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7. HUMOR AND THEOLOGY OR THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE OF ISRAELITE INTELLIGENCE: A LITERARY-FOLKLORE APPROACH TO JOSHUA 2

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author unveils the humor invested in the story of Rahab and the spies. The expressions of humor can be discovered by comparing the story to other instances of the same story type found in the Bible and determining its unique character *vis-à-vis* the other stories.

Our story is counted among those of both the "spy story" story-type (Numbers 13-14; Josh 7:2-5; Judg 1:22-26; 18:2-11; 2 Sam 17:17-22) and the story-type of "the woman who rescues a man" (1 Sam 19:9-17; 2 Sam 17:17-22, and cf. Judg 4:17-21; 16:1-3). These two story types, borrowed from the world of folklore, well served the author's purpose in formulating the story and its message, and their juxtaposition assured maximum effectiveness. The story-type of "the woman who rescues a man" is fundamentally a woman's story-type whereas the "spy story" type is entirely masculine. In our story dominance is given to the woman who makes the male spies appear to be worthless lackeys. The sexual element that was an essential part of the original base of the story-type of "the woman who rescues a man" was toned down in order to accommodate the story to the conservative nature of biblical narrative and to make even further fun of the men—soldiers who do not behave in a masculine manner. Putting the bungling spies in the shadow of a Canaanite harlot produces an important link in the cycle of stories which seek to teach the lesson that "vain is the help of man" (Ps 60:12)—military intelligence included and that "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exod 14:14).

The Bible inspires a certain respect and seriousness in its readers, a sense that they must walk its paths with diffidence. This is because the Bible is not a book like any other but the "book of books," the Holy Scriptures of the nation of Israel. The Bible portrays the relationship between God and his people Israel, based on God's high-

teous rule over his world and his people, showing grace and mercy. The history of the nation of Israel is thus explained as deriving from the people's obedience to the divine commandments, or of their turning away from their God: great saving acts on the one hand, and unbearable punishments on the other. Ethical and didactic in character, biblical literature's purpose is to inspire every Israelite—by means of the story of God's action in history—to follow the Lord and enjoy his favor: "That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Ps 78:7-8).

We who take the way of a "close reading" of the biblical text certainly would not propound a frivolous approach to the Bible. On the contrary, we base our method on the assumption that one can reveal the meaning of the text only by paying full attention to every detail of its form and by persistently searching for the meaning of every word in its context (cf. M. Weiss; Zakovitch, 1982; 1985). Nevertheless, we must object to any approach that puts shutters on Holy Scripture or insists on a "dry-rot" type of seriousness. If we wish to discern the meaning of a biblical story, we must dispel all darkening clouds, shake the book free of all dusty religious notions, and be prepared to smile, snicker, or even laugh out loud; fire will not descend from the heavens, nor will bears come out of the woods to punish our presumed irreverence. In fact, the realization of the author's wry smile or wink in the composition of a literary unit may lead to a clearer understanding of the story's meaning and message. I shall here discuss the story of Joshua's spies in Jericho (Joshua 2) in order to demonstrate that a healthy sense of humor is often necessary for the full appreciation of a biblical narrative.

The story of the spies in Rahab's house is, at first glance, something of an embarrassment. Why should the "Book of the Wars of the Lord," the account of God's wondrous saving acts in settling the nation in its land, begin precisely at the house of a harlot? Why does the Jericho prostitute get such a prominent place in the story, on the very opening pages of the books of the Former Prophets? The problems aroused by such an apparently ignoble beginning, which takes place in the days of Joshua,¹ can be fully resolved and their rhetorical func-

¹It seems that the story of Rahab and the spies was not approved of by one of the editors of the book of Joshua, who did not wish to include it in his book. Several proofs can be adduced for this.

The story disturbs the chronological continuity at the beginning of Joshua's command to cross over the Jordan in another three days: "Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for in another three days

you will cross over this Jordan . . ." (1:10-11). An additional reference to the sphere of time is found at the beginning of chapter 3:1-2: "Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan . . . So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp." But the crossing does not take place on the same day; after the officers command the people, Joshua commands them: "And Joshua said to the people, Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you" (v. 5). Apparently, the words "for in another three days" (1:11), and "after three days" (3:2) refer to a crossing on the third day, the day they arrived at the Jordan river (cf. such passages as Gen 40:13, 19-20; 42:14-18; Exod 19:15-16; Lev 13:4-5; Deut 15:1 [cf. v. 9; 31:10]; Josh 9:16-17; 1 Kgs 12:5-12; 22:1). Chap. 3:5 on the other hand, which presumes that an additional day has gone by, "for tomorrow . . .," contradicts these verses. Moreover, v. 5 is a foreign element in the story of the crossing: the officers' commanding of the people (v. 4) does not assume an additional day and in v. 6 also there is no hint of this assumption. Verse 6 is the direct continuation of v. 4: after the officers give orders to the people, Joshua gives orders to the priests.

