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Title: A Critical Analysis of Comedic Devices in the Bible: Esther, Jonah and the Story of Samuel

In the thesis's five chapters, it examines the use of comedy in the Book of Esther, the Book of Jonah and the Story of Samuel (1 Sam. 1-6). In connection with this, the thesis defines "comedy" by reviewing general scholarship on comedy; surveys literature that specifically discusses comedy in the Bible; and evaluates comedic devices used in Esther, Jonah, and the story of Samuel. It presents arguments which support and oppose defining the narratives as comedy.

The overarching goal of the thesis was to explore how the use of comedy and comedic devices shape our reading of these texts and our understanding of their stories.

The thesis is divided into five chapters plus an Appendix. The first chapter addresses the issue of defining comedy, and distinguishes between comedic genres and comedic devices. It then reviews literature on comedy in the bible. The second, third and fourth chapters are structured similarly, but address three different sections in the Bible: Esther, Jonah, and then 1 Samiuel 1-6. Each chapter first reviews the scholarship on comedy in that particular biblical section, it then identifies and analyzes the comedic devices in the text, with particular attention paid to how those devices operate and the effects they produce. The Appendix provides a thorough account of literature on comedy in all books of the Bible.

The materials used for thesis include commentaries, books and articles on Esther, Jonah and 1 Samuel. In addition, the thesis incorporates scholarship on the theories of humor.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF COMEDIC DEVICES IN THE BIBLE: ESTHER, JONAH AND THE STORY OF SAMUEL

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, **Sylvia Singer**, who would have been so proud to see me reach this next step on my life's journey. Her fervent wish for me was always that all my "hopes and dreams" would come true. Completing this thesis has taken me one step closer to realizing my dream of becoming a rabbi, and while I wish she could have been here to celebrate this accomplishment with me, I know that she is, and always will be, with me in my heart, cheering me on.

I would also like to thank those people who supported me during the process of writing my thesis:

My brilliant thesis advisor, just-about-to-be-**Dr. Andrea Weiss**, whose love of Bible is inspiring and ability to edit is tremendous. From the moment I stepped into her Bible class three years ago, I knew that I would want her guidance through this experience. I am grateful that she was willing to take me on as her "advisee," especially as she prepares to give birth to her second child in just a few weeks and defends her dissertation today (1/20)!

My parents, **Sherry and Barry Mendelson**, who love me unconditionally and whose belief in me has sustained me throughout all of the different turns which have led me to reach this achievement in my life. I am so lucky to have such extraordinarily supportive parents and I hope that I have made them proud.

My fiancé and soon-to-be husband, **Adam Graf**, who gave up many evenings out and endured many weekends at home with me so that I could work on this project. I am truly looking forward to working on our next undertaking together: our wedding!

My sister, **Ali Mendelson**, who knows more about being funny than anyone else I know. She is a great sister and a great friend.

My friends and family, who have given me the time and space to work on this thesis without feeling guilty for neglecting them, and most especially **Amanda Rykoff, Dan Tabak**, and **Jennifer Hammer**, who were there for me when I really needed them the most.

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Alysa Mendelson
January 20, 2004/26 Tevet 5764

A Critical Analysis Of Comedic Devices In The Bible: Esther, Jonah And The Story Of Samuel

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בֶּן בַּג בַּג אוֹמֵר, הַפֵּךְ בָּהּ וַהֲפֵךְ בָּהּ, דְּכֹלָּא בָהּ.
וּבָהּ תֶּחֱזֵי, וְסִיב וּבְלֵה בָהּ, וּמִנַּהּ לָא תִזוּעַ,
שֶׁאֵין לְךָ מִדָּה טוֹבָה הֵימֶנָּה:

Ben Bag Bag used to say, 'Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it. Reflect on it and grow old and gray with it. Do not turn from it, for nothing is better than it.'
—Pirke Avot 5:22

In terms of the Bible, Ben Bag Bag certainly was correct. Turn it and turn it, for everything, including comedy, can be found in the Tanakh. Some might be surprised by this proposition. The Bible is regarded as a sacred text, which would therefore seem to exclude the possibility that it contains comedic features. "Sacred" is defined in the dictionary as "worthy of religious veneration," "entitled to reverence and respect" and "not secular or profane."[1] Comedy, in contrast, is a seemingly secular art and is often profane. The irreverence and lack of respect usually associated with comedy seem to conflict with the veneration customarily accorded to the "sacred" Bible.

Yet, if we take a closer look at the text, another turn perhaps, we will find that the Bible actually contains a number of moments of comedy. Indeed, there are not only *moments* of comedy, there are also several lengthy comedic *episodes*. This thesis endeavors to identify some of those comedic moments and episodes, analyze their comedic devices, and examine the role comedy plays in enhancing the message and impact of the larger stories in which they are found.

The Difficulty of Defining Comedy

Comedy is most simply defined as "a drama of light and amusing character and typically with a happy ending" and also as "a ludicrous or farcical event or series of

[1] "Sacred," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1980 ed.

events."[2] However, this basic definition does not reflect the diverse facets of comedy, for this is "not a clear-cut objective concept."[3] Many scholars have noted the difficulty of explaining and defining comedy,[4] "a problem which has been vexing philosophers for decades."[5] For instance, Edwin Good writes: "Humor is notoriously difficult to classify, and definitions of types vary."[6] Conrad Hyers elaborates: "There are always those who want terms defined, laboring under the assumption that the most complex issues can be pinned down by a few well-chosen phrases. Yet terms such as *humor*, *comedy*, *irony* and *satire* are not easily compressed and packaged in this way."[7] The task of finding an adequate definition of comedy proves complicated, but not impossible. One factor that facilitates the attempt to define comedy is the distinction between of different comedic devices.

General Comedic Devices

Comedic devices share common goals, yet each achieves these goals differently. Additionally, the variety of comedic devices allows us to find humor in diverse ways. In

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[2] "Comedy," Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1980 ed.

[3] Athalya Brenner, "On the Semantic Field of Humour, Laughter and the Comic in the Old Testament," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 39-57, at 39.

[4] While the terms "comedy" and "humor" can be considered "terms of art," with separate and distinct meanings, for the purpose of this thesis they will be used interchangeably (as they are by some of the scholars cited herein).

[5] Yehuda T.Radday, "On Missing the Humour in the Bible: An Introduction," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 21-38, at 22 [hereinafter *Missing the Humour*].

[6] Edward L. Greenstein, "Humor and Wit: Old Testament," ed. David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. III, 325-33, at 331.

[7] Conrad Hyers, And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy, (Atlanta: John Knox P, 1987), at 7.

his book, The Bible and the Comic Vision, William Whedbee identifies a number of key comedic devices:

> Comedy typically delights in various forms of verbal artifice such as punning or word-play, parody, hyperbole, redundancy, and repetitiveness. Moreover, comedy especially exploits incongruity and irony, highlighting discrepancy, reversal, and surprise. Comedy moves with relish into the realm of the ludicrous and ridiculous.[8]

In order to appreciate how these comedic devices function in biblical comedy, it is necessary to have basic understanding of the differences among several of them, including: word play, exaggeration, reversal, repetition, ludicrous, and the ∪-shaped plot.

1. Word play

Word play can involve puns or the use of words with similar sounds. Good has identified several types of word play: a) the juxtaposition of two use of the same word with ironic implications; b) the juxtaposition of two forms of the same verb or root with different meanings; c) the use of double meanings; d) the use of words to mean their opposite; and, e) the play on sounds (alliteration).[9] Through word play, the author may address otherwise forbidden or sensitive topics. Feinberg notes: "By twisting words out of shape, or by using sounds to take advantage of unexpected meanings . . . we are revolting, in a small and safe way, against 'rules of language.'"[10] As Schutz writes, word play "skirts the formal rules of taboo, and the wordiness of humor allows even further camouflage of the violation."[11]

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[8] J. William Whedbee, The Bible and the Comic Vision, (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2002), at 9.
[9] Good, at 121-25.
[10] Leonard Feinberg, The Secret of Humor, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978), at 183.
[11] Charles E. Schutz, "The Psycho-Logic of Political Humour," It's a Funny Thing, Humour, ed. Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976), 65-69, at 66.

2. Exaggeration

Exaggeration magnifies its subject matter to such an extreme that the audience can not miss its absurdity.[12] The employment of this device often leads to the degradation of something that formerly seemed dignified.[13] In addition, exaggeration points out that which we might otherwise not notice. It makes us look at life as if it were under a magnifying glass: details that might be overlooked are amplified for all to see.[14] Walter Sorrel explains another consequence of exaggeration: by blowing up "reality to the point of excess and distortion" exaggeration exposes "the hollowness of reality."[15]

3. Repetition

While exaggeration amplifies particular qualities of the comedic subject to such an extent that their absurdity shocks the audience into laughter, repetition works by conditioning the audience to laugh. Frye explains: "Laughter is partly reflex, and like other reflexes it can be conditioned by a simple repeated pattern."[16] However, Herbert Brichto makes an important distinction: "Repetition is not sameness";[17] a crucial aspect of repetition involves some degree of variation or a break in the repeated pattern. Henri Bergson claims that "the repetition of a word is not laughable in itself."[18] He continues, "In a comic repetition of words we generally find two terms: a repressed feeling which

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[12] Bergson, at 141.
[13] Bergson, at 141
[14] Henri Bergson, "Laughter," Comedy, ed. Wylie Sypher (1956; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 61-192, at 140
[15] Walter Sorrel, Facets of Comedy (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1972), at 19.
[16] Northrop Frye, "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler Pub., 1965), 141-62, at 146.
[17] Herbert Chanan Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), at 19
[18] Bergson, at 107-08.

goes off like a spring, and an idea that delights in repressing the feeling anew."[19] While that which is repeated shares essential aspects with the original word or pattern, it is also clearly different from the original.[20] The difference produces comedy.

4. Reversal

Reversal works through the rising of the unexpected from expectedness. Also known as peripety, reversal occurs when "an action or state of affairs produces the opposite of the expected result."[21] Berg explains that "the peripatetic principle expresses the frustration of human expectations and demonstrates that the course of human lives is influenced by forces beyond human control."[22] However, comedic reversals are not random. Instead, as Michael Fox explains, they frequently occur in a "sequence of paired

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[19] Bergson, at 108.

[20] Neal R. Norrick, "Repetition as Conversational Joking Strategy," Repetition in Discourse Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Vol. Two, ed. Barbara Johnstone (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Pub. Corp., 1994), 15-28, at 15.

Repetition occurs frequently in the Bible in a more general, not necessarily comedic fashion. See also Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, (New York: Basic Books, 1981), at 95-96. Alter proposes a scale of five "repetitive structuring and focusing devices in biblical narrative":

(1) Leitwort: "Through abundant repetition, the semantic range of the word-root is explored, different forms of the root are deployed, branching off at times into phonetic relatives (that is, word–play), synonymity, and antonymity." Alter, at 95

(2) Motif: "A concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object recurs through a particular narrative." Alter, at 95.

(3) Theme: "An idea which is part of the value-system of the narrative—it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal, political, historiopolitical, theological—is made evident in some recurring pattern." Alter, at 95.

(4) Sequence of actions: Usually "three consecutive repetitions, or three plus one, with some intensification or increment from one occurrence to the next, usually concluding either in a climax or reversal." Alter, at 96.

(5) Type-scene: "This is an episode occurring at a portentous moment in the career of the hero which is composed of a fixed sequence of motifs." Alter, at 96.

[21] Sandra Beth Berg, The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure, (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), at 105.

[22] Berg, at 105.

and balanced oppositions rather than in a miscellaneous collection of coincidences."[23] Often they lead toward deliverance from some impending catastrophe, which is averted at the very last minute.[24] At other times, despite every effort by the actor, whatever turns he takes often lead him back to the same starting point.[25]

5. Ludicrous Situations

The operative factor in the ludicrous includes incongruity.[26] In addition, incongruity involves a "perceptible falling short of an already agreed upon standard of seriousness which we set for the object."[27] This device fails if it evokes emotion or brings about a feeling of pity for the subject.[28] As Bergson argues, "take a downright vice,—even one that is generally speaking, of an odious nature—you may make it ludicrous if, by some suitable contrivance, you arrange so that it leaves our emotions unaffected."[29]

6. Understatement

Understatement, which is the key operating feature of irony, is also known as *litotes*. It occurs when a "thing means more than it says" and is therefore comedic because of its incongruity with "what is actually so."[30]

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[23] Michael V. Fox, Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther, (Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001), at 251.
[24] Frye, at 155.
[25] Bergson, at 114.
[26] Robert W. Corrigan, "Comedy and the Comic Spirit," Comedy: Meaning and Form, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler Pub. 1965), 1-12, at 6.
[27] Corrigan, at 6.
[28] Bergson, at 150.
[29] Bergson, at 150.
[30] Good, at 30.

7. Caricature

Unlike understatement, which downplays a key characteristic, caricature overstates. The device of caricature oversimplifies, concentrates on the essential issue, and then magnifies that issue to the point of ridicule.[31] In this way, caricature represents an amalgamation of several other comedic devices, including exaggeration and the ludicrous.

8. ∪-shaped plot

In addition, these comedic devices usually drive the story's "∪-shaped plot," which is another critical characteristic of comedy. The ∪-shaped plot begins with "a largely harmonious, integrated society," which plunges into "deep and often potentially tragic complications," and concludes by "turning upward into a happy ending."[32]

Northrop Frye established the basic structural principles for a comedy. At the beginning of a comedy, there are usually blocking characters, who obstruct the free movement of society.[33] The action of the comedy involves the overcoming these blocking characters or other obstacles.[34] Often, the action of comedy comes close to a catastrophic overthrow of society, but just before a collapse the action quickly reverses.[35] During its downward descent, there is often a "scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character."[36] However, comedy usually works toward a satisfying resolution, which the audience sees as the desired outcome.[37] Frye explains

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[31] Sorrel, at 26.
[32] Whedbee, at 7.
[33] Frye, at 142.
[34] Frye, at 142.
[35] Frye, at 155.
[36] Frye, at 143.
[37] Frye, at 145.

that the "society emerging at the conclusion of comedy represents . . . a kind of moral norm, or pragmatically free society."[38]

Theories of Comedy

The different genres of comedy use the various devices described above in order to achieve the larger purposes of comedy. To understand the aims of comedy in a given text, we must first examine some of the prevailing theories of comedy, of which the following are most predominant. Sigmund Freud developed what is known as the "relief theory," which explains that by laughing we release energy that would otherwise be used to repress our thoughts and emotions. Laughter allows for the "release of pent-up nervous energy" and consequently allows for the conservation of "psychic energy."[39] Patricia Keith-Spiegel summarizes Freud's theory of humor in the following way:

> Freud contended that the ludicrous always represents a saving in the expenditure of psychic energy. When energy built up for occupation in certain psychic channels is not or cannot be utilized (owing to the censoring action of the superego) it may be pleasurably discharged in laughter. . . . In *wit*, [for example] the pleasure derives from economy in the expenditure of inhibition. Wit can be "harmless" as in the enjoyment of nonsense or childishness, or it can express inhibited tendencies. Social restrictions (interjected in the form of the superego) do not permit the acting out of regressive infantile sexual and aggressive behavior in a direct manner. . . In *humor*, there is an economy in the expenditure of feeling. Humor turns an event that would otherwise cause suffering into less significance. Energy is displaced onto the superego, and the ego is thereby allowed to return to an infantile state.[40]

Thus, according to this theory, there is "relief" in overcoming the "censoring action of the superego" and otherwise "inhibited tendencies," which is achieved by saying in a

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[38] Frye, at 147.

