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Irony in the book of Job and three modern adaptations : J.B., A Masque of reason, and "A Job of the plains"

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IRONY IN THE BOOK OF JOB
AND THREE MODERN ADAPTATIONS:
J.B., A MASQUE OF REASON,
AND "A JOB OF THE PLAINS"

BY

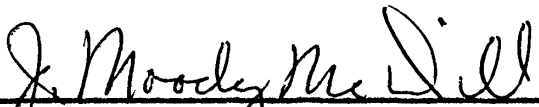
BECKY BARTHOLOMEW HAWKINS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

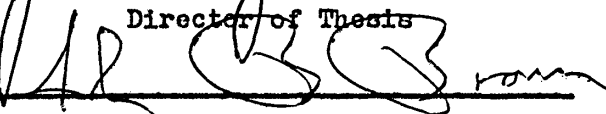
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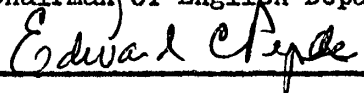
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PREFACE

I have found the book of Job to be a fascinating work of art in a literary sense as well as a theological one. One literary technique which is rarely noted in Job is that of irony; yet irony is a major key to the art and understanding of the Old Testament book. While irony is an important aspect in the biblical Job, it is also a significant element both in modern man's approach to the Job-God relationship and in his approach to the book of Job itself. This element must also be evident in any attempt to parallel or parody successfully the Joban story, even in a contemporary setting. Therefore, my intent has been to center my thesis around the evidences of irony in the book of Job while also including a look at three contemporary adaptations--J.B. by Archibald MacLeish, A Masque of Reason by Robert Frost, and "A Job of the Plains" by William Humphrey--thus showing the important part irony plays in the basic Job story.

I am aware that the chapter on Job is both long and exegetic, but there is a reason for this. It is imperative that the reader have a complete understanding of Job in order for its adaptations to have any meaning at all. J.B., A Masque of Reason and "A Job of the Plains" are all based on the book of Job. As will be seen in my discussion of Job, the book is complex and not at all the simple, monolithic work it has been conjectured to be in the past. My interpretation of Job is somewhat different from the traditional, and it is, therefore, necessary that this interpretation be established in order for my

discussions of the modern adaptations to have merit. Many of the ironies which occur in the three contemporary works rely totally on an understanding of the biblical account. If that understanding is not present from the start, the remainder of my thesis will mean very little to the reader as I constantly refer to Job, its historical background, and its ironies in plot and theology. Moreover, the chapters on Job and J.B. are longer than those on A Masque of Reason and "A Job of the Plains" if only because the works themselves are lengthy. I am dealing with forty-two biblical chapters and 153 pages as compared to eighteen and fifteen pages respectively.

I have not labelled every irony due to the risk of being too repetitious. I have, however, tried to arrange the paragraphs in such a way that the ironies will be in some order. Except in the case of "A Job of the Plains," the sequence has been situational irony, verbal irony, dramatic irony and general irony. In the case of examples of situational ironies, instead of attempting to label continuously, I have tried to show what the reader expects and what actually occurs. This has involved the observation of several methods of presenting situational ironies including the use of opposites, parallels and parodies.

The basic format of my thesis will include six chapters beginning with a general discussion of irony, emphasizing the specific ironies noted throughout the thesis. The next four chapters will deal with the ironies in Job, J.B., A Masque of Reason, and "A Job of the Plains." Finally, there will be a closing chapter which will include a summary and concluding remarks.

CHAPTER I

IRONY

It is the purpose of this thesis to discuss the technique of irony and its importance in the book of Job and three modern adaptations: J.B., A Masque of Reason, and "A Job of the Plains." Before the specific ironies in each work can be discussed, it is necessary to establish an understanding of irony itself. D. C. Muecke states that "the principal obstacle in the way of a simple definition of irony is the fact that irony is not a simple phenomenon."¹ While it is not the intention of this paper to discuss the technique of irony in depth, it will be necessary to establish a foundation and a source of reference for the ensuing discussions of irony in the works chosen for analysis.

It is widely agreed that there are two major types of irony--verbal irony and situational irony. The stock definitions for verbal irony are generally something like "saying one thing and meaning another" or "meaning the opposite of what is said" while situational irony involves an "incongruity between the actual result of an event and the expected result" or "when the opposite of what is expected happens." The understanding of these ironies, however, goes much deeper. For instance, verbal irony works on the basis of a formula. It begins with an affirmative statement; then it negates the affirmative by implying

¹D. C. Muecke, The Critical Idiom: Irony (Fakenham, Norfolk: Cox & Wyman, 1970), p. 8.

the opposite and creates from the two opposed meanings a third which is more powerful than the sum of its parts, thus, verbal irony. If a person were to say "What a beautiful day we are having!" while looking out a window at the rain, wind and cold, then it is obvious he means more than he is saying. No doubt he means the opposite of what he has said and even more noticeable would be his tone of voice, perhaps a bitterness or disappointment. This is a form of verbal irony, and the writer can adopt this technique as well. At first the reader assumes that the ironist means what he is saying. Then the reader catches the implication and finally senses that the ironist means something more emphatic than the obvious negative implication.

While verbal irony deals with actual and implied words, situational irony is concerned with incidents and happenings. There is more to situational irony than just expecting one thing to happen and finding something else in its place. The reader is involved in this irony as well because he realizes that the events have actually worked out the only way they could and that he should have known better than to count on his first expectations.²

Another type of irony is the irony of the theatre or dramatic irony. While many classify dramatic irony as a third major irony, it is in essence an extension of situational irony. In the theatre, dramatic irony occurs when a character assumes something is true, but the audience knows that the character is wrong, i.e., dramatic irony allows the audience to know more than the character(s) in that a

²Robert Foulke and Paul Smith, "Narrative Irony," An Anatomy of Literature (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 858-859, 864.

character may say something that means one thing to him yet it means another thing to those who better understand the situation. Furthermore, an even more powerful form of dramatic irony according to Muecke occurs when "the audience's superior knowledge is shared by one or more characters and particularly when the victim is unaware of the presence of such characters on the stage."³ Dramatic irony, however, does not have to take place in the theatre only; it can be incorporated in prose as well. Here there is a fine line between verbal irony and dramatic irony, and Laurence Perrine distinguishes them in this way: while verbal irony presents a discrepancy between what the speaker says and what he means, dramatic irony contrasts what the speaker says and what the author means, i.e., while the speaker may be speaking in frankness, the author may be indicating ideas or attitudes quite opposed to those the speaker is voicing.⁴

There are a number of ways of "being ironical" including sarcasm, parody and satire; yet in all probability, no one ever presents an ironic situation without some kind of moral purpose. This leads to one final point of discussion which will be of great significance in the remainder of this paper. This involves what Muecke calls "General Irony" and others label "World Irony," "Philosophical Irony," or "Cosmic Irony." There is in this type of irony a sense of detachment where a victim is exposed and singled out; he is wrong, and those to whom he is exposed are right or at least safe from attack. General

³Muecke, The Critical Idiom, p. 43.

⁴Laurence Perrine, Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 628.

irony, however, is special in that "the ironic observer is also among the victims of irony along with the rest of mankind."⁵ The basis for general irony lies in the contradictions which arise when men speculate upon such topics as the origin and purpose of the universe; the impenetrability of the future; the conflicts between reason, emotion, and instinct; and freewill and determinism. As this study of Job and its adaptations progresses, it will be evident that questions raised by these literary works revolve around this concept of general irony. General irony does not appear until Christian ideology lost its power to convince man that there was no conflict between man and Nature or between man and God. However, slowly and then with increasing speed, men became more aware of fundamental contradictions in life and were no longer content to wait for the joys of heaven to compensate for the evils of earthly existence.⁶

Muecke finds a number of elements in irony including a contrast of reality and appearance, a comic element, an element of detachment, and an aesthetic element. Close to the general definitions of verbal and situational irony stated previously is the element of the contrast of reality and appearance. Here, the ironist seems to be saying one thing but in all actuality is saying something totally different, and the victim of irony assumes that things are as they seem and is unaware that they are quite different. The comic element is a painful comedy; "laughter rises but is withered on the lips. Someone or something we cherish is cruelly made game of; we see the joke but are hurt by it."⁷

⁵Muecke, The Critical Idiom, pp. 67 and 69.

⁶Muecke, The Critical Idiom, p. 70.

⁷Muecke, The Critical Idiom, p. 33.

The element of detachment as seen in general irony finds that its meaning is the concept that there is a being, a Fate, a god, looking down on mankind in utter amusement at the follies which ensue. In this light, God is frequently cast as the archetypal ironist and Man, the archetypal victim. Finally, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the aesthetic element involves the very art of irony, the beauty of its effect. Laurence Perrine elaborates on this aspect of irony by pointing out that irony is a delicate device for "if irony is misunderstood, the reader goes away with exactly the opposite idea from what the user meant to convey . . . For this reason the user of irony must be very skillful in its use."⁸

Irony is an extremely difficult technique to understand because its effect is highly personal. What may be ironical to one observer may not be ironical to another primarily because irony is based on the unexpected or on the ability of the writer to express an opinion through a round-about way. If a writer cannot judge what his reader expects or the conditions under which his work is being read, then his irony is unsuccessful and goes unrecognized. Furthermore, although an attempt has been made in this chapter to define irony, it is, in reality, an impossible task. Not all ironies can be labelled. I have attempted to do such labelling only as an effort to give organization and to promote a basic understanding of irony as it can be seen in particular works of literature. It will be noted that the major ironies designated in this paper revolve around the "traditional" concept of God and biblical history. These "traditional" concepts lead us to expect one view of man and his relationship to God, yet contem-

⁸Perrine, Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense, p. 626.

porary and even biblical men reversed this view in order to show an obvious discrepancy in thought. In order to demonstrate such a discrepancy, the technique of irony has become the writers' most available tool. It will be my purpose to show that Job, J.B., A Masque of Reason, and "A Job of the Plains" find their power and impressiveness in their use of verbal and situational ironies and their constituents.

CHAPTER II

JOB

In the Prologue, the reader of the book of Job immediately recognizes the most obvious irony of the entire book. This irony centers around the fact that a man like Job should suffer in the first place. Job is described by the prose writer as a man who is "blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (1:1). Even more astounding is the reader's awareness that Job does nothing to provoke his sudden misfortune. Instead, Job is the pawn in a game of wits between Satan and God:

We are to understand from the very beginning that Job is not being punished. He is not even being disciplined. He is being tried. And that not because God himself intends the trial; God permits it. Not as testing, but confidently and proudly as vindication.

Not only does Job suffer under the watching eyes of God, but also he accepts his fate, at least in the sense that he does not curse God: "In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (1:22). These ironies and those which will follow are examples of situational irony in that much of what happens in Job--the picture of God, Job's reaction to his misfortune, Job's final fate, and the friends' offerings--either presents a point of view expected but not taken or

¹Paul Scherer, "Job: Exposition," The Interpreter's Bible III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 912. NOTE: There are very few sources which deal with the irony in the book of Job; therefore, I have had to rely heavily on The Interpreter's Bible as a major reference. Unless otherwise footnoted, much of the thought behind this chapter on Job has found its basis in Paul Scherer's Exposition.

vice versa. For instance, Job innocently states to his wife, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10), yet he has no foresight as to just how much he will suffer. It is at this point that the reader, conditioned by the traditional writers of earlier biblical texts, begins to confront a God he is not ready to accept. The loving and just God of the pre-exilic Hebrew mind is now ironically contrasted with a God who allows unjust suffering on the part of one who is good, and folly on the part of one who is antagonistic, i.e., Satan. Job is filled with unpleasant concepts of God, possibly because Job himself finds it difficult to correlate the traditional God with the one who is cursing him. While at one point Eliphaz praises God in a doxology of faith, Job counter-attacks by admitting his confusion:

For he crushes me with a tempest,
and multiplies my wounds without cause; . . .
Though I am innocent, my own mouth would
condemn me;
though I am blameless, he would prove me
perverse . . .
When disaster brings sudden death,
he mocks at the calamity of the innocent.
The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
he covers the faces of its judges--if it
is not he, who then is it?
(9:17, 20, 23-24)

As humble as Job appears at the outset, he becomes stubborn, and unlike the common traditionalist myth that he is patient, Job demands his innocence and the right to know why he has been suffering: "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;/ I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;/ I will complain in the bitterness of my soul . . . Why hast thou made me thy mark?/ Why have I become a burden to thee?" (7:11, 20). In his despair, Job cannot help looking back at his situation before his misfortune and comparing it to his present fate:

"I am a laughingstock to my friends;/ I, who called upon God and he answered me,/ a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock" (12:4).

In 29:2-30:21, Job goes into greater detail, speaking to God and pointing out how it used to be and how it is for him now: "Thou hast turned cruel to me;/ with the might of thy hand thou dost persecute me" (30:21).

Despite all that Job must suffer, still he attempts to be righteous even though he is little by little realizing that God's nature is not what he expected. He builds his confidence by saying that as long as the righteous hold to their ways, if they are clean of sin, they can only grow stronger and stronger (17:9). Job's character is, in itself, ironic. The reader soon recognizes that Job can never maintain the same temperament; in one passage, he is approaching a state of penitence short of confession (yet what is there to confess?), and in another moment, he is raging a one-sided, unanswered debate. All the time Job is harassed by the thought of his own integrity which in his case is worse than a guilty conscience. The very throbs of his anguish become the birth pangs of truth. In all practicality, it would have been easier for Job if he had sinned. At least his conscience would not have been in such upheaval. Yet it is this mental turmoil which resulted from the truth--Job had not sinned.

