

Job 28 in its Literary Context

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In order to discern the relationship of Job 28 to the book in which it is located in the biblical text, several questions must be answered. What is the theme of Job 28? Who is the likely speaker in this chapter? How does Job 28 function within the flow of the book of Job? Does Job 28 play an integrative role within the book? By a close reading of the text, this paper endeavors to answer these four interpretive questions, and thus draw some conclusions about Job 28 in its literary context.

KEYWORDS: *Job 28, wisdom, close reading, narrator, literary structure, literary context, leitmotif, eucatastrophe.*

INTRODUCTION

Although scholars are united in hearing a distinctive tone in Job 28, descriptions of what that tone is and how that tone relates to the book of Job are remarkably diverse. On the one hand, some regard Job 28 as discordant, suggesting that it was composed by a different hand and perhaps at a much later time, and then inserted awkwardly into the text.¹ Others detect a voice that is nearly identical to one of the speakers named in the book, with Job, Zophar, and Elihu all mentioned as plausible contenders.² Still others hear in Job 28 a harmonic line that interacts with

1. Édouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1926; repr., 1967), li; Leo G. Perdue, “Wisdom in the Book of Job,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue et al.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 96; and William McKane, “The Theology of the Book of Job and Chapter 28 in Particular,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag* (2 vols.; ed. Markus Witte; BZAW 345; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 2:711.

2. For Job as speaker in chapter 28, see Mummadi Prakasa Reddy, “The Book of Job—A Reconstruction,” *VT* 90 (1978), 83; Gerald H. Wilson, *Job* (NIBC 10; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 299–300; and Tremper Longman III, *Job* (Baker Commentary on

the rest of the book as an intricate counterpoint.³

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THEME OF JOB 28

Job 28 is comprised of three strophes of nearly equal length in vv. 1–12, vv. 13–22, and vv. 23–28, culminating in a summary statement in the final verse. Punctuating the chapter is a refrain that occurs in nearly identical language in vv. 12 and 20: “But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?” These echoed words express the foundational question that has emerged from the dialogue between Job and his friends in chapters 3–27: What is the source of wisdom, and to what extent can humans access it?⁴

The first strophe in vv. 1–12 is typically read as presenting a vivid description of ancient technology used by humans as they mine precious materials. In a recent monograph, however, Jones argues that this section is better understood against the backdrop of ancient Mesopotamian kings who journey to the ends of the earth in their hope of discovering precious treasure for the first time. As he sees it, this passage is a parody that subverts the hubristic claims by Job’s friends that they have discovered the wisdom that has eluded Job.⁵

the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 327. For Zophar, see Samuel E. Balentine, *Job* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 10; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 416, who notes especially the connections between Job 28:12–13, 20–22 and Zophar’s words in 11:7–12. For Elihu, see Edward L. Greenstein, “The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 in Its Conceptual and Literary Contexts,” in *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (ed. Ellen van Wolde; Biblical Interpretation Series 64; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 272–75; and David J. A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC 18A; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 906–09.

3. Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1985), 35; and Robert Davidson, *Wisdom and Worship* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 4.

4. R. N. Whybray, *Job* (Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 20.

5. Scott C. Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry* (BZAW 398; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 62–87.

In contrast to Bildad, who dismisses humans as mere maggots and worms (25:6), the speaker in Job 28 regards humans as exceedingly clever. By their ingenuity and intelligence, and at considerable personal risk, humans are able to unearth hidden riches such as precious metals and gems (28:1–2). Probing to the farthest limit in their search (28:3–4), they are successful in discovering deep within the earth the treasures for which they seek (28:5–6). In their search in the most inaccessible places of earth, they surpass even the keen-sighted birds and fearless animals (28:7–8) as their engineering techniques bring into light what is hidden (28:9–11). The human prowess detailed in vv. 1–11, however, is a foil to the question in v. 12;⁶ all of this makes the failure for humans to find wisdom all the more poignant. All of the intellectual ingenuity exerted by Job and his friends has failed to discover wisdom and understanding. As this strophe indicates, human searching that is successful in so many areas of endeavor cannot find wisdom despite its most ardent efforts.

