִשְׁתַּ וְהַחֲסוֹת בְּצֵל־מִצְרַיִם לְכַלְמָה:

The ones intending to descend (to Egypt), but they have not asked my mouth, to take refuge in Pharaoh’s fortress, and to gain haven in Egypt’s shadow:
Yet Pharaoh’s fortress will become your shame,
And the haven in Egypt’s shadow, humiliation.

This short passage attains transformation by reversal to combat those who would ally with Egypt against the imminent Assyrian threat. But what “those going to Egypt” expect becomes their “shame” and “humiliation.” The **ל** of transformation achieves this.

¹⁵⁸ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, p. 377.

¹⁵⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 408-409.

Isa 32:14-15

כִּי־אֶרְמוֹן גִּטָּשׁ הַמִּזֶּן עִיר עֲזָב
עִפְלָ וּבְחֹן הָיָה בְעַד מְעָרוֹת עַד־עוֹלָם
מְשׁוֹשׁ פְּרָאִים מְרֵעָה עֲדָרִים:
עַד־יַעֲרָה עָלֵינוּ רוּחַ מִמָּרוֹם
וְהָיָה מִדְּבַר לְכַרְמֶל וּכְרָמֶל לִיעֵר יִחְשָׁב:

For the palace will be neglected, the city din abandoned.
Hill and watchtower will become cleared fields unto an era,
A joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of herds.
Until poured out upon us is a wind from the height,
When the desert will become an orchard,
and an orchard considered a thicket.

This passage moves from the dystopian results of indictment and judgment into the utopian results of restoration. The רוּחַ from above produces a turning point from one to the other. This רוּחַ is יַעֲרָה “poured out,” a word producing paronomasia with שְׂמֵעָרוֹת “fields,” מְרֵעָה “pasture,” and עִיר “city.”¹⁶⁰ Notably, both sides of this “hinge” are characterized by a lack of human involvement. The cities lay fallow, but the wilderness spaces flourish. The last lines of this passage bear great similarity to Isa 29:17-19; the key difference is the starting point is even more drastic. It is a desert (rather than Lebanon) that will become an orchard (which will then become a wood). Because of this, the transformation is even more radical, then matched by a lengthier world right-side-up vision (Isa 32:16-20).

Isa 35:5-7

אֲזִי תִפְקַחְנָה עֵינֵי עֹרְרִים וְאָזְנֵי חֲרָשִׁים תִּפְתַּחְנָה:
אֲזִי יִדְלַג כְּאַיִל פִּסְחַח וְתָרֵן לְשׁוֹן אֵלֶם
כִּי־נִבְקָעוּ בַמִּדְבָּר מַיִם וּנְחָלִים בְּעֲרָבָה:
וְהָיָה הַשָּׂרֵב לְאַגָּם וְצִמְאֹן לְמִבְּוֵעי מַיִם
בְּנֹהַ תַּנִּים רִבְצָה חֲצִיר לִקְנָה וְגִמְאָ:

¹⁶⁰ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, p. 416, identifies the first two.

Then opened shall be the eyes of blind people, and the ears of deaf people shall be opened.
 Then a lame person shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of a mute person shall exult.
 For waters shall burst forth in the desert, and streams in the arid land.
 And the caked earth will become a reed-pool, and parched ground springs of water.
 In the haunt of jackals is its/her resting place. Grass (will become) reed and papyrus.

Like many passages, the bodily restoration of humans accompanies a cosmological transformation. More commonly, the environment changes and *then* human beings follow suit; here, Isaiah reverses the trope. However, the causal order remains the same (note the כִּי connecting the two realms of transformation). It is because the environment will flourish that humans will do the same.

He begins by prophesying that the “quartet of the infirm” will experience a reversal of fortunes: what is closed (eyes, ears) opens, and what is nonfunctioning (legs, tongue) works perfectly. These later aspects function in two manners. The leaping and singing demonstrate functionality and the resulting celebration on account of that functionality. In this way, Isaiah blends the reversal with its glee. He conveys a great deal of order through the grammatical parallelism and chiasm. In v. 5, תִּפְקַחְנָה “be opened” forms a chiasm around the line. The following verses follow strict syntactic structures (יְדַלֵּג כְּאַיִל פִּסַּח וְתָרַן לְשׁוֹן אֱלִים) [verb, comparison, object; verb, comparison, subject] and כִּי־נִבְקְעוּ בַמִּדְבָּר מִיָּם וּנְחָלִים בְּעֶרְבָה [the chiasm succeeds by ellipsis]). The order of the vision obtains in part through the contrast of the judgment on Edom in the chapter preceding.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 456.

Water brings about the environmental alteration, making dry, unproductive places lavish with life. Once again, the transformation directly precedes a utopian vision described through negation (no lions or beasts will prowl along the holy path).

Isa 51:3

כִּי־נָחַם יְהוָה צִיּוֹן נָחַם כָּל־חָרְבָתֶיהָ
וַיִּשֶׂם מִדְבָּרָהּ כְּעֵדֶן וְעֵרְבָתָהּ כְּגִן־יְהוָה
שָׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה יִמָּצֵא בָּהּ תוֹדָה וְקוֹל זִמְרָה:

For Yahweh has comforted Zion, has comforted all her ruins.
And he will make her desert like Eden,
And its waste like Yahweh's garden.
Jubilee and joy will be found in her,
Thanksgiving and the sound of song.

Isaiah assures God's comfort to his people here (set in the prophetic perfect), and extends a promise of hope to the exiled community. The Zion-centric theology imagined a world right-side-up marked by incredible abundance. The *מִדְבָּר* "desert" and *עֵרְבָה* "waste" contrast two (but really one) image of ultimate cultivation: God's own garden, or Eden. This garden crops up only in exilic and post-exilic writings, "generally by way of contrast with a land or city rendered uninhabitable as a result of destructive human or nonhuman agency."¹⁶²

4.2.2.2 Jeremiah

Jer 50:35-39

חָרַב עַל־כְּשָׁדִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְאֶל־יֹשְׁבֵי בָבֶל וְאֶל־שָׂרֵיהָ וְאֶל־חַכְמֵיהָ:
חָרַב אֶל־הַבָּדִים וְנֹאֲלוּ חָרַב אֶל־גְּבוּרֵיהָ וְחָתוּ:

¹⁶² Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible, 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), p. 327.

חָרַב אֶל-סוֹסָיו וְאֶל-רֶכְבּוֹ וְאֶל-כָּל-הָעָרֵב אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכָהּ וְהָיוּ לְנָשִׁים
חָרַב אֶל-אֲזָרוֹתֶיהָ וּבָזוּ:

חָרַב אֶל-מִימֶיהָ וַיִּבְשׂוּ כִּי אַרְץ פְּסָלִים הִיא וּבְאִימִים יִתְהַלְלוּ:

לָכֵן יֵשְׁבוּ צִיִּים אֶת-אֵיִם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בָּהּ בְּנוֹת יַעֲנָה וְלֹא-תֵשֵׁב עוֹד
לְנִצָּח וְלֹא תִשְׁכֹּן עַד-דָּוָר וְדוֹר:

A sword upon (the) Chaldeans—an utterance of Yahweh—and against the inhabitants of Babylon and against her officials and against her sages.

A sword against the diviners, that they are shown foolish.

A sword against her heroes, that they are filled with terror.

A sword against his horses and to his chariot,
and to the entire mixed people who is in her midst,
that they become women!

A sword against her treasures, that they are plundered.

A drought against her waters, that they dry up.

For she is a land of images, and by objects of terror they will run mad.

Therefore, desert-beings shall live with jackals, ostrich chicks will live within her. And she will not be inhabited again, (even) into the distant future, and not dwelt in, unto generation and generation.

Because Jeremiah's MT is so divergent from the LXX, I include it here, italicizing

notable differences in the English:

³⁵ μάχαιραν ἐπὶ τοὺς Χαλδαίους καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας
Βαβυλῶνα καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μεγιστάνους αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς συνετοὺς
αὐτῆς. ³⁶ μάχαιραν ἐπὶ τοὺς μαχητὰς αὐτῆς, καὶ παραλυθήσονται.
μάχαιραν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἵππους αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἄρματα αὐτῶν. ³⁷
μάχαιραν ἐπὶ τοὺς μαχητὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν σύμμικτον τὸν ἐν
μέσῳ αὐτῆς, καὶ ἔσονται ὡσεὶ γυναῖκες. μάχαιραν ἐπὶ τοὺς
θησαυροὺς αὐτῆς, καὶ διασκορπισθήσονται ³⁸ ἐπὶ τῷ ὕδατι αὐτῆς,
καὶ καταισχυνθήσονται, ὅτι γῆ τῶν γλυπτῶν ἐστίν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς
νήσοις οὐ κατεκαυχῶντο. ³⁹ διὰ τοῦτο κατοικήσουσιν ἰνδάλματα
ἐν ταῖς νήσοις, καὶ κατοικήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ θυγατέρες σειρήνων.
οὐ μὴ κατοικηθῆ ἰνδάλματα οὐκέτι εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

A sword against the Chaldeans and against those who inhabit
Babylon and against her officials and against her wise ones; a
sword against her warriors, that they be weakened! A sword
against their horses and against their chariots; *a sword against
their warriors and* against the mixture that is in her midst, that they

will become *like* women; a sword against her treasuries, that they will be *scattered over her water, so that they will be disgraced*, for it is a land of graven images; and *amidst the islands where they were boasting*. Therefore, phantoms will dwell among the *islands*, and daughters of *Sirens* will dwell in her. They will certainly not be inhabited any longer, unto the age (Jer 27: 25-40).

As is common in TT passages, the objects of the reversal are stripped of their essential qualities: diviners are foolish, heroes are terrified, etc. Indeed, Leslie Allen observes that the so-called Song of the Sword "...provides a series of reversals that war would impose on bastions of power..."¹⁶³ thereby overturning and dismantling Babylonian military might. The gendered trope of "becoming women" is a common slight in the ancient Near East, and as Cynthia Chapman shows, it is particularly salient in the Neo-Assyrian military program and in Judahite writings detailing run-ins with Assyria.¹⁶⁴ Yet we should not be surprised that it appears in texts after the Assyrian period, since such gendered metaphors became "literary touchstones" for use, reformulation, and reuse—including as curses of feminization.¹⁶⁵ It develops more forcefulness here in that Jeremiah incorporates horses and chariots into the gendered metaphor alongside the various peoples. The LXX softens this by adding an extra "sword" stich, so that it is only the various men who "become women."

In this oracle, the sword (a metonymy for armies) is the agent of transformation. It is the sword that turns each Babylonian representative of power (officials, heroes, chariots, treasures, etc.) into what they are not. The object of the sword shifts from the human (identified by

¹⁶³ Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 516.

¹⁶⁴ Cynthia R. Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* (Harvard Semitic Monographs, 62; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Chapman, *Gendered Language of Warfare*, p. 169. On "curses of feminization," pp. 48-58. See also Claudia Bergmann, "We Have Seen the Enemy, and He Is Only a 'She': The Portrayal of Warriors as Women," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007), pp. 651-672; and Hoffner, "Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity."

vocation) to their habitat (wealth, natural resources). The last line of the repetition is unique in that in the MT the prophet transforms the sword itself into a drought (that is, the **חֶרֶב** becomes a **חֶרֶב** through a slight phonetic shift [*hrb* to *hrb*]). This may be because the sword cannot effectively strike the waters, but this is unlikely (especially considering long-standing images of God’s battle with the sea). More likely is that the scribe(s) render the transformative tool powerless after it has performed its duty. This is especially appealing in light of the context—after Jeremiah’s many pro-Babylonian oracles, he now revokes their ephemeral power by prophecy. As Allen puts it: “the earlier oracles presupposed and sometimes expressed attack from Babylon as the means of divine punishment, but now it is Babylon’s turn to face retribution.”¹⁶⁶ Either way, the last line of the formulaic portion upends the expectation of the listener/reader.

The upending of Babylon makes it inhospitable for humans, and ideal for the stereotypical wasteland animals: jackals, ostriches, the **חַיֵּי הַמִּדְבָּר** “desert-beings,”¹⁶⁷ and **σειρήνες** “sirens.” The presence of these entities marks the destruction as final and preternatural. The devastation is so thorough that Babylon becomes a liminal, nearly semi-chthonic space. Martin Kessler observes a high density of literary flourishes in Jeremiah 50-51, saying, “The piling up of words and motifs serves an obvious rhetorical purpose: the writer wished to make his point with extraordinary emphasis and passion.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Allen, *Jeremiah*, p. 508.

¹⁶⁷ Henrike Frey-Anthes, “Concepts of ‘Demons’ in Ancient Israel,” *Die Welt Des Orients* 38 (2008), p. 43, who says that “The creatures are described ambiguously in order to underline the vagueness of the peripheral counterworld,” and clear identification is avoided by the prophet to avoid a chance for incantation.

¹⁶⁸ Martin Kessler, *Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel Versus Marduk of Babylon: A Literary/Theological Interpretation of Jeremiah 50-51* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 42; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003), p. 177.

4.2.2.3 Ezekiel

Ezek 17:24

וַיִּדְעוּ כָּל-עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה
הַשְּׁפִלְתִּי | עֵץ גְּבוּהַּ הַגְּבוּהָתִי עֵץ שְׁפֹל
הוֹבֵשְׁתִּי עֵץ לֵחַ וְהַפְרֵחְתִּי עֵץ יָבֵשׁ
אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי:

And all the trees of the field will know that I am Yahweh.
I make low a high tree,
I make high a low tree.
I dry up a live tree,
I make bloom a dry tree.
I am Yahweh; I have spoken, and I will do (it).

This oracle began with a חִידָה “riddle” and מְשָל “proverb” (Ezek 17:1-10) about the betrayal of a treaty with Babylon. In it, a raptor plants a sprout from a cedar’s uppermost branch. Yahweh ends the lesson by explaining that he will take a new branch from the cedar and nourish it. He ends the parable by illustrating his power over the rise and fall of nations. The current standing of the “tree” is of no consequence to him, because of his power to transform a nation into something great or small. The word pairs correspond in perfect chiasmus: God will שפֹל “bring low” the גְבוּהַּ “high” tree, and he will גבה “make high” the שְפֹל “low” tree; he will יבש “dry” the לֵחַ “green” tree, but פרח “make flourish” the יבֵש “dry” tree. The word pair לֵחַ “live, green” and יבש “dry” is a merism used of trees elsewhere (cf. Ezek 20:47). In other words: all “trees” (i.e., nations and their leaders) stand as they do by Yahweh’s bidding. The outlier in this chiasm is the root פרח; perhaps Ezekiel did not have a verb on hand from לחח.¹⁶⁹ It is also

¹⁶⁹ He may have here relied on another semantically related lexeme that could still connect with לח through paronomasia (by way of the ח), but the connection is quite weak.

possible that, as we have seen with other texts above, Ezekiel opts to divert from the pattern in the last stich to *perform* the transformation.

Ezek 21:31

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה
הַסִּיר הַמְצַנְפֹת וְהָרִים הָעֵטָרָה זֹאת לֹא־זֹאת
הַשְׁפֹּלָה הַגְּבִיָה וְהַגְּבִיָה הַשְׁפִּיל:
עֲוֹה עֲוֹה עֲוֹה אֲשִׁימְנָה
גַּם־זֹאת לֹא הָיָה עַד־בָּא אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ הַמְשַׁפֵּט וּנְתַתִּיו:

This is what my master, Yahweh, said:
“Remove the turban, lift off the garland! This rather than that!
Make high the low, and the high make low!
A ruin! A ruin! A ruin I will make it! This one too!
It has not been, until he to whom I have assigned justice has come”
(Eng. 21:26).

The removal of headgear constitutes a call for lament and repentance, but also the removal of the ruler from office. What follows is a command to reverse the high and lowly in most general terms. Exactly to *what* or *whom* the prophet refers to here is incredibly vague—for it is unlikely that Ezekiel advocates that someone of truly low societal position should rule. It is more likely that hyperbole is at play here. Someone else must rule, by God’s judgment, but he also uses the motif here to call for a general shift in society: “whatever you were doing, do the opposite.” Ezekiel’s lexical choices (שְׁפֹל and גְּבִיָה, the same words used in Ezek 17:24) indicate a formulaic usage of the motif, and thus a learned and intentional implementation of it, by this particular prophet.

