



# **Bursting at the Seams: Phonetic Rhetoric in the Speeches of Elihu\***

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the abundant ‘phonetic rhetoric’—or, language that depicts the expression and reception of words about words—in the Elihu Speeches (Job 32–37). This phonetic rhetoric frames nearly all of Elihu’s speech, and constitutes approximately one quarter of his language. An analysis of this rhetorical feature contributes to the ongoing debates about the place of Elihu in the book of Job, and to the interpretation of his character. It suggests that the Elihu Speeches climax the painful ordeal of Job following the rounds of dialogue with his companions. Furthermore, Elihu’s phonetic rhetoric depicts his character as oblivious to his own verbosity and the impact of his words vis-à-vis Job’s desire to hear from God.

Word’s from a wise person’s mouth are gracious. But the lips of a fool engulf them. At first, the words of their mouth are foolish, but in the end their mouth *brings* wicked madness. So, the fool multiplies words. (Eccl. 10.12-14a<sup>2</sup>)

## **1. Introduction to Elihu’s ‘Phonetic Rhetoric’**

One of the most vexing issues facing studies of the book of Job is how properly to interpret the character of Elihu and the function of his

\* I have greatly appreciated the insights and comments from Abi Lynch (my wife), Dr V. Philips Long, Matthew Bates and Dr David Diewert.

2. Translations in this essay are mine unless otherwise noted.

speeches. Uncertainties exist at two primary levels. First, biblical scholars debate whether the Elihu Speeches (hereafter ES) fit the narrative/poetic context of the book of Job. On the one hand, many have suggested that they are a later addition, exhibiting a different style from the rest of Job. The fact that Yahweh makes no explicit reference to Elihu in the ensuing theophany seems to bolster this claim.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, many recent narrative studies have argued for the literary compatibility of the ES within the broader Joban landscape.<sup>4</sup> It is often claimed, for instance, that the voice of Elihu somehow facilitates the transition between Job's dialogues with his friends and the voice of Yahweh in some preparatory manner.<sup>5</sup>

Second, scholars differ quite considerably about how to interpret the figure of Elihu and, consequently, his rhetorical tone. For some, Elihu is the voice of the narrator, espousing an authoritative point of view. For others, Elihu is the guise of Satan,<sup>6</sup> a comic figure,<sup>7</sup> or a foil to Yahweh's voice.<sup>8</sup> Currently, the jury is still out on how, or whether, the ES fit within the context of the book of Job, and how one should interpret Elihu's character and rhetorical tone.

3. Note that while many interpret the lack of response from Yahweh as an implicit dismissal of Elihu, the logic could easily be turned on its head to assert that Elihu's faulty or misguided speech *would have* necessitated a response from Yahweh—thus the omission is an implicit affirmation. Only an analysis of the contents of the ES can lend clues for evaluating Elihu's perspective.

4. For a survey of approaches to the ES, see Lindsay Wilson, 'The Role of the Elihu Speeches in the Book of Job', *RTR* 55.2 (1996), pp. 81-94, and Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job & Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), pp. 81-83.

5. Brevard Childs, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 540-41, subscribes to this view.

6. David N. Freedman, 'Is it Possible to Understand the Book of Job?', *Bible Review* 4.2 (1988), pp. 26-33, 44 (44), points out that the pseudepigraphical book *The Testament of Job* adopts this interpretation (41.5; 43.5, 17). For differences between *The Testament of Job* and the biblical book of Job, see J. Crenshaw, *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1995), p. 443.

7. See William Whedbee, 'The Comedy of Job', *Semeia* 7 (1997), pp. 1-44.

8. See Norman Habel, *The Book of Job* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), and Hendrik Viviers, 'Elihu (Job 32-37), Garrulous But Poor Rhetor? Why is He Ignored?', in Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (eds.), *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* (JSNTSup, 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 137-53. Likewise, J. Gerald Janzen, *Job* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), p. 223, suggests that a subversive aspect of the divine voice is that it follows Elihu's claims to inspiration and exclusivity. He writes, 'They [the ES] stand beside the divine speeches to create a situation in which Job must decide which "revelation"... is from God'.

The following study will argue that a peculiar rhetorical dynamic of the ES—what I will call ‘phonetic rhetoric’—offers some clues for navigating these two key issues.<sup>9</sup> For our purposes, ‘*phonetic rhetoric*’ will refer to language that depicts the expression and reception of words about words, including its sensory and acoustic dimensions.<sup>10</sup> Elihu spends what amounts to about a quarter of his speeches in this process of linguistic self-deliberation, exploration and defense.<sup>11</sup> To sum up the thesis at the outset: the unexpected ES thematically *fit* the book of Job in that they climax the suffering ordeal that Job experiences via the collapse of his material world and via the ‘counsel’ of the companions. In addition, Elihu’s ‘phonetic rhetoric’ reveals his own character as oblivious to the disjunction between his confident and careful self-depictions and his verbally excessive rhetoric.<sup>12</sup> While particular aspects of Elihu’s speech ring true in terms of their theological content, this study will demonstrate

9. Although, to my knowledge, no studies have attended to Job’s phonetic rhetoric, the following are a sampling of some rhetorically sensitive studies of the ES: Wilson, ‘The Role of the Elihu Speeches’; Viviers, ‘Elihu (Job 32–37), Garrulous But Poor Rhetor?’; John Briggs Curtis, ‘Word Play in the Speeches of Elihu (Job 32–37)’, *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 12 (1992), pp. 23–30; Pieter Van Der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995). I found Norman Habel’s, *The Book of Job* to be the most rhetorically sensitive commentary. Other context-specific studies will be noted throughout the study.

