

# Jacob as Job in Thomas Mann's Joseph und seine Brüder

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## **JACOB AS JOB IN THOMAS MANN'S JOSEPH UND SEINE BRÜDER**<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract:**

The Book of Job from the Old Testament is juxtaposed in detail with its hypertext in Thomas Mann's novel: the chapter where Jacob mourns for his "dead" Joseph. An argument is made that Mann's awareness of rabbinical literature creates a connection with the Akedah tradition, i.e., different ways of dealing with the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in Genesis. The notion that Abraham actually does kill Isaac, as suggested by a medieval rabbinical text, is interwoven into the analysis of Jacob's mourning for Joseph who appears as an Issaac-like sacrificial victim in Mann's novel. A connection is established between Abraham, Job and Jacob as figures whose children are claimed by God, and their reactions to this test are compared.

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<sup>1</sup> Published article here:

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/bjdjpwdfhmbanjnk/?p=65db6d10094a4affbc026fed97bd7fd2&pi=0>

### ***Akedah***

Genesis is not the only hypotext behind Thomas Mann's *Joseph und seine Brüder*.<sup>2</sup> The chapter entitled "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" is based on the Book of Job, and, as W. Berger points out, "die Ähnlichkeit besteht [...] in der sehr akzentuiert herausgearbeiteten Korrespondenz des dramatischen Aufbaus der Szene in der Form eines Redekampfes und in der theologischen Thematik der Reden. [...] Die Reden Jaakobs sind erfüllt mit wörtlichen und halbwörtlichen Zitaten aus dem Buche Hiob" (125). In this essay I intend to propose that Mann's decision to insert this smaller hypertext into the larger hypertext of the novel has to do with the particular nature of a third biblical character: Abraham. The latter appears as a bridge between the biblical Job and Mann's literary Jacob. The result is a very complex interplay of themes in a chapter that resonates with seemingly contradictory notions but, in the end, achieves the kind of novelistic harmony that characterizes *Joseph und seine Brüder* as a whole.

Abraham (Gen 22:2) and Job (Job 1:18) face essentially the same situation: God's outrageous claim on the life of the patriarch's offspring. In the rabbinical literature, the story of Abraham's "sacrifice" of Isaac is known as the *Akedah*. As B. Zuckerman writes,

it is significant that, in discussing the Joban tradition, we find ourselves making connections with the *Akedah*. But these connections are both natural and obvious since underlying the two traditions is very much the same kind of story: both traditions deal with the patriarchal figures who are subjected to a severe testing by God – indeed, they are the two preeminent such stories in the Bible. Thus, it should not surprise us to see one version of the *Akedah* recreated in the image of Job (28).

This link with the story of Job is especially strong because there is an undercurrent in the *Akedah* tradition which postulates that Abraham actually *kills* Isaac (Zuckerman 19). Thus, Abraham in this version of the *Akedah* is just

like Job in that God is not merely bluffing when He claims the life of the patriarch's offspring. This undercurrent in biblical and post-biblical Judaism is most likely a vestige of something from a time when child sacrifice was not yet condemned by subsequent Israelite tradition (cf. R. Friedman 256–257; S. Spiegel 63–65, 77).

The most famous manifestation of the bloody Akedah tradition appeared in the 12th century from the pen of Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn:

He made haste, he pinned him down with his knees, / He made his two arms strong. / With steady hands he slaughtered him according to the rite, / Full right was the slaughter. / Down upon him fell the resurrecting dew, and he revived. / (The father) seized him (then) to slaughter him once more. / Scripture, bear witness! Well-grounded is the fact: / And the Lord called Abraham, even a second time from heaven (148–149).

S. Spiegel suggests that the events, which might have prompted Rabbi Ephraim to write this poem, were the massacres of German Jews by passing Crusaders. In 1096 when the Jewish community of Mainz found itself surrounded by murderous hordes, relatives slaughtered their kin in order to deprive the crusaders of their sadistic satisfaction (Spiegel 27, 137). Given the other slaughters of the first Crusade and then the similar disasters of the second Crusade in the 1100s, which Ephraim had experienced as a young boy, the sacrifice of the Mainz Jews may have suddenly taken on a new meaning in the context of the ancient bloody *Akedah* traditions. These people sacrificed their loved ones to uphold faith in their God just the way Abraham sacrifices Isaac (Spiegel 138).

This is significant to our understanding of Thomas Mann for two reasons. Firstly, as W. Berger has demonstrated, Mann was greatly influenced by the rabbinical literature and derivative legendary material in his creation of *Joseph und seine Brüder* (65–66). Secondly, the characters of the Joseph tetralogy think exactly along such lines, namely, they identify with biblical predecessors,

placing the events of their own lives into cyclical patterns of reenactment (Cunningham 55–56).