As human searching cannot discover wisdom, so the second strophe indicates that wealth cannot purchase wisdom (28:13–22). Because wisdom cannot be found in either the human world (28:13) or the world of nature (28:14), it must be found beyond the realm of what is created. It must be found in the God who fashioned the world by wisdom (cf. Prov 3:19–20; 8:22–31). Not even the rarest and most precious material items can buy wisdom (Prov 28:15–19). Hartley notes well, “wisdom outweighs all earthly jewels and metals. These highly valued objects prove worthless in the marketplace of wisdom. No amount of precious metals or priceless jewels can purchase wisdom.”⁷ This realization of the inability of wealth to purchase wisdom prompts the speaker to restate in nearly identical words the programmatic question of the chapter in v. 20: “Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?” The strophe concludes in vv. 21–22 with the statement that wisdom is hidden both from living humans and from those who have died, although the dead claim to have heard a rumor of it.

The answer to the questions in vv. 12 and 20 is given in the third strophe of Job 28. Only the omniscient God knows the way to the wisdom that evades human discovery (28:23–24). On the basis of his

6. Balentine (*Job*, 422) argues that the miner’s inability to find some treasures provides Job a model for turning to the elusive God with his unanswered questions. With Job 28, however, it seems better to focus on the miner as successful in his search, and thus it is a contrast to the failed efforts of humans like Job to find wisdom through their own intense search. Thus, Job functions as the counterfoil to the chaotic end of the dialogue section (cf. James A. Wharton, *Job* [Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 117).

7. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 380.

complete knowledge of the world he created, God directs every detail in nature (28:25–27).⁸ God himself, then, is the source of wisdom, so in seeking for wisdom humans must come to him. This God in whom resides wisdom has spoken to humans to reveal to them the path to wisdom that they cannot discover by their own efforts. Job 28 concludes by restating as a hymnic reaffirmation of Prov 9:10⁹ the classical definition of wisdom: “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.” According to this divine saying, humans learn wisdom through reverence for God that produces obedience to him, not by knowing everything about the world, for that exceeds the range of humans. Wisdom cannot be discovered by human effort apart from God, but it does exist in God, and it may be found in a dependent relationship with him.¹⁰ This is not the final answer, because Job will continue to speak in chapters 29–31, but it does point toward the climax of the book in the speeches by Yahweh in chapters 38–41, when the perspectives of Job and his friends are assessed as inadequate,¹¹ and Yahweh alone is revealed as the source of the wisdom that remains mysterious to humans.

SPEAKER IN JOB 28

Considering the thematic content of Job 28, who is the most likely speaker in this chapter? Suggested identifications of the speaker have varied considerably. Parallels between Job 28 and the speeches of Job’s three friends have on occasion prompted interpreters to regard one of them as the speaker of this chapter. For example, Whybray points to

8. Clines, *Job 21–37*, 921.

9. Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job* (Bible and Literature Series 29; Sheffield: Almond, 1991), 246.

10. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 397. Cf. Jones (*Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry*, 101–02), who concludes: “For the poem in Job 28, true wisdom is not gained through brash ventures to the edges of the world, but by taking one’s place within an ancient plan. Even while heroic exploration ultimately fails to reveal wisdom, wisdom may nonetheless be born from that failure by recognizing, creating, and maintaining limits. Like the divine artisan who fixes the elements of the cosmos with measurements, outlines, and boundaries (vv. 25–26), humans may perceive wisdom while putting things in their place, separating one thing from another, and upholding those distinctions. Wisdom is found in a moral universe that is fundamentally rooted in the awe of the God who ordered the world (v. 28).”

11. Alison Lo, *Job 28 as Rhetoric: An Analysis of Job 28 in the Context of Job 22–31* (VTSup 97; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 236.

