

**“Like a Garment Eaten by Moths” (Job 13:28):
Clothing, Nudity and Illness in the Book of Job**

The book of Job provides the most complex and detailed descriptions of illness in biblical literature. Job is afflicted with skin disease, “sore boils” on his entire body (2:7), elsewhere a characteristic of curse and divine punishment (Exod. 9:9; Deut. 28:27). He suffers from loss of appetite (6:7), sleeplessness (7:4), a ruptured kidney (16:13), and fever (30:30).

Accordingly, there has been a burgeoning interest concerning what the book might reveal about medical anthropology in the biblical world. Scholars have debated whether Job’s afflictions represent real somatic symptoms or if they are merely a manifestation of his psychological distress.¹ The book has been approached from the direction of disability studies,² as well as by those interested in how medical discourse shapes embodiment more

¹ Considering the psychosomatic and psychological dimensions of Job’s illness are Jack Kahn, *Job’s Illness, Loss, Grief and Integration: A Psychological Interpretation* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1975); Francois T. De Villiers, “Symptoms of Depression in Job – a Note on Psychological Exegesis,” *OTE* 17 (2004), pp. 275-14; Daniel Merkur, “Psychotherapeutic Change in the Book of Job,” in J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins (eds.), *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Vol. 2. *From Genesis to Apocalyptic Vision* (Westpoint: Praeger, 2004), pp. 119-39; Katharine J. Dell, “What Was Job’s Malady?” *JSOT* 41 (2016), pp. 61-77; and JiSeong J. Kwon, “Psychosomatic Approach to Job’s Body and Mind: Based on Somatic Symptom Disorder,” *J Relig Health* (2019), pp. 1-13.

² See Rebecca Raphael, “Things too Wonderful: A Disabled Reading of Job,” *PerspRS* 31 (2004), pp. 399-424; idem, *Biblical Corpora: Representations of Disability in Hebrew Biblical Literature* (LHBOTS 445; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 81-105; Jeremy Schipper, “Healing and Silence in the Epilogue of Job,” *WW* 30 (2010), pp. 16-22; Kirk Patston, “Disability Discrimination in the Book of Job,” in Andrew Picard and Myk Habets (eds.), *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.

generally.³ Less explored are the frequent references made in the text to dressing and undressing. These references demonstrate the various aesthetic dimensions, social contexts and functional roles of clothing from the world of the Hebrew Bible.⁴ As well as these

41-52; and Katherine E. Southwood, “‘You Are All Quacks; If Only You Would Shut Up’ (Job 13.4b-5a): Sin and Illness in the Sacred and the Secular, the Ancient and the Modern,” *Theology* 121 (2018), pp. 84-91.

³ See H. Viviers, “Body and Nature in Job,” *OTE* 14 (2001), pp. 510-24; Alec Basson, “Just Skin and Bones: The Longing for Wholeness of the Body in the Book of Job,” *VT* 58 (2008), pp. 287-99; Pierre van Hecke, “Is My Flesh Bronze? (Job 6:12): Metaphors of Fluidity and Solidarity in the Description of the Body in the Book of Job,” *Classical Bulletin* 86 (2010), pp. 101-15; Amy Erickson, “‘Without My Flesh I Will See God’: Job’s Rhetoric of the Body,” *JBL* 132 (2013), pp. 295-313; Scott C. Jones, “Corporeal Discourse in the Book of Job,” *JBL* 132 (2013), pp. 845-63; Johan de Joode, “The Body and Its Boundaries: The Coherence of Conceptual Metaphors for Job’s Distress and Lack of Control,” *ZAW* 126 (2014), pp. 554-69; and Ingrid E. Lilly, “*Rûaḥ* Embodied: Job’s Internal Disease from the Perspective of Mesopotamian Medicine,” in Annette Weissenrieder (ed.), *Borders: Terminologies, Ideologies, and Performances* (WUNT 366, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 323-36.

⁴ The book attests to the economic value of textiles, equivalizing the stockpiling of clothing to that of silver (27:16-17). Clothing as protection from the elements is an important theme (24:7, 10; 31:19-20). Relatedly, as items with both high economic value and importance for survival, the stealing of clothing is condemned. The text reads: “For you took pledges from your brothers for no reason, and you stripped the clothing (*bigdê*) from the naked” (22:6). This coheres with extra biblical and non-biblical evidence. Amos denounced those who “lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes (*bēgādîm*) taken in pledge” (Amos 2:8). A seventh-century pottery sherd recovered from Meşad Ḥashavyahu describes the complaint of a field labourer whose garment (*begeḏ*) has been seized. The plaintiff pleads to the local governor to redress this injustice. See Joseph Naveh, “A

references to actual textile items, the book of Job also refers to clothing and acts of dressing and undressing in a much more symbolic sense, in order to describe various psychological states such as shame, honour, majesty and glory:

Those who hate you will be *clothed* with shame,
and the tent of the wicked will be no more (8:22).

He has stripped me of my honour
and has taken *the crown* off my head (19:9).

I put on righteousness *and it clothed me*,
my just dealing was *like a robe and a turban* (29:14).

Adorn yourself, then, with majesty and excellency,
and *clothe yourself* with glory and honour (40:10).

This metaphorical use of clothing and dressing is in common with wider biblical literature. In the Hebrew Bible, a person can be clothed in “righteousness,” while “righteousness” can also be worn as a breastplate or robe (Isa. 59:17; 61:10).⁵ Clothing related to the semantic domain

Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century BC,” *IEJ* 10 (1960), pp. 129-39. The tearing of garments is part of a series of mortuary rituals which functioned to allow mourners to use their bodies to mimic and enact the transformation and fragmentation of the body after death. Both Job and his friends perform this action of ritual identification in response to Job’s plight (1:20; 2:12).

⁵ On Isaiah’s “robe of righteousness,” see Scott R.A. Starbuck, “Disrobing an Isaianic Metaphor: *mē’îl šēdāqâ* (‘Robe of Righteousness’) as Power Transfer in Isaiah 61:10,” in Antonios Finitis (ed.), *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: “For All Her Household Are Clothed in*

of “glory” is found in Pss 8:6; 45:4; Sir. 6:31; 45:6-8; 50:11.⁶ One can be clothed in “strength” and “dignity” (Prov. 31:17, 25), or conversely in “shame” (Pss 35:26; 109:29; 132:18). To be clothed in the garments of the slain is tantamount to death itself (Isa. 14:19).