Apparently, v. 5 was added to chapter 3 in the wake of the secondary integration of chapter 2 between chapter 1, which presents the command to cross the Jordan, and its execution in chapter 3. The story of sending the spies takes place after the order to cross the Jordan in another three days (1:11). Joshua sends spies from Shittim (2:1), and they apparently return there before crossing the Jordan (3:1). But the spies' mission goes on beyond the third day mentioned in 1:11 and 3:2: the first day of the spy mission, at the earliest the day of the order of crossing, the spies end up at Rahab's house where they lie down for the night (2:1-2); after the search of her house Rahab suggests they hide in the mountains "three days" (4:16), and her suggestion is taken: "Then they departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned" (v. 22). Even if, on the third day of their hiding, they come down from the mountain and return to Joshua's camp, this would be the fourth day of their mission, while they should have crossed the Jordan on the third day. Accordingly, the editor who included the story of Rahab in his book, added chap. 3:5, which postpones the crossing an additional day. (For the chronology, see Zakovitch, 1979).

The story of Rahab contradicts the story of the tumbling of the walls: It is said of Rahab: "for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall" (v. 15), which contradicts the account of the sparing of her house with the tumbling down of the wall in chapter 6 (for this reason these words were omitted by the Septuagint, or by its *Vorlage*).

The editor who finally integrated chapter 2 in the book of Joshua, added in chapter 6 verses relating to the fulfillment of the oath to Rahab (vv. 17b, 22-23, 25). The continuity of chapter 6 is not disturbed in the least if these verses are excised. The fact that chapter 2 is a secondary element in the book of Joshua is, however, no claim as to the lateness of the chapter—just the opposite: it seems that the story was found offensive, and whoever rejected it composed in its stead a more honorable tradition (chapter 6) concerning the manner of conquest of the first city in the land of Canaan. It is extremely difficult to get rid of a tradition, however, and particularly impossible to ignore it, and a later editor who was familiar with and appreciated this story, reinserted it into the book. He then tried, as well as he could, to smooth out the seams between the story and its literary context both by the addition of 3:5 and by adding the verses concerning Rahab in chapter 6. For the problem of the relation of chapter 2 to chapter 6 see recently Soggin (38-39).

tion appreciated, if we are prepared to decipher the story equipped with a sense of humor. I shall not suggest a "close reading" of the story itself but will deliberately limit myself to those features that give evidence of a certain narrative jocularity. One thing, however, should be remembered: the instances of humor in the Bible are extremely subtle and even covert—the biblical narrative is no Marx Brothers-style slapstick comedy. At times one can discern a degree of whimsicality only by means of a parallel, comparing a particular story to other expressions of the same story-type, the abstract pattern we reconstruct from several stories similar in content and whose plots can be divided into parallel stages.

Such story-types came into being in the traditions of oral literature, which preceded written biblical literature. Religious and ideological considerations brought about extensive changes as the original story-types of the oral traditions were adapted to their written form in the Bible. The oral traditions were not committed to writing in order to entertain readers, nor to preserve them for posterity in a period of crisis and save them from oblivion as the Scandinavian school of biblical research (e.g., Nielsen) has claimed. They were written down in order to ensure a character worthy from an ideology-religious point of view, to seat God "on a high and lofty throne," to cast the heroes of folk traditions in an honorable mold, and to purge the traditions of all that conflicts with the sublime conceptions of the ideological and religious framework of the Holy Scriptures. These changes, undergone by the folk story-types in the process of their incorporation into biblical literature, do not make the work of reconstructing the original traditions and types an easy task, and I am aware that the ground I venture to walk on here is quite slippery.

One way for reconstructing traditions involves comparing a single story to its fellows of the same story-type. In so doing, we become aware of the story's deviations and uniqueness over against its partners, and it is precisely in these deviations, which can at times testify to the parodic use of the story-type, that expressions of humor are likely to be found. In the hypothetical (for the time being) biblical "index of story-types" the story of Rahab and the spies will be found under the rubric of spy stories (cf. Malamut, 1970; 1979), along with the story of Moses' dispatching of the spies (Numbers 13-14 and its echo in Deut 1:22-40); Joshua's sending of spies to Ai (Josh 7:2-5); the Josephite's sending of spies to reconnoiter Bethel (Judg 1:22-26); the Danites' spy-mission to Laish, their new territory (Judg 18:2-11); and the case of David, who sends his two spies, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, to Absalom's camp (2 Sam. 17:17-22) (cf. further Num 21:32, 1 Sam 26:4; 2 Sam 15:10). The theological or theocentric character of biblical literature brought about changes in the literary type of spy stories, which

originally surely emphasized the spies' courage—the heroics of skilled Israelite intelligence agents, who, upon encountering difficulties in their mission, prove their resourcefulness and manage to extricate themselves from any danger. In the Bible, however, as we shall see further on, the spies' own resourcefulness and success in their mission is no guarantee of success in battle.