The latter portion of the passage is quite jumbled and chaotic, an example of anacoluthon.¹⁷⁰ Walther Zimmerli underscores the performative function of this “confused” speech:

It is no longer preserved in the form of an address, but contains expressions, set out in the style of abrupt cries, which work like individual hammer blows and which finally have the effect, almost like an oath, of summoning the disaster.¹⁷¹

Ezek 36:33-36

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בַּיּוֹם טַהַרְי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי
אֶת־הָעָרִים וְנִבְנְוּ הַחֲרָבוֹת:
וְהָאָרֶץ הַנְּשָׁמָה תִּעֲבֹד תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה שְׁמָמָה לְעֵינַי כָּל־עוֹבֵר:
וְאָמְרוּ הָאָרֶץ הַלְלוּ הַנְּשָׁמָה הָיְתָה כְּגֹן־עֵדֶן וְהָעָרִים הַחֲרָבוֹת
וְהַנְּשָׁמוֹת וְהַנְּהָרְסוֹת בְּצוֹרוֹת יָשְׁבוּ:
וַיֵּדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָרוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוִה בְּנִיתִי
הַנְּהָרְסוֹת נִטְעַמְתִּי הַנְּשָׁמָה אֲנִי יְהוִה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי:

This is what my master, Yahweh said:
“On the day of my cleansing you from all your iniquities, I will (re)populate the cities, and rebuilt shall be the ruins.
And the deserted land will be worked instead of that which it was—a desolation in the eyes of all passersby.
And they will say, “This deserted one here has become like the Garden of Eden, and the dismal, destroyed, and decrepit cities are fortifications they inhabit!”
And they shall know, the nations that remain around you, that I am Yahweh! I have (re)built the ruined places and transplanted (in) the deserted place. I am Yahweh—I have spoken and I will do it.”

¹⁷⁰ For more instances of anacoluthon in the Bible, see Gary A. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1999), pp. 1-20. Relatedly, on anacoluthon in narrative, see Adina Moshavi, “2 Kings 6:1-3 as an Instance of Conversational Repair,” in Peter Machinist, et al., eds., *Ve-Ed Yaaleh (Gen 2:6): Essays in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Edward L. Greenstein*, Vol. 1 (Writings from the Ancient World Supplement Series, 5; Society of Biblical Literature, 2021), pp. 309-332.

¹⁷¹ Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Ronald E. Clements, trans. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 446.

This passage is somewhat typical of the Latter Prophets as a promise of return from exile and restoration of the people in their land. God is the agent of this restoration: he purifies the people, rebuilds the ruins, and cultivates the land. The point is that he must do it himself in order for the onlooking nations to recognize him and his power. Those who pass by have seen Judah in its ruined state. Ezekiel uses a direct quote to demonstrate their shock at God’s restorative power.

A few elements in the quote emphasize their awe. The first is הַלְלוּ, a rare relative pronoun. It has a “strengthened demonstrative force.”¹⁷² Noegel argues that it is not just stronger, but even *pejorative*, by Ezekiel’s deployment of diglossia.¹⁷³ This draws in listeners and highlights the stark contrast that results from God’s transformative power. The second is the string of three descriptors הַחֲרָבוֹת וְהַנְּשֻׁמוֹת וְהַנְּהָרְסוֹת “dismal, destroyed, and decrepit,” which serve to emphasize just how ruined the region was, and by extension, how much more incredible its renewal. They are positioned to contrast the “Garden of Eden,” as seen above in Isa 51:3. What was fallow (both agriculturally and culturally) will be plentiful and rich. As with Ezek 17:24, this transformation is a display intended to reveal God’s power (and here also faithfulness) to the surrounding nations.

4.2.2.4 The Twelve

Joel 4:10

כְּתוּ אֶתִיכֶם לְחֲרָבוֹת וּמִזְמֹרֹתֵיכֶם לְרִמָּהִים
הַחֲלֹשׁ יֹאמֶר גְּבוּר אֲנִי:

¹⁷² Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’s Hebrew Grammar*, E. Kautzsch, ed. 2nd ed. (London: Clarendon Press, 1910), §34f.

¹⁷³ Scott B. Noegel, “The ‘Other’ Demonstrative Pronouns: Pejorative Colloquialisms in Biblical Hebrew,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 33 (2004), pp. 23-30.

Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning blades into lances! The weakling shall say, “A hero am I” (Eng. 3:10)!

This passage is a reversal of Isa 2:4 and Mic 4:3, in that Joel “turns it upside down”¹⁷⁴ in bitter irony.¹⁷⁵ It is most likely that Joel does this intentionally, as it is a richly intertextual book. It is also possible that behind Joel, Micah, and Isaiah’s sayings lies an idiom readily available for reformation and reuse. The former is more appealing in that Joel diverges lexically, using רֶמַח “lance” in place of הַנֵּיט, “spear” an unlikely decision if he were appealing to a known idiom. This deviation from his source material is fitting for his TT Day of Yahweh, by subverting expectations in the last portion of the motif’s deployment. Additionally, the lexical change creates paronomasia by way of the ר, מ, and ח in מְזַמְרֵתֵיכֶם and חֲרָבוֹת. The onomatopoeia that Wilfred Watson observes in Isa 2:4 also applies here.¹⁷⁶

Amos 2:12-16

וַתִּשְׁקוּ אֶת־הַנְּזִירִים יַיִן וְעַל־הַנְּבִיאִים צִוִּיתֶם לֵאמֹר לֹא תִנְבְּאוּ:
הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מַעֲיֵק תַּחְתִּיכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר תַּעֲיֵק הָעֵגְלָה הַמְּלֵאָה לָהּ עָמִיר:
וְאֲבָד מְנוּס מִקָּל וְחֹזֵק לֹא־יִאֲמָץ כַּחַז וְגִבּוֹר לֹא־יִמְלֹט נִפְשׁוֹ:
וְתִפֹּשׂ הַקֶּשֶׁת לֹא יַעֲמֵד וְקַל בְּרַגְלָיו לֹא יִמְלֹט
וְרֶכֶב הַסּוּס לֹא יִמְלֹט נִפְשׁוֹ:
וְאֲמִיץ לְבֹו בְּגִבּוֹרִים עָרוֹם יָנוּס בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא נֹאֵס־יְהוָה:

Yet you made the Nazirites drink wine, and concerning prophets you commanded, saying “Do not prophesy!”
Look, I am bringing you to a stop just like a cart full of grain stops moving.¹⁷⁷
And flight will perish from the swift, and the strong will not firm up his strength, and a hero will not save his life.

¹⁷⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 191.

¹⁷⁵ Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, trans. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 80.

¹⁷⁶ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 236

¹⁷⁷ On the word מַעֲיֵק and its other possible derivations, see Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 94.

And the archer will not stand fast, and the swift-footed will not save, and the horse rider will not save his life.
The one who firms up his heart among the heroes will flee naked on that day—an utterance of Yahweh.

In Amos' finale of his entrapment of Israel, he deploys the motif as a form of *lex talionis*. Just as the Israelite leaders turned moral leadership on its head (by defiling the cultic practices of Nazirites and prophets), God will overturn all societal order. Each participant in warfare (swift, strong, archer, and cavalry) will fail in their role. God transforms each by negation, just like the recipients neglected cultic policies. The threefold negation of מלט "save" emphasizes the hopelessness of the situation and the immobility of the figurative cart.¹⁷⁸

Amos 6:11-12

כִּי־הִנֵּה יְהוָה מְצִיָּה וְהִכָּה הַבַּיִת הַגָּדוֹל רְסִיסִים
וְהַבַּיִת הַקָּטָן בְּקַעֲיִם:
הִירְצוּן בְּסֹלֶל סוֹסִים אִם־יִחְרוֹשׁ בַּבְּקָרִים
כִּי־הִפַּכְתֶּם לְרֹאשׁ מִשְׁפָּט וּפְרִי צְדָקָה לְלַעֲנָה:

For look! Yahweh commands it—and he will strike the great house to pieces and the small house to splinters.
Do horses run on rock? Or does one plow the sea with an ox?¹⁷⁹
For you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

Amos introduces the TT transformation with two rhetorical questions (both requiring a negative response). He chooses elements from agricultural knowledge, asking about comically unfitting application of normally useful animals. The second, if the emendation of בַּבְּקָרִים is correct, is a more extreme question than the first. The meaning is that just like the scenarios of the rhetorical questions, the Israelite audience has distorted the use of justice and righteousness. As Shalom Paul explains, “Such a question is preposterous and ridiculous, for it contradicts the

¹⁷⁸ On the literary structure and repetitions in this passage, see Paul, *Amos*, p. 95.

¹⁷⁹ Emending בקר ים as בקרים.

natural order of things... What is absurd in the animal world has become fact in Israel's world."¹⁸⁰ By clarifying that it is the פְּרֵי צְדָקָה “fruit of righteousness,” Amos carries the agricultural element forward. They have perverted a perfectly good product into something dangerous. The transformational ל describes the action of these Israelite leaders.

Paul notes the antanaclasis of ראש here (previous occurrences are in Amos 6:1 and 6:6, [“best”], 6:6 and 6:7 [“head, front”]).¹⁸¹ The device serves to further confound the listener. סוּסִים, בְּקָרִים, and בְּקָרִים are significantly paronomastic.¹⁸² Also present is a geminate cluster in סוּסִים and רְסִיסִים and pseudo-gemination through clitic prepositions in בְּבָקָרִים, לְלַעֲנָה, and לֹא דָבָר (in the following verse).¹⁸³

Amos 8:9-10

וְהָיָה | בְּיוֹם הַהוּא נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה וְהִבֵּאתִי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּצַהֲרָיִם
וְהִחֲשַׁכְתִּי לְאָרֶץ בְּיוֹם אֹר:
וְהִפַּכְתִּי חֲגִילְכֶם לְאֵבֶל וְכָל-שִׁירֵיכֶם לְקִינָה וְהִעֲלִיתִי עַל-כָּל-מִתְנַגְּיִם
שֶׁק וְעַל-כָּל-רֹאשׁ קַרְחָה
וְשִׁמְתִּיהָ כְּאֵבֶל יָחִיד וְאַחֲרֶיהָ כְּיוֹם מָר:

And it will be on that day—an utterance of Yahweh—that I will bring (down) the sun at midday, and I will darken the land during a day of light. And I will change your festivals into mourning and all your songs into a lament. And I will pull up burlap over all your loins, and baldness on every head. And I will make it like the mourning of an only child, and its end like a day of bitterness.

¹⁸⁰ Paul, *Amos*, pp. 218-219.

¹⁸¹ Paul, *Amos*, p. 218.

¹⁸² Paul, *Amos*, p. 218.

¹⁸³ On geminate devices, see Scott Noegel, “Geminate Ballast and Clustering: An Unrecognized Literary Feature in Ancient Semitic Poetry,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2004), pp. 1-18 (online), and “More Geminate Ballast and Clustering in Biblical Hebrew,” in Ian Wilson and Diana Edelman, eds., *History, Memory, and Hebrew Scriptures: Studies in Honor of Ehud Ben Zvi on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), pp. 417-432. See also Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 286-295.

The prophet initiates this description of the Day of Yahweh with the deictic formula **בַּיּוֹם** “on that day.” The vision begins with cosmological transformation, i.e., the failure of the sun at midday. This is a common apocalyptic trope. He then moves into the realm of human society. God will overturn everything gleeful with gloom. People will lament.

This is in line with Amos’ own reversal of expectations regarding the Day of Yahweh: **הוֹי הַמְתְּאֲנִים אֶת־יְוָם יְהוָה לְמַה־זֶּה לָכֶם יוֹם יְהוָה הוּא־חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא־אֹר** “Woe to those who crave for the Day of Yahweh! Why is this the Day of Yahweh for you?! It shall be darkness, and not light!” By the prophet’s analogical thinking, his own transformation of the Day from light to darkness, God himself will transform light into darkness. **אֹר** “light” produces paronomasia with the twice-repeated **יָאֵר** “Nile” in the previous verse (v. 8), one of which is spelled defectively, resulting in **כָּאֵר** “like light.” However, the orthographic variation may alert us to a polyseme: **וְעֵלְתָה כָּאֵר כְּלֵה וְנִגְרְשָׁה וְנִשְׁקַעָה כִּי־אֹר מִצְרַיִם** “And all of it will rise like light/the Nile and be tossed about and sink, like the Nile/light of Egypt” (Amos 8:8). Reading “Nile” causes one to think of the cyclical, predictable flooding of the Nile (hardly a negative image). Reading “light” inspires one to think of Egyptian solar cosmology, a constant cycle of life and death. God will “bring down” the sun at midday (v. 9), bringing sudden death and mourning to Israel. This also successfully conjures Passover imagery, reimagined to be a day of darkness and destruction for Israel. This is especially the case if one reads **יְחִיד** as “only child,” as in passages like Genesis 22.¹⁸⁴ Thus, in this TT passage, God reverses the natural order, social order, and even Israel’s own traditions.

¹⁸⁴ Jer 6:26 uses the same language, perhaps evoking the Amos traditions. “Sole survivor” is another possible meaning—one found in another TT passage from Ugarit (see *CAT* 1.14 II 43-50 below).

Mic 4:3

וְשָׁפֵט בֵּין עַמִּים רַבִּים וְהוֹכִיחַ לְגוֹיִם עַצְמִים עַד־רְחֹק
וְכָתְתוּ חַרְבֵיהֶם לְאֵתִים וְחַנִּיתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמְרוֹת לֹא־יִשְׂאוּ גּוֹי אֶל־
גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּן עוֹד מִלְחָמָה:

And he will judge between many peoples, and rebuke mighty nations at a distance.

And they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning blades. Nation will not lift sword against nation, and they will not study war any longer.

Nothing notable about this passage differs from its counterpart in Isa 2:4. The only substantial difference is the *nun-paragogicum* on יִלְמְדוּן: “they will (not) learn,” which is semantically insignificant. Even the context is strikingly similar: the nations will come to God’s reestablished dwelling on Zion to learn his ways and worship him.

Mic 6:14-15

אַתָּה תֹאכַל וְלֹא תִשְׂבַּע וַיִּשְׁחַךְ בְּקִרְבֶּךָ
וְתִסַּג וְלֹא תִפְלִיט וְאַשֶׁר תִּפְלֹט לְחֶרֶב אֶתָּן:
אַתָּה תִזְרַע וְלֹא תִקְצוֹר אֶתָּה
תִדְרֹךְ־זֵית וְלֹא־תִסוֹד שֶׁמֶן וְתִירוֹשׁ וְלֹא תִשְׁתֶּה־יַיִן:

You shall eat but not be satisfied, and your filth will be within you. You will bring in, but not preserve—and what you do preserve, to the sword I will give (it).

You shall sow but not reap, you will tread olives but not rub (yourself) with oil, and you will press, but you will not drink wine.

This TT passage utilizes the inversion of fruition, what might be called a formula of futility. All actions taken by the addressees will result in unfulfillment. The stichs of v. 15 closely adhere to the formula (you will do *x*, but not *result-of-x*). The earlier lines add to the formula for further rhetorical effect: it is not only that they will not be satisfied, but *also* that filth will be in them; it is not only that they will not preserve, but they will preserve a morsel—yet God will put it to the sword.

Mic 7:3-6

עַל־הָרַע כְּפַיִם לְהִיטִיב הַשָּׂר שְׂאֵל וְהַשְׁפֹּט בְּשִׁלּוֹם
וְהַגְדֹּל דִּבֶּר הַחַיִּים נִפְשׁוּ הוּא וַיַּעֲבֹתוּהָ:
טוֹבָם כְּחֹדֶק יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּסוּכָה
יּוֹם מִצְפִּיף פְּקֻדָּתָךְ בָּאָה עֲתָה תִהְיֶה מְבוֹכְתָם:
אֶל־תֶּאֱמִינוּ בְרַע אֶל־תִּבְטְחוּ בְּאֵלֹהֵי
מִשְׁכַּבְתְּ חִיקֶךָ שֹׁמֵר פֶּתַח־פִּיךָ:
כִּי־בֵן מִנְבִּיל אָב בֵּת קָמָה בְּאֵמָה כֹּלָה בַחֲמַתָּה
אִיבֵי אִישׁ אֲנָשֵׁי בֵיתוֹ:

Upon the evil thing are hands to do (evil) well: the official and the judge are asking for payment, and the great one is speaking out the capriciousness of his being, and they bind it together. The best of them is like a bramble, and the upright is (sharper) than a thornbush. The day of your watchmen, your punishment, is coming; now shall come their confusion. Do not trust in a neighbor! Do not count on a companion! (Even) from the one lying (in) your lap, guard the doors of your mouth. For a son invalidates a father; a daughter arises against her mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law—a man's enemies are the people of his own house.

