

Following Job's feet: A psychoanalytic perspective

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Abstract

The feet are the base of the body but suggest mobility at the same time. As such an important corporeal part to be expected is that figurative language would develop around it hinting at unconscious associations to feet which might not be consciously logical. In the Book of Job the protagonist's feet are mostly referred to as metaphors and then mainly with negative connotations. This is both because of the Satan's attack on a man whom he suspects of having moral feet of clay and because of Job's internal feuds with the feminine. Job experiences this as a sense of falling. A psychoanalytic perspective on metaphors for behaviour and especially on sexual euphemisms could penetrate through the façade of possible political correctness to add to a deeper understanding than the traditional exegesis has rendered thus far and give a glimpse of an underlying body-image.

Key words

Book of Job; psychoanalytic; feet; euphemism; metaphor

1. Introduction

Although it may seem far-fetched to focus on the furthest body-part of a biblical protagonist who seems to live mainly in his head, the word, רֶגֶל (foot), occurs more often than the skin and the womb, two crucial body-parts in the Book of Job. In fact, כֶּף (sole) is one of the first body-parts to be mentioned in the book. The hypothesis is that Job's faltering feet signify him falling from his place in the world of meaning.

This study has been from a psychoanalytical perspective where the body and its parts all have personal, subjective apart from collective, cultural

meanings, not only for real persons but also for characters in literature, such as the protagonist, Job, in the book carrying his name. As such, these meanings include metaphors and metonyms, as examples of dealing with the concrete and the literal.

After a brief summary of the concept of metaphor from a psychoanalytical view, a commented summary will be presented of the instances where feet are explicitly mentioned in the Book of Job. This will be followed by a panoramic overview of other nouns and verbs, especially falling, which imply feet in the book, to finally move forward to a psychoanalytical interpretation of the feet in the relevant text.

2. Biblical metaphors: a psychoanalytical view

Before focusing on metaphors, a brief excursion on psychoanalytic exegesis in a condensed version seems to be in order. Compared to other schools in psychology, depth-psychology's main focus is on the unconscious which is empirically but also intuitively traceable, especially from both language and the body which have a mutual, communicative link. Freud started by analysing literature before he used his insights for his patients' dreams expressed in language to then understand their bodily symptoms. In language, the form as linguistic process manifested for instance in syntax and style, rhetoric, and rhythm, and in tropes, is indicative of hidden content and meaning. This is even more the case for psychoanalytic¹ exegesis, as a focus on the Freudian and Neo-Freudian thinking, when the body is part of that content, often serving as symbols for psychic concerns. The irrational and illogical unconscious is the symmetrically inverted mirror-image of the conscious (imagine here trees reflected in a river) and does not have any negatives in the sense of denials which would be an abstract. Its images are concrete and taken as literal. So, humour and metaphors are, for instance, taken literally, and "not-X" is stored in the unconscious as "X" only. The advantages of reading a biblical or, for that matter, any other text, or of listening to any speech with a psychoanalytic

1 Apart from incidental references, the other branch of depth-psychology, Jungian or "analytic psychology" with its collective unconscious, will be ignored in this study only for practical reasons.

attitude is that deeper emotional understanding and therefore empathy for the other will increase.

The body and its parts are always “imaged” in a text and even in speech in general, and as such these body-parts are constructed from imagination. The concrete realities are absent and only represented in the text by words. As such they are always interpretations of the bodily observations and experiences of the character, the author and / or the recipient, all of which always include an unconscious dimension. This is particularly the case when the body is used in a metaphorical way. The pre-existing images in the unconscious always cover the raw sensory impressions.

Freud (1961:284) recognised two dream phenomena which expressed these images in the unconscious: displacement (*Verschiebung*) and condensation (*Verdichtung*). These have been related to two stylistic features in language respectively by Roman Jakobson (1971:258): metaphors (analogical) and metonyms (associative), although Lacan (1966:511) linked metaphors to condensation and metonyms to displacement. However, Ricœur (1975:24), who regarded metaphor as movement, understood Jakobson’s (1971:244, 249–251, 254–255, 257–259) distinction between contiguity as comprising displacement being metonymy and condensation being synecdoche, on the one hand, and similarity being identification and symbolism, on the other. From this confusion about the psychological nature of metaphors it is clear that one can at best speak of feet as referential to something other than the anatomical body-part.