Eliphaz's assertion in 4:21 that humans die without wisdom,¹² and Balentine notes that Zophar makes similar points in 11:7–20.¹³ Newsom, however, rightly demonstrates that all three of the friends claim to know where wisdom can be found, so in fact they are not the speakers in Job 28. Rather, they are better “seen to be rebuked as naïve by the wisdom poem for their confidence in equating either their own discernment or tradition with transcendent wisdom.”¹⁴

In the recent second volume of his commentary on Job, David Clines argues vigorously that the text of the book has suffered dislocation, and that the Elihu speeches in chapters 32–37 originally came immediately after the speech of Job in chapter 27. After the speeches attributed to Elihu, he continues to speak in chapter 28, and then he is followed by Job's final confession of innocence and Yahweh's speeches. Clines argues that Elihu's words in 37:24 should be rendered, “Therefore mortals fear him, and the wise in heart are afraid of him,” leading directly into the theme of Job 28. As intriguing as Clines's suggestion is, it requires a major reordering of the Masoretic Text, and he adduces no evidence in the textual tradition to support his hypothesis that by accident a sheet of sheepskin was sewn out of order on an early scroll of Job.¹⁵

Because both chapter 27 and chapter 29 begin with specific notices that Job is speaking, many interpreters conclude that Job must be the speaker in chapter 28 as well, although Settlemyre is nearly alone in claiming that this wisdom poem was originally spoken by Job after his repentance speech in 42:6.¹⁶ The content of Job 28 frequently echoes words that Job has uttered previously in 9:10–12; 12:13; 17:10; 23:8–10; and 26:14 as he refutes the presumption that humans can discern the inscrutable divine mysteries.¹⁷ The reference to darkness in 28:3 may echo Job's similar language in his initial lament in 3:4–6, but it should

12. Whybray, *Job*, 20.

13. Balentine, *Job*, 416.

14. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 179.

15. Clines, *Job 21–37*, 909, which draws upon his article, “Putting Elihu in His Place: A Proposal for the Relocation of Job 32–37,” *JSOT* 29 (2004): 115–125.

16. C. C. Settlemyre, “The Original Position of Job 28,” in *The Answers Lie Below: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Edmund Toombs* (ed. Henry O. Thompson; Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 288.

17. Roy B. Zuck, *Job* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 122–3.

also be noted that this motif occurs as well in the speeches of Eliphaz (5:14; 15:22, 23, 30; 22:11), Bildad (18:18), and Zophar (20:26).

A stronger argument for Job as speaker points to the language of an intensive search that describes both the successful activity of miners in 28:1–11 and the desire for death by people in anguish in 3:21. In addition, Janzen notes that nearly identical language is used by Job in 12:22 to describe how God “reveals the deep things of darkness and brings utter darkness into the light” and by the speaker in 28:11 who pictures the miners as they “search the sources of the rivers and bring hidden things to light.”¹⁸

These similarities, however, are not so pervasive as to require that Job is the speaker in chapter 28. It is true that when a speaker continues into a subsequent chapter, as for example Eliphaz in chapter 5 or Job in chapter 7, the absence of identification implies that the same speaker is continuing from the previous chapter. However, in those cases, the tone and theme of the preceding chapter continues into the subsequent chapter. This pattern does not hold for chapter 28, because compared with the emotionally charged speeches by Job in chapters 27 and 29, the tone of Job 28 is markedly calm. This profound change of voice when heard orally would suggest a different speaker, even without a specific attribution at the beginning of the chapter. In addition, as Walton notes, “the wisdom hymn comes to conclusions that do not reflect Job’s thinking as it is represented in his speeches either before or after the hymn.”¹⁹ Rather than engaging in the animated dialogue with the three friends or addressing his bitter complaint to God, as Job typically does in his speeches, the voice in Job 28 reflects calmly upon the inadequacies of the human search for wisdom. Both in its content and in its form, this chapter is distinct from the other speeches in the book of Job. In fact, the profound contrast in tone between chapters 27 and 29 on the one hand, and chapter 28 on the other hand, suggests that the wisdom poem may well be the voice of a speaker other than Job.