Micah picks up the breakdown of ethical behavior in a world gone mad. He looks across the land, and every faithful person (חֲסִיד) has perished, leaving the wicked to govern.¹⁸⁵ One may understand the line טוֹבָם כְּחֹדֶק יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמְּסוּכָה “the best of them is like a bramble, and the upright (sharper) than a thornbush” in two ways. The first is that with all the good people gone, the best of those who remain are awful. Alternatively, the best of people have themselves *become* the worst. This is to be preferred because of the lines that follow, wherein one cannot trust those in whom one used to place trust. The situation is one of transformation from ethical to unethical.

¹⁸⁵ A similar description of the disintegration of societal good is present in Jer 9:3-12.

The situation is so dire that one cannot trust one's own neighbor, companion, or family members. This portrays an “infestation” quite like the issue of foreigners in Egyptian TT passages. Here, rather than foreigners infiltrating the pristine Egyptian land and bringing chaos, it is evil itself that has infiltrated Israelite households through the people.

Haggai 1:5-6

הַעֵת לָכֶם אַתֶּם לְשֹׁבֵת בְּבֵתֵיכֶם סְפוּגִים וְהַבֵּית הַזֶּה חָרָב:
וְעַתָּה כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שִׁימוּ לְבַבְכֶם עַל־דַּרְכֵיכֶם:
זָרַעְתֶּם הֲרִיבָה וְהִבֵּא מַעֲט אָכֹל וְאִין־לְשֹׁבְעָה שָׂתוּ וְאִין־לְשִׁכְרָה
לְבוֹשׁ וְאִין־לְחֶם לֹא וְהִמְשַׁתְּכֶר מִשְׁתַּכֵּר אֶל־צָרוֹר נָקוּב:

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in paneled houses, but this house is desolate?

And now, this is what Yahweh of Hosts has said: “Set your mind to your ways! You have sown much, but brought in little; eaten, but there is no satisfaction; drank, but there is no drunkenness; dressed, but there is no warming oneself. The one who works for a wage (puts it) into a pierced pouch.”

Haggai uses the formula of futility to critique the returned Jews who neglect to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. He begins by noting the disequilibrium of the lavish “paneled” houses in which the Jerusalemites are living, while *the* house (i.e., the temple) remains ruined. The prophet invokes a form of *lex talionis* as interpretation: because they have neglected God’s house, their works have been in vain. The heavens and the earth withhold their bounty “because my house is desolate,” says God (v. 9).

4.2.3 The Writings

4.2.3.1 Psalms

Ps 18:28

כִּי־אַתָּה עִם־עַנְי תוֹשִׁיעַ וְעִינַיִם רָמוֹת תִּשְׁפִּיל:

For you deliver an oppressed people,
and lofty eyes you abase.

See the discussion above on 2 Sam 22:28. The text differs only slightly, in that here God brings low “lofty eyes,” whereas in 2 Samuel 22, God’s own eyes are upon the רָמִים “exalted.”

Ps 75:8

בִּי־אֱלֹהִים שִׁפְטָה זֶה יִשְׁפִּיל וְזֶה יִרָם:

When God judges, he abases this one,
and that one he raises up.

The Psalmist here deploys the motif to assert God’s absolute freedom in judgment. These lines do not clarify whom God lifts and lowers, but one can assume them to be the poor and affluent: “The merism of casting down and exaltation expresses absolutely, without concrete addressees, the sovereign power of God, but it is connected in the Psalms with the theme of the poor.”¹⁸⁶ Biblical authors use וְזֶה וְזֶה elsewhere to denote unpredictability (cf. 2 Sam 11:24), and so perhaps the Psalmist suggests that God’s judgments in social inversion are beyond human comprehension, and the best one can do is to avoid pride and praise God.

Ps 147:6

מֵעֹדֵד עֲנָנִים יְהוָה מִשְׁפִּיל רְשָׁעִים עַד־אָרֶץ:

Yahweh helps up those bowed low,
abases the wicked to the ground.

Psalm 147 contains a reversal of fortunes wherein God exalts the humble and tears down evildoers. The goal-marking אָרֶץ is somewhat unique among TT texts, especially these formulaic ones found in the Psalms. It adds a more visceral directionally and invites the listener

¹⁸⁶ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, Linda M. Maloney, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 256.

to ponder cosmological interpretations. Namely, could אֲרֶץ signify “underworld”? I think it is preferable, or at least a possible reading. Indeed, the preceding Psalm demonstrates such a use of the lexeme: עָשָׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם “(Yahweh is) the one who makes the heavens, underworld, and the sea, and all that is in them” (Ps 146:6).¹⁸⁷ Thus, God does not only reverse the fortunes of humble and wicked in their current situations, but also brings the wicked to the underworld (i.e., arranges their deaths). This echoes the sentiment of Hannah’s Song.

4.2.3.2 Proverbs

Prov 29:23

גָּאוֹת אָדָם תִּשְׁפִּילֶנּוּ וְשֹׁפְלֵי־רוּחַ יִתְמַדְּ כְבוֹד:

A person’s pride will abase him,
but the one lowly of spirit will obtain honor.

This proverb is quintessential in many ways, presenting a two options to the listener and their results. The prideful person is a passive recipient of pride’s actions upon them—another instance of *lex talionis*. On the other hand, the lowly person takes the active role, obtaining glory for themselves. In this instance, the sage writer views the reversal of fortunes as the normal outworking of how the world operates. That is, the reversal is not a TT occurrence, but a sign of justice and wisdom at work.

Prov 30:21-23

תַּחַת שְׁלוֹשׁ הַגְּזָה אֶרֶץ וְתַחַת אַרְבַּע לֹא־תוּכַל שְׂאֵת:

תַּחַת־עֶבֶד כִּי יִמְלֹךְ וְנֹבֵל כִּי יִשְׁבַּע־לְחֶם:

תַּחַת שְׁנוּאָה כִּי תִבְעַל וְשֹׁפְחָה כִּי־תִירַשׁ גְּבֻרָתָהּ:

¹⁸⁷ See Scott B. Noegel, “God of Heaven and Sheol: The ‘Unearthing’ of Creation,” *Hebrew Studies* 58 (2017), pp. 119-144.

Under three things the earth quakes, and under four it cannot bear:
 Under a slave that rules as king, and a miser that is full of food;
 Under a hated woman that rules, and a slave-wife when she
 dispossesses her lady (Prov 30:21-23).¹⁸⁸

Leeuwen discusses this passage at length in relation to the “world upside down,” so I will be brief.¹⁸⁹ Like Isa 3:24 above, this passage repeats תַּחַת to convey a negative descent. It also utilizes the “n, n + 1” numerical parallelistic device that often attains a climactic effect.¹⁹⁰ This means that in this list of four items, it is the last that is most egregious to the scribe: the slave-wife who dispossesses the lady of the house. This is certainly the case, as the fourth item is the only that mentions both parties of inversion. The author of this passage has a very different view of justice as compared to many of the passages above in that a TT occurrence is a violation of social, and even cosmic, order. For him, the earth shakes in frustration at the ascension of a slave, outlaw, slave-wife, and neglected woman. Such an incident is something to be spurned, not relished. Qohelet shares such a view of the TT.

4.2.3.1 Qohelet

Qoh 8:14

יִשְׁ-הֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ
 אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וַיֵּשׁ רְשָׁעִים שְׂמֹגֵיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כְּמַעֲשֵׂה
 הַצְּדִיקִים אֲמַרְתִּי שְׂגִם-זֶה הֶבֶל:

There is an absurdity that is done upon the earth: that there are righteous people to whom it befalls according to the conduct of the wicked, while there are wicked people to whom it befalls according to the conduct of the righteous. I said, “This also is an absurdity!”

¹⁸⁸ Here I revocalize תבעל as a *qal*, following Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down,” p. 602, n. 11; and Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, p. 873.

¹⁸⁹ Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs 30:21-23 and the Biblical World Upside Down.”

¹⁹⁰ See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 144-149.

More than any other biblical book, that of Qohelet views the TT negatively. For him, it is a sign of the הָבֵל “absurdity, vanity, vapor” of life.¹⁹¹ Reversals are part and parcel of the random absurdity that plagues humanity, a sign of God’s indifference. The righteous receive no reward for their deeds because life happens to them כְּמַעֲשֵׂה “according to the conduct” of the wicked, and vice-versa. Notably, the TT motif here serves to highlight the lack of justice. It is as if he notes that God is *not* exercising *lex talionis*.

Qoh 10:5-7

יש רעה ראיתי תחת השמש בשגגה שיצא מלפני השליט:
 נתן הסכל במרומים רבים ועשירים בשפל ישובו:
 ראיתי עבדים על-סוסים ושירים הלכים בעבדים על-הארץ:

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like a mistake that goes out from before the ruler:
 The moron is placed in many high places, but the affluent sit in lowly places.
 I have seen slaves upon horses, yet officials walk like slaves on the ground (Qoh 10:5-7)!

Qohelet goes beyond ideas of rewards and punishments. Another outworking of absurdity, or even evil, is an individual’s change in social status. Choon-Leong Seow places such sentiments in the *realia* of the author’s *Sitz im Leben*. He says that Qohelet’s usage of the rag-to-riches/riches-to-rags tale:

...may reflect the volatile economy of the Persian period, a time when there were tremendous economic opportunities but also significant risks. So his audience could certainly relate to this *Beispielzerzählung*. It was an unreliable world in which Qohelet and his audience lived, for those who were rich and powerful could suddenly find themselves

¹⁹¹ In translating הָבֵל as absurdity, I follow Fox’s argument. See Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*; Fox, “The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet”; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*; Sneed, “הבל as ‘Worthless’ in Qoheleth”; Fox, “On הבל in Qoheleth.”

impoverished, while those who were poor might suddenly come into great wealth and prestige.¹⁹²

The placement of Qohelet in the Persian period reveals another motivation for his point of view: he has no cruel empires upon which to wish or prophesy doom. His is a “safer” world, relatively speaking, and his perspective (or at least the *literary* perspective whence the author speaks) quite elite. Therefore, he bemoans reversals as רָעָה “an evil.” One can see his pessimism and elitism in his word choice: he imagines those who climb the social ladder as כְּסִילִים “fools,” rather than “afflicted,” “poor,” or the many other terms seen throughout the prophets. Jesús Asurmendi perceives the imbalance:

Here is an observation that seems unacceptable to Qoheleth: rich people occupying low positions and fools in high ones. But the correlation does not work. A rich person corresponds to a poor person, and stupidity to intelligence. However, in this instance, for Qoheleth someone “poor” equals an “idiot” and a “rich” person represents someone intelligent. He had said the opposite himself in 4:13-16!¹⁹³

Such a contradiction is part of Qohelet’s *modus operandi*. The imbalance of comparisons may itself serve to “throw” the reader off balance in the same way that society has lost its balance.

The last line of the passage about modes of transportation may reflect a reversal such that a slave can gain independence and rise social ranks while an officer slips to the lower rungs. Alternatively, it could signify a simple destratification of society, wherein one can remain a slave and ride a horse.

¹⁹² Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 31.

¹⁹³ Jesús M. Asurmendi, “Power in Qoheleth and the Prophets,” in Nuria Calduch-Benages, ed., *Wisdom for Life: Essays Offered to Honor Prof. Maurice Gilbert, SJ on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Berlin/Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 139.

4.2.3.2 Lamentations

Lam 1:1

אֵיכָהּ | יֹשְׁבֵהָ בְדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה
רַבָּתִי בְּגוֹיִם שָׂרְתִי בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הָיְתָה לְמָס:

How lonely she lies!
The city once abundant with a people,
She has become like a widow among the nations.
The great empress among the provinces
Has become a corvée-laborer (Lam 1:1).

By their nature, laments describe reversals. They mourn the current state of reality (the loss of a loved one, or in this case, the destruction of a city) as a shade of what once was. Thus, they naturally inhabit a “grey” area in relation to the TT motif. The initial lines of Lamentations contrast Jerusalem’s glorious past with its dismal present through the motif. The empress has become a forced laborer, and the bustling city has become a mourning widow.

Lam 4:1-10

אֵיכָהּ יוֹעַם זָהָב יִשְׁנֶא הַכֶּתֶם הַטּוֹב
תִּשְׁתַּפְּכֶנָּה אַבְנֵי־קֶדֶשׁ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוּצוֹת:
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיְקָרִים הַמְּסֻלָּאִים בַּפֹּז
אֵיכָהּ נָחֲשָׁבוּ לְנַבְלֵי־חָרָשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי יוֹצֵר:
גַּם־תַּנִּין חָלְצוּ שֵׁד הַיְנִיקוּ גּוֹרֵיהֶן
בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַכְזָר כִּי עֲנִים בַּמִּדְבָּר:
דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק אֶל־חֶבֶוּ בַּצָּמָא
עוֹלָלִים שָׂאוּ לֶחֶם פֶּרֶשׁ אֵין לָהֶם:
הָאֲבָלִים לְמַעַדְנִים נִשְׁמוּ בַּחּוּצוֹת
הָאֲמָנִים עָלֵי תוֹלַע חִבְקוּ אֲשֵׁפְתוֹת:

וַיִּגְדַּל עֵינֹן בַּת־עַמִּי מִחֹטְאֵת סֹדֶם
 הַהִפּוּכָה כְּמוֹ־רִגַע וְלֹא־חָלְו בָּהּ יָדַיִם:
 זָכוּ נְזִירֶיהָ מִשְׁלֵג צָחוּ מִחֶלֶב אֲדָמוּ לְעָם מִפְּנֵי־יָם סִפִּיר גִּזְרָתָם:
 חָשָׂךְ מִשְׁחֹר תִּאָּרֶם לֹא נָכְרוּ בַּחוּצוֹת
 צָפַד עוֹרֶם עַל־עַצְמָם יִבֶּשׁ הָיָה כְּעֵץ:
 טוֹבִים הָיוּ חֲלִיל־חֶרֶב מִחֲלִיל־רַעֲב
 שֶׁהֵם יִזְבּוּ מִדְּקָרִים מִתְּנוּבַת שְׂדֵי:
 יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת בְּשָׁלוּ יִלְדִיָּהֶן הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לָמוּ בְּשֹׁבֵר בַּת־עַמִּי:

How the gold has grown dim, good gold is hated; precious stones
 are scattered at the head of every public place.
 The precious children of Zion, weighed more than fine gold, how
 they are regarded as jars of clay, the work of a potter's hands.
 Even jackals offer the teat, they nurse their young; the daughter of
 my people become cruel, like ostriches in the desert.
 Sucklings' tongues stick to their palates with thirst, children beg
 for bread but there is no one to break it for them.
 The ones who ate dainties are desolate in the streets; those nurtured
 upon scarlet lie in trash heaps.
 And the iniquity of my people has become greater than the sin of
 Sodom, the one overthrown like a moment, yet hands were not laid
 upon her.
 Her devoted ones were brighter than snow, they shined more than
 milk; they themselves were redder than pearls of coral, their hair
 was lapis lazuli.
 Their appearance has become darker than black; they are not
 recognized in the streets. Their skin has shriveled upon their bones,
 it has become dry like wood.
 Those slain by the sword were better off than those slain by
 famine; they who bled out, pierced, than (by) yields of the field.
 Hands of compassionate women have cooked their own children.
 They became food for them in the battle of the daughter of my
 people.

Lamentations 4 contains one of the lengthier TT passages in the Hebrew Bible. Like the
 rest of the book, it laments the present by conjuring a lovely past in the listener's mind. Adele
 Berlin offers vivid commentary:

The picture is not only one of heartrending snapshots of individuals in
 their misery, but of the abrogation of all that was normal in Judean
 society, a drastic reversal of fortunes, socially and physically, caused by
 the ravages of wartime and famine. The rich have become destitute, the

leaders are powerless, and activities normally pursued in the privacy of one's home are done in full public view on the streets—all human dignity has been lost.¹⁹⁴

The poem begins by showing how all that was precious is now profane (precious metals and stones are strewn about in the streets). The elites and their children lie in heaps, perhaps as corpses. They were once bright, lively, and colorful. Now, they are unrecognizable, since blackness “can index an absence of identity.”¹⁹⁵ The stereotypical desert animals, the jackal and the ostrich, make an appearance as comparisons. The Jerusalemites have fallen to a level of care and concern below jackals. Such a lengthy description provides several types of tragic reversal:

1. Valuable (gold, stones, children, elites) becomes common (hated, scattered, jars of clay, corpses, trash heaps).
2. Compassionate (nursing and providing mother) becomes cruel (cannibalistic, abandoning mother).
3. Health (vibrant, luminous, dark hair) becomes infirmity (black, shriveled, slain, starving).