Perhaps some of the most obvious ironies in the book of Job occur in the appearance of Job's friends:

It is among the ironies of life that men like Eliphaz are the first to offer themselves as soul-physicians to the afflicted. They have cartloads of wholesome advice to bestow, and who but the afflicted are their lawful dumping ground? It is always permissible to take liberties with misery. Advice may be the frankest form of friendship; but when pressed on the unfortunate it may be the most offensive form of patronage. . . . Job was no longer great, therefore he need no longer be counted enlightened How these

men took advantage of their position! How they dinned rudimentary counsel into the ears of the man at whose feet they had once been willing to sit!²

The initial question to consider is whether Job's friends are really "friends." Apparently they come with good intentions according to the prose writer. The three friends--Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar--decide to meet with the purpose of condoling and comforting Job. At first they do not recognize him in his wretched state, and they raise their voices and weep; and they rend their robes and sprinkle dust upon their heads toward heaven. Furthermore, in a friendly manner, they sit with him for seven days and nights and do not speak to him for they see that his suffering is very great (2:12-13). The poet, however, develops their personalities more, and at the same time, reveals the inadequacies of their friendship. Eliphaz unwittingly calls Job a fool, saying that if he were in Job's place, he would seek God: "As for me, I would seek God,/ and to God would I commit my cause" (5:8). The irony is that this is exactly what Job does, with no immediate results. Furthermore, Eliphaz calls Job a fool, and in the final scenes of the book, it is Eliphaz--as well as the other two friends--who is the fool and must have Job as his mediator. Bildad follows up what Eliphaz suggests by also telling Job to make supplication to the Almighty, and in that way, God would reward him with a rightful habitation: "And though your beginning was small,/ your latter days will be very great" (8:7). This, in essence, is exactly what happens to Job but not for the reasons Bildad thinks. Bildad is convinced Job has sinned as are the other friends--this

²James McKechnie, Job, Moral Hero, Religious Egoist, and Mystic p. 37, quoted Paul Scherer, "Job: Exposition," The Interpreter's Bible, III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 945.

is the major problem with their advice; they are giving it for the wrong reason. Job, however, can see through his friends and pays little attention to them: "As for you, you whitewash with lies;/ worthless physicians are you all" (13:4). Ironically, Job next asks his friends what they would do if they were in his place, not realizing that this is exactly what later happens to them:

Will it be well with you when he searches you out?
Or can you deceive him, as one deceives a man?
He will surely rebuke you
if in secret you show partiality.
Will not his majesty terrify you,
and the dread of him fall upon you?
Your maxims are proverbs of ashes,
your defenses are defenses of clay. (13:9-12)

Job is forced to face the truth about his friends--"My friends scorn me" (16:20). According to Paul Scherer, they turn religion into "a hollow and meaningless thing on both counts." They would have been more successful had they been less 'pious,' yet they succeed, instead, in telling truths that are half lies. They attempt to judge Job proceeding from systems to persons, but in God's world, persons come first. With this approach, the result is that their half lies come too close to being sneak lies, whether told consciously or unconsciously in order to support a 'safe' truth.

Elihu is a "surprise" visitor if only because the reader is not introduced to him earlier as in the case of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Elihu appears suddenly in the thirty second chapter, proudly announcing that he has an opinion of Job's situation which he will offer without partiality or flattery toward any man. Opinion he does give, without reservation, but his arrogance is obvious: "Listen to me;/ be silent, and I will teach you wisdom" (33:33). Elihu states in

36:15 that God delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ears by adversity, but how little Elihu realizes that this is the basis of Job's suffering and complaints all along. The ramifications of this verse are more than Elihu imagines. Finally comes the point in the story of Job where Job has the opportunity to laugh at his pitiful friends. God has spoken to Job, and in the Epilogue, God says to Eliphaz:

'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.' So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer. (42:7-9)

In the traditional Hebrew approach, God is the father image for the Hebrew nation. He protected his people as they left Egyptian captivity and blessed their society as it established its culture around his leadership. God, or Yahweh, was a loving, just god and the only god. It was not uncommon for God to bless those who followed his edicts; nor was it unusual for him to curse those who broke from his guardianship. The book of Job, however, while presenting a God who blesses and curses, separates this nature from justice. To the poet, at least, God is anything but just. Job is not hesitant in wishing death for himself, but even this is not successful. There, ironies abound. He wants death, yet still he lives; he wants God to talk to him, yet God gives no answer. Instead, Job feels hedged in by a less than passionate God: "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me;/ my spirit drinks their poison;/ the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (6:4). The common reader does not want to face

the fact that God is the cause of such injustice so he turns to the figure of the challenging Satan. Job, however, faces the truth; he cannot trust God: "But how can a man be just before God?/ . . . Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;/ I must appeal for mercy to my accuser./ If I summoned him and he answered me,/ I would not believe that he was listening to my voice" (9:2, 15,16). Even more ironical is that now Job realizes the good are no longer blessed and the evil, cursed. Instead, the opposite is true. The earth is given to the wicked, and God allows it:

Why do the wicked live,
 reach old age, and grow mighty in power?
 Their children are established in their presence,
 and their offspring before their eyes.
 Their houses are safe from fear,
 and no rod of God is upon them. (21:7-9)

Of the poor, Job cries:

They go about naked, without clothing; hungry, they carry
 the sheaves;
 Among the olive rows of the wicked they make oil;
 they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst.
 From out of the city the dying groan,
 and the soul of the wounded cries for help;
 yet God pays no attention to their prayer. (24:10-12)

Job's friends are the first to present a picture of the traditional concept of God. Zophar promotes God as manifold in understanding. But is he? At this point, Job is far from secure in this knowledge. Now Job must retaliate. At one time Job was sure that God's favor rested on him. But now he is equally sure that he is the object of God's relentless hostility. Job can no longer tolerate his friends' ignorance. He knows that only God can rescue him: "Since thou hast closed their minds to understanding,/ therefore thou wilt not let them triumph" (17:4). Job's friends say that he must repent before

God will come, but Job knows this would be futile since there is nothing for which to repent. What Job does not realize is that he is closer to the truth in his stubbornness than his friends can ever hope to be. Job asks for God to grant him only two things--that he withdraw his hand from Job and that he not cause Job to fear him (13:20-21). Yet, ironically, these are the two things which God does not do. All that happens next to Job, happens in spite of them. Job does everything to find God although his friends do not recognize this, but it is up to God now to reveal himself:

Oh, that I knew where I might find him,
 that I might come even to his seat! . . .
 Behold, I go forward, but he is not there;
 and backward, but I cannot perceive him;
 On the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him;
 I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him. . . .
 But he is unchangeable and who can turn him?
 What he desires, that he does. (23:3, 8-9, 13)

Job verbalizes his situation claiming that his despair sends him to a land of gloom where "light is as darkness" (10:22). Later he says, "When I looked for good, evil came;/ and when I waited for light, darkness came" (30:26). At one point, Elihu strikes close to the truth in his attempt to present a realistic picture of God to Job; "Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds,/ the thunderings of his pavilions?" (36:29). With this statement in mind, it is now important to note just in what manner God finally does reveal himself to Job. Previously, Job asks God, "withdraw thy hand far from me,/ and let not dread of thee terrify me" (13:21), yet God's appearance in the whirlwind does the opposite as though God's purpose is to terrify Job which undoubtedly it is. When God speaks:

. . . it is to sharpen against his servant the arrows of his vast irony, calling on Job to come up and sit on the

throne of the heavens and do better if he can, if he thinks it is so easy to govern the world in righteousness.

(Scherer, p. 1170)

For thirty-eight chapters, the book of Job builds up to the point when God will straighten everything out, when He will answer the questions of Job, and even more greatly, the questions of all mankind. When He does answer, it is with power and self-assurance, but He says nothing--nothing new, that is. He gives no answers and no explanations. Job learns nothing of Satan and nothing of the wager. What God does say, Job already knows. Job was a good man at the offset; God establishes this himself. But God's speech serves more as a not-so-subtle hint to Job--in essence, Job is reminded of his place, realizing that God thinks not only of man but all elements of creation even though man may not like this idea of being in any other place but first. From the beginning, Job challenges God, demanding to know why he has suffered. Job is stubborn and, at times, disrespectful. One would expect him to seize this opportunity to assert himself and further demand that as long as God is speaking to him, He might as well answer Job's pleas. But Job reacts in an entirely different manner. He humbles himself--"Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?/ I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4).

There are a number of situational ironies which do not fall under the categories of Job's character, the friends' appearances, or the picture of God which Job presents. This by no means suggests that these examples of irony are insignificant, for, in fact, they are not. If we can take the prose writer at his word when he says that Job was blameless and upright, it is then interesting to note that if indeed Job sinned, it was not until after he is cursed--his sin

being a dying faith and what some might consider excessive pride. Furthermore, Job's attitude is ironic in that God treats him so unjustly, yet he still attempts to be righteous though it becomes increasingly hard for him to do so. The final prose portion of Job is not to be ignored if only because much of the traditional attitude toward Job centers around God's reward. Yet, one wonders if anything is worth the suffering Job endured. Nevertheless, Job does end up wealthier than before:

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house; and they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. . . . And after this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days. (42:10-13, 16-17)

At one point in the seventh chapter, Job cries, "Remember that my life is a breath;/ my eye will never again see good" (7:7). The reader, however, sees at the end that Job is wrong; he has misjudged his situation, although who can blame him?

Dramatic irony is a further extension of situational irony, and in Job it is an obvious technique which causes the reader to sympathize with Job even more. Throughout the poetic portions up to the theophany, Job wants to know what he has done to provoke such discomfort on his part: "Teach me, and I will be silent;/ make me understand how I have erred./ Is there any wrong on my tongue?/ Cannot my taste discern calamity?" (6:24, 30). Of course the reader knows from 1:12 that Job has done no wrong, that God has made a

bargain with Satan at Job's expense. In one instance, Job begs God to let him die: "Oh that thou wouldst hide me in Sheol, / that thou wouldst conceal me until thy wrath be past" (14:13), but what Job does not know is that God has given Satan permission to inflict anything upon Job except death; there is no escape for Job, not even death. In essence, according to one source, the object of the Prologue is to tell the reader what Job does not know and never knows, the reason for his suffering.³

The three friends and Elihu, however, are as ignorant of Job's innocence as Job is; in other words, they are not aware of the wager between God and Satan either. All four automatically accept the traditional concept that man does not suffer unless he has sinned and is being punished by a just God. Eliphaz puts this belief into words when he questions Job, "Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? / Or where were the upright cut off?" (4:7). Besides, according to Eliphaz, no mortal man can be righteous and pure before God; God does not even trust his servants and he charges his angels with error. Bildad approaches Job's suffering in a different way in that he places the blame not on the sins of Job, but on the sins of Job's children. Bildad further reprimands Job for accusing God of tearing at him; instead he blames Job for tearing at himself (18:4). All in all, the reader wonders if Job's friends are really friends since they judge, rather misjudge, him so badly. They said it was Job's fault, and he said it was God's. Ironically, Job never finds out how close he is to the truth.

³I. F. Wood and Elihu Grant, The Bible as Literature: An Introduction (New York: Abingdon Press, 1914), p. 180.

The intrusive Bildad asks, "Does God pervert justice?/ Or does the Almighty pervert the right?" (8:3). But to the reader, God does indeed pervert justice (at least according to mankind's interpretation of justice). Even though Bildad asserts that if Job is pure and upright, surely God will rouse himself for him and reward him with a rightful habitation (8:6), the reader knows that this will not happen. God eventually does "rouse himself," but not according to Bildad's logic. It does not occur if Job is pure and upright, for Job is pure and upright. Moreover, Bildad continually attempts to frighten Job by telling him the fate of those who forget God-- "the hope of the godless man shall perish" (8:13). But Job protests and says to God directly, "thou knowest that I am not guilty" (10:7), and God does know just that. Zophar is not to be outdone by the other friends, and he maintains that God exacts less of Job than his guilt deserves; Zophar could not be any farther wrong. Elihu, also, affirms what the others have said: "Far be it from God that he should do wickedness,/ and from the Almighty that he should do wrong" (34:10). Later Elihu states that God "does not regard any who are wise in their own conceit" (37:24). While this last statement may in one sense be true; nevertheless, the reader sees at the end of the story that God accuses the three friends of not speaking what is right about him while Job has. As pointed out before, God does not explain to Job why he has suffered so, and the reader senses an inadequacy in this confrontation. In truth, "God permits Satan to make the experiment, frankly admitting that the action is wholly without just cause."⁴ This is the frustration in the book of Job.

⁴Sprau, Literature in the Bible, p. 240.