In this essay, I am particularly interested in Job’s metaphorical references to dress. But beyond the use of clothing metaphors in order to describe *psychological* states, I argue that the domains of dress and undress are essential for understanding Job’s *somatic* condition. In the metaphors explored above, Job’s state prior to sickness is described in terms of a full set of clothing: he is clothed “in righteousness” with both robe and turban (29:14). But as Job describes his increasingly sickened condition, these descriptions are couched in metaphors correlated with a loss of clothing: he is stripped, and his crown removed (19:9). Scholarship on nudity in the ancient Near East typically connects nakedness to shame, or rather stresses the erotic aspect of nudity, usually along gendered lines.⁷ As Holger Gzella explains,

Crimson” (LHBOTS 679; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 143-59. Starbuck argues that the metaphor is being exploited for political purposes, as a positive reversal of social status for the postexilic community.

⁶ On this metaphor see Marilyn E. Burton, “Robed in Majesty: Clothing as a Metaphor for the Classical Hebrew Semantic Domain of *kābôd*,” in Christoph Berner et al. (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 289-301.

⁷ On nudity in the ancient Near East, see in particular Julia Asher-Greve and Debra Sweeney, “On Nakedness, Nudity, and Gender in Egyptian and Mesopotamian Art,” in Silvia Schroer (ed.), *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art* (OBO 220; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 125-76; Julia Assante, “Sex, Magic and the Liminal Body in the Erotic Art and Texts of the Old Babylonian Period,” in Simo Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (eds.), *Sex and Gender in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the XLVIIe Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Helsinki* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus, 2002), pp. 27-52;

“nakedness is associated with weakness and shame.”⁸ On the other hand, according to Wolfgang Zwickel, in the case of women, “undressing always had an erotic aspect.”⁹ By these accounts, Job’s clothing divestment is merely related to his loss of status, as an additional source of shame. But nudity can have a range of anthropological, sociocultural and religious meanings in biblical literature.¹⁰ In this essay, I add an additional implication to the

idem, “Undressing the Nude: Problems in Analysing Nudity in Ancient Art, with an Old Babylonian Case Study,” in Silvia Schroer (ed.), *Images and Gender: Contributions to the Hermeneutics of Reading Ancient Art* (OBO 220; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 177-208.

⁸ Holger Gzella, “Nudity and Clothing in the Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible,” in Christoph Berner et al. (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 217-36 (217).

⁹ Wolfgang Zwickel, “Fabrication, Functions, and Uses of Textiles in the Hebrew Bible,” in Christoph Berner et al. (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 187-215 (187).

¹⁰ Nudity can certainly be sexual (Lev. 18:6-19; 20:11, 17-21; Ezek. 16:36-37; 18:8; 23:29), or connote ideas of shame – indeed, *qālōn*, “shame,” functions as a synonym for nakedness in Jer. 13:26 and Nah. 3:5. Enforced nudity can be a means of punishment and degradation (Ezek. 16:39; 23:29; Hos. 2:5, 11; Mic. 1:11). Nudity can mark out abnormal human behaviour, for example Noah’s drunkenness in Gen. 9:20-27. Nudity can have religious dimensions, thus Saul prophesized naked (1 Sam. 19:24). On the other hand, a priest must “cover his naked flesh” with underwear when entering the inner sanctuary on pain of death (Exod. 28:43; 39:28; Lev. 6:10; 16:4; Ezek. 44:18). On the implications of this requirement, see in particular Deborah W. Rooke, “Breeches of the Covenant: Gender, Garments and the Priesthood,” in Deborah W. Rooke (ed.), *Embroidered Garments: Priests and Gender in Biblical Israel* (HBM 25; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), pp. 19-39. And nudity and clothing can mark out the wild from the civilized, as in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

loss of clothing items in biblical texts. I argue that cultural associations between dress, nudity and illness inform the book of Job, and therefore that dress and nudity are connected to and in fact a key part of Job's experience of being ill.

This thesis relates to the complex relationship which existed between clothing and the body in the ancient Near East. In order to reconstruct this relationship, I draw upon insights from anthropology as well as a close reading of biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts. Anthropologists have observed certain cultures in which clothing has the potential to index the personhood of its wearer, as an expansion, distribution or extension of the phenomenological self. Turning from this theoretical material to ancient Near Eastern literature, I begin by exploring biblical texts in which clothing functions as a spatial extension of the body. I argue that these ideas saw clothing and especially clothing divestment take on a heavy symbolic value, and thus clothing metaphors could be utilized to describe and index bodily health, as demonstrated by the myth of Ištar's descent to the underworld. This association between clothing, nudity and illness is then proposed to be crucial for understanding and interpreting some of the more obscure references to clothing in the book of Job, adding additional resources for translation and interpretation. The states of dress and undress are essential to Job's somatic experience of illness, and by unpacking these ideas we can better comprehend ancient Israelite and Judahite conceptions of medical anthropology, as well as embodiment more generally.

Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing and the Body

Recently, nudity in biblical literature has been explored from many directions in Christoph Berner et al. (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019).

In exploring the complex relationship which existed between clothing and the body in the Hebrew Bible and the wider ancient Near East, I am influenced by sociological and anthropological approaches to dress and the body.¹¹ Though Theresa Winge has criticised scholars who study the body without discussion of dress or, conversely, scholars of dress who fail to include the body in their discussions,¹² there is an increasing body of scholarship which has considered the relationship that exists between the body and the items which populate it.¹³ The sociologist Quentin Bell famously alleged that “our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even the soul.”¹⁴ While Bell’s comments were hyperbolic, a number of social theorists have recognized that in some societies clothing can form a spatial extension of the body:

¹¹ For an excellent recent discussion of method in utilizing social anthropology in order to interpret biblical texts, see Katherine E. Southwood, *Marriage by Capture in the Book of Judges: An Anthropological Approach* (SOTSMS 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 50-4.

¹² Theresa M. Winge, *Body Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2012), p. 19. Joanne Entwistle has characterized the lack of interest of the social sciences in clothing and adornment due to perceptions that this assemblage consists of “unimportant, ephemeral nonsense.” There are gendered assumptions at play that relate clothing and adornment to the female domain, and hence consider sartorial customs and sumptuary practices to be unworthy of serious analysis. See *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 53.

¹³ See especially the essays collected in Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson (eds.), *Body Dressing* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

¹⁴ Quentin Bell, *Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1976), p. 19.