Many scholars regard Job 28 as an interpolation added long after the composition of the rest of the book. Perdue identifies wisdom in this chapter with Woman Wisdom in Proverbs, considering it “a personification of a divine attribute active in the creating and sustaining of the cosmos,” and attributing it to “the theological imagination by an unknown sage who attempts to construct another world than those of the

18. J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Interpretation; Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985), 194.

19. John H. Walton, “Job 1: Book of,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 333.

narrative and poetic dialogues.”²⁰ Similarly, McKane asserts that the chapter is likely very late since it is out of context, but at the same time he also acknowledges that its theology does parallel aspects of the speeches of Elihu and Yahweh.²¹

It may well be, however, that the speaker in chapter 28 is better identified as the narrator whose voice is heard in the prologue and the epilogue of the book. Because the text of Job does not state this explicitly, this proposal must be established by more indirect evidence. In particular, it will be necessary to examine the function of Job 28 within the book as a whole.

FUNCTION OF JOB 28²²

After the three cycles of speeches between Job and his friends disintegrate into textual confusion, emotional turmoil, and argumentative impasse in the final round in chapters 21–27, and before Job’s impassioned final assertion of his innocence in chapters 29–31, chapter 28 functions as a serene interlude. Wharton comments on the effect that this chapter has on the reader of the book: “As if all of us needed a break from this long siege of arguments and counterarguments that finally lead nowhere, Job 28 offers us a calm moment of reflection on the ultimately impossible human quest to find and comprehend the wisdom that belongs only to God.”²³

Although the tranquil tone of Job 28 is clearly different from the turgid rhetoric that precedes and follows it, it must also be recognized that there are numerous links between this chapter and the other sections in the book. Thus, Job 28 functions as more than just a pause that refreshes the weary reader. Its meditation on wisdom is not an extraneous insertion, but it is integrally linked with the rest of the book.

Without directly responding to the claims and accusations by the friends, Job 28 implicitly functions as a rebuttal to them, as well as to Job, as they all failed to account for his suffering. The primary purpose of Job 28 is to affirm that God alone knows the way to wisdom, but in making this point it also discloses the inadequacies of what Job and the

20. Perdue, “Wisdom in the Book of Job,” 96.

21. McKane, “The Theology of the Book of Job and Chapter 28 in Particular,” 711.

22. For extensive bibliography on the numerous proposals regarding the function of Job 28, see Jones, *Rumors of Wisdom: Job 28 as Poetry*, 9–10 (n. 52).

23. Wharton, *Job*, 113.

friends have argued in their dialogue in chapters 3–27. By this means, “the reader is reminded that the wisdom of both sides to the debate is finite and limited because it is human; true wisdom is to be found in God alone.”²⁴ Both Job and the friends have reasoned that their personal observation of life (5:27) and tradition received from past sages (8:8–10) yield reliable wisdom.²⁵ Both sides have presumed the legitimacy of the retribution principle, that in God’s ordered world wisdom always leads to life and folly always leads to death, but they have applied that principle differently to Job’s situation. As Job experiences the kinds of adversity that he has always regarded as the plight of the wicked, he cannot understand why God has ceased giving him the blessing that his righteous life deserves. The friends view Job’s adversity as the expected and necessary divine punishment on one who has indeed sinned greatly, so they urge him to repent and yield to God (22:21–30), but Job resolutely refuses to admit to sins that he fervently believes he has not committed.

In the final chapter of the book, Job acknowledges that he has spoken of things that he did not understand (42:3), and Yahweh says to Eliphaz that he and his two friends have not spoken the truth about him (42:7). As Westermann notes, chapter 28 anticipates these disclosures in Job 42 as it declares that “wisdom is not at human disposal in the sure way the friends assumed and presupposed it was.”²⁶ In different ways, both Job and the friends fell short of the wisdom that belongs completely only to God, and therefore they misconstrued the causes for the adversity that Job experienced. All four of them, likely intellectual colleagues as learned sages,²⁷ were unduly committed to the retribution principle as the explanation for life, and therefore they failed to consider there are aspects of Yahweh’s world that are known by him alone, but which remain mysterious to humans.