No one thinks in more cyclical terms than Mann's Jacob who is obsessed specifically with acting out the *Akedah*, i.e., playing Abraham's role. Echoing the Mainz Jews of 1096, Jacob views his relationship with Joseph in terms of Isaac's sacrifice. This is because Jacob is torn between his love for Rachel and Joseph on the one hand, and his loyalty to God on the other (cf. G. Bridges 164). To work out this conflict, Jacob feels that he needs to be tested the way Abraham was before him. And so he mentally tries to act out Abraham's role, with Joseph serving as the sacrificial Isaac. But at the last moment Jacob-Abraham drops the knife: "Da versagte ich vor dem Herrn, und es fiel mir der Arm von der Schulter, und das Messer fiel, und ich stürzte zu Boden hin auf mein Angesicht" (105). Implicit here is not so much the Abraham of Genesis 22, but the Abraham of the bloody *Akedah* tradition. This is borne out by the fact that Mann's Jacob does end up "killing" his son when he sends Joseph alone to visit the other brothers. As Bridges points out, "by sending Joseph to his brothers, then, Jacob in effect sacrifices the son he loves – just as surely, as the father himself thinks afterwards, during his period of mourning, as if he had built the sacrificial fire with his own hands and laid the boy upon it, as an 'Isaaksopfer' " (162).

However, yet again Jacob fails to act out the bloody *Akedah* fully since he cannot assume the responsibility for Joseph-Isaac's death: "Zuzugeben, daß er selber das Hauptschwein gewesen, das mit seiner gefühlsstolzen Narrenliebe den Joseph zur Strecke gebracht, das hieß er heimlich zuviel verlangt und wollte nichts davon wissen im bitteren Schmerz" (642). Abraham in Ephraim's poem shows that he does not have this problem by preparing to slaughter Isaac again after the latter revives. But Mann's Jacob cannot do this, and so, having utterly failed as an Abraham and yet still requiring a biblical model, he assumes the persona of another father whose offspring is claimed by God: Job.

However, here a new problem arises, since the biblical Job, it turns out, appears in two distinctly different guises: the meek sage who accepts all that God does to him and the bellicose victim who accuses God of injustice.

### **Origins of Job**

The scholarly community has come to see two main stages in the creation of the Job narrative. There was, to begin with, a well-known folk tale about a righteous man named Job whose patience in the face of suffering was so powerful that he remained faithful to God through the worst of his trials. According to L. Perdue and W. Gilpin it can be situated most probably no later than the monarchy period, i.e., before the Babylonian exile in 587 B.C.E. (13). At this point Job did not murmur against God, since that would have undermined the original message of patience and perseverance in the folk tale. The tale ended with the restoration of Job to his original happy state and the consequent picture of God as a keeper of justice (MacKenzie and Murphy 470).

Then a poet and philosopher of astonishing depth took up the folk tale and developed it by adding the poetic dialogues found in chapters 3–27, 29–31, 38:1–42:6 of the Book of Job. It is at this point that the genre of the Job story changed: from folk tale to diatribe. The folk tale became the prologue, but this pasting left problematic suture marks. There is a fundamental metaphysical difference between the rather simple or even simplistic folk tale about the patient Job and the blaspheming, God-cursing Job of the poetic dialogues. In the folk tale we have an unquestioning, almost pawn-like protagonist who sheepishly accepts everything from God, even though God commits an outrage against his most faithful servant just to prove a point to Satan! J. Wilcox suggests that the Job of the folk tale has an “undeveloped mind [...]. He bears, but he does not think” (87).

The creation of the bitter Job in the poetic dialogues might have been occasioned by the disaster that was the Babylonian invasion of 587 and the destruction of Judah (Gilpin and Perdue 14). Such a cataclysmic event would have caused many to doubt God's justice, since now the Davidic covenant appeared broken, and the whole point of God's action on earth was eliminated with the disappearance of the temple-state.<sup>3</sup> The Job of the poetic dialogues is in the position of the many Israelites who would have lost faith in the traditional picture of divine justice as their lives were inexplicably crushed by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. Thus, the second stage in the creation of the Job story can be plausibly placed somewhere during the exilic period or soon thereafter.

### ***Jacob as Job***

When Mann's Jacob assumes the role of Job in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph," his aim is to compensate for his failure as Abraham. And if he were to confine himself to the Job the prologue, he would patiently accept Joseph's death and live up to his own ideal of faith. In the beginning of the chapter, this is what Jacob appears to do. Just as the patient Job strips naked at the news of his children's death, saying, "naked I come from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (1:21), so too Jacob tears off all his clothes when shown Joseph's bloody coat (Mann 632). Just as the patient Job is afflicted by a skin disease and sits among the ashes, scratching himself with pieces of broken pottery (Job 2:7-8), Mann's Jacob pretends to have the same skin disease and also uses broken pottery for relief (Mann 634).