If the human body is seen as a spatial form, the skin represents the demarcation line between the inside and the outside. Clothing then becomes an extension of this corporal space boundary and the interface between a person's corporal space and the external space of the environment.¹⁵

Thus, in some cultures, clothing and other items of adornment worn closely upon the body are understood to comprise an extension, expansion or distribution of the phenomenological self. Utilizing the language of the anthropologist Philippe Erikson, we might understand clothing and jewellery in these cultures to be “extra-somatic body parts.”¹⁶ Erikson and other scholars of the Native Amazonia have demonstrated how objects worn closely on the body could be subjectivized as extensions of their owners' bodies.¹⁷ And this has implications for somatic health. Crucially for my interpretation of Job, Joana Miller has explored the link between body ornaments and personhood among the Nambikwara, a tribe which occupies the region extending from the northwest state of Mato Grosso and the neighbouring areas of the

¹⁵ Ingrid Losheck, *When Clothes Become Fashion: Design and Innovation Systems* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), p. 17. This blurred phenomenological relationship between clothing and the body was noted already by James Frazer: “whatever is done to clothes will be felt by man himself.” See *The Magic Art*. 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1911), vol. 1, p. 207.

¹⁶ See Philippe Erikson, “Obedient Things: Reflections on the Matis Theory of Materiality,” in Fernando Santos-Granero (ed.), *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood* (Tuscan: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), pp. 173-91.

¹⁷ Fernando Santos-Granero writes that “it is not so much that the body is a clothing but rather that clothing is a body.” See “Sensual Vitalities: Noncorporeal Modes of Sensing and Knowing in Native Amazonia,” *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4 (2006), pp. 57-80. See also the essays collected in idem (ed.), *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood* (Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press, 2009).

state of Rondônia. Since body ornaments are considered to be a constitutive part of the person in this society, in the language of this tribe illness is frequently described as the loss of body ornaments, or as the exchange of one's body ornaments with those of other beings.¹⁸ Clothing and clothing divestment is utilized to index and describe bodily health, and the removal of items of dress correlated to a weakening of the physical body.

Clothing and the Body in the Hebrew Bible

I argue that a phenomenological relationship between clothing and the body was also operative in the thought-world which shaped the Hebrew Bible. This is demonstrated by a number of texts in which clothing or jewellery transferred between individuals also transfers their ethnicity or royal status. Thus, the clothing worn by the king takes on the symbolic value of his sovereignty. Royalty can therefore be conferred between one individual to another through the transfer of items of royal dress: by gifting his signet ring or other items of clothing, the king could confer prestige and even royal status onto an individual. When Jonathan and David swap clothing, Jonathan renounces his right as crown prince and transfers royal succession to David (1 Sam. 18:4).¹⁹ We might also recall Deut. 21:10-14, in which the captured foreign woman is stripped of clothing and so presumably also her

¹⁸ Joana Miller, "Things as Persons: Body Ornaments and Alterity Among the Mamaindê (Nambikwara)," in Fernando Santos-Granero (ed.), *The Occult Life of Things: Native Amazonian Theories of Materiality and Personhood* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), pp. 60-81.

¹⁹ An Akkadian tablet (RS 17.159) preserves the divorce petition between a thirteenth-century king of Ugarit and his queen. The couple's son, Utrisharruma, is permitted to return with his mother to Amurru – but in so doing he would lose his right to the Ugaritic crown, symbolized by his removal of clothing which is then left upon the throne.

previous ethnic affiliation, and thereafter is eligible for marriage to an Israelite male.²⁰ The gifting of Pharaoh's signet ring to Joseph, along with fine linen garments and a gold chain, symbolizes Joseph's royal power and authority, as second only to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:42). In the books of Esther and Daniel, once a king has sealed an edict with his signet ring, the law takes on a life of its own and cannot be changed, even by royal decree. The king might regret his edict, but he can no longer reverse it (Est. 3:10, 12; 8:2, 8, 10; Dan. 6:10). The clothing items of the king are thus understood as an extension of the king himself. They have and can confer real, tangible power and authority: they encode his personhood and hence a law sealed by the personal ring of the king can stand in for the king in the case of his physical absence. Jezebel, for example, utilized King Ahab's signet ring to seal letters and therefore authorize them as authoritative (1 Kgs 21:8). The king's presence and authority are made physically manifest via his signet ring, thus even the king himself cannot challenge a law which has

²⁰ A marriage contract from Emar provides a clause that describes how a man can divorce his wife if she has been unfaithful: the wife must remove her robe and leave it upon a chair. See John Huehnergard, "Five Tablets from the Vicinity of Emar," *RA* 77 (1983), pp. 11-43 (30). In certain Akkadian texts, the woman is stripped completely in order to initiate the divorce. See Cécile Michel, "Les Assyriens et leurs femmes anatoliennes," in J.G. Derkson (ed.), *Anatolia and the Jazira during the Old Assyrian Period* (PIHANS 111, Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabike Oosten, 2008), pp. 209-29 (223 n. 76). As well as stripping, cutting or tearing garments could ratify a divorce. In this context, the hem of a person's garment seems to have had a special significance. Divorce could be ratified by a spouse cutting the hem of the partner's clothing, ritually representing their separation. For examples, see J.J. Finkelstein, *Cutting the sissiktu in Divorce Proceedings* (WdO 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), esp. pp. 236-40; and Meir Malul, *Studies in Mesopotamian Legal Symbolism* (AOAT 221; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), pp. 197-208. Stripping a person of their clothes thus deprives them of their legal status as a member of the family.

been sealed in this way. This function of the signet ring extended beyond royal contexts, to the extent that the signet ring became a symbol of permanence and authority more generally.²¹ The book of Proverbs commands wisdom's teaching to be "bound upon your fingers" (Prov. 7:3). NET renders the Hebrew *'ešba*, "finger," as forearm here, in light of the commandment in the book of Deuteronomy to bind the words of the Deuteronomic law code on the forearm and forehead to serve as a reminder (Deut. 6:8). But the command might better be interpreted in light of the practice of wearing signet rings upon fingers. Just as the signet ring was a symbol for permanence and authority as a material symbol of the body from which it came, so too should wisdom's teachings never be forgotten.²²

The ability of clothing to transfer social and ethnic status is also found in narratives involving prophetic or priestly succession. Thus Elijah throws his mantle over Elisha to

²¹ We might also recall the *'ērābôn* or pledge which Tamar requests from Judah, and which will stand in as a sign of his paternity in his physical absence: his signet ring, cord and staff (Gen. 38:18). It is possible that Judah's cord refers here to the practice of wearing the signet ring not only on the finger, but also on a cord around the neck. In the Song of Songs, a signet seal is set "over your heart" as well as on the wrist (Song 8:6), suggesting an object which could be worn both around the neck and on the hand, presumably on the finger as a ring although William Hallo has suggested that seals could also be worn as bracelets. In this context, he connects Judah's "staff" to a pin worn to affix the signet seal. See "'As a Seal Upon Thy Heart': Glyptic Roles in the Biblical World," *BRev* 1 (1985), pp. 20-7. In Prov. 3:3; 6:21, commandments are to be worn around the neck or upon the heart, and we might similarly interpret this in light of the practice of wearing inscribed seals around the neck.