In the body, a symptom often has metaphorical meaning due to a specific linguistic background, such as when someone is “psychosomatically” lame due to an unwillingness to “go” somewhere, thus acting out resistance. The function rather than the form or other feature of the feet is then selected and compared to an ability which, as *tenor* (or signified), interacts with the feet as *vehicle* or *figure* (as signifier) based on a *ground*, that is, the commonality between these two, to use the terminology of Ivor Richards (1936).

Metaphors are not arbitrary as words are in respect of their meanings, and yet not objectively given either. As the psychocriticism of Charles Mauron (1963) has shown, the choice of a particular metaphor refers back to the unconscious of the specific person or groups employing it.

Furthermore, what seems to modern recipients of the text as metaphors might actually be a kind of somatisation, that is, an experience of the body which relates it to an emotional feeling. Some of these may be personal, others cultural and others even universal. The body has been said to be the base of all metaphors (Barthes 1970:74, Douglas 1966, Gliserman 1996:3), that is, all metaphors ultimately refer back to the body, its experience, and its psychic image. The inverse is also true: the body is constantly used as metaphor for something else. Both of these kinds of metaphors relating to feet in the Book of Job will be examined here.

One kind of metaphor is euphemism. Not only in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Noegel 2013) but also in other cultures, euphemisms are mainly used to deal with the three greatest anxieties: the Divine, death, and sexuality. Feet, just as hands (Van der Zwan 2017b:6–7), are sometimes used in the Hebrew Bible to hint at genitals. This does not seem to be consciously the case anywhere in the Book of Job, unless in a more indirect sense (*vide infra*).

The use of body-parts in the text of the Hebrew Bible has, firstly, been recognised as synthetic (Wolff 2002:23). Instead of expressing mere anatomical form, these nouns rather focus on function and the physiological (Keel 1984; Wagner 2010:85ff.; Schroer & Staubli 2005:21). The bodily ability of a body-part, its experience and any emotion attached to it can surface as a metonymy, using a part to represent a whole (*pars pro toto*), where a totality has been reduced to a part, often regarded as its essence.

Secondly, body-parts can sometimes represent the whole body, suggesting that this body-part is somehow selected as the meaning-centre or essence of the body. The word, *מֵעָה*, is well known for this function, even when it more specifically means belly, without, however, a closer identification, which is only offered by a specific context. This refers to part-object relations, the initial form in which infants and primal cultures relate to another from whom a body-part, which is important for the infant or culture, is selected and presented as if it were the whole love-object. It is also anchored in the initial experience of one's own body as fragmented before a mirror image creates the illusion of a unitary body (*vide infra*). This perspective is still expressed in the aspectivistic portrayal of the body in two- and three-dimensional art and so typical of the biblical body image. In fact,

in consciousness one can never view the body in its totality even after the mirror-illusion which only shows one side of the body. Alternatively, a whole can also point towards a part (synecdoche, *vide infra*).

The body is probably never spoken of, not even in clinical contexts, without at least unconscious associations and therefore with figurative links. This is also the case when Avalos (2007:2) reports that, “when 1 Kings 15:23 notes that King Asa was ‘diseased in his feet,’ diagnosis of this disease proves to be the dominant interpretative issue for this verse among recent commentators”.

3. Overview of feet mentioned in the Book of Job

3.1 Job sitting and standing

When the reader meets Job the first time, he has been putting his best foot forward. According to 1:20 he must have been sitting, as he raises himself up expressed through the verb, וַיָּקָם (and he arose) after he has received the tragic news of the death of his children. This event brought him briefly to his feet. However, in 2:8 he sits again, this time on the ashes, meaning he must have moved, as Job is probably not at home and quarantined outside the community if he is suffering from צרעת according to Leviticus 13–14. Yet, his life has come to a standstill. In fact, there is little movement² in the plot of the poetic part of the book (cf. Zerbe on mobility *vide infra*). In 2:13 his three counsellors sit down with him, in both instances the verb, יָשַׁב (sit, dwell), being used. One can assume that God eventually close to the end brings him to his feet again by admonishing him twice to gird his loins in 38:3 and 40:7.