[39] Marcella T. Goldsmith, Nonrepresentational Forms of the Comic (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), at 2; see also Simon Critchley, On Humour (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[40] Patricia Keith-Spiegel, "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues," The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), at 13 (emphasis added).

humorous way that which we might not otherwise say. The relief theory characterizes humor as "a veiled form of attack" for the very reason that "[t]he mask of humor's subtlety and its seemingly innocuous character are used by the humorist to conceal his destructive motives and thus to bypass inhibitions in his audience and himself."[41]

A second approach, the "incongruity" theory,[42] plays on discrepancies between what is expected and a surprising actual result.[43] The comedy "is the result of the inevitable conflict between the conceived and the perceived . . . a subtle play of differences and similarities gives rise to the unexpected paradoxes that make us laugh."[44]

Third, the "superiority" theory introduced by Hobbes "accounts for some comical phenomena only when the person we find comical is degraded."[45] This theory of humor is "based on the observation that we laugh at other people's infirmities, particularly those of our enemies."[46] The theory not only applies to people, but to "ideas, political institutions and inanimate objects as targets for ridicule."[47] Henri Bergson's approach has also been categorized with this theory. Bergson holds that "laughter has a corrective influence on the audience, since it is expressed to reestablish a lost equilibrium between the mechanical and the living."[48]

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[41] David L. Singer, "Aggression Arousal, Hostile Humor, Catharsis," Motivation in Humor, ed. Jacob Levine (New York: Atherton P, 1969), 103-27, at 104.
[42] Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard are credited with developing this theory.
[43] Keith-Spiegel, at 6.
[44] Goldsmith, at 20.
[45] Goldsmith, at 2.
[46] Jerry Suls, "Cognitive and Disparagement Theories of Humour: A Theoretical and Empirical Synthesis," It's a Funny Thing, Humour, ed. Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon P, 1977), 41-46, at 41.
[47] Keith-Spiegel, at 7 (citing A. Bain, The emotions and the will (3d ed.), (New York: Longmans, Green, 1888)).
[48] Goldsmith, at 4.

Scholarship on Comedy in the Bible

A number of biblical scholars explored the comedic features present in various biblical texts. They have cited several instances of comedy throughout the Tanakh, from the story of creation to the Samson story, to the Song of Songs, to Daniel.[49] Four major publications on comedy in the Hebrew Bible have been published[50] along with several others that speak more specifically to comedy in the Christian Bible.[51] Though there are scattered articles on this topic, most of the literature appears in these four collections.

Whedbee provides the most comprehensive discussion of humor in the Bible. His recent book centers around the thesis that:

> the holy book we call the Bible revels in a profoundly ambivalent laughter, a divide in human laughter that by turns is both mocking and joyous, subversive and celebrative, and finally a laughter that results in an exuberant and transformative comic vision.[52]

Whedbee highlights Northrop Frye's image of the "∪-shaped plot" as the defining characteristic of comedy.[53] He illustrates how this ∪-shaped plot operates in several parts of the Bible, including the books of Genesis and Exodus, as well as Esther, Jonah, Job, and the Song of Songs.[54]

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[49] See Appendix.

[50] Cheryl Exum, ed., Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32, (Decatur, GA: Scholars P, 1985); Edwin M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1965); Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, ed., On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990); J. William Whedbee, The Bible and the Comic Vision (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2002).

[51] Douglas Adams, The Prostitute in the Family Tree: Discovering Humor and Irony in the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox P, 1997); Conrad Hyers, And God Created Laughter: The Bible as Divine Comedy, (Atlanta: John Knox P, 1987).

[52] Whedbee, at 4-5.

[53] Whedbee, at 7.

[54] See Appendix.

Another major work, On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, presents fourteen essays. In their introductory article, Yehuda Brenner and Athalya Radday propose that the "humour, jokes and comic expression" in the Hebrew Bible "can serve as a valuable strategy for biblical exegesis."[55] They acknowledge the difficulty the different contributors to the collection had in creating a uniform definition of "humour in general and biblical humour in particular."[56] Moreover, they recognize the inherent controversy in "[r]eading texts which are not self-defined by some intrinsic means as 'humorous' or 'comic' (which the biblical texts are not)."[57] In addition to identifying numerous comedic stories in the Torah, articles in the collection discuss examples of how comedy operates in various passages in the Tanakh, including 1 Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, Jonah, Job, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Esther.[58] Two articles in particular stand out for their original insights into the purpose of humor in the Bible.

In his article "Missing the Humour in the Bible," Radday explains that humor plays a critical role in the Bible. He argues that the primary "aim of the Bible is the moral improvement of the world";[59] to achieve this goal "all verbal weapons are permitted—indeed imperative—and neglect of even one such weapon would be

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[55] Yehuda T.Radday and Athalya Brenner "Between Intentionality and Reception: Acknowledgement and Application (A Preview)," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 13-19, at 13 [hereinafter Radday & Brenner Intro].

[56] Radday & Brenner Intro, at 13.

[57] Radday & Brenner Intro, at 14.

[58] See Appendix.

[59] Yehuda T. Radday, "Missing the Humour in the Bible," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 21-38, at 32.

tantamount to irresponsibility."[60] He concludes that "humour is indispensable"[61] because in this "armoury of weapons there is . . . no sharper sword than humour."[62] He also acknowledges that while humor may be an essential tool, generations of audiences have failed to recognize the Bible's comedic potential. Radday posits that until the 5th century CE, Jews did recognize the humor in biblical stories.[63] However, after the adoptions of Christianity as the state religion, "Judaism had to take a defensive stand and its defenders, careful not to be outshone in piety by their Christian antagonists, became self-conscious."[64] Consequently, the Bible became "smothered in reverence."[65] According to Radday, only a small number of studies on humor in the Bible exist because, until recently, Christians were the primary source of academic studies of the Bible.[66] Christian reverence of the "narrative part of the 'Old Testament'" made seeing humor in the Bible

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[60] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 32.
[61] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 32.
[62] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 32.
[63] Radday cites a passage from the Talmud (b. B. Mez. 59b), which he summarizes as follows: "When the Sages about 100 CE once discussed a controversial point of law, all were of one opinion except Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hyrcanos, who disagreed. At that moment, a heavenly voice was heard endorsing Rabbi Eliezer's minority vote. But Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah refused to be impressed and countered the endorsement with a quotation from the Torah: "[It is written in Deut. 30.12 that the Torah is not a utopia and that] it [*sc.* the law] is not in heaven [having been to Israel *in toto* on Mount Sinai, hence heaven must not meddle in the discussion and] we [need] not consider heavenly interference.' The story continues:

> Rabbi Nathan met the prophet Elijah [who had died a few hundred years earlier] and asked him, 'What did the Holy One, be He praised, do at that time [i.e. when he heard Rabbi Joshua's irreverent reply which completely distorted the plain meaning of a Torah verse]?' Said he: "He laughed and said, 'They overruled me, these sons of mine!'"

Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 36.
[64] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 37.
[65] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 37.
[66] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 34.

unlikely.[67] Thus, Radday argues, "Christian theology, by its very nature, is likely to make Christian theologians and exegetes blind to the humour of the Bible."[68] He asserts that by contrast, Jews are more likely to be open to the text's "lighter" possibilities because for Jews "the stories are in principle mainly mere illustrations."[69]

In another article from Brenner and Radday's collection, Francis Landy describes the Bible as "fun and human" and deems "the reverence accorded to [it] a hindrance, ironically, a form of idolatry."[70] This overly reverent treatment of the Bible, he suggests, only serves to distance people from the text that they are supposed to hold close. He explains: "The solemn ritual of reading the Bible excluded humour as a valid way of worshipping God, and has created an impression of a stiff and serious document that never relaxes into a smile, so that many sensitive readers have closed their minds to its comic possibilities."[71] He cites some of Freud's arguments from Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious as key to understanding the importance of humor. One such argument posits that humor has a subversive nature, which allows "repressed wishes and thoughts to be surreptitiously released . . . for this reason oppressed peoples like the Jews develop a very sharp, highly ambivalent comic repertoire, in which the national anguish finds bearable expression."[72] Landy agrees that the Bible is indeed a subversive

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[67] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 34.
[68] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 35.
[69] Radday, *Missing the Humor*, at 34.
[70] Francis Landy, "Humour as a Tool for Biblical Exegesis," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 59-98, at 101.
[71] Landy, at 101.
[72] Landy, at 100.

document, which uses humor as an instrument for its readers to conduct their own self-critical investigations.[73]

J. Cheryl Exum edited a somewhat less comprehensive collection on comedy in the Bible in the journal *Semeia* entitled "Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible."[74] Articles in the journal discuss comedy in Daniel,[75] Hosea[76] and in the "Latter Prophets."[77] In addition, four response articles discuss theories about comedy in the Bible.[78] As the title indicates, this journal issue not only focuses on comedy in the Bible, but on tragedy as well. As a result of this dual focus, the discussion of comedy is less in depth than in the two prior works.

Whereas the previous three works discuss comedy in a more general way, Good's volume, Irony in the Old Testament, focuses on one specific genre of comedy, irony. He proposes that "the ironic vision [in the Old Testament] is a perception of human life as it is lived and a vision of life as it ought to be lived."[79] According to Good, life "ought to be lived" obeying God's command because Israel and God are in a covenant, which

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[73] Landy, at 103.
[74] J. Cheryl Exum, ed., Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32 (1984).
[75] Edwin M. Good, "Apocalyptic as Comedy: The Book of Daniel," ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32 (1984), 41-70.
[76] Martin J. Buss, "Tragedy and Comedy in Hosea," Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32 (1984), 71-82.
[77] Norman K. Gottwald, "Tragedy and Comedy in the Latter Prophets," in J. Cheryl Exum (ed.) Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible in *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* 32 (1984), 83-98.
[78] The authors and titles of these articles are: David Robertson, "Tragedy, Comedy, and the Bible—A Response;" Yair Zakovitch, "$\cup$ and $\cap$ in the Bible;" David Gunn, "The Anatomy of Divine Comedy: On Reading the Bible as Comedy and Tragedy;" and, Francis Landy, "Are We in the Place of Averroes? Response to the articles of Exum and Whedbee, Buss, Gottwald, and Good ."
[79] Edwin M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament. (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1965), at 243.

means that "Israel lives in response and obedience to God's history and comes to be what he is intended by God to be."[80] Thus, Good finds that the irony in the Bible pokes fun at those who believe that they can live their lives free of the obligations of the covenant with God.[81]

Along with these full length treatments on comedy in the Bible, another interesting chapter by Daniel Russ appears in Louise Cowan's The Terrain of Comedy. Russ argues that when viewed "from the perspective of comedy [the Bible] may be seen to constitute the fullest achievement of that genre in Western literature."[82] He asserts that, unlike comedy based on the foibles of human beings, biblical comedy "arises out divine action itself: a God creates the world with comic possibilities before time, wrestles and sups with His people, enduring their rebellion and scorn in the midst of time, and plans a wedding feast on earth at the end of time."[83]

Finally, entries on this topic appear in biblical dictionaries, such as "Humor and Wit" in the Anchor Bible Dictionary[84] and on "Humor"[85] and "Irony and Satire"[86] in the Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible. In the Anchor Bible Dictionary, Edward Greenstein notes several comedic devices used in the Bible, such as the satire of the royal court of the Moabite king Eglon in Judg 3:15-30, the farcical scenes of Haman's downfall in the

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[80] Good, at 242.
[81] Good, at 242. Earlier in his book, Good explains that "the irony in comedy lies in seeing the pretensions of the imposter exposed as folly." Good, at 17. Thus, for Good, irony in the Bible is about the deniers of God's providence.
[82] Daniel Russ, "The Bible as Genesis in Comedy," in Lousie Cowan, The Terrain of Comedy (Dallas: Dall. Inst. of Hum. & Cult., 1984), at 41.
[83] Russ, at 42.
[84] Greenstein, at 330-33
[85] W. F. Stinespring, "Humor" in George Arthur Buttrick (ed.) Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible (1962), 660-62.
[86] W. F. Stinespring, "Irony and Satire" in George Arthur Buttrick (ed.) Interpreter's Dictionary of Bible (1962), 726-28.

book of Esther, and the ludicrous Ninevites who are so eager to repent that "they dress their cattle in mourning clothes" in Jonah 3. In addition, he lists seven forms of irony:

1) sarcasm (in Gen. 37:19, when Joseph's brothers say, "Here comes this dreamer");
2) ridicule (in 1 Kings 18:27, "Elijah's mockery of the Baal prophets");
3) satire (the "story of Jonah as satire of a prophet");
4) parody (in Esther 1-3, "the account of Ahasuerus' silly, irreversible edicts);
5) trickery (in Gen. 12:10-20 and ch. 20, "Abraham's representation of his wife as his sister");
6) verbal wit, such as wordplay and especially punning; and,
7) proverbial humor: in proverbs, the "grotesque hyperbole and surrealism of the simile produce the humor" (in Prov 26:18-19, where it says "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death,/is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I am only joking!'")[87]

The Interpreter's Dictionary entry on "humor" identifies the pun, a "form of wordplay," as the predominant form of humor in the Bible.[88] One example involves word plays with proper names, such as "the untranslatable pun [in the story of Creation] (2:7): "Then the Lord God formed man [adham] of dust from the ground [adhama]."[89] In its entry on "Irony and Satire," several examples of irony and satire are noted.[90] In addition, "the

[87] Greenstein, at 332.
[88] Stinespring, at 660-61.
[89] Stinespring, at 660.
[90] Stinespring, at 726-27.

most significant strain of satire in the OT is that in the books of the prophets, [which] . . . is directed against the prophets' own people and culture."[91]

This thesis will build upon the work of the above scholars, while investigating the comedic potential in Esther, Jonah and 1 Samuel 1-6. In each case, the comedic devices will be identified and analyzed, with particular attention paid to how these devices operate and the effects they produce.