The inversions offered by Lamentations are rich in simile. They are transformations by action, inaction, and comparison. The motif here is particularly lopsided, which befits a lament. The idea is that *all* have suffered and sunk to the lowest lows. Jerusalem's god has reversed the good fortunes, and worsened those that were already bad, resulting in a destratified wasteland.

¹⁹⁴ Berlin, *Lamentations*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁵ Scott B. Noegel, “Not So Black and White: On Skin, Horses, and Heat in the Hebrew Bible,” pp. xyz, in press.

4.3 Ugaritic Texts

To my knowledge, no scholars have observed the TT motif in the texts of ancient Ugarit. Nor have they linked them in form to the biblical or Egyptian texts above. I note two passages that deploy the motif from the *Epic of Kirtu* with brief comments.

4.3.1 The *Epic of Kirtu*

<i>yḥd bth sgr</i>	<i>ʾlmnt škr tškr</i>	
<i>zbl ʿršm yšū</i>	<i>ʿwr mzl ymzl</i>	
<i>wyṣi trḥ ḥdt</i>	<i>ybʿr lṭn ʾtṭh</i>	<i>lm nkr mddth</i>

The sole (survivor) will shut up his house. The widow will hire a hireling.

The sickly will carry a bed. The blind will foretell a fortune.

The new groom will go out. He will drive his wife to another, to a stranger, his beloved (CAT 1.14 II 43-50).

Nicolas Wyatt describes the situation as a “series of increasingly ludicrous occurrences” that Kirtu causes in his desperation to build a sufficiently sized army.¹⁹⁶ The ludicrousness (of the whole epic, in fact) strikes Joshua Finkel as sarcastic:

However, this preposterous conduct on the part of the devoted young husband may best be explained on the ground that the Keret poem is highly satirical in vein and as such raises the zeal of the recruits to a pitch of gross exaggeration... And all this specifically for what purpose? To achieve for the king that which is diametrically opposed to the bridegroom’s own selfless act, i.e. to help the king force an unwilling princess to be his royal mate, while he himself zestfully hands over his well-beloved to a stranger. If this is not sarcasm, I do not know what is.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit*, 2nd ed. (Biblical Seminar, 53; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 191, n. 72.

¹⁹⁷ Joshua Finkel, “The Expedition of the Ugaritan King Keret in the Light of Jewish and Kindred Traditions,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 23 (1954), p. 22.

I quote Finkel’s explanation at length to demonstrate how puzzling the TT motif can be, and how elusive its function. Finkel’s remarks are an extreme example of earlier scholarship’s misjudgment of these texts—but such attitudes are receding.¹⁹⁸ However, reading *this particular* passage as “sarcastic” is not entirely wrong. Koowon Kim provides a helpful corrective, without disregarding entirely Finkel’s reading. He states that “hyperbole and irony” function as “dominant literary devices” in the passage.¹⁹⁹

The basic meaning of the passage is that Kirtu will initiate a universal draft that will require service of all those usually exempted: the infirm, newlyweds, widows, and traumatized survivors. The action of the *ʿwl*, “blind,” remains enigmatic, translated variously as “run,” “find a way haltingly,” “donate,” “foretell,” “avoid obstacles,” and so on.²⁰⁰

A dream text is the perfect context for the TT motif, as its bizarre descriptions defy the norm. It also provides an opportunity to display El’s predictive power. El (and by extension the scribe Ilimilku) displays his divine knowledge by articulating what would take place with precision. In the context of Kirtu carrying out El’s instruction and prediction, the scribe then repeats this passage with minor changes to remove certain ambiguities. Among these is the shift from *yhd* to *ʾhd*, the first of which the reader may understand as an “allusive critique” to Kirtu

¹⁹⁸ Wyatt offers a brief overview of Kirtu’s early analysis, including Baruch Margalit’s treatment of the epic as a “light-hearted romp and as a parody of LBA religion, and particularly its royal ideology...” Wyatt appraises this reading as “wide of the mark.” Nicolas Wyatt, *Word of Tree and Whisper of Stone: And Other Papers on Ugaritic Thought* (Gorgias Ugaritic Studies, 1; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007), p. 148.

¹⁹⁹ Koowon Kim, *Incubation as a Type-Scene in the Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories: A Form-Critical and Narratological Study of KTU 1.14 i-1.15 III, 1.17 I-II, and 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, 145; Boston: Brill, 2011), p. 213.

²⁰⁰ *DULAT*, p. 599, s.v. /m-z-l/.

himself, as Noegel observes.²⁰¹ An especially interesting polysemy for discussion of the TT motif in Ugaritic texts is *zbl*, which one may understand as “sick person” or “prince/ruler.”²⁰² The former makes sense at this early point in the epic, but the scribe fulfills the possibility of the latter when Kirtu’s disrespectful son Yaššibu criticizes him.²⁰³ His critique constitutes the only other TT passage in the Ugaritic epics:

ištm' wtqg' udn
kgz' gzm tdbr *wgrm ttwy*
šqlt bgl't ydk *ltdn dn almnt* *ltpt' tpt' qsr npš*
kn aht' rš' mdw *anšt' rš' zbln*

Like the greatest warrior, could you drive away? Or stay in the mountains?
 You have brought low your hand into inactivity.
 You do not judge the case of the widow; you do not arbitrate the claim of the life-short.
 When you seized the bed of sickness, you languish (in) the bed of infirmity (*CAT* 1.16 VI 30-36).

This second passage conveys the motif by inaction. The indictment is that Kirtu has failed to act as a king must in his illness. It occurs in the climactic moments of the poem, in which Yaššibu addresses his “sickly” father. Unbeknownst to him, Kirtu has recovered and again is capable of rule. This continues the irony that Kim noted in the earlier passage—a glib irony most effective by the reader’s insider knowledge via the ever-present narrator. Only Yaššibu is ignorant, and his arrogance culminates in a display that the audience (however one imagines an “audience” in the setting of Ugarit) can relish.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ See Scott B. Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” *Aula Orientalis* 32 (2014), p. 307, who points this out as well as several other polysemies in the dream.

²⁰² Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” p. 307.

²⁰³ Brought into English in a variety of ways.

²⁰⁴ Examples of such a type of irony abound in the Bible. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, revised and updated edition (New York: Basic Books, 2011), pp. 11-12, *passim*, discusses this device.

Another device that highlights the TT reversal is the inversion of stereotypical word pairs. Watson notes this and discerns the device's function: "the stock sequence *almnt // ytn* has deliberately been inverted, portraying how the king is acting unjustly."²⁰⁵

One benefit of Yaššibu's outburst for discussion of the TT motif is that we see the linkage in Ugaritic thought of the land's well-being, the king's well-being, *and also* the king's well-doing—the last "moral" component affects the first two directly.²⁰⁶ The haughty son blames the king for his negligence in upholding justice among those who need it most. This royal ideology is unsurprising, as these are stock concepts for royal inscriptions, praise poems, and the like.

4.4 Northwest Semitic Inscriptions

4.4.1 The Deir 'Alla Text

Much about the Deir 'Alla plaster text is debated, including the script, the language/dialect, and the date of composition. Scholars have suggested the language to be Aramaic, Canaanite, and even its own distinct branch of Northwest Semitic; discussions of the date have settled roughly into in the eighth century.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 358.

²⁰⁶ Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion: According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, Wilfred G. E. Watson, trans. (Bethesda, Md: CDL Press, 1999), p. 329.

²⁰⁷ Jo Ann Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Allā*, (Harvard Semitic Monographs, 31; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984); see the various contributions in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, eds., *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden, 21-24 August 1989* (Leiden/New York: E.J. Brill, 1991); and the more recent evaluation of Na'ama Pat-El and Aren Wilson-Wright, "Deir 'Allā as a Canaanite Dialect: A Vindication of Hackett," in Jeremy Michael Hutton and Aaron D. Rubin, eds., *Epigraphy, Philology, and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives on Philological and*

6 ונצבו . שדין . מועד . ואמרו . לש[מ]ש . סכרי . שמין .
בעברכי . שם . חשך . ואל . נ
7 גה . עלם . ואל[.] סכרכי . תהבי . חת[ם] . בע[ב] . חשך .
ואל[.] . תהגי . עד . עלם . כי . ססעגר . חר
8 פת . נשר . וקל . רחמן . יענה . ח[סדה] . ו[בני] . נתץ . וצרה .
אפרחי . אנפה . דרד . נשרת .
9 יון . וצפר . ו[כל] . עף שמ[ין] . ו[] . מטה . באשר . רחלן .
יבל . חטר . ארנבן . אכלו .
10 [ז]אב . חפש [...] . שתיו . חמר . וקבען . שמעו . מוסר .
גרי .
11 על[ן] . [...] לחכמן . יקחד . ועניה . רקחת . מר . וכהנה .
12 [...] לנשא . אזור . קרן . חשב . וחשב . ח
13 [בש] . [...] ושמעו . חרשן . מן . רחק

6 And the *Šadīn* stood in assembly and said to *Šamšu*, “Stich and stop up the heavens with your thick cloud! Put darkness and not brightness 7 forever. And place your bolt, set a seal with a cloud of darkness, and do not remove it unto an age.

Indeed the 8 oriole taunts the raptor and the voice of the vulture replies its loyalty, and the offspring of the falcon. And the chicks tear up a heron, a pigeon tears at 9 a dove, and birds, and every bird of the heavens.

And [...] a staff instead of ewes, a rod will be led.²⁰⁸ Hares will eat 10 the wolf, a bat [...] they drink the wine, while hyenas obey discipline. And whelps of the fox [...] 11 laughs at the sages.

And a poor person mixes myrrh, while a priestess 12 to carry, gird up threads. The one who is esteemed, esteems, and the one who was esteemed, esteems. 13 The deaf hear from far off [...]

The introductory tale for the Balaam text is elusory with its broken pieces. It would seem that the text above contains a description of Balaam’s מחזה “vision” of what the שדין intend to do. The experience was overwhelming for him, on account of his bitter weeping (II ובכה יבכה).

Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett (Ancient Near East Monographs, 12; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015), pp. 13-23.

²⁰⁸ Following the syntax for which P. Kyle McCarter argues in “The Balaam Texts from Deir ‘Allā: The First Combination,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980), p. 55. See also Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Allā*.

3-4) and fasting (וליכל לחם 1. 3). The וְשָׂדִין petition Šamšu to cause a drought (sealing the skies) and bring darkness over the land. The כִּי at the end of l. 7 is ambiguous, as it so often is. Is it emphatic (“indeed”), temporal (“when, during”), or causative (“because”)? The latter option is least appealing since there is no comparative precedent for divine judgment on account of animals acting out of line.²⁰⁹ In fact, there is a biblical trope wherein God uses animals as an upstanding comparison next to humans, since they know their role in the world.²¹⁰ It is more likely that the overturning of natural order is the result of judgment.

The text then moves from the animal kingdom (from winged to mammalian) to human affairs. Each line conjures a pair operating in contradiction to their normal relation. Birds of prey have become the prey, and the shepherd’s staff is now led by a ewe. This all creates the sense that things have gone horribly awry, with the unraveling of order into its antithesis—a “world turned upside down,” wherein “everything... has been turned topsy-turvy.”²¹¹ P. Kyle McCarter concludes that the cosmic reversal is not entirely negative:

This is not a divine punishment for wickedness... The behavior of the birds, animals, and people described in the Deir ‘Allā text is not wicked in many cases—that of the hyenas or the deaf, for example, can be considered an improvement—but it is uniformly unnatural. It is a cosmic, not moral, evil to which the gods here propose their grim solution.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Contrary to McCarter, “The Balaam Texts from Deir ‘Allā,” who says “...ky, ‘For,’ gives the reason for the proclamation of doom” (p. 58). Shmuel Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period*, Anson F. Rainey, trans. (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), p. 447, suggests the flood of Genesis 6 as analogue, but there בְּפֶשַׁע בְּחַיָּוִת clearly has humanity (or perhaps the Nephilim) in mind. Aḥituv agrees that with the text as it stands, it is “impossible to decide which interpretation is correct” (p. 448).

²¹⁰ See Isa 1:3 and Jer 8:7.

²¹¹ McCarter, “The Balaam Texts from Deir ‘Allā,” p. 58; Jo Ann Hackett, “Some Observations on the Balaam Tradition at Deir ‘Allā,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 49 (1986), p. 217.

²¹² McCarter, “The Balaam Texts from Deir ‘Allā,” p. 59.

Without further context from the next section, the passage is irretrievably cryptic. The latter portion appears to entail chthonic elements, considering phrases like *יעבר אל בית עלמן* “passing to the house of eternity,” and terms like *נקר* “(divinized) corpse.”²¹³ I submit that *כי* works as an emphatic particle in the passage; thus, the bizarre descriptions that follow *do* constitute divine judgment rather than its precursor. Thus, the text understands the TT to be related to divine intervention—much like the biblical authors, and unlike the TT motif in Egypt.

Shmuel Ahituv attends to social inversions regarding ll. 11-12:

It appears that in these lines there is a shift to the changes in human social status, and it has been appropriately compared to the “Admonitions of Ipu-wer” where the Egyptian society is depicted as being turned upside down: the rich wear rags. Those who dressed well now wear rags and those who were unable to weave clothes for themselves now wear the finest linen garments.²¹⁴

He cites additional similarities with *Khakheperreseneb* and *Ipuwer*, as is standard in comparisons between the Israelite and Egyptian instances of the motif.²¹⁵ However, he does not analyze these in depth.

²¹³ On *נקר* and *נצר* as reflecting Egyptian *ntr*, see Christopher B. Hays, “An Egyptian Loanword in the Book of Isaiah and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription: Heb. *nṣr*, Aram. *nqr*, and Eg. *ntr* as ‘[Divinized] Corpse,’” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 4 (2012), pp. 17-23. Hackett, in “Some Observations on the Balaam Tradition at Deir ‘Alla,” suggests that Combination II contains a ritual that was to be performed in order to reverse the judgment of the goddess and *šadīm* (p. 218).

²¹⁴ Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, p. 451.

²¹⁵ Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, p. 452.

4.4.2 The Sefire Inscription

The Sefire Treaty Inscriptions date to the mid eighth-century, roughly contemporaneous with the Deir ‘Alla text. They detail treaties between Meth‘ael, king of Arpad, and Bir-Gayah, king of KTK, of uncertain identification.²¹⁶

ומן ליצר מלי ספרא זי בנצבא זנה
ויאמר אהלד מן מלוה או אהפך טבתא ואשם [ל]לחית
ביום זי יעב[ד] כן
יהפכו אלהן אש[א]ה[א] וביתה וכל זי [ב]ה
וישמו תחתיתה [לע]ליתה
ואל ירת שר[ש]ה אשם

And whoever does not keep the words of the text that is on this stele, or says, “I will remove some of its words,” or, “I will overturn the good term(s) and turn them to wickedness,” on the day that he does so, may the gods overturn that man, his house, and all that is in it! And may they make its bottom its top, and let its sprout not inherit a name (Sefire I C 16-25)!

Once again, one observes *lex talionis* in this passage. Just like the transgressor of the treaty attempts to הפך “overturn” the “good terms,” likewise will the gods do to him and his house.²¹⁷ And though the text does not repeat the word לדד “remove,” that is exactly the treat against the lineage. If a person removes some of the words, so will the gods remove that person’s

²¹⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* (Biblica et Orientalia, 19; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967), pp. 2-3; Jan Dušek, “Dating the Aramaic Stele Sefire I,” *Aramaic Studies* 17 (2019), pp. 1-14 (though Dušek only makes claims regarding sides A and B of the stele).