3.2 Some statistics of the word, רֶגֶל, in the Book of Job

The Hebrew word, רֶגֶל (foot), occurs 13 times in the Book of Job, 6 of which in the singular form and never referring to God. This frequency is well below that of the word, יָד, which is found 53 times. In at least 11 instances the foot or feet are problematised and negatively connoted. At least once it is used in a perhaps neutral and metonymic, *pars pro toto*-sense in

2 Although the roots, דָּרַךְ and אָרַח (path, journey), occur at least 27 and 12 times respectively.

28:4 for unaware passers-by (Clines 2006:532; otherwise “foot” would be personified) and as one pole of the merism in 2:7 for Job’s whole body. Only once does it feature in a positive and then metaphorical way for ethical behaviour in 23:11 said by Job, but in the second stich still expressed as a litotes, a negative form even if to emphasise a positive meaning.

Only thrice, in 2:7, 29:15 (in both cases referring to Job’s feet) and 39:15, is it used literally. The remaining 9 instances are all metaphorical. In 10 instances it concerns Job’s feet when the two instances mentioned by Bildad are subtle accusatory hints to Job. In 6 of these the imagery of entrapment is used for Job, suggesting that he is seriously stuck in his situation. Four protagonists (8 times by Job, twice by Bildad, once by Elihu [virtually quoting Job] and once by God) use the Hebrew word but the first time that the word occurs in the text is when the narrator refers to Job as the object of the Satan’s violence who as (one) son pretending to be the phallic father (cf. the Satan’s “hand”, elsewhere often also a sexual euphemism) interrupts the dyadic bond between the maternal God and the (favoured) child, Job. If this triangular conflict amongst the three main protagonists is an oedipal (from the Greek for “swollen foot”, and so psychoanalytically “erect penis”) one, it is not coincidental that the Satan focussed first on the foot of Job as feared rival for the Satan’s probably narcissistic, ithyphallic³ but perhaps envious phantasies.

Here רגְלוֹ מִכַּף (from the sole of his foot; that is, in the singular) forms one of the poles in a merism,⁴ where the sole is an outer extremity of the foot, itself even an extremity *of the body*. Clines (1989:163) regards this expressions alongside others as yet another suggestion of the extremity *of the situation* in which Job finds himself. As such, it could serve a similar function as the skin which also marks the boundaries of the body. The remarks about Job’s feet should therefore not be seen as some kind of footnote to the plot and is on a similar footing as the role of other crucial body-parts in the book such as the eye (*vide infra*).

3 A figure with an erect penis.

4 Mathewson (2006:60n.92) regards these extremities as hyperbolic rather than literal.

3.3 Stumbling and unstable feet

In 8 or 9 times Job uses the word, רגל (foot), with negative connotations of powerlessness, such as in 12:5 where the foot (in the singular) is that of those (in the plural) who slip, as they lose their sense of balance suggested in 31:6, just after the opposite has been mentioned about a reckless and treacherous foot in the previous verse, 31:5. Clines (1989:465), keeping 4:4 in mind, however, interprets this lack of foothold as the ensuing misfortune rather than transgression itself. The singular should be interpreted as an abbreviation for the plural and this as generalisation to avoid a direct attribution of guilt. This sense of impotence is also the case in 13:27 where Job explicitly mentions his feet twice, and in 30:12 (where Job's perpetrators are human), in all these cases referring to his own being as completely straitened and constrained by God. Habel (1985:218) points out that the stumbling referred to is not an accident but the result of intended sin and is therefore gloated upon by others.

3.4 Trapped and immobile feet

Instead of movement (cf. Zerbe on mobility *vide infra*), Job's feet are trapped and "imprisoned", a sense connected to בִּסְדָּר (in the stocks) in 13:27 (cf. also 30:12–13 where a trap is probably prepared to make him fall and block his path; cf. Morla Asensio⁵ 2010:47; although the meaning of שָׁלַח is not clear). Habel (1985:) points out that the T-stem verb, חָקַק or חָקָה (cut in, inscribe, engrave), in 13:27 refers to the permanent marking of a slave's foot with the owner's name, but this is a flat-footed conclusion and unrealistic (Clines 1989:496). Rather it suggests his footprints (cf. also Clines 1989:439) as irreversible and permanent as something written in a book, as in 19:23, where a related verb is used, though with a different stem of the root. Legal and hunting connotations are here combined, and as such Job is dehumanised as if he were an animal. Being bound, Job ironically finds no place of his own (Morla Asensio 2007:198). This experience of Job is confirmed by Bildad's similar image of Job in 18:8 (within the wider 18:7–11; *vide infra*) and Elihu virtually quotes these words by Job in 33:11. Despite being the base (also the Sanskrit word for "walk" and related to the

5 Clines never refers to Morla Asensio, probably because the latter's commentary is only in Spanish and has never been translated. However, Morla Asensio does refer to Clines.