[91] Stinespring, at 727.

TURN IT: ESTHER

Turn it and turn it again. Our first turn takes us to the Book of Esther, certainly the Bible's most obvious example of comedy. Esther is read on the joyful festival of Purim, however not everyone has been amused by this tale of Esther, the Jewish woman who becomes queen and ultimately advocates for her people, and the Jewish people who triumph over the evil machinations of the foolhardy king's trusted advisor, Haman. Throughout the ages, audiences have been confronted with seemingly "objectionable features" in the book of Esther, including the decadence of court life, its apparent degradation of women,[1] intimacy between Jews and non-Jews, the joyful celebration of the massive number of deaths at its ending,[2] and God's apparent absence. However, recent scholars now assert that these "objectionable features" must be considered in light of the comedic nature of the book as a whole.

Review of Scholarship on Comedy in the Book of Esther

Contemporary biblical scholars have examined specific comedic aspects of the book of Esther as well as the overall comedic nature of the book in its entirety. More than any other scholar, Adele Berlin advocates that the book of Esther must be considered a comedy. In her recently published commentary to the book, she states:

> The comic aspects of the book are not incidental, merely to provide comic relief, they are the essence of the book. They define the genre of the book, and thus set the parameters according to which we should read it. We cannot appreciate the story fully unless we realize it is meant to be funny.[3]

The comic style of the book of Esther, Berlin argues, is "evidence that the purpose of the

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[1] Bruce William Jones, "Two Misconceptions about the Book of Esther," in 39 CATHOLIC BIBLICAL Q 171-81, at 173.
[2] Jones, at 173.
[3] Adele Berlin, Esther: The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 2001), at xviii.

Megillah was to model and to authenticate the celebration of Purim."[4] However, as other commentators on biblical humor have also noted, the comedy of Esther is often overlooked simply because it is part of the biblical canon.[5] Berlin acknowledges that the "idea that Esther partakes of the comic spirit is not new."[6] However, she argues, "even commentators who recognize the comic nature of Esther do not take it into account sufficiently when they interpret the book."[7] Berlin not only argues this in her introduction, but also demonstrates this in her verse by verse exegesis that Esther is a comedy.

While Berlin focuses exclusively on the book of Esther, Whedbee's chapter on Esther is part of a larger discussion of comedy in the Bible. He characterizes the book of Esther as "perhaps the clearest embodiment of the comic vision among all the biblical narratives, representing a brilliantly conceived story in which plot-line, characterization of major figures, and rhetorical strategies combine to produce a finely told comedy."[8] He argues that the recurring reversals in the book of Esther are crucial to its movement[9] and holds that this "thematic trajectory of reversal follows the ∪-shaped plot -line so endemic to comedies."[10] The story begins "on the high note of festivity . . . plunges downward into a series of crises of increasing seriousness . . . then swings upward to consummate in a traditional 'happy ending' [of] the deliverance of the Jews."[11]

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[4] Berlin, at xvi.
[5] Berlin, at xviii (quoting Moshe Halbertal).
[6] Berlin, at xvii.
[7] Berlin, at xviii.
[8] Whedbee, at 171.
[9] Whedbee, at 172.
[10] Whedbee, at 172.
[11] Whedbee, at 173.

Similarly, a number of scholars have highlighted the comedic aspects of the book of Esther. Kenneth Craig examines Esther in light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the literary carnivalesque.[12] Craig explains Bakhtin's view that the carnival "suspends all 'hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions;'"[13] thus, through "folk laughter . . . [carnival] seeks to decrown [and] to transform all that is official and sacred."[14] Reversal is a critical element of the carnival and Craig, like Whedbee and Sandra Berg, maintains that in the book of Esther the "plot unfolds by reversals—not changes or breakdowns, but specific 180 degree turns. The force of evil is not merely overcome; it turns back on itself."[15] Other comedic devices, such as "open air spectacles, parodies (especially of religious rituals), and . . . various forms of billingsgate, curses, and oaths,"[16] also appear in the story of Esther and contribute to what Craig argues is its "ritualized mocking of customary official existence."[17]

Timothy Beal concurs with Craig that the book of Esther scoffs at—and attempts to unmask[18]—those in positions of power. More specifically, Beal hypothesizes that through the use of certain comedic devices—such as reversal, exaggeration, and farce—the story of Esther highlights issues of ethnic and gender identity.[19] Beal holds that because of its "many identity convergences, shifting alignments, ambivalences, and

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[12] Kenneth M. Craig, Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), at 24.
[13] Craig, at 30.
[14] Craig, at 30.
[15] Craig, at 81
[16] Craig, at 51
[17] Craig, at 51
[18] Craig, at 293.
[19] Timothy K. Beal, The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation and Esther (New York: Routledge, 1997), at 2.

marginal locations," the book of Esther should be labeled "farcical."[20] He also points to the "themes of carnival and masquerade" in the text, which blur identities and subvert traditional structures of authority and power.[21] Beal concludes that the story "makes a farce of royal, masculine power relations" and consequently results in a change of the expected societal order.[22]

Like Beal, Fox recognizes farce as a key tool used in the book of Esther. He notes that the book's beginning, which "spares the time to describe gentile ostentation and folly," does not give any indication of the grave events which will soon ensue.[23] Rather, through the use of exaggeration, whether in the "display of wealth [or the] bumptious machismo of the Persian noblemen," the author makes clear that "[b]uffoons rule the empire (if not the domestic roost), and ironies and confusions are rife."[24] He also contends that reversals like Haman's plan being "nipped in the bud,"[25] the satire of the nobility[26] and the ludicrously rigid legal system[27] all contribute to the book's comedic nature. Ultimately, Fox concludes, the book of Esther prods Jews in exile to utilize their inner resources to their best defense against the threats to their existence now that they have no state, no king, no army, no temple and no priests.[28]

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[20] Beal, at ix.
[21] Beal, at 2.
[22] Beal, at 16-17.
[23] Fox, at 33.
[24] Fox, at 33.
[25] Fox, at 158 and 184.
[26] Fox, at 168.
[27] Fox, at 177.
[28] Fox, at 148.

The Use of Comedic Devices in the Book of Esther

All of the above scholars delve into other aspects of the book of Esther—whether it is the carnivalesque, ethnic and gender issues, or character and ideology—as they also discuss comedic issues. More than these other three, Whedbee focuses on comedy in the Bible per se. While Whedbee's focus is the ∪-shaped plot of comedy, Berlin argues more forcefully that comedy is the lens through which we have to see the entire book. While the comedic devices that pervade the book often overlap and work in tandem with one another, one can distinguished six main comedic devices.

1. Exaggeration

The repeated use of the comedic device of exaggeration throughout the book of Esther sets a comic tone for the book from its beginning and recurs throughout the story. From the very first sentence, the book contains wild exaggerations of numbers that establish the story's comedic tone. For example, the king reigns over an incredibly vast empire, 127 provinces, which stretches from Turkey to Ethiopia.[29] In just the first nine lines of the story there are an exaggerated number of banquets, some of which last an inordinately long time. Indeed, the story begins with a banquet that the king is hosting for his ministers, servants and soldiers that lasts for an excessive 180 days (1:3-4). As if this half-year banquet were not enough, the king makes a second banquet for everyone in Shushan that lasts for seven days (1:5). And even Vashti, the king's wife of the moment,

[29] Craig writes: "Much attention . . . is given to dimensions in the first chapter. A hyperbolic tone is suggested by the reference to the one hundred twenty-seven *medinot*, which must here be translated as 'provinces'—not satrapy, the standard administrative unit in Persia. If the *medinot* are regions within satrapy, i.e., if they are provinces, we may conjecture that the author avoids the standard designation in order to present a higher number." Craig, at 54.

hosts a third banquet, just for the women (1:9). Even in the most decadent kingdom, it is impossible to imagine greater revelers than in the book of Esther.

The exaggeration in the first chapter sets the reader up to understand that the number of Persians who die in the end is also an exaggeration. The exaggeration begins with the death of five hundred men in the fortress Shushan (9:6), as well as Haman's ten sons (9:7-9), and continues with the slaying of seventy-five thousand more enemies (9:16). Commentating on chapter nine, Berlin explains:

> Exaggeration and irrationality reach new heights, even for this book. But it is all in fun; nothing here is real . . . this number [seventy-five thousand] should be understood as being just as exaggerated as the other numbers in the story. The unbelievably large number is an additional sign that this 'overkill' is not real killing."[30]

Exaggeration also pervades the book's narrative detail. For example, the king governs his vast empire, not by training his armies or even holding cabinet meetings with his ministry, but by drinking and partying. Indeed, the extended description of the king's palace and the activities which take place therein paint a picture of his lavish excesses. In fact, the king actually declares: "The rule for drinking is, 'No restrictions!'" and provides the resources to enforce this rule (1:8). His wine is plentiful, endlessly flowing and served in myriad golden goblets of different shapes and sizes (1:7). It is easy to imagine empty goblets marked with the stain of the king's wine littering the king's opulent palace, which is described as having "hangings of white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics" (1:6). The distortion of the king's image—his drunken excess—degrades him

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[30] Berlin, at 87.

and creates a sense of disorder in what should be an ordered world.[31] The disorder prepares the audience for the critique ahead.

Throughout the book of Esther, key characters make life and death decisions quickly, with little thought and exaggerated consequences. One example of this is the king's reaction to Vashti's refusal to appear before him and his drunk friends. He did not want her there for important state business, but rather to show off her beauty (1:11). After Vashti refuses, the king not only willingly accepted his advisor's suggestion that he remove Vashti from the throne and seek a replacement (1:16), but also that all the women of the kingdom should be commanded to "treat their husbands with respect" (1:20). Thus, not only does the king banish Vashti for one incident, he indicts all the women of the kingdom, and he does so, as Moore has noted, by bringing "into full play the communications system of the entire Persian empire"[32] (1:22). As Berlin aptly describes:

> The king may be inept and unable to act, but his advisors overcompensate with too much action. They make a mountain out of a molehill; a domestic incident has become a national crisis.[33]

The king's collective treatment of women as a result of Vashti's refusal is replicated in Haman's collective treatment of Jews as a result of Mordecai's refusal to bow down. Rather than seeking to punish only Mordecai for his defiance, Haman responds by asking the king to destroy all of the Jews (3:9). Even though Haman's request involves the mass murder of an entire people, the king does not question him. Instead, the king just accepts Haman's reason that it is not "in the king's best interest to tolerate" the Jews (3:8), and decrees that "all the Jews, young and old, children and

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[31] Feinberg, at 4.
[32] Carey A. Moore, Esther: Introduction, Translations, and Notes (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), at 14.
[33] Berlin, at 19.

women, on a single day" are to be "destroyed, massacred, and exterminated" (3:13). Although this decree against the Jews is never carried out, this same extreme punishment is decreed against all the enemies of the Jews because of the actions of just one man, Haman (8:11).

2. Repetition

Like exaggeration, the use of repetition in the book of Esther reinforces the absurdity and excess of the king, his court and his kingdom. The repetition of words, phrases and motifs not only embellishes already exaggerated scenes, but also contributes to the sense of excess and disorder that prevails throughout the book. Berlin identifies several forms of repetition in the book of Esther. First, she notes the repetition of the word "all" (as in "all the women," "all the Jews," "all the king's servants").[34] Second, she highlights the use of dyadic expressions like *'ish va-'ish*, "every man"; *medinah 'u-medinah*, "every province; *'am va-'am*, "every people."[35] Third, she points out the repeated use of synonyms joined together (as in "officials and courtiers," "the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty," "relief and deliverance," "light and gladness, happiness and honor").[36] Fourth, Berlin notes the repetition of scenes or acts (the banquet scenes and the issuing of edicts).[37]

Berlin notes that 8:17 exemplifies these various forms of repetition:

> In every province and province and in every city and city wherever the king's command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. [38]

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[34] Berlin, at xxvii.
[35] Berlin, at xxvii.
[36] Berlin, at xxvii
[37] Berlin, xxvii.
[38] Berlin, at xxvii (Berlin's translation).

In addition to the forms of repetition mentioned by Berlin, the book contains other noteworthy forms of repetition.

A form of one-word repetition occurs at the beginning and end of the book. Another form of repetition can be found in chapter one, in which the word "king" and the name Ahasuerus are repeated twenty-four times,[39] leaving no chance the reader will forget that the person so out of control is the ruler of the kingdom. Similarly, the repetition of the word "Jew" twenty four times in chapters nine and ten underpins the shift in the Jews' new position by the end of the story. Only now, as they pursue the destruction of their enemies, it is the Jews who are creating disorder in Ahasuerus's kingdom. The verbal repetitions reinforce the irony in the reversal of the Jews' fate.

Similar to the repetition of one word, the repetition of a phrase adds to the increasing sense of disorder throughout the book. For instance, the repetition of the phrase "if it please the king" seven times in the book[40] reinforces the foolishness of the king. This "deferential, almost obsequious formula found frequently in Esther"[41] highlights how impetuously the king makes decisions to satisfy his momentary pleasures. This is demonstrated in each of the following examples, in which the phrase "if it pleases the king" (אם־על־המלך טוב) prefaces a decision or action by the king. First, his advisor suggests that "if it pleases the king" Vashti should be banished (1:19). Then, Haman suggests that all the Jews should be killed, so the king decrees their decimation (3:9). Despite decreeing earlier that it would please him for all the Jews to be killed, after Esther asks "if it please the king" to reverse this death sentence, he changes his mind and

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[39] Moore notes that "in 167 verses [the root] *mlk* 'king, to rule,' occurs approximately 250 times throughout the book." Moore, at liv.
[40] Esther 1:19, 3:9, 5:4, 5:8, 7:3, 8:5 and 9:13.
[41] Moore, at 10.

gives her and Mordecai the power to "write with regard to the Jews as they see fit" (8:8).[42] Finally, Esther requests that "if it pleases the king" Haman's ten sons should be killed and the Jews' right to attack their enemies should be extended by one day (9:13). Indeed, in each of the seven occasions the king agrees to the request even if it contradicts an earlier edict. Thus, the repetition of the seemingly obsequious phrase "if it pleases the king" emphasizes that it is not the king who rules the advisors, but the advisors who rule the king.