While verbal irony is not a dominant factor in the Job story, it is, nevertheless, not to be overlooked, for it is a primary weapon of the prose writer. Job cannot be said to be a comical book, and the element of humor is rarely evident. There is, however, one point where the reader cannot help cheering Job on as he verbally attacks his friends--but his attack is subtle and probably fools Bildad to whom he is addressing the attack:

Then Job answered:

"How you have helped him who has no power!
 How you have saved the arm that has no strength!
 How you have counseled him who has no wisdom,
 and plentifully declared sound knowledge!
 With whose help have you uttered words,
 and whose spirit has come forth from you? (26:1-4)

The three friends obviously either do not understand what Job means or they understand, but ignore it. Moreover, the reader gets the impression that Job does not expect them to pay much attention to what he says in return to their exhortations: "But you, come on again, all of you,/ and I shall not find a wise man among you" (17:10). It has previously been noted that frequently the friends say remarks to Job which they consider to mean one thing, and the reader discovers later that what was said was true but not in the way meant. Eliphaz states at one point: "Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves;/ therefore despise not the chastening of the Almighty./ For he wounds, but he binds up;/ he smites, but his hands heal" (5:17-18). This is easy for Eliphaz to say since he is not the one suffering. Moreover, what he says about God is true; he just does not know how true. For God does bind up Job's wound and his hands do heal, twice over. Bildad also makes a similar assertion: "And though your beginning was small,/ your latter days will be very great"

(8:7). Just how great Bildad has no way of knowing; neither does Job for that matter. Little does Bildad know that Job's latter days will be so great that he will have to pray on Eliphaz's, Bildad's, and Zophar's behalf. Further, Elihu sees God as delivering the afflicted by their affliction and opening their ears by adversity. Even though Elihu says this, he probably has no idea that God will deliver Job or appear to Job in such a thunderous, ear-opening manner. It has been pointed out before that the three friends, who honestly believe they are speaking the truth, are really speaking half-truths and even lies. They know nothing of the nature of God, and what they do know, they misunderstand and misinterpret. Job maintains that his suffering is God's fault, and it is. But Job's suffering is more complicated than even Job realizes. Job's disillusionment is deeply personal, but however critical of God, one critic asserts that Job does not speak in arrogance and revolt, but in love.⁵ There is no doubt that Job is confused, and it is possible Job has no idea just how he feels. One final example of verbal irony can be seen in God's appearance in the whirlwind. Since the onset of Job's affliction, he has been begging God for answers. God's answers, however, come in the form of questions. In fact, God demands answers to his questions, knowing full well Job cannot give them to him. Furthermore, God is not asking his questions for answers anyway; he already knows the answers. All in all, the last four chapters are total confusion, but the theophany achieves its purpose. Job no longer questions God; instead he accepts the total

⁵Richard B. Sewall, "The Book of Job," The Book of Job, ed. Paul S. Sanders (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), p. 23.

theophany event humbly and briefly:

Then Job answered the LORD:
 I know that thou canst do all things,
 and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.
 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'
 Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
 things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
 'Hear, and I will speak;
 I will question you, and you declare to me.'
 I had heard to thee by the hearing of the ear,
 but now my eye sees thee;
 therefore I despise myself,
 and repent in dust and ashes. (42:1-6)

And irony which plays perhaps the most important part in Job is that which is called general or cosmic irony. In this type of irony, the victim represents not only himself but all of mankind. In essence, it centers around the relationship between God and humanity. The element of detachment cannot be denied in the picture of God which Job presents. God is indeed majestic, just, pure, and merciful, but the reader can never quite shake the feeling that God is never for a moment involved in his world, or perhaps it should be said that he is so much involved with the entire universe that man feels left out;

But how can a man be just before God?
 If one wished to contend with him,
 one could not answer him once in a thousand times.
 He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength
 --who has hardened himself against him, and succeeded?--
 . . . For he crushes me with a tempest,
 and multiplies my wounds without cause;
 He will not let me get my breath,
 but fills me with bitterness.
 If it is a contest of strength, behold him!
 If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?
 (9:2-4, 17-19)

Job suffers, and he begins to realize a basic truth about his suffering.

Job sees his misfortunes not as unique to himself alone but as typical

of man's lot. In a way, he becomes a partisan of the human race.⁶ Job, however, is not the only character seen as an Everyman figure. Paul Scherer sees, instead, Elihu and the three friends as more clearcut symbols of man:

It is strange to reflect that the real challenge was not Job's at all. The unremitting challenge God has to deal with year in and year out was what Elihu and the three friends were, and what they kept saying. Perhaps one should take them, not Job, as symbols of man, always confronting the Eternal, always difficult, standing for the most part either dully or sullenly apart from his purpose, often enough striding brazenly across it or running stubbornly against it.

(p. 1149)

It can be said with little dispute that Job, Elihu and the three friends--all--represent modern man in that they either disbelieve the mystery or mistrust it, and their first impulse is to make it visible. They must solve the mystery, for the idea of the mysterious gives them a sense of the unresolved.⁷ All in all, as explained by Marvin Pope, Job's journey from despair to faith is the way each mortal must go.⁸

Job seeks death because, like all men, he wants not only life but also a worthwhile existence. If he cannot have this, he rejects it and protests the compulsion to live. It seems cruel to place Job in such an uncompromising position just to prove a point. Yet the book of Job is trying to say that even in the deepest despair, man need not be separated from God. If only Job had known all along

⁶Sewall, The Book of Job, p. 29.

⁷G. Buchanan Gray, "The Purpose and Method of the Writer," The Book of Job, ed. Paul S. Sanders (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 102.

⁸Marvin Pope, "Viewed as a Whole," The Dimensions of Job, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 227.

what he never finds out. Still, Job no doubt reacts just as God has planned. Job goes away satisfied by God's so-called answers to his many questions, and he seems to forget that there had been a time when God's majesty had been of no comfort to him, but a terror. Job's friends condemned Job for daring to question God, but as it was, the skeptic was nearer the truth than the pious.

It is interesting to note one final irony, perhaps the irony above all in Job. Job is continually calling on God to reveal himself, to prove that he is nearby. The reader knows that God has been with Job all along, manifesting himself through Job's suffering rather than coming to Job's rescue. Indeed, God has been present from the start, so finding God is not really the problem. The real challenge is to get rid of God--for without God, none of Job's affliction would have occurred.

Much of the artistry of the book of Job is based on the author's use of irony which revolves around the traditional Hebrew concept of a loving and just God. The author of Job turns from the traditional and reveals a cold, calculating God who openly displays his power at the expense of Job's well-being. The ironies abound. The reader knows why Job suffers, yet Job himself never learns of the initial bargain between God and Satan. Job wants to die, but this is the one escape he is not allowed. The fact that a man as good as Job should suffer so disastrously is perhaps the greatest irony of all. Taken together, the ironies in Job serve as a technique by which the author reveals the questions that exist in men's minds concerning the nature of God.

CHAPTER III

J.B.

Archibald MacLeish has taken the Job story and incorporated it into a drama in verse. MacLeish has used the technique of irony in order to study the relationship of God and man and to point out modern man's attempt to cope with a traditional view of God which to him is no longer adequate in modern society.

MacLeish published J.B. in 1957. The problem which propelled MacLeish to consider the question of man's suffering arose during World War II. He was in London during the blitz, and the slaughter of innocent civilians in the Luftwaffe bombings disturbed him deeply.¹ He was especially appalled by the suffering of the Scots people: "They got bombed because the curve of the river there made a mark the bombers could see on a moonlit night . . . that was their sin."² As he grappled with the ideas of the senselessness of much human suffering, he was driven toward the classic treatment of this question in western literature and toward the book of Job.

In writing J.B., MacLeish points out a significant difference between the Hebrew man and modern man. MacLeish sees the Hebrew as living in an age with room for faith and hope and meaning in life.

¹Colin Campbell, "The Transformation of Biblical Myth: MacLeish's Use of the Adam and Job Stories," Myth and Symbol, ed. Bernice Slote, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), p. 82.

²Warren Bush, ed., The Dialogues of Archibald MacLeish and Mark Van Doren (New York, 1964), p. 105, quoted Leslie Desmond, "J.B. and the Case for Modern Man," Lit, 10 (Winter, 1969-1970), p. 6.

The tragedy of modern men is that they see themselves as helpless victims, possibly to be killed in worldwide wars . . . "without a thought or reason but--if we can call it one--of force."³

In writing J.B., Archibald MacLeish has employed the technique of irony at its best perhaps because he was aware from the start of the results of such an approach. The irony in J.B., however, is much more subtle and intricate than in Job. MacLeish does not use only the most obvious ironies although verbal irony plays a large part in the success of the drama. More specifically, MacLeish uses the element of contrast between reality and appearance, the painful comic element, and the element of detachment. In many cases he employs the technique of simple incongruity in an effort to show that much of what is said or done by the characters is inconsistent within itself.

The setting of the drama is a corner inside an enormous circus tent, and it is later recognized that this is representative of the world. In order to promote a "religious" and universal atmosphere, clothes that look like vestments of many churches and times have been scattered about the stage. Mr. Zuss and Nickles "betray in carriage and speech the broken-down actor fallen on evil days but nevertheless and always actor" (p. 3).⁴ Yet it is these two characters which dominate the drama and force its meaning on the reader. The name "Job" has been changed to "J.B.", and by using the initials, MacLeish has promoted an image of his character which revolves around

³Leslie Desmond, "J.B. and the Case for Modern Man," Lit., 10 (Winter, 1969-1970), p. 5.

⁴The page number for this quotation and all subsequent quotations in this section refer to the text: Archibald MacLeish, J.B. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958).

high society, stocks and bonds, and suburbia. The setting is, in essence, a stage within a stage, and eventually the characters, including Zuss and Nickles, become so involved in the drama that reality and make-believe become obscure and lose focus: "Those stars that stare their stares at me--/ Are those the staring stars I see/ Or only lights . . ./ not meant for me?" (p. 5).

As mentioned previously, the drama revolves around Mr. Zuss and Nickles--their conversations and conflicts--as much as around J.B. Furthermore, it is important to note that a major irony concerns the relationship between Mr. Zuss and Nickles and their relationship to the drama as a whole. It is interesting that Mr. Zuss and Nickles have the same characteristics as the characters they play. Mr. Zuss is described as "large, florid, deep-voiced, dignified, imposing;" these could be the same terms used to describe the traditional anthropomorphic God of the ages. On the opposite side, Nickles--who is not granted the title "Mr."--is gaunt and sardonic, typifying the traditional concept of the Satan. In the opening scene of J.B., Mr. Zuss and Nickles have an argument concerning their masks. There is no question in Mr. Zuss' mind that he will play God, but when Nickles suggests he wear a mask, Mr. Zuss is taken back for he cannot imagine what is wrong with his own face. Nickles, in what seems an attitude of respect, comments:

God the Creator of the Universe?
 God who hung the world in time?
 You wouldn't hang the world in time
 With a two-days' beard on your chin or a pinky! (p. 6)

However, this tone of respect changes soon as Nickles sarcastically expresses his real purpose in promoting the mask: God never laughs,

and a mask is needed to cover the possibility that Mr. Zuss may forget his role and laugh. When the players finally do wear their masks, the mask of God is a harsh reminder. It is a large white, blank, expressionless mask with lidded eyes. Nickles is appalled by the half-closed eyes, and when Mr. Zuss defends himself--"There is nothing those closed eyes/ Have not known and seen"--Nickles quickly asserts, "Except/ To know they see: to know they've seen it" (p. 16). Nickles' mask, however, is entirely different. It is as large as God's but is dark compared to God's white. Most important, the Satan mask is open-eyed and seems to stare. Though the eyes look wrinkled with laughter, the mouth is drawn down in agonized disgust. When Nickles is silent, Mr. Zuss reminds him that this is the "traditional/ Face we've always found for him" (p. 19). But Mr. Zuss does not stop at this; he goes on to say that he couldn't wear the Satan mask, especially with those eyes; he'd scrub the skin off afterwards. Nickles would rather wear the look of loathing than one of cold complacency. To Nickles, God's mask (and God) is as horrible as a star above a destroyed city. Those eyes, those horrible eyes, are closed to the realities of the world. The open eyes of Satan are aware of life's miseries; and, Hell is being conscious of these miseries. The key to much of the drama's irony, therefore, lies in MacLeish's presentation of Mr. Zuss and Nickles as God and Satan. The masks express the idea that the traditional concepts of God and Satan can no longer hold true. The loving God is seen now as blind to the needs of the world, and there is no expression of love; instead his countenance is blank, empty of all feeling. MacLeish's ironic twist in the God-Satan concept is that it is Satan who is filled with pity. His

expression may be one of disgust, but it is such because Satan is aware of man's plight and this appalls him. Nickles is sickened by J.B.'s attempt to poison his children's minds "with love of life" possibly because he knows what life will bring for them. When J.B. and Sarah discover in Scene Three that their son has been killed in a ridiculous war accident, Mr. Zuss and Nickles look on, their masks in their hands. Mr. Zuss' face is expressionless, and Nickles' bears a twisted grin--he has expected this. Yet when J.B. loses all five of his children, it is Nickles who is horrified and not Mr. Zuss. He thinks it is merely further proof of J.B.'s devotion. The terrifying aspect of all this to Nickles is that the loss of J.B.'s children is not enough: "He cannot rest until He wrings/ The proof of pain, the ultimate certainty./ God always asks the proof of pain" (p. 94). As hard as this is to accept, Mr. Zuss affirms it by saying, "His suffering will praise" (p. 95). Ironically, MacLeish, in essence, makes God the demonic personality while Satan argues in J.B.'s defense. This defense no doubt has an ulterior motive in that Satan wishes for J.B. to deny God; nevertheless, Satan does seem more aware of J.B.'s suffering than God. J.B. is next struck by physical decay and poverty. For Nickles, this is just one more indication that God is cruel beyond understanding since God has seemingly allowed a nuclear war which destroys millions in order to afflict only one:

Every blessed blundering time
 You hit at one man you blast thousands.
 Think of that Flood of yours--a massacre!
 Now you've fumbled it again:
 Tumbled a whole city down
 To blister one man's skin with agony. (p. 99)

At one point, J.B. cries, "God will not punish without cause . . . God is just" (p. 109). But as with the ancient Job, God has been

unjust, playing with Job's (and J.B.'s) life to prove a point. The roles of Mr. Zuss and Nickles and God and Satan interact so completely that they lose separate identity. This was undoubtedly MacLeish's purpose. The roles shift back and forth so frequently that Mr. Zuss cannot separate himself from God and Nickles cannot separate himself from Satan. The results find Mr. Zuss not only as the character "God" but also as God Himself. The same is true for Nickles. This becomes especially evident in Scene Two when Mr. Zuss and Nickles have the same argument as found in the opening chapter of Job. Zuss boasts that God will teach J.B.; He will show him what God is, but Nickles counteracts by saying that once J.B. is put under pressure, he will break: "Wait till your pigeon/ Pecks at the world the way the rest do--/ Eager beak to naked bum" (p. 48). Mr. Zuss will not have such insolence, and he commands Nickles to put on his mask for "Nothing this good man might suffer,/ Nothing at all, would make him yell/ As you do. He'd praise God no matter" (p. 48). And why must J.B. suffer at all? "To praise!" (p. 48). How like the originals Mr. Zuss and Nickles have become. There is, also, the mysterious voice, A Distant Voice, that speaks out over Mr. Zuss and Nickles. It is this voice that speaks in the whirlwind even as God spoke in Job. As a character, the "Voice" is never seen, only heard. This, no doubt, is the presence of God, who gets great pleasure in watching Mr. Zuss and Nickles play God and Satan who in turn are watching an actor play J.B. who is really playing a modern day Job. This circle of characterization is one more way MacLeish ironically portrays his characters as becoming so involved in their parts that they take on their roles as reality.