However, it becomes quickly apparent that Jacob cannot be the patient Job of the prologue, just as he cannot be the Abraham of the bloody Akedah. Sitting among the ashes, he assumes the role of the other Job, the accusatory Job of the poetic dialogues who exclaims: "Why did I not perish at birth and die as I

came from the womb?" (3:11); "Do I have the strength of stone? Is my flesh bronze?" (6:12); "Will you now turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese, clothe me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews? You gave me life and showed me kindness" (10:9–12). Echoing the same passage and even importing into it some of the patient Job's words, Mann's Jacob delves into his lament:

Hätte er mich aus Erz gemacht in seiner Weisheit, so aber ist's nichts für mich... Mein Kind, mein Damu! Der Herr hat ihn gegeben, der Herr hat ihn wieder genommen, – hätte er ihn doch nicht gegeben erst oder mich selbst nicht aus Mutterleib kommen lassen und überhaupt nichts! (640).

Er hat *ihn* gearbeitet mit Händen und reizend gemacht. Wie Milch hat er *ihn* gemolken und seine Gebeine wohl aufgebaut, hat *ihm* Haut und Fleisch angezogen und Huld über *ihn* ausgegossen (640–641; my italics).

I have stressed the personal pronouns in order to show that the focus of Jacob's lament is different from Job's. The Job of the poetic dialogues complains about his own suffering, the death of his offspring remaining a part of the patient Job's realm. But Jacob has not quite left his role as Abraham, which means that the son's death is still the central issue. As Jacob's lament continues, it becomes clear that all links with the patient Job of the hypotext's prologue were merely a posture.

### ***The Defense of God***

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar initially come to console Job but end up defending God against Job's accusation in the Book of Job.<sup>4</sup> Their premise is that God must be a keeper of justice, i.e., no one who suffers does so without having merited such punishment. Job, on the other hand, anticipates the position of a modern existentialist like Albert Camus by arguing that life is absurd and that

the blameless do suffer. Thus, Job agrees with his friends that God *should* be a keeper of justice but refutes their premise that God actually fulfills such a role.

In Mann's novel the function of the three friends is assumed by Eliezer, Jacob's faithful servant. In response to Jacob's case against God, Eliezer says: "Bist du von Sünde frei, da du Fleisch bist, und ist's so gewiß, daß du Gerechtigkeit geübt hast dein Leben lang?" (645) Here Eliezer echoes the hypotext's Eliphaz who says: "Who being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?" (4:7) The implication is that if Job is suffering, he must have done something wrong even if he does not know it, which is what Eliezer implies in Mann as well.

But there is an important difference between Eliezer's approach and that of Job's three friends. The latter cling so fanatically to the doctrine of retribution that they refuse to see Job for the blameless man that he is, and, ultimately, they fail to see God for what He is. Eliphaz in fact goes so far as to charge Job with specific crimes (Job 22:5-9), and this reflects the moral failure of the three friends: they come to comfort a suffering man but end up pouring salt on his wounds for the sake of rationalizing the situation. However, Job is indeed blameless, which is stated in the prologue (Wilcox 33-34). The folk tale required a guiltless Job, since otherwise his patience would have illustrated less his faith in God than his willingness to expiate his sins (Wilcox 44, 165). The poet of the dialogues understood this and therefore preserved Job's guiltlessness in what he added to the folk tale. Only a guiltless Job can charge God with injustice and then learn his lesson about the nature of God rather than the nature of justice. The whole point of Job's lament is to illustrate the absurdity of retributive justice as a concept, and only a righteous Job can do that. It is for all these reasons that Job's three friends are condemned by God for insisting on Job's guilt and therefore misunderstanding the whole point of Job's suffering, while Job is elevated above his friends for coming closer to the truth (42:7-17).

Mann's Eliezer does not act cruelly and cannot be accused of misunderstanding either the nature of Jacob's behavior or, ostensibly, the nature of God. When he accuses Jacob of iniquity, the charge is not at all groundless. As I have pointed out earlier, Jacob is torn between his love for God and his love for Rachel/Joseph. The latter love is "criminal" on two counts. Firstly, Jacob has been trying to go against God's grand plan by giving preference to Joseph over his older siblings. Secondly, Jacob is guilty of idolatry, which is how the narrator assesses the patriarch's love for Rachel and Joseph: "Denn was wäre das zügellose Gefühl des Menschen für den Menschen, wie Jaakob es sich für Rahel gönnte und dann, in womöglich verstärkter Übertragung, für ihren Erstgeborenen, anderes als Abgötterei?" (320). Mann's God retains the key feature of the Old Testament God: the complete intolerance of competition when it comes to Israel's loyalty. The stress placed on monotheism is part of an important theme in *Joseph und seine Brüder*, namely, that monotheistic religion represents a higher stage in the moral evolution of humanity. This is evident in Joseph's discussion with the young pharaoh regarding the nature of the Sun god. Sigrid Mannesmann sums up Jacob's guilt as follows:

Zum ersten verhindert die Liebe zu Joseph und Rahel die von Gott geforderte ausschließliche Hingabe an seinen Dienst; zum zweiten verschafft sich Jaakob mit dieser Liebe eine private Sphäre innerhalb des Stammes, mit der er in Widerspruch zu seiner Funktion als Repräsentant des Kollektivs gerät; und zum dritten überschreitet er mit der selbtherrlichen Bevorzugung Rahels und Josephs [...] die Grenze der dem göttlichen Souverän vorbehaltenen Rechte (141).

Thus, Mann's Jacob does not correspond to the blameless Job at all and knows it well enough, which means that his diatribe against God is not the Joban protestation of innocence. And in fact, Jacob accepts that he needed to be corrected. What he rejects is the *severity* of this correction, i.e., Joseph's death: "[Gott] setzt den Preis an nach Willkür und treibt ihn ein sonder Nachsicht. Er hat nicht gehandelt mit mir und mich nicht abdingen lassen, was mir zu viel ist" (639). Hence, what in the hypotext is a charge of injustice,

turns in the hypertext into a charge of cruelty. Consequently, if we look back at the metaphysics in the Book of Job, then God in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" seems very different from the God of Job. The whole point of the poetic dialogues in the Book of Job is to disprove the simplistic association of God with retributive justice. In "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" God still appears to be a keeper of justice. What is more, the reader knows something that Jacob does not: Joseph is alive. Therefore, even the charge of cruelty is invalid. Jacob has in fact merely received a slap on the hands, however intense it may have been. But God has not done "was [Jaakob] zu viel ist" since Jacob will live to be reunited with his beloved son.

### ***Voice from the whirlwind***

Job, having demanded that God respond to all the accusations, finally has his wish granted. God responds as a voice from the whirlwind and does so in two ways: by what He says and by what He does not say. In the latter case God vindicates Job by *not* seeking to adopt the position of the three friends. Hence, God does not say that the notion of retributive justice is valid. In fact, God does not address the issue of human justice at all. Instead, God demonstrates to Job how ignorant, marginal, puny and weak humans are in the grand scheme of creation: "Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons?" (Job 38:31–32). And then God makes His ultimate point by comparing human weakness to two great mythological beasts that appear as the jewels of divine creation – Behemoth and Leviathan (cf. Wilcox 157):

Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on the grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like rods of iron (40:15–18).

Who dares open the doors of [Leviathan's] mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? His has rows of shields tightly sealed together; each is so close to the next that no air can pass between. [. . .] Firebrands stream from his mouth [...]. Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him (41:14–22).

God implies that, compared to all this enormity, compared to the cosmos, humans are so unimportant that there is no reason for Him to concentrate on their petty concerns, such as worldly justice. Given the spirit of the Old Testament in general, one can infer here that God's response does not absolve humanity from pursuing justice within human society, but to tax God with this duty is inappropriate (cf. Wilcox 175).

In Mann no voice from the whirlwind replies to Jacob's lament, although later a divine reply does come in the form of Joseph's restitution and the salvation of Israel from famine. However, for the time being, Mann puts God's words from the Book of Job into Eliezer's mouth. And the loyal servant quotes the hypotext almost verbatim:

Du redest unmöglich daher. [...] Willst du befinden über Recht und Unrecht und zu Gericht sitzen über Den, der nicht nur den Behemoth gemacht hat, dessen Schwanz sich wie eine Zeder streckt, und den Leviathan, dessen Zähne schrecklich umherstehen und dessen Schuppen wie eherne Schilde sind, sondern auch den Orion, das Siebengestirn, die Morgenröte, die Hornissen, die Schlangen und den Staub-Abubu? [...] Willst du verstehen was dir zu hoch ist, und das Leben ergründen nach seinem Rätsel? (644–645)

Eliezer's point is simultaneously the same as and different from the point made by God in the voice from whirlwind in the Book of Job. On the one hand, Eliezer appears to echo the hypotext by suggesting how insignificant human justice is compared with the blinding greatness of God's works. Just like God in the Book of Job, Eliezer is saying that God has plans far beyond our petty concerns, and no one should be arrogant enough to claim to understand what these divine intentions are. But in the hypotext the divine plan goes beyond humanity,

which is why God talks to Job not of human preoccupations, but of the cosmos and giants, such as Behemoth and Leviathan. In Mann's novel God never goes beyond humanity and, specifically, Israel's interests. This means that the grand plan that Eliezer accuses Jacob of not grasping has to do with the fate of the Chosen People. And indeed, as it turns out, Joseph's demise is a key component in this epic design, since without Joseph's transfer into Egypt, Israel cannot be saved from upcoming famine. Jacob, who is as limited by his human as Job is, cannot know this. In the end, both characters have their nose rubbed in their small-scale point of view.