Another phrase, "destroyed, slain, and annihilated" (להשמיד להרג ולאבד) appears three times in the book. First, Haman's edict is that the Jews should be "destroyed, slain, and annihilated" (3:13). This language (להשמיד להרג ולאבד) is repeated two more times, first when Esther tells the king of Haman's plans (7:4) and then when the edict is reversed and it is the Jews who are given permission to "destroy, slay and annihilate" their enemies (8:11).[43] As Jones explains, the "literary device of heaping up superfluous synonyms" highlights the severity of this punishment.[44] As with the repetition of "if it pleases the king," the repetition of "destroyed, slain, and annihilated," emphasizes the reversal of fortune for the Jews and their enemies.

3. Reversal

Reversal is not only shown through the repetitions in the book of Esther, but as Berg contends, the constant reversals in the story are the distinguishing feature of the book.[45] According to Berg, these reversals illustrate "the possibility—even

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[42] In response to the request "if it pleases the king" in 8:5.
[43] Jones, at 178.
[44] Jones, at 178.
[45] Berg, at 112.

probability—of the themes of power, loyalty and inviolability."[46] She maintains that the theme of reversal must also conclude on the upswing.[47] In this way, she argues, "[t]he theme of reversal serves as a compass, pointing beyond itself to the themes of power and inviolability."[48] By concluding the book's many reversals with a happy ending, the author illustrates that "[t]he course of history, despite the odds, can be reversed. In spite of their expectations, the people of Israel can remain inviolable."[49]

The comic device of reversal functions throughout Esther as a means to poke fun at the frequently changing status—and therefore, the instability—of the book's characters. The rise and fall of Haman exemplifies the phenomenon of reversal.[50] Haman's ascent begins when he is promoted in 3:1 to be "higher than any of his fellow officials" (3:1). Yet from the beginning, despite the king's order that all should bow down to Haman, Mordecai refuses to bend. With Mordecai's refusal, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai begins. As the story progresses, despite all of Haman's success, it does him no good as long as he sees Mordecai (5:13). He cannot get over his fury and this will lead to the reversal of his fortunes. While Haman thinks that he has quashed any threat Mordecai might pose because he will not bow down, the audience

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[46] Berg, at 112.
[47] Berg, at 113.
[48] Berg, at 113.
[49] Berg, at 113.
[50] Michael Fox identifies a series of reversals, which he call theses and antitheses, that run through the "core drama" that begins in chapter three and ends in 8:17. They are:

Haman's authority (3:10/3:11)	Mordecai's authority (8:2a/8:2b)
Haman's decree (3:12)	Mordecai's decree (8:9)
Counsel of Haman's wife and friends	Despair of Haman's wife and friends
Haman's pride	Haman's disgrace

Fox, at 159-62.

knows that it is Mordecai who has an inside line to the king. Haman's success will not help him when he is revealed to the king as the scoundrel that he is.

The comedic tension builds as Haman tells his wife and friends about his invitation to the feast with Esther and the king. While he considers this a positive sign of his success, the audience knows (or is at least hoping) that it will lead to Haman's demise. By the end of chapter six, Haman returns to Zeresh and his friends absolutely humiliated from the events of the day. However, the reversal is not complete even after Haman parades Mordecai around town on the king's horse—an honor that Haman had gleefully designed for himself.[51] Instead, just as the conflict between Haman and Mordecai begins when Mordecai refuses to bow down and Haman seeks to punish him (3:5-6), it ends when Haman unwittingly "bows" (as he falls on the couch) before the king and is sentenced to death (7:8). This is the low point from which there is no return as Haman falls from the king's grace permanently. The reversal is complete as Haman hangs "on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" (7:10).

The character of Esther also illustrates the theme of reversal. Sandra Berg argues that the critical reversal that marks the turn of events in the book occurs when Esther seeks out her husband in contravention of his edict that no one could approach him upon penalty of death. By doing so, "Esther becomes the initiator of events, and this transition is marked by Ahasuerus' rewarding, not punishing, her crime in 5:1-5 [of going to speak to him without permission]."[52] Berg contends the reversal is complete in chapter eight

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[51] The reader can not help but laugh as Haman plans this spectacle and says, "Whom could the king delight tohonor besides myself?" (6:5).

[52] Berg, at 110.

when the king "extends his golden scepter to Esther," demonstrating the "position, power, and influence [she now has] in this male-dominated world."[53]

Perhaps the best example of reversal comes at the end of the book as a previously powerless people is radically transformed into a people that inspires fear.[54] The fate of the Jews grows out of reversals involved in "the empowerment and the disempowerment of individuals." Specifically, this shift in power is demonstrated in Esther's rise over the king (her ability to speak directly to him and his acquiescence to her requests) and Mordecai's rise over Haman. Moreover, the transfer of the king's ring is a physical manifestation of this shift: in 3:10, the king gives Haman is signet ring and gives him the freedom to do "what is good in his eyes;" in 8:8, the king gives that same ring to Mordecai and Esther, and tells them to do "what is good in their eyes." This reversal is thus seen in the edicts that are issued in the "parallel passages of 3:9-4:3 and 8:2-17 . . . Both passages deal with the issue of authority and the focus is on decree writing, counter decree writing, and decree dispatching."[55] While Haman causes the king to issue an edict calling for the destruction of the Jews, this edict is reversed when Esther causes the king to issue an edict allowing the Jews to destroy their enemies. Michael Fox thus writes that, "the historical manifestation of reversal is stated explicitly [when the king's decree is made effective] in 9:1":[56]

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[53] Craig, at 102.
[54] Berg, at 34.
[55] Craig, at 85.
[56] Fox, at 163

Craig writes: "The pervasive sense of tragedy conveyed in the opening chapters is transformed, but only by the book's end, into a gay, happy, and even comic celebration. When the once powerless Jews attain power at the story's end, their fasts become joyous celebratory feasts, and the final feasting and celebration is a reversal of the fasting and

> On the thirteenth day [of Adar], ... the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power (9:1).

It is this reversal that gives the book of Esther its significance to the Jewish people.

4. Misunderstanding

Haman's fall from power results from two very funny misunderstandings. First, while the king plans to honor Mordecai for saving his life, Haman mistakenly thinks the king wishes to honor him. Thus, when the king asks him "What should be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" (6:6a), Haman, "said to himself: 'whom would the king desire to honor more than me?'" (6:6b). Consequently, Haman proposes an elaborate ceremony to honor this "mystery" man:

> 'For the man whom the king desires to honor, let royal garb which the king has worn be brought and a horse on which the king has ridden and whose head a royal diadem has been set; and let the attire and the horse be put in charge of one of the king's noble courtiers. And let the man whom the king desires to honor be attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, while they proclaim before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!' (6:7-9).

To Haman's surprise, it is Mordecai, and not himself, whom the king desires to honor and Haman, the "noble courtier" who parades Mordecai and the king's horse through the city square. He is so humiliated that after this debacle, he "hurried home, his head covered in mourning" (6:12).

As if one humiliating incident was not enough, a second misunderstanding seals Haman's fate. At Esther's banquet, which Haman once thought would lead to a further promotion in his lifestyle (5:9-12), Haman must instead plea for his life (7:7). When he falls before Esther, the king sees Haman "lying prostrate on the couch" and accuses him

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weeping that occurred just after Haman's genocide edict was published earlier in the story." Craig, at 84.

of trying to "ravish the queen in [his own] palace" (7:8). It is this misunderstanding which leads to Haman's fatal trip to the gallows from which he once thought Mordecai would hang (7:9).

5. Caricature

The caricature of the central characters in the book of Esther "reinforces and deepens the comic movement"[57] of the story. For each character, one key characteristic is overstated and mocked. Whedbee explains that through "such stock characters as a foolish, fickle king, a beautiful, wise heroine, a loyal courtier, and a wicked villain . . . the comic intentionality of the story forcefully and funnily emerges."[58] From very beginning of the story, the king is "merry with wine" (1:10), he gives the officers of his house the freedom to do "according to every man's pleasure" (1:8), and he even asks his (not so) "wise" men how to deal with his personal issues (1:13-15). As Fox so fittingly describes, the king "as we quickly learn, is weak-willed, fickle, and self-centered. He and his advisors are a twittery, silly-headed, cowardly lot who need to hide behind a law to reinforce their status in their homes."[59] As if to prove how fickle the king is, while he rashly decides to banish Vashti from his life, he immediately summons "beautiful young virgins" for a beauty contest to replace Vashti (2:2).

Every story must have its evil villain and Haman fills the role perfectly. He makes everyone "prostrate themselves before him" (3:2), he is "full of wrath" (3:5), and he even is described as the "Jews' enemy" (3:10). Fox explains:

> Everything Haman does is manifestly foolish, as he is buffeted about and driven by his passions and impulses. His anger makes him unable to wait for his revenge

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[57] Whedbee at 173.
[58] Whedbee, at 173.
[59] Fox, at 168.

> and leads him to push fate and try to kill Mordecai prematurely. . . . By making Haman superficial and silly, the author hits him where his sort would most feel it: in his pride."[60]

Haman's quintessential villain is the counterpoint to Mordecai's ideal servant.

Mordecai is the "loyal courtier": he saves the king from a plot to kill him but reaps no early reward (2:23), he steadfastly refuses to bow down to the evil villain Haman (3:4-5), and when he hears of the king's decree to kill the Jews, he "rents his clothes, puts on sackcloth with ashes and cried with a loud and bitter cry" (4:1). As Fox explains, Mordecai's "behavior is to be taken as exemplary."[61] As if all this is not enough, he and Esther lead the Jews to victory over their enemies.

No tale of triumph is complete without the damsel in distress who eventually wins the heart of the king and saves her people. Esther is the perfect heroine: beautiful, virginal, and yet seductive and persuasive. She is the orphan bride to the king, who wisely uses position and her wiles to save her family and her people.

6. Ludicrous Situations

The reversal of Haman's fortunes is also an example of one of many ludicrous situations in the book of Esther. The ludicrous nature of the king's actions and decisions is most clear when he turns to his "wise men"—the seven princes—to help him decide what to do after Vashti denies his request to appear before him. Instead of telling the king that he should sober up and make peace with his wife, they encourage him to punish not only Vashti but all wives by issuing a decree that all women "will give honor to their husbands" (1:20). Thus, the "matter of the queen" becomes an all-encompassing "matter of the kingdom." It is ludicrous that the king, who is not even the lord of his house,

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[60] Fox, at 183.
[61] Fox, at 185.

might be able to assert control over the marital relationships of all his subjects simply by declaring that "every man shall be lord in his own house" (1:22).

Even after the king has a new queen he believes he can control (but in reality can not), he still does not take control over his affairs of state. Instead, he appoints Haman, a man who seeks to undermine him, to run his affairs. It is not hard to laugh at Haman, as he is a character of extremes. On the one hand, he is "joyful and glad of heart," on the other hand, he quickly becomes infuriated and obsessed with the defiance of one Jew (5:9). Haman, the king's right-hand man and the story's representative from "official culture," is far from effective in advising the king on how to run the state. Rather, he is a "ludicrous, self-glorifying villain"[62] who plots to kill an entire people because of the actions of one man.[63]

We might expect that a king who is as obviously taken with his wife's charms as King Ahasuerus was with those of Vashti to treat her with more respect. Instead, he dismisses her from his life without much thought. This episode is even more ludicrous when compared to the king's offer (later in the story) of half his kingdom to Esther. One wife he dismisses with barely a thought, yet for the other he can not seem to do enough.

Conclusion

The book of Esther contains a multitude of comedic devices, which dominate the book from beginning to end. The book starts with outrageous exaggerations, continues with ludicrous situations and, in many scenes, the comedic features overlap and reinforce one another. Isolating these devices proves challenging, because they so often work in

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[62] Fox, at 253

[63] It should be noted that had he been able to carry out his plan, his actions would have lost their comedic value as they crossed the line from the ludicrous and silly into the realm of serious. Corrigan, at 6.

tandem to produce a hilarious effect. For example, many comedic devices, including exaggeration, ludicrous situations, and caricature, are implemented to mock the king and the ruling class. The weight of the overwhelming number of examples offered in this chapter bolsters the scholarship of others, like Berlin and Whedbee, who have classified Esther as a comedy.

The book of Esther tells the story of a people in exile and under attack to an audience who perhaps has, like Esther, kept their Jewish identity a secret, who may have forgotten from whence they came and, more dangerously, may have become too comfortable where they are. Why is this particular story of the threatened annihilation of the Jewish people told as a comedy? The comedic features of the book of Esther highlight several issues important to its audience: it cautions its audience to be alert to the whims of those in power, exposes the reality of "exile" and the struggle of living as Jews in a gentile world, encourages Jews to believe that even desperate situations can be reversed,[64] and its establishes the festive spirit of the holiday of Purim.

The book's incongruities often to lead to laughter as they illuminate the deficiencies in the king's regime. For example, the king replaces one wife with another on a whim, issues a decree that orders the people to drink with "no restrictions," and appoints a villainous man as his key advisor. Rather than create order in his kingdom, as is expected of a ruler, Ahasuerus is instead the primary cause of its disorder. The discrepancy between what is expected of the ruling class and the actual manner in which it operates produces comedy.

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[64] Berg at 114.

The foibles of the court also allow the audience to feel superior to the comedic subjects as they watch them encounter ridiculous situations. For example, the caricature of Haman, the "enemy of the Jews," reveals the "real littleness and ugliness" of his character type.[65] As the audience watches Haman's plan to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews backfire, they laugh at his humiliation while he parades Mordecai through the city square and at his horror as he is mistakenly accused of trying to "ravish the queen," and they are also able to feel superior over not only Haman, but the class he represents.

The book provides a critical view of society, and as the audience laughs at the story's ludicrous situations, they are also overcoming their own psychic "censoring actions,"[66] which often inhibit their expression of true feelings about the world in which they live. As a consequence, a minority people who has endured generations of oppression, can speak out against the people in power. This is, according to Freud, the primary function of comedy: "the release of pent-up nervous energy" through laughter.[67] Indeed, during the celebration of Purim, the audience marks the "days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy" (9:22). Often, in the celebration of Purim, revelers "become" the king—drunk and out of control. This is also, as Craig argues, the function of the carnival: such festivity enables "guests to leave behind particular worries and cares from the official world and don a celebrative mask as they enter the feast."[68]

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[65] Sorrel, at 102.
[66] Singer, at 104.
[67] Goldsmith, at 2.
[68] Craig, at 61.