Greek word for “foot”) of the body, the feet need to be mobile; otherwise it becomes a blockage to life. However, this baseness of the feet is also the reason why it is scotomatised as “abject” in the Kristevan sense, looked down upon as rejected body-parts (cf. Bataille 1985:23; cf. Zerbe on the foot as repository of badness *vide infra*), as evidenced also in the Book of Job (*vide supra*).

In 18:8 and 18:11 Bildad blames the guilty as being the real cause of being trapped in a metaphorical net of immobility, of having no solution to move forward, or move *überhaupt*. Yet, Clines (1989:495) considers the stocks to be rather fetters (similar to בִּזְקִים in 36:8) still allowing limited movement, lest Job could not leave footprints which God could watch over. The word, פֶּחַ (usually a bird-trap [cf. Clines 1989:608]), in 18:9 suggests the irony of a bird which does not even need its feet for moving. Significant is that Bildad even specifies a part of the foot, עֶקֶב (heel), in 18:9 as well, showing how much his attention is on this part of the body. This is, of course, reminiscent of Genesis 3:15 where the serpent will constantly attack the human heel.

3.5 God following Job's feet

In 23:11 (cf. 17:9) Job turns this immobility around and reinterprets it as an anchorage of stability when his “foot” stays בְּאַשְׁרוֹ (in His [that is, God's] step; elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, however, only of humans) or sticks straight to דֶּרֶכּוֹ (His [that is, God's] path), all three nouns in the singular to suggest the abstract meaning conferred by the three metaphors respectively. Morla Asensio (2007:400) also notes that “in God's footprints” (his translation of [אַשְׁרֵי]) is uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, but that “footprints” could serve as a synecdoche for “path” which is assumed to be marked by such tracks. Job denies the hypothetical opposite in 31:5, where his foot (again in the singular) would have hurried after deceit. Even when this is the opposite of being stuck in the stocks, both extremities would be problematic. Only a sure-footed rhythm on God's path is proper. One is tempted to regard this instance of רַגַל as a euphemism in a chapter where sexuality plays an important role in his mind, but the two verbs, הִלַּכְתִּי (I have walked) and וַתַּחַשׁ (and [my foot] has hastened) argue for a metaphorical use for authentic behaviour, void of superficial (self-)deception. As Schellenberg (2016:101) points out, Job is trying to get his whole body under control, perhaps precisely because his body feels so fragmented. That

there could be a sexual association is still possible in the context, but it is not the direct meaning here. It is also possible that Job distances himself by dissociating from this sinning body-part as an almost autonomic subject for which he would not want to take responsibility, but in 23:11 he does the same even when sin plays no role there. That the body-part is in parallel to himself as a total person does not necessarily mean that it is a metonym for the whole body or self as Schellenberg (2016:100) understands it, as this could also be an antithetic parallelism.

3.6 Fear of phallic feet

It is significant that God's own feet are implied in 23:11, even when they are never explicitly mentioned, perhaps even for fear of relating them euphemistically in a distanced way to the genitals as the unsayable. Yet, in contrast to the idols which are critiqued in Psalm 115:7 for having feet but being able to walk, God would have to have feet to be walking and so their superior. God is therefore a moving God, not static like the statues. Morla Asensio (2007:119) also understands 9:13 as the helpers of Rahab prostrating at God's feet, meaning that they humble themselves by no longer remaining on their feet. Although God's feet are not explicitly mentioned, the two contrasting body postures implies that feet are pointers to power and subjection. On the other hand, Morla Asensio (2007:179) remarks about 12:19 that the priests mentioned there would lose their public dignity when they lose their shoes, perhaps during captivity (cf. also Clines 1989:474). Bare feet are therefore shameful, similar to the bare genitals. The feet are therefore ambiguously connoted.

3.7 Fond memories of the feet

Contrasted to the generally negative portrayal of Job's feet are his nostalgic memories in 29:6 of his feet bathing in soothing "cream" (from חֶמְאָה, denied to the wicked in 20:17) and oil (reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32:13–14 and 33:24), both products of the land and symbols of prosperity in the Hebrew Bible (Morla Asensio 2010:22). This is also somehow subtly critiquing the trampling of olives by the feet of the exploited poor in 24:11.