Job 28 culminates with God’s words to humans in v. 28, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.” By these words, the Lord points humans, and the narrator points the reader, toward the traditional definition of wisdom found in Prov 9:10 and

24. Jamie A. Grant, “Wisdom Poem,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 892.

25. Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 178–79.

26. Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (trans. Charles A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981; repr., 1977), 137.

27. McKane, “Theology of the Book of Job,” 711.

elsewhere. Wisdom is not discovered by knowing everything about the world, for that is beyond the purview of human understanding. Rather, wisdom resides in the Lord, and it is accessed by relationship with him, as a person reveres and obeys him. True wisdom, then, is not human comprehension of how life works, but faithful reverence for the Lord who sovereignly controls the world he has created. Although wisdom cannot be discovered by human effort apart from God, it exists in God, and it may be found in relationship with him.

The language in 28:28 clearly echoes the descriptions of Job in the prologue (1:1, 8; 2:3) as a man who feared God and shunned evil, and this has led some interpreters to conclude that Job 28 marks a return to the simple faith that Job had before his great adversity. For example, Steinmann states that this wisdom poem “signals that Job has begun his journey back to the simple trust in God he had before his suffering began. And so it ends with an affirmation of that simple faith.”²⁸ Similarly, Perdue argues,

It attempts to return to a simpler, precritical faith yet unchallenged by the crisis of holocaust. While elegantly crafted, it still represents the naïve stance of Job in the Prologue and of the friends in the Dialogue: wisdom is unquestioning piety and obedience to divine commands.²⁹

This assessment could perhaps be sustained if the book ended at this point, but it fails to take account of the subsequent speeches by Yahweh and the epilogue. When seen within the context of the entire book, Job 28:28 in directing attention to the fear of the Lord is indeed calling upon humans to maintain a dependent relationship with God that is manifested in “correct behavior in religion and in ethics.”³⁰ This, however, is not a return to untested naïve belief, but rather it is an invitation to journey with the Lord unto genuine commitment that has been forged in the fires of adversity.

Just as Job 28 functions as a rebuttal to the friends and Job, and as reaffirmation of the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, so it serves to anticipate the speeches of Yahweh in chapters 38–41. The inability of humans to discover wisdom by their own searching in Job 28

28. Andrew Steinmann, “The Structure and Message of the Book of Job,” *VT* 46 (1996): 98.

29. Perdue, *Wisdom in Revolt*, 247.

30. Clines, *Job 21–37*, 925.

indicates that God must speak if humans are to attain wisdom. The final verse of the chapter refers to what God has said to humans in the past. But the language in Job 28:23–27, and in particular the reference in v. 26 to God making a path for the thunderstorm, anticipates what Yahweh will say as he speaks to Job out of the storm beginning in 38:1. By this means, Job 28 points beyond itself to the “dramatic and revolutionary perspective offered in the speech of Yahweh.”³¹

In his speeches, Yahweh functions as the master teacher of wisdom who poses a lengthy list of questions to his student Job. Perdue notes perceptively that the divine questions “ask if Job has the wisdom to understand the workings of the cosmos and if he possesses the power to rule over it. Yet the questions are asked in such a way as to emphasize that while Job may lack the knowledge and power to direct the cosmos, he should know that God does not.”³² By demonstrating to Job that his human understanding is limited when compared to the knowledge of God who alone knows where wisdom dwells (28:23), Yahweh breaks the impasse to which Job and the friends have come in their reasoning. Though they are well versed in the rudiments of wisdom as summarized in the general pattern of retribution in God’s moral order,³³ they need to learn that there is much that is known by the omniscient Yahweh that transcends their limited comprehension. Without providing all the answers, the divine questions in Job 38–41 and Job’s demurrals to them (40:3–5; 42:1–6) indicate that there is much that Yahweh knows that must remain in the realm of mystery for humans. The wise person, therefore, will fear the Lord even when what the Lord ordains cannot be grasped.