The ultimate message of the Book of Job is that humans must accept suffering and God's dissociation from earthly justice. In Mann's fictional world things are not as existentially dismal. Because God does focus exclusively on humanity in *Joseph und seine Brüder*, what humans can do is attempt to fit into God's grand design in order to facilitate the accomplishment of His plans. This is epitomized by Tamar who seeks to become the progenitor of David in line with what she believes to be the big picture. And Joseph in Egypt follows the same line of reasoning, trying to further God's aims in a truly conscious and consistent manner. Mann's Jacob is different in that he has a mind of his own and requires correction, just as Job requires to be corrected for seeing God as a failed keeper of retributive justice. To quote John Wilcox regarding the Job-Jacob comparison,

Some interpreters wish to see Job as a kind of Jacob, wrestling with God and prevailing. Job does wrestle – with orthodoxy, with suffering, with injustice; and he does win a confrontation with God. But in his encounter he does not prevail; God thoroughly humbles him. Of course, Jacob came away from his celebrated "victory" with a limp! It is hard to see what he won, except a new name; but he did manage to save his life. [...] These heroes of confrontation are not, in any obvious way, victors over God; they "see" God and live; but unlike Prometheus, they do not take away any divine prerogatives. What Job perceives is insight into his own "littleness" (205).

However, even though Joseph's disappearance can be seen as a lesson that illustrates Jacob's "littleness" in the Joban sense, paradoxically, it can be argued that in *Joseph und seine Brüder*, Jacob's punishment is in fact not punishment at all, since, regardless of Jacob's guilt before God, Joseph's installation in Egypt fulfills the epic plan. Therefore, an important difference emerges between the hypotext and the hypertext. In the Book of Job God's action is indeed directed exclusively against Job, and the metaphysical-theological lesson learned by Job is the whole point. In the Joseph tetralogy what happens to Jacob when Joseph disappears is really only a side-effect of something far bigger than the present moment. However, this notion becomes apparent only if we leave the confines of "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph." Within this chapter the Jacob-Job connections operate in a way that does place the sufferer at the centre of divine action.

### ***The Dead Offspring***

After making the protagonist suffer in the hypotext and in the hypertext, God restores the dead offspring. In Job's case the children have been killed in actual fact, and God does not resurrect them. Instead, new ones are born to Job, which he seems to accept without a murmur. In this connection Zuckerman points out:

Without doubt, when the new children replace the old, this is represented in the Epilogue as a very positive outcome. But it is also inevitably a somewhat melancholy and difficult finale. The new generation cannot but serve to recall that the generation passed is dead and that they died without sufficient cause. And while God is certainly shown to be merciful to Job, His mercy is not complete (164).

This means that the "restoration" of Job's children is a continuation of the lesson taught by the voice from the whirlwind, namely, that God is not a keeper of human justice. Hence, even though nothing is impossible for God,

and ostensibly the deity could have brought Job's dead children to life, this does not happen. Job is not allowed to forget that his prior view of God was wrong. In fact if Job were aware of the dialogue in heaven from the Prologue where the fate of his children is decided *by a wager*, he would have to make an extra step in his struggle to accept God's grand design.

In Mann's novel the "dead" Joseph is not replaced but actually restored to Jacob which is yet another indication of how different the God of Jacob in Mann appears to be from Job's existentialist deity. Joseph is resurrected, mythologically speaking, because Jacob perceives Egypt to be the underworld, and Joseph's entire passage is presented in terms of the death-resurrection pattern of pagan deities, such as Osiris or Tamuz. The result is that God in *Joseph und seine Brüder* appears as a kinder, more human and humane deity than in the Book of Job. This God is not the one who would allow the armies of Babylonia to crush His house and city in 587 B.C.E. In fact, as Mann's narrator points out, any punitive actions on God's part are normally attributable to prompting from the angelic host: "Sie lehren vor allem, daß 'Strenge' nicht sowohl Gottes eigene Sache, als vielmehr die seiner Umgebung ist [...] Semaël war es namentlich immer gewesen, der die Empfindlichkeit der Engel gegen den Menschen, oder eigentlich über Gottes Teilnahme für diesen, geschürt hatte" (46-47).