3.8 Forceful feet

The רֶגֶל (“foot”, or rather paw, in the singular) in 39:15 is a metonym for a body-part which תִּזְרָה (may crush it [that is, the ostrich’s eggs]) and would be that of the הַשָּׂדֶה וְחַיִּית (or] the wild beast) rather than a human being (cf. Clines 2011:1126). This association with the abuse of power reminds one of the hand of the Satan in 1:12 and 2:6, and one wonders if the two perpetrators are not actually identical due to their phallic aggression. Together with the first mention of foot in 2:7 (and perhaps also רֶגֶל [an abbreviation for a passer-by, a pedestrian] in 28:4) this last mention forms a frame of literality with which secondary, metaphorical and metonymical senses are nevertheless still attached. In 39:24 the horse’s feet are implied (cf. Habel 1985:525) and probably modelled as the ideal for Job.

4. Related nouns and verbs

This strong figurative sense of the word, רֶגֶל (foot), is reinforced by numerous other nouns and also verbs implying the feet, such as “sole” (מִכְּבֵּשׁ in 2:7), “barefoot” (שׁוֹלֵל in 12:19), “step”, often serving as metonym for “feet” (צִעְדִּי in 18:7; בָּאֲשָׁרִי in 23:11 [cf. אֲשָׁרִי in 31:7]; the *hapax legomenon* dual form, הֶלִיכִי, in 29:6; cf. also 31:7), “heel” (בִּעְקֵב in 18:9), “slip” (לְמוֹעֵדִי in 12:5), “crush, tread, trample” (תִּזְרָה in 39:15), “walk” (הִלְכָתִי in 31:5 and הֵלַךְ in 31:7), “path” (אֶרְחוֹתַי in 13:27, for instance; *vide supra* footnote 2) and “way” (דֶּרֶכּוֹ in 3:23 and 23:11, for instance; *vide supra* footnote 2), which may all suggest behaviour in general or add to the range of nuances and connotations of the feet, adding to their context. From these one could abstract some theme clusters.

4.1 Feet and consciousness

Where hands usually suggest actions, the feet point to a general ethical way of being and entrapment of the feet to the lack of choice. The feet seem to be symbolic of a dynamic, moral, and conscious part of being human, a psychic part apparently not existing in animals whose feet only trample without any conscience (cf. 39:15), like the unaware pedestrians in 28:4.

In 41:14 דָּאֲבָה (dismay, faintness, failure, swooning) is personified as dancing (דּוֹן, a *hapax legomenon*), that is, the reactions and experiences of onlookers from whom it has been transferred and is seen from the eyes

of the leviathan as “feet” which are weary and weak. This is, however, a different verb from the one, רָקַד, used in 21:11 for dancing children who are playing. Clines (2011:1197) likewise leaves the impression that it is possible that the “galloping” movement (cf. Zerbe on mobility *vide infra*) of the leviathan imagined as crocodile instils fear in the onlookers.

4.2 Feet and conscience

Morla Asensio (2010:78) correctly notices that eyes, hands, and feet are all body-parts responsible for ethical life. Surprisingly, he ignores the heart as mentioned with the other three in 31:7 where it even הָלַךְ “walks” after his seducing eyes. It is surprising but significant that Amy Erickson (2013), investigating the impact of legal metaphor on Job’s use of bodily imagery, never relates it to the feet. Jones (2013:853) draws attention to the fact that God’s persecutory eyes are focussed on Job’s feet as in 24:23 and 34:21. This comes as a surprise, as God never mentions Job’s feet. However, in 14:16 God limits Job’s צִעְדֵי ([my] footsteps), and in 31:4, 37 the number of Job’s very steps are numbered by God. Here it is clear that Job’s journey is not only about his moral life, but about his life as such. His feet are therefore not free to walk as he wishes but seem to be instrumental of God’s will.

4.3 Empathy for falling and failing feet

It is significant that the eyes and the feet are the two body-parts which Job selects and assists in 29:15⁶ when he reminds his audience that he used to be the eyes for the blind וְרַגְלִים (and feet; in the dual) לַפֶּסֶחַ (for the lame; in the singular, so generalised, or very personal, not just for a group of people needing charity). It might be meant as merism to suggest that he used to be there for the *whole* body, for whatever part of it when it failed in his neighbours. However, this merism does not concern extremities such as the feet and the head. It hides another logic. That the eye in itself is a definite focal issue in the book of Job (cf. Van der Zwan 2019:*passim*) is generally agreed upon by scholars. The same could therefore apply to the feet, but then in a more subtle way.