An additional story-type to which our story belongs is that of "The Woman Who Rescues a Man." Of the biblical spy stories, that of Jonathan and Ahimaaz, who are saved thanks to the wisdom of the woman from Bahurim, also belongs to this pattern, as does the story of Michal who helps David her husband escape from King Saul, her father (1 Sam 19:9-17). This story-type, as we shall see below, includes two additional stories, the story of Sisera who expects Yael to act according to the dictates of the pattern and rescue him from the advancing Israelites (Judg 4:17-21), and the story of Samson's visit to the harlot of Gaza—a story very similar to ours (Judg 16:1-3).

An examination of this story-type demands that particular attention be paid to the fact that this is fundamentally a woman's story-type. At this juncture, then, we cannot refrain from saying a few words about what usually happens to heroines in the transition from oral literature to the written literature of the Bible. The Bible is "The Book of the Wars of the Lord," in which the central role is given to men: the patriarchs, the judges, the priests, the kings, and the prophets. The female characters stand in the shadow of men, even though there are exceptions: Deborah and Jael (Judges 4-5), Delilah (Judges 16), the wise woman of Tekoah (2 Samuel 14), the wise woman from Abel Beth-macach (2 Samuel 20), Bathsheva with Solomon (1 Kings 1), the wicked Jezebel (1 Kings 21), the Shunammite (2 Kings 4), Ruth and Naomi, Queen Esther, and others.

In the folk tales re-worked and written down at the hands of the Brothers Grimm and Walt Disney, heroines are not only "passive and pretty, but also unusually patient, obedient, industrious, and quiet," (Stone:44). "The only test of most heroines requires nothing beyond what they are born with: a beautiful face, or a pleasing temperament. At least that is what we learn from the translation of the Grimm tales and especially from Walt Disney" (Stone:45). The more original versions of the women stories, however, reveal that this literary genre knew of more active women: "In none of these tales do we find the stereotyped conflict between the passive, beautiful woman and the aggressive, ugly one. Most of the active heroines are not even described in terms of their natural attributes—and Mally Whuppee is judged by their actions" (Stone:46).

The Bible does contain, as mentioned, a few women-stories. But since the Bible is a book with a male orientation, only when a female-

story fits the Bible's overall agenda was it committed to writing in its original oral form. In the stories of Deborah-Jael, for example, the heroes are women who disgrace the foreign enemy Sisera, and the heroine Esther succeeds in changing the dim-witted king Ahasuerus' mind at the banquet, since this king is interested only in wine and women.

The customary passivity of female protagonists is, furthermore, usually accompanied by the expurgation of sexual motifs in the written and re-worked versions of the folk stories: "Overt sexual references if they ever find their way into original collections, rarely appear in children's books" (Stone:46). The classic versions of the stories of Rapunzel, Cinderella, and the like are rather less innocent than the revamped versions intended for children. An original, sexual version of "Sleeping Beauty" is adduced by Lithi (30) that demonstrates the considerable gulf between the oral folk story and its written adaptation.

The biblical story, for its part, was not entirely purged of erotic elements, as a few of these stories were deliberately preserved in the Bible, always for ulterior motives. The book of Genesis tells of Reuben and Bilhah, his father's mistress, since it must explain why Reuben lost his birthright (Gen 35:22; 49:3-4); the story of the rape of Dinah was retained in order to portray Simeon's and Levi's revenge, in consequence of which cruel behavior they lost their birthrights (chap. 34; 49:5-7). An additional rape story, of Tamar by her brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13), explains why Solomon was made king instead of his older brothers. The terrible story of Lot's daughters, who sleep with their drunken father (Gen 19:30-38), is permeated with derision toward the two sister nations Ammon and Moab which, according to the story, are the offspring of Lot's two daughters. All other sexual elements which survive in written biblical narrative can be explained in a similar way, though we have no space here to do so.

We shall thus pay special attention to the balance of power between the sexes: the man's wisdom and initiative as opposed to the woman's, his actions as opposed to hers, as well as clues which might point to the sexual character of the story-type should something of these elements remain in our story. I stress again that the examination of the narrative types will not be done systematically; I will discuss only those details which might help in uncovering the author's wry humor.