²² A similar idea belies the reference to signet seals in Song 8:6, which expresses the idea that, like an edict sealed by a signet seal – like death itself – love cannot be escaped from. The conception is the same as that of the sealed edicts which can no longer be changed in the books of Esther and Daniel.

designate him as his chosen successor (1 Kgs 19:19). Elijah will use the same garment to part the waters of the Jordan, indicating the perceived power and efficacy of the garment (2 Kgs 2:8; cf. 2 Kgs 2:14). Elijah's mantel, worn closely upon the prophet's body, is invested with prophetic power. By donning it, Elisha appropriates this power and can thereafter fulfil miraculous roles. Before Aaron dies, he is stripped of his clothing. In order for Aaron to vacate the office of the high priesthood, he must remove his priestly garments. These items are then dressed on the body of his son Eleazar, who thereafter assumes the role (Num. 20:22-28). The potential of clothing to index abstract conceptions of body and self animates and informs these texts.

Ištar's Descent: The Interface Between Clothing, Nudity and Illness

Utilizing insights from anthropology, thus far I have argued that in the Hebrew Bible bodies were understood to be "multi-material"²³ – that the items worn closely upon the body were understood to be constitutive parts of the person. Accordingly, clothing divestiture as well as the destruction of clothing had a weighty symbolic value. An excellent ancient Near Eastern example of this is found in the Sumerian and Akkadian descriptions of Inanna's and Ištar's descent to the underworld, during which the goddess is stripped of her items of dress.²⁴ In

²³ I owe this helpful phrase to Professor Francesca Stavrakopoulou (personal communication).

²⁴ For translations of these myths, see Jeremy Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 68-76; and Pirjo Lapinkivi, *Ištar's Descent and Resurrection: Introduction, Cuneiform Text, and Transliteration with a Translation, Glossary, and Extensive Commentary* (SAACT 6; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010). The Akkadian myth is clearly dependent upon the much more elaborated Sumerian tale. The Akkadian version was composed as part of the "modernization, simplification, expansion and corruption" of

ancient Mesopotamia, the dead were understood to be separated from the living by formidable barriers: both Inanna's and Ištar's journeys to the underworld involved a passage through seven gates, at each of which the gatekeeper requested that the goddess disregard an item of clothing before being allowed to pass through. Naked, the goddess finally enters the underworld. In the Akkadian version of the myth, sixty diseases enter her body, diseases of the eyes, arms, feet, heart and head. In both accounts, she is unable to return to the land of the living. The goddess is dead, and in the Sumerian version of the myth, her lifeless corpse is hung up upon a hook.

Marten Stol provides a fairly typical explanation for the removal of Ištar's clothing: he argues that the purpose of Ištar's forced stripping is to humiliate her.²⁵ Dina Katz suggests that the requirement for nudity was to render the goddess defenceless.²⁶ But we must also consider the symbolic value of clothing in the ancient world. If we look closely at the semantic level of these acts of dressing and undressing, it becomes apparent that, while dressed, the goddess is immortal. When undressed, she experiences death. In the cultural conception which informs these mythological texts, it is the removal of clothing which allows Ištar to enter into the realm of the dead, and without her clothing, she cannot leave.²⁷ This is

earlier Sumerian texts which took place in the second and first millenniums BCE. See Benjamin R. Foster, *Akkadian Literature of the Late Period* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), p. 100.

²⁵ Marten Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (trans. Helen Richardson and Mervyn Richardson; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), pp. 20, 642.

²⁶ Dina Katz, *The Image of the Netherworld in the Sumerian Sources* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2003), p. 265.

²⁷ Similarly, Gilgamesh instructs Enkidu to wear soiled clothing on his visit to the underworld, again symbolizing the necessity for a weakened body represented via dress as a prerequisite to visiting the domain of the dead. For the text and translation, see Andrew R. George,

highly reminiscent of the observations of Miller on the Nambikwara, where illness is frequently described in terms of the loss of body ornaments.²⁸ As a bodily item, clothing could index ideas of bodily wellness and health and thus the removal, destruction, transfer or transformation of clothing can relate to ideas of illness or even death. We have already seen this in the clothing metaphors employed by the book of Job, where Job's state prior to sickness is described in terms of a full set of clothing – but when his increasing sickness is described, this is couched with metaphors that describe a loss of items of dress. In fact, damaged clothing and damaged bodies are often paralleled in biblical literature,²⁹ while the tearing of garments can express social and political degradation.³⁰ This latter image is complicit with the common use of the body as a metaphor for the wider social order in the Hebrew Bible.³¹ As a part of the body, items of dress can be similarly construed.

Clothing, Nudity and Illness in the Book of Job

The Epic of Gilgamesh: The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 184, ll. 185-94.

²⁸ Miller, "Things as Persons," pp. 60-81.

²⁹ See e.g., Ps. 102:26; Isa. 50:9; 51:6; Sir. 14:17.

³⁰ 1 Kgs 11:29-31; 1 Sam. 15:27-28.

³¹ See especially Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), pp. 51-2. If the body can serve as a mirror for the ordering of society as a whole, social commentary can therefore be expressed by recalling bodies whose boundaries have been breached, hence the metaphor found in a number of prophetic texts which can be understood as a description of national disobedience akin to "whoring" (Isa. 1:21; Jer. 3:1-10; Ezek. 16:15-17; 23:4-8; Hos. 2:1-5; 5:3).

Thus in the book of Job, metaphors involving illness, the body, dress and undress coalesce. Indeed, birth into corporeal form during creation is described in terms of being clothed:

You clothed me with skin and flesh
and knit me together with bones and sinews (10:11).³²

On the other hand, death is associated with nudity:

Naked came I out of my mother's womb,
and naked I shall return there (1:21).