J.B. is not a powerful character, at least not in the same sense that Job was, but this may be so because of the authors' individual treatments. The author of Job stresses the role of Job, and all other characters, including God, are played down. In J.B., however, MacLeish devotes as much time to the God-Satan relationship as he does to J.B.; thus J.B. must share the stage instead of playing a solo performance. In remembering the ancient Job, Mr. Zuss sees Job's challenge as rank irreverence; it was not Job's right to demand justice of God. When Mr. Zuss asserts that God has reasons, Nickles argues that God has reasons for the hawks and goats, but not for Job (man). In fact, "the one thing God can't stomach is a man" (p. 10). Even if this is not completely true, the attitude is there, and it permeates the drama from beginning to end. Already, J.B.'s destiny can be guessed.

In the opening scenes of J.B., we see the title character as a faithful family man with unshakable faith in a just God. Although J.B. is recognizably devout, he is not as one might expect, traditional. It is his wife who maintains the more traditional attitude toward religion. Scene Two opens on a Thanksgiving dinner, and soon there ensues a disagreement between J.B. and Sarah regarding the correct way to thank God. Sarah presents the traditional or Deuteronomic ethic of rewards and punishments. For her, God should be thanked verbally, for if man does his part, then God will not forget. J.B., in calm disagreement, defends the innocent enthusiasm of their children saying their excitement is enough thanks for God. Of his own faith, J.B. says:

Never since I learned to tell
My shadow from my shirt, not once,

Not for a watch-tick, have I doubted
 God was on my side, was good to me.
 Even young and poor I knew it.
 People called it luck: it wasn't.
 I never thought so from the first
 Fine silver dollar to the last
 Controlling interest in some company
 I couldn't get--and got. It isn't
 Luck.

(p. 35)

But this does not calm Sarah. She is afraid because they have so much. J.B. relies on his good fortune and assures her that God is just and that man can count on Him. J.B. regards success, wealth and happiness as things which are just there; one does not acquire them by being deserving.⁵ Still Sarah submits that God can reward and He can punish. She sees them caught in "Heaven's quandary"--and J.B. attempts to calm her fears by saying, "To be, become, and end are beautiful" (p. 43). There is no question in J.B.'s mind about God's justice, but as the drama proceeds, there is reason for doubt. In many instances, Sarah is more correct about God than J.B. She is not comfortable. She asks the children whether they had thought of God while they were enjoying life. She senses that things cannot go on as well as they have been. Indeed, it seems that since Sarah has been preparing herself for downfall, she would be able to accept what happens. But when tragedy strikes, unlike what is expected, she is the one who loses faith. It is J.B. in his faithful innocence who ought to curse God, but he maintains his faith to the disgust of his wife. When the soldiers come to see J.B. and Sarah, they are in a drunken stupor, unaware that David's parents do not know of his death. Sarah believes they are bringing a message from David; she

⁵Campbell, "The Transformation of Biblical Myth," Myth and Symbol, p. 82.

has no idea they will give her a message about him. MacLeish gives the reader a clue when he has the soldiers speak in the past tense about David, but still the ugly truth comes as a shock to both the parents and the reader. To add to the irony of the occasion, it is discovered that David is killed after the end of the war as a result of an officer's blunder. In her anguish, Sarah blames God, but at this point, no words are heard from J.B. even though sorrow is to be expected. With the death of two more children, witnessed by a man "caught in that inextricable net/ Of having witnessed, having seen" (p. 66), Sarah and J.B. are thrown even deeper into despair. Sarah again blames it on God, a normal reaction, and is reprimanded by J.B.: "Shall we . . ./ Take the good and not the evil?/ We have to take the chances, Sarah:/ Evil with good./ It doesn't mean there/ Is no good!" (p. 71). But Sarah will not stand for this and she goes one step farther in attempting to show J.B. the truth. She points out the conflict, the irony, in J.B.'s theory: "When you were lucky it was God!" (p. 71). She sees a flaw in J.B.'s logic; J.B. gives God the credit when something good happens, but he will not blame God when something bad occurs. There is no doubt that J.B. is now at the point of despondency--the stage directions point this out: "awkwardly," "then, in a desperate candor," "His voice breaks," "He drops on his knees beside her" (pp. 71-72), but still he does not curse God. Finally, at a time when husband and wife need each other, Sarah rebukes J.B. and refuses to be touched by him. In Scene Five, their fourth and youngest child dies after being assaulted by a young psychopath. J.B. clutches the parasol which was found on the dead child's body and cries, "The Lord giveth . . ./ the Lord taketh away!" (p. 83). It is Nickles, however, who points

out what is happening. Nickles tells Mr. Zuss that J.B. knows-- "He knows Who gives, he knows Who takes now" (p. 83). J.B. is suffering, and now he knows suffering's Name, now he knows that God is as much a part of suffering as He is blessing. By Scene Six, J.B. has lost all that he had. His clothes are torn and white with dust, his bank has been destroyed by the war, his last daughter has been killed by a falling wall, and Sarah is distraught with anger and sorrow. Still, as before, J.B. will not let himself sink into despair. He is beginning to question why this has all happened, but he will not forsake God. When he attempts to sway Sarah, her anguished scream is followed only by a contrasting silence as he calls, "Blessed by the name of the Lord" (p. 90). J.B. finally reaches the point where he wants to die, but he still defends God when Sarah calls Him their enemy. Against this scene, MacLeish has introduced a group of women and a young girl who are homeless like J.B. Among themselves, they discuss J.B.'s fate, and with their cold insight, they condemn Sarah for her loss of compassion. Sarah, in speaking to J.B., expresses her fear to sleep for as she closes her eyes, Eyes are open there to meet her. This is the ominous presence of God who has shut the night against her and filled the darkness with a blazing light; she can get no peace. Nickles, always the reminder of the irony of J.B.'s predicament, inserts here that God's will, which J.B. trusts explicitly, is not intended for J.B.'s peace or Sarah's, but for His own. When J.B. again demands that God is just, Sarah leaves him with one last cry: "I will not stay here if you lie . . ./ Not if you betray my children . . ./ I will not let you sacrifice their deaths/ To make injustice justice and God good!" (p. 110). But even the thought of

his children's innocence will not make him change: "We have no choice but to be guilty./ God is unthinkable if we are innocent." For J.B., one cannot go to God in innocence; one must have guilt before God even exists. He cannot reconcile the innocence of his children--an innocence which he asserts in Scene Two--with a God who will destroy this innocence for no reason. The tragedy and irony is, that for all J.B.'s good intentions, he is wrong. He feels he must suffer guilt even though he does not know why, when all the time there is no justification. When Nickles challenges Mr. Zuss to tell J.B. his fault, there is no answer. There is never any answer for J.B.

When the three friends come to comfort him, J.B. tells them that he knows how he must look and that he knows how others see him. But does he really know? J.B. thinks he only appears a poverty stricken man, covered with sores and dressed in rags. Yet Nickles sees in J.B. a pitiful human with no idea of what has been going on behind his back. His wife, in her blasphemy, is closer to the truth than J.B. can accept; she sees much more in the situation as it truly is even though she deserts J.B. When the three friends attempt to justify his situation, J.B. becomes impatient, begging them to tell him his sin: "Speak of the sin I must have sinned/ To suffer what you see me suffer" (p. 125). And when Zophar answers by piously saying that one does not need to know what he has done in order to repent and be forgiven, J.B. is offended. At one point he told Sarah he had no choice but to be guilty, but now he realizes his integrity is at stake, and he cannot repent for sins he has not committed. As in the biblical account, after the last friend speaks, there is a rush of wind, and out of the wind comes the voice of God. Even though the friends are still with J.B., they hear nothing other than

the rushing wind while God speaks to J.B. of the wonders of the world that He has created. Only one other person hears the Voice, but the young Jolly Adams is told it is only thunder. Yet she knows she has heard a word--she does not know it is the Word. The Distant Voice questions J.B. in an effort to make him recognize his position in the Universe. While the words MacLeish uses are direct from the biblical account, the stage directions speak with additional meaning. J.B. answers God with his face drawn in agony. As he repents, he bows his head and wrings his hands. Now he sees God, he sees the truth, and it is painful; it is something he did not wish to accept but now he must.

Perhaps one of the most profound ironies in J.B. is Mr. Zuss' reaction to J.B.'s repentance. Nickles notes that Mr. Zuss does not look pleased, and soon he discovers why. In J.B.'s final scene with God, God interprets J.B.'s response as one not only of repentance but of forgiveness, for God:

Then, he calmed me!
 . . . Forgive me! . . .
 for the world! . . .
 In spite of everything he'd suffered!
 In spite of all he'd lost and loved
 He understood and he forgave it! . . . (pp. 138-139)

J.B. bows his head and forgives God. He feels guilty no longer for what is monstrous is not of his doing and he can, therefore, bear it.⁶ God's victory is a bitter one. God is to forgive, but ironically it is J.B. who forgives Him. J.B.'s story does not end here, however, for God restores him at the end. In fact, according to Nickles, God restores what man did not want in the first place--life

⁶John Ciardi, "The Birth of a Classic," The Saturday Review, 41 (March 8, 1958), p. 48.

and the lives we live. When Mr. Zuss pronounces that J.B. will get back all he ever had and more, Nickles mentions ironically, "Sure, His wife. His children!" (p. 142). How can he get back those who are dead or one who has deserted him of her own will? Besides, J.B., according to Nickles, does not want his wife; he would not touch her if he could. With his plea, Nickles confronts J.B. who wants to be left alone. Nickles is quick to point out that he is not the Father; he is a Friend--as though being the Father would not give him a chance. He warns J.B. of what is to come, that if he continues to repent, God will allow him to live his life again as it was, always running the risk of ending in the same anguish as he is now. Nickles tries to persuade J.B. to throw it all in God's face, but when J.B. does not listen, Nickles is not surprised. In a subdued manner, he merely states, "I know" (p. 148).

In the final scene, Sarah returns to J.B., having failed at losing herself in the holocaust of the war. In a world which is seemingly dead, she finds one branch of forsythia, a sign of life: "Among the ashes! / I found it growing in the ashes, / Gold as though it did not know . . ." (p. 150). Sarah has not forgotten the misery they suffered, and she reminds J.B. that though he cried for justice there is none. For them, only love can be the answer. Ironically, Sarah admits that she left J.B. because she loved him, and now she has returned to him for the same reason. They realize together that God does not love--that is possible only on the human level. The candles of the church are out. There is no answer from organized religion, only from love for each other. There is darkness outside but as they draw together, "The light increases, plain white daylight from the door" (p. 153).

J.B. has learned a truth which is not pleasant but one he must accept. J.B. suspects at the beginning and knows at the end that "the actions of one who does not know what he is doing are neither just nor unjust, good nor bad."⁷ The God he has trusted does not appear to warrant this trust. Because J.B. is not a rebel, the intervention of the Lord speaking from the whirlwind appears no longer as the irony of love which creates faith but as a manifestation of impersonal and senseless power which produces in man only abject resignation.⁸ The Satan which he has been taught to fear is, in a twisted way, his only friend. His wife, who warns him from the beginning, is the first to turn from God; and love, which he thought to be of God, is apart from Him. God was not responsible for his recovery; instead, it is J.B.'s inner strength which is alone the source of his own restoration.⁹

While J.B. primarily revolves around the inter-relations of Mr. Zuss, Nickles, J.B., Sarah and God (The Distant Voice), there are some significant ironies which include other elements and characters in the drama. The three friends who enter in the Ninth Scene have the same names as those in the biblical account. The friends are described by Mrs. Botticelli as "old pokey crows," and after a brief exposure to them, the reader tends to agree with her. J.B. has been calling for God, but in His place come Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar. In one aspect, the friends say nothing, nothing that is of meaning to J.B.

⁷Campbell, "The Transformation of Biblical Myth," Myth and Symbol, p. 86.

