Biblical Intertextuality, Nissim Ezekiel and the Jungian "Enterprise"

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that Nissim Ezekiel's "Enterprise", first published in *The Unfinished Man* (1960), strongly alludes to the Book of Job from the Old Testament of the Bible. Through intertextual and interdisciplinary readings, one can discern how the shadow that falls upon the characters of Ezekiel's poem during the pilgrimage possesses the characteristics of Yahweh's shadow that falls upon Job, and becomes directly responsible for his decrepitude. The shadow grows in both texts because the Supreme Unconscious (God) is indifferent to(wards) the human condition, and to the consequences of an apocalyptic aftermath, as illustrated in C.G. Jung's *Answer to Job*. Their spiritual and moral states are restored upon two conditions – the protagonist's internalization of both human struggle and divine wrath makes him resilient towards both, creating the theoretical premise for the resolution of their antinomy, followed by the evocation of the sublime that resists annihilation as well as the catastrophe of extreme suffering. It leads to the substitution of the poem's theoretical framework from "the good of God" to the "agon of the Go(o)d", as I argue towards the conclusion of the paper.

Keywords: Intertextuality, The Book of Job, sublime, interdisciplinary reading, Jung.

Introduction

There is, in the second stanza of Ezekiel's critically acclaimed poem, "Enterprise", a conceptual impasse not adequately traced from a psycho-religious point of view, although, at least one critic has identified the (ambivalent) religiosity in the poetic objective, and the poetic self *per se*[1]:

> But when the differences arose
> On how to cross a desert patch,
> We lost a friend whose stylish prose
> Was quite the best of all our batch.
> *A shadow falls on us – and g r o w s.*
>
> (Gokak ed., p. 267, ll. 11-15, both forms of emphasis mine)

While cultural interpretation of the event, weaved into its anecdotal form, abounds in most literary remarks on the poem, I offer a different version of the conceptual impasse mentioned earlier – the "shadow" that falls on the aspirants is, to begin with, the same shadow that fell on Job in the Old Testament of the Bible – the shadow of God. In *Job* 17:7, where the protagonist is locked in an argument with Eliphaz, attempting to rationalize the wrath incurred against him by God, he acknowledges that:

> My eyes have grown dim with grief;
> My whole frame is but a shadow.
>
> (New International Version, Varkey & Varkey ed., p. 59)

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The "grief" experienced, and expressed by Job is rephrased into the less dramatic "fall", whose interpretation, seconding my first argument, is equally Biblical, as it refers to the Fall of Man in the Book of Genesis. Interestingly enough, while the physiological aspect of Job emerges from the loss of personal property (family included), the immediate difference he draws is from the reconciliatory arguments of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, with the need to internalize God's anger without assuming his ontology. This is restructured, if not re-acculturated by Ezekiel when the "differences arose" in his group, in the same way that the lack of material prosperity marks the locus of difference between divine worship and a dehumanized Job. It is referred to in Ezekiel's remarkable pun on the word "Cross", which symbolized its Biblical resemblance (Christ's crucifixion) as well as the Job-like annoyance ("cross"), arising when differences became too difficult to bridge. Similarly, while Job's "whole frame" has ceased assuming corporeal value, having been reduced to a shadow by God's excessive, if not irrational light, it is worked into the verse-paragraph through Ezekiel's reference to how "stylish prose" kept alive the framework of his group. This is consonant with the idea of how Job's eyesight is lost, or blinded by supererogatory grief, in the same way that Ezekiel's group "lost" sight of their friend – hence the connotative value of this comparison.

Ezekiel's "Enterprise" as an Intertext of the Book of Job

Up till this point, I have argued how "Enterprise", and its ideological argument is characteristic of the chief argument in the Book of Job, but it does not state why the shadow of Job's God is indebted to, and is exactly like the shadow cast by Ezekiel's God in the poem. In a bid to remain faithful to the chronology of the texts and their Gods, I will first attempt an interpretation of the shadow in the former; in Carl Gustav Jung's *Answer to Job*, he justifies why it *is* the shadow of God, and why Job is not reduced to an inferior version of himself, but a defeated face of God:

> Truly, Yahweh can do all things and permits himself all things without batting an eyelid. With *brazen countenance* he can project his shadow side and remain unconscious at man's expense. He can boast of his superior power and enact laws which means less than air to him. (R.F.C. Hull tr., 597, my emphasis)

In other words, Job's frame is reduced to a shadow, not because he has acted morally or immorally; it is because God is too bright to remain faithful to the moral code of conduct. The projection, albeit apocalyptic, is the cause of indirect material, moral, physiological, and spiritual collapse of Job, who is now the direct recipient of an apocalyptic aftermath, and a representative of humanity as it tends to adjust itself *consciously* with the "brazen countenance" of the supreme unconscious. In a similar fashion, Ezekiel's Job, as a whole, is confounded by the "brazen countenance" of a "desert patch", symbolic of apocalyptic extremes. This is cited as divine, unconscious obstruction to conscious, human objectives, the consequence of which is defection, in the same way that the loyal Job defects from his unquestionable adherence to Yahweh. Reiterating this point is the fact that Job was his most faithful follower – ironically, his "best" – a careful imbrication of the Biblical and the human. Jung becomes more specific in his characterization of the "shadow" in "Conscious, Unconscious and Individuation":

> Like the anima, it [the shadow] appears either in projection on suitable persons, or personified as such in dreams. The shadow coincides with the "personal" unconscious (which corresponds to Freud's conception of the unconscious). Again, like the anima, this figure has often been portrayed by poets and writers. (R.F.C. Hull tr., p. 284)

If the projection is most perfect on the most "suitable persons", then both Job, and Ezekiel's friend, whose prose was "quite the best", qualify as the most "suitable persons" for the manifestation of God's shadow. To what extent are their personifications dream-like? Both Job and Ezekiel's group are exposed to the ideological underside of their great enterprise – the false consciousness of remaining infinitely loyal to the "idea" of God, cleverly worked into the (un)fulfilment of human objectives

when journeying towards a pilgrimage. Following this is the coincidental amalgamation with the "personal unconscious", revealed accurately by God's atrocity upon Job in 7:14 and 7:15.[2] Since Jung mentions Freudian unconscious by name, one can opine that the "desert patch" is symbolic of the return of the repressed – a topographic uncanny that halts the group, dead on its tracks, an obstruction that was only real in their dreams, but no longer. I heap ideological similarities between these two texts with the intention of asserting how the shadows in both texts are Godly (one could also say God-lie, meaning the lie of the "true", subjugated under the "power" of God) – devoid rightfully of the rationale, and are depictions of an apocalyptic aftermath. As Job's friend Bildad confesses, even the non/indirect recipient of Yahweh's shadow should not discourse upon God's extra-intellectual framework, since power cannot be discoursed by conscious, human reason:

> For we were born only yesterday and know nothing,
> And our days on earth are but a shadow.
> Will they not instruct you and tell you?
> Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?
>
> (ibid. 8:9, 8:10, p. 26-27)

Citing transitoriness as the sole reason for human reticence against divine power, Bildad obstructs Job's thought by reminding him of the destiny of the (entire) human community, should God retaliate. Pedagogical conscience becomes a stumbling block against the positive consequences of the *agon* against Yahweh's judgment. This, however, is one half of the argument; one continues to be intrigued by the more difficult question: why does the shadow continue to grow? As Ezekiel emphasizes, the defection of one could result in the consolidation of the rest, which does not happen, for two reasons: one, the characters of "Enterprise" are pitted against something more formidable than the human, which forms a section of the major argument. This (divine) formidability is posed no/minimal risk from human endeavours pertaining to resistance – an argument certainly applicable to Job, as demonstrated by Jung in *Answer to Job*.[3] That Yahweh must present himself to reinforce his power over mankind exposes divine fragility to an extent, but God shows more concern for wavering hegemony than wavering power. Secondly, the shadow continues to grow because the subject of resistance, God himself, cannot be adequately objectified; hence, its ethereal/universal element eludes consolidated, human resistance. This too, is not the line of argument deemed applicable for the present paper. Instead, I argue that the shadow continues to grow, because God, being the Supreme Unconscious, is blissfully ignorant of the human, conscious condition, which is nothing but an accidental product of an apocalyptic aftermath, from a psycho-religious perspective. The Book of Job provides a near-perfect example of this inconsiderate, divine influx when Elihu instructs Job of the Jungian God's "blazing countenance":