This verse has received particular attention due to the infelicity which some commentators have seen in the comparison. The obvious question is posed by Nicodemus to Jesus (John 3:4): can one enter the mother's womb a second time? Naphtali Tur-Sinai even argues that two different notions have been fused: "Naked I came forth from the womb and naked shall I

³² The creation of the world itself is also couched using metaphors of clothing: God proclaims that he made clouds the "garment" of the sea (38:9). This is highly reminiscent of Prov. 30:4, which speaks of God who has "gathered the wind in his fists, who has wrapped up the waters in a garment." The analogy in Prov. 30:4 is strengthened even further if the difficult *bēhopnâw*, "in his fists," is emended in light of the LXX *en kolpō* to *bēhiṣnō* or *bēhoṣnō*, "in the fold of his garment." Indeed, Kevin Cathcart has suggested that there is no need to emend the text, interpreting MT *bēhopnâw* in light of Ugaritic *hpn*, a kind of garment or robe. See "Proverbs 30,4 and Ugaritic *hpn*, 'Garment,'" *CBQ* 32 (1970), pp. 418-20. The resulting translation is "who has gathered the winds in his robe, who has wrapped up the waters in a garment." Similarly, the Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscription describes a goddess "sewing up" the heavens (KAI 312 I:6-7). In all three texts, we find a deity using textiles in order to control and effect the weather.

go to my grave,” and “from dust I did come and from dust I shall return.”³³ But as C.L. Seow has argued, the fusion is not at all haphazard: “the poetry presumes plays on the association of a human mother and mother earth.”³⁴ The primary comparison is between nakedness at birth and nakedness at death. This has been interpreted in terms of “natural” nudity, nudity not yet tainted by negative associations with shame or degradation, in the fashion of Adam and Eve in the garden.³⁵ But nudity in the Garden of Eden is a trope used to underscore the idea that the garden is a place of origin inaccessible to contemporary times.³⁶ In the garden it

³³ Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967).

³⁴ C.L. Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Illuminations; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2013), p. 282; cf. Gregory Vall, “The Enigma of Job 1,21a,” *Bib* 76 (1995), pp. 325-42. In Ps. 139:15, the human body is formed from the depths of the earth; cf. Gen. 2:9; 18:27; Job 4:19; Ps. 103:14. In Sir. 40:1, the earth is the “mother of us all.” See also Psalm 139, where v. 13 speaks of individual’s creation in the womb, and v. 15 of the same individual’s creation in the depths of the earth. That Job declares that “naked I shall return *there* (*šāmāh*)” may also be significant. Greek *ekei*, “there,” can be used to refer to the underworld, e.g. Euripides, *Medea*, 1065. See G.R. Driver, “Ancient Lore and Modern Knowledge,” in André Caquot and Marc Philonenko (ed.), *Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1971), pp. 277-86. In Eccl. 3:17 and Job 3:17, 19, *šam* may be being used in this way.

³⁵ See e.g., Claudia Bender, *Die Sprache des Textilien: Untersuchungen zu Kleidung und Textilien im Alten Testament* (BWANT 177; Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 2008), pp. 134-8.

³⁶ Jürgen van Oorschot, “Nudity and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: Theological and Anthropological Aspects,” in Christoph Berner et al. (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 237-53 (241). Dress has a similar function in the epic of Gilgamesh. In the Old Babylonian version of the epic, Enkidu is dressed by the prostitute Shamhat prior to his entrance into the civilized world. See George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, p. 12, ll. 55-71.

was acceptable to be nude; but in the contemporary world this is unacceptable. Nudity in the book of Job cannot be understood in the same way as nudity in the Garden of Eden. Instead, this reference to nudity attests to nakedness as a *fragile state of being*, exemplified by the new-born and dying person. Nudity thus indexes a particular weakened bodily state.

Similarly, metaphors drawn from the world of clothing can describe the state of the body's health:

My flesh is clothed with worms³⁷ and dirty scabs;³⁸

³⁷ David J.A. Clines (*Job 1-20* [WBC 17; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989], p. 163) proposes a homonym of *rimmâ*, “worms,” as a medical term, cognate with Arabic *ramaya* (VI form), “[of wound] become putrid.” Similarly, Alfred Guillaume (*Studies in the Book of Job, with a New Translation* [ALUS 2; Leiden: Brill, 1968], p. 85) connects the Hebrew word to Arabic *rimmat*, “rottenness.” However, *rimmâ* with the meaning “worms” is attested in Job 17:14; 21:26; 24:20; 25:6; Exod. 16:24; Isa. 14:11; and in the Deir ‘Allâ plaster inscription (KAI 312 II:8). It is often connected with rotten food and the grave (Exod. 16:24; Isa. 14:11). In the collective sense, the word is used to denote the worms which devour corpses (Sir. 7:17; 10:11). The notion of Job’s body “clothed” with worms implies decay without the need to make recourse to comparative philology.

³⁸ Literally *gîš ‘āpār*, “clod of dust.” The word *gîš* is a hapax form of *gûš*, “clod.” Clines (*Job 1-20*, p. 163) thinks *‘āpār* has been added as a gloss on the rare word form. Cf. Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; London: Nelson, 1967), p. 100: it is “necessary to specify the clod of earth.” With a medical sense, the idiom probably has the meaning of something like scab or pustule. See already G.R. Driver, “Problems in the Hebrew Text of Job,” in Martin Noth, D. Winton-Thomas, and H.H. Rowley (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (VTS 3; Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 73-6. Dust is a symbol of death in Job 17:16; and in 21:26, dust and worm appear together as a word-pair symbolizing the grave. These images have been carefully chosen to depict Job’s physical symptoms, suggesting decay and death.

my skin is hardened and festering (7:5).

Here the image of being clothed is utilized in a graphic description of Job's physical complaints. According to Norman Habel, a clothing metaphor is used instead of medical language in order to heighten the image of Job's physical torment and mental anguish.³⁹ But according to the body-clothing interface explored above, clothing as an index of bodily health was an important part of medical anthropology in the ancient world. Indeed, Mesopotamian curses frequently threaten the encroachment of *šaharsubbû* or skin disease upon the body as if an item of clothing.⁴⁰ Similarly, we learn

³⁹ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 159.

⁴⁰ See e.g., SAA 2: 11, ll. 4-7; 45, ll. 419-421; 72, ll. 10-14. That skin disease in particular is associated with clothing metaphors is intriguing. The complex relationship that existed between body and clothing demonstrated by the logic of these curses may explain why items of cloth can suffer from *šāra 'at*, "skin disease," in biblical literature (Lev. 14:55). On curses which utilize the imagery of clothing, see Laura Quick, "Clothed in Curses: Ritual, Curse and Story in the Deir 'Alla Plaster Inscription," in Laura Quick et al. (eds.), *To Gaul, to Greece and Into Noah's Ark: Essays in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (JSSS 44; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 95-109.

So, he⁴¹ wastes away like something rotten,⁴²
like a garment eaten by moths (13:28).