⁸Samuel Terrien, "JB and Job," The Christian Century, 76 (January 7, 1959), p. 10.

⁹Tom F. Driver, "Notable, Regrettable," The Christian Century, 76 (January 7, 1959), p. 22.

They expound a great deal, but none can come to an understanding. Bildad, the determinist, thinks that the triumph of all humanity makes an individual's suffering sufferable. Eliphaz, the sophisticate, tries to reduce J.B.'s sense of guilt to a neurosis. And finally, Zophar, the religious stereotype, thinks that the idea that all men are guilty explains the unique sufferings of a particular human being.¹⁰ Overall, J.B.'s "friends" try to convince him that he is a victim of circumstance. They question God's love, man's luck, and guilt. But, in essence, they say very little. They mention God very little, and when they do, it is not complimentary. Yet it is understanding God for which J.B. needs their help. They fail him and display little dignity besides.

MacLeish's most brilliant effort at irony appears in the form of verbal irony, for it is the tone of voice of the characters which sets the stage for the meaning of the drama. Cut into much of what is said is a deep seeded sarcasm, frequently used as a rhetorical device or as a weapon of satire. J.B. does not use this sarcasm, for most of what he says is sincere, thus making him even more of a victim. Sarah, however, is not so flawless. In the second scene when she is arguing with J.B. about giving thanks, she means verbal thanks so that God will be sure to hear it. Simple faith is not enough to satisfy her, and even though she is the loudest to profess her faith, she is the first to turn from it. In Scene Five when the police come to search for Rebecca, Sarah becomes impatient. To her, the officer has been asking too many trivial questions, and Sarah raises her voice

¹⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Modern Answers to an Enigma," Life, 46 (May 18, 1959), p. 135.

at him, "It's Rebecca is missing!" J.B., in an attempt to calm her, speaks, "He knows!" but Sarah, in her anxiety, lets her true feeling come out in a bitter attack, "No, it's God that knows!" (p. 77). Even though J.B. is referring to the officer, Sarah is not wrong either. God does know. In the same scene, Sarah defends her husband by screaming violently, "We believe in our luck in this house! / We've earned the right to! We believe in it . . . / All but the bad!" (p. 78). Yet Sarah knows that is all they have had lately--bad luck, with the loss of three maybe four children. When all five children are dead, J.B. tries to console Sarah by coaching her to speak words of comfort. At first she repeats the words mechanically, but in her anguish she strikes out, "Kills! Kills! Kills! Kills!" Finally, she accuses J.B. of sacrificing their children and wealth attempting to make injustice justice and God good when she knows this is not possible.

There are several places where MacLeish allows his characters to speak in the original text in order to convey the parallel and the universality of the situation. It is also an attempt at parody used to heighten the irony. The messengers who bring word of the various tragedies use the repetitious line, "I only am escaped alone to tell thee," and when Mr. Zuss and Nickles portray their roles as God and Satan, they speak the biblical text. The most lengthy discussion using the original text is the theophany when God appears to J.B. and J.B. answers in repentance. It is difficult to pinpoint the irony of the three friends because much of what they say means so little. MacLeish expresses this vagueness as much in the stage directions as in the characters' actual speeches. For instance, when asked why they have come, there is "a coarse laugh" from Bildad, "a fat laugh" from Zophar, and "a thin laugh" from Eliphaz. These

directions, added to their answer, "for comfort," do not leave much doubt that they have little concern for their role as comforters. Throughout their encounter with J.B., their speeches involve such actions as "a great guffaw," "snort of jeering laughter," "all park-bench orator," "losing interest," "outraged, flushed, head thrown back," "oblivious," and "a fat chuckle." MacLeish continually emphasizes their disinterest in and disregard for J.B.'s plight; they are present only to use his suffering as a soap-box for their empty philosophies.

The master of verbal irony in the drama, however, is Nickles, and any that may appear in the part of Mr. Zuss is secondary to that of Nickles. There is a contrast in the language itself for MacLeish employs exalted, vivid and verbose language for Zuss while he gives to Nickles' vocabulary homely realism and four letter words.¹¹ The vocabularies in themselves give a key to the personalities of the characters. Nickles is constantly badgering Mr. Zuss with one insult after another in an effort to bring the God image a little closer to reality. He does not approve of Mr. Zuss or the God role he plays, and while Nickles' comments may seem complimentary if taken literally, they are actually tongue-in-cheek insults. Nickles enjoys rebuking Mr. Zuss/God's world-wide fame: "No rush to buy your world, I notice" (p. 4) and "heaven is your department" (p. 16). Of Mr. Zuss he asks, "You wouldn't play God in your/ Face would you?" (p. 6), and when Mr. Zuss attempts to insult Nickles in return by saying that he would never wear Nickles' mask, Nickles retorts, "Your beaux yeux

¹¹ Desmond, "J.B. and the Case for Modern Man," Lit., p. 8.

would never bear that Look of . . . of pity!" At one point Mr. Zuss makes a feeble attempt at being humble; he is hurt that Nickles thinks that his own face is not good enough to play God, and he offers, "Perhaps a more Accomplished actor . . .," but Nickles knows his cue and offers, "The one man for God in the theater! . . ./ The part was written for you" (p. 7). Mr. Zuss takes this compliment seriously, possibly because it is exactly what he wants to hear. But knowing Nickles' opinion of Mr. Zuss, it is obvious he is only goading Mr. Zuss so that he will display his arrogant self. At one point, Nickles refers to Mr. Zuss as "Jahveh," a term of respect, but this is said only as ridicule, for Mr. Zuss can never come up to the respect such a name requires.

While Nickles sympathizes with J.B., he is not as concerned about J.B. as an individual as he is that J.B. is representative of all mankind. For Nickles, "piety in a rich man stinks," and J.B. is just another of God's "pigeons". When considering J.B.'s plight, Nickles speaks to Mr. Zuss nastily, "God will teach him better won't He?" (p. 47). Nickles knows that J.B. will lose his innocent faith because God will taunt him until he sees the world as it is. In Scene Three, Nickles cannot resist the urge to come down the ladder to prompt Sarah when word arrives that David is dead--"God won't let it happen, not to/ Our kind, God won't" (p. 61). But Nickles knows God is letting it happen, and he enjoys watching Sarah discover the truth also. At another point in the drama, Nickles tries to prompt J.B., but Mr. Zuss intervenes. When Mr. Zuss points out that J.B. still has not denied Him, that he still affirms his faith, Nickles makes the affirmation look ridiculous:

Ever watch the worms affirming?
 Ever hear a hog's Amen
 Just when the knife first hurt? Death is
 Good for you! It makes you glisten!
 Get the large economy container,
 Five for the price of one!

There are two songs which Nickles performs, both in which he puts into words the misconception mankind has of God. In one he states, "If God is God He is not good,/ If God is good He is not God" (p. 11). And in the other he plays on the traditional concept of the will of God: "If God is Will/ And Will is well/ Then what is ill?/ God still?/ Dew tell!" (p. 78). Nickles manages to twist everything one has ever believed about God: He is not good; His will can be as negative as it is positive; His will is not peace, it is turmoil (p. 94). When Nickles hears J.B. proclaim that he wants to know why he has been cursed, Nickles wisely notes that if he did know why, he would not be in the spot he is in in the first place. Mr. Zuss, as noted before, is appalled that J.B. forgives Him, and Nickles is disturbed by the same incident, but for a different reason. J.B. has disappointed Nickles; he has played right into God's hands:

God comes whirling in the wind replying--
 What? That God knows more than he does . . .
 Throwing the whole creation at him!
 Throwing the Glory and the Power! . . .
 How does he play Job to that? . . .
 Plays the way a sheep would play it--
 Pious, contemptible, goddam sheep
 Without the spunk to spit on Christmas! (p. 136)

Yet, this pious repentance is no surprise to Nickles, and when he attempts once more to persuade J.B. to give up, he sees the end of his role. God boasts that he will restore all that J.B. had and more, to which Nickles adds that God restores what we did not want in the first place. J.B.'s children are dead, his wife has left him--

what is there to restore? Yet when Nickles attempts to warn J.B., he fails.

MacLeish's language is perceptive primarily because he has managed to convey man's nature and situation, often with ironic humor.¹² However, while this humor may evoke a laugh, it is a sad laugh; sad because the situation the reader is witnessing rings of truth and it is not comfortable.

Dramatic irony is evident in J.B. primarily if the reader has read the biblical story of Job first. MacLeish takes much for granted in his plot, for the dialogues of God and Satan are sketchy and leave the reader guessing if he is unprepared. If it is known that God and Satan have made a bargain, then a number of incidences of dramatic irony are evident. For instance, Job continuously asserts that there is justice and order in the scheme of life and that God is the supreme just judge. However the reader knows from the conversations of Nickles and Mr. Zuss that this is far from true, and when the drama has concluded, J.B. knows the truth also. J.B. further asserts that God does not punish without cause, and he begs to know his sin. Yet there is no sin. With the biblical Job, at least he suffered a mild case of hubris after he was afflicted, but J.B. is not even guilty of that. In the second scene, Sarah verbalizes the Deuteronomic ethic that good deeds are rewarded and bad deeds are punished by God. However, as the drama progresses, Sarah realizes that such a philosophy is incorrect--there is no reason behind rewards and punishments; it is as though they are distributed at random. Nickles notes early in the drama that Sarah will leave J.B.; J.B. "Loves a woman who must some-

¹² Desmond, "J.B. and the Case for Modern Man," Lit., p. 8.

time, somewhere, / Later, sooner, leave him" (p. 47). When Sarah actually does leave J.B., he has dropped his head into his hands and does not see her run out. The congregation of women see her leave, even before J.B. He calls for her and is greeted by silence. J.B. knows that he is in a wretched state, but he cannot see what Sarah sees, for she knows the truth about the God J.B. trusts with his life; and that is exactly what he sacrifices for this God--his life. Once J.B. speaks to the three friends:

I'd rather suffer
 Every unspeakable suffering God sends,
 Knowing it was I that suffered,
 I that earned the need to suffer,
 I that acted, I that chose.
 Than wash my hands with yours in that
 Defiling innocence. (p. 123)

He is, indeed, suffering but not for something he earned. He does, in fact, suffer for his innocence.

The last irony of major importance is general irony where the victim not only suffers for himself, but also for all mankind. This can be extended in that MacLeish's entire drama is meant to represent mankind. According to Nickles, mankind must always be ready for anything that hurts, and J.B. is proof of this. To Nickles, J.B. is not playing a part, "He's where we all are--in our suffering" (p. 84). Even Mr. Zuss admits that the role J.B. plays is one which occurs generation after generation. J.B. is to be interpreted "less as an unusual individual, but rather as a symbol for the collective victims of undeserved suffering in the world."¹³ To one critic, J.B. conveys the agony of the one who seems to have everything but really finds

¹³Desmond, "J.B. and the Case for Modern Man," Lit., p. 7.

himself having nothing.¹⁴ In all, J.B., a man of innumerable blessings, becomes the man of all sufferings.¹⁵

One irony found in the drama as a whole is noted by Tom Driver. He suggests that the drama begins by raising the most difficult of all religious questions--the justice of God--and by the end, the drama has jumped from this high religious plane to a purely humanistic one "with the result that the play seems to be divided against itself."¹⁶ This is not to say, however, that there is no depth to the drama. Even though MacLeish does not offer any definite answers to the questions he poses, there are lessons learned which in themselves are ironies. Nickles finds that life can be loved despite all the filth, pain, and suffering in the world; Zuss discovers that the answer to the human problem is not fear of God but love of life; and J.B. learns that what is human must suffer, but man can love, and with love, life can be lived over and over again.¹⁷ Of his own drama, MacLeish points out the ironies which he was attempting to portray. To him, God has need of man, of the suffering Job, for God stakes His supremacy on man's strength and love. Only man can prove that he loves God, just as it is J.B.'s task to prove himself to others as well as God. Without man's love, God does not exist as God, for no one can command love, not even God. For MacLeish, the answer to the human problem

¹⁴Louis Finkelstein, "Insight into Our Deep Need," Life, 46 (May 18, 1959), p. 135.

¹⁵Ciardi, "The Birth of a Classic," The Saturday Review, p. 48.

¹⁶Tom Driver, "Notable, Regrettable," The Christian Century, p. 21.

¹⁷Jean White, "Will to Live is Key to MacLeish's 'J.B.'", Library Journal (January 1, 1959), p. 37.

is human love such as J.B. and Sarah pledge at the end of the drama: "our labor always, like Job's, is to learn through suffering to love-- to love even that which lets us suffer."¹⁸ Love, then, is the answer, the only possible answer to the ancient human cry against injustice. There is no reliance on faith or acceptance of God's will. In MacLeish's opinion, the responsibility lies with man, and this is the lesson J.B. must learn.

There are ironies in MacLeish's personal philosophies which he incorporates in J.B. God is unimportant, almost farcical in his pseudo-majestic station, while Satan is the uncovered hero, the voice of reality. By exposing the nature of God as he sees it, MacLeish reveals through the ironies of J.B. the human situation, placing the responsibility on man rather than on God.

CHAPTER IV

A MASQUE OF REASON

As noted in Chapter III, Archibald MacLeish's approach to the Job story is a cynical one. His ironies revolve around sarcasm and the bitterness of the human situation. Yet, while MacLeish uses ironies in an acrid fashion, Robert Frost takes a comic approach to the Job story in A Masque of Reason. It is important for the following study to look briefly at some of Frost's religious beliefs, for these can be seen indirectly throughout A Masque of Reason and lend a better understanding to Frost's unique approach to the Job story.