²¹⁷ On textual devices and the performative aspects in the Sefire inscriptions, see Jonas C. Greenfield, “Studies in West Semitic Inscriptions I: Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” *Acta Orientalia* 29 (1964), pp. 1-18; and Melissa Dianne Ramos, “Spoken Word and Ritual Performance: The Oath and the Curse in Deuteronomy 27-28” (Ph.D. Dissertation; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Los Angeles, 2015), pp. 75-109. Relatedly, see the many textual devices in the Aramaic Fekheriye inscription in Scott B. Noegel, “Literary Features in the Aramaic Inscription from Tell Fekheriye (KAI 309),” forthcoming.

honor through their descendants. The gods are invoked to cause the TT situation to occur. Again, this resembles the views of the Bible more than that of Egypt texts.

Clearly, the terms of the curse are worded carefully. What will happen to the **בית** works on two levels. First, one's house/palace will be overturned, as in destroyed. Second, one's household may be in purview as well, as in the social hierarchy will be upturned. This is similar to the ambiguity of the use of **הפך** in the Jonah narrative.

The “upper” and “lower” evokes an earlier section in the introduction to the treaty. There, the treaty is said to include **מלכי כל עלי ארם ותחתה** “the kings of all of upper Aram and its lower part” (A 5-6). Thus, the TT portion upends the terms of the treaty by reversing the words **עלי** and **תחת**.

5 Conclusion

“He who has seen the vision of his city upside-down has seen it the right way up.”

—G. K. Chesterton²¹⁸

5.1 Characteristics of the Motif, or, What *is* “Topsy-Turvy”?

Based on the readings above, there are several varieties of the motif:

1. Transformation by reversal
 - a. Bidirectional (x becomes y and y becomes x)
 - b. Unidirectional (x becomes y [or like y], while y remains unchanged)
2. Transformation by replacement (instead of x , there will be y)
3. Transformation by (in)action
 - a. Uncharacteristic action connoting transformation (the deaf will hear)
 - b. Uncharacteristic failure to act connoting transformation (the warrior will *not* save)
4. Transformation by negation
 - a. Futility of action (one will sow, but not reap)²¹⁹
 - b. Negation of existence (there will be no war)
5. Transformation by destratification
 - a. Destratification by equal treatment (as [it will be] for x , so with y)

²¹⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi*, (London/Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p. 88.

²¹⁹ This variety has much in common with curse formulae. See Ramos, “Spoken Word and Ritual Performance” for an in-depth analysis of these constructions and their function.

b. Destratification by result

The common denominator should be clear by the list above: the essence of the TT motif is *transformation*. This list accounts for the variety of forms that scholars had previously identified as TT (using one of the many terms noted above). The variation accounts for why the motif is difficult to address with precision—in reality, the TT motif is a collection of five variations that convey transformation.

Many of the passages above use a combination of these forms. Yet the “reversal” form of the TT is by far the most prevalent. Of the thirty-five occurrences I discussed from the Hebrew Bible, twenty-seven of these contain reversals of some kind (77%). In a few cases, these accompany other types—such as Isa 2:4, which uses reversal and inaction. In Appendix 1, I include a chart with forms of the motif and the passages in which they are found.

Grammatically, there is a huge variation (as one should expect from a motif spread across time, space, and genre). Yet the widespread use of the preposition ל as indirect object is one feature of the motif. More specifically, it is the “*lamed* of purpose.”²²⁰ For this study, I have referred to it as the transformational ל , to highlight its grammatical function of marking the result of a reversal or transformation. The predicative-*m* operates in a similar way in many Egyptian passages.

²²⁰ WOC defines it: “The ‘indirect object’ *lamed* marks the so-called datival goal, while another sort of goal is marked by the *lamed* of purpose. The goals here include a thing made... or used... or a person altered in status or even form” (11.2.10d).

5.1.1 What is *Not* Topsy-Turvy

In this section, I address two types of texts that others may suggest to be TT, but I precluded from this study: those of “macro reversals” and inversions based in social practice. I explain my reasoning below. However, my exclusion of macro reversals is tentative, and further study will have to determine whether these constitute a variation of the motif related to the ones I have considered in this current study.

Macro Reversals

The first category of these excluded materials is narrative that contains large-scale reversals. I dismissed such examples after significant deliberation. I do so for three reasons: these reversals are 1) far less formulaic, 2) often more implicit than explicit, and 3) reversal is *everywhere* in good stories, which would make the present project far too broad. By less formulaic, I mean that the TT motif in the passages examined above fit the general types of transformation listed above. The formulae allow scribes to convey a density of meaning in short passages, often fitted to parallelism. By less explicit, I mean that inversions in narrative are obvious to the attentive reader, but not always explained by the narrator. This overlaps with my third point, that tales of quality require reversals. For instance, the entire Jonah narrative is formulated in narrative reversals: the reluctant prophet becomes the disobedient prophet, the “wicked” Assyrians obey the call to repentance quickly and unanimously, and so on. Yet nowhere in the book does the scribe utilize any “formulaic” or parallel lines of reversal, such as “the obedient become obstinate, the wicked become righteous.”

Another example may be helpful. The whole story of Esther operates by way of reversal. As Fox states: “this theme [of reversal] is not only stated in certain verses, it is actually built into

the book's architecture, in the thesis-antithesis series."²²¹ Additionally, the function of the book and its content (order, chaos, overturning of corrupt powers, etc.) have much in common with many of the passages above. In his *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, Jonathan Grossman explains that "one purpose [of the narrative] is to conceal simply for the sake of concealment—to destabilize the reader's sense that he fully understands what is going on" and the "narrative describes an absolute lack of order, a world where everything, even the narrator's own words are topsy-turvy." Despite these significant similarities, I have not included any passages in Esther in the analysis above. Why? Since macro-inversions and transformations are not what we find in the Egyptian texts. The function and the themes are comparable, but the device itself by which the scribes attains these require differentiation. Put simply: not everything TT constitutes the *TT motif*—at least as I have defined it for this study. Further study may determine that there is a related macro form of the motif.

Inversions Based in Social Practice

As I described above (2.1.2), Kruger related the TT motif to mourning practices in ancient Israel, noting that mourning rituals "often display... symbolic inversions," such as fasting, wearing sackcloth, etc.²²² I would like to problematize this claim. I agree that mourning rituals often include "reversals" from day-to-day behavior. Yet this is fundamental to ritual. It is ritual only insofar as it differentiates itself from the norm. Ritual action is "a matter of nuanced

²²¹ Michael V. Fox, "The Structure of the Book of Esther," in Alexander Rofé and Yair Zakovitsch, eds., *Isaac Leo Seeligmann Volume III: Essays on the Bible and the Ancient World* (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein's Publishing House, 1983), p. 292.

²²² Kruger, "The Inverse World of Mourning in the Hebrew Bible."

contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laden distinctions.”²²³ Take an example adjacent to the world of lamentation: the *Akitu* Festival. In this festival, the king experiences grief on behalf of the people, gets slapped, and ideally sheds tears. This inverts the standard behavior of the king, but the action within the context of ritual is the expected and necessary behavior. The ritual requires extraordinary procedure. Beyond the problems of ascertaining what “counts” as inversion within the world of mourning rites, there are problems with relating a literary motif to ritual practice. How exactly does the TT motif relate to these rights, other than to say they both contain inversions from perceived normalcy?²²⁴ In my view, Kruger’s study is not useful for understanding the TT motif (but in the study of ritual actions, it benefits the reader).

A second theme related to social practice that I have opted to exclude from my analysis are those passages wherein a lastborn child attains the right of the firstborn, or at least gains God’s favor—of course, this event occurs at many points in the Bible (Abel and Cain, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and Aaron, David and his brothers, etc.). At first glance, this appears to be quite TT, and indeed, the narrator highlights the shock of such reversals quite dramatically at points (Esau’s heartbreaking lament at the loss of his inheritance comes to mind: בְּרַכֵּנִי גַם־אֲנִי אָבִי “Bless me, me too, my father” [Gen 27:34]). However, the fact of the matter is that primogeniture was not as unanimous in Israel as modern readers have often thought.²²⁵ Indeed, Israel was not alone in this practice. Also in peripheral Babylonia, primogeniture was not

²²³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 90.

²²⁴ See Saul M. Olyan, “Ritual Inversion in Biblical Representations of Punitive Rites,” in Susan Niditch and John J. Collins, eds., *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch* (Brown Judaic Studies, 357; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2015), pp. 135-143, for a deeper treatment of inversion in Israelite ritual.

²²⁵ Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), argues that fathers chose the “firstborn” from among their sons (p. 5).

assumed. To demonstrate this, Frederick Greenspahn notes two documents from Sippar and Nuzi that state, “the institution of younger and older offspring does not exist in Sippar,” and “They shall divide equally, with no older or younger among them.”²²⁶ These legal documents along with narratives from the Hebrew Bible suggest that the reversal of primogeniture began as a counter-cultural act. Yet these actions of reversal, like the mourning rites I discussed above, belong to a more legal-historical line of inquiry, or if through a literary lens, as a motif of its own (as Greenspahn does). Thus, I have not considered passages that describe the younger brother taking the place of their elder in my analysis of the TT motif.²²⁷ However, some narratives may use a related device of macro reversal.

5.2 Contexts: Generic, Thematic, and Historical

5.2.1 The Problem with “Genre,” and Why Poetry?

The question of genre has become more complex in recent decades with the problematization of firm categories by literary theorists. John Snyder’s statement encapsulates the dilemma: “every work deviates from any particular set of characteristics that may be attributed to its kind.”²²⁸ Morenz exercises thinking similar to this. He suggests that extant

²²⁶ Greenspahn, *When Brother Dwell Together*, p. 17.

²²⁷ The closest contender for meeting the TT criteria is Gen 25:23, in which Yahweh speaks to Rebekah about her discomforts in pregnancy, explaining that **וְלֹאִם מְלֵאִם יֵאֱמָר וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר** “And one people will be stronger than (the other) people; and the old(er) will serve the young(er).” The reason I remain convinced that this falls outside the TT motif is that the message is cryptic in who exactly will serve whom. English translations rely on word order (which is far from stable in poetry) and the fulfillment of the word—readers all know that Jacob comes out on top. Plus, considering how often the god of Israel prefers the younger, it does not seem so out of the ordinary as to be TT.

²²⁸ Cited in Stewart Alden Moore, *Jewish Ethnic Identity and Relations in Hellenistic Egypt: With Walls of Iron?* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 171; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), p. 154.

Egyptian literature may have derived from (mostly) non-extant prophetic texts (*Ipuwer* and *Neferti* being modeled on formal prophetic and lament texts).²²⁹ This also relates to the phenomenology of prophecy: does the phenomenon itself determine the “genre”? Bergman distinguishes Egyptian prophecy from apocalypse by the means of revelation: an auditory experience produces prophecy, while a visual, apocalypse.²³⁰ Of course, this distinction does not hold up in the biblical corpus.

This brings up the question of the contexts of the passages discussed above. I will make a few observations about these contexts. The first is the most obvious: the TT motif occurs exclusively in poetry.²³¹ This raises the question: why poetry? There are several ways of looking at this. For one, poetry is the best avenue for the shock and confusion that the TT motif aims to achieve. Consider Robert Alter’s comment:

...poetry, working through a system of complex linkages of sound, image, word, rhythm, syntax, theme, idea, is an instrument for conveying densely patterned meanings, and *sometimes contradictory meanings*, that are not readily conveyable through other kinds of discourse.²³²

The TT motif often is self-contradictory—for example, remember the comment of Enmarch that *Ipuwer*’s genre necessitates “opposing, contradictory, ironic and allusive themes that defy simple analysis.”²³³ A scribe can achieve such a thing most effectively through poetry.

²²⁹ Morenz, “Literature as a Construction of the Past,” pp. 102-103.

²³⁰ Bergman, “Introductory Remarks on Apocalypticism in Egypt,” p. 58.

²³¹ One can quibble about what is/is not poetry—but the only texts I cite above that are less firmly poetic are the Theban tomb text (3.3.1) and a few prophetic texts like Haggai 1:5-6. However, I would argue that they are all *at the very least* poetic and take the form of parallelism.

²³² Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 113. Emphasis added.

²³³ Enmarch, *A World Upturned*, p. 60.

Secondly, one must consider the distribution of the TT motif throughout the Hebrew Bible. It immediately becomes apparent that Isaiah uses the motif most of all—in particular First Isaiah, which accounts for eleven of the thirty-four occurrences across the corpus. Amos, Micah, and the Psalms each deploy the motif three times. This is not surprising, as Isaiah is well-known for his sophistication. Additionally, scholars have shown that Isaiah is especially knowledgeable of Egyptian matters compared to most other biblical prophets.²³⁴ It is also apparent that the Latter Prophets deploy the motif far more often than any other collection within the Bible (though Isaiah may skew this result). I find that that best explanation for this is related to prophecy, discourse, and performance. I discuss this below (5.3.2).

5.2.2 The Historical Contexts

Below, I very briefly discuss what the material data might bring to the conversation, focusing on Iron II Judah. I do this to ponder the context behind certain biblical texts that have their origins in this period. That is, how might changes in population, politics, and cult have prompted use of the TT motif in the Judahite Bible?²³⁵

²³⁴ Christopher B. Hays and Joel M. LeMon, “The Dead and Their Images: An Egyptian Etymology for Hebrew *’ôb*,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 1 (2009), pp. 1-4; Christopher B. Hays, “A Hidden God: Isaiah 45’s Amun Polemic and Message to Egypt,” *Vetus Testamentum* 72 (2022), pp. 1-17; “An Egyptian Loanword in the Book of Isaiah and the Deir ‘Alla Inscription”; “The Covenant with Mut: A New Interpretation of Isaiah 28:1-22,” *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010), pp. 212-240; and also Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 13-27: A Continental Commentary*, Thomas H. Trapp, trans. (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 235, claims that “the terminology [of Isa 19] used betrays a detailed knowledge of Egypt,” which “cannot be observed anywhere else in the OT.”

²³⁵ By “Judahite Bible,” I allude to Daniel E. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah’s Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Why should one consider late Iron II Judah in particular? In short, this is a pivotal period for the composition and redaction of the Bible.²³⁶ More importantly it is the time in which most of the prophetic texts examined above have their origins—most notably, First Isaiah. It is not only pivotal for textual importance, but also is bookended by what are arguably some of the most historically significant events of the Levant: the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, and the southern destruction and exile that soon followed.²³⁷ These are the liminal years that this paper seeks to examine via textual data. On this liminality, William Dever imagines a scenario in which a non-urban Israelite visits a walled city:

In addition to resentment, a visitor to the big city might have gone away filled with fear. Why these monumental city walls? Who is it that threatens us? And what can we ordinary people do to protect ourselves in the open countryside? I suspect that our poor farmer would have gone home thinking that the rich were getting richer, that the city was a cesspool, and that *the world was falling apart*. In fact, by the mid-8th century B.C.E. it was.²³⁸

Thus, Judah was itself fundamentally an “upside down” kingdom marked by swift and radical transitions during its short lifespan. A survey of the archaeological data illuminating Judahite life will demonstrate that nearly no area of life was untouched by the whiplash produced by the Assyrian destruction of Israel, fall of Assyria, and imminent threat of Babylonia.

²³⁶ The composition and redaction history of the Hebrew Bible is a gargantuan debate into which I do not intend to step. Hence, I say that this era was *a* pivotal period—one among multiple.

²³⁷ “Significance” for history is somewhat arbitrary based on one’s own biased interests. However, I find the articulation of Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, p. 27, useful: “in any period the important facts are those that determine subsequent history.” By this criterion, the falls of the two kingdoms are certainly among the most significant.

²³⁸ William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 141 (emphasis added).

5.2.2.1 Shifts in Population and Allegiances

Perhaps the most significant transition that marks the late Iron II period for the kingdom of Judah is its population explosion. This is especially the case at the Jerusalem capital, which expanded the most rapidly and dramatically.²³⁹ Even outside city centers, Judah reached a peak population density, even filling regions previously more sparsely populated (like the Judean desert’s “unparalleled” settlement patterns).²⁴⁰ Archaeologists of all stripes understand this expansion to be quite radical, but to different degrees, depending on where one lands regarding origins of the southern kingdom (i.e., the tenth-century debate). For instance, Israel Finkelstein understands Jerusalem to be a “relatively poor village” ruling over a thinly populated hill country during the tenth and ninth centuries—but a village that swiftly expands into a “highly bureaucratic state” by the mid-eighth. He estimates that the Judahite population *at least* doubled within a matter of decades during the mid-eighth century.²⁴¹ This latter result is agreed upon by Amihai Mazar, who would regard tenth-century Judah as a formal state.²⁴² Aside from population, the city of Jerusalem itself expands from roughly fifteen acres to 150, five times larger than Lachish—a “great metropolis.”²⁴³ So then, the population exploded—but why? Both

²³⁹ James W. Hardin, “Judah During the Iron Age II Period,” in Ann E. Killebrew and Margreet Steiner, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant: c. 8000-332 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁴⁰ Hardin, “Judah During the Iron Age II Period.”