Edward Greenstein has connected this verse to the enigmatic reference to Job sewing:

I have sewed sackcloth on my skin,
and buried my horn in the dust (16:15).

According to Greenstein, since Job's flesh has rotten away like a garment, "the way to make himself physically whole again and repair his flesh is to try and cover his disintegrating skin with a layer of manufactured fabric."⁴³ Sackcloth is of course a fabric commonly utilized in

⁴¹ The use of the third person here is unexpected, as the previous verses provide the first-person speech of Job. Accordingly, most commentators argue that the verse has been transposed from chapter 14, usually following v. 2. See e.g. Marvin H. Pope, *Job: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 15; New York: Doubleday, 2008), p. 104; Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 195; Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 323. On the other hand, Seow (*Job 1-21*, p. 652) argues that the switch is poetic, functioning to highlight that Job has lost his connection to his own body.

⁴² Clines (*Job 1-20*, p. 283) emends *rāqāb*, "decay," to *rōqeb*, "goatskin bottle," since OG has *askō*, "skin." But this word does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. In Hos. 5:12, *kā'āš*, "like a moth," is parallel to *kārāqāb*, "like dry rot," which might suggest that the words are functioning as a parallel pair and cautioning against the emendation. For *rāqāb* with the meaning "decay" or "rot," see Prov. 12:4; 14:30; Hab. 3:16.

⁴³ Greenstein, "Metaphors of Illness and Wellness in Job," p. 44.

mourning rituals.⁴⁴ David Clines therefore relates Job's actions to the severity of his situation: the sewed on fabric indicates that he is in a permanent state of mourning.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the paralleled cola go on to describe how Job has buried his horn, the symbol of his power and dignity, in the earth.⁴⁶ This cola thus describes Job's weakened physical and mental state. Accordingly, our verse could also be understood as referring to bodily wellbeing – it describes the state of Job's skin.⁴⁷ Job's body is connected to sackcloth as both a rough and coarse fabric, providing a gruesome image of his diseased skin, as well as to ideas of death and mourning. Due to his illness, the boundaries of his body are visibly breached and breaking down, like a moth-eaten garment. This affliction is so acute that it is described graphically through clothes which abhor their owner (9:31), an image which has surprised some commentators enough that they have suggested emending the text.⁴⁸ But in light of the

⁴⁴ For sackcloth as the dress of mourning, see Gen. 37:32; 2 Sam. 3:31; 1 Kgs 20:31-32; 21:27-29; 2 Kgs 6:30; 19:1-2; Isa. 15:3; 20:2; 22:12; 32:11-12; 37:1-2; 58:5; Jer. 4:8; 6:26; 48:37; 49:3; Ezek. 7:18; 27:31; Joel 1:8, 13; Amos 8:10; Jon. 3:5-6, 8; Pss 35:13; 69:11; Lam. 2:10; Est. 4:1-5; Dan. 9:3; Neh. 9:1; 1 Chr. 21:16.

⁴⁵ Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 386.

⁴⁶ On the imagery of the horn, see Pope, *Job*, p. 124.

⁴⁷ This recalls J.V. Kinnier Wilson, "Leprosy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *RA* 60 (1966), pp. 47-58 (56), who connects this verse to a skin disease which would cause the skin to become rough or coarse.

⁴⁸ According to the most common usage of the Piel of *tā'ab*, "to abhor," the verse describes how Job's personified clothing hates him (so NRSV, TNIV, NJPS, etc.). However, Walter L. Michel, *Job in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (BibOr 42; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1987), pp. 231-32, repoints the verb to the passive, and takes the suffix to be datival, thus: "my clothing would be a horror to me." However, the Pual of *tā'ab* is not attested elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew – a Niphal verb would be required to derive this meaning. See Seow, *Job 1-21*, p. 570.

use of clothing to index the health of the body, the image becomes more comprehensible: Job's clothing, the symbol of his vital body, has rejected him.

In the cases explored thus far, that these references to clothing and textiles may be connected to bodily health is reasonably obvious and uncontroversial. However, other references to clothing and nudity from the book of Job may be reinterpreted in light of bodily health, with significant implications for understanding their meaning and intention. Job 12:17-20 describes a macabre procession:

He leads counsellors away stripped
and makes judges mad
He loosens the bonds of kings
and binds a loincloth around their waist.
He leads priests away stripped
and overthrows the potentates.
He deprives the trusted advisers of speech
and takes away the discernment of elders.
Upon nobles he pours disgrace,
and loosens the belt of the mighty.

The text is difficult, and not all commentators agree on what exactly is being described. The first verse of the pericope, v. 17, describes counsellors who have been stripped and judges who have been made mad. G.R. Driver apparently felt that the two cola did not sufficiently parallel one another, and hence suggested deriving the adjective *šōlāl*, here “stripped,” from an Arabic root meaning “to be mad,” thus both the counsellors and judges have had their

senses removed.⁴⁹ However, this root is not attested elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew. Even less convincingly, Alfred Guillaume equated the word with Arabic *tafalfala*, “took short steps,” suggesting that the verse described counsellors led away in fetters.⁵⁰ On the basis of the LXX translation of *šēlāl* (Q *šōlāl*) in Mic. 1:8 as *anupodetos*, “barefooted,” a number of commentators have translated *šōlāl* as “barefoot” here in Job 12:17, 19, too. Clines, for example, refers to captives being led away barefoot in Isa. 20:3-4 and Mic. 1:8.⁵¹ However, in Mic. 1:8 the idiom *hālak šōlāl*, “to walk naked/barefoot,” is attested in parallel to *‘ārôm*, “naked,” and thus it is by no means certain that “barefootedness” rather than nudity is the intention of the text.⁵² In any case, both counsellors and priests (v. 19) are described as lacking either their full regalia, or having had their sandals removed.⁵³

⁴⁹ G.R. Driver, “Problems in Job,” *AJSL* 52 (1935-36), pp. 160-70 (160).

⁵⁰ Alfred Guillaume, “A Contribution to Hebrew Lexicography,” *BSOAS* 16 (1954), pp. 1-12.

⁵¹ Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 300.

⁵² Moreover, contra Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 176, we can hardly say that *šōlāl* is the characteristic word for barefootedness either - *yāḥēp* is the word used for barefooted in Isa. 20:2.