In The Dimensions of Robert Frost, Reginald Cook notes that to Frost, God is an unseen reality. He is not an avenging Jehovah or a Great Mathematician. Neither is He an enigma, a cunning contriver, a universal anomaly, or the inobvious. Rather, He is ultimate divine wisdom, that which is beyond human wisdom. Frost does not dread God. Neither does he hold God responsible for man's sufferings in a world he did not make. Frost does, however, maintain his humility, for he worries about God's acceptance of his poetry. For him, man enters into a relationship with God to bring about the future, and poetry was a part of Frost's relationship to God. It is important to note this humility in Frost; for, as will be seen in A Masque of Reason, it is counterbalanced by a spiritual daring which points out absurdities and inaccuracies. Frost is nonsectarian in that for him organized

religion is loaded with doctrine and superstition which get in the way of the true aspects of religion--aspiration and love. The virtues he most exalts are love, courage, respect for the human personality and respect for tradition. Though Frost realized that man's presence on earth may not be totally explicable, he did see that man has reason and courage and most important, love. Frost advocates God-belief because if man does not strive for an ultimate consent then he accepts no obligations "to bring about the future."¹ For Frost, poetry and action, love and need are united. It has been noted that when Frost is most serious, he is most casual and A Masque of Reason is a supreme example. As seen in his masque, Frost's poetry begins in delight, the reader's first reaction, and ends in wisdom.²

Frost approaches the Job story by a broad use of humor, nonchalance and irreverence. His primary technique is that of situational irony in that he takes a dramatic confrontation and turns it into a casual conversation between Job, Job's wife Thyatira, and God. Frost has taken what any reader would consider powerful biblical characters and turned them into much less respectable characters if only because their speech is often too casual to demand the traditional esteem offered them. The masque is set in a fair oasis in the purest desert, an obvious modernization of the ancient land of Uz. With this as background, Frost wastes no time in his presentation of ironical characterizations. God enters early in the masque and is first seen

¹Reginald L. Cook, The Dimensions of Robert Frost (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1958), pp. 189-194.

²Louis Untermeyer, "Robert Frost: An Appreciation," The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), pp. xxviii-xxx.

caught in the burning bush, an indication of his less-than-respectable manner. Frost has taken the Old Testament God of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence and has transformed Him into an exact opposite--a God who finds it difficult to express himself and is unable to explain what He supposedly ordained. The reader has been conditioned through history to stand in awe of this inexplicable power, but now he finds himself laughing in a pitiful sort of way at a bungling ruler who cannot even accept the responsibilities of the universe he created. Ironically, God, who is the judge of the cosmos, must construct a portable plywood throne on which he cannot even sit because he must hold it in place by standing next to it. When He recognizes Job, He nonchalantly asks if he is well after all He put him through, and in truth, God admits having allowed Job's suffering, something the biblical God never does. To press the matter even farther, God thanks Job for helping him to prove that there is no connection between what man deserves and what he gets. In remembering the biblical account, it is important to note that this miscarriage of justice is what the reader suspects as the book progresses, but the influence of Job's pious character will not allow such a simple answer. Frost, however, does not protect his reader and the truth about God's justice is known from the beginning. In lines 54-76, God attempts to put into words the feelings He has endeavored to express for centuries. Ironically, the God of perfect wisdom admits that He could not find the proper words--"I have to wait for words like anyone" (l. 58).³ Once He establishes His composure, God apologizes to Job--deity to man--

³The page number for this quotation and all subsequent quotations in this chapter refer to the text: Robert Frost, "A Masque of Reason," The Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York: H. Holt, 1949).

for the sorrow He inflicted on him. He explains His motive by stating, "It had to seem unmeaning to have meaning" (l. 64), a meaning which changed the entire realm of religious thought. Where man once believed the Deuteronomic ethic of rewards and punishments, he now realizes there is no reason for anything. In essence, Job released God from bondage to the human race. At one time God had to follow after man, doing what man expected of Him so that man would continue to worship Him. Now, God is free because He no longer has to reward and punish accordingly.

Much that is expected of God is shattered by God's seeming incompetence. A God of omniscience does not even know that the Witch of Endor was burned for witchcraft--"That is not/ Of record in my Note Book" (l. 103), and when asked to explain injustice, all He can say is, "That's the way it is" (l. 111). At one point in a comment on Thyatira's age, the all-knowing God makes a statement of resounding profundity: "You got your age reversed/ When time was found to be a space dimension/ That could, like any space, be turned around in?" (ll. 159-161). Actually, the statement sounds profound, but it means nothing which could be Frost's way of commenting on God's role throughout the entire masque--nothing.

The opening passages of the Old Testament attribute the creation of the world to God. Furthermore, in the book of Job, God Himself promotes His power as displayed in the creation. God, in fact, will let man accept praise for very little. Frost's ironic twist, however, finds God acclaiming Satan as the inventor of Hell--perhaps because He does not want the entire responsibility on His own shoulders. He further gives Job credit for helping to establish truth, a truth enhanced by the presence of science, but nevertheless, a truth. Together,

according to God, He and Job discovered that man must submit to unreason if only because in this way he will not find it difficult to take orders--especially in war if nowhere else.

When Job asks God why he was chosen to suffer, God does not praise Job's uprightness and piety as might be expected. Instead, God matter-of-factly announces, "It had to be at somebody's expense" (1. 222). And when pressured by both Job and Thyatira, God finally admits He was just showing off to the Devil; He was playing children's games. The ironic truth at this confession is that this is what mankind expected all along but never wanted to admit. Here is a crushing blow to man's concept of faith; it is a waste. Even more disheartening is God's revelation that He is tempted--a human weakness--and His ego will not allow Him to be taunted by the Devil. The rivalry is an obvious one, and God seeks to prove that His believers are more dependable than Satan's--thus, the test, with Job as the pawn. Yet, even though the contest of wits ended centuries past, God is still an egomaniac, concerned about His appearance before His rival, the Devil: "I'll get back on my throne/ For this I think. I find it always best/ To be upon my dignity with him" (11. 386-388). It is strange that even though there is an obvious rivalry between God and Satan, they have an uncanny understanding of their roles. God explains the Devil's disappearance by saying, "He has his business he must be about" (1. 431) even though God undoubtedly realizes this business is in direct opposition to His. Nevertheless, God gets the upper hand as He accepts the responsibility of the Devil's appearance in the first place: "I brought him in,/ More to give his reality its due/ Than anything" (11. 432-434).

Frost's God, then, is diametrically opposed to the traditional concept of the Father, the Creator, the supreme Justice. Frost is not even being sarcastic; he does not need to be. The light humor is a powerful device in an ironic presentation of a God who can be struck speechless, a God who erects a prefabricated throne which eventually collapses, a God who cannot remember history and who does not wish to be responsible for the future--a God who seems inferior even before a mere servant or an arch-rival.

Frost's Job does not leave much of an impression on the reader perhaps because he is overshadowed by God and Thyatira. At first, the "Man" is not recognized as Job, and only after God has appeared is he identified as the long-suffering servant. Job has obviously been weathered by the years, and his strength of character is not as apparent. He must now take second seat to his wife, whereas, in the biblical account he reproves her and pays little heed to her curses. While God has appeared in order to thank Job for his service, He seems more intrigued by Thyatira, for even though God does not take her seriously, she is outspoken, and this is what He likes. Ironically, it was this quality in Job which God admired centuries before, but Job has now lost his spunk, and God must turn to Thyatira. Undoubtedly, despite his piety, Job has a high opinion of himself, and he prepares to face Judgement Day: "Here's where I lay aside/ My varying opinion of myself/ And come to rest in an official verdict" (ll. 27-29). But when he learns that God has come to explain rather than destroy, he is anxious to learn to reason for his suffering, something he has grappled with for years. The reader gets the impression that Job is hen-pecked, for Job can question God only after Thyatira has broken

into their conversation with her accusations. Even Job admits his weakness--"My wife gets in ahead of me with hers" (l. 164)--and he is beginning to waiver in his trust to the point that Thyatira is winning him over to her point of view: "I'm apt to string along with Thyatira" (l. 168). He is confused and finds himself pulled in two directions: God says He and Job have an "understanding" and Thyatira says there are no reasons behind God's actions. Unlike the original Job, he cannot make up his mind. Ironically the man of dignity now has very little dignity; the man of powerful speech is caught in his own uncertainty. There are, however, a few occasions where Job stands tall and confronts God, and it is at these times that the old Job shines through. Job asserts that just because he was content without an answer from God does not mean he feels God has no answer. And in his most powerful accusation, Job accuses God of thinking out the scheme of his suffering and taking his time at that. God feels the lesson man has learned is an important one, but Job points out that no one cares anymore: "The audience/ Has all gone home to bed. The play's played out" (ll. 252-253). In reference to the biblical confrontation, Job admits that he was willing to accept an 'Oh, because' from God as explanation for his suffering, but Job will no longer stand being put off so simply: "You'd be the last to want me to believe/ All Your effects were merely lucky blunders" (ll. 258-259). But God has not changed, and the reader cannot help feeling sorry for Job. He has tried in desperation to clear God's name, to give reason to God's actions, and when he is put off once more by God, he cries, "I don't want to know" (l. 271). Yet the reader knows he is lying, he does want to know. The Job of patience and acceptance is now pressured to admit there are no values worth

achieving, and if any are achieved, they are as empty graves, absent of all meaning. When God finally admits his purpose to Job—a game—what can Job say? As in the biblical theophany event, he expects a grandiose expression of God's power; instead, the excuse is weak and disappointing: "I expected more/ Than I could understand and what I get/ Is almost less than I can understand" (ll. 331-333). Even in the Old Testament account, Job is not as patient as traditional thought would promote him. This "impatience" shows through more predominantly in Frost's Job who is tired of God's feeble excuses and scoffs, "God, please, enough for now. I'm in no mood/ For more excuses" (ll. 367-368). In all, Job's character lacks depth. Even though at several points Job stands up to God, this defiance is weak if only because there is little Job can say in the face of truth.

The most successful and the most ironic character in Frost's masque is Job's wife, Thyatira. From the beginning she presents a mood of light fantasy and nonchalance which pervades throughout the entire play. She is not awed by the presence of God as might be expected; rather she simply recognizes Him by Blake's picture and urges Job to go over to Him and introduce himself, a reminder to God. God, of course, is supposedly omniscient, meaning He should remember all. Yet Thyatira does not trust His godly aspects from the start. Throughout the masque, she attacks God's justice, for she has never been content with the theory of punishments and rewards. Thyatira's major complaint is God's obvious prejudice against witches; in a religion of prophets, men are received with honor, and witches, as in the case of the Witch of Endor, are burned. Thyatira is far from humble. Even after seeing that God rewarded Job, she is not ashamed

that she cursed God in the face of disaster. Ironically, she defends herself in the presence of God asserting that her actions were misunderstood; she may have deserted God, but she did not desert Job. In her rebuttal, she shows her true character. She is a nag, telling her husband constantly to stop scratching the sores he received at the hand of Satan. She boasts that she performed her wifely duties, and then she goes so far as to accuse God of losing his temper when asked for reasons. She proudly flourishes that only a man would ask for reasons; a woman would never try to be Plato. In her innocent pride, she does not realize that she is further admitting her own incompetence. When Job tries to settle her, she insists that she is serious, and to her, she is. But God and Job consider her a frivolous female: "Nothing keeps her awake/ But physical activity" (ll. 153-154).

Frost has used Thyatira somewhat as Shakespeare used the fool in King Lear. Her flightiness, rather than destroying the play, enhances it in that Thyatira speaks the truth. She is comic, but her role is revealing. Because of her, God can keep no secrets; nothing is sacred with Thyatira. She sees through the facade of centuries; and even more ironical, God is enthralled by her. He seems to enjoy her banter as though He is blind to her revelations. It is Thyatira, not Job, who gets the final confession from God: "One simple little statement from the throne/ Would put an end to such fantastic nonsense" (ll. 308-309). The masque cannot get too dramatic if only because Thyatira offers a break when the intensity even threatens to build. After God has attempted to explain Himself to Job with little success, the Devil, who is "never far away," arrives to complete the original threesome. At this point, Thyatira goes for her Kodak, asking that the three forget their rivalries. She acknowledges that she and Job are

not bitter about the game between God and Satan; she is, indeed, a good natured loser. It is Thyatira who ends the masque, not Job or God. She mutters and fusses over Job and God and the Diaphanous Satan who are still posing for her picture-taking. She speaks absent-mindedly, inserting directions here and there for the posers. However, in her scatter-brained way, she ends the play with a statement which may mean little to her but sums up the attitude of man toward the truths learned through God's and Job's confrontation: "You'd as well smile, as frown on the occasion" (1. 465). Ironically, she has sensed the truth; one might as well accept and adjust to unreason; it is here to stay.

