

This analysis has an important corollary. Any interpreter who misses the satirical nature of the story is bound to misinterpret and to misuse it.⁸⁴ This has especially important implications for the modern biblical historian. Composers of satire typically exaggerate or misrepresent the object that they satirize; satire involves a range of "distortions, analogies, or "pure" fabrications."⁸⁵ Thus, much of the story might be an "invented tradition"⁸⁶ set in the past, which was composed for political purposes, namely to mock the enemy Moabites. Its author did not intend to write a straightforward representation of historical events. Thus, the identification of the story's genre as "satire" implies that Halpern's understanding of it as "history" is misguided. The historical enmity between Israel and Moab stands behind the story, but given the nature of satire, there is no reason to assume that any of the specifics of the Ehud story are based in reality.

Halpern is not unique in "misgendering" the story, namely assigning it to the wrong genre. Many of the histories of Israel treat the story of Judg 3:12-30 as history in the sense of a source for what actually transpired in the so-called period of judges. Most do not see all of its details as accurate, but search for some historical kernel.⁸⁷ For example, Noth uses the story to determine the boundaries between Israel and Moab in the period of the judges;⁸⁸ Bright claims that, "It is probable that Ehud's victory over Moab (Judg 3:12-30) likewise fell during the twelfth century,"⁸⁹ and Mayes, on the basis of a comparison of this story with other events depicted in Judges, concludes, "The indications are, therefore, that the position of the story [Judg 3:12-30] as first of the series accurately reflected its reference to an event which took place early in the period of the judges."⁹⁰ The newer history of Miller and Hayes,⁹¹ which expresses general skepticism concerning the information found in Judges,⁹² nevertheless uses the Ehud story to help reconstruct the tribal relationships in the period of the judges.⁹³ Only a small minority of historians, such as Soggin⁹⁴ and Ahlström,⁹⁵ claim that because of its genre the Ehud story is inappropriate for use in reconstructing the history of the pre-monarchic period. Certainly, they are correct, for the story is political satire, which is anchored in the historical period in which it was composed rather than in the historical period which it pretends to narrate.⁹⁶

IS THE EHUD PERICOPÉ LITERATURE OR HISTORY?

Judg 3:12-30 is history only in the sense that it is a narrative that presents a past. The specifics of this past likely have little to do with the real Moab; instead, an author has fashioned a creative work of political satire, predominantly reflecting not the history of the period it purports to describe, but the period and conflicts of its author. In defining the story as satire, I do not make any claims about how it was appreciated from an aesthetic perspective in 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 7:7-8ac: "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, counter-ing 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 made 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