> For God does speak – now one way, now another –
> Though no one perceives it.
> In a dream, in a vision of the night,
> When deep sleep falls on people
> As they slumber in their beds,
> He may speak in their ears
> And terrify them with warnings,
>
> (ibid., 33:14-16)

Notice that God "does speak", implying the articulative power of the divine, but it is accompanied by a divine paradox – if divine articulation stands under no obligation to communicate with other divine, or extra-divine fealties, one has every reason to doubt whether divine articulation is an ideological, linguistic and rhetorical fallacy, since nobody "perceives" or understands it. Complicating this is the shadow caused by uncommunicative yet articulate, divine power, for alienation from divine language means not only the faith in nothingness, but the aftermath of that wrath incurred

when the inarticulate, hence powerful, holds man responsible for not decrypting his linguistic code. Nor can man be rightfully held culpable for not decrypting divine speech, for it articulates itself "in a dream", or "in a vision of the night" – in other words, in the unconscious terrain of man, infiltrating absence with presence and suspending conscious structures for the benefit of human articulation. Complicating this further is the "terrifying" dimension of God, which is structured around the application of one demeanour to its theoretical extreme, without the capacity for tempering. If one operates with the presumption that the "dream" and "night" are both human, it is reasonable to conclude that Job and God are antinomial to each other, figuratively enacting the apparent, antinomial status of the conscious and unconscious states of the human mind, an argument emphasized by Jung in his *Answer to Job*.[4] It has, notwithstanding the antinomy itself, an underlying diabolism: so far as both God and Satan (whispering inside the ears of an asleep Eve in the Garden of Eden) seek ideological hegemony over the unconscious of Man, and remain blissfully unaware of the consequences of their wrath upon man for their own inarticulate, self-serving domain, they are uncannily similar, if not Freudian. The shadow "grows", because God injects the irrational/universal when Man is most vulnerable, and also because inarticulative influx forces man into the submission of his rational power (if that is power, at all, in this current context) without knowing how to negotiate on human terms, resulting in the apocalyptic aftermath, portrayed best by Job when he mourns his loss, but cannot stop the shadow from amplifying exponentially, leading to an affect which attempts to introject His anger and reverse the consequences of irrationality upon God, in a bid to humanize him and enforce a dialectic, a heroic attempt for which Job has been credited with the nomenclature of the Sublime[5]:

> What you know, I also know;
> I am not inferior to you.
> But I desire to speak to the Almighty
> And to argue my case with God.
>
> (13:2-3, p. 44)

I revert back to Ezekiel's poem when the league "were twice attacked, and lost our way. / A section claimed its liberty/To leave the group. I tried to pray" (17-19). To what extent is the metaphor of attack a divine influx? The confrontation with the "desert patch" is replicated by the poet for communicating that the shadow continues to grow, as represented by the increasing attacks. Job uses the metaphor of God's terror in 3:23-3:26 by invoking the affect in divinity-induced suffering, reproduced by Ezekiel in his repetition of "lost", holding the divine agency responsible/culpable. What is common to both is this desire for discourse with the Almighty; while Job pits desire and speech as negotiable tools in his discourse with power, Ezekiel utilizes traditional means, such as praying, probably seeking a cessation of, or at least a justification for these terrors.[6] Job's accusation, and his need to disempower God by employing Satanic apparatus, etymologically speaking (adversary), is subtly replicated by Ezekiel's use of the word "try"; the false consciousness of power could create a psychological barrier with its ideal form, and attenuate the worst inflictions of divine wrath. The articulation of objective loss (and its companionate grief), I hypothesize, could have been inserted by Ezekiel from Herman Hesse's *Journey to the East*, first published as *Die Morgenlandfahrt* in 1932, followed by an English translation in 1956 – a text with which the poet might have been familiar.[7] Notwithstanding this standalone resemblance, the shadow, I conclude, grows in Ezekiel because it grew in the Book of Job; it grows, because God remains blissfully ignorant of his apocalyptic aftermath, or fractionally aware of it – not enough to relinquish His power or invert the hegemonic pyramid in both texts.