6 Although elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible they are often juxtaposed: Leviticus 21:18; Deuteronomy 15:21; 2 Samuel 5:6, 8; Jeremiah 31:8 and Malachi 1:8.

The feet are ironically also the first body-part mentioned when the Satan attacks Job's body. Ironical is also that recalling these disabilities coincides with the nostalgic memory of Job's healthy feet (soothed in 29:6; *vide supra*) before his illness which started rhetorically with his feet. The empathic Job is the corrective eyes and feet for those suffering from disabilities in these body-parts.

These two disabilities are two explicit categories amongst the twelve listed for human beings in Leviticus 21:17–21.⁷ Significantly, ugliness is not explicitly amongst these categories but perhaps implied. People with such disabilities and even temporary bodily malfunctions are here excluded from bringing sacrifices and so prevented from being near to God (cf. also Schellenberg 2016:114). Incidentally, the same two disabilities are mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:6–8, one of the instances amongst “an unusually frequent number of disability images appear[ing] in its [that is, in 2 Samuel's] opening chapters”, according to Schipper (2007:107). These groups of disabled people count amongst those, from whom David has to distance himself, as he solidifies his power. In particular, Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, is repeatedly mentioned due to his lame feet in 4:4, 9:3, 9:13 and 19:27.

This ideology of the correct body pervades, in fact, the whole book of Leviticus as body-idealism and is justified under the rubric of holiness as a kind of separation, and then not only pertaining to human beings, but also to sacrificial animals (cf. also Deuteronomy 15:21, 17:1). Job's feet may now be excluded from this pure inner circle of the Divine. That is why his “bad” body struggles to reach God. He does not seem to go anywhere in this search.

4.4 Feet as base of the body

In 13:27 שְׁרָשֵׁי (the soles of; literally: “roots”, not found anywhere else [Clines 1989:496]; according to some: “footprints” [Habel 1985:225–226]), for example, suggests rootedness in a firm footing, which is, however, somehow undermined. This root has a range of figurative even anthropomorphic

7 Cf. 2 Samuel 5:6, 8 referring to territorial culture, the implied scorn of the lame in Proverbs 26:7 and the figurative sense as pejorative for dullness as in Isaiah 42:18, 19 and 59:10, for instance:

meanings and also occurs in 29:19, as well as in 8:17, 14:8,⁸ 18:16 (in this latter case used by Bildad) and 30:4, insinuating that Job's feet as symbol of stability is related to a tree's roots. In 19:28 it is used to denote essence when Job refers to the bottom-line cause for his calamities in the eyes of his companions. While in 28:9 Job refers with it to the base of a mountain, in 36:30 the same root is also used for the deepest bottom of the sea. From this it is clear that רַגְלֵי שְׂרָשִׁי (the soles of my feet) in 13:27 has several other associations beyond the bodily reference, all rooted in nature.

5. Psychoanalytical meanings of feet in the Book of Job

5.1 Multiple meanings of feet

Zerbe (1985:313) summarises the psychoanalytic meanings of feet as “overdetermined” (that is, having multiple meanings and causes) and therefore highly cathected. Psychoanalytic insights about body-parts have been gained from studying dreams, myths, clinical cases and language, especially metaphors and idioms. Before identifying six symbolic meanings of the foot as phallus (1985:305–306), female genital (1985:306–308; cf. Deuteronomy 28:57), repository of badness (1985:308–309), mobility (1985:309–311), passivity (1985:311–312) and site of self-mutilation (1985:312–313), she refers to several psychoanalytical scholars who have interpreted the different aspects of feet as a mental image.