²⁴¹ Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, Brian B. Schmidt, ed. (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), p. 151, 153-154.

²⁴² Finkelstein and Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel*, p. 166.

²⁴³ William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2017), p. 548.

scholars allow a large part of this growth to consist of refugee Israelites in the wake of Sargon II's campaigns. Therefore, Judah was a kingdom intimately familiar with the reversal of fortunes—the poorer of the people of Israel had become the richer, and the richer had become war refugees. This huge influx of northern populace likely served as a catalyst for the many other transitions that characterize the period. Such *realia* may have stoked the imagination of the scribes that produced the Bible.

This newly integrated population still had to decide on its position in relation to Assyria. Evidence for widespread destruction throughout the area include building projects (like new walls and water systems), abandonment of smaller cities, an explosion of bureaucracy and top-down economic guidelines (like *šql* weights) and production systems, and so on.²⁴⁴

What happens after the widespread destruction is debated. Some argue that Judah never recovers; others that it is especially prosperous during this period due to the *Pax Assyriaca*.²⁴⁵ Finkelstein and Silberman see the latter option as most viable, while William Dever situates himself between these two views, arguing that Judah did recover from the Assyrian destruction, but not as a truly autonomous state.²⁴⁶ For all intents and purposes, Iron IIC Judah was an

²⁴⁴ Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, pp. 548-554; William G. Dever, "Social Structure in Palestine in the Iron I/II Period on the Eve of Destruction," in Thomas Evan Levy, ed., *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), pp. 416-431, describes the complexity of the construction projects: "...such massive defensive architecture reveals not only sophisticated centralized planning and well-engineered construction, but also the borrowing and skillful adaptation of military strategies that go back to a long Bronze Age tradition that extends from Anatolia across Syria to Northern Mesopotamia... they are products of a hierarchical, state-sponsored economy and society" (p. 423).

²⁴⁵ Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, p. 581, defines this as "a period of relative stability and even prosperity throughout the southern Levant as the entire region came under Assyrian hegemony."

²⁴⁶ Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 270, summarize: "The archaeological evidence supports the assumption of heightened government involvement in all phases of life in Judah—to the extent that the number of seals, seal impressions, administrative ostraca, and official weights in seventh century Judahite levels far exceed the quantities found before." Dever, *Beyond the Texts*, pp. 576-580.

Assyrian vassal with a few moments of rebellion. It may have even been a favorite vassal kingdom, since they apparently paid lower taxes/tribute to Assyria than their neighbors according to a textual tally.²⁴⁷

If this level of vassalhood is the case, one can imagine what an unsettling “peace” it must have been. Within a single lifespan, the region is overwhelmed by the power of the Assyrian Empire and then turns to serve it in allegiance and rely upon it for security and economic well-being. Such a shift in mindset does not come easily. It would necessitate creative theological thinking to understand how one’s god could remain involved in the swift changes.

5.2.2.2 What the Material Data Mean for Study of the Motif

The above is a very brief overview of the archaeological evidence that illuminates life in late Iron Judah. It is clear that this short period of just over a century teems with transitions in most areas of life.

The Levant is no stranger to transitions. A few examples illustrate this: during the Late Bronze Age it was subject to struggles between the Egyptian and Hittite empires. During and following the Late Bronze Age collapse, entirely new ethnic groups immigrated to the land. So is there anything unique about the transitions in the Late Iron Age, or are such transitions just typical for the “crossroads” of the ancient Near East?

The transition of Judah’s rapid population expansion and the introduction of northern refugees produces a “mixed multitude” of Israelites and Judahites as a singular (but not homogenous) group. Regardless of its historicity, this united identity is reflected in the origin

²⁴⁷ Finkelstein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 265.

stories that the groups tell: they were once one people who came into the land together and eventually lived under the authority of one god and one king.

The quick political shifts that occur during this period are also unique in their long-term effects and reception. Finkelstein and Silverman highlight this:

The Assyrian century—from the last years of the rule of Ahaz to the days of Hezekiah and Manasseh—is a fascinating case of dramatic policy swings in Judah. The three kings—grandfather, father, and son—flip-flopped between defiance and engagement with the Assyrian authorities and between syncretistic and puritan religious policies.²⁴⁸

The eventual transitions into aniconism and destruction of non-Yahwistic cultic materials are the seedbed for a firm monolatry/henotheism, and a reimagining of the past. The Israelite authors portrayed this pivot not as an innovation, but a return to a golden age.

The material data prove significant for understanding the literature that comes from this period, as well as literature that finds its inspiration within the same timeframe. In other words, pointing out the extreme shifts that occurred in late Iron II Judah is meaningful for interpreting what became the Hebrew Bible. It shows that its authors lived in world full of dramatic reversals. The status-quo was never stagnant for long. I suggest that this type of reversal informed and ignited the imaginations of the biblical authors. They lived within a TT world, and their writings reflect that world.

In this way, its literary deployment within a historical setting is quite similar to the setting of the inception of the Egyptian form of the motif that emerged in the Middle Kingdom. Only after a period of (relative) stability of the Old Kingdom, and being reintroduced to chaos in the First Intermediate Period, do the Egyptian scribal elite develop a literary device to engage with

²⁴⁸ Finkelstein and Silverman, *The Bible Unearthed*, p. 270.

the *realia* of a chaotic world *after things return to order*. The 12th Dynasty (and those who followed suit) utilized the motif to consolidate power via cosmo-royal ideology after the messy intermediate period and the transition from the 11th Dynasty to its usurper, Amenemhat I. After this period of solidification, the TT texts remained ever-relevant. Following the rule of the Hyksos, New Kingdom Egypt becomes more xenophobic and expansionistic than ever before, attempting to ensure that chaos never again infects the land of Egypt. The political realities need a textual device that deals with chaos and reaffirms social and cosmological hierarchy and ordered goodness.

Moreover, the emphases of *Kirtu*, though divorced from any discernable historical context, show the same concern for power, the transfer of said power, and order.²⁴⁹ It is only in the context of Kirtu's dream concerning his sickness and imminent death, and then Yaššibu's struggle for the throne, that the scribe utilizes the TT motif. And so even here, in an uncertain historical context, we can see how the motif could have functioned to quell the same anxieties about transfer of power and the chaos that might ensue.

The Israelite form emerges in a strikingly similar situation: after a period of (relative) stability and prosperity, Assyrian destruction brings chaos, and then the *Pax Assyriaca* settles things down once more, for "To experience the collapse of established order is to be aware of order's fragility."²⁵⁰ This awareness of order's vulnerability sets the stage for the Judahite

²⁴⁹ The location of *Kirtu* in the Ḫabbur region, Hurrian loanwords in the epic, as well as Kirtu itself being a known Hurrian name, has suggested to some that the text was imported into the Ugaritic literary corpus. See a summary of the evidence in František Válek, "Foreigners and Religion at Ugarit," *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 9 (2021), pp. 47-66. See also Walter Mayer, "The Hurrian Cult at Ugarit," in Nick Wyatt and John C. L. Gibson, eds., *Ugarit, Religion and Culture: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Ugarit, Religion and Culture, Edinburgh, July 1994; Essays Presented in Honour of Professor John C. L. Gibson* (Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur, 12; Münster: Ugarit-Verl, 1996), pp. 205-212.

²⁵⁰ Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, p. 111, 114.

prophets and their eventual scribes to deploy the TT motif. Only after the world had “fallen apart” (to use Dever’s language) could scribes attempt to put it back together so as to make sense of it once more.

5.2.2.3 Contexts for Influence

As for discerning direct influence of Egyptian TT texts on the Hebrew Bible, one should hold tentative conclusions. However, the amount of resonance detailed above, including form and content, invites consideration of the possibility. This goes against a history of reticence to see Egyptian influence in the biblical texts. Donald Redford has stated that

There is no clear, fundamental debt to northeast Africa in intellectual heritage or material culture. Those cultural elements from Egypt that have been demonstrated were borrowed only sporadically and made but a superficial impact on the Israelites.²⁵¹

He goes on to explain that in the case of prophetic texts, “cultural differences between Egypt and the Levant render connection to or influence upon Hebrew prophecy highly suspect.”²⁵² I think that sustained attention to the motif in Egypt and Northwest Semitic texts has shown that this is not the case. Direct influence or not, Egyptian texts profoundly imprinted themselves upon those of Israel. Its existence in Ugaritic and epigraphic texts demonstrates that the device was known to Canaanites long before the emergence of Israel and its Judahite scribes—but it may have remained associated with Egyptian colonialism in the Levant into the period of the classical

²⁵¹ Donald B. Redford, “Egyptian,” in John Kaltner and Steven L. McKenzie, eds., *Beyond Babel: A Handbook for Biblical Hebrew and Related Languages* (Resources for Biblical Study, 42; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), p. 118.

²⁵² Redford, “Egyptian,” p. 119.

prophets.²⁵³ The high degree of similarity between theme, form, generic context, and even sort of “type scenes” of reversal indicates a connection between the cultures’ use of the motif.

Indeed, Mark Smith describes the way that the biblical authors adapted literary materials (including content and form) from those over them (in this case, Assyria and Babylon, but the point obtains regarding Egypt as well):

one dimension of the literary brilliance of the Bible can be seen in part how it uses the traditions of the empire ruling over it in order to establish Israelite identity over and against it; in short, cultural victory, of both literary and religious sorts, in inverse relations to political realities.²⁵⁴

Smith’s assertion is one possibility regarding how the motif “works”—it subverts traditions from the empires around it to become powerful through culture and literature. In other words, Israel’s texts perform the TT motif in reality; the weaker Israel becomes the greater through the text.

Next, I will consider the function of the motif more directly.

5.3 Function

5.3.1 Devices and Ideologies

To ascertain the function of the motif, it is useful to observe what devices and ideologies accompany it. Throughout Chapters 3 and 4, I highlighted several ways that scribes employed textual devices to emphasize and perform the TT motif. Let me note a few examples.

²⁵³ Shirly Ben-Dor Evian, “The Past and Future of ‘Biblical Egyptology,’” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 18 (2018), pp. 1-11, describes four periods wherein cultural transfer from Egypt is most plausible.

²⁵⁴ Mark S. Smith, “Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature Part II: Mesopotamian Impact on Biblical Narrative,” *Revue Biblique* 114 (2007), p. 207.

First, scribes used structural inversions to accomplish this. In Hannah’s Song (1 Sam 2), I pointed out the pattern of strong (גִּבֹּר), weak (וְנִכְשָׁל), strong (שָׁבֵעַ), weak (רָעֵב), but then *weak* (עֲקָרָה), *strong* (רַבַּת). This textual reversal enacts the TT motif. Similarly, in *Ipuwer* 7.1-8.5, a shift occurs from a pattern of “misfortune of *x*, good fortune of *y*,” to “good fortune of *y*, misfortune of *x*.” At times, after the pattern has shifted, “group *x*” has disappeared entirely from the text. These kinds of structural inversions destabilize the reading and subvert expectation. Thus, the discussion of chaos and order within the texts is present even in the shape of the texts. Sometimes such inversions can be observed on a larger scale, as I pointed out in the case of *Neferti*, which moves from chaos to order at the arrival of Ameny. These structural inversions show the erudition and intentionality of the scribes that produced the texts.

Second, I pointed out several cases of polysemy in my discussion of the texts. For example, in *Nef* 26-28, I observed that *šw* operates as a multidirectional polysemy, meaning “empty” and “dry.” Similarly, in *Ipuwer* 6.5-7, I pointed out a case of unidirectional polysemy in *šdi* as both the “taking” of the secret writings and their being “read out.” Both these examples from the Egyptian material serve a disruptive function. The scribes skillfully convey the disorder of the TT situation by using polysemy. The same can be said of Israelite scribes who used polysemy in a comparable fashion. One example of this is Jeremiah’s Song of the Sword, with the use of חרב meaning both “sword” and “drought.” Another comes from Amos 8, wherein כִּיאֹר and כָּאֵר both convey “like light” and “like the Nile.” Again, the scribes’ use of polysemy in TT texts across cultural boundaries shows that they deployed it consciously, expertly, and intentionally.

Lastly, the ideologies represented in TT texts is also valuable to consider. I draw attention to two related ideologies: divine causation and *lex talionis*. I observed a consistent pattern that differentiated TT texts between Egypt and the Levant, that is, that Levantine texts stated clear divine causality much more clearly. This is predictably the case for the biblical texts that tend toward universalizing all events under Yahweh's rule; twenty-one of the thirty-five passages in the Bible make reference to God's involvement, and many of those that remain make this connection clear in surrounding passages. The same is true for the TT passages from Deir 'Alla and Sefire. Both articulate that reversals are the result of divine action. This is in contrast to Egyptian texts, wherein the gods are far less involved (if mentioned in relation to the upside down state of the world at all). This relates to the very different cosmology and eschatology of Egyptians and Levantines; for the Egyptians, the distant future consists of a return to chaos accompanied by the cessation (or even death) of the gods.²⁵⁵ Thus, the texts connect current or looming chaos to divine absence (abandonment or not) rather than punishment.

5.3.2 Discourse and Performance

Also worthy of reflection is that TT motif nearly always occurs in discourse—whether implicit or explicit. Again, this coheres with the poetic form (which I discussed in 5.2.1).

Regarding the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, Edward Greenstein observes that

Nearly all of what comprises biblical verse is not third person discourse, such as that of a narrator, but the discourse of a particular speaker, either in the first person or in a quotation by another speaker. So simple and

²⁵⁵ Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 160-165.

plain a phenomenon has almost completely escaped the notice of biblical scholars.²⁵⁶

Indeed, this statement coheres even when examining the earlier Egyptian materials: *Ipuwer*, *Neferti*, the *Complaints*, the *Debate*, and the *Peasant* all deploy the motif within the context of discourse. This is because the TT motif is something to be performed. Greenstein concludes by asserting that the form of parallelism (i.e. poetry) in biblical poetry conveys performance: “When biblical characters speak, they perform a dramatic act.”²⁵⁷ In the same way, the scribes have their prophets and literary figures perform the TT motif, and presumably, the readers of these texts would perform the motif by extension.

This brings me to what I consider to be *the central question* regarding the TT motif: what does it seek to accomplish, or, what is its function in the texts? No previous studies have proposed a function for the motif. The very recitation of the texts actualizes their contents, either by inverting reality, or by maintaining it through the performative inversion-and-un-inversion.

This latter type harnesses the sacred power of chaos, in the words of Jonathan Z. Smith:

Chaos is a sacred power; but it is frequently perceived as being sacred “in the wrong way.” It is that which is opposed to order, which threatens the paradigms and archetypes but which is, nevertheless, profoundly necessary for the very creativity... of the Sacred.²⁵⁸

In this way, passages from Egypt and Israel portray chaos in order to harness its power. This is beyond simple lamentation of the state of the world, or a warning of what may come if the divine realm decides to bring judgment. It also goes beyond the definition of the TT motif as simply “literary.” Indeed, there has often been a false dichotomy between “literary” and “performative”

²⁵⁶ Edward Greenstein, “Direct Discourse and Parallelism,” in Athalya Brenner-Idan, ed., *Discourse, Dialogue, and Debate in the Bible: Essays in Honour of Frank H. Polak* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), p. 79.

²⁵⁷ Greenstein, “Direct Discourse and Parallelism,” p. 91.

²⁵⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Wobbling Pivot,” *The Journal of Religion* 52 (1972), p. 143.

dimensions, as Noegel has pointed out.²⁵⁹ Yet in TT texts, the literary portrayal of dynamic chaos is a means *through which* the scribes can access the “creativity” of the divine—for it is from static chaos that the gods created the world. By activating these chaotic tropes and combating them by transformation, the scribes (who were connected to [or were themselves] ritualists) took part in the fending off of chaos.

5.4 Conclusion: Gaining Precision

With all this in mind, I define the topsy-turvy motif as a motif of dramatic transformation by reversal, replacement, (in)action, negation, or destratification in poetic texts that aims to affect reality by its performance.

