

True, Noth has incorrectly emphasized the conservative nature of historians, while almost totally ignoring their radically creative role. But can we contradict Noth's opening statement, and suggest that the author of our passages did "fabricate" history?¹¹⁸ This question returns us to our discussion of the Chronicler,¹¹⁹ who, like the historian responsible for the passages I have analyzed in Deuteronomy 1-3, sometimes quotes earlier sources, but often radically reshapes them.¹²⁰ The Deuteronomist's belief in how the world works was more important than what his sources claimed. This belief encouraged him to restructure his sources, to fill them out, and, if necessary, to modify them radically. It is ironic that this is all accomplished within a work that emphasizes that the Israelite community should neither add to nor subtract from YHWH's teaching (Deut 4:2; 13:1).¹²¹ The same irony may be seen in Josephus' *Antiquities*, I.17, where the Jewish historian claims, "The precise details of our Scripture records will, then, be set forth, each in its place as my narrative proceeds, that being the procedure that I have promised to follow throughout this work, neither adding nor omitting anything."¹²² In fact, however, Josephus rearranged biblical events, omitted and added material, all for apologetic, didactic or literary reasons.¹²³ Josephus, who reuses the quote from Deuteronomy, offers a clear example of how the author of Deuteronomy diverged in a very striking way from his sources, and could be viewed as "fabricating" history. However, to the extent that the Deuteronomist honestly believed his ideology, and like all of us, was simply viewing the past from the perspective of his present, he was writing history like all other historians.

THE EHUD STORY AS SATIRE

All satire is not only an attack; it is an attack upon discernible, historically authentic particulars.

Edward R. Rosenheim, "The Satiric Spectrum," *Satire: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Ronald Paulson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 317-18.

JUDGES 3:12-30

I begin with a translation of the Hebrew text of the Ehud story in Judg 3:12-30.¹ The translation depends upon my comprehension of the text's genre and tone. Thus, it anticipates my understanding of the pericope's genre and purpose.²

(12) The Israelites again did what was evil³ in the eyes of YHWH;⁴ YHWH empowered Eglon, king of Moab against Israel because they did what was evil in the eyes of YHWH. (13) He mobilized the Ammonites and the Amalekites under him; when he went and attacked Israel, they⁵ conquered the City of Datepalms. (14) The Israelites were vassals of Eglon, king of Moab for eighteen years. (15) The Israelites cried out to YHWH, and YHWH established a savior for them, Ehud son of Gera, a Benjaminite,⁶ a left-handed⁷ man; the Israelites sent tribute in his hand to Eglon king of Moab. (16) Ehud made himself a sword – it was double-edged and short;⁸ he girded it under his garments on his right hip. (17) He "sacrificed" the tribute-offering⁹ to Eglon, king of Moab. Incidentally, Eglon was a very corpulent man. (18) As he finished "sacrificing" his tribute-offering, he dismissed [his] retainers, the tribute bearers. (19) He had just returned from Pesilim,¹⁰ which is near Gilgal. He said, "I have a secret matter concerning you, O king." He said, "Quiet!" All of his retainers left him. (20) Ehud had come to him while he was sitting in the throne room,¹¹ which was his private room. When Ehud said, "I have a divine oracle concerning you," he arose from the throne.

(left hand, took the sword from his right thigh
 ally.¹² (22) The hilt followed the blade, and fat
 s¹ because he did not remove the sword from
 h¹ement¹³ came out. (23) Ehud left toward the
 p¹the doors of the throne room behind himself,
 a¹) Just as he had left, [Eglon's] servants came,
 a¹ doors of the throne room were locked. They
 s¹aving his legs¹⁶ in the throne room." (25)
 T¹point of embarrassment, but he still did not
 o¹throne room. They took the key, and opened
 it, master sprawled on the ground, dead. (26)
 M¹fled while they were waiting. He had passed
 P¹eSeir. (27) When he arrived, he blew a shofar
 o¹e Israelites descended the mountain with him,
 w¹) He said to them, "Follow¹⁷ me, for YHWH
 ha the Moabites into your hands"; they followed
 h¹ordan crossings that belonged to Moab, and
 let¹they smote the Moabites at that time, about
 twy fat man and every warrior; not one fled. (30)
 M¹ that day under the hand of the Israelites; the
 lar¹for eighty years.