The opening of our story may already hint that something is about to go awry as the initiative to dispatch the spies is not God's but Joshua's: "Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men as spies . . ." (v. 1). According to Num 13:1, in the story of Moses' sending out spies, it is God who instructs Moses to deploy men to spy out the land. But the second edition of this story in the book of Deuteronomy

replaces the divine initiative with human initiative: a mission which ended so disgracefully—the spies' evil report of the land—could not possibly have been initiated by God. The characterization of our spies, who are not even mentioned by name but simply as "two men" (and in chapter 6:23 they are even called "young lads!"), further heightens the prevailing sense of disgrace. True, an aristocratic birth is no guarantee, in our day, of success in spy missions. But it seems that at the base of the biblical stories lies the notion that spies worthy of their name must come from good families, like Moses' spies: "every one a leader among them" (Num 13:2), "all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel" (v. 3); like the Dante spies: "five men of their family from their territory, men of valor" (Judg 18:2) (cf. Ehrlich:234; Silver; Talmun:50-52); and even David is careful to select his spies from priestly families—the sons of Zadok and Abiathar (2 Sam 15:35-36). Joshua does not select the well-born or even soldiers as his spies; he may simply have grabbed the first two lads who happened to be near his tent when he went out to dispatch spies—sheer irresponsibility!

Does Joshua's sloppiness end with the selection of the spies? Let us look closely at how he briefs them before going out on their mission. Contrast Moses, who deals at length with questions of geography and strategies: "So Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, 'Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not . . .'" (Num 13:17-19, and cf. also the abridged version in Deut 1:22). Joshua, whose opening words are similar to those of Moses, dispatches the spies without any briefing at all: "Go, view the land, especially Jericho" (v. 1). Such a beginning—inexperienced spies taken from the ranks of the common people, sent forth on their mission with no real instructions—promises the reader an unconventional story at least, and in our case, a story full of humor.

Our two spies waste no time: "So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there" (v. 1). Josephus had difficulties accepting the fact that instead of applying themselves to the mission at hand the two spies head straight for the house of a harlot. He thus fills in a supposed gap in the biblical story:

For, undetected at the first, they had surveyed their entire city unnoticed, noting where the ramparts were strong and where they offered a less secure protection to the inhabitants, and which of the gates through weakness would facilitate entrance for the army. Those who met them had disregarded their inspection, attributing to a curiosity natural to

strangers this busy study of every detail in the city, and in no wise to any hostile intent. But when, at fall of even, they retired to an inn hard by the ramparts, to which they had proceeded for supper, word was brought to the king as he supped that certain persons had come from the camp of the Hebrews to spy upon the city and were now in Rahab's inn... (*Antiquities*, Book v, chap. 1, sec. 2).

Josephus' spies exhibit exemplary behavior, and his account is humorless to the same degree. One could conceivably justify our spies' action—perhaps they chose to come to the harlot's house precisely because in such a place soldiers let loose both their swords and their tongues. But this is not the case. Our spies do not come to this house for the sake of the people, but for their own sake: "and they lodged there."

In order to understand the motives of the spies' action it is worthwhile first to point out what a harlot is and whether those who come to her house do so only to enjoy her physical charms—as in Samson's visit to the harlot of Gaza: "Then Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her" (Judg 16:1)—or whether the services a harlot might offer are not necessarily limited to the sexual realm. Targum Jonathan to the Prophets translates the Hebrew word for harlot as "inn-keeper," but this does not mean that her services do not include those in the sexual realm as well, since this is how "harlot" is translated in many additional verses (such as Ezek 23:44). Kimhi appropriately remarks: "a harlot, literally, or a food-seller, as translated by Jonathan 'inn-keeper' . . . The correct understanding is that of Jonathan—a prostitute—since there is no difference between a harlot and an inn-keeper: both give themselves to any and everyone." Abartanel explains the connection between a harlot and an inn-keeper thus: ". . . And I think that Jonathan ben Uziel also would not contradict the explanation of the commentators, since every woman inn-keeper, due to the number of men who have dealings with her in her house . . . will necessarily be a harlot, because one of them will seduce her . . . as well as due to the fact that most women who practice this trade were formerly harlots." Could it be, then, that our spies came in order to lie with the harlot, or were they simply looking for a nice hotel? In either case the spies give the impression of being far removed from the world of espionage. After the wanderings in the wilderness the spies seek the pleasures of civilization and the delights of the big city, whether this means well-cooked food and a soft, clean bed at an inn, or the favors of a woman better kept than the daughters of the wilderness—thanks both to her profession and to the fact that big-city life pampers the body more than the scorching desert sun. The story does not provide us a clear answer as to why the spies came to Rahab's house, but it is clear that nothing happened between them. In a similar story, Samson does not hesitate to make use of the