Further study of the motif would benefit from differentiating these five means of transformation. This would add precision to the discussion and aid further cross-cultural analysis. As I mentioned in the introduction, I have noted occurrences of the TT motif in several textual collections outside of Egypt and the Levant. Narrowing the focus of further studies to one form of the motif (such as transformation by destratification) will add a level of precision that past scholarly discussion has lacked. This will also foster interdisciplinary understanding.

²⁵⁹ Noegel, “*Worplay*” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 152.

Appendix 1: Distribution of Topsy-Turvy Variations, Devices, and Ideologies in the Biblical Texts

Text	Reversal	Replacement	Action	Negation	Destratification	Polysemy	Paronomasia	Structural Reversal	Gender	Divine cause	Utopia	<i>Lex Talionis</i>
1 Sam 2:4-8	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
2 Sam 22:28	✓									✓		
Isa 2:4	✓			✓		✓	✓			✓		
Isa 3:4-5	✓									✓		
Isa 3:24		✓						✓		✓		
Isa 11:6-9			✓		✓			✓		✓		
Isa 14:13-15								✓		✓		✓
Isa 14:30	✓											
Isa 29:14			✓				✓			✓		
Isa 29:17-19	✓		✓								✓	
Isa 30:2-3	✓											
Isa 32:14-15	✓						✓				✓	
Isa 35:5-7	✓							✓				
Isa 51:3	✓									✓	✓	
Jer 50:35-39	✓			✓		✓			✓			✓
Ezek 17:24	✓							✓		✓		
Ezek 21:31	✓							✓		✓		
Ezek 36:33-36	✓									✓		
Joel 4:10	✓						✓					
Amos 2:12-16			✓							✓		
Amos 6:11-12	✓					✓	✓					✓
Amos 8:9-10	✓					✓				✓		
Mic 4:3	✓					✓	✓			✓		
Mic 6:14-15				✓						✓		
Mic 7:3-6				✓								
Hag 1:5-6				✓								✓
Ps 18:28	✓									✓		✓

Ps 75:8	✓									✓		
Ps 147:6	✓					✓				✓		✓
Prov 29:23	✓											✓
Prov 30:21-23	✓							✓	✓			
Qoh 8:14	✓											
Qoh 10:5-7	✓				✓			✓				
Lam 1:1	✓								✓	✓		
Lam 4:1-10	✓								✓	✓		

Appendix 2: A Brief Excursus on the Reception History of the Topsy Turvy Motif in Isa 11:6-9

I include a discussion of the history of interpretation of Isa 11:6-9 here to signal that there is much more work to be done on the TT motif, and reception history is one such avenue of inquiry. In other words, I have contributed significantly to our understanding of the TT motif in its Egyptian and Levantine contexts above; the discussion below will consider how others received and understood one of these radical texts.

I choose this passage because Isaiah 11 at large, but particularly Isa 11:6-9, has captivated readers throughout the ages, inviting imaginative and creative readings. Some have understood the depictions to be hyperbolic language; others, an actual hope a future restoration of the created order. Still other readers perform rich allegorical readings on the passage. In this excursus, I will examine several instances of these readings of many traditions and religious “stripes” in a loosely diachronic fashion and non-exhaustive fashion.

A2.1 Inner-Biblical Interpretation

Isaiah 11:6-9 undergoes an alteration within the Book of Isaiah itself. In Second (or Third) Isaiah, we find a strikingly similar passage:²⁶⁰

²⁶⁰ Here, I assume separate authorship of the latter portions of Isaiah. According to broad agreement in scholarship, Isaiah 40-66 originate later than 1-39. Most scholars go further to break 40-66 into two distinct authorial periods as well. For a contrary argument, see Mark F. Rooker, “Dating Isaiah 40-66: What Does the Linguistic Evidence Say?,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996), pp. 303-312. Even if Isaiah as a whole was dictated by a single individual (though I do not think this is the case), this later reuse of prophetic material still constitutes an interpretation of the prophet’s own words. Alternatively, 11:6-9 could be a late addition to tie together the eschatological themes of the book as a whole. On this, see the discussion of Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 101-102.

זֶאֵב וְטֹלָה יִרְעוּ כְּאַחַד וְאַרְיֵה בְּבֹקֶר יֹאכְל־תֶּבֶן וְנֹחַשׁ עֵפֶר לְחֶמּוֹ
לֹא־יִרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל־הָרַקְדָּשִׁי אָמַר יְהוָה:

“A wolf and a lamb will feed as one, and a lion shall eat straw like the ox, while dust will be the food of the serpent.

They shall not do wrong, and they shall not destroy on my entire mountain of holiness,” says Yahweh (Isa 65:25).

This quotation and its transformation are intriguing for its new context and its new content. First, the context. The pericope that this verse is found begins with v. 17, wherein Yahweh proclaims that he plans to create a “new heavens and new earth” alongside a newly “created” Jerusalem. Thus, the eschatological overtones of Isaiah 11 are amplified further in this new prophetic environment.

Second, the new content of the passage is fascinating. The author of Isaiah 65 has deployed the earlier prophecy in a more compact form. In this he makes room for an addition: “dust will be the food of the serpent.” Clearly this is in connection with Yahweh’s curse upon the mysterious, crafty, talking snake: **עַל־גֻּחְזֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְעֵפֶר תֹּאכַל כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ** “Upon your belly you will go; you will eat dust all the days of your life” (Gen 3:14). If Isaiah’s new context magnifies the cosmological overtones, all the more does the deployment of material from the Genesis 2-3 creation narrative. Thus we see that the author(s) of Isaiah saw earlier material that was worth reinterpreting for a new literary and historical context. The new interpretation does not betray the meaning of the original, but it does reimagine and expand it to fit an even more explicitly cosmological context: the overt new heavens and earth.

A2.2 Early Versions

Before examining commentaries on the Isaiah passage, it would be helpful to examine how the early versions treat the passage. After all, one obviously should not assume that every interpreter examined below were commenting on the same form of the text. The versions do not diverge in dramatic ways, but a few notes might serve well before moving on.

Targum Jonathan transforms our passage in the following way:

בְּיָמֵי מְשִׁיחָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִסְגִּי שְׁלָמָא בְּאַרְעָא וְיִדּוּר דִּיבָא עִם אַמְרָא
וְנִמְרָא עִם גְּדִיָּא וְשָׂרִי וְעַגְלָא וְאַרְיָא וּפְטִים כְּחָדָא וְיִנִּיק זְעִיר יְהִי מְדַבֵּר לְהוֹן:
וְתוֹרָא וְדִיבָא יִרְעִין כְּחָדָא יִשְׂרוּן בְּנִיחוּן וְאַרְיָא כְּתוֹרָא יְכוּל תְּבַנָּא:
וְיַחֲדָא יִנְקָא עַל חוֹר חוּי פְתוּן וְעַל חִיזוּ גְלְגְלִי עֵינֵי חוּי חוֹרְמָן חֲסִילָא יְדוּהֵי
יִשִּׁיט:
לָא יִבְאָשׁוּן וְלָא יִחְבְּלוּן בְּכָל טוֹרָא דְקוּדְשֵׁי אַרְיָ תְתַמְלִי אַרְעָא לְמִידַע ית
דְּחַלְתָּא דִּי בְּמִיָּא דְלִימָא חָפּוּן:

*In the days of the Messiah of Israel shall peace increase in the land, and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little suckling child shall lead them. The cow and the hear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play over the hole of an asp, and the weaned child shall put his hands on the adder's eyeballs. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the fear of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:6-9 TargumJ).*²⁶¹

The italics from the provided translation already mark divergences from the Hebrew text, which simplifies noting the transformation that the Targum translation has undergone. The most notable addition is in the first line, clarifying the times to which Isaiah refers: “the days of the Messiah of Israel.” Though one might already infer that from the context of the passage and its hopeful

²⁶¹ Translation is that of H. G. M. Williamson and B. D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible, 38; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988). Italics in the translation are original and denote transformations or additions to the text. Aramaic text is from the Sefaria Library website: https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Isaiah?lang=en.

imagery, the Aramaic text makes this even clearer through epexegetis. Not too much should be made of the “adder’s eyeballs” (as opposed to hole), since **הַרְיָאֵמָ** (Heb.) is a *hapax legomenon*, and the Targum seems to read it as **רִיָאֵמָ**, “light; bright eyes,” as in Prov 15:30.²⁶² Perhaps the intended meaning here is that though the adder will *see* the boy’s hand, it will no longer be inclined to bite him. The last divergence of the addition of “the fear of.” This is not uncommon in the Targumim, as they often go to great lengths to safeguard God’s majesty by avoiding any hint of anthropomorphisms.

The LXX version of our passage reads as follows:

καὶ συνβοσκηθήσεται λύκος μετὰ ἀρνός, καὶ πάρδαλις συναναπαύσεται ἐρίφῳ, καὶ μοσχάριον καὶ ταύρος καὶ λέων ἅμα βοσκηθήσονται, καὶ παιδίον μικρὸν ἄξει αὐτούς· καὶ βοῦς καὶ ἄρκος ἅμα βοσκηθήσονται, καὶ ἅμα τὰ παιδιά αὐτῶν ἔσονται, καὶ λέων ὡς βοῦς φάγονται ἄχυρα· καὶ παιδίον νήπιον ἐπὶ τρωγλῶν ἀσπίδων, καὶ ἐπὶ κοίτην ἐκγόνων ἀσπίδων τὴν χεῖρα ἐπιβαλεῖ. καὶ οὐ μὴ κακοποιήσουσιν οὐδὲ μὴ δύνωνται ἀπολέσαι οὐδένα ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ ἅγιόν μου, ὅτι ἐνεπλήσθη ἡ σύμπασα τοῦ γνῶναι τὸν κύριον, ὡς ὕδωρ πολὺ κατακαλύψει θαλάσσης.

And a wolf will feed together with a lamb, and a leopard will rest with a kid, and a calf and a bull and a lion will feed together, and a child will lead them. And an ox and a bear will feed together, and they will be together with their offspring, and a lion will eat straw just like an ox. And an infant child will put their hand over an adder’s hole and on a bed of adder’s offspring. And it is certain that they will not do wrong, nor will they be able to destroy anyone on my holy mountain because everything has been filled with the knowledge of the Lord, like much water covers the seas (Isa 11:6-9 LXX).

There is little to discuss in this rendering, especially considering that LXX Isaiah often translates quite freely. Here, though, the Greek closely aligns with its source text fairly well. Perhaps the most notable difference is that the translator has rendered “all the land” as “everything”

²⁶² HALOT, 549, s.v. **הַרְיָאֵמָ**.

(σύμπασα). This may be to better make sense of why the animals behave more generously toward one another—they too, have been filled with the knowledge of God.

A2.3 Early Jewish Readings

The Qumran Community’s eschatological beliefs grew directly out of their readings of the prophets, whose prophecies articulate “a linear concept of time in which God would ultimately end a period of oppression, injustice and scarcity and restore an era of security, justice and prosperity for his people Israel.”²⁶³ Through the hermeneutical practice of actualization, or contemporization, the interpreters at Qumran saw themselves as the imminent recipients of such an ideal world as described in Isaiah 11. They were living in the “last days,” wherein strict adherence to the Law and rejection of the corruption of Israel at large were a means to pass the “test” of these last days. How long this period would last does seem to have been less precise to the community.²⁶⁴ However, they clearly understood that they were in the final stages in a process toward a final salvific act of God. The community’s views on these “last days” can be summarized as follows:

1. People must uphold the Law thoroughly in a process of purification throughout a period of wickedness.

²⁶³ Kenneth E. Pomykala, “Eschatologies and Messianisms,” in Charlotte Hempel and George J. Brooke, eds., *T & T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2019), p. 496.

²⁶⁴ See 4Q174, 1.14-15 and 1Q28a 1.1-3 for slightly different understanding of the community’s temporal location. The former refers to a future time in the “last days” (אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים) wherein God will establish an eternal temple. The latter describes the community as already situated in such eschatological times: “And this is the rule of all the congregation of Israel in the final days, when they gather [in community to wa]lk in accordance with the regulation of the sons of Zadok, the priests, and the men of their covenant who have turn[ed away from the] path of the nation.” Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), pp. 352-353 (for 4Q174), 100-101 (1Q28a). Such a “now, but not quite yet” eschatology is shared by the New Testament authors.

2. The priestly and royal messiahs would arrive, initiating a change for the better. The renewed community would draw some Jews from outside the sect.
3. A cosmological war would ensue between the “sons of light” and the “sons of darkness,” the former being led by the messiahs. The enemies of Israel (in particular, the *Kittim*) would be defeated.
 - a. Simultaneously, a heavenly war takes place between Michael/Melchizedek and his angelic host against Belial and the spiritual powers of darkness.
4. Michael/Melchizedek atones for the sins of the people and establishes a new and pure temple.
5. An ideal afterlife (whether bodily or not) follows a final judgment.²⁶⁵

This final stage of a utopian afterlife is especially pertinent for the current discussion; the stages that precede are also vital because the Qumran Community likely understood Isaiah 11 as a whole as reflecting this progression: (1) a need for divine intervention, (2) messianic arrival and acting on behalf of the pure, (3) destruction of enemies, and (4) restoration of an idyllic, supernatural order. The firmly dualistic understanding of their times as “evil,” and the time to come as “good,” is particularly resonant with the TT motif, viewing the world as either completely chaotic or completely ordered.²⁶⁶

The Isaiah *Pesher* does not directly address the lines in consideration for this paper (11:6-9). But the verses directly preceding (11:1-5) do garner attention in extant fragments and can lend some understanding to how the exegetes likely read our passage. Such an exercise is

²⁶⁵ Pomykala, “Eschatologies and Messianisms,” pp. 498-500.

²⁶⁶ See Marcus Tso, “Ethics and Dualisms,” in Charlotte Hempel and George J. Brooke, eds., *T & T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 559-567.

especially necessary for the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, because in “...the eyes of the Yahad, the interpretation of many of the prophetic books (as well as the psalms attributed to David) appeared to hold the same authority as the prophetic text itself.”²⁶⁷ The *peshet* reads:

[The interpretation of the word concerns the shoot] of David which will sprout in the fi[nal days, since] [with the breath of his lips he will execute] his [ene]my and God will support him with [the spirit of c]ourage [...] [...] thro]ne of glory, h[oly] crown and multi-colour[ed] vestments [...] in his hand. He will rule over all the pe[ople]s and Magog [...] his sword will judge [al]l the peoples. And as for what he says: “He will not [judge by appearances] or give verdicts on hearsay,” its interpretation: which [...] and according to what they teach him, he will judge, and upon their authority [...] with him will go out one of the priests of renown, holding in his hand clothes (of)... (4Q161 Frags. 8-11, ll. 18-25).²⁶⁸

The “shoot of Jesse” in Isaiah 11, according to its interpretation at Qumran, clearly refers to a (royal) messianic figure who will do justice and exterminate his enemies through force. At his judgment of the nations, he then partners with a priestly messiah to do... *something*. The passage cuts off here, unfortunately. With what else we know about the eschatological beliefs of the community one can infer where the interpretation might have gone next as the exegete moves on into vv. 6-9 and beyond. That is, the reversed natural order of things in these lines that follow describe the resulting restoration that flow from the destruction of evil powers (both natural and supernatural). The event of judgment by the messiah(s) produces a new, upside down world, where humans and animals alike no longer practice violence.

²⁶⁷ Hindy Najman and Nicole Hilton, “Revelation,” in Charlotte Hempel and George J. Brooke, eds., *T & T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 481-489.

²⁶⁸ Translation is that of Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, pp. 316-317.

One other note should be made in reference to the *Pesher* passage: the royal messiah is subservient to the priesthood. It reads, “‘He will not [judge by appearances] or give verdicts on hearsay,’ its interpretation: which [...] and according to what *they* teach him, he will judge, and upon *their* authority [...] with him will go out one of the priests of renown” (emphasis added). This is in line with the hierarchical portrayal of messianic figures at Qumran.²⁶⁹ It would appear that the priests hold knowledge as to how the world ought to be, and that it is only through the combined “might” and “knowledge” of the royal and priestly leaders (respectively) that eschatological restoration can occur. This aligns with our passage from Isaiah quite well, as it concludes: “They will not do wrong, and they will do violence on my entire mountain of holiness, for the land will be full of the knowledge (יְדָעָה) of Yahweh, like the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). Thus, the emphasis of the priests’ knowledge of the divine, as well as sacred practice and purity, *may* have played a role in their continued exposition of Isaiah 11.