(" PATTERNS IN THE TEXT

Scholar¹outlined several literary features of the story. For
 exam¹ his study of "*Erzählkunst*" (narrative art) notes
 device¹on of words and phrases, including the story's
 use o¹hort, and the rhythmic nature of much of the
 story.¹the Ehud story emphasizes its mimetic nature,
 its use¹symbolism (especially Eglon, "a play on 'egel,
 calf . . . be a fatted calf ready for slaughter"), prefigur-
 ation (of thrusting the dagger and blowing the shofar
 to rallatological and sexual references (the bathroom
 incident¹locked doors).²⁰ Alter alludes to a similarity
 betwe¹d "satire in time of war."²¹ He concludes his
 discuss¹ story.²²

In a it is quite possible that the writer faithfully
 repr¹ata without addition or substantive embel-
 lish¹on of the narrative, however . . . produ¹ce[s]
 an i¹nt of the historical event, conferring upon
 it a finition and discovering in it a pattern of
 mea¹s historicized fiction than fictionalized his-

tory – history in which the feeling and the meaning of events are
 concretely realized through the technical resources of prose fiction.

The analyses of Alonso-Schökel and of Alter highlight the problem of
 understanding the Ehud story as literature. While I do not doubt that the
 text gives pleasure to contemporary readers, and should be considered
 literature from that vantage point, I am most interested in historical-critical
 readings, which contextualize the work in ancient Israel. Is "fictionalized
 history" a useful term for describing how the ancient audience understood
 the narrative? Does "literature" best describe the function of this narrative
 in ancient Israel?

Another problem with these literary analyses is that it is difficult to
 know which of the devices noted by each scholar were actually perceived in
 ancient Israel. Literary devices depend on conventions which vary widely
 between cultures and within individual cultures at different times. For
 example, v. 21 contains three words which we would consider to rhyme:
šēmō'lo, yēminō, bēbiṭnō,²³ yet as far as we know, rhyme was not a charac-
 teristic device of Hebrew poetry, so the Israelite ear probably did not hear
 it as we do, nor did it function in ancient Israel in a way similar to rhyme
 in contemporary society.²⁴ We can list particular devices and phonological
 features, but their perception is culturally and historically bound. I would
 suggest, however, that when devices are found consistently throughout a
 text, or sets of unusual phrases are used, these were likely perceived in
 antiquity. However, we should not immediately call texts showing such
 patterns "literary," which typically implies an aesthetic judgement. Rather,
 we should inquire after the purpose of the unusual patterning or word
 choice.

One pattern that runs throughout the unit is the use of sacrificial termin-
 ology. This was noted by Alonso-Schökel, Alter and Yairah Amit, who
 comment on the sacrificial overtones in Eglon's name, from *'ēgel*, "a calf."²⁵
 This observation, however, requires additional strengthening, since animal
 names are not infrequently used of biblical characters,²⁶ and only further
 contextual evidence can make us confident that the sacrificial motif is
 present and is significant. In this case, further careful stylistic analysis
 provides additional sacrificial terminology. Vv. 17 and 18, in saying that
 Ehud offered tribute, employ an expression typically used of offering
 a sacrifice.²⁷ This exceptional and inappropriate use of animal sacrifice
 terminology would have likely led the ancient Israelite reader or listener
 to conclude that sacrifice is an underlying theme of the passage.²⁸ This is
 why I translated v. 17 as, "He 'sacrificed' the tribute-offering." The author's
 choice of this idiom suggests that the name Eglon is symbolic, and is
 chosen because of its sacrificial overtones.²⁹ The story as a whole plays on
 the notion of sacrifice: while pretending to bring tribute/"offering" to
 Eglon, it is actually Eglon, "the calf," who becomes the offering. Indeed,

the sacrificial knife and the partial disembowelment of the "animal" are depicted in graphic detail. The function of this motif may be seen after we observe how this sacrificial image functions in conjunction with other motifs in the story.

Alter noted certain aspects of the narrative's scatology and "deliberate sexual nuance."³⁰ The text explicitly refers to Eglon's excrement (v. 22) and his servants' assumption that he is relieving himself (v. 24). In addition, as Alter notes, the thrust of the dagger may be viewed sexually. These observations may be further extended through a closer reading of the story and an analysis of the terms that its author chose to use.