31. Walton, “Job 1: Book of,” 338.

32. Perdue, “Wisdom in the Book of Job,” 93.

33. It must be emphasized that even in Proverbs the general correlation between acts and consequences drawn in many sayings such as Prov 26:27 is qualified and nuanced in other passages in Proverbs in ways that correspond to Job and Ecclesiastes. See, for example, the excellent discussion by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen (“Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs,” *HS* 33 (1992): 25–36), in which he concludes: “The sages’ stance is to maintain faith in God’s justice, even when they personally cannot see it or touch it, even when the recorded past does not verify it. Here religion provides no escape from the pain or absurdities of existence. The book of Job was inevitable, not because Proverbs was too simplistic, but because life’s inequities, as reflected in Proverbs, drive faith to argue with the Deity” (34).

JOB 28 AS THE INTEGRATIVE CENTER OF JOB

When Job 28 is viewed through a literary lens, there is much evidence that suggests that this chapter serves as the integrative center for the book. Despite the many proposed reconstructions of the book of Job, the earliest textual evidence, from the Septuagint and the Targum of Job, supports the present sequence of chapters and verses. In this textual form in which it has been transmitted, the book consists of a prose framework that encloses the main section in poetry, an A-B-A literary pattern employed by many texts in ancient Near Eastern and world literature, such as the Code of Hammurabi, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Decameron*. As Clines notes, the arrival of the three friends in the prologue in 2:11–13 clearly leads into their cycles of speeches with Job, and Yahweh’s address to them in the epilogue (42:7–8) presupposes what they have said.³⁴ Throughout the book there is a coherent plot line featuring exposition, complication and resolution, with consistent characters, thematic progression, and recurrent motifs. The final words of the book, with Job enjoying his family and full of years forms an inclusio with the opening scene, in which Job is pictured as the greatest man among all the people of the East and his family is marked by its recurrent times of celebration. Lo observes well: “all the parts of Job are tightly knitted together. A removal of any single part will damage the entire plot structure. Despite the great variety of surface discrepancies throughout the book . . . , there is a continuous narrative plot giving underlying coherence to the book as a whole.”³⁵

It has been demonstrated already that Job 28 refers back to the dialogues that precede it and ahead to the speeches of Yahweh. What is also evident is that the language used to define wisdom in 28:28, fearing God and shunning evil, is also featured in the description of Job in the prologue by the narrator in 1:1 and by Yahweh in 1:8 and 2:3. Newsom notes:

[T]he didactic prose tale of chapters 1–2 and chapter 42 quarrels with the genre of the wisdom dialogue in chaps. 3–27. The speculative wisdom poem in chap. 28 does not merely form a

34. David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC 17; Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), lviii.

35. Lo, *Job 28 as Rhetoric*, 233.

dismissive reply to the wisdom dialogue but takes side in the quarrel *with* the prose tale and *against* the dialogue.³⁶

It cannot be proven, but it is a reasonable reading of the text that the voice in Job 28 is the same as the voice of the narrator in the prologue and epilogue of the book. If this is the case, then the narrator in Job plays a role similar in some ways to that of the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*, as he sets the stage for the action, provides interpretive commentary for the viewer, and presents a concluding evaluation.