10. Anatomical words like ‘tongue’, ‘lips’, ‘ears’ and ‘palate’ capture the sensory-kinesthetic aspects of sound. As McKay (quoted in Wilson, ‘The Role of the Elihu Speeches’, p. 88 n. 29) puts it, ‘what Elihu is actually doing while he speaks is as important as what he is saying’. As will become clear, Elihu’s anatomical references communicate something about the rhetorical effect of his words.

11. This is based upon a word count of the verses containing Elihu’s phonetic rhetoric. See ‘Phonetic Framing’ in section 4 below for the specific verses counted. Phonetic words are used quite often in the ES. For instance, Job uses combinations of the roots מלך, רבד, רמר and שמע for a combined total of 170. Of these, 46 occur in the ES (27%), even though his speeches comprise about 15% of Job based on a counting of verses. Other phonetic words like ‘ear(s)’ (אזן), ‘voice, sound’ (קול), ‘tongue’ (לשון) occur 16 times in the ES out of their 54 occurrences in the book (30%). As we will observe, it is not just their frequency, but also their strategic locations in the ES that is distinctive. As Wilson, ‘The Role of the Elihu Speeches’, p. 90, rightly notes, Elihu perceives the dialogue between Job and his companions ‘as being one about “words” or how to speak rightly about God’ and so he misses the deeper nature of Job’s predicament.

12. As Wilson, ‘The Role of the Elihu Speeches’, p. 87, suggests, ‘the reader will need to be alert to the possibility that Elihu’s self-perception is not accurate or exhaustive, so that he may be performing different or additional roles to the ones of which he is aware’. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 444, also suggests an ‘ironic gap’ at this point. Janzen, *Job*, pp. 218–21, outlines some of the ways in which Elihu’s speech is subverted from the wider context of Job, and also from within his own speech.

that his rhetorical mode of speech constitutes an assault on Job, *some* right things spoken in a very wrong way. This essay will follow the phonetic rhetoric in the order of the five ES as given in the book of Job.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Intrusion of Elihu: The Transition into Chapter 32

The ES form an interesting case for Joban rhetorical studies because, unlike the speeches of Job's other three companions, we have no record of the *impact* of Elihu's words on Job. Thus, we begin by situating the ES against the background of the preceding chapters so that the foreground of Elihu's rhetoric can be better understood.

The 'damage' to Job only begins in chs. 1 and 2. These chapters introduce the beginnings of Job's anguish that continued via the 'counsel' of Job's companions and Elihu.<sup>14</sup> From the beginning, Job is assailed by words, by the breathless reports of his three servants,<sup>15</sup> the biting words of his wife, and by his three companions. The omission of a final speech from Zophar and the brevity of Bildad's last speech<sup>16</sup> imply that the council of Job's friends has reached its limits vis-à-vis Job's insistent innocence. But the voice he needed to hear most was silent...or delayed. Job then issues his last speech (chs. 29–31),<sup>17</sup> which climaxes in a high-fisted demand to hear from God:<sup>18</sup> 'Oh that someone would give me a *hearing!* See, my signature. Let the Almighty *answer* me, and my accuser write an indictment' (31.35). The reader is then prepared for Yahweh by the narrator's closing comment: 'The words of Job are ended' (31.40).

13. The five speeches of Elihu are structured as follows: first speech (*apologia*) (32.6b-22); second speech (33.1-33); third speech (34.1-16); fourth speech (35.1-16); final speech (36.1–37.24). Note, however, that the second speech (33.1-33) is not introduced by the narrator and is thus a more superficial break. Either way, Elihu utters more speeches than Job's other companions.

14. Although many have depicted the speeches of God as further onslaught or intimidation, it is important to keep in mind that *only* these speeches satisfy Job (42.6).

15. Note the three-fold repetition in 1.16-18 of the phrase 'while he was still speaking another came and said...'

16. Bildad's final speech is only six verses in length in contrast to his first speech of 22 verses and his second speech of 21 verses.

17. Job 29.1-25 is an interesting contrasting depiction of Job in his 'prime'. Earlier in his life, the oppressed felt free to speak, cry out and sing because Job was on their side. The nobles and princes were silent because of Job's witness for the oppressed. Now, Job is in the place of the oppressed with no one to speak for him and certainly no words to be equated with 'spring rain' (29.23).

18. Emphasis mine throughout.

This dialogue closure actually forms an important *link* between the speeches of Job and Elihu. What is essentially a literary *conclusion* serves to emphasize the rhetorical impact of the ES—that is, their ‘out-of-nowhere’ nature recalls Job’s earlier experience of ‘out-of-nowhere’ rhetoric from the messengers (1.13-19)—and increases the alienation between Job and the conversation partner he longed for. However, the major difference between this intrusion and the messengers of ch. 1 is that both Job and the reader are surprised by the furtherance of painful dialogue as Elihu enters from ‘left field’, as it were.

The folly of Elihu’s verbosity is especially poignant given Job’s previously expressed anguish over the many words of his companions. As early as ch. 13 Job had expressed despair over the possibilities of dialogue with his companions:

But I would *speak* to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God. As for you, you whitewash with lies; all of you are worthless physicians. If you would only *keep silent*, that would be your wisdom! *Hear* now my reasoning, and *listen* to the pleadings of my *lips*. Will you *speak* falsely for God, and *speak* deceitfully for him? (13.3-7 NRSV)<sup>19</sup>

Against this backdrop of lengthy dialogue, involving the painful words that Job’s companions hurl against him, and his craving for divine words, the ES intrude quite unexpectedly. As Whedbee puts it: ‘The effect is an ironic reversal of expectation and a jarring example of incongruity. We expect God—and we get Elihu!’<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Narrator’s Introduction and the *Apologia* of Elihu (Chapter 32)

The narrator anticipates the angry/urgent nature of Elihu’s speech in the prologue (32.1-6a) and pre-emptively dismantles the rhetorically humble façade that Elihu creates in 32.6b-22 (note the four-fold repetition of ‘anger’ [אָר] and ‘burned’ [בָּרַח]):

Then the *anger* of Elihu...*burned*, his *anger burned* against Job on account of his justifying his own life rather than God.<sup>21</sup> And his *anger burned* against his three friends because they did not find an answer and thus they condemned

19. This text is only representative of Job’s more general sentiments (see Job 13.13; 21.5; 23.3-7; also Prov. 17.28; Eccl. 5.3; 10.3).