⁵³ If this latter image is indeed in sight, it is more unpleasant than first appears. As early as the Pyramid Texts, the Egyptian phrase *ḥr t̪b(w)t/t̪bty*, “under the sandals,” occurs with the meaning “to be subject to someone,” and by the Eighteenth Dynasty this idiom had become a standard formula applied to the pharaoh as protector of Egypt. See F.J. Stendebach, “*regel*,” *TDOT* 13 (2014), pp. 309-24 (311). This implication of the shod foot is also found in biblical literature, thus “Upon Edom I hurl my sandal” is used as an idiom to describe God’s territorial conquest in Ps. 60:10. Similarly, David’s conquests are described by the expression that his enemies have been placed under the soles of his feet (1 Kgs 5:3). In the same way that the shod foot could communicate authority and mastery, the removal of footwear communicated loss, subservience and defeat. Bare feet thus signal a loss of freedom in captivity (Isa. 20:2-4; 2 Chr. 28:15); while personal loss was communicated by the

The text goes on to describe how God has loosened the bonds of kings, binding a loincloth around their waist (v. 18). The word translated here as “bonds,” *mûsar*, properly means “discipline, instruction,” and is therefore usually emended to *môšēr*, “bond,” on the basis of the Targum and Vulgate translations.⁵⁴ The idiom of loosening bonds typically refers to the liberation of prisoners (Isa. 3:2; Ps. 116:16). Yet the surrounding verses clearly speak of a humiliating, degrading situation. The “binding or girding of the loins” refers to tucking one’s tunic into a belt, usually in preparation for some physical activity. This need not be purely militaristic. Katherine Low, for example, has argued that as well as signalling upcoming physical exertion, the “girding of the loins” indicates an expectation of gendered masculine performance.⁵⁵ To be girded thus connotes ideas of power and status. To loosen bonds therefore implies a loss of power. This recalls Isa. 45:1, where Cyrus’s ungirding of the loins of kings describes his subdual of the nations. This image is continued in v. 21, where God loosens the belt of the mighty. Some commentators have emended the continuation of the cola in v. 18 so that *’ēzôr*, “loincloth,” becomes *’ēzûr*, “bond,” apparently providing a better parallel to these images of loosened bonds.⁵⁶ But in this case, God binds the object around the subject, and as we have seen, this would provide the opposite meaning than the bonds that have been loosened: to be bound or girded with a belt would imply physical and mental potency. The *’ēzôr* most probably described a linen loincloth rather than a leather belt (see e.g. 2 Kgs 1:8; Jer. 13:2; Ps. 2:3), and thus describes the item of clothing

removal of sandals during mourning (Ezek. 24:17, 23; Jer. 2:24; 2 Sam. 15:30). The forceful removal of a person’s sandals indicated a loss of status in the community (Deut. 25:9-10).

⁵⁴ So NET, NRSV, KJV, ESV, etc.

⁵⁵ Katherine Low, “Implications Surrounding Girding the Loins in Light of Gender, Body, and Power,” *JSOT* 36 (2011), pp. 3-30.

⁵⁶ See Pope, *Job*, p. 94.

worn upon the most intimate part of the body – and a source of uncleanness through genital emissions.⁵⁷ The donning of a loincloth therefore could symbolize lowliness, so Sir. [MS^B] 11:4: “Do not mock one who dons a loincloth, do not jibe at the bitter day.”⁵⁸ The text thus describes God loosening and removing clothing items from various high-status figures and, in one case, adding a new item, the loincloth, a site of uncleanness.

Scholars interpreting these verses typically relate them to the image of enemies being taken away barefoot into captivity (Isa. 20:3-4; Amos 2:16; Mic. 1:8; 2 Chr. 28:15).⁵⁹ In some cases, as we have seen, this has governed their interaction with the text, and emendations have been made in order to shackle the priests and judges in fetters (Guillaume), as well as in the interpretation of *šōlāl* as “barefooted” in light of similar processions of barefoot prisoners from elsewhere in biblical literature (Clines). But if we actually look at the embodied aspects of these verses, we find that God “makes judges mad” (v. 17). He “deprives the trusted advisers of speech” (lit. “he removes the lip of the trusted ones”) and “takes away the discernment (lit. “taste”) of elders” (v. 20).⁶⁰ These are descriptions of mutism as well as mental impairment, the latter of which along with skin disease and blindness is one of the most characteristic illnesses described in biblical literature.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Lev. 15:16-18; Deut. 23:10-11.

⁵⁸ Relatedly, the wearing of a waistcloth is associated with mourning in CTU 1.5.VI.17. This recalls the wearing of sackcloth on the loins during mourning in Gen. 37:34; 1 Kgs 20:31-32; Isa. 20:2; Jer. 48:37; Amos 8:10.

⁵⁹ See e.g. Clines, *Job 1-20*, p. 300.

⁶⁰ For *ṭaʿam*, “taste,” with the meaning of discretion or sense see 1 Sam. 21:14; 25:33; Ps. 119: 66; Prov. 11:22; 26:16

⁶¹ See esp. Deut. 28:27-29: “The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumours, eczema, and scabies, all of which cannot be healed. The Lord will also subject you to

Accordingly, I suggest that we interpret the references to God loosening and removing clothing items, as well as exchanging the garments of the king for a loincloth, in light of the role of clothing in indexing bodily health: these descriptions are supposed to further characterise the mental and physical decline of the depicted subjects. This solves the problem which Driver observed between the lack of parallelism between the two cola in v. 17 – but in a culture where clothing is intimately related to the body, to depict a character stripped of his clothing or shoes can aid in the characterisation and description of illness, in this case, mental illness. To be *šōlāl*, “stripped” or “barefoot,” can be equivalent to being made *hālāl*, “mad.” We might suggest, then, that MT *mūsār*, “discipline, instruction,” emended to *mōsēr*, “bond,” has a double meaning: a wordplay on the image of loosened bonds as well as loosened faculties of discernment. Rather than an image of prisoners led into captivity, these verses draw on the culturally specific language of dress and undress in order to describe and depict the physical and mental decline of the subjects.

Another difficult reference to dress is found in 30:18, where Job as first-person speaker provides an intriguing description of his clothing:

With great force my garment is disguised

madness, blindness, and confusion of mind. You will feel your way along at noon like the blind person does in darkness.” As paired motifs, skin disease and blindness/madness are also found as curses threatened in Neo-Assyrian treaties, see esp. SAA 2: 6, ll. 419-424. According to Saul Olyan, physical and mental disabilities are commonly associated in biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts. See *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 62-77. Like skin disease, mental illness is frequently threatened as a divine punishment, see e.g. Deut. 28:27-29; 33-34; Jer. 25:15-16; 50:35-38; 51:7; Zech. 12:14; Daniel 4.

it binds me like the collar⁶² of my tunic.