We know relatively little about ancient Israelite sexual terminology, particularly sexual slang. The Ehud story, however, contains several phrases which are elsewhere found in explicitly sexual contexts. For example, disproportionate space is given to the opening and closing of doors (vv. 23-5). This certainly develops the story, but also introduces a set of words that are well anchored in metaphors for sexuality in ancient Israel. These include the use of "to open," and "locked," which are used sexually in Song of Songs 5:2 and 4:12.³¹ The possible sexual significance of Ehud's sword in v. 16, as short and double-edged, namely as a short straight sword, gains credence once we realize that the typical sword of the period had a curved side with which one hacks away at enemies,³² and thus was much less appropriate as a phallic symbol. It is possible that the unique phrase "waiting until embarrassment" in v. 25 plays with the notion of a person impatiently waiting for the toilet,³³ thus heightening the scatological nature of the chapter. Furthermore, in v. 20, the author uses the expression "come to" to express Ehud's approach toward Eglon; this term may also be used of sexual intercourse.³⁴ Finally, the "formulaic" ending in v. 30 is slightly different from the similar formulae in Judges in that it contains the word "hand."³⁵ Certainly, in this context its primary meaning is "hand," but elsewhere, it is used euphemistically for the penis.³⁶ It is quite possible that the choice to break with the typical pattern and to insert "hand" was informed by an awareness that the chapter is depicting the subjugation of the Moabites to the Israelites in sexual terms. If this is so, an editor of Judges appreciated the sexual aspect of Eglon's subjugation, and slightly modified the usual concluding formula so it would fit that image.

The sexual reading of the passage suggested by Alter should not be seen as a product of modern, post-Freudian sensibilities. An explicitly sexual poem of Todros Abulafia ends, "Oh how I wish - may she come to me and the hilt will penetrate after the blade."³⁷ The reuse of Judg 3:22 in this poem shows that the sexual imagery that stands behind this chapter was already appreciated in the thirteenth century.

Judg 3:12-30, almost from the beginning, sets up the Moabite enemy as a sacrificial victim. It is full of scatological and sexual references at the enemy's expense. Recognition of these features certainly makes the chapter

more pleasurable for us to read. But to the extent that a reader is committed to a historical-critical understanding of the chapter, he or she must wonder about the purpose of these devices within a context that describes a battle between Moab and Israel.

ISRAELITES AND MOABITES

Ideally, we should present the relationship between the two nations during the period of the story's composition. This is impossible, however, because we do not know when it was written, though it is noteworthy that according to some scholars, there was no real Moabite kingdom before the rise of the Israelite monarchy,³⁸ so the story's setting in the period of the judges is certainly anachronistic. Most scholars would agree that the Book of Judges was redacted at the latest in the early exilic period, incorporating earlier traditions, some of which originated as tribal stories.³⁹ Therefore, in order to understand the story's stylistic features in relation to its author's historical background, it is relevant to sketch the evidence concerning the relations between Moab and Israel in the pre-exilic period.⁴⁰ Given the nature of the story in Judges, it is not necessary to outline the history in detail, but only to offer in general terms the relationship between Israel and Moab.

The vast majority of evidence suggests hostility between the neighbors. This is reflected in many types of stories. For example, the story of Moab's birth (Gen 19:37) reflects negatively on the Moabites, as do the oracles of Balaam in Num 21:29 and 24:17, and the legislation of Deut 23:4. According to "historical texts," the Moabites were vassals already at the time of David (2 Sam 8:2), and battles between Moab and Israel are narrated in 2 Kgs 1:1, 3:4-27, 13:20 and 24:2. The Moabites are condemned in collections of oracles against the nations from the beginning through the end of classical prophecy (Amos 2:1-3, Isaiah 15-16, Jeremiah 48 and Ezek 25:8-11). Antipathy is also reflected in Ps 60:10 (=108:10) and 83:7. It is difficult to date most of these texts, but they likely point to the existence of antagonism between Moab and Judah and Israel for much of the pre-exilic period. This perspective is also confirmed by the Moabite Mesha Stele, which mentions Israelite oppression of Moab for "many days" (line 5), and follows this with a depiction of Moabite conquest of Israelite territory.⁴¹

Positive relations between Moab and Israel might be suggested by Deut 2:9, which notes that Israel should not harass Moab when entering Eretz Israel, and by 1 Sam 22:3-4, where David leaves his parents with the king of Moab for safekeeping.⁴² It is likely that these two texts reflect some period of peaceful co-existence between Israel and Moab, but it is unclear when this might have been. In any case, these two texts are in the minority, and probably reflect a relatively brief period of friendship.⁴³

MODERN LABELS, ANCIENT TEXTS: THE GENRE OF THE STORY

The story in Judg 3:12-30 should be understood against this historical sketch as a humorous story mocking the Israelites' enemy, the Moabites; more specifically, it should be read as a satire. Various studies of this genre can be productively used to understand its meaning and purpose.