20. Whedbee, ‘The Comedy of Job’, p. 19.

21. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 441, rejects the MT rendering, which follows the scribal tradition—‘made Job guilty’ for ‘made God guilty’ (one of the eighteen ‘Emendations of the Scribes’).

God... So when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of the three men, his *anger burned*. (32.2-3, 5)

The narrator is hardly subtle!<sup>22</sup>

*Elihu*, on the other hand, presents himself as a patient and reasonable listener<sup>23</sup>—one who is ‘timid and afraid to declare’ (32.6b) what he thinks. Yet he proceeds to speak:

Therefore, I say, *Listen* to me. Indeed, let me *declare* my knowledge. Behold, I waited for your *words*, I listened for your insights, until you had searched with *words*. But while I eagerly attended to you—Look, no one among you could decide against Job or *answer* his *words*. (32.10-12 NRSV)

Thus the narrator alerts us, early on, to an ambivalent character who, though internally angered, smoothly repudiates Job’s earlier request for God’s voice (31.35). The lack of answer from the Almighty forms a void into which Elihu steps, assuming *de facto* that the Almighty will not verbally answer Job (33.13-30; 34.12-13; 35.13-14).<sup>24</sup> As we later find out, it is Elihu who is not explicitly answered by the Almighty.

A further aspect of Elihu’s phonetic rhetoric can be highlighted from an insightful study by Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher.<sup>25</sup> Her analysis of Psalmic body imagery is helpful for the present thesis that Elihu’s words constitute the climax of Job’s suffering vis-à-vis his companions’ previous verbal assaults. It also connects our study of the transition into ch. 32 and the contents therein.

Gillmayr-Bucher suggests that the Psalmist often prefers body imagery to abstract categories. This creates the dramatic effect of a speaker whose body is an actor, performing different activities before an audience. For instance, the first move in establishing communication in the Psalms is

22. אֲנִי-אֵפֶס (‘I too’), later on in 32.10, 17, is possibly a double meaning, as it could also be translated ‘I am anger’ in keeping with the narrator’s assessment of Elihu in (32.2, 5). Although this translation would not make sense as Elihu’s intention, given his patient self-depiction, it does recall the assessment by the narrator in 32.2, 5 in an ironic fashion. Note also that in 36.13 Elihu claims that the hypocritical of heart lay up anger (אֵפֶס).

23. David Diewert, ‘The Composition of the Elihu Speeches: A Poetic and Structural Analysis’ (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1991), p. 105 n. 82, points out the contrast between 32.11a where Elihu depicts patient waiting, and 32.16a where the waiting is portrayed as anxious.

24. Habel, *The Book of Job*, pp. 445, 448, suggests that Elihu assumes the role of ‘answerer’, given his use of the root אָנַח seven times in ch. 32 alone and his anger over the inability of Job’s friends to ‘answer’. In total, Elihu uses forms of the root אָנַח (‘to answer’) 13 times during his speeches.

25. See her article ‘Body Imagery in the Psalms’, *JSOT* 28.3 (2004), pp. 301-26.

often to ‘turn’ one’s face and not ‘hide’ it.<sup>26</sup> This body performance is significant for our ‘phonetic’ reading of the ES in that, as the implied audience, we observe Elihu *performing* his speech before us:

Let me speak, so that I may find relief. Let me open my *lips* so that I may answer. (32.20)

Look! I open my *mouth*; my *tongue* in my *mouth* speaks. (33.2)

For the *ear* tests *words* as the palate tastes food. (34.3)

Elihu constantly re-visits his audience to maintain communication and to orient listeners toward his words. Gillmayr-Bucher further suggests that some of the most threatening behavior from ‘enemies’ in the Psalms comes from the lips, tongue, teeth or mouth. In fact, these body parts often function either as metonymy to refer to the enemy as a whole or the weapons of the enemy itself.<sup>27</sup> In a similar manner, Job construes his enemies using body imagery/language:

Against me they [the wicked] open wide their *mouth*. (16.10)

How long will you set snares of *words*? (18.2)

How long will you torment my life and crush me with *words*? (19.2-3)

Job’s sufferings are clearly compounded by his verbal critics and scoffers:

I have become [labeled] ‘Derision for his friends’. (12.4)

He has made me a joke of the peoples. (17.6)

And now, I am their taunt song. I have become a joke-word (מלח) for them. (30.9)

In addition, Job’s companions attack *his* body ‘weaponry’ through their words:<sup>28</sup>

How long will you speak such things, and the words of your *mouth* be a mighty wind? (8.2)

For your sin informs your *mouth*. You choose the *tongue* of the crafty. (15.5)

If evil is sweet in his *mouth*, then he hides it under his *tongue*. (20.12)

26. Gillmayr-Bucher, ‘Body Imagery’, p. 306.

27. Gillmayr-Bucher, ‘Body Imagery’, pp. 308-309, quotes the following verses that support her argument well: ‘For they have opened the wicked and deceitful mouth against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred’ (Ps. 109.2-3a); ‘Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?’ (Ps. 120.2-3).

28. In addition, Eliphaz speaks of the ‘sword’ of the mouth (5.15) and the ‘scourge’ of the tongue (5.22). Zophar wished that God would ‘open his lips’ against Job (11.5).