One last argument requires to be made with reference to Ezekiel's "Enterprise"; as the poem approaches its end, the reconciliation initiated from the poet's side (One cannot argue the same for God) sounds defeatist, and one final submission to the failed dialectic initiated earlier:

When finally we reached the place
We hardly knew why we were there,
The trip had darkened every face,
Our deeds were neither great nor rare.
Home is the place to gather g r a c e.

(26-30, both forms of emphasis mine)

K.D. Verma has elaborated upon the final line in this stanza, claiming that "true grace lies in the identity of the self with the object-world" (156). But this is partially true; the identity of the self is obscured by Ezekiel's reference to the metaphysics behind the lack of euphoria upon arrival – the "why" in the second line introduces, albeit stealthily, the "where" in his disapproval. The consequence of this is, the "self", and its "identity" had been lost somewhere, and somehow along the way; hence, the speculative metaphysics acted upon by the poet. Worsening this is the compensation for the factual loss of grace – the "darkened" face becomes symbolic of the loss of the Universal, and the devaluation of the objective itself ("our deeds were neither great nor rare"), the incantation of which in the final line is a reminder of its absence, or the metaphysical possibility of its presence. The instructive element in these abovementioned lines does not go untraced either, as Amit Chaudhuri remarks how his [Ezekiel's] later poems might be construed as "a description of an unlearning which is also a form of learning, a relentless attempt to rectify wrongs – for the discipline of the poet of the minor literature" (219-20). This is, also, a useful half-truth, for "unlearning" does not lead towards an enlightened poet, but the theorization of an ideal that stands *despite* the poem. Ezekiel's objective is to draw the demoralized community into a human whole, jettisoning them from the un-accomplishable, theological ideal – un-accomplishable in factual terms, but certainly an ideological reality, so long as the "pilgrimage" is never initiated again. Grace is rendered religious, in its original, etymological sense;[8] "place", in the more private sense, is symbolic of the (community of the) individual who aspires for the conscious, dialectic synthesis between the Supreme Unconscious, whose bounty becomes "grace", and "home", the communitarian unconscious which aspires, like Job, to remain in a fragile, habitable zone, away from all apocalyptic aftermaths of Yahweh. The unbridgeable gap between these two theoretical extremes is recognized by Job's friend, Zophar, leading Job to individuate towards the culmination of the Book:

Can you fathom the mysteries of God?
Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?

(11:7, p. 37)

Both rhetorical questions must be treated dialectically; the mysteries of God are unearthed by Job when confronted by Yahweh towards the final section of the Book, but the objective behind fathoming its mysteries is apparent, since Job expects to be compensated for his physical loss and retain reverence for the Almighty at the same time (the loss of his body, home, etc.), not inherit His power. Similarly, probing the limits of the Almighty introjects the Godly by donning his demeanour, but its purpose, once again, is the restoration of moderation from excruciating, human limits where life becomes unsustainable. In other words, individuation is the viable solution for the antinomy between God's light and God's shadow, where Man's *agon* finds meaning, a mediation which, although fragile, has both religious and human connotations, and substitutes the naïve "good of God" for the mature "agon of the Go(o)d", as Jung asserts in "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation" and "A Study in the Process of Individuation".[9] To what extent is this intertextual reading applicable to Ezekiel's poem?

Conclusion

It would be dishonest to claim that individuation had escaped the eyes of the critics of "Enterprise";[10] the protagonist of the poem, like H.H. in Herman Hesse's novella, realizes that accusation

would not resolve the catastrophe of the apocalyptic, whereas a careful re-assessment of the league's original ideal would probably bear fruit.[11] Therefore, like Job, he does not "fathom the mysteries of God," or "probe the limits of the Almighty"; he forces God to restore His grace, and evolves into a Jungian, "indestructible whole", where instead of settling for an elusive, dialectic synthesis, he opts for a dialectic framework by transcending it, giving an impression of the antinomian sublime. This then, is the Jungian "Enterprise" of the poem: "Home is the place to gather grace" must be interpreted as a dynamic coalition of the Sublime conscious, Communitarian unconscious and the Supreme Unconscious whose transient dialectic is transcended for an epiphanic revelation that does not submit to either human or divine excesses, which are limitations, theoretically speaking. It individuates in an effort to struggle heroically towards moral superiority, and restore spiritual consciousness from an otherwise inflammatory God who had "darkened every face". In doing this, Ezekiel is unconsciously indebted to the Book of Job, and he introjects Job's discursive masculinity and his eventual victory within the ideological framework of his poem, as I have analysed in this paper.