In literary terms, Job is composed as a comedy, with a U or V-shaped thematic development that "moves from idyllic beginning through catastrophe and a vast dialectical terrain back to an end which is a transformed version of the beginning."³⁷ The prologue and dialogue section traces the downward progression in Job's experience. After the interlude in Job 28, the three monologues by Job, Elihu, and Yahweh progress upward, until the denouement in the epilogue. The pivot on which the thematic development turns is located in Job 28, in which human searching is incapable of finding wisdom, but God alone knows the way to it. Because this comedic pivot turns the tale from a negative to a positive direction, it can be described as a eucatastrophe. In this role, Job 28 functions similarly to vv. 15–17 in Ps 73, in which the psalmist's downward progression into despair is halted and reversed by his recognition of the damaging effects his example could have on others and by his remembrance of the final destiny of evildoers. On a much larger canvas, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ are the literary and historical pivot upon which the entire biblical metanarrative of redemption turns. In all of these cases, the pivot is not the end of the story, but it is the essential turning point that propels the movement in the direction toward its final resolution.

Within the book of Job there are two climaxes, with the first building to its high point just before chapter 28. Throughout the dialogues between Job and the friends, the speeches become steadily shorter and more hostile, until the dialogue collapses in the third cycle. At that point, Job concludes that humans can discern only the outer fringe of God's works (26:14), an acknowledgement of the limits of human wisdom that is expounded in Job 28:1–22. After the interlude, a

36. Carol Newsom, "Dialogue and Allegorical Hermeneutics in Job 28:28," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context* (ed. Ellen van Wolde; Biblical Interpretation Series 64; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 299–300.

37. Janzen, *Job*, 4.

second climax builds through the monologues of Job, Elihu,³⁸ and Yahweh, until Job finally replies to Yahweh, “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. . . . My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (42:3, 5). With these words, Job accepts the truth that is taught in Job 28:23–27, that wisdom resides in Yahweh alone.

The theme of wisdom that dominates Job 28 is also found throughout the rest of the book. In fact, the חכָּה lexical root occurs 24 times in Job apart from this chapter, and with special frequency in the dialogue section, leading Whybray to conclude, “Indeed, it may be claimed that in a real sense the question of wisdom is the main issue of the dialogue. The dialogue is a dispute about who is in the right—that is, about who among the disputants possesses wisdom.”³⁹ In the book of Job, then, wisdom serves as the leitmotif. Throughout the first section of the book, Job and the friends conceive of wisdom in terms of the retribution principle that tends to reduce life into an acts-consequences formula. Job 28 finds humans incapable of discovering wisdom, but then it concludes with the divine disclosure that to fear the Lord and to shun evil is the way to the wisdom that God alone understands. Although terms for wisdom do not occur as often in the speeches of Yahweh, he does refer to it explicitly in 38:36–37 and 39:17, and the concept lingers implicitly throughout his questions to Job, until Job finally admits in 42:1–6 that he does not understand as Yahweh does. Job comes to recognize that the traditional understanding of wisdom that his ears had heard is inferior to what his eyes have now come to see as a result of Yahweh’s instruction to him.

This, however, should not be taken as a repudiation of traditional wisdom, because humans in their inherent limitations must live according to the dictates of Job 28:28. Rather, the leitmotif of wisdom in Job operates in a way analogous to the progression in Maurice Ravel’s *Bolero*, in which the recurrent motif is played initially by a solo flute, and then other instruments are progressively added until the whole orchestra is employed in the complex harmonic conclusion. Similarly, in the book of Job, the relatively simplistic concept of wisdom which was presumed by Job and his friends is not negated, but it is supplemented by

38. In the structure of the book, Elihu finds the arguments of both Job and the friends lacking, but he does not significantly move beyond what they have said previously. However, he contributes to the climactic progression in the second part of the book especially in his concluding hymn in chapter 37, which anticipates the rhetorical questions probing nature that dominate the divine speeches in chapters 38–41.

39. Whybray, *Job*, 19.

the speeches of Yahweh, whose questions to Job indicate that there is much in the divine wisdom that must remain mysterious to humans. Although humans cannot comprehend wisdom in its totality, they must nevertheless live in the fear of the Lord, submissively trusting him for those things that finite humans cannot understand.

In view of this evidence, Job 28 is hardly an awkward and discordant insertion into the book of Job, as some have maintained, but rather it plays a crucial role as the literary integrative center for this masterfully-wrought tale.