In light of Job's anguish and suffering via his earlier companions, it seems fair to interpret the unexpected, but lengthy, intrusion of Elihu as a continuation of this verbal assault upon Job.<sup>29</sup> As we soon shall see through other images, Elihu's speech resembles drawn swords (see Ps. 55.21) more than the wisdom he purports to convey (Job 33.33).

### 3a. 'Full of Words'

In contrast to the previous suggestion by Job that the silence of commentators would indicate wisdom ('If you would only keep silent, that would be your wisdom!', 13.5), Elihu views their silence as a failure:

They are dismayed, they answer no more; they have not a word to say. And am I to wait, because they do not speak, because they stand there, and no longer answer? I also will give my answer; I also will declare my opinion. For I am *full of words*; the spirit within me presses me. (32.15-18)<sup>30</sup>

Elihu's accumulation of *words* in 32.18 recalls the narrator's earlier depiction of his accumulating *anger*. The acoustic phrase מְלֵתִי מְלֵיִם ('I am full of words')<sup>31</sup> in 32.18 contrasts with the failure of מְלֵיִם by Job's companions in 32.15: 'words have failed them'.<sup>32</sup> The cessation of speech meant failure in the evaluation of Elihu, because they were unable to fault Job yet closed their mouths.

While Elihu criticizes the failed מְלֵיִם of Job's companions, he will introduce his own מְלֵיִם as an alternative for consideration.<sup>33</sup> And as

29. This does not necessarily negate the wisdom of the ES. His extraordinary creation hymn in chs. 36–37 resembles the ensuing speech of Yahweh. My point, however, is that Elihu's phonetic rhetoric *overwhelms* the wisdom contained within his speeches.

30. John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 436 n. 26, points out that this imagery is drawn from ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature where "the chambers of the belly", or "the viscera" [refer to] storehouses of knowledge'. The sense here is that the pressure of the increasing words in his inner belly pushes out inside him and requires expulsion.

31. Job uses the nominal מְלֵה and verbal מְלַל 34 times of its 62 occurrences in the Old Testament. Fourteen of these occurrences are in the ES. The Aramaic מְלֵה, which accounts for 24 occurrences, appears in Daniel and most often refers to the words or decrees of the king, matters related to dreams, or to interpretations of dreams and divine messages.

32. In 32.14 Elihu recognizes that Job had not directed his מְלֵיִם at him. It seems that Elihu proceeds to participate in the dialogue, not out of respect for his elders, but out of the irresistible, yet uninvited, urge to speak! See also 4.2, where Eliphaz demonstrates a similar compulsion to speak.

33. See also 33.1, where Elihu demands that Job *hear* him even though he *heard* that Job wanted a response from God. Similarly, from 33.8 to 33.31-33 Elihu acknowledges that he had *listened* to Job, yet he is still compelled to make his voice *heard*.

Norman Habel rightly suggests,<sup>34</sup> Elihu works from the assumption that it is improper for God to appear before Job in response to his demand for litigation, so Elihu prepares to close out the arguments by his own מליים.

### 3b. The Bursting Windbag

Elihu's next words in 32.19 foreshadow verbal folly rather than wisdom: 'Behold my belly is like unvented wine, like new wineskins, it is about to burst open!' (32.19).<sup>35</sup> While Elihu might desire to convey civility in the beginning of his *apologia* (32.11-12), one cannot help but notice the comic aspect implied in the description.<sup>36</sup> Habel notes that whereas Jeremiah experienced an inner compulsion to speak because of God's word burning within him (20.9), Elihu inadvertently portrays himself as a 'windbag' needing to 'relieve' himself (note the wordplay in 32.20 between ריח [‘to relieve’] and רוח [‘wind’]).<sup>37</sup> He also captures the significance of the wineskin metaphor well:

For Elihu to describe himself as filled with wine is to employ an ambiguous metaphor and may suggest that his prolixity and bold speech are the marks of a drunken fool... Elihu is bloated by both [wind and wine] and about to explode with extended discourses.<sup>38</sup>

34. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 443

35. Note the similar words of Zophar in 20.2-3.

36. Note also Whedbee, 'The Comedy of Job', p. 18, who argues that Elihu becomes a 'comic character' because he comes out of nowhere, acts like a 'buffoon', and then is never heard from again after ch. 37. Similarly, Michael Fox, 'Job 38 and God's Rhetoric', *Semeia* 19 (1981), pp. 53-61 (56), says, 'one is reminded of Shakespeare's comic interludes before the denouement'. Yet Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job* (NIB, 4; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 319-637 (564), contends (regarding this text) that 'What is humorous in one culture, however, is no reliable guide to what is humorous in another. Within the context of ancient values and metaphors, Elihu says nothing absurd. Because discipline in speech was so highly valued, words that might sound excessive required justification.' While her point is an important general corrective, it does not do justice to the irony of the image. An important comic (or disturbing) dimension of Elihu's rhetoric is that he depicts himself *too* well. The narrator had initially portrayed Elihu's speech as compelled by anger (32.2-3, 5). Elihu unwittingly bolsters this portrayal with the bloated (about-to-explode) wineskin imagery, though he apparently wishes to convey רוח-sourced conviction and control.

37. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 444. Whereas Eliphaz used the belly full of wind (רוח) image to parallel the notion of 'useless talk' (15.2-3), Elihu inadvertently characterizes himself as a windbag, though evidently wishing to describe himself as the possessor of wisdom.

38. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 454, directs readers to Prov. 13.16; 15.1-2; 17.27-28; 18.2-6; and 24.7, which portray the revelations of foolishness that accompany speech.