The contention that the story is humorous is actually quite challenging to prove. Although scholars have claimed that "the holy book we call the Bible revels in profound laughter,"⁴⁴ it is difficult to determine what ancient Israelites actually found funny, since the biblical text rarely contains clues to the reactions of the audience. Certainly conceptions of what makes contemporary stories funny may not be automatically projected backward on to biblical Israel. It is therefore desirable to understand Israelite humor by using models that do not depend on contemporary Western humor. The discussion of humor in Franz Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam*⁴⁵ is especially useful in this regard. Many of the stories which according to Moslem tradition are humorous, are no longer humorous to us, and this forces Rosenthal to form generalizations about humor that cover both modern and ancient societies. He notes:⁴⁶

The definition [of humor] which would appear to be the most plausible one because of its general applicability connects humor with the relief felt at the momentary lifting of one of the many restrictions which the physical and social environment imposes upon man. . . . The humor in puns . . . has its origin in the fact that human linguistic expression moves in quite narrow and circumscribed and usually logical channels. Any deviation from those channels is keenly felt as a release from conventional restrictions and, therefore, is humorous. A great variety of dealings among human beings is immediately classified as humor if there is any suggestion of a deviation from ordinary reality and the conventions of human society.

Some biblical evidence suggests that Rosenthal's conventions are applicable to ancient Israel as well. For example, one of the rare cases when the narrator tells us that someone laughs concerns the laughter of Abraham or Sarah at the impending birth of a son (Gen 17:17; 18:12, 15). They laugh because their old age makes the event highly unlikely; this fits Rosenthal's observations, that laughter reflects one type of "deviation from ordinary reality."

Following Rosenthal's suggestions, it is clear that the Ehud story is humorous.⁴⁷ Its explicit, extensive use of scatology and its sexual innuendo is a "momentary lifting of one of the many restrictions which the . . . social environment imposes upon man." The episode described, with a single commoner defeating the enemy king and outsmarting the royal courtiers,

is certainly "a deviation from ordinary reality." Furthermore, if this story was written during one of the periods when Israel was a vassal of Moab, by portraying Israel as the victor it presents a substantial release from everyday life. Thus, although humor is to a large extent culturally bound, what we do know of Israelite culture suggests that this story was appreciated as humorous in antiquity. It was seen as poking fun at Eglon and the Moabites in general, who, as noted above, were typically viewed as an outgroup from the Israelites' perspective. This type of humor which disparages an outgroup typically functions, "(1) To increase the morale and solidify the ingroup [and] (2) To introduce or foster a hostile disposition toward that outgroup."⁴⁸

I suggested above that this humorous story should more specifically be characterized as satire, as was briefly noted by Alter.⁴⁹ This raises the question of whether it is appropriate to apply to the Bible such genre labels as "satire," which originate in the classical world. This concern has been raised by Yair Zakovitch regarding the application of the Greek genre terms "tragedy" and "comedy" to biblical literature.⁵⁰ It has in some ways been anticipated by the earlier discussion in this book of using the labels "history" and "literature" of biblical texts. I will first examine the general notion of applying non-native genres to (ancient) texts; I will anchor my general discussion with a brief examination of the usefulness of the term "biblical poetry," and of the genre designations developed by Hermann Gunkel in his study of the Psalms.⁵¹

The application of non-native genre labels to ancient texts has been recently discussed in detail by Tremper Longman III in connection to his isolation of the genre "Fictional Akkadian autobiography."⁵² He notes that genre labels perform an invaluable function by guiding the reader in interpreting a work, since interpretation is largely genre-determined.⁵³ Other scholars would concur; for example, Tsvetan Todorov claims that genres offer readers "horizons of expectation."⁵⁴ Ralph Cohen, in a defense of the concept "genre," notes that this function is true for literature of any period, oral as well as written.⁵⁵ For example, a person who reads a work written to be a parody as a historical account would be misunderstanding that work's ancient function, and would misinterpret it.⁵⁶ Given the importance of genre as a guide for reading, Longman claims that it is appropriate to impose genre labels not known to be native to a culture.⁵⁷ Following Gunkel, various criteria, such as mood, vocabulary and social setting might help determine a work's genre.⁵⁸ Finally, Longman suggests that texts of similar genres should be studied together because of the light that they may shed on each other.⁵⁹