harlot: "Then Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her" (Judg 16:1). Joshua's two spies do not go in to the woman but to her house. Note that it is precisely the use of the ambiguous word *וַיָּבֹאוּ*, "to lie down," that indicates that they did not lie with her, since it is clearly stated "and they lodged there," which should be compared to additional passages in which a place-description and the root *וַיָּבֹאוּ*, "to lie down," is found, with no hint whatsoever of any sexual activity (Gen 28:11; 1 Sam 3:9). The spies' coming to the house of the harlot, and not to the harlot herself, and the use of the ambiguous verb *וַיָּבֹאוּ* are of importance for the continuation of the plot. Nevertheless, the ne'er-do-well character of the spies is already apparent: if they have already neglected their spy mission "to spy out the land," or "the nakedness of the land" (Gen 42:9,12), and come to the house of a harlot, we would expect that they take full advantage of the opportunity their visit provides, that is, to see Rahab's nakedness. But the two simply head straight to bed, and even their sleep is hardly undisturbed, as will be seen further on in our reading.

In other stories of the pattern of the Woman Who Rescues a Man from Danger, the men come to the house of the woman in order that she rescue them, such as in Sisera's coming to Yael's tent (Judg 4:17-18). In this story there remains only a faint echo of the sexual component: it appears that in the oral tradition Yael allows, and even encourages, Sisera to come to her, and precisely at the moment when he expects a bounty of pleasure, he meets his end. A clearer echo of this tradition can be seen in the poetic formulation of the same tradition: "between her legs he sank, he fell, he lay down, / Between her legs he sank, he fell, / Where he sank, there he fell dead" (Judg 5:27). The expression "between her legs" reappears in the Bible only once more, where its meaning is clear: "her placenta which comes out from between her legs" (Deut 28:57) (cf. further, Zakovitch, 1981). In the story of David's spies the two also come to the house of the woman from Bahurim only in order to hide. In this story there is no longer any trace of sexuality: the two do not even enter the house but go down (by themselves) into the well in the courtyard, and the woman only covers them up. Moreover, the narrator hints at the woman's decency by mentioning that she is married: ". . . and they came to a man's house in Bahurim" (v. 18), and the man—the woman rescuer's husband—is not mentioned again! It is worthwhile noting that a modern expression of the narrative type of the rescuing woman—the beginning of Günther Grass' *The Tin Drum*—can serve to provide clear evidence of the organic relevance of the sexual element! Only our spies, then, come to a house where one might enjoy oneself, but know no pleasure. They lie down to sleep but they can't even manage to doze off since Rahab was forced to hurry and rescue them. The need to rescue them is thus the direct result of their coming to Rahab's house,

and not the reason for their going there. Such a state of affairs may indeed raise a smile on our lips.

The utter failure the spies brought upon themselves is clear from the next passage: "And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country'" (v. 2). The spies, then, arrived at Jericho at night—that is, toward evening (and see below, v. 3)—and on that same night their identity, as well as their whereabouts, is made known to the king. True, the news of Samson's presence in Gaza quickly takes wing; compare the similar formulation: "When the Gazites were told,² 'Samson has come here'" (v. 2). But Samson did not arrive in Gaza "stealthily," in order to spy, and it would not make much difference if he were noticed or not. Such a hero as Samson need not worry for his own skin, as the continuation of the story bears out. Not so the two spies, the knowledge of whose arrival at Rahab's house signals the utter failure of their mission. It is true that another pair of spies were also seen by the enemy in the course of their mission—Jonathan and Ahimaaz, David's spies—but this took place during the execution of the mission itself: "But a lad saw them, and told Absalom" (2 Sam 17:18)—part of the risk of every secret agent—and not during a quest for bodily pleasures of one sort or another.

