HOPE IN TWO KEYS:  
MUSICAL IMPACT AND THE POETICS OF JOB 14

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IMPACT OF JOB 14 ON MUSIC

Job 14, the third and final movement of Job’s response to Zophar’s first address, contains some of the most familiar words of the book: “Mortal, born of woman, is short-lived and full of trouble” (v. 1), “For there is hope for a tree” (v. 7a), “If a person dies, will that one live again?” (v. 14a). These have been made popular by the impact of the poem, especially in Christian theology, liturgy, and music.

Beginning with Clement of Rome at the end of the first century CE (1 Clem 17:4), early Christian interpreters cited the Old Greek of vv. 4–5 as proof-text for the doctrine of original sin, for that translation suggests that no one can be pure “even for one day,” while v. 14a, again according to the Old Greek, affirms that new life is possible when one has died – **ean gar apothanē anthropos, zēsetai “for if a person dies, that one will live.”** And that view is apparently corroborated in v. 14c, according to the Old Greek: **hypomenō, heōs an palin genōmai “I will endure until again I would be.”** Even those who followed not the Old Greek but the Vulgate, where v. 14a is retained as an interrogative, typically thought the rhetorical question to imply an affirmative

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2 OG’s **mia hēmera** reflects Hebrew **hd ym**, with the graphic confusion of d with r and y with s, both confusions being particularly likely in the Paleo-Hebrew script: **h̄r̄sm** > **hd ym**. The underlying Hebrew text of the Greek, thus, reflects an archaistic orthography, here with the internal **yod-mater** absent. The archaistic orthography of Job is suggested by 4QPaleoJob.

3 So Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lectures*, XVIII:15 (see PG 33, pp. 1035–1036).
answer: there is possibility of life even after death (v. 14a), so one must wait for the coming of the bodily resurrection (v. 14b–c).

Then, in the medieval period, beginning in the eighth century, vv. 1–6 and 13–16 became familiar to Christians through the Office of the Dead, a liturgy originally associated with burial, but which soon became a staple in daily devotions in the monasteries and even by the laity at home. The French historian of music Michel Huglo has demonstrated that the liturgy was sung according to the Old Roman chants. Not surprisingly, therefore, the earliest documented instrumental compositions on Job were cycles of motets based on that liturgy by Renaissance composers, most famously Orlande de Lassus (“Lasso”) in his Sacrae lectiones novem ex prophetâ Iob, in officiiis defunctorum (1565) and Lectiones sacrae novem, ex libris Hiob excerptae (1582), but also Homo natus de muliere, the second motet in Officium defunctorum by Portuguese composer Estêvão de Brito (1575–1641). These were followed by Stefano Rossetti’s (“Rossetto”) motet, Homo natus de muliere (around 1575) based on 14:1–2, 5b–6 and another piece by the same name composed by the English madrigalist John Wilbye (1574–1638), based on 14:1–2, the text being used already in funeral liturgy in England. Even more well-known today is Henry Purcell’s Funeral Sentences (for the funeral of Queen Mary in 1695), a reworking of his earlier Man that is Born of a Woman, based on a funeral liturgy in the Church of England’s then-new Book of Common Prayer. Later compositions include a motet by Johann Christoph Bach (1642–1703) Der Mensch, vom Weibe geboren and Samuel Sebastian Wesley’s Man that is Born of Woman (1853). From the twentieth century come Swedish composer Ingvar Lidholm’s Homo natus de muliere, the first movement of his Laudâ (1947), and American Daniel Pinkham’s Man that is Born of a Woman (1971), a composition for mezzo-soprano and guitar based on the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. All these compositions highlight the despair of vv. 1–2 or 13–16, though in many instances, following the medieval Office of the Dead, the two passages

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4 Thus Rufinus of Aquileia in his Commentary on the Apostles Creed (PL 21, p. 384) and Gregory the Great in his Moralia in Iob, XII:16–17 (see CCSL 143A, pp. 638–639).