The difficulty commentators have had in sufficiently interpreting this verse may be made apparent by juxtaposing the various emendations, suggestions and interpretations that have been levelled at it. The problem is of course that thus far in the book of Job, it is Job's body – his skin, afflicted with sore boils – rather than his clothing that has been transfigured. Accordingly, various creative solutions have been posed. The NJPS translates the second cola: "The neck of my tunic fits my waist." According to this reading, Job's clothing is "disguised" because of the weight he has lost in illness – his clothes no longer fit him to the extent that there is a mismatch of size between body and clothing. But this is a paraphrase rather than a translation, built from an interpretation which is at best only suggested by the text – it is certainly not the explicit sense of the verse.

The verb *ḥāpaś* in the Hithpael means "to disguise oneself," thus Job's garment has become disguised or disfigured.⁶³ This has seemed nonsensical to a number of commentators. Robert Gordis therefore argues that the verb is a phonetic variant of *ḥābaš*, "to seize," and that the Hithpael form is a conflation of the third and second person which arose due to the interchange between the third person (vv. 17, 19) and the second person (vv. 20-24) in the larger passage. Thus, Gordis is able to derive the meaning: "with great power, He grasps my garment."⁶⁴ Similarly, David Clines emends the verb to *yitpōs*, "seizes," again interpreting

⁶² Literally *kēpī*, "like the mouth" of my garment. The "mouth" of a garment refers to the opening through which the head is passed, so Exod. 28:32.

⁶³ Cf. 1 Sam. 28:8; 1 Kgs 20:31.

⁶⁴ Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (Philadelphia: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), p. 335.

the verse according to the image of God picking up Job by the clothing.⁶⁵ But *ḥāpaś* is a recognizable Hebrew form, and I would caution against emending it simply because the commentator does not understand the context.⁶⁶ Certainly the image of God picking up a person by the clothing is not found elsewhere in Scripture.

A number of commentators have considered the means by which the garment could have become disfigured. The verse begins *bērāb-kōaḥ*, “with great strength.” Alfred Guillaume compares *kōaḥ*, “strength,” to Arabic *qayḥ*, “pus.” On the basis of Arabic *ḥafaša*, “run [with water],” he proposes that *ḥāpaś* might mean something like “saturate,” thus: “my clothing is saturated with pus.”⁶⁷ Joseph Reider derives a comparable meaning from the verse, suggesting emending *kōaḥ* to *kēaḥ*, which apparently means “phlegm” if one is to accept a similar emendation in Ps. 22:12. He thus translates the verse as: “because of the greatness of phlegm, my garment is disfigured.”⁶⁸ These interpretations recall the KJV translation of the verse, which adds italicized words to provide sense: “By great force *of my disease* is my garment changed...” Finally, Karl Budde emends *lēbûšî*, “my garment,” to *běšārî*, “my flesh,” thus interpreting the verse as another reference to Job’s skin ailment: his skin has become disfigured.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Clines, Job 1-20, p. 955; cf. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, p. 442.

⁶⁶ So Habel, *The Book of Job*, p. 416: “the sense of the verb *ḥps* as ‘to be disguised’ does not fit the context.”

⁶⁷ Alfred Guillaume, “The Arabic Background of the Book of Job,” in F.F. Bruce (ed.), *Promise and Fulfilment: Essays Presented to Professor S.H. Hooke* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), pp. 106-27.

⁶⁸ Joseph Reider, “Some Notes on the Text of Scriptures,” *HUCA* 3 (1926), pp. 109-16 (114).

⁶⁹ Karl K.F.R. Budde, *Das Buch Hiob, übersetzt und erklärt* (HAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896).

I agree that the verse likely characterises Job's illness – but without the need for any textual emendation. In this case, the simple meaning is the correct one: Job's garment is indeed transfigured or disguised. But in light of the use of clothing to index the health and vitality of the body, transfigured clothing similarly implies the transfiguration of the body. This verse makes use of the metaphor of clothing-as-body in order to further characterise and develop Job's skin condition. This is so acute that Job is totally encompassed by it: "it binds me like the collar of my tunic."⁷⁰ This is reminiscent of the Mesopotamian texts which describe skin disease encroaching upon the body as if an item of clothing. The immediately preceding verse also describes physical symptoms ("the night racks my bones, and the pain that gnaws me takes no rest"), thus v. 18 develops on these symptoms in its description of the transformed, constricting garments. Far from being a problematic verse, Job 30:18 is consistent with the use of dress and undress in order to characterise illness found elsewhere in the book.

In this essay, I have explored the metaphorical use of clothing and the states of dress and undress in order to characterise Job's experience of illness. Drawing on observations concerning the complex relationship between dress and the body made by anthropologists, I have argued that in ancient Israelite and Judahite society, clothing worn directly upon the

⁷⁰ Contra David Wolfers, "The 'Neck' of Job's Tunic (Job xxx 18)," *VT* 44 (1994), pp. 570-72. As we have seen, "to gird" need not necessarily imply a martial sense "which relates to protection against potential attack" (ibid, p. 73). The Capable Wife "girds her loins with strength" in Prov. 31:17, and here it is clearly not a militaristic act. The "girding of the loins" refers to tucking one's tunic into a belt, and while this can have an association with an upcoming physical activity, in the context of Job 30:18 and the "collar" of his tunic, the verb likely refers to a tightly fitting garment, from which he feels he cannot find relief.

body was understood to be a manifestation of the self, as an extension, expansion or distribution of the somatic body. This was demonstrated through discussion of a number of biblical texts in which clothing takes on the status of its wearer and thus can be passed between individuals to pass on that status, whether royal, prophetic or priestly. Acts of dressing and undressing therefore take on an additional symbolism, used to describe the health and vitality of the body, as well as its physical decline. In the myth of Ištar's descent to the underworld, the goddess must therefore remove her clothing in order to access the domain of the dead. Turning to the book of Job, I argued that this text makes use of clothing metaphors in order to aid in its characterisation of illness. The metaphor of clothing-as-body is consistently employed in the book of Job to describe Job's physical state, and dress and nudity are therefore connected to and in fact a key part of Job's experience of being sick. While in some cases this imagery is fairly obvious, these insights are also essential in order to help explicate and translate some of the more obscure references to clothing and nudity in the book of Job. In so doing, we are able to better appreciate the sophisticated use of metaphor as well as the vivid descriptions of Job's illness developed by the poet. These observations are therefore crucial for understanding the literary artistry of the book of Job, as well as medical anthropology and embodiment more generally in biblical literature.