In the king's speaking to Rahab through his emissaries, there is an apparent harshness of style and duplicity: "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house . . ." (v. 3). And to be sure, among the ancient translations there is one that latched on to the first words: "who have come to you" (Peshitta), and one that forgoes the first words and renders the last: "who have entered your house" (Septuagint). But the redundancy is only apparent: the king simply points out the two possibilities at hand, whether they came for sex "who have come to you," or in order to sleep "who have entered your house." In Abaranel's words: "that the king's emissaries said to her 'bring out the men who came, whether they came to sleep with you, or whether they came for food and lodging. For whatever reason they came, bring them out.' This is what 'who came to you' means—to sleep with her, and 'who came to your house' means to ask for lodging. And the words 'for they have come to search out all the country' come to say: 'do not think that they came to sleep with you or to ask for lodging, as they said, for then you would consider how you could hand them over to us . . . But bring out the men, for they have come in fact to spy out the entire

²Only in Targum Jonathan: *שמעו*, and in the Septuagint according to the Alexandrian text *ἀνγγέλον*, and in the Vatican text *ἀγγέλον*. The word can apparently be explained as haplography under the influence of the neighboring *τοῦ*.

land. So do not have compassion on them, for they seek your life, and that of all the people of the city."

The two possibilities raised by the king of Jericho will play an important role in the immediate continuation of the story, in Rahab's answer (v. 4), which will choose from among them that which serves her purpose. Abaranel noted another important detail: the king of Jericho judges the spies according to their mission and not according to their coming to the harlot's house, which reveals a total abandoning of their duty. Even though they do not behave as spies and show themselves unworthy of the name, the king seeks to accuse them of espionage. All this serves to certify them as first-class bunglers.

Rahab's response is double-ended, both in deed and in speech: "Then the woman took the two men and hid them."³ Further on we will discuss the relation between "hid them" in this verse, and the account of Rahab's covering the spies with flax on the roof in verse 6. We indicate here that their concealment apparently preceded the words of the king's messengers to Rahab: Rahab was aware of the danger—one way or another—before she was asked to hand over the spies. In Kimhi's words: "She had already taken them and hidden them before the king's messengers entered her house, when she sensed that the king was aware of the matter." A similar action sequence is found in the story of the rescue of David's spies. Before the arrival of the king's messengers at the house of the woman from Bahurim, "a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and came to a man's house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. And when Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house . . ." (2 Sam 17:18-20).

Hiding the spies before the arrival of the king's messengers may be intended to hint at Rahab's wisdom: perhaps behind the vague words "And it was told the king of Jericho" lies Rahab? Could it have been Rahab herself who informed the king in order to make the spies feel obligated to her, and to make them swear to spare her when Jericho is conquered? This hypothesis, which at first glance seems rather far-fetched, not only solves the problem of Rahab's motivation—what led her to hurry and hide the spies—but also adds to the humor of the story. Very early on she appreciates the golden opportunity that has fallen to her, and all the characters—from the spies to the king—are pawns in this harlot's hands. She does, to be sure, take a great risk, but the potential reward—sparing her and her family's lives—

³One should read *וַתִּקַּח*. The variant is due to the similarity of the letters *vav* and *mem* in the ancient Hebrew script. Cf. Naveh (32). For similar variants, cf. Josh 8:33; 2 Kgs 17:34.

justifies it. According to this understanding of Rahab's motivations, it is not compassion she shows toward the spies but cruelty: just when they ask to lie down to sleep, Rahab places them in danger. And should someone question why the narrator would want to hide from the readers the fact that Rahab was the source who "graciously offered" the information to the king, the answer is that when we do not know everything, we gain the impression that it was Rahab's good-heartedness that led her to rescue the two bunglers. Only when she asks that her deed be repaid do we begin to doubt her good-heartedness and honesty.⁴ The narrator's avoidance of saying that the spies were hidden before the arrival of the king's police is also intended to enhance the reader's suspense. The reader knows that the spies lay down (to sleep) before the king's men arrive, but until one hears of their hiding, one has no idea whether they will be captured or not.

The words "Then the woman took the two men and hid them" compel us to consider the relationship between the actions of the male spies and the actions of the female harlot, Rahab. It is Rahab who initiates and acts, while the two secret agents are simply objects to be manipulated by her, for better or for worse. This is in complete contradiction to the behavior of men in parallel stories of this type. Samson has need of the harlot only when he goes in unto her; the harlot is a sex object for Samson and she plays no part in rescuing him. In the spy-story of Jonathan and Ahimaaz in Bahurim, the spies are also not without initiative, like our two lads. Ahimaaz and Jonathan find themselves a place to take shelter from Absalom: "And they came to a man's house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court, and they went down into it" (2 Sam 17:18). Moreover, the words "and hid them" bring about a clear association to a sub-type of the "woman who rescues a man" story—the "woman who hides a child" (e.g., Exod 2:2-3; 2 Kgs 6:29; 11:1-3). Here, the child is necessarily passive, as in the story of the hiding of the infant Moses by his mother: "she hid him three months" (Exod 2:2). Note the use of the same verb, *hā'at*.