The wineskin image suggests that Elihu's windy words (32.19) come more from a cathartic desire to 'get relief' (32.20) than from the impartial wisdom gained from listening well (32.11-12, 20-21). The wineskin needing to relieve its wind (i.e. words) also recalls Job's earlier experience with the wind of his companions:

All of you are miserable comforters! Is there any limit to your *windy words* (דַּבְרֵי רוּחַ)? Or what sickens you that you keep on 'answering'? I too could speak like you, if you were in my place. I could fit words together against you, and I could shake my head at you. Or I could strengthen you with my mouth, and the solace of my lips could bring relief. (16.2b-5)

Elihu may have listened to Job's arguments, but he did not hear his cry, or at least he could not accept that his cry should be answered by another voice. While Elihu employs the wineskin imagery to describe his inner need to speak, the ensuing preoccupation with words *and* the length of his speeches enable readers to interpret the imagery as a reference to the quantity of his words and also as a contrast to his earlier controlled self-description. One might surmise here that the fermentation of his anger pressured him to speak.

#### 4. Phonetic Framing (Chapters 33–37)

We have already explored Elihu's extended phonetic introduction in ch. 32,<sup>39</sup> but what of his other speeches? As we examine his ensuing speeches, we find that phonetic language typically frames the ES and thus continues to play a defining role. The outline opposite highlights this structuring dynamic.

The arrangement is not the only way to understand the framework of the ES, yet it serves to emphasize the strategic way in which the phonetic language of the ES is located. Now we turn to examine this structure in more detail.

Whereas Habel reads בִּמְנֵי רוּחַ as a comic reference to constipation or gas, Diewert, *The Composition*, p. 113, suggests that the phrase is more akin to inner compulsion. While Elihu's pressurized belly may not refer to constipation or gas, the humorous aspect is nonetheless retained vis-à-vis his voluminous phonetic references and lengthy speeches.

39. For an outline of the rhetorical structure of ch. 32, see Patrick W. Skehan, "I will speak up!" (Job 32), *CBQ* 31.3 (1969), pp. 380-82. Of this chapter, Skehan writes, "The poem is...a formal rhetorical exercise, with a caricature of its ostensible protagonist inherent in its hesitations and its outbursts; if it has more structure than the contents would seem to deserve, this is quite deliberate" (p. 382).

Speech I	32.6b-22	
		Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> (described above)
Speech II	33.1-33	
	A	Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> (33.1-5) <sup>40</sup>
		B Basic Argument (33.6-30)
	A'	Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> (33.31-33)
Speech III	34.1-37	
	A	Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> (34.1-4)
		B Basic Argument (34.5-33) <sup>41</sup>
	A'	Phonetic Critique of Job (34.34-37)
Speech IV	35.1-16	
	A	____ <sup>42</sup>
		B Basic Argument (35.1-15)
	A'	Phonetic Critique of Job (35.16)
Speech V	36–37	
	A	Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> (36.1-4)
		B Basic Argument (36.5-33)
	A'	Phonetic <i>Apologia</i> for God (37.1-5)
		B' Basic Argument (37.6-24)

#### 4a. Elihu's Second Speech (33.1-33)

As already indicated above, Elihu's second speech is introduced with a phonetic *apologia*, connecting strongly with the previous chapter's emphasis:

But now, *hear my speech*, O Job, and *listen* to all my words. See, I open my *mouth*; the *tongue* in my *mouth* speaks. My *words* declare the uprightness of my heart, and what my *lips* know they *speak* sincerely. The spirit (רוח) of

40. This second *apologia* could be extended to include vv. 6-8 though the phonetic elements are in vv. 1-5.

41. There are brief mid-argument phonetic *apologias* in 34.10 and 16.

42. In 35.1-4, Elihu quotes and questions Job's words and then declares his intentions to answer. The phonetic elements are too sparse here to warrant the label 'Phonetic *Apologia*'.

God has made me, and the *breath* of the Almighty gives me life. *Answer* me, if you can; set your *words* in order before me; take your stand. (33.1-5 NRSV)<sup>43</sup>

In this case Elihu gives a slow-motion unfolding of his words, as if to bring his listeners to the edges of their seats. The anatomical language of mouth, tongue, lips specify the locus of Elihu's preoccupation, for to him, the most important matters at hand have to do with the correct arrangement of words, their precise delivery, proper reception and Spirit inspiration. Yet, the slow-motion anatomical language recalls Job's earlier experience of pain from his companions' mouths, tongues and lips.<sup>44</sup>

This additional *apologia* by Elihu, following his extended introductory *apologia* in 32.6b-22, confirms his wordy self-depiction in 32.18-19. E. Dhorme writes, 'We are dealing with a man who talks for the sake of talking, and who with much bustle announces that he is about to declare extraordinary things which we are still waiting to hear'.<sup>45</sup>

The imperatives in this introduction invite Job into Elihu's speeches. Yet his invitation turns sour with his demands for Job's silence at the end of the chapter (33.31-33). These invitations and demands can be arranged in the chiasmic pattern on the opposite page.

This chiasmic arrangement centers on Elihu's request for dialogue with Job, yet the twofold invitation to 'answer me' and 'speak' is overshadowed by the stronger A and A' imperatives which direct Job toward silence, or rather, Elihu's monologue.<sup>46</sup> This micro-arrangement of 33.31-33 typifies what occurs at the macro-level in the ES. Elihu's initial patience and

43. Elihu's argument that he possesses the spirit and breath of God (33.4) echoes 32.18 where Elihu claimed that the fullness of his words (מלִי) resulted from an inner spirit. Here, he implicitly links his inner spirit (רוּחַ) to the Spirit (רוּחַ) of God, giving his words special inspiration. In light of his preceding *apologia* in 32.6b-22, Elihu most likely continues (in 33.1-7) to legitimate his own rhetoric over against his predecessors. Janzen, *Job*, p. 218, points out that 33.4 links Elihu's to earlier claims in 32.8, 18 where he stressed his possession of רוּחַ and נְשִׁמָה, thus suggesting that Elihu was making an audacious claim. However, the progression in 33.1-7 demonstrates more ambivalence than arrogance. While his claim to special inspiration was perhaps necessary upon entrance into the elder circle of wisdom, the following phrase in 33.5, 'refute me if you can!' (using the hiphil הַשִּׁיבֵנִי הִלֵּל), seems to emphasize his superiority. Then in 33.6 Elihu establishes his commonality with Job and proceeds to try to set Job at ease (33.7). At least he is not consistently arrogant.