Frost has been able to use verbal irony in a humorous but effective way, a twist in words which allows double meanings and a clash of the comic and tragic. In some cases, the verbal ironies overlap with those examples of situational ironies mentioned previously. Those which do overlap will not be mentioned again, yet there are a number of additional verbal ironies which cannot be overlooked. Instead of "pitching tent," God is seen "pitching throne," a throne which cannot even stand on its own. Job identifies what he thinks is a court of some kind, perhaps where he will be judged again. Yet, as the masque progresses, if the throne is indeed meant to be a court, it is God, not Job, who is on trial. It is God who eventually confesses. Job's wife urges him to identify himself before God as though God could forget his ancient confrontation with Job. When asked how he feels now, Job admits that the letup is "heavenly," an "escape from so great pains of life on earth." Though God is traditionally considered to be the Word, He is often lost for words, and He can explain Job's

suffering as having to be "unmeaning to have meaning." The reader discovers, however, that it never really has meaning, not even through history. It was and still is unmeaning. When Job learns he has been promoted to a saint, he notes that "Salvation in our case is retro-active/ We're saved, we're saved, whatever else it means" (ll. 81-82). When God mentions starting from the beginning in order to establish the meaning of justice, Job cries, "Oh, Lord, let's not go back to anything." God thinks he is trying to protect his wife, but Frost has italicized this word for emphasis, probably referring to that point in Job's character which cannot endure much longer. Ironically, the "patient" Job cannot bear the thought of living through his suffering again. Job is crushed by the new image of God which destroys the traditional view with which he contented himself. He is a God who must "await event/ As well as words," a God who had to teach society a lesson at someone else's expense: "It has to see them acted out by actors,/ Devoted actors at a sacrifice--The ablest actors I can lay my hands on" (ll. 224-226). In one speech, Job attributes the characteristic of "devilish ingenuity" to God, and he reveals that the questions in men's minds is a fraud to cover nothing, to cover meaning which is not there. Job compares this lack of meaning to the question of having children. Man does not question having children until after they are born. The the goal becomes telling the children to have none of their own. It is a matter of indecision being passed from generation to generation with no answers offered. Thyatira, the master of sarcasm whether intentional or coincidental, stifles Job's hopes: "You won't get any answers out of God" (l. 301). And when God does admit showing off, Job credits this to His humanness.

Because God is not measuring up to Job's expectations, the only way Job can accept the obvious frailties is to cast them off as human traits. Yet this is not complimentary to God; He is being brought down to the level of mankind. God is not without his sarcastic opportunities, and it is God who ironically strikes at the Church: "Next time you find yourself pressed onto one/ For the revision of the Book of Prayer/ Put that in if it isn't in already:/ Deliver us from committees. 'Twill remind me" (ll. 370-373). God at one point speaks that the "Devil's never very far away," and even though this is obvious sarcasm on the part of God, Thyatira carries it one step farther, "The Devil's being God's best inspiration." When Thyatira says that she and Job can make it even in the face of the truth of injustice which they have seen, Satan speaks out sarcastically, "Like the one Milton found to fool himself/ About his blindness" (l. 416), no doubt referring to Milton's "When I Consider How My Light is Spent." Thyatira is thrilled that Satan has spoken even if his voice is "as sweet as a pagan temple gong," but God explains Satan's sensitivity by pointing out in a pseudo-sympathetic manner, "Church neglect/ And figurative use have pretty well/ Reduced him to a shadow of himself" (ll. 424-426). A highlight in the masque, however, is the final scene as Satan appears to be carried away on a tendency--a long narrow strip of middle-aisle church carpet, sisal hemp--and he is rescued by Thyatira's outstretched hand. Thyatira is quite perturbed by this and speaks abruptly, "come off it." Not only does she literally mean to step off the tendency, but also she is obviously tired of the procrastination and speaks in a slang manner to stop the swaying attention. Of Thyatira herself, Job and God are patient but do not take her seriously and tend to

speak down to her: "Sometimes she thinks she has (been a witch) and
 gets herself/ Worked up about it. But she really hasn't," "She'll
 go to sleep. Nothing keeps her awake/ But physical activity," "She'd
 like to know how You would take a prayer/ That started off Lord God
 of Hostesses." Throughout the masque Thyatira is continuously insulted
 though this does not seem to bother her, a credit to her character.

There are a number of ironies which exist primarily as obvious
 changes in the original account. Job, who once suffered at the hand
 of God, is again in a desert, but this time he is leaning back against
 a palm in apparent leisure. The Burning Bush, a traditional symbol
 of the presence of God, is seen as an incense tree and a Christmas
 Tree, with its strange light a foreshadowing of the coming of God.
 The Devil himself is described as "a sapphire wasp/ That flickers
 mica wings," and he enters wearing a disrespectful smile which is
 undoubtedly an expression revealing his attitude toward the whole
 situation. Thyatira alludes to the Old Testament Genesis account by
 asking the Devil if he has a "Lady Apple" for her, a memento she
 would treasure. Like the first Eve, she would be pleased to have a
 gift from the Devil, and the reader knows she would not hesitate to
 accept it. Finally, when Frost ends the masque, he writes "Here
 endeth Chapter Forty-three of Job. Since the book of Job is only
 forty-two chapters, this is Frost's way of indicating that he does in-
 deed intend this to be a sequel, a present-day look at Job's predica-
 ment.

The only obvious reference to an Everyman concept or general
 irony would be Frost's opening dialogue in which the reader sees only
 a conversation between "Man" and "Woman." Not until line 33 does

the reader discover the "Man" is Job; therefore, at the beginning Frost is making sure that all mankind can be represented by the "Man" and "Woman"; hence, mankind learns the truth along with Job.

In essence, A Masque of Reason is Frost's account of a theophany event where God reveals himself to man. There is little plot, but unlike MacLeish and Humphrey, it was not Frost's intention to parallel his story with the biblical account. The Old Testament Job offers a background, a historical approach on which Frost could base his entire confrontation with reason. When one thinks of the ancient Job, one recalls the traditional concepts of patience and faith. Ironically, however, Frost has not entitled his masque A Masque of Faith or A Masque of Patience. It is, instead, a masque of reason, a concept which in the long run, Frost leaves up to the reader. Though Frost himself accepted the world's contradictions and conflicts without being destroyed by them, he demonstrates a wry acceptance of such contradictions in his masque. He has employed irony in the form of parody, anti-climax or the distortion of a serious mode.⁴ The comic element of irony is indeed present in Frost's work as the air of nonchalance pervades even Job's boldest attempts to confront God. The banter between Job and God builds to a point where the reader thinks that finally a reasonable answer will be given, only to be disappointed time and time again. Thyatira inserts her feminist accusations or God refuses to answer, all leaving Job as helpless as he was before. By the time God does give His reason for Job's suffering, it is such a let-down that Job wonders why he wasted his time.

⁴Reuben A. Brower, The Poetry of Robert Frost (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 220.

Frost's casual approach to the Job story should not be misunderstood. It is not a frivolous account to be discarded after one reading; neither is it a deeply psychological study to be analyzed with great pains. Frost approached the Job story sincerely but humorously because he no doubt felt there was no other way to look at it and not become entrenched in questions that can never be answered. It is doubtful Frost believed all which he asserted in the masque, but this adaptation is obviously his way of unbalancing the traditional fears of questioning what God supposedly ordained. The masque is successful if only because through Frost's use of irony in characterizations and plot, he reveals subtle truth otherwise ignored.

CHAPTER V

A JOB OF THE PLAINS

William Humphrey, a Southwestern writer, has written a short story which takes the Job account and twists it in such a way that the plots are different but the meanings are much the same. Little has been written about Humphrey, and there is no literary criticism of his short story "A Job of the Plains," but it can be noted that his fiction is almost entirely regional--the Midwest--and is written in "plain, unadorned prose, with no attempt at stylistic experimentation. The dialogue style, like the narrative style, is simple and clear: people talk the way they do in life."¹ In Humphrey's works are the recurring themes of the old world versus the new and the relationship of one to his native land. Among his fiction are stories which uncover a character who is more victim than villain and a man eaten up by greed, fearing his money will get away from him. All of these characteristics can be readily seen in "A Job of the Plains" which is not only a comprehensive study of man's nature but a successful investigation of the technique of irony.

Humphrey begins immediately by using verbal irony or more precisely, parody, as he opens his story with a direct parallel to the biblical version. In this case, however, the major character is Chester Dobbs, and the setting is Oklahoma. Note the biblical version:

¹James W. Lee, William Humphrey (Austin: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1967), p. 5.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. (Job 1:1-3)

as compared to Humphrey's:

There was a man in the land of Oklahoma whose name was Dobbs; and this man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. And there were born to him three sons and four daughters. His substance also was one lank Jersey cow, a team of spavined mules, one razorback hog, and eight or ten mongrel hound pups. So this man was about as well² off as most everybody else in eastern Pushmataha County.

The verbal and situational ironies are apparent from the start. Verbally, the biblical account and Humphrey's adaptation are so close as to promote identification of the story similarities. These similarities with the Job passages are extended in the second paragraph where God and Satan bargain for Dobbs' allegiance. The paragraph, except for the substitution of the name "Dobbs" for "Job", is a combination of direct quotations from the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version of Job 1:6-11.

In the original Job story, Job was cursed by Satan with the loss of his wealth, the death of his children, the desertion of his wife, and the destruction of his health. Humphrey has made a significant switch in this scheme, and in this switch lie the ironies of Humphrey's adaptation. The story begins during the Depression, and that in itself gives a clue as to the initial predicament of Dobbs. At first, Dobbs' crops of cotton look successful, but when Dobbs attempts to

²This and all subsequent quotations are taken from: William Humphrey, "A Job of the Plains," Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense, ed. Laurence Perrine (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), pp. 131-145.

make the best of this situation, he is caught ironically in his own trap. Saving his crops for more prominent prices, Dobbs is trapped by the fall of the market and left with five fat bales that could not even be given away. Despite his misfortune, he makes the best of his plight, borrowing from the bank, butchering his one hog and surviving the winter. Yet when spring comes, instead of improving, things get worse. Dobbs attempts to borrow more money, but unlike previous years, no one will lend. Instead, the grocer "from whom Dobbs had had credit for twenty years" demands cash from this point on and the payment of past bills. Despite the hard times, Dobbs persists and plants more cotton. During the winter he had been grateful that his wife Ione could not have more children, but now he is equally grateful that his family is so large and can help with the new crops. Yet after years pass, the dry spells continue, and the crops fail. Irony tops irony; a good year never seems to come. Moreover, there are rumors that the world will end, and even though the people know better, times are so hard that they believe the prophets. The day comes and passes, however, uneventful and dry.

At this point in the story, Humphrey takes the opportunity to parody the biblical jargon as he did at the start. He does this by introducing an angel from heaven in the guise of a county agricultural agent--"An angel fell from heaven in the form of the county agricultural agent and landed at Dobbs' gate"--a man who offers to pay Dobbs not to grow anything on half of his acreage. The natural reaction would be an avid acceptance of the offer, but Dobbs is wary. Instead of taking advantage of what is offered, Dobbs worries about what he will do with the extra time. The agent is confused that he should

come across a man so conscientious in such hard times. He next offers to buy Dobbs' hogs; ironically, they are being bought by the government for no purpose other than to kill them. Dobbs is not even pleased with this offer as he is appalled by the thought of the slaughter of these pigs for no reason--if only because there are people starving who could use the meat. Dobbs' conscience will not let him take money for no work; neither will it let him sell his pigs for slaughter. Finally in his naive manner, he blames the situation on the politics of the times: "And if this is what voting straight Democratic all your life gets you, then next time around I'll go Republican, though God should strike me dead in my tracks at the polling booth!" (p. 135).

Even now the hardships have not ceased, and misfortune increases. Dobbs goes on relief and suffers the humiliation of taking hand-outs. On top of this, similar to the account in Job, Dobbs and his entire family are struck by disease--pelagra--caused by a diet deficiency. It is not surprising that Dobbs, at this point, would begin to question his misfortune in the light of his religious dedication:

What's it all for, will somebody please tell me? What have I done to deserve this? I've worked hard all my life. I've always paid my bills. I've never diced nor gambled, never dranked, never chased after the women. I've always honored my old mama and daddy. I've done the best I could to provide for my wife and family, and tried to bring my children up decent and Godfearing. I've went to church regular. I've kept my nose out of other folkses' affairs and minded my own business. I've never knowingly done another man dirt. (p. 136)

Like Job, Dobbs admits that if he had misbehaved, he could accept his misfortune as punishment, but to Dobbs' knowledge, "I ain't never once stepped out of line, not that I know of." In Job, three friends come to comfort Job, but in Humphrey's story, there is little personal interaction between Dobbs and his friends. In fact, there is

very little sympathy if only because everyone is "in the same boat" as Dobbs. Dobbs cannot reconcile that while he and his neighbors are suffering, some men are living in luxury. When O.J. Carter tries to explain it by saying that when judgement day comes, all men will receive their just rewards, Dobbs admits that he is not even sure he believes this any more. Like Job, he begins to question justice, and the Deuteronomic ethic no longer fills his needs. Flippantly, Cecil Bates remarks, "Well, you can't take it with you," and Dobbs answers him sarcastically, "I don't want to take it with me . . . I won't need it in the sweet by-and-by. I'd just like to have a little of it in the mean old here and now" (p. 137).

When a hot breeze springs up, there is the general statement that "they were in for something worse than just another dust storm," but at this point there is little indication of just how true this statement will be in the light of Dobbs' future. When a cyclone hits and destroys his home, Dobbs blames it on his wild talk. Even though he does not accept the idea of rewards and punishments, ironically he returns to this theory in order to explain his bad luck. Humphrey inserts here a subtle irony as he pictures Dobbs and his frightened family hovering underground. The reader knows that God and Satan have allowed this to happen to Dobbs, but in their innocence, the Dobbs family sings of God's love: "Jesus loves me, this I know . . ."