The position that non-native genres should be avoided is argued by James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*.⁶⁰ He notes that there is no biblical Hebrew word for poetry,⁶¹ and states, "Thus, to speak of 'poetry' at all in the Bible will be in some measure to

impose a concept foreign to the biblical world."⁶² However, as noted by Kugel's critics, even though "poetry" is a Greek term, it is appropriate in reference to biblical texts because calling a text "poetry" offers us clues as to how to read it.⁶³ If we read (the "poetic") Isaiah 1 in the same way that we read (the "prosaic") Exodus 1, we would seriously misunderstand Isaiah. We would be stumped by certain syntactic features (such as the frequent omission of the verb in the B line), we might interpret some figurative language literally, and we would not know how to process verses which are constructed using parallelism. By offering the label "poetry" to Isaiah, we help to classify it as not prose, and as similar in certain significant respects to varieties of poetry known from our Western civilization. As modern readers of the biblical texts, we need some term to designate this group of texts and to indicate that they should not be read in the same way as different types of other ("prose") texts, and hence we choose the most helpful of our own terms, "poetry."⁶⁴

Kugel's desire to avoid designating biblical texts as "poetry" is partially motivated by a legitimate concern that we might incorrectly impose all of the typical characteristics of non-biblical poetry on to the Bible. However, genres are relatively open-ended and flexible categories,⁶⁵ so all works of the same genre need not share all the same characteristics. Defining ancient genres aids us in seeing certain characteristics of a work that were not previously highlighted and sometimes allows us to presume a likely social setting or role for literary texts.

The psalms of the Bible have been divided on the basis of form-critical features into such genres as laments of the individual, laments of the community, hymns, etc. Hermann Gunkel played a central role in this division,⁶⁶ and his categories or genres, which do not reflect biblical terminology, have remained influential.⁶⁷ These categories have been recently called into question in H. J. Kraus' Psalms commentary, where designations actually found in the psalms themselves are preferred.⁶⁸ His suggestion has not been generally accepted because Gunkel's model (in a modified form) offers a more useful interpretive tool than Kraus' terms, since its categories help to group together certain psalms with certain terms and characteristics (e.g. the phrase "YHWH is/has become king" or the "confidence motif"), allowing them to be viewed together and to bear on one another.⁶⁹

In sum, the application of genre titles which are not known from the biblical period remains useful if the modern and ancient texts share significant features. It is quite possible that these genre groupings did not explicitly exist in antiquity; still, it is possible to write a particular type of literature with certain characteristics and forms even when there is no name used to define their concurrent use. The genre designations "poetry" and "lament of the individual" are therefore appropriate to biblical literature, since they help to designate a group of texts that share a common

body of characteristics and might have a similar *Sitz im Leben*.⁷⁰ Similarly, it is legitimate to isolate a group of biblical texts that share the typical characteristics usually attributed to satire. Judg 3:12-30 is one such text, as is Isa 14:4-23, which is typically seen as a mocking or satirical lament about a "Babylonian" ruler, most likely Sargon of Ashur.⁷¹

The definition of satire by Northrop Frye suggests that it is typified by "wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd [and]... an object of attack."⁷² The Ehud story fulfills this definition. Furthermore, once we realize that the Ehud story is satire, the chapter's prominent use of sexual and scatological themes falls into place; as noted by scholars of literature in such essays as "Bowl Games: Satire in the Toilet"⁷³ and "Decadent Sexuality and Satire,"⁷⁴ these elements frequently characterize satire. In addition, scholars of satire have noted that political satire is characterized by the use of animal imagery;⁷⁵ this might help to explain the use of the calf-related name, Eglon.⁷⁶

"All satire is not only an attack; it is an attack upon discernible, historically authentic particulars."⁷⁷ This statement emphasizes that the literary category of satire has a particular *social-historical* setting, and that the satire in Judg 3:12-30 must be understood within the background of the actual relationship between Israel and Moab. It functioned as literature of attack, mocking the enemy neighbor Moab, reinforcing its identity as an outgroup. It was important to do so because the Moabites were geographically proximate to Israel and according to the tradition in Gen 19:29-38, they were related to Israel via Lot, Abraham's nephew. Furthermore, there were several traditions circulating in ancient Israel that indicated a positive attitude toward Moabites; to the extent that this was a vocal minority opinion, it was necessary to combat it with means such as the satirical story in Judges 3.