44. See the discussion of Gillmayer-Buchner's work in section 3, above.

45. Dhorme, *A Commentary*, p. 486.

46. Of the 30 direct imperatives that Elihu gives, 18 pertain to hearing and listening.

occasional invitations to speak fade into the background of his more frequent rhetorical demands for an audience. He never again invites a response from Job.

*Give attention,* O Job,  
 A *Listen* to me;  
 Keep Silent  
 and Let me Speak  
 then

B If there are words  
 C Answer me  
*Speak,* For I desire to justify you  
 B' If there are no [words]

A' *Listen* to me  
 Keep Silent  
 and *Let me teach* you wisdom

#### 4b. Elihu's Third Speech (34.1-37)

As in 33.1-5, Elihu's next introduction (34.2-4) combines anatomical word imagery with phonetic imperatives and cohortatives.

Then Elihu continued and said:

A *Listen* to my words  
 B ...you wise ones

A *Give ear* to me  
 B you knowledgeable ones  
 C For the ear tests words as the palate tastes food<sup>47</sup>

A *Let us choose* what is just  
 B for ourselves

A *Let us know* what is good  
 B among ourselves

47. Hartley, *The Book*, p. 210, points out that in Mesopotamia, the ear was thought to be the 'center of intelligence'.

Elihu bolsters his audience, drawing them in to listen and hear through appeals to their assumed wisdom and knowledge.<sup>48</sup> The clause in the center line C echoes Job's words in 12.11: 'Does not the ear test words, as the palate tastes its food?'—which was essentially an argument that he had the necessary faculties to understand that his suffering was from the hand of God.<sup>49</sup> Here in 34.3, Elihu adopts this phrase to direct listeners (and readers) to critique Job's words<sup>50</sup> with *their* faculties of comprehension. The central analogy of taste-testing words, that is, employing the human power of intelligent understanding, is surrounded by appeals and invitations. After gaining his audience through an initial character appeal ('wise ones', 'knowledgeable ones'), Elihu suggests that their collective abilities, centered on his own argument ('my words', 'to me'), would secure 'what is just...[and]...good' (A lines above). Elihu's ensuing argument (vv. 5-30) puts those faculties of comprehension—expressed in the ability to taste-test words—to work against one who, unlike his audience of wise listeners, 'drinks up scoffing like water', and keeps company with a different crowd than them, 'evildoers...[and the] wicked' (vv. 7-8).

Yet there is another facet to Elihu's invitation. Elihu wanted his listeners to perform the same role that *he* had earlier: 'Surely you [Job] spoke in my ear, and I heard the sound of *your* [Job's] words' (33.8; see 33.31, 33; 34.2). And in 34.16 Elihu asks his listeners to 'Pay attention to the sound of my words ('שָׁמַע') (34.16).<sup>51</sup> But what Elihu does not anticipate is that the 'sound' of his words may undermine his validity as a wise speaker and not just pit his audience against Job.<sup>52</sup> Against the backdrop of the narrator's privileged information (chs. 1–2; 32.1–6a), and especially given the frustrated dialogue in chs. 3–31, it is doubtful

48. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 479, points out that Elihu employs numerous rhetorical skills in this speech in order to 'reflect a common tradition with which Elihu's fellow judges can agree'. For example, Elihu appeals to his listeners as wise or intelligent on three occasions (34.2, 10, 34). Is this the flattery of which he had exonerated himself in 32.21-22?

49. As Diewert, *The Composition*, p. 263.

50. In 34.5-33 Elihu quotes Job and then attempts to refute his claims.

51. Diewert, *The Composition*, p. 290, notes that in 34.16, Elihu pejoratively uses the phrase 'if you have understanding' both to question the extent of Job's knowledge, and establish validity for his own words.

52. Wilson, 'The Role of the Elihu Speeches', p. 88, concludes this concerning Elihu's self-understanding: 'The implied reader is thus invited to see that Elihu's self-understanding is at best incomplete, and certainly not reliable. Thus, his arguments and conclusions are...significantly undermined, and are unlikely to be the final verdict'.

whether Elihu's proposed meeting of the 'wise' could possibly bear the fruit of justice and goodness that he anticipates.

The conclusion to this third speech (34.34-37) exhibits an inversion of his opening phonetic *apologia* (34.1-4):

- |   |                                 |   |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| A | Job <i>speaks</i>               |   |
|   | B                               | without knowledge                           |
| A | his <i>words</i> (are spoken)   |   |
|   | B                               | without insight                             |
|   |                                 | C <i>O that Job were tried to the limit</i> |
| A | <i>for answering</i>            |   |
|   | B                               | like wicked men                             |
| A | he <i>adds</i>                  |   |
|   | B                               | rebellion                                   |
| A | he <i>abounds</i> <sup>53</sup> |   |
|   | B                               | [implicitly 'in sin']                       |
| A | he <i>multiplies</i>            |   |
|   | B                               | his words against God (34.35-37)            |

Notice how Elihu's conclusion to his third speech inverts, and darkens, the tone of his *apologia* in 34.1-4. Whereas in 34.1-4 Elihu invites an inner circle of 'wise ones' and 'knowledgeable ones' to a council of listening, in this case, Elihu peremptorily predicts the findings of the 'wise' council (34.34) in order to place Job among 'the wicked'. Whereas in the *apologia*, Elihu invites the wise to employ their understanding to find justice and goodness, now they are predicted to indict Job 'to the limit' (34.36). Whereas in the opening *apologia* of ch. 34, the C line phrase invited listening, now Elihu invites condemnation in line C. Bolstering that climactic center are phonetic verbs (A lines), which Elihu evokes to condemn Job on account of his analysis (B lines).