In the book of Esther, while the king and his advisors may act treacherously toward the Jews and pass discriminatory laws that threaten the well-being of the Jewish people, we know that these misguided actions will be righted by the end of the story. The juxtaposition of humorous elements of the story with the reality of the situation that diaspora Jews face highlights the story's message. Staying true to your identity will lead to triumph over seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

A SECOND TURN: JONAH

Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it. While Esther is easy to classify as a comedy, more questions arise as to whether other sections of the Bible can be similarly labeled. Next, we turn to the book of Jonah, which Jews read as the *haftorah* portion during the afternoon of Yom Kippur. The book's penitential theme and its association with the holiest day of the Jewish year may seem to preclude a comedic interpretation. However, many scholars have argued to the contrary and have highlighted the comedic aspects of the book of Jonah.

Review of Scholarship on Comedy in the Book of Jonah

Good, one of the earliest scholars to recognize the comedic elements in the book of Jonah, titled his widely cited chapter on the subject "Jonah: The Absurdity of God."[1] He holds that the book of Jonah is thoroughly ironic and consequently a satire, which "portrays the prophet in order to ridicule him."[2] The author of Jonah, Good argues, uses the "perception of incongruity" throughout the book as a basis for the satire.[3] For example, Jonah's full name means "son of faithfulness or truth"[4] but, as Good points out, Jonah does not act this way as he "abandons his faithfulness at the first opportunity and speaks truth only under duress."[5] On the one hand, Jonah proclaims God's "universal reign and the breadth of his compassion."[6] On the other hand, Jonah is the "personification of . . . arrogant isolation from God" as he attempts and fails to distance

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[1] Good, at 39-55.
[2] Good, at 41.
[3] Good, at 41.
[4] See 2 Kings 14:25. Good also suggests that because Jonah was an obscure biblical figure and "otherwise unknown prophet," any story about him in the book of Jonah would not contradict anything "previously known." Good, at 41-42.
[5] Good, at 42.
[6] Good, at 54.

himself from God throughout the book.[7] Good concludes that this is the absurdity the author seeks to expose.[8] In the alternative, Good suggests, if the audience does not accept the absurdity of Jonah, its only alternative is the "absurdity of God."[9]

Like Good, Millar Burrows classifies the book of Jonah as a satire.[10] In his article, entitled "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah," published five years after Good's book, he first reviews and rejects as not "quite [hitting] the mark" prevailing theories of Jonah's literary category.[11] He notes that one reason why scholars have not accurately classified the book is because they failed to appreciate the "central importance of the grotesque in the story."[12] Burrows claims that the book of Jonah is full of the "humor of deliberate hyperbole, which makes the object of attack ridiculous by incongruity and gross exaggeration."[13] These comedic devices, Burrow argues, reveal Jonah as "self-centered, self-righteous, and self-willed."[14] Jonah, Burrows continues, was too concerned with his "image":[15] by uncovering this weakness in Jonah, the author means to "leave the reader [feeling] a little chastened, a little ashamed, and [encouraged] to take ourselves and our opinions and prejudices less seriously."[16]

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[7] Good, at 54.
[8] Good, at 54.
[9] Good, at 54.
[10] Millar Burrows. "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah." Translating & Understanding the Old Testament. Ed. Harry T. Frank and William L. Reed. (Nashville and New York: Abingdon P, 1970), at 95.
[11] For example, he disputes that the book of Jonah is an historical account (Burrows, at 80-86), midrash (88-89), allegory (89-90). He notes that "[more appropriate] but still not precise is the description of our story as a parable." Burrows, at 90-92.
[12] Burrows, at 94.
[13] Burrows, at 95.
[14] Burrows, at 97.
[15] Burrows, at 97.
[16] Burrows, at 105.

Hans Walter Wolff concurs with Burrows that Jonah is a book with a lesson.[17] He considers the book a novella with didactic features that do not overwhelm the audience precisely because they are presented with a comedic twist.[18] The story begins with "annihilating satire" that evolves into "liberating irony," which Wolf defines as the "literary form of a restrained didactism."[19] Wolf argues that Jonah's "preposterous" behavior—attempting to flee God—is "mercilessly pillorie[d]" by the author.[20] Thus, Wolff posits, while the "heathen" sailors pray, the "Hebrew" does not even think of praying during the storm.[21] This contrast in behavior, Wolff advances, ridicules Jonah.[22] Wolf also notes the irony: Jonah attempts to flee God's service and wants to die, but is instead "saved by God."[23] In the second half of the book of Jonah, Wolff continues, the author employs the grotesque.[24] Wolff offers the example of the big fish, which swallows the prophet and then later vomits him up onto dry land.[25] Wolff summarizes: "Through the modulations of comedy . . . [the author of Jonah] not only delights his readers but also makes it easier for them to perceive God's loving laughter over narrow-minded piety."[26]

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[17] Hans Walter Wolff, Obadiah and Jonah. Trans. Margaret Kohl (1977; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), at 84.
[18] Wolff, at 84.
[19] Wolff, at 84.
[20] Wolff, at 84.
[21] Wolff, at 84.
[22] Wolff, at 84.
[23] Wolff, at 84.
[24] Wolff, at 84.
[25] Wolff, at 84.
[26] Wolff, at 11.

Like Wolff, Judson Mather believes that the book of Jonah has didactic purpose and calls it "a story-with-a-message."[27] Mather argues that the book of Jonah is a "rich comic invention," which uses comedic devices to communicate its message.[28] More specifically, he characterizes the book as a "situation comedy" in which the author employs the devices of burlesque, parody and farce.[29] Mather suggests that a "burlesque of piety" begins in Chapter I and "is carried to even greater lengths in Chapter III."[30] Thus, he continues, the author parodies piety when the sailors pray for their lives as Jonah sleeps and the people of Nineveh unexpectedly rush to repent.[31] In addition, Matther asserts that "the troubled relationship between God and Jonah [is] essentially farcical," because Jonah is serving as the "straightman" for a whimsical God.[32] Mather ultimately concludes that the book of Jonah is a satire which challenges the "penchant [of iconoclastic religious traditions] for idealizing what they recognize as beyond comprehension."[33]

In his commentary on the book of Jonah, Jack M. Sasson, like Mather, posits that the book of Jonah contains several comedic elements, including satire, parody, and farce.[34] Such devices, Sasson argues, deliberately and intentionally "[alert] an audience

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[27] Mather, at 281.
[28] Judson Mather, "The Comic Art in the Book of Jonah." Soundings 65.3 (1982): 280-91, at 281-82.
[29] Mather, 281.
[30] Mather, at 282.
[31] Mather, at 281-81.
[32] Mather, at 282.
[33] Mather, at 285.
[34] Jack M. Sasson, Jonah: a new translation with introduction, commentary, and interpretations. (New York: Doubleday, 1990), at 326 (Sasson lists several other categories, including myth, fable, folktale, allegory, midrash, legend, and parable.).

to unacceptable behavior."[35] According to Sasson, scholars agree that in the book of Jonah "the narrator's position is also God's, and that the prophet's position is surrogate for the institutions or concepts deserving ridicule."[36] In his own analysis, Sasson perceives the character of Jonah as both a comic dupe and comic hero through which the author reveals the book's lesson, that humans can not "understand, let alone [judge], their God."[37] As comic dupe, "Jonah comes to be a tool by which to drive home profound ideas as well as homespun truths."[38] Specifically, the author uses Jonah "to affirm God's omnipotence."[39] The audience can not help but laugh at Jonah, who "never grasps the double-edged meaning behind the message he communicates."[40] As comic hero, Jonah "simply will not allow heaven to dictate moves in total disregard to his dignity."[41]

Unlike Mather and Sasson, who propose that Jonah combines several genres of comedy, John R. Miles focuses solely on Jonah as a parody, which he calls a more

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[35] Sasson, at 331.
[36] Sasson, at 332.
[37] Sasson, at 351.
[38] Sasson, at 347. Sasson cites two other examples of the comic dupe in the Tanakh. They are: (1) the "man of God" in 1 Kings 13 and (2) Balaam in Numbers 22-24. In each example, the dupe is acting "under strict instruction on how to conduct himself." Sasson, at 347. 1 Kings 13 shows that there are dire consequences for prophets who "modify a divine order . . . or slacken in their zeal before thoroughly fulfilling their missions." Sasson, at 347. The similarity between Jonah and Balaam, Sasson argues, is even stronger as "both were reluctant prophets [who] were charged with messages to nations not their own." Sasson, at 347-48.
[39] Sasson, at 348.
[40] Sasson, at 346.
[41] Sasson, at 348. Sasson further discusses the comic hero in a footnote, in which he quotes R. M. Torrance: "In the resulting conflict, or agon, [the comic hero] proves himself a hero by courageous perseverance, resourceful intelligence, and a more or less conscious acceptance of the inevitable risks that he chooses to run in his willfully comic challenge to the deadly seriousness of his world." Sasson, at 349.

indirect "breed" of satire.[42] In parody, according to Miles, in order to be laughed at the "literary style of the book . . . must be so standardized as to be immediately recognizable."[43] He adds that the author of parody relies on stereotypes and "formulaic" language to achieve a humorous effect.[44] Miles submits that as a "narrative of the prophetic career" the book of Jonah is "surely the clearest stereotype of Scripture."[45] He supports this contention by noting the specific "stock" characters—the prophet, the "summoning deity," the "wicked king in his wicked city"—and "stock" scenes—the "prophet's initial reluctance, his prediction of destruction, his grief at failure" in the book of Jonah.[46] While other scholars have pointed to the book of Jonah as a sharp critique of the prophet, Miles contends that "[as] all comedy, the book of Jonah has no real villain."[47] Instead, says Miles, the book concludes with a "happy ending [that] is held up only by the prophet's childish pout."[48] Miles explains that just as Jonah is "foolish in his resentment," the Ninevites are "foolish in their repentance."[49] Consequently, the foolishness of both, which is illustrated through parody, demonstrates the author's message that the "age of religious reason" is within reach, but has not yet arrived.[50]

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[42] John R. Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," in On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible. Eds. Radday, Y.T. and A. Brenner. J. for the Study of the OT 92. (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 204-15, at 204.
[43] Miles, at 205.
[44] Miles, at 205.
[45] Miles, at 205.
[46] Miles, at 204.
[47] Miles, at 214.
[48] Miles, at 214.
[49] Miles, at 214.
[50] Miles, at 214.

Whedbee contends that the basis for classifying the book of Jonah as comedy is a "pattern of contradiction, [which] shows the collision of divine and human wills."[51] The collisions occur, Whedbee explains, as the "[Jonah] narrator maneuvers his reluctant prophet into a series of confrontations," first with the sailors, then with God, then with the Ninevites, and once more with God.[52] These confrontations, Whedbee suggests, caricaturize the "prophetic rebel" played by Jonah.[53] Whedbee compares Jonah's rebelliousness to the remonstrations of other "reluctant prophets." He argues that Jonah, unlike other "reluctant prophets," makes no passionate speech to protest God's expectations of him but rather remains silent and attempts to run away from God.[54] Whedbee adds that Jonah's "blatant" disobedience of God does not stem from his own sense of inadequacy, as has been the case with other "reluctant prophets," but from the inadequacy he perceives in God's character.[55] Jonah objects to God's seemingly harsh treatment of people: however, "no one gets hurt in Jonah ([excluding] the hapless plant that served as object lesson)"[56] because, as Whedbee proposes, "God seems to be playing a huge theological and practical joke on Jonah."[57]

Whedbee notes that some scholars have argued against a "comic treatment" of the book of Jonah because of its religious significance.[58] He responds that these scholars fail

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[51] Whedbee, at 216.
[52] Whedbee, at 217.
[53] Whedbee, at 197. He furthers that the caricature of Jonah is satirical and parodies images of "Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Joel."
[54] Whedbee, at 196-97.
[55] Whedbee, at 196.
[56] Whedbee, at 216.
[57] Whedbee, at 216.
[58] Whedbee, at 193 (citing Adele Berlin, "A Rejoinder to John A. Miles, Jr., with Some Observations on the Nature of Prophecy," Jewish Quarterly Review, Vol. LXVI/4 (April, 1976), at 227 (Berlin argues that "Jewish tradition regards the book of Jonah with such

"to recognize that comedy and parody can in fact be compelling strategies in the service of religious faith."[59] For example, Uriel Simon represents one scholar who rejects the comedic reading of Jonah. Although he acknowledges that there is a "widespread view that Jonah is a profoundly humorous book,"[60] he reads the irony in the book as dramatic and not comedic. Simon contends:

> The fundamental seriousness of the fugitive prophet and his utter fidelity to himself are meant to arouse the reader's sympathy rather than derision: Jonah is a genuinely pathetic figure in his hopeless struggle with his God.[61]

Simon acknowledges that "there is no shortage of irony" in the book,[62] but he claims that "the irony actually intensifies the pathos."[63] When one closely examines the biblical text what does the evidence reveal? Can a thorough evaluation of the comedic devices in the book of Jonah resolve this debate?

The Use of Comedic Devices in the Book of Jonah

Elements of comedy, while not as pervasive as in the book of Esther, can be found throughout each chapter of the book of Jonah. Scholars most often have attempted to categorize the book of Jonah as a specific genre of comedy, like satire or parody. However, in order to measure the impact of comedy in Jonah, it may be more helpful to identify the specific comedic devices which operate in the book, the regularity with which they occur and the way in which they operate.

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reverence that it is read at the afternoon service on the Day of Atonement, hardly the appropriate occasion for a parody of the Bible."); Kenneth M. Craig, A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1993), at 142 (Craig contends that "the story of Jonah is too earnest for laughter.").

[59] Whedbee, at 193.

[60] Uriel Simon. Jonah: the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation. Trans. Lenn J. Schramm. (Phila.: JPS, 1999), ay xxi.

[61] Simon, at xxi.

[62] Simon, at xxi.

[63] Simon, at xxii.

1. Exaggeration

All of Jonah's experiences in the book are tinged with at least some hint, if not an overt display, of exaggeration. The first example of exaggeration in the book occurs when Jonah makes the choice—or at least an attempt—to run away from God. While other biblical prophets have displayed a hesitancy to accept God's call—such as Moses (Ex. 4:1) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6)—Jonah rejects God's call and does not even respond verbally. He does not even argue with God, but rather he rejects the call, turns and flees. Everything about this episode is described in the superlative. Not only does Jonah try to ignore God's call, but he also gets on a ship headed in the opposite direction (1:3), heads for the most remote part of the ship, and falls into such a deep slumber that when a storm almost overwhelms the boat, he does not even wake up (1:5). Juxtaposed with Jonah's extreme indifference is the intense efforts effort by the ship's crew—who are יראה גדולה ("exceedingly afraid") (1:10)—to survive the storm. The sailors try frantically to return to shore even as the sea "grew more and more tempestuous against them" (1:13): only as their option of last resort do they actually toss Jonah overboard (1:15).