In Part Two of his short story, Humphrey uses irony which is based not only on the original Job story but also on what happened in Part One. On Dobbs' land, which had before been barren, oil has been found. Where Dobbs was once poor, he is now wealthy. Where once his friends "had all come and bemoaned and comforted him over all the evil

the Lord had brought on him," they now "cross over to the other side of the street to keep from meeting him"--"foul-weather friends" Humphrey labels them. Generally friends will be friendlier if a person is in a situation to make their friendship worthwhile, "fair-weather" friends they are called. But Dobbs' friends were ironically different; they were generous when he was kicked down, but now that his fortune is found, they ignore him. Even Dobbs' family becomes arrogant in its own way as the daughters beg to move into a mansion, but Dobbs reminds them sarcastically, "The only difference between you and them pore whites is you ain't pore no more." Dobbs humility does not influence his family, however, and they willingly move to the Venable mansion. Traditionally, there is a housewarming party to which all the relatives and neighbors are invited--a varied mixture of common folks and the elite. Yet, throughout all the festivities Dobbs begins to see the truth of the situation. Where he once thought he was equal and accepted by all, he now sees that he and his family are the subjects of ridicule from both wealthy and poor. Dobbs is a sincere man, trying to make up for the hardships which his family has endured. He is not trying to be pushy and pseudo-aristocratic, but his family obliterates his true intentions, and his friends misunderstand. Ironically, his old friends feel he is trying to be better than they are in order to brag about his new-found wealth. On the other hand, the town socialites misinterpret his intentions and regard him as a poor man with a fancy house. Dobbs' mother remains upstairs throughout the housewarming for she is afraid he will be ashamed of her in front of his "highfalutin" new friends. Little does she realize he is already ashamed, not because of her but because

he is living a lie:

The townspeople went home sniggering with laughter, or fuming with outrage in the name of the vanished Venables. Both groups found excuses for declining future invitations, and in the evenings the big house on the hill heaved with sighs of boredom,

(p. 140)

One would think that wealth would be a great relief to a man who has suffered the agony of the Depression. Yet Dobbs is bored with nothing to do. Where he once wished he did not have to do the farm chores, he now misses the work which filled his day. Habit wakes him and guilt pushes him up in the morning though there is nothing to do once he rises. His pastimes consist of fishing and hunting for which he buys new tackle and a fine new gun. Yet, one by one, he goes back to his old cane pole and his old singleshot. Ironically, he discovers that fishing and hunting are not so much fun unless one is playing hookie from work, and he cannot seem to forget the days behind the plow as he rubs his callused hands with nostalgia. All of Dobbs' friends are kept busy by work, and this just makes him feel guiltier for not doing what he has always had to do in the past. The only others not working are the town vagrants, and Dobbs feels the threat of being classed with them. Though Dobbs tries to remain in the group of his old friends and though they are polite to him, he realizes that he is embarrassing them. Just as Dobbs suspected at the housewarming, many "seemed to believe that Dobbs thought they were no longer good enough for him" (p. 141). Yet Dobbs could not be more sincere when he invites his friends to visit, as he is a lonely, misunderstood man, and the compassion of the reader does him little good. Even though his friends will have little to do with Dobbs socially, Humphrey heightens the irony further by making Dobbs a host to his friends' demands. Dobbs begins to

lend his money only to find he is never repaid. He thinks others have his same values, but he learns that honor is not a widely-adopted virtue. Still, when he refuses to lend money, he loses more as it is rumored that he is a miser. Dobbs is caught in a trap which has no escape door. No matter how he tries, someone is against him. Ironically, however, Dobbs does begin to hoard his money, fearing that it will disappear as quickly as it appeared. In truth, he lives the opposite of his means, "for a man in his position he lived like a beggar" (p. 141). It would seem that the normal reaction of a man in his new found wealth would be a sudden longing for what his money can now buy. But Dobbs does not react in a normal way. He cannot acquire a taste for the rich man's cuisine, and he is forced to admit that even the foods he ate when he was poor tasted good only when he worried if there would be any more for the next day. With reference to Genesis 3:19--"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread"--Humphrey, in defense of Dobbs, states "the sad truth is, to a man who always has, bread which does not taste of his own sweat just does not have any taste" (p. 142). Dobbs' plight is, indeed, a sad lot, and it does not improve with time.

One of the story's major ironies revolves around Dobbs' daughters. At the beginning of the story, the daughters are described as "level-headed, affectionate, hard-working girls," but because they were homely, the boys passed them by. Now, however, after Dobbs' new wealth, there is a sudden attraction to the Dobbs girls. The dramatic irony is evident: the reader knows why and Dobbs knows why, but the girls are oblivious to the truth. The problem at one time was to find suitors; now the problem is to keep the girls from marrying the first men who

ask them. The girls realize their father does not approve of their instant romances, and they blame it on his love of money: "You mean you're afraid he's after your old money. That's all you ever think about" (p. 142). Actually money is all the daughters used to think about and all the boyfriends are thinking about. But there is no convincing the love-sick girls, and eventually they all marry. Denise elopes and is caught, then marries another man, flippantly declaring the old cliché, "I'm free, white, and twenty one," and when this marriage fails, she marries again--four times. The twins, who before had always agreed, fight for the same man, and Emmagine marries into another wealthy family.

Ernest, the middle son brings home a bride who does not get along with the family from the start, and Ernest takes his family away, rarely coming back. Faye, the oldest boy, comes home from the Navy, and soon after a girl comes to Dobbs claiming she is carrying Faye's child. The dignified Dobbs, a man of high character, finds himself offering to pay the girl, and when she accepts his money, Humphrey describes Dobbs as "ashamed of the whole human race" (p. 144). Perhaps the most disheartening irony centers around Dwight, the youngest. In him, Dobbs places his hopes. He is not interested in girls, and his boyhood free-for-alls are a part of the past. Instead, he is in love with cars. Yet, this love turns into his death wish: "Two months later the boy was brought home dead" (p. 145). And with Dwight's death, Dobbs' final hope dies also. On the way home from the funeral, Ione, like Job's wife, curses their plight: "This would never happened if we had stayed down on the farm where we belonged. Sometimes I wish we had never struck oil" (p. 145). Even though Dobbs scolds his wife, he, too,

is thinking the same thing; he just does not wish to say anything. In fact, there is a very real hint throughout the entire story that this is what Dobbs has sensed from the beginning.

As an appropriate closing, keeping the parallel with the biblical version, the Lord has not deserted Dobbs. In the Job account, the Lord "gave Job twice as much as he had before . . . And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" (42:10, 12). It is the same with Dobbs: "And so the Lord blessed the latter end of Dobbs more than his beginning" (p. 145). Just as Job acquired fourteen-thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses, Dobbs has fourteen thousand head of whiteface cattle and five thousand Poland China hogs. With Job, along with his new fortunes, his brothers and sisters came, ate with him, showed him sympathy for his suffering and gave him money and a ring of gold. He also had seven sons and three daughters. The daughters were beautiful and shared in the inheritance with their brothers. Dobbs, however, is not so blessed. His mother continually threatens to leave, his sons do not return home, and the daughters are never mentioned. He divides his inheritance equally among them although each feels the other will be getting more than he. The final contrast concerns Dobbs himself. While Job lived a hundred and forty years, saw four generations and died an old man, full of days, Dobbs "lived not very long. Just long enough to see his sons' sons, and despair." Thus Dobbs dies, "being old before his time and having had his fill of days" (p. 145).

William Humphrey has taken a familiar biblical story and, by twisting certain prominent elements, has challenged what one has before accepted as obvious. For instance, when one thinks of a blessing, one

generally thinks of something good which happens to someone who has been hit by misfortune of some kind. Further, when one considers poverty as opposed to wealth, there is no question as to which one is the better--wealth. Yet "A Job of the Plains" leaves a question in the reader's mind concerning this point. Job was wealthy; he lost this wealth, and it was returned to him after his suffering had served its purpose. Thus, even though Job suffered, he was duly rewarded. Dobbs, on the other hand, was an average citizen who became a victim of the Depression, and when oil was found on his land, he became a man of increasing wealth. Since the Devil bargained with God, the reader knows that Dobbs is to be tested. But which is the curse--the Depression or the wealth? The answer to this question is Humphrey's major irony. It would seem to follow that the Depression would be the worst possible fate for Dobbs. Yet, this is not true. In the Depression, Dobbs is one of many. He has a large number of friends for they are all comrades-in-arm. They comfort each other and share what little they have among themselves. It is when Dobbs acquires his wealth that he finds himself rejected by his friends who can no longer identify with him. Furthermore, his family, once united by the need of survival, quarrels within itself and eventually dissipates. Humphrey, however, does not follow all Dobbs' mental anguish by a point of blessing where he is restored all that he had. Instead, the story simply ends. There is no final moment of triumph, there is no fulfillment. Rather, Dobbs dies, a miserable, lonely man having had his fill of all life could offer. Humphrey, therefore, looks more realistically at the Job story as one way it might truly occur. The curse is not losing wealth but gaining it. The reward is not being repaid for losses, but death.

In his attempt at recreating the Job story, Humphrey parodies the scriptures in order to show the ironies of situation. From the Job account, the reader expects a particular sequence of events, and this makes Humphrey's twists even more effective. The reader is continually surprised as he never finds what he expects. The first reaction to Humphrey's story is a humorous one, perhaps because of its uniqueness. But as one looks closer at Dobbs and the utter despair he experiences, there is seen a powerful emotional expression of truth. In the book of Job even though there is a sense of injustice, there is an answer to Job's suffering; it may be a weak answer, but at least it is an attempt. In "A Job of the Plains" there is no answer for Dobbs' suffering, and there is no comfort. The injustice is readily seen, and the irony is obvious.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The book of Job presents a number of problems which puzzle man to the point that he feels compelled to grapple with them and attempt, in his own way, to solve them. Basic to all these problems is the desire in man to determine the nature of God and His relationship to the universe. The writer of Job does not provide an answer to such probing questions. Instead it is his task to question what before was accepted on faith. He does this by creating a character who must suffer injustice and disregard at the hands of God and all those he feels are dear to him. The ironies in Job are numerous if only because the traditional Hebrew concept of God cannot hold its own. A good man in the sight of God is condemned to living the horror of disease, financial disaster and personal loss. A God who is generally considered loving becomes the tormentor, almost childlike in His game with Satan. Job's friends turn from him in his time of need, and his wife deserts him when her love should be the strongest. The reader knows of Job's coming turmoil before he knows, yet the reader can do nothing but watch. Job is never aware of the whys of his situation, and still his faith remains.

Modern man cannot accept the Hebrew man's easy answers concerning the universe, nor can he accept Job's faith in the light of what he must suffer. In literature, the plight of Job is frequently used to designate suffering in a cruel world, and in such a way, three contem-

porary writers have attempted to deal with the basic questions in Job. Archibald MacLeish, Robert Frost, and William Humphrey have directly approached the question of suffering in their individual works J.B., A Masque of Reason, and "A Job of the Plains" respectively.

The author of Job uses irony to present the problem of man's relationship to God. MacLeish, Frost, and Humphrey use irony to attempt a solution. MacLeish approaches the Job story with a bitterness which is heightened by the ignorance of his God and the sarcasm of his Satan. MacLeish promotes love on the human level as the only answer to man's situation, and God takes a step into the background. Frost's approach is more lighthearted, but this is not to be confused with dismissal. Apparently Frost feels that there is no way that man can realistically deal with such a massive problem as injustice, and he attempts to show the absurdities which result when man assumes he can understand God. Humphrey combines both the bitterness of MacLeish and the humor of Frost in such a way that his work is perhaps the most provocative of the three. Though he initially provokes laughter, it becomes a feeling of pity which ends profoundly when Dobbs gives up and dies. The biblical Job has faith; MacLeish's J.B. has love; Frost's Job has indifference; but Humphrey's Dobbs has nothing.

Irony is by no means the only technique used by the biblical author or the contemporary authors. Yet it is a major means by which each author can surprise his reader into understanding the problems which exist. Irony is an appropriate tool in that it allows the writer to make implications with which his readers may identify. Irony promotes sarcasm, satire, and subtleties which can be intricate or obvious in their attempts. Consequently, the writer must rely on his readers'

instincts as well as their intellect. Irony can be a method of shock and ultimately a method of truth which, if used at its best, can open the mind to a world of questions. Though MacLeish, Frost and Humphrey may have attempted to answer the problems set forth in Job, their use of irony merely acts as a technique by which more questions evolve. Answers do not have to be final. It can be that questions are answers in themselves. If this is true, then Job, J.B., A Masque of Reason, and "A Job of the Plains" are at least attempts to approach problems which man cannot ignore. Irony is the writers' implement by which they can subtly, yet more effectively, display these questions, and so it is that irony is a primary tool through which the problem of God's relationship to man can be surveyed.

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VITA

I was born September 25, 1947 in Bristol, Virginia, but my family soon moved to Portsmouth, Virginia, where we lived until I was seventeen. Before my senior year in high school, we moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, where my parents still reside. I graduated from Albemarle High School in 1965 and attended Longwood College where I graduated in 1969 with a B.A. degree in English. I attended one full year of graduate school at the University of Richmond, and in the fall of 1970, I began my first year of teaching. I was married to Michael Stephen Hawkins on December 27, 1970, and in August 1971, I began my second year of teaching at a new middle school in Richmond. My husband and I have recently moved to Durham, North Carolina, and we plan to live here for at least the next three years. My husband will be attending Duke Divinity School, and I will be teaching eighth grade English in Durham County.

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