In the Book of Job it is also an angel, Satan (the equivalent of Mann's Semaël), who suggests to God the idea of testing Job: "Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (1:11). And it is not God's hand that kills Job's children: it is actually Satan who does the dirty work. As B. Zuckerman suggests, Satan is used as a "buffer to God," i.e., the angel attenuates God's intervention in Job's life, making God look better in a situation where the deity can be justifiably accused of sadism (27-28). Such an early form of theodicy is indeed necessary in the Book of Job, but is it necessary in Mann's novel? Has it not been argued that no injustice or cruelty

comes from God in the case of Jacob's punishment? The answer depends on whether we consider God as he appears only in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" or in the Joseph tetralogy as a whole. In the latter case Mann's God and the God from the Book of Job have far more in common than might seem.

### ***Justice and power***

At the apex of his lament Jacob exclaims: "Dann erweist sich, Eliezer, daß Gott nicht Schritt gehalten hat in der Heiligung, sondern ist zurückgeblieben und noch ein Unhold" (644). In light of Eliezer's defence of God and given what we know of the circumstances surrounding Joseph's demise, it would appear that Jacob has no grounds for making such an accusation. However, if we return to the passage where the narrator refers to God's desire to punish Jacob's obsessive love for Rachel and Joseph as idolatry, it turns out that God's motives are not as religiously sophisticated as they may appear:

So bleibt kein Zweifel, daß es sich um Eifersucht reinsten Wassers und eigentlichsten Sinnes handelt, – nicht um die allgemeine und abgezogene auf ein Vorrecht, sondern um höchst persönliche Eifersucht auf die Gegenstände des abgöttischen Gefühls, in welchen es rächend getroffen wurde, – mit einem Worte: um Leidenschaft (320).

Therefore, underneath the apparently legitimate and theologically grounded prerogative to protect the first two commandments of the Decalogue, there lurks a primitive, anthropomorphic passion that the narrator calls a "Wüstenrest." In this context, Jacob's association of God with an "Unhold" (above) no longer appears completely unjustified.

In this respect Mann has culled out of the hypotext what is in fact an undeniable reality in the Old Testament: God is not an unambiguously well-developed strategic planner and thinker from mature Judaism, but rather an unstable being whose anthropomorphic imperfections often displace his more

sublime characteristics as older strata of tradition vie with subsequent ones for ideological mastery. This matches the unevenly evolving attitude toward child-sacrifice in Israel (see above). Such a view of God suggests the arbitrary exercise of power evoked by Job's speeches in the poetic dialogues. Yahweh is perceived by Job in two unflattering manifestations. He is a tyrannically capricious warrior who does not care about justice: "He destroys both the blameless and wicked" (Job 9:22; cf. Habel, 29). Compare this to what the lamenting Jacob says in Mann: "Im Übermut umbringt er die Frommen und Bösen" (644). But Job goes further than that, suggesting that God is an active promoter of *injustice*, making the bad person prosper and the good person suffer: "Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, the offspring before their eyes. Their homes are safe and free from fear" (21:7-9; cf. Mettinger, 44; Vermeulen 46).

The implications of Job's experience and that of Jacob in Mann's novel are that God is simply too powerful to be just. Job describes God as one would an ancient monarch: a ruler with no burden of accountability for his actions. Habel calls God, as Job presents Him, a "warrior king" (28), which is probably a good reflection of the links between Israel's conception of God and the political realm in Antiquity. After all, the Covenant in the Old Testament is pictured in terms of a *political* treaty between a suzerain and a sovereign. J. Levenson writes: "The First Commandment is emphatically not a messenger formula, but the self-presentation of the suzerain followed by his recitation of his essential benefactions to the vassal" (32; also cf. 31, 33). And not surprisingly, Mann's God, in some of His vestigial manifestations, is also seen as a "Kreigs- und Wetterherr einer braunen Schar von Wüstensöhnen, die sich seine Streiter nannten" (319). As Zuckerman argues:

In a Western democracy, the authority for enforcement is carefully insulated from the judiciary and is instead invested in the executive branch of government. But in the Ancient Near East, no such separation of powers existed. Rather, the authority to enforce was coupled with judgeship and invested in the ruler, usually a king (109).

And this political relationship is projected onto the relationship between God and humanity in the Book of Job: "It is power that defines the roles of God and man: God dominates, man submits" (Zuckerman 116). The conclusion would appear to be that justice and power, in relation to the Ancient Near Eastern royal model, make poor bed-fellows. Therefore, Jacob's picture of God as an "Unhold" is both different from and similar to Job's view of God. God is just in punishing Jacob's meddling with the divine plan and the patriarch's idolatrous obsession with Joseph, but He is arbitrary with respect to His jealousy and passion in this matter. Therefore, Eliezer's defence of God is both right and wrong at the same time. God in *Joseph and seine Brüder* is as complex and self-contradictory as Jacob himself, i.e., a projection of Jacob's psyche and development. And this brings us to another issue in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph": is God a real independent agent in Jacob's lament for his dead son?