53. This somewhat confusing *ספוק* in 34.37 is corrected in numerous Mss to *שפק*, meaning 'to abound', so that the phrase reads, 'he abounds transgression among us'. Alternatively, *BDB*, p. 706, suggests that the qal form of *ספק* can mean to slap one's hands in presumptuousness. The Mss are an attractive alternative in that the verb *שפק* would then parallel *סיר* and *ירב*—which denote a similar action—and make sense of the context, unless one considers the *waw* in *ספוק* to be an original *yod*, in which case the imperfect would read as a hiphil which can also mean 'to abound'.

In this third speech (34.1-37), then, Elihu begins with a phonetic *apologia* and ends with an indictment of Job's multiplication of words against God. So, although Elihu was self-consciously aware of his own fullness of words ('I am full of words [מלתי מלים]', 32.18), and angry over the failure of the three companions' words, he will twice condemn Job for multiplying his words (וירב אומריו, 34.37; 35.16), and utter the lengthiest unbroken set of speeches in the entire book.

#### 4c. Elihu's Fourth Speech (35.1-16)

The next speech (35.1-16), which contains no opening phonetic *apologia*, ends with a similar accusation to 34.35: 'So Job opens his mouth vainly (הבל); He multiplies words (מלים) that lack knowledge' (35.16).<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Elihu described God to Job as one who would not listen to an 'empty (הבל) cry' (35.13), presumably his own. The premise of both claims (35.13, 16) is that God does not hear Job's cry because it lacks integrity and because the human and divine realms are separated from each other. Job is foolish to suggest that his voice is somehow 'present' to God. Elihu is instead present, and as we will observe in the next section, Elihu self-admittedly assumes the role of God's stand-in.

#### 4d. Elihu's Fifth Speech (Chapters 36–37)

Elihu's introductory *apologia* reflects on the source and value of his words:

Then Elihu continued and said, 'Wait for me a little, and let me make known to you that there are still words (מלים) to be spoken on God's behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from far away. I will ascribe righteousness to my maker. For surely my words are faultless. One complete in knowledge (תמים דעוה) is with you!' (36.1-4)

Even after four chapters of speech, Elihu shamelessly claims to have more מלים to declare, and this time לאלה ('on God's behalf', 36.2). The לאלה מלים, however, is a claim never backed by God 'on behalf' of Elihu.<sup>55</sup> Yet can we determine whether God's silence on this issue is an implicit refutation or endorsement?

54. הבל is surely a harsh condemnation of Job's laments. Elihu argues here that God is removed from the human picture and that Job's arguments are hollow.

55. While certain aspects of Elihu's speech are certainly held as true in Yahweh's speeches (e.g. isolated statements about God's character and the cosmic imagery of Elihu), neither Elihu's role as stand-in and accuser, nor his most basic assumptions about Job's character are endorsed by God.

Elihu's self-depiction in 36.4, as a speaker who is תמיים דעוה ('complete in knowledge'), contrasts sharply with his portrayal of Job in 35.16, whose words are בבל־ידעת ('without knowledge'), creating obvious rhetorical distance between himself and Job. While some translators suggest that Elihu's claim in 36.4 refers to Yahweh (e.g. NAS), other translations (e.g. NIV, NRSV, JPS) allow תמיים דעוה to refer to Elihu. It seems that the latter interpretation can be sustained, given Elihu's willingness to speak 'on God's behalf' (36.2), the source of his knowledge in verse three ('from far away'), and the parallelistic structure of 36.4, in which case 36.4b legitimates the claim made in 36.4a. Not until 37.16 does Elihu describe God as one who is תמיים דעים. Thus, in his final *apologia*, Elihu blurs the distinction between the reliability of *his* own words and the reliable words of *God*.

Finally, in portions of the last chapter of the ES, Elihu describes the powerful voice of God. This shift finally moves attention away from Elihu's own voice toward another.<sup>56</sup> On at least six occasions in 37.1-5, Elihu compares God's voice to 'rumbling' thunder accompanied by lightning. Yet Elihu maintains his original assumption about the utter hiddenness of God: 'The Almighty—we cannot discover him' (37.23). He never assumed, however, that God would respond with spoken word. In the final analysis, Elihu argues, God 'pays no regard to all those who think they are wise' (37.24). God does not answer people like Job.<sup>57</sup>

### 5. The Phonetic Rhetoric in the Intrusion of Yahweh (38.1-2)

Given the final words of Elihu in 37.24, the theophany of chs. 38–41 could not be more jarring! The voice of God *is* heard after the pseudo-definitive words of Elihu. Yahweh's very first question, in fact, bears directly upon the nature of words—their delivery by a human and their impact on Yahweh: מי זה מחשיך עצה במלין בל־ידעת ('Who in the world is darkening *my* counsel with words that lack knowledge?') (38.2).<sup>58</sup> While

56. This shift marks a larger decrescendo that occurs in the final two speeches of Elihu from the abundant phonetic rhetoric of chs. 32–35 toward cosmic imagery, or natural-pictorial rhetoric, of chs. 36–37.

57. Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 516, points out that this links the conclusion of Elihu's speech to Job's climactic cry for God's voice in 31.35.