Rahab again reveals great wisdom in her words to the king's messengers: "Yes, the men came to me." Thus, of the two possibilities indicated by the king, Rahab chooses the first, and for good reason: if

⁴If we are correct in asserting that Rahab was the one who informed the king of the spies' coming to her, then our chapter is quite similar to the story of the Gibeonites (chapter 9). In chapter 9 the Gibeonites, like Rahab, are fearful of the Israelites and their God (vv. 9-10; cf. 2:9-10), and, by a ploy, get the Israelites to swear that no harm will befall them (v. 15). Note that just as Joshua erred in sending out spies at all—an action which shows that his faith in God is less than absolute—so the Israelites err in not inquiring of the Lord in the Gibeonite affair, but trust them: "Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord" (v. 14).

the men had come to her in order to lie with her, it would be reasonable to assume that they had finished their business and gone on their way, just as Samson does when he leaves the city at midnight (Judg 16:3). If, on the other hand, they had come only in order to seek a place of lodging, they would surely still be in her house. In Abarbanel's words: "... [Rahab says] 'It is true that the men came here but not in order to ask for lodgings but to lie with me.' And this is true—the men did come to me," and she said this in order that they would think that they had already left, for after laying with her they would have gone." Note that Rahab's cleverness again puts the spies in a ridiculous light. First the king relates to them as real spies; now Rahab relates to them as real men. And just as they were unworthy of the first, so are they unworthy of the second! Rahab's answer to the king also concerns what she was not asked: "but I did not know where they were from." Again, in Abarbanel's words: "[Inquiring into a client's past] is not compatible with the habits of harlotry"—a harlot does not demand a passport or an identity card from those who come to enjoy her services.

In v. 5, in her desire to create an impression of loyal patriotism, Rahab hurries, apparently in order to send the pursuers on the trail of the two spies: "And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out." Unlike Samson, who does not consider such trivial matters as the closing of the gate and, accordingly, is forced to take the gate with him when he leaves, the spies, according to Rahab, apparently hasten to leave the city before the gate is closed. While the woman of Bahurim appears to send the pursuers in the direction of Jonathan's and Ahimaaz's flight—"They have gone over the water brook" (2 Sam 17:20)—Rahab practically does one thing, and its exact opposite. On the one hand she says: "Where the men went I do not know" (the second half of her former words: "but I did not know where they were from"), and on the other, she seems to encourage the pursuers to go and catch them, by expressing her assurance that they will indeed catch them if they do not tarry (and thus spare her from both danger and embarrassment): "Pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." While Rahab works her charms on the pursuers, the spies sit in their hiding-place, thoroughly grateful to their rescuer.

Verse 6 returns us to them: "But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof." This verse seems simply to be an expansion of what is stated in v. 4: "and she hid them," with the narrator's words here in the past perfect tense. In Kimhi's words: "It was already stated above 'and she hid them,' and now it is said 'and she had hidden them,' in order to explain how she concealed them." Before, the narrator did not want to unduly disturb the action of the royal

guards' search and, accordingly, sufficed himself with a brief remark that reveals a little and conceals twice as much. The simple use of the words "and she hid them," above, also leaves us in suspense as to where the spies were hidden at the last moment and whether their hiding was sufficiently secure in order to throw the guards off their trail. Now that the pursuers have already gone on their way, and while they are yet "pounding the pavement" in vain pursuit of our spies, the time is ripe to reveal where the spies were left—far from the harlot's bed, on the roof. Moreover, we are now able to enjoy bemusedly, without any suspense, the picture of the two would-be spies lying together, covered with the stalks of flax (cf. Fellis:279). Here, again, all the action is attributed to Rahab, and the spies are but pawns in her hands. This contrasts with David's spies, who choose their own place of hiding while the woman helps them only when she spreads "a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it" (2 Sam 17:19). Even the deceived Sisera is more active than the spies in the course of his being hidden: he tells Yael what to do and asks her to stand at the opening of the tent, putting his pursuers off the trail should they inquire of him (Judg 4:20).

In v. 7 we leave the pursued on Rahab's roof and have a look at the pursuers. Rahab, the only woman in the story and one whose experience with men is far from negligible, succeeds, then, to fool everyone with no difficulty. The pursuers act according to her advice and go out on the chase: "So the men pursued them." And note that here Rahab plays the role of the simple-minded harlot, not knowing who the Israelites are, or where they are at that moment. The pursuers, on the other hand, understand that they must search for the spies on the way to the fords of the Jordan, which lead eastward, where the Israelites are encamped. In the continuation of the story she will send the escapees, who will be of the utmost importance as the guarantee that her life will be spared, in the opposite direction (v. 16). The pursuers do not forget to return to close the city-gate after they leave: "And after the pursuers had gone out, they shut the gate." This act also might bring a smile to our faces: by closing the gates, they intend to protect the city from the danger without while, in fact, they secure the safety of the spies within.