Time is also exaggerated in the book of Jonah: events occur either extremely quickly or inordinately slowly. For example, while it already seems unlikely that Jonah would survive even one moment in the belly of the big fish, he remains there for three days (2:3) until the fish vomits him up onto dry land (2:11). The narrator notes that Nineveh was a lengthy "three days' journey across" (3:3), which Good explains was probably fifty miles;[64] yet, it only takes one day for all of the people to hear Jonah's

[64] Good, at 48

message (3:4). Despite the speed in which the Ninevites learn that they must repent, they are given forty days to do so (3:4). When the king hears the news, rather than take time to deliberate, he immediately rises from his throne and sits in ashes (3:6). Finally, the plant grows enough in one day to provide shade for Jonah and withers just as quickly (4:6-7).

As already demonstrated by the extended time it takes to cross the city of Nineveh and the abbreviated time it takes for news of Jonah's prophecy to travel to its citizens, "everything in Nineveh is exaggerated."[65] Good suggests one possible explanation for the large size of the city: "The author of [Jonah] was talking about an imaginary city, which he had never seen but which had a huge and evil reputation in the ancient world. The size of the city is exaggerated to imply the magnitude of the prophet's task."[66] The swift rate at which the Ninevites (and even their livestock) repent makes Jonah, who turned away from God at first, look foolish. As Feinberg explains about the purpose of exaggeration: "by exaggerating hypocrisy or selfishness or inconsistency, [it is exposed to] public view and degrades the victim,"[67] which is exactly what happens to Jonah.

2. Reversal

The exaggerations in the book of Jonah are often heightened by the many reversals which take place, beginning with the prophet's unexpected reaction to God's call. The reader will most likely assume that Jonah will heed God's call, but instead he runs in the opposite direction (1:2). Burrows observes that the first readers of the story must have been very amused that any man would try to thwart the will of the Lord of all

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[65] Good, at 49.
[66] Good, at 49.
[67] Feinberg, at 117.

the earth.[68] In chapter one, after rejecting God's call, he then declares that not only is he a Hebrew, but that he "fears the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). When the situation gets desperate, Jonah then encourages the sailors to toss him from the ship, which leads to a reversal in fortune as well for Jonah. Jonah even allows the sailors to toss him from the ship, which leads to a reversal in fortune for the sailors and a reversal in Jonah's mission (1:12).[69]

Whereas Jonah rejects the call to "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim against it" (1:2) in chapter one, in chapter three Jonah complies with God's command. Rather, he reverses course several times. He prophesies to the people of Nineveh (3:4), but is so disappointed that they actually listen to him (4:1) that he tells God he wants to die (4:3). The reversal of the Ninevites' unexpected repentance is highlighted by the use of the word "נהפכת" (3:4).[70] Even the plant provides another example of reversal: one day it is flourishing (4:6), the next day it withers and dies (4:7). Sasson comments, that the "immediate consequence of the miraculously sprouting plant is a reversal of Jonah's self-doubts, for it allows him to imagine that God uses it to forge a subtly layered lesson about egoism and its frequent complement, indifference to others."[71] Thus, when the plant grows and shades him, he is "exceedingly glad because

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[68] Burrows, at 95.

[69] "On the other hand, perhaps we must see Jonah's offer [to allow the sailors to throw him off the ship] not as a sudden burst of generosity but as his perception that death might yet be a way out of his frightful mission." Good, at 45.

[70] Good argues that the verb ה.פ.ך has a "double meaning. It can mean what Jonah intends it to mean, that the city is doomed, that it will be overthrown as Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown." Good, at 48. On the other hand, it "can also mean 'to be changed' in a positive sense, from something bad to something good." Good, at 49.

[71] Sasson, at 346.

of the gourd" (4:6). When the plant withers, he once again wants to die (1:9). Indeed, these reversals highlight Jonah's misplaced priorities.

3. Repetition

Repetition in the book of Jonah reinforces the significance of Jonah's task and his absurd notion that he can escape it. The repetition of words or their three-letter roots, often in contrast with another word or root, further magnifies the exaggeration that pervades the book. For example, the roots ג.ד.ל and ר.ע.ה repeat fourteen and ten times, respectively, throughout the book's forty-eight verses.[72] Jonah flees from the "big city" (1:2), but is stopped by a "big wind" and a "big storm" (1:4), which the sailors call "evil" (1:7). Later on, Jonah prophesies to the "big city" of Nineveh (3:3) so that they might turn away from the path of "evil" (3:8). In addition, the repetition of the root י.ר.ד (go down), heightens Jonah's moral descent, especially when juxtaposed in the first chapter with God's command to ק.ו.ם (get up).[73] The reader can not help but laugh as Jonah not only ignores God's command to "get up" and prophesy (1:1), but does the exact opposite. He "goes down to Joppa" (1:3), "goes down" into the boat (1:3), "goes down into the innermost part of the ship" (1:5) and, in a play on words which exchanges the root י.ר.ד for נ.ר.ד.ם, he "goes to sleep" (1:5). The irony becomes clearer with this repetition of ק.ו.ם.: the ship's captain urges Jonah to "rise" (1:6) as God once did (1:2), only this time Jonah can no longer get away.

No matter how Jonah tries, he can not escape his fate. The repetition of the phrase "hurled . . . into the sea" (ט.ו.ל . . . אל־הים) in 1:4, 1:5 and 1:15, demonstrates this

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[72] James Limburg, Jonah: a commentary (Westminster/John Knox P, 1993), at 27.
[73] Herbert Chanan Brichto. Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics. (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 67-87.

and builds tension as the reader waits to discover Jonah's fate. The repetition of the formula magnifies the irony that after God hurls a great wind into the sea, only throwing Jonah into the sea will calm the storm. Furthermore, it is ironic that Jonah's experience in the "belly of the fish" (2:1) and the time it takes to cross the city of Nineveh (3:3) both last three days. The repetition of the same amount of time facilitates the comparison of both experiences and challenges the reader to get the joke.[74] His time in the fish seems even more ridiculous, because if he had done what he was told in the first place, those three days would have been spent in Nineveh instead.

4. Ludicrous Situations

Jonah's experiences in the belly of the fish and in Nineveh, which are connected by repetition, also take the story of Jonah into the realm of the ludicrous. In both scenarios Jonah and the Ninevites, respectively, seem to be in extreme peril, yet "death is never taken as a serious threat."[75] This is a fundamental element of the ludicrous, which is not comedic if it arouses real "sympathy, fear, or pity."[76] By placing Jonah in the belly of the fish, the author takes the prophet to his lowest possible point, both literally and figuratively. As one scholar contends, "we may wish to see Jonah's salvation by regurgitation as a conscious attempt to make him more ridiculous."[77] In Nineveh, known to be an extremely wicked city, the people respond immediately to Jonah's call to repent (3:5). Even the king is so desperate to avert God's decree that he reacts by "rising from his throne, covering himself with sackcloth and sitting in ashes" (3:6). Adding an

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[74] Neal R. Norrick. "Repetition as a Conversational Joking Strategy," Repetition in Discourse Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Vol. 2, ed. Barbara Johnstone, Advances in Discourse Processes, Vol. XLVIII (Norwood, NK: Ablex Pub. Corp, 1994).
[75] Corrigan, at 6.
[76] Bergson, at 150.
[77] Miles, at 210.

element of exaggeration to the already ludicrous situation, the king extends the decree to repent to include the livestock (3:7-8). In the process, both the people of Nineveh and the prophet are ridiculed.

5. ∪-shaped plot

Jonah's structure fits within the construct of the ∪-shaped plot, which supports its comic overtones. The book begins immediately with God's selection of Jonah, which in another context might be considered a positive event. The descent into disharmony occurs very quickly, within two verses of the story's beginning (1:3). There are several "potentially tragic situations" as the story continues: suffering the great storm, being swallowed by the big fish, prophesying to Nineveh, and even watching the plant wither; yet, the story ends on an upswing. The people of Nineveh repent and Jonah finally confronts God and perhaps comes to terms with his own doubts. Miles summarizes: "By the end of the fourth chapter, Jonah has done his job, Nineveh is saved, and a happy ending is held up only by the prophet's childish pout."[78]

Conclusion

Scholars rightfully disagree about whether this book should be considered a comedy, but the evidence supports the work of those who claim that Jonah should be classified as such. It is no wonder that this Yom Kippur literature, with its theme of repentance, might cause us pause when considering it as comedy. However, the book clearly incorporates several prominent comedic elements, including exaggeration, reversal, repetition, ludicrous situations, and the ∪-shaped plot. These elements pervade all four chapters of the book and thus, when viewed as a whole, we must consider Jonah

[78] Miles, at 214.

to be a comedy. Ultimately, Jonah's incorporation of these comedic elements allows the book to tell a penitential story and convey an important message, without being too heavy handed in its execution.

The story is told in a comedic vein in order to expose Jonah as fallible. Unlike a prophet who typically would follow exactly what God says, Jonah struggles with God and even tries to run away. The incongruity of Jonah's actions produces a comedic result: the audience most likely expects that Jonah—the prophet—would accept God's call and is thus surprised at his actual attempted flight from prophecy.[79] The story pokes fun at Jonah for his avoidance tactics, which include trying to sleep through the most difficult storm of his life, and we must laugh at his futile attempt to escape the unavoidable. Our laughter, however, mostly likely stems from our ability to relate to Jonah's fears: serving God is never easy and we are often tempted to run rather than face the challenge of understanding God's will. Eventually, the story of Jonah helps us overcome our fears, as Jonah did.

The book of Jonah allows us to express certain aspects of our relationship with God and the doubts that we might have, which we otherwise might not verbalize. As Freud explains in his "relief theory," through laughter we release energy that would otherwise be used to repress those thoughts and emotions. Because the book of Jonah is a comedy, we can deal with our own struggles with God through the book.

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[79] Keith-Spiegel, at 6.

REFLECT ON IT: 1 SAMUEL 1-6

Turn it and reflect on it. While much has been written on the comedic features in the books of Esther and Jonah, scholars have paid very little attention to the comedic features of the first six chapters of the book of 1 Samuel. Those chapters contain two narrative units. The first, 1 Samuel 1-3, covers the birth and rise of Samuel juxtaposed with the fall of the house of the priest Eli. The second, 1 Samuel 4-6, includes the battle of the Philistines and the episode with the ark. Robert Alter, in his commentary and literary analysis of this book, highlights a number of places in this pericope that contain a "satiric purpose"[1] or that produce a "certain grotesquely comic and incongruous effect."[2] Because of the existence of a number of comedic devices in the section, it warrants a more thorough investigation. Are there enough comedic features in the narrative unit to label it an outright comedy? If not, how do the comedic elements operate? How do they enhance the meaning of the story as a whole?

The Use of Comedic Devices in 1 Samuel 1-6

1. Misunderstanding

The first episode in the book of Samuel concerns the events surrounding the birth of Samuel to Hannah. The narrative emphasizes Hannah's sorrow and her pain; it makes her tragic situation clear. Not only is Hannah distressed by her barrenness, she is taunted by her rival, Peninah (1:6). Given this sadness, she prays to God to "look on her woe" (1:11) and give her a child. When the priest Eli sees Hannah praying, he misunderstands her actions:

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[1] Robert Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), at 12.
[2] Alter, at 32.

> And it happened as she went on with her prayer before the Lord, with Eli watching her mouth, as Hannah was speaking in her heart, her lips alone moving and her voice not heard, Eli thought she was drunk. And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on drunk? Rid yourself of your wine!" (1:12-14).[3]

What kind of priest can not recognize when a person is fervently praying? This early scene provides a modicum of comic relief against the backdrop of Hannah's tragic situation. It marks the beginning of the narrative's attempt to question Eli and his sons' fitness as priests.

2. Reversal

Hannah's struggle in the beginning of chapter one is the first of many reversals in this narrative unit. The first series of reversals are connected to the birth and childhood of Samuel. Hannah goes from being a distraught barren woman to a grateful mother. In the beginning of this episode, she is so upset that she does not eat, which is an external manifestation of her internal sadness:

> The Lord had closed up her womb. And thus, was it done year after year-when she would go up to the house of the Lord, the other would torment her and she would weep and would not eat. And Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart afflicted? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" (1:7-8).

After she gives birth to Samuel, Hannah "went on her way, and she ate, and her face was no longer downcast" (1:18). Hannah's act of eating demonstrates the change in her emotional state and character.

The psalm recited by Hannah emphasizes this reversal, for she recites a psalm about people whose situations become reversed, including a barren woman who "bears seven and the many-sonned woman is bleak" (2:5). The psalm shows how Hannah herself feels that her fate has been reversed, as she declares: "My heart rejoiced through

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[3] Alter's translation is used throughout this chapter.

the Lord, my horn is raised high through the Lord. My mouth is wide to bolt down my foes; for I was gladdened by your deliverance" (2:1).[4]

Another reversal in this narrative section is the change in Eli's approach to Hannah after first mistaking her prayer for drunkenness and describing her as a "worthless girl" ("בת-בליעל") (1:16), when she is not. Joel Rosenberg comments that even "the professional man of God is unable to detect the channels of divine-human rapport being established."[5] Once Hannah defends herself (1:15), Eli quickly realizes his error and changes his tone: "May the God of Israel grant your petition which you asked of Him" (1:17). Eli's interaction with Hannah marks the beginning of the end of his priesthood. Moreover, later in the pericope, the narrator deliberately uses the same word Eli previously used to degrade Hannah to describe Eli's sons, whom Eli cannot see are actually "worthless" fellows ("בליעל") (2:12). The repetition of this word sets up the contrast between the house of Eli and Samuel.

Samuel's arrival marks the reversal of the future of Eli's sons. Throughout chapters two and three, there is a constant juxtaposition of verses about Eli's sons and Samuel. For example, the offense of Hophni and Phineas "was very great before the Lord, for they scorned the Lord's offering" (2:17). Then, in the very next verse, "And Samuel was ministering in the presence of the Lord" (2:17-18). The implicit comparison continues as Eli speaks to his sons:

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[4] Finally, another verse in the psalm foreshadows the triumph of the Israelites over the Philistines and Samuel over the house of Eli: "He raises the poor from the dust, from the dung heaps the wretched he lifts to see among princes, a throne of honor he bequeaths them" (2:8a).

[5] Joel Rosenberg, "I and 2 Samuel," The Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (1987; Harvard UP, 2002), at 124.

> "And they did not heed their father's voice, for the Lord wanted to put them to death. And the lad Samuel was growing in goodness with both the Lord and with men" (2:25-26).