In applying the label "satire" to an ancient Israelite text, it is noteworthy that satire as a genre transcends cultural and chronological boundaries, as noted by Paul Frye: "The satiric spirit as it is manifested in verse seems to appear (whether as mockery, raillery, ridicule, or formalized invective) in the literature or folklore of all peoples, early and late, pre-literate and civilized."⁷⁸ Leonard Feinberg has outlined the many satirical elements that can be found in non-Western literature,⁷⁹ including "use of grotesque material, scatological details, and allusions to sex"⁸⁰ and puns.⁸¹ In analyzing the function of satire in both East and West, he notes the importance of satire in making the satirist's audience feel superior to the person or group being satirized,⁸² and claims, "For many people this feeling of superiority, illusory though it may be, offers one of the few sources of delight they are likely to experience. Humor... is often unkind, but by providing a release from psychic tensions it serves a useful purpose."⁸³ All of these observations concerning ancient and non-Western satire are relevant to the Ehud story.

Important corollary. Any interpreter who misses the story is bound to misinterpret and to misuse it.⁸⁴ This has important implications for the modern biblical historian. Corporally exaggerate or misrepresent the object that they involve a range of "distortions, analogies, or "pure" fabrication of the story might be an "invented tradition"⁸⁶ set is composed for political purposes, namely to mock the author did not intend to write a straightforward reprobate events. Thus, the identification of the story's genre that Halpern's understanding of it as "history" is misaligned enmity between Israel and Moab stands behind the nature of satire, there is no reason to assume that any the Ehud story are based in reality.

He in "misgendering" the story, namely assigning it to any of the histories of Israel treat the story of Judg 3:12 as sense of a source for what actually transpired in the judges. Most do not see all of its details as accurate, but rhetorical kernel.⁸⁷ For example, Noth uses the story to describe the relationship between Israel and Moab in the period of the judges, "It is probable that Ehud's victory over Moab (Judg 3:12) occurred during the twelfth century,"⁸⁹ and Mayes, on the occasion of this story with other events depicted in Judges, indicates are, therefore, that the position of the story first of the series accurately reflected its reference to a place early in the period of the judges.⁹⁰ The new and Hayes,⁹¹ which expresses general skepticism concerning the story found in Judges,⁹² nevertheless uses the Ehud story to describe the tribal relationships in the period of the judges. A minority of historians, such as Soggin⁹⁴ and Ahlstrom, because of its genre the Ehud story is inappropriate for the history of the pre-monarchic period. Certainly, the story is political satire, which is anchored in the history it was composed rather than in the historical period to narrate.⁹⁶

PERICOPE LITERATURE OR HISTORY?

Judg only in the sense that it is a narrative that presents a past this past likely have little to do with the real Moab has fashioned a creative work of political satire, predict not the history of the period it purports to describe and conflicts of its author. In defining the story as satire, any claims about how it was appreciated from an antiquity. Rather, I mean to show how certain

motifs, such as the enemy as a sacrificial victim, and scatological and sexual references, had a social function of mocking the real (not the literary) Moabites, who were perceived by the writer as Israel's enemies.

Although this pericope does not narrate factual history, the literary representations it conveys did play a historical role within ancient Israel, expressing the Israelite belief in their superiority over their neighbors, the Moabites.⁹⁷ It is a story of national pride, which serves to illustrate the special way in which Israel perceived itself as God's chosen nation, small, but greater than others.⁹⁸ Certainly in its final form, in which Ehud is sent as a savior after Israel is subjugated (but before it repents),⁹⁹ the story illustrates the principle articulated in Deut 7:7-8a: "It is not because you are more populous than the other nations that YHWH has desired you and has chosen you, for you are the smallest of all the nations. Rather it is because of YHWH's love for you . . ." The Ehud story would help the average Israelite appreciate Moab's (real or hoped for) humiliation, countering any feeling of empathy that may have been felt toward the Moabites either because of their geographical proximity or their status as (supposed) relatives.