5.2 Forbidden features of feet

According to Sigmund Freud feet (1991:299; 1998:157; 2008b:364) and hands (1998:157; 2008b:364) often symbolise ([only] male?) genitals, as discovered from dream analysis (*vide supra*). As Freud is often seen as having sexualised so many things, one wonders why he has not elaborated more on the feet as sexual symbols. Karl Abraham (1927:135) regarded a male's foot fetishism as partial repression and psychic replacement of the supposed female penis. The psychiatrist, Karl Menninger (1930), pointed out that folklore often connects feet and sexuality, linking them to the fertile earth and phallic power expressed in vitality and success. Michael Balint (1935:481) noticed that the shoe could also represent female faeces

8 According to this verse the root dies but later revives.

and as mentally displaced vagina contains the foot as displaced penis during sexual intercourse. Otto Fenichel (1945:342) emphasised in this regard the pre-genital phantasies of the penis as that of the mother. Róbert Bak (1953:291) highlighted ego-weakness due to pre-genital fixations and identification with the mother resulting in clinging to substitutes which psychically condense her lower extremities, as separation from her is too problematic. Carl Jung (1956) only focused on the role of feet in myths where treading and dancing represent magical fertilisation and phallic self-assertion as in the sexual act. De Garbarino (1961:61) also found that failure to walk in a clinical case symbolised the patient's dependence but also passive aggression. Bemporad, Dunton and Spady (1976) noted that clinging to body-parts as part-objects representing the idealised and eroticised dyad as whole-objects hampered internalisation of ambivalent feelings and so also individuation.

There might be some psychoneurological support for the link between feet and genitals in the cortical homunculus, a map of the brain locating the processing of different body-parts (Nagler 1957). To the neuroscientist, Ramachandran (1994:315,316), this is an accidental connection as two adjacent areas of the somatosensory cortex for the two body-parts are involved.

Against this background of psychoanalytic insight foot fetishism is food for thought. Although smell was found by the sexologist Iwan Bloch (1907:670) to be the bodily function most fetishized,⁹ feet is currently the most common form of sexual fetishism involving an apparently non-sexual body-part (Scorolli, Ghirlanda, Enquist, Zattoni, & Jannini 2007:432, 434, 435). It is, of course, risky to infer that this would have been the case in all cultures throughout history but gives a sense of the psychological meaning-making potential of the feet.

It may be that Job feels sexually impotent and passive (cf. Zerbe on the foot as symbol for the female genital, badness, passivity, and self-mutilation; *vide supra*), due to his overwhelming traumas. This has also brought his

9 Confirmed by Freud in a footnote added in 1910 in his "Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie" (Three essays on the theory of sexuality) of 1905 that feet fetishism develops when the olfactory pleasure derived from stinking feet has been repressed (cf. Van der Zwan, forthcoming a).

issues with femininity to the surface (cf. Van der Zwan forthcoming b). This is, however, a situation which is implicitly corrected and compensated for in the last chapter where he has seven sons and three daughters again.

5.3 Fear of falling due to failing feet

Pettys (2002:102) asserts that the whirlwind in 38:1 is actually meant to lift Job off his feet. This is rather an association by a recipient than an association embedded in the words of Job or at least of the author. This reminds one, however, of the great wind which makes the house where Job's children are partying in 1:19 to fall on them, and so, by implication for them to fall down dead as well. Melanie Klein (1975:4) found that not death as such but the idea of falling causes the greatest anxiety amongst infants. One can intuitively sense that something of that remains in adulthood and that Job's awareness of his failing feet might have something to do with that (cf. Van der Zwan forthcoming c).

In this first chapter the fact that a house has fallen down, could also suggest something of the body falling down and falling apart, because according to both Freud (1998:154; 2008a:89; 2008b:351) and Jung (1984:116) the body is often suggested by a building, especially a house, a house in which the self resides.

This terrible news makes Job to fall down himself, perhaps not only to worship as the text claims in 1:20 but also as expressing with body-language what he experiences in his psyche. Job refuses, however, this same kind of falling before his human interlocutors in 13:2: **מִמֶּנִּי אֲנֹכִי לֹא-נִפֹּל** (I am not inferior [literally: falling more than] to you). A few verses earlier, in 1:15 the Sabeans attack and **וַתִּפֹּל** (made to fall, that is, fall onto) their victims, while in 1:16, it is a fire which **נִפְּלָה** (falls) upon Job's flocks and their shepherds, later resonated in 13:11 when it is God's dread which **יָפַל** (falls) upon Job's adversaries. So three times falling portrays the brokenness and loss with which Job is confronted in the first chapter before he falls down himself as well, perhaps as unconscious identification with the victims.