Finally, God's call promoting Samuel also dooms Eli's sons as God tells Samuel of the fate of the house of Eli:

> "And I have told him that I was passing judgment on his house for all time because of the sin of which he knew, for his sons have been scorning God and he did not restrain them" (3:13).

In yet another ironic twist, Samuel's fortunes will later reverse when his own sons act as corruptly as Eli's once did and Samuel's position is usurped by Saul (8:3).

The story contains reversals connected to not only the men of God, but also the position and power of God and the fate of the Israelites. When the Israelites battle the Philistines, the reader expects God to help the Israelites, but instead the Philistines surprisingly rout the Israelites. This defeat must have, as McCarter suggests, "generated a sense of disorder"[6] in Israelite society. The reversal heightens the tension and contrast between the Israelites' initial defeat and eventual victory. In addition, it highlights the consequences of capturing the Ark of God: those who possess it are "struck by the hand of God" and are afflicted with "tumors in their secret parts" (i.e., hemorrhoids) (5:9). Polzin describes the scene: "Tumult accompanies the ark or news thereof wherever it goes."[7] As a "death panic [spreads] throughout the city" (5:9-12), the Philistine overlords want to send the Ark of God back to the Israelites, yet another reversal. With this, the purpose of these reversals becomes clear, as McCarter explains, "By withholding his hand from the Philistines at Ebenezer, Yahweh had created an opportunity not only to

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[6] P. Kyle McCarter, I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), at 107.

[7] Robert Polzin, Samuel and the Deuteronomist (San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub., 1989), at 56.

remove his ark from Shiloh and its wicked priests but also to demonstrate his power in the land of his enemies."[8] These examples demonstrate that reversal surfaces as a motif throughout these chapters. The question is: Do they have a comic effect? If not, why not? These questions will be addressed further on.

3. Repetition

As with reversal, the use of repetition emphasizes the establishment of Samuel as priest and the tremendous power of God. Two scenes in particular highlight these themes. In the first scene, when God calls Samuel, God repeats the call three times to Samuel, who each time thinks it is Eli, not God, who calls to him. The first two lines of this episode highlight the repetition that continues throughout the next ten lines.

("here I am"):
א ("call") יהוה אל־שמואל ויאמר **הנני**
ויקר
וירץ אל־עלי ויאמר **הנני** ("here I am") כי־**קראת** ("call") לי
ויאמר לא־**קראתי** ("call") שוב שכב וילך וישכב׃[9]

Altogether, the root ק.ר.א appears twelve times in verses four through fifteen, with eleven instances of ק.ר.א occurring in the first seven lines; the word "הנני" appears five times in those same verses, with the first four instances in verses four through eight. The narrator could have summarized the events of this episode much more succinctly, but the verbal repetition emphasizes Samuel's obliviousness. Eventually it is Eli, not Samuel, who realizes that God is calling Samuel and directs him to respond "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (3:5). When God calls Samuel a fourth time, God repeats

[8] McCarter, at 126.
[9] 1 Sam. 3:4-5.

Samuel's name twice,[10] as if to reinforce the notion that Samuel is totally unaware. When Samuel finally responds, he repeats Eli's words to God but ironically omits "my Lord," a further sign of his lack of awareness about who is speaking.

The second scene that uses the comedic device of repetition is the contest between the gods. Robert Alter aptly describes this scene as a:

> bizarre satiric story of a battle between cult objects—the potent Ark of the Covenant, which is conceived as the conduit for the cosmic power of the God of Israel, and the idol of Dagon, vainly believed to be a real deity by the Philistines. The dominant tone of the story is a kind of monotheistic triumphalism.[11]

In this scene, the same phrase repeats twice: "Dagon was fallen forward to the ground before the Ark of the Lord" (5:3; 5:4). First, the Ashdodites pick up the idol and put it back in its place (5:3). The second time Dagon falls, the people find it with its head and hands chopped off (5:4). The missing hands of the Philistine idol highlight the strength that YHWH is about to demonstrate. Soon enough, "the hand of YHWH was against the city" of Gath (5:9) and each of the subsequent cities to which the ark is brought. The repetition of the word "hand" leads to the comparison of the hands of Dagon with the hand of YHWH. The author pokes fun at the perceived strength of an idol like Dagon, who proves no match for YHWH.

The "heaviness" ("ותכבד יד־יהוה") (5:6) and "strength/hardness" ("קשתה ידו") (5:7) of YHWH's hand is emphasized through the verbal repetition of the root כ.ב.ד. and its synonym ק.ש.ה. Polzin illustrates one possible implication of this verbal repetition and play on words: "[T]he term for 'glory,' *kavod*, is transparently cognate with *kaved*,

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[10] Cf. Gen. 22:12 (where the angel calls out "Abraham, Abraham," there the repetition of the name produces a different effect).

[11] Alter, at 27.

"heavy," the adjective used to explain Eli's lethal tumble from his chair—the leader who might be supposed to represent Israel's glory exhibits only deadly heaviness."[12]

4. Exaggeration

Exaggeration produces a comic effect in chapters 1-3 (Eli and the priesthood) and in chapters 4-6 (the Ark). The reader can not help but laugh at the priest who is so fat that when he hears shocking news he falls backward off his chair, breaks his neck and dies (4:18). Moreover, Eli already knows that his sons are going to die, yet is he extremely shocked when he is told of their deaths.

Just as Eli's obesity is exaggerated, gluttony also plays a role in the exaggerated description of his sons. The text describing their excessive behavior speaks for itself:

> And the sons of Eli were worthless fellows; they did not know the Lord. And this was the priest's practice with the people: each man would offer a sacrifice and the priest's lad would come when the meat was boiling, a three-dashed pronged fork in his hand. And, he would thrust into the cauldron or the pot or the vat or the kettle, wherever the fork would pick up, the priest would take away with it. Thus they would do to all the Israelites who came there to Shiloh. Even before they had burned off the fat, the priest's lad would come and say to the men who were sacrificing, "Hand over meat to roast for the priest, for he won't take boiled meat from you, only raw." And the man would say, "Let them burn off the fat now and then take you whatever you want," and he would say, "No! For you shall hand it over now, and if not, I will take it by force." And the lad's offence was very great before the Lord, for they scorned the Lord's offering (2:12-18).

The high priest's sons are so corrupt that they are "represented in a kind of frenzy and gluttony poking their three pronged forks into every imaginable sort of pot and pan."[13] Alter adds: "This sense is then heightened in the aggressiveness of the dialogue that follows, in which Eli's sons insist on snatching the meat uncooked from the worshipers,

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[12] Robert Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1999), at 26.
[13] Alter, at 12. See 1 Sam. 1:14-18.

not allowing them, as was customary, first to burn away the fat."[14] The use of four different words to signify a pot highlights just how many servings the sons ate. Furthermore, their outrageous appetites extend beyond copious amounts of food to multitudes of women, for they even "lay with the women who flocked to the entrance of the Tent of Assembly" (2:22). As if this picture of the sons' corrupt behavior is not enough, when Eli reprimands them, they ignore him (2:25). The exaggeration of their terrible behavior is heightened further when juxtaposed with Samuel's "growing goodness with both God and with men" (2:26).

When compared with the priests' foolishness, God's greatness is further magnified through the exaggerations depicted throughout the second half of the pericope. In the war against the Philistines, four thousand Israelites are killed in the first attack (4:2) and another thirty thousand die in the next battle (4:10). These numbers seem absurd or, as McCarter asserts, "out of the question."[15] However, they exemplify the Philistines' great strength and provide a basis for comparing God's superior strength later. At that time, God's supremacy is demonstrated when another fifty thousand are actually "struck down" by God in Beth-shemesh for looking into the Ark of God (6:19).[16]

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[14] Alter, at 12. See 1 Sam. 1:14-18.

[15] McCarter, at 107. Though he does not conclude that this exaggeration was intended to be humorous.

[16] Alter, at 34. Alter suggests this large number "makes no sense because Beth-shemesh was a small agricultural village." Although the exaggerated number "appears in all the ancient version, . . . the more plausible number seventy appeared" in a text allegedly possessed by Josephus. He concludes that the larger number was an "intrusion into the text."

The repeated use of the word "גדול" emphasizes the perception of God's strength throughout the book.[17] Between battles, the Israelites bring the Ark of God ("ארון ברית-יהוה") into their camp and all Israel burst into a "great shout, and the earth resounded" (4:5), which profoundly frightened the Philistines (4:6). The powerful Philistines react by proclaiming, "Woe to us! . . . Woe to us! Who will save us from the hands of these mighty gods?" (4:8). This can be read two ways: either the Philistines are speaking sarcastically and mocking the Israelites and their God, or they are being mocked themselves for their exaggerated fear of what God will do to them in battle. Even after the Philistines' tremendous victory over the Israelites, they are overcome with a "great panic" about what God will do to them (5:9). This "great panic" is warranted, in light of the dire consequences for the "people of the city, young and old" who are struck with hemorrhoids (5:9). Exaggeration in this narrative unit thus ridicules the priesthood and emphasizes the power of God.

4. Ludicrous Situations

The narrator also implements the ludicrous in this unit. First, the Philistines are punished for taking the ark by the quite unusual punishment of "עפלים," which can be translated as either "tumors in their secret parts" or "hemorrhoids."[18] Further, when the

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[17] Polzin notes that the author uses the word "great" several times (4:5, 6, 17; 6:14, 19) and sometimes "very great" (4:10; 5:9) throughout the second half of the pericope. Polzin, at 46.

[18] Alter opts for "tumors" and explains why: "Many translations render this as 'hemorrhoids' and there is a little confusion in the Masoretic text: the consonantal written version (*ketiv*) has "tumors," but the tradition for reciting the text (*qeri*) indicates 'hemorrhoids.' This confusion is compounded because the Septuagint, seconded by Josephus, includes a plague of mice not in evidence in the Masoretic version, and the golden mice of the next chapter look very much like a response to just such a plague. The fact, moreover, that hemorrhoids are a humiliating but not lethal disorder and are not spread by epidemic, whereas the Philistines protest that they are dying, gives support to

Philistine leaders realize they have no choice but to return the Ark of God, they place it on a cart with "golden mice and figures of their hemorrhoids" (6:11). Alter describes the scene's "grotesquely comic and incongruous effect: Israel's most sacred cult object drawn in a cart by two cows with swollen udders, and alongside the Ark golden images of vermin and tumors."[19] The cows have not only returned the ark to its rightful place, they have drawn the story into the realm of the ludicrous.

4. ∪-shaped plot

Because it begins with the disharmony in Hannah's life (1:2), the unit as whole does not exhibit the classic structures of the ∪-shaped plot. However, the ∪-shaped plot begins shortly thereafter, starting with Samuel's birth. The narrative plunges downward into a series of difficult episodes for Eli, his sons, the Israelites, and later, the Philistines. Eli begins as the high priest, but his sons are corrupt and God condemns them to death. The deaths of Hophni and Phineas are linked to the fate of the Israelites and the Ark of God: the brothers are two of the thirty thousand Israelites killed by the Philistines, who simultaneously attain the Ark of God. Soon enough the heavy hand of God strikes the Philistines, who consequently return the Ark of God to the Israelites. However, the descent continues with God's "great blow" against the fifty thousand Israelites (6:19). Only after this final descent does the story ascend from darkness:[20] Samuel is firmly

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an interpretation as least as old as Rashi: the plague in question is bubonic plague, carried by rats (metamorphosed in this story into mice, and associated with the epidemic but perhaps not clearly understood as the bearers of the disease); the tumors are the *buboes* of bubonic plague, which might especially afflict the lower body, including the rectal area." Alter, at 28.

[19] Alter, at 32.

[20] Exum and Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson, and Saul," at 8.

ensconced in his position as priest, he makes a sacrifice to God, and the Philistines are routed (7:11).

Conclusion

Although the argument has been made that the books of Esther and Jonah should be labeled as comedies, the same conclusion cannot be made for 1 Samuel 1-6. This unit contains the same types of comedic devices found in the other books, and they likewise pervade the given narrative unit; however, not all of the comedic devices in the pericope produce a comedic effect. For example, even though there are a number of reversals in the book, these examples do not come across as funny. In the case of Eli's and his sons, the reversals result in the characters' downfall. In Hannah's case, her reversal is set again a tragic beginning. Nevertheless, other comedic devices do produce a humorous effect. For example, the exaggerated portrayal of Eli and his sons casts them as comic characters. The repetition involved in God's call to Samuel is meant to engender laughter.

What do these comedic devices contribute to the narrative? First, the narrator uses humor as a means to poke fun at the institution of the priesthood. All of the actions ridiculed in the first narrative unit are those undertaken in the service of God. For example, the priest Eli does not recognize that Hannah is deep in prayer and even mistakes her praying for drunkenness. Eli's sons are portrayed as gluttons and their lack of self-control is laughable. The humor is heightened by the constant comparison with Samuel, who is always portrayed in this narrative unit as dutifully serving God. Yet, even Samuel mistakes God's call for the voice of Eli. Without the use of comic devices,

mocking the priesthood might otherwise be impossible because of its status as a revered institution.

Second, comedy is effectively implemented to ridicule the Philistines and the practice of idolatry. In particular, the narrator uses the comedic device of repetition to emphasize their impotence at the hand of YHWH. First, their might is demonstrated by the large number of Israelites that they defeat in battle. Yet, the Philistines are always portrayed as fearful of YHWH and in the "battle between the cult objects" of the two peoples, it is the idol Dagon—who is worshiped by the Philistines—whose hands are chopped off; and, it is the hand of YHWH that eventually strikes them down. This kind of mockery of idolatry occurs elsewhere in the book of prophets. For example, Deutero-Isaiah:

> Those who squander gold from the purse and weigh out silver on the balance they hire a metal worker to make it into a God, to which they bow down and prostrate themselves. They must carry it on their backs and transport it; when they put it down, it stands, it does not budge from its place. If they cry out to it, it does not answer; it cannot save them from their distress (Isa. 46:6-7).[21]

However, whereas in Isaiah the ridicule is explicit, in Samuel it is subtly conveyed through humor.

The comedic devices in 1 Samuel 1-6 add a humorous element to an otherwise straightforward story. By doing so, they are able to bare the limitations of the priesthood and the folly of the Philistine's idolatry in a way that captures the reader's attention.[22]

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[21] See also Isa. 40:19-20; Isa. 41:6-7; Isa. 44:13-17.
[22] Sorell, at 9-10.

Here, the "superiority theory" of comedy is in full effect. The audience is able to "laugh at each other's infirmities, particularly those of our enemies."[23] While the overall story of 1 Samuel 1-6 cannot be classified as a comedy, its comedic features play a key role in communicating its message.