58. This translation interprets זה as an enclitic intensifier. See Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 24, and GKC, §138 c-d.

this question posed by God certainly affirms aspects of Elihu's speech,<sup>59</sup> it implicitly undercuts Elihu's argument that God was wholly removed from Job's experience or perhaps only addressing Job indirectly and enigmatically.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, God ignores Elihu's claim that his words contained תַּמִּים דַּעוּתָהּ in 36.4. God avoids taking sides, or mimicking Elihu's point-by-point critique of Job's words. In fact, it is only Job's words that God affirms as 'reliable' (42.7, 8).

## 6. Final Remarks

As we observed regarding the transition from chs. 3–31 to 32–37, Job's anguished request to *hear* from God was met with the *sound* of Elihu—an intrusion inadvertently exploited through Elihu's extended phonetic rhetoric. Elihu's counter-request to Job's is that his audience *hear* and

59. See, e.g., 34.35; 35.16 where Elihu accuses Job of lacking knowledge.

60. In a recent article, Karl G. Wilcox, "'Who is This...?': A Reading of Job 38.2", *JSOT* 78 (1998), pp. 85-95, suggested that the question posed by God here is directed at Elihu. Because the inquiry is located in the God/Job dialogue (38.1), he claims that it syntactically necessitates reference to Elihu, the last speaker, or else it would be rendered, 'Who are *you*...?' However, in response, John Bimson, 'Who is "This" in "Who is this...?" (Job 38.2) A Response to Karl G. Wilcox', *JSOT* 87 (2000), pp. 125-28, argued against Wilcox's position for the following reasons: (1) God is possibly speaking to some sort of heavenly consort or hypothetical third party and thus addressing Job indirectly; (2) for Wilcox to be consistent in his claim (Yahweh's reply in 38.2 follows Elihu so it must refer to him), he must also argue that the rest of Yahweh's speeches should instead follow ch. 31 because they respond to Job; (3) Yahweh implicitly critiqued Job's lack of knowledge regarding the numerous human-unaware activities in the cosmos; (4) finally, Job applies the challenge of Yahweh to himself in 42.3 suggesting that Job viewed the words as directed at himself. Certainly God is addressing Job in his speeches from chs. 38–41, yet Bimson's claim (2) does not necessarily follow from the biblical data. Wilcox's whole point is that the question is posed *to Job* but with reference to a person outside the dialogue (זה). The phrase מִי זה is not typically spoken to its referent. It is usually directed to an audience about a third party (1 Sam. 17.55-56; Isa. 63.1; Jer. 46.7; Ps. 24.8; cf. מִי הוּא in Job 13.19; 17.3, and מִי זֶה in Song 3.6; 6.10; 8.5). While it is not totally clear whether God is evoking a divine counsel here with Job as its single referent ([1], above), and Job does apply God's critique to himself, it can at least be sustained that God's opening invitation recalls, and even repudiates Elihu's earlier claims based upon its narrative positioning and semantic similarities (Elihu's claim to מְלִיץ which are תַּמִּים דַּעוּתָהּ and then God's question to one who speaks מְלִיץ which are בְּלִי דַעַתָּה). Perhaps the diachronic assumptions of biblical scholarship have too hastily ruled out this possibility. Although Bimson allows for an *implicit* dismissal of Elihu, the syntax and context suggests a more deliberate connection.

taste-test his words, specifically their sound, delivery, accuracy, divine inspiration and multiplicity. Yet the audience that he expended so much verbiage to secure—through numerous phonetic *apologias*—never explicitly responds.

Following the narrator's introduction, in which Elihu is depicted as full of anger, Elihu ironically introduces himself as careful and urgent, collected and about to explode (32.6b-22). Eventually, these tensions become so strained that they no longer hold up. Though Elihu carefully frames his arguments through phonetic *apologias* and critiques, his words constantly escape him in such a way that they undermine the legitimacy of his voice, especially in light of Job's painful experience and the divine voice that follows.

This suggests a more nuanced way of understanding how the ES function in the book of Job, confirming the suggestions of narrative critics that the speeches fit the overall schema of the book of Job, but disaffirming proposals that the ES soften the transition into the Divine Speeches. If the ES help to prepare the reader for God's voice it is only with fragmented elements of truth, and more likely, an intensified longing for a superior perspective.<sup>61</sup> Job ends his speeches in 31.35 with a cry for God's voice, Elihu intrudes, and then ends his speeches in 37.34 with the suggestion that God does not answer people like Job. Elihu's unexpected intrusion, lengthy monologues and overzealous confidence regarding his own words (*vis-à-vis* Job) fits the agonizing trajectory of Job's experience thus far. In the beginning Job gets what he never expected, and now we *with Job* get the verbose young Elihu—something we never saw coming. But in the end, even the one who surprises everyone gets surprised. Yahweh *does* speak to Job.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, I return to the words of Qoheleth, this time including the final words of 14b:

61. This is the difficult dynamic of Elihu's rhetoric (that he speaks so many true things) that leads some to associate Elihu's voice with the voice of the author. Yet, and I hope that this essay has demonstrated this, Elihu abuses his own truth. Conversely, and this is the nature of Job's rhetoric, Job speaks truth even as many things he said were not right. Vaclav Havel, in his essay 'The Politics of Hope', in *idem, Disturbing the Peace* (trans. Paul Wilson; New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 163-206 (195), puts this well regarding theater: 'ultimately, all theatre is built around the conflict between who a character seems to be and who he really is'.

62. I take it that God's voice was satisfactory to Job in its overall effect, though the individual elements of God's argument may have been painful, or overwhelming, for Job to hear. Job's satisfaction was an ironic reversal even of *his* expectations.

Words from a wise person's mouth are gracious. But the lips of a fool engulf them. At first, the words of their mouth are foolish, but in the end their mouth *brings* wicked madness. So the fool multiplies words. No one knows what will happen, and who can tell them what [or who!] will come after them? (Eccl. 10.12-14)