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Notes

[1] "Ezekiel himself acknowledged [that] "I am not religious or even a moral persona in any conventional sense. Yet, I've always felt myself to be religious and moral in some sense. The gap between these two statements is the essential sphere of my poetry"" (85). See Makarand Paranjape's "A Poetry of Proportions: Nissim Ezekiel's Quest for the Exact Name", published in *South Asian Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2005, pp. 79-95. *T & F Online*, doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2005.11932402. Accessed 7 November, 2022.

[2] "Even then you frighten me in dreams/and terrify me with visions, /so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine" (NIV, p. 25).

[3] "But what does man possess that God does not have? Because of his littleness, puniness, and defencelessness against the Almighty…God has no need of this circumspection, for nowhere does he come up against an insuperable obstacle that would force him to hesitate and hence make him reflect on himself" (R.F.C. Hull tr., 597)

[4] "He [Job] clearly sees that God is at odds with himself – so totally at odds that he, Job, is quite certain of finding in God a helper and an "advocate" against God…Yahweh is not split but is an *antinomy* – a totality of inner opposites – and this is the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism, his omniscience and omnipotence" (Hull tr., 567)

[5] What Job wills, in essence, is the enforcement of a "possible internal fracturing" (163) against God, which would destabilize theodicy, leading to the moderation of divine power and raise Man to the magnitude of the Kantian sublime, denotative of moral superiority. See ""The Voice from the Whirlwind": The Tragic Sublime and the Limits of Dialogue" by Carol A. Newsom, published in *Defenses of Clay: The Book of Job,* edited by Hannah and Elizabeth Varkey. Citations at the end of the essay.

[6] "From the mid-sixties onwards he has been creating a spiritual and psychic 'room' of his own which may either provide access to nothing or serve as a doorway to the infinite enigmas of self and place" (100-101). The "Enterprise" becomes a befitting beginning to this phase. See James Wieland's "Making light of the process: Nissim Ezekiel's poetic fictions", published in *Kunapipi*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 1980, pp. 91-103. *Research Online*, https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol2/iss2/13. Accessed 8 Nov, 2022.

[7] The protagonist of the novella, H.H., who is also a participant in that "great enterprise" (42), realizes, after the loss of their servant Leo, that "this was the beginning of trouble, the first indication of a storm which would break over us…but it seemed that the more certain his loss became, the more indispensable he seemed" (32). The edition in question is the 1998 reprint of its translation from the original German, published by Book Faith India.

[8] "God's unmerited favour, or help" (n.p.). See this link: https://www.etymonline.com/word/grace# etymonline_v_41183

[9] "The way human life should be…is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an "individual" …it is not the empirical man that forms the "correspondentia" to the world, as the medievalists thought, but rather the indescribable reality of the psychic or spiritual man, who cannot be described because he is compounded of consciousness as well as of the indeterminable extent of the unconscious" (288, 308). Citations at the end of the essay.

[10] As Norman Ross Edgington correctly averred, "The process of individuation can be successful only through integrating the physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and psychological aspects of existence" (142). See "Nissim Ezekiel's Vision of Life and Death", published in the *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1987, pp. 139-145. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40872969. Accessed 6 Nov, 2022.

[11] H.H. must also seek the grace of Leo towards the end; as I have hypothesized that Ezekiel was inspired by the events of the novella, it is important to note how Leo transforms into a modern-day Yahweh, where he punishes the protagonist, for he seems to "have slighted religion" and "it only needed our reminder to awaken the defendant's conscience and make him a repentant self-accuser" (81). He individuates, by initiating a dialectic between Leo the servant and Leo the supreme unconscious, before the author hints at his death upon revelation.

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