[23] Suls, at 41.

CONCLUSION: DO NOT TURN FROM IT

Do not turn from it, for nothing is better than it. While some biblical scholars have resisted associating the Bible with comedy, we should not turn from using comedy as a tool to better understand it. This thesis, building on the work of other scholars, has shown that comedy certainly exists in parts of the Bible. Although it may seem counterintuitive, once we identify the devices that produce comedy and the way they operate in a given unit, the evidence shows that certain parts of the Bible, like Jonah and Esther, are comedies, and that others, like 1 Samuel 1-6, should be viewed as containing comedic components. Although it is not always easy to construct a definition of comedy, we can instead distill the different devices which produce comedic effects. In examining the text critically, we can then determine whether these devices, when taken together, have comedic consequences. After analyzing Esther, Jonah and 1 Samuel 1-6, I have concluded that the first two are comedies, and the last contains comedic features which help convey the text's important messages.

Comedy is a tool of expression that gives us power we otherwise lack, providing relief from or a sense of superiority to that which might usually overwhelm us. More importantly, comedy empowers us to say what we might be too afraid or timid to say. For example, the book of Esther mocks the authority of the royal court, the book of Jonah expresses the difficulties of being in relationship with God, and the narrative unit in 1 Samuel 1-6 critiques the revered institution of the priesthood. When couched in humor, a message, point of view or understanding of a larger situation, which might be too politically or emotionally sensitive to express straightforwardly, can often be effectively communicated. As Edwin Good explains, ironic comedy seeks to criticize and expose

"falsehood and stupidity, [recognize] foolishness and pretense, . . . and [mock] those who think they are something when they are actually nothing."[1] In addition, the reader may also be able to better hear the text's message when conveyed through a comedic lens. The incorporation of comedic elements allows a biblical text to communicate an important message without alienating, overwhelming, or patronizing its audience.

Comedy can span a wide range of emotions, from subtle humor intended only to provoke mild amusement to outrageously hilarious exploits intended to produce uncontrollable belly laughs.[2] Often, this kind of comedy occurs when there is a discrepancy between "what is expected and the actual result."[3] With comedy, while we openly discuss one issue, we can covertly comment on another. For example, while the book of Esther mocks the evil Haman, it also expresses a certain angst about the security of Jews living in the Diaspora. In the book of Jonah, while the audience laughs at Jonah's ridiculous attempts to run from God, in all likelihood they can not help but acknowledge their own resistance to embracing God. In his treatise on comedy, Walter Sorrel explains that we may "think we laugh about what we see on the surface . . . [but] while laughing, we are consciously or unconsciously aware of the tremendous and tragic power lying in the submerged part [and] of its threatening potentialities."[4] What goes unsaid—the submerged part of the text—often contains the true meaning or intention of the text.

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[1] Good, at 17.
[2] Sypher, 28-29.
[3] Keith-Spiegel, at 6 (describing the "incongruity" theory of comedy).
[4] Sorell, at 16.

Comedy allows us to effectively uncover this submerged meaning. Radday observes that comedy is an "indispensable" tool in discovering the Bible's meaning.[5] He is correct and we should not turn from it. The Bible is sacred and we should treat it as such, by using every possible means we have, including comedy, to understand its deeper meaning.

[5] Radday, at 32.

APPENDIX

Comedy has been identified in many books of the Hebrew Bible. The following is a partial list of episodes in the bible considered to have comedic elements:

Genesis

Creation story/Garden of Eden[1]

Cain and Abel[2]

Nephilim (Gen. 6:1-4)[3]

Noah[4]

Babel[5]

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[1] J. William Whedbee, The Bible and the Comic Vision (Minneapolis: Fortress P, 2002), at 25-41 (discussing the "comic tones" of the Garden story: "the puns are primal and pivotal, condensing and inscribing in dazzling verbal play crucial aetiologies that vividly depict the relational realities of the original creation and its conditions. They represent a form of etymological doubling, a kind of parody in miniature which results in a verbal resonance across word fields."); Edwin M. Good, Irony in the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1965), at 82-84 ("The ironic theme in these chapters is that of man's failure to live up to the aim of his creation."); Daniel Russ, "The Bible as Genesis in Comedy,"The Terrain of Comedy, ed. Lousie Cowan (Dallas: Dall. Inst. of Hum. & Cult., 1984), 43-45 (the detailed account of the Creation story "indicates that [God] created a world pregnant with comic overtones").

[2] Whedbee, at 41-46 (pun on the names of Cain, Abel and Seth; parody similar to that in the Garden story: Cain's reaction to God's "seemingly arbitrary preference for Abel's offering"—Cain's internal struggle with sin—echoes the struggle of Adam and Eve with their own desires); Good, at 84-86 (Cain's murder of Abel draws out the irony in God's urging of Cain to "do well"); Francis Landy, "Humour as a Tool in Biblical Exegesis," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990) 101-117, at 106-08 (discussing the possible sarcasm of the statement "Am I my brother's keeper?").

[3] Whedbee, at 46-49 (calling Gen. 6:1-4 a "parodied mythology" that mocks divine beings); Good, at 86 (irony that "human aspiration to what is more than human produces nothing but evil").

[4] Whedbee, at 49-56 (punning with Noah's name (נח/נחם/תנח/מנוח) and possible satirical portrayal of God); Good, at 86-89 (noticing the waters of the flood are an ironic conclusion to the creation story, they are a return to chaos).

[5] Whedbee, at 56-59 (the story of the Tower of Babel is a parody in which "the name of Babel becomes a prime symbol of the irreducible multiplicity of language and of the

Abraham (and Sarah)[6]

Isaac[7]

Jacob[8]

Tamar and Judah[9]

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deep-seated linguistic confusion that marks the human scene"); Russ, at 47-48 (the Babel story is a prime example of comic justice).

[6] Jared W. Ludlow, Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham (New York: Sheffield AP, 2002); Whedbee, at 64-88 (for example, identifying the "comic play of ironic reversal" in Gen. 12: while we expect Abram to be an "exemplary man of faith," his actions are those of an "apparent coward and liar who is much more concerned with danger to himself rather than fear for his wife's welfare"); Good, at 89-97 (noting the irony of God's promise to the childless Abram that his descendants will one day be a great nation); Landy, at 108-11 (Gen. 18:20-33, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, has the elements of "joke": the absurdity that the almighty Judge would not be just, the surprise that Abraham would reveal such hostility to God, and the paradox that Abraham, and not God, believes in sparing the evil to protect the good); Robert P. Carroll, "Is Humour Also Among the Prophets?" On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 169-90, at 172-73 (pointing out the irony of Gen. 20:7, in which Abimelech must turn to Abraham, the man who tricked him, so that his life might be spared); Russ, at 48-49 (noting one of the "high comic moments of all literature": Sara laughs when God's messenger tell her and Abraham that a baby is on the way. By instructing Abraham to name his son Isaac, "God captures for all time the absurd, ridiculous, and joyous moments which were inseparably bound to awaiting this promise miracle child").

[7] Whedbee, at 88-93 (Isaac's "story has always a comic upturn, aborting the possibility of tragedy. He is typically an innocent, passive man who is set up again and again—a classic, half-pathetic, half-humorous dupe whose story is filled with ludicrous moments."); J. Cheryl Exum and J. William Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), 122-34 ("The evocation of various forms of laughter in the name 'Isaac' precisely finds its most congenial home in a narrative best defined as comedy, a narrative which embodies all the ingredients that have conventionally made up the comic vision").

[8] Whedbee, at 93-111 ("Jacob is a trickster or rogue who by dint of wit and guile makes his way successfully in the world, a rogue who emerges ultimately as the spiritual namesake and ancestor of he nation Israel . . . his adventures . . . usually appear in episodic, open-ended narrative which often has intrinsic comic and humorous character."); Good, at 97-106 (comic instances involving Jacob begin with the "ironic reversal of normal inheritance pattern" and continue throughout Jacob's relationship with his brother and other members of his family).

Joseph[10]

Exodus

Exodus 1: the Israelites in Egypt when a new king arises[11]

Exodus 2:1-10: Moses is born[12]

Exodus 3-4: God calls Moses[13]

Exodus 4:18-31: Moses questions God's choice of him as leader[14]

Exodus 5-15: God versus Pharaoh[15]

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[9] Whedbee, at 108-11 (Seducing Judah, Tamar "shows her true mettle as a daughter of Eve" in her effort to become pregnant and see her husband's line continue. The joke on Judah was in the "service of life." By "resorting to 'justifiable deception,'" Tamar "takes her place with other tricksters of Genesis who move out from their marginalized, subordinate position and plot a viable future); Good, at 107-08 (the irony of juxtaposing Tamar's insecure position as a widow with her eventual "blackmailing" of Judah).

[10] Whedbee, at 111-23 ("a comedy of deception and deliverance"); Good, at 106-14 (noting, for example, the ironic reaction of Joseph's family to his prediction that they would one day bow down to him and the incident in which Joseph is thrown in jail as a consequence of a "perjuring nymphomaniac").

[11] Whedbee, at 136-38 (noting: 1. the irony of the partial fulfillment of God's promise: while the Israelites have "multiplied and filled the land . . . they have not mastered it; [rather,] they have been mastered," 2. the satire of the Pharaoh, who appears as a "boaster and arrogant fool," and 3. the "classic trickster motif" in which the midwives "counter the king with a deceptive rationalization that is in fact a put-down, thus satirizing both the Egyptian women (who are weak in comparison with the Hebrews) and the Egyptian king (who is not very bright)").

[12] Whedbee, at 138-44 (pointing out the "incongruity and irony" in the birth story of Moses: the women's conspiracy (as opposed to the passive men) to defy the king and save Moses, the irony of Pharaoh's daughter caring for Moses and the ironic reversal of his own mother serving as his nursemaid; the high point of Moses' birth, the low-point of his being sent away and the positive turn of events when he saved mirrors the ∪-shaped plot line of a comedy).

[13] Whedbee, at 144-51 (suggesting Moses' resistance to God's call is a parody of prophetic vocation narratives).

[14] Whedbee, at 151-55 (noting "[t]he episode dramatically illustrates the type of narrative we are dealing with—a sometimes comic representation of deliverance which revels in "comic reversals" and "awe-ful" events—all in the service of life that comes in the midst of death, life and death together entwined in a dance of opposites, each one intensifying and illuminating the other.")

Numbers

Numbers 11:4-33: "Food from earth—food from heaven"[16]

Judges

Judges 13-16: Samson[17]

1 Samuel

1 Samuel 25: Nabal, Abigail and David[18]

1 Samuel 1-28: Changing leadership in the book of Samuel[19]

1 Kings/2 Kings[20]

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[15] Whedbee, at 155-71 (arguing that comedy arises in the story as it moves from "Pharoah's arrogant, sarcastic "Who is Yahweh?' to the climactic 'Who' question sung out in the triumphal Song of Moses/Miriam: 'Who is like you, Yahweh, among the Gods?'").

[16] Francis Landy, "Humour as a Tool for Biblical Exegesis," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990),, at 111-15 (noting the "absurdly short memories" of the Israelites, the reversal of our expectation that Moses will be a strong leader when he instead fears the people more than he fears God, and God's "promise of divine gifts" when this actually conceals divine rage; "Our laughter at the all-too-human or childish catalogue implicitly begs questions of the whole enterprise: what are such people doing in the wilderness?").

[17] J. Cheryl Exum and J. William Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 122-34 (comparing the comedy of Samson's story to the tragedy of Saul's story: while Samson's story has the "characteristic ∪-shaped plot" and ends on an upswing that allows for Samson to put himself in God's hands and "bring relief from a world of darkness" brought on by the domination of the Philistines, Saul's story does quite the opposite as he plummets on a downward spiral, which ends in his "tragic isolation").

[18] Moshe Garsiel, "Wit, Words, and a Woman: 1 Samuel 25," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 161-68.

[19] Robert P. Carroll, "Is Humour Also Among the Prophets?" On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 173-74 (1 Sam. 1-28).

[20] Carroll, 174-75 (Elijah); Ibid., 175-77 (Elisha).

Jeremiah[21]

Ezekiel [22]

Hosea[23]

Amos[24]

Jonah[25]

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[21] Philip R. Davies, "Joking in Jeremiah 18," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 191-202 (Jer. 18: Discussing that the people's reaction to God, the potter who forms and reforms the pots—the people Israel—and to Jeremiah is not what the reader would expect. "The roles of the deity and [the people] have been reversed." The prophet's words go unheeded and, in an ironic twist, he seeks to punish the people because they have not listened to him and not because they have not listened to God.); Carroll, 184-86 (Noting that "[w]hat humour there is in Jeremiah is black and cruel rather than gay and lighthearted.").

[22] Carroll, at 186-87 ("Some humour may be derived from the gaps between the speaker's self-importance . . . and the tendency of the people to put him down in various ways." See, e.g., Ezek 21.49; 33:30-32).

[23] Martin J. Buss, "Tragedy and Comedy in Hosea," ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32 (Decatur, GA: Scholars P, 1985), at 71-82 (Hosea mocks ritual actions (through understatement), parodies Israel's overconfidence, creates ironic tensions and ends, like most comedies do, on the upswing when "Yahweh acts as Israel's husband"); Carroll, at 179-80 (noting the irony in "the images of food and cooking set over against the analysis of social hunger and dissatisfaction" and the satire of "religious . . . ceremonies conducted in the presence of skillfully made idols.").

[24] Carroll, at 178-79 (noting the "ironic reversals of situations").

[25] See supra, Chapter 3; See, e.g., Whedbee, at 191-220; Good, at 39-55; Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 203-216; Carroll, at 180-81.

Job[26]

The Song of Songs[27]

Ecclesiastes[28]

Esther[29]

Daniel[30]

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[26] Whedbee, at 221-62; Good, at 196-240; Whedbee, "The Comedy of Job," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 217-50.

[27] Whedbee, at 263-77; Athalya Brenner, "'Come Back, Come Back the Shulammite' (Song of Songs 7.1-10): A Parody of the Wasf Genre," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 251-76.

[28] Good, at 168-95; Etan Levine, "Qohelet's Fool: A Composite Portrait," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 277-94.

[29] See, supra, Chapter 2; See, e.g., Adele Berlin, *Esther: The JPS Bible Commentary*, Philadelphia: JPS (2001); Whedbee, at 171-90; Radday, "Esther with Humour," On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner, J. for the Study of the OT 92 (Sheffield: Almond P, 1990), at 295-14.

[30] Edwin Good, "Apocalyptic as Comedy: The Book of Daniel," ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism 32 (Decatur, GA: Scholars P, 1985), at 41-70.

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