Texts from outside the Dead Sea communities indicate hopes shared with the passage in discussion. It is unclear whether they are pulling from Isaiah directly or simply share theological conventions, and thus probably not worth much discussion here (since they are also quite abundant).²⁷⁰

A2.4 Early Christian Readings

The New Testament itself never explicitly cites vv. 6-9, but the “stump of Jesse” undergirds many of the claims that the authors make about Jesus’ messianic identity (cf. Heb

²⁶⁹ Pomykala, “Eschatologies and Messianisms,” p. 501.

²⁷⁰ A few notable ones include 2 Baruch 73:6, Sibylline Oracles 3:788-795, and Philo’s *De Praemiis et Poenis* 87-90.

7:14, Rev 5:5, Rev 22:16, etc.). However, direct citations and quotations are of course not the only way the New Testament authors deploy the Scriptures. Allusion is another literary tool that permeates the texts.

The natural tranquility of the Isaiah passage may inform the Gospel of Mark's puzzling note in 1:13: καὶ ἦν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι διηκόνουν αὐτῷ “And [Jesus] was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by the Satan, and *he was with the wild animals*, and the angels were serving him.” What have the wild animals to do with the larger story? The term θηρίον is important, as it most often (though not exclusively) refers to potentially dangerous animals throughout the LXX.²⁷¹ Here, then, the author of Mark deploys a well-known motif in earlier Jewish literature (biblical and extra-biblical) of a peaceful recreated natural order of things—especially when it comes to animals perceived as particularly hazardous. While he does not cite Isa 11:6-9 in any way, this *may be* one of the passages that he aims to “activate” within his readership.

Not surprisingly, early Christian readings share with Qumran the emphasis on the messianic thrust of Isaiah 11. Of course, the great divergence is that for Christian communities, the chapter referred to one figure: Jesus of Nazareth, who in their view, had already come and initiated the process of restoration through his teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension. Thus, the two primary differences between Qumranic and Christian interpretations of Isaiah 11 are that (1) the figure(s) to which the passage refers, and (2) the community's temporal position in

²⁷¹ “But both the word usage and the habits of thought that went with it would be likely to bring especially the dangerous animals to mind. Mark portrays Jesus in peaceable companionship with animals that were habitually perceived as inimical and threatening to humans.” Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), p. 119. See also Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), s.v. θηρίον.

relation to the arrival of the messianic figure(s). Many more commentaries and homilies are available from early Christian communities, so the passages examined below are by no means exhaustive.

Fairly common is interpreting the “animals” to indicate different kinds of humans.

Eusebius’ deployment of the passage serves well as an example:

[Isaiah] continues prophetically to show the transformation of all different races of humanity, barbarian and Greek through the teaching of Christ... The irrational animals and wild beasts in the passage represent the Gentiles, who are naturally like animals. One who comes from the seed of Jesse will rule over the Gentiles. This is the genealogy of our Savior and Lord, in whom the Gentiles now believe and hope.²⁷²

Thus, in his view, the animals in the passage represent the Gentiles, who behaved in violent and inhuman ways before “believing” and “hoping” in the “seed of Jesse.” This itself is a form of actualization, in that Eusebius sees himself and his fellow Gentile Christians as the true referents of the prophecy.²⁷³ It is to be expected that Eusebius (and others, as seen below) deploy similar interpretive methods as found at Qumran; his models were likely (in part) the New Testament authors, who themselves practiced the same interpretive methods that they knew as Jewish readers of the Bible.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Eusebius of Caesarea, *Proof of the Gospel* 3.2, cited in Steven A. McKinion and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Isaiah 1-39* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 10; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 105-106.

²⁷³ Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), notes that, “Whenever there is a reference to animals, Eusebius assigns them an allegorical significance, as if by reflex... one could conclude with good reason that Origen’s form of allegory, while still present in Eusebius, has often been moved to the periphery to function as a sort of ornament” (p. 78).

²⁷⁴ “Their common concern was to find in Scripture a warrant for their practices and beliefs, and their common assumption was that approaches they had taken to Scripture as Jews could be adapted to Christian purposes. Rabbinic (or better, Pharisaic) proof texting, the *pesher* method, and the sort of allegorical approach we find in Philo are all used, often all three by the same author.” James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 128.

Irenaeus is in general agreement with this interpretation. However, he is more wary to limit the prophecy to being already fulfilled and have no realization in the actual animal kingdom:

I am aware that some try to refer these [prophecies] to fierce people of diverse nations and of different kinds of behavior, who have believed, and when they have believed have come to agree with the righteous. But although this is now true of various kinds of people who have come from different nations to the one conviction of the faith, nevertheless [it will also be true] in the resurrection of the just with reference to these animals.²⁷⁵

Thus, for Irenaeus, this passage is polysemous. It *does* anticipate the inclusion and behavioral reformation of the nations; it *also* carries its “plain” meaning, in that the animals described (wolves, serpents, etc.) will also undergo a change in nature in the future, resurrected world. In accepting both of these meanings, he draws no dichotomy between the allegorical and non-figurative readings. In still receiving the latter, Irenaeus shares with the Qumran community a belief that the world will indeed be turned “right-side up,” but through a divine process. God has already acted to bring in the Gentiles, and will still act to full finish the restoration project.

For some early Christians, the passage in discussion not only contains messianic tones carried on throughout the chapter, but even *directly refer* to the Christ. In discussion of the little boy (נֶעֶר קָטָן) who will lead the animals in peace (11:6), Gregory the Great makes an intertextual connection:

It is also added here: “and a small child will lead them.” Who is this small child, if not the one about whom it was written: “A child is born to us, a son is given to us?”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5, cited in McKinion and Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 106.

²⁷⁶ Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 2.4.3.177, cited in McKinion and Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 108. Gregory here draws a connection to Isa 9:6 to interpret the passage.

This demonstrates that some early Christians were not satisfied only with messianic allusions or themes, but saw necessary to demonstrate that their communities understand the words as *explicit* prophecies that foretold the messianic arrival of Jesus. Such an unambiguity was necessary to establish in the early centuries of the church, as many communities were demonstrably unsure about how, or even *if*, they should receive the Jewish Scriptures as now also Christian Scripture.²⁷⁷ Not only did the Old Testament refer to the messiah, but also it foretold what he would accomplish, according to Ambrose:

Hear how the antidote was administered to the flesh: the Word of God became flesh, put his hand into the serpent's den, removed the venom and took away sin. In other words, "from sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."²⁷⁸

Here, Ambrose utilizes dense intertextuality (connecting Gen 3:15, Isa 11:8, John 1:14, and Rom 8:3) to establish that the Old Testament anticipated Jesus as the sin-removing messiah. It would seem that, like Gregory above, Ambrose reads Isa 11:6-9's "little boy," "baby," and "weaned child" as signifying Jesus himself. But he does not directly say as much, so this may be reading too much into his understanding of the passage.

Athanasius employs a typological reading of our passage to point out that the "knowledge of God" has now proceeded to "fill the earth," by the proliferation of the gospel announcement:

But now, to all the earth has gone forth their voice, and all the earth has been filled with the knowledge of God, and the disciples have made disciples of all the nations, and now is fulfilled what is written: "They shall be all taught of

²⁷⁷ Indeed, this is also tied up in how/if Christians ought to receive the god of the Jewish Scriptures *himself*. (In)famously, Marcion of Sinope and his followers asserted that Jesus' father was distinctly *not* the Yahweh of ancient Israel, and developed complex demiurgical traditions to flesh out this distinction. See Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 23-26. The continued assertion that the Old Testament directly discusses Jesus may have been a reaction and intended remedy against such thinking.

²⁷⁸ Ambrose, *Explanation of the Twelve Psalms* 37.4.183, cited in McKinion and Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 108.

God.” And then what was revealed was but a type; but now the truth has been manifested.²⁷⁹

Here, in contrast to other Christian interpreters, Athanasius makes the claim that this vision of Isaiah has in fact *already* reached its fulfillment. He is unique in this aspect. To his mind, the Christian mission has already been accomplished, and seemingly the ideal order of the world already at hand. Unfortunately for us, he does not discuss the rest of the passage, but only uses this partial line to proof-text his point.

It is remarkable that the passage even proved useful for making claims about hermeneutical practice:

The lion, moreover, will not eat meat but hay, because it feeds on simple food. Observe also that the cow will not eat meat, but the lion will eat hay. I believe that “hay” in sacred Scripture is understood to be simple words, as is “wheat,” the inner marrow, the meaning which is found in the letter. And it frequently happens that secular men unacquainted with the mysteries are fed by a simple reading of the Scriptures.²⁸⁰

One would be hard-pressed to not recall Origen’s distinction of the “body,” “soul,” and “spirit” of Scripture when reading this interpretation. Jerome seems to make a similar distinction here: the “lions” (secular people) should feed on the simple reading (i.e., non-mysterious) of the Scriptures. His understanding of the process of consumption as reflective of reading divine writings is reflective of a consistent metaphor found within the Old and New Testaments themselves (Jer 15:16, Ezek 3:3, Rev 10:9, etc.). Thus, Jerome sees this passage to be at least partially about the change in figurative “diet” that one should undergo when initiating a new way

²⁷⁹ Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 1.13.8.187, cited in McKinion and Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 108-109.

²⁸⁰ Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4.11.6-9, cited in McKinion and Oden, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 106-107.

of life. Thus, more than any of the other Christian interpreters examined above, Jerome avoids an eschatological or cosmological reading. He prefers the practical, moralizing option.²⁸¹

A2.5 Conclusions

Through its rich and unnatural imagery, Isa 11:6-9 encourages its readers to imagine a supernatural context in which any of its events could be imagined to actually occur. Its earliest interpreters, including later biblical authors, translators of the early versions, and the earliest Jewish and Christian commentators, have much in common in their understandings of this passage. This is despite incredibly varied social and temporal locations. Commonalities that one can note include:

1. An emphasis on the messianic context of the passage.
2. An emphasis on an eschatological setting for Isaiah's description.
3. An explanation of when and how the world will be (or has been) reshaped.

The first shared interpretive feature is strikingly profound, though at first glance it may seem obvious to modern interpreters of the text. This may be due to the long interpretive history that lay behind us. But a close reading of the text of Isa 11:1-9 does not *require* any messianic

²⁸¹ Childs, *The Struggle to Interpret Isaiah as Christian Scripture*, critiques Jerome's insistence on a moralizing (as opposed to eschatological) reading of our passage (among others):

In contrast with Justin, Irenaeus, and Augustine, Jerome appeared to have little grasp of biblical eschatology... without a multifaceted understanding of the intersection of the divine and the human within an unfolding divine drama, he was left with a flat, empirical history as a form of chronicle, and a non-historical realm of spiritual truths that floated above the "real" history of the world. For example, when handling the eschatological portrayal of the return of paradise in Isa. 11:6-9, Jerome begins by rejecting the "carnal" literalism of the Jews who demand to see the literal evidence of peace among the animals. He then interprets the eschatological description of the prophet in moralistic, spiritual terms as depicting the life of the Christian church where the rich and poor, the powerful and humble live in harmony (p. 101).

interpretation.²⁸² It certainly makes sense under that lens. However, it is remarkable that every early community examined above lands at a messianic reading.

The second likeness is also interesting, since this shows that regardless of how figurative an interpreter thought the passage ought to be understood, they still base their reading as taking place in the real world. That is, none read this passage as simply hyperbole, naivety, or parabolic. Whether the passage is to be fulfilled in the future, or has already occurred in some way, it represents an authentic, transformational event.

This last commonality, of course, is where these early interpretations diverge the most. A short summary of these divergences may be helpful. First, on the recycling of the passage later in Isaiah: here, it occurs in an even *more* explicitly eschatological context than its original placement. God promises to create a new heavens and a new earth in this new context. It is in this newly created world, Isaiah 65 asserts, that the animals will behave quite unlike they do in their natural state. It seems, then, that the animals themselves are part of the re-creative project that will occur in the future.

The translator(s) of LXX Isaiah do little in terms of word choice, additions, or subtractions to inform us how they understood and interpreted the passage. Isaiah Targum Jonathan, however, introduces the pericope by exegetically amplifying its messianic tones. One can see that Targum Jonathan did understand the passage as describing a period of time

²⁸² Childs, *Isaiah*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 100 asserts, “Although it is possible that the cutting off of the line of Jesse to a stump may refer to the destruction of the house of David in 587, it is not a self-evident conclusion to draw from the verbal sense of the text.”

enacted by a messianic figure. This period is marked by “*the peace*” (שָׁלוֹם), which would explain why nonviolence is the defining characteristic of the transformed animal kingdom.

The Qumran Community (likely) understood the passage on quite similar terms as Targum Jonathan. Based on the Isaiah *peshet* regarding Isa 11:1-5, one should infer that the interpretation at Qumran of the passage in discussion is charged with messianism—a feature characteristic of the community’s overall thinking. For them, then, the idyllic setting of the passage was an imminent reality for which they eagerly anticipated.

The most differing interpretations from the ones above are those of early Christian interpreters, whose interpretations varied from one another quite radically. The characteristic shared by these interpreters which most distinguishes them from those found above is their temporal location and its theological implications. That is, in their view, this prophecy of Isaiah referred to an action that had either begun or had already been realized. Jesus, their messiah, had already arrived and in some way launched a renewal project. But in what way this project actually realized Isaiah’s vision was hardly unanimously agreeable. For some, like their Jewish counterparts, the vision still laid in the future as a promise yet to be fulfilled. Others understood the passage more figuratively as an already-fulfilled vision of behavioral reformation of the nations. Both groups saw the passage as directly referring to Jesus, and even utilized opportunities to see Jesus more overtly throughout the passage.

It is clear that for all of these communities, Isaiah’s grand vision was entirely unrealistic, but by no means purely fantastical. It describes our world, but also a world quite different from ours. All the interpreters examined above share this idealistic realism. That is, none take the prophecy to be imaginative for the sake of a didactic purpose; it does not inspire only to affect

the hearer. It may indeed to so, but for the earliest interpreters of the text of all stripes, the words of the prophet describe reality—a world truly turned “right-side up.”

Figures

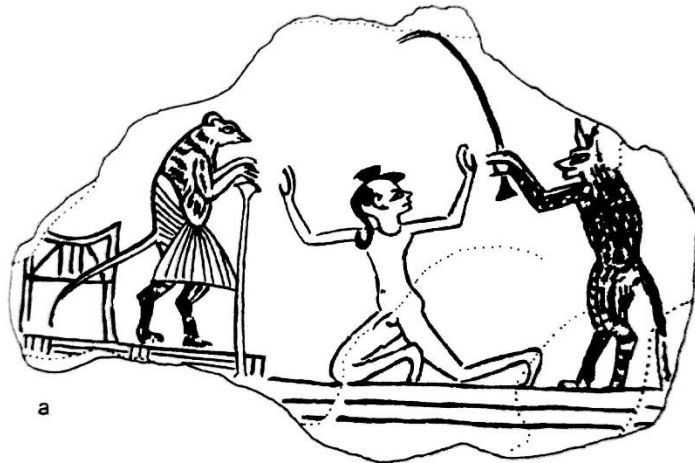


Figure 1: Ramesside period painted ostracon. Oriental Institute Museum #13951. Plate 6a, Knoppers and Hirsch, *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World*.

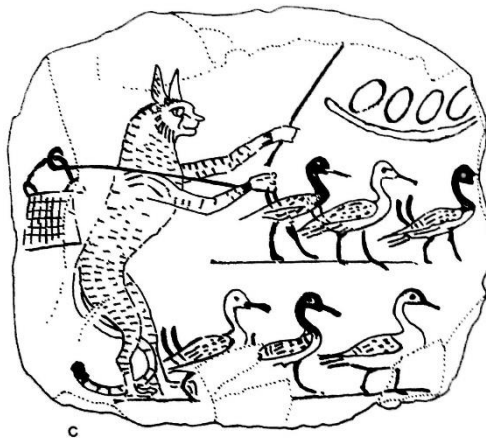


Figure 2: Ramesside period painted ostracon. Egyptian Museum #65429. Plate 6c, Knoppers and Hirsch, *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World*.



Figure 3: Tomb of Neferhotep (TT49). Eighteenth Dynasty.

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