In 4:4 Eliphaz uses the verb, **בָּשַׁל** (stumble, stagger), in a figurative way. Morla Asensio (2007:74) interprets the noun, **בֶּרֶךְ** (knee), as synonymous for "foot", which might also be a related case in 3:12 where the **בְּרָכָיִם** (knees) or "lap" could be a euphemism for the female genitals at the exit

during birth. The weakness in this body-part in 4:4 suggests moral and probably psychological weakness. Significantly, Job does not offer his feet as in 29:15 but instead his words to keep these weak people “standing”. When Job feels like an innocent victim whose feet have been trapped, there is a sense of paranoia due to what he regards as his unfair fate.

That the idea of falling is a recurrent subtheme in the Book of Job is therefore understandable. Losing consciousness is a way of falling, as when sleep falls upon someone when they fall asleep, according to *בִּנְפֹל* (in falling, when it falls) in 4:13 in the words of Eliphaz, repeated by *בִּנְפֹל* in 33:15 on the lips of Elihu. In 14:18 it is even a mountain which *נִפֹּל* (falls) apart with time, followed by the rhetorical question: so why not humans as well?! This is Job’s argument about the fragility of every creature. Falling also has some sense of fate,¹⁰ as when lots are *תִּפְּלוּ* (made to fall) in 6:27.

Despite having wished for an early death in 3:16 when Job sees himself *כְּנֶפֶל* (as a miscarriage, that is, a dead baby which falls from the womb), he still resists the thought of falling, when he denies being inferior to his companions in 12:3: *מִמֶּנִּי אֲנֹכִי נָפֵל-לֹא* (literally: I am not falling more than you; vide supra). In nostalgic longing for former times when he was admired and respected, he remembers that the light of his face was not *יִפְּלוֹן* (made to fall down) in 29:24. This phantasy of falling becomes more literal in 31:22 when Job imagines his body *תִּפְּוֹל* (falling apart) as a result of any uncharitable behaviour on his side.

The fear of falling and falling apart is closely tied to the bodily experience before an infant sees itself in a mirror (Lacan 1949; Winnicott 2005:149–159), which might not be a literal mirror, but could be the holding eyes of the loving mother. This whole image of the body and therefore the self creates the illusion that the body is one and integrated, a function which the skin also provides. It is therefore understandable that the skin is such an issue for Job (Van der Zwan 2017a), and why *מִפְּלֵי* (the flakes or falling, drooping parts) of the leviathan in 41:15 held together is the ideal and corrective to 30:30 where the verb is not explicitly used but implied for skin falling from the body, thus suggesting a delayering as if peeling of an onion.

10 Cf. “toe-val” in Afrikaans and Dutch, as “Zu-fall” in German.

6. Conclusion

In the Book of Job, feet are ambiguously associated with several psychological senses and are constantly accompanied by connotations, just as in most other biblical books. Both the Satan and God focus on Job's feet, as do the other interlocutors with 10 out of 13 times referring to Job's feet. Job is very much aware of this, and it is therefore the reason why he mentions feet, and more specifically *his own* feet, the most: 8 out of 13 times. The Satan *starts* his attack on Job's body with his feet and God's surveying eyes follow Job's feet wherever they go, whether they trample others or stumble when his behaviour makes him unstable. When he gets stuck in the stocks, they are immobilised due to his alleged immoral conduct. In this way images emerge of hunting, justice and general animosity from others who have set their traps for the disliked victim. His feet then convey his paranoid feelings of an unfair fate. Apart from thus using the feet as metaphor, his feet are also suggested by metonyms such as "steps" and "path", typical images in the Hebrew Bible's wisdom literature when dealing with life and morality.

That the feet are also sometimes used euphemistically for genitals elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible contextually implies that they can also serve as symbols of the abject, eliciting shame: going barefoot is a form of subversive nakedness. They are so to speak rooted in the dust of the earth from which Job has been formed and whither he will return.

Yet, as one pole of the merism incorporating the whole human being, they stand for an extremity and a body-boundary similar to the skin, which is also under the Satan's attack. The feet as physical body-part therefore refer to another reality, one of psychic experience. Alternatively, when used literally, they could at the same time have an additional metonymical meaning of abuse pictured as trampling or of support portrayed as crutches. These "displaced" meanings mean that feet mostly have negative associations in the Book of Job, as they have lost their potency and place in a world of literal meaning.

Other nouns and verbs metonymically referring to feet express Job's emotional and spiritual struggle which exists as yet another subtext in the book. Fearful fantasies of falling run as a subtheme right throughout

the book and betrays something about the feet in Job's unconscious body-image.

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