### ***Transcending God***

*Joseph und seine Brüder* is a distinctly secular novel with a modern anthropological approach to religion. God appears clearly as a product of cultural evolution in the mind of the narrator who adopts a post-Enlightenment point of view:

Der Bund Gottes mit dem in Abram, dem Wanderer, tätigen Menschengestalt war ein Bund zum Endzwecke beiderseitiger Heiligung. [...] Mit anderen Worten: Die Läuterung Gottes aus trüber Tücke zur Heiligkeit schließt, rückwirkend, diejenige des Menschen ein, in welchem sie sich nach Gottes dringlichem Wunsche vollzieht. [...] Gott erlangt seine wirkliche Würde nur mit Hilfe des Menschengestalt (319–320).

The dependence of God on the human mind implies that from the authorial position, divine agency is in fact the projection of mythological thought onto ordinary events, i.e., the ascription of meaning to being (cf. C. Nolte). This means that Mann's hypertext is fundamentally different from the biblical hypotext, since in Old Testament thought God's ontological independence is a given. The Book of Job is probably one of the best examples. To quote John Wilcox, "[Job] tells his stories of woe almost as if he saw God's agency in the woes. To the modern mind, this is one of the most striking features of Job's speeches: Job never doubts that his sufferings, and the sufferings of others who are innocent or upright, are the direct results of God's actions – indeed *are* God's actions" (79). In this respect Job's is a typically mythological mind-set in that Job never sees any events as coincidences without meaning and supernatural agency. Everything is connected with everything else in the world of myth.

Mann's Jacob, presumably thinks in the same way throughout the novel. Like Job, Jacob cannot imagine being without meaning, i.e., God's independence of the human mind and divine agency in earthly events are a given. Therefore, there is a fundamental difference between the narrator's secular anthropology and Jacob's metaphysics. However, in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" a curious change takes place as Jacob suddenly comes very close to the narrator's unmythological point of view: the patriarch allows for the possibility that God is *ontologically dependent* on His worshippers! Here is what Jacob says to Eliezer "Er ist mein Schöpfer, ich weiß es. Er hat mich wie Milch gemolken und mich wie Käse gerinnen lassen, ich gebe es zu. Aber was ist mit ihm, und wo wäre er ohne uns, die Väter und mich? [...] Hat er vergessen [...] wie ihn Abram entdeckt und hervorgedacht [...]? Aber wo wäre denn er auch wieder ohne den Menschengeist? Eliezer, der Bund ist gebrochen!" (643–644).

Jacob appears to be entertaining simultaneously two mutually exclusive notions. On the one hand, God is an independent agent (his "Schöpfer") and therefore responsible for the suffering in question, just as in Job's case. On the other hand, stepping out of character, Jacob seems to suggest that God is a product of human thinking: ("Abram hat ihn hervorgedacht"). In order to account for this puzzling twist in Jacob's line of reasoning and in his characterization, let us consider the legal aspect of Jacob's above-cited statement: "Eliezer, der Bund ist gebrochen." Mann's Jacob is dealing with God in terms of contract law, i.e., in line with the covenant tradition behind the creation of the Pentateuch. In human society when two parties conclude a contract, the assumption is that a third (impartial and empowered) party must oversee the application of the agreement. However, when it comes to contracts with God, as Zuckerman points out, "the most fundamental rule of law in the Ancient Near East [is] that God *is* the law" (113). Therefore, any contract with God is a priori legally flawed.

This is precisely Job's problem when he considers the contract with God. Job, seeing himself as not having violated the contract, seeks to sue the deity, even though he knows that God is the last instance: "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hands upon us both" (9:33). In order to accomplish this impossible feat, Job engages in some remarkable imaginative thinking by positing a hypothetical witness figure, a fictitious redeemer (*goel*): "Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high" (16:19) and "I know that Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" (19:25). The Redeemer is not a reflection of Job's *sincere* belief in God's rival or in a third party above himself and God. Job is not a polytheist and realizes that God is the only force in the transcendental realm that acts upon the physical world. Job merely creates a hypothesis: what would happen if there were a higher instance that could help him take God to court? As Zuckerman says, "this Redeemer of Job's is quite literally conjured up out of nothing. He is

the product of Job's desperate hope against hope that somehow, somewhere there must be a divine Someone who acts on his behalf" (115).