Not all of the rhetorical elements isolated by various scholars, such as Alonso-Schökel or Alter, within the Ehud episode may be accounted for by understanding the story as satire. Biblical texts, like many writings, are not typically composed for a single purpose. As noted by David Gunn, "Literature that reads like a theological tract or political pamphlet typically has a short life as entertainment."¹⁰⁰ Thus, it is natural for texts which depict a past to appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of its audience. This is acknowledged, though sometimes hesitantly, by most biblical scholars. For example, Peter R. Ackroyd, in his "Introduction" to his commentary *The First Book of Samuel*, asks "Why are [biblical] books written?" He replies:

A book may be written for the sheer joy of telling a story. But though this could be a factor in the preservation of many ancient traditions in Israel, the books which we have in the Old Testament must all be regarded as religious books in the sense that they offer an interpretation in religious terms of what they relate. This does not make them any less artistic as stories.¹⁰¹

Ackroyd's position is reasonable, though his "religious books" should be replaced with the broader "ideological books." In any case, few biblical works were written primarily as aesthetic masterpieces,¹⁰² though this may be their end result. Aesthetic features of biblical texts may be connected to their genre, as in the satirical elements in the Ehud story, or they may be related to the authors' or tradents' interest in the story's preservation and perpetuation.

We can follow other scholars and point out certain devices that make the Ehud story interesting, fun or aesthetic to us. These might include the

use of irony, especially concerning the left-handed Righthander [Benjaminite],¹⁰³ which raises a chuckle to many current readers, and might have had a similar effect in the past. The linking of various sections with the root *tq*^c used of "thrusting" the dagger (in v. 21), and of "blowing" the shofar (in v. 27), ties the unit together in a way which is pleasing to most contemporary readers of Hebrew.¹⁰⁴ The rhyme between the proximate obscure words *happaršēdonā*, "the excrement" (v. 22b), and *hammisdērônā*, "the portico" (v. 23a), is pleasing to us, though textual difficulties make the rhyme uncertain, and in any case, it is clear that ancient Hebrew authors did not employ rhyme, and thus these words would have been perceived differently by people in ancient Israel who read or heard the story.¹⁰⁵

The last point is fundamental. James L. Kugel has suggested that readers imagine biblical poetry in the image of poetry that they know; thus Josephus speaks of the biblical metrical poetry written in "hexameters."¹⁰⁶ Josephus is not unique; we tend to project our notion of the Bible's literariness on to the biblical period, despite clear evidence that literary sensibilities change in such fundamental ways over time. We can each tell in what way a biblical verse or unit is literary to us, but that should not be confused with ancient "literary competence,"¹⁰⁷ what Diana Vikander Edelman calls to "read like an ancient Judahite."¹⁰⁸

My position that the Ehud story is not literature, but is satire, seems self-contradictory, but is based on the notion that unlike "literature," the genre of satire is known in a relatively stable form across many cultures and epochs and is useful in interpreting the pericope because it helps to explain a clustering of unusual features within the text. The story survived because in antiquity it had a purpose – political satire is a utilitarian genre, which helps you to define yourself *vis-à-vis* another group. For these reasons, I have focussed on "literary" elements that are connected to this genre, rather than on those which might have been connected to the story's preservation or its other aesthetic qualities; though these latter elements were likely important in antiquity, I do not believe that they may be recovered by us.

IDEOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF SAMUEL¹

Without doubt the motivation for the author of this narrative was . . . (a) to legitimate David's succession to the throne which rightly belonged to the house of Saul, and (b) to acquit David of charges brought against him for complicity in the disaster which ruined Saul's family.

Niels Peter Lemche, "David's Rise," *JSOT* 10 (1978), 2

THE KING DAVID REPORT

The best starting point for understanding the ideological nature of the biblical Book of Samuel is the novel by the (former) East German writer Stefan Heym, *The King David Report*.² Heym, much like an ancient Israelite author, did not live under a regime which encouraged a free press and complete access to information. Both East Germany and ancient monarchical Israel were highly centralized, and in terms of powers given to the king and his bureaucracy, the Judean king could be seen as parallel to the East German premier.³ We know little about patterns of censorship in ancient Israel, but analogies from other ancient Near Eastern societies suggest that official versions of stories could be propagated through the monarchy, which could also attempt to suppress alternative versions.

According to *The King David Report*, Solomon commissions Ethan to write a history after David dies because

Israel abounds with stories about him [David], most of them useless, some even harmful. . . so we must have one authoritative report, to the exclusion of all others, on the life and great works and heroic battles of my father, King David, who chose me to sit upon his throne.⁴

Before Ethan starts his work, the court recorder describes the guidelines that Ethan must follow:⁵