Essentially, Job's "defender" is an example of what literary fiction accomplishes as a means of creating models of reality. The reader revels in alternate worlds offered by literature where the limitations of the reader's condition in the actual world can be temporarily transcended in the imagination. The resulting sense of satisfaction is indicative of how truly powerful the human capacity to create reality models really is. Therefore, the Redeemer is Job's literary fiction, his temporary escape from the harsh reality of the actual world where there is no recourse against God. I would propose to assess Jacob's "out of character" ability to allow for God's dependence on human thinking along the same lines. Although everywhere else in *Joseph und seine Brüder* there is not even a hint of Jacob's ability to transcend his sincere conviction that God is real, for an instant – during his lament for Joseph – Jacob emancipates himself from the divine burden. To quote Sigrid Mannesmann, "Jaakobs emphatische Klage um den verlorenen Sohn ist gerade der Versuch, sich von Gott und seiner 'Welt' zu distanzieren" (143). Using the language of litigation, Jacob proceeds along the lines of imaginative reasoning established by Job and has his day in court, even if only for an instant. Borrowing the narrator's post-Enlightenment model of the world, Jacob vanquishes God temporarily and achieves fictional empowerment.

### **Conclusion**

Needless to say, both Job and Mann's Jacob must soon return to their mythological reality. Jacob ceases the accusations and follows Eliezer away from the mound of ash: back into the tent where the patriarch resumes his prior role of God's loyal servant. Job, having heard the voice from the whirlwind, ceases all talk of a redeemer and suing God. Job concludes the lament with the following statement: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand [...] Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes"

(42:3–6). However, Job in the Book of Job and Jacob in *Joseph und seine Brüder* have scored a point against God. They have managed to drag God into a debate! This is more than most mortals can ever hope for. Even if Job and Mann's Jacob lose the debate, the very fact of having caused the Deity to respond (directly in the Book of Job and through Eliezer in Mann's novel) turns their defeat into a kind of victory. Thus, "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph" ends with the following statement: "Aber er ging doch mit und ließ sich ins Zelt führen. Auch er hatte kein Interesse mehr an Kehricht, Splitternacktheit und Schaben, denn sie hatten nur dienen müssen, daß er ausgiebig rechten mochte mit Gott" (647). All of Jacob's wily ways are evident in this passage: he has tricked God after all, vanquishing Jahweh the way he did during the wrestling match at Jabbok (Gen 32:22–32). In the same way, Job leaves after having heard the voice from the whirlwind: after having learned about the majesty of the universe from the Creator Himself!

However, to return to the *Akedah*. How do Job and Mann's Jacob compare to Abraham from Ephraim's *Akedah*? Do Job and Jacob ultimately pass or fail the test? Abraham certainly does, ready as he is to kill Isaac a second time. There can be no greater demonstration of faith in God. But at the same time, there can be no greater demonstration of the superhuman in the actions of a literary character. Viewing the ideal of Ephraim's *Akedah* from the humanistic vantage point of the Twentieth Century, Mann does not present a superhuman Jacob. In fact, the Jacob of Genesis is already faulty enough: no match for the Abraham of Genesis. It is this human picture of the third patriarch that predominates in *Joseph und seine Brüder*. And this is why Jacob cannot live up to the larger-than-life Abraham of Ephraim's *Akedah*. A human being cannot agree to the death of his or her offspring for whatever reason. It may not make theological sense, but it does make socio-ethical and biological sense.

The Job of the poetic dialogues, although coming out of the biblical world, is in fact very much like Thomas Mann's Twentieth-Century creation. He is human,

unlike the super-Job of the prologue to the Book of Job. A human being cannot remain silent when being hurt unjustly, whoever the assailant may be. Without renouncing their God, Job and Mann's Jacob speak out. And this leads me to conclude that Jacob in Mann's novel and Job in the Book of Job turn out to be too human to pass the test perfectly and yet too devout to fail entirely. For all of the unevenness, stemming from the two incompatible pictures of Job in the Book of Job, the conclusion is that Job does the best he possibly can under the circumstances. The same can be said of Jacob in "Jaakob trägt Leid um Joseph." He has tried to be like Ephraim's Abraham, but no matter what the outcome of this attempt, Jacob's absolutely genuine emotion redeems him in the end. He may not be a giant like his grandfather, but he is like the Job of the poetic dialogues: the best a human being can hope to be in a world where God makes all the rules.

### Notes

2. Here is G. Genette's definition of hypertextuality: "J'entends par là toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, hypotexte) sur lequel il se greffe de manière qui n'est pas celle d'un commentaire. [...] J'appelle donc hypertexte tout texte dérivé d'un texte antérieur." (11-14).

3. This is the promise made by God in 2 Samuel 7:5-16 that a descendent of King David would always sit on the throne in Jerusalem.

4. Elihu is a fourth one, but most commentators agree that the Elihu section was added later by someone else and in a rather clumsy way (MacKenzie and Murphy, 483-484; cf. J. H. Eaton, 35).

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