Whereas in v. 2 it is said of the spies that "they lodged there," v. 8 says: "Before they lay down . . ." By the recurrence of the verb *..v.2..v.8* we see that the two spies, seeking a restful night in Jericho, only meet with frustration. Before they are even able to lie down, they are hastened to the roof to hide. And if they thought to catch some sleep under the stalks of flax, then "she came up to them on the roof" and prevents even this. Moreover, the verb *..v.1..v.2*, "and lodged" (v. 2), was the last verb that attributed any action to the spies themselves. From there until v. 8, up to the words "Before they lay down," they are en-

tirely passive. From here on we cannot expect any significant action on their part.

Now in vv. 9-13, the spies will be forced to listen to Rahab's long speech, a speech that in all its seriousness underscores an intentionally ironic gap between the Canaanite's fear of the Israelites, on the one hand, and, on the other, the spies themselves, hardly representatives of these fear-inspiring people. The two frightened spies, whose lives were saved a moment before by this prostitute, now hear from her: "I knew that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint-hearted because of you." Rahab, who had previously played the unknowing fool ("but I did not know where they were from . . . where the men went I do not know" [vv. 4-5]), is now clearly aware of that which is worthwhile for her to know: "I knew that the Lord has given you the land . . ." She speaks here in the past tense, as if the matter were already accomplished (cf. Deut 3:18; 12:1; and below, v. 24), whereas the next two parts of the verse are in the present tense and reflect the result of Rahab's recognition of God's powers. Her fear is not inspired by the bungling spies but, rather, exists despite them. Even the pathetic state of the spies cannot detract from her belief in God's ability to accomplish his plan, nor from her fear of the Israelites, his people. The expressions of Rahab's Godly fear recall the Song of the Sea (cf. already *Mekhila de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai*, "Bešallah," 9), and refer to it in chiastic order, as is common in internal biblical quotations (cf. R. Weiss; Zeidel):

Exod 15:15-16		Josh 2:9
All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away		and that the terror of you has fallen on us
Terror and dread will fall on them	X	and all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away

While in Exodus the fear is of the Lord alone, Rahab's words express a fear of the Israelites as well. Nevertheless, we should not allow Rahab's words to mislead us for an instant. Her fear of the Israelites is the direct result of fear of God, as is clear from the next verse: "For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt" (v. 10; cf. Joshua's words at 4:23). Alongside the miraculous event of the crossing of the Red Sea, Rahab mentions, to be sure, an event in the mortal realm—the Israelites' victories: "And what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed" (v. 10). But here, too, it is not the heroics of our spies or even the military prowess of the Israelites that

is a factor, but the power of the Lord: "And as soon as we heard these things"—repeats the beginning of the previous verse—"our hearts melted"—God, who dried up the Reed Sea, melted their hearts—"neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you (cf. Josh 5:1), for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (v. 11; cf. Deut 4:39). Rahab's words reveal that she, a small-time prostitute from Jericho, knows better than Joshua how great and powerful is Yahweh, the God of Israel. If Joshua had trusted in God's power as much as Rahab, he would not have needed to send out his bungling spies! Rahab's speech-making creates quite a striking picture. She speaks with confidence and ease, proclaiming her fear of the Israelites, yet all the while, in fact, the fate of the Israelites rests in her hands.

Rahab concludes by mentioning God's name because now she wants the spies to swear to her future safety: "Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house" (v. 12). Rahab was and remains a harlot with a calculating mind, and her story is the only one from the type of the "woman rescuer" in which the heroine does what she does for gain's sake. Now it is clear to us why she saw fit to save the spies—and maybe even to put them in danger in the first place—and to betray her own countrymen. By cold calculation she realized that her people were already doomed and that by giving shelter to the spies she would save her own and her family's lives. She smoothly represents the matter as "a life for a life": "since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house,"—though, in fact, there is no real equality: she is not content that the "favor" be shown only to her, but asks that it also be applied to her entire family. The small-time harlot does indeed know how to calculate; one by one she enumerates all of her relatives: "and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death" (v. 13).

Now, at last, the spies open their mouths for the first time in the entire story (v. 14); but, as expected, their words reveal neither initiative nor originality. The passive spies agree to Rahab's request that they swear by God, and their speech is taken entirely from her own words. She concludes with the words "and deliver our lives from death," and they open with the words "our lives for yours."⁵ In the continuation of their words, too, the spies borrow her words. She said, "I knew that the Lord has given you the land" (v. 9), and they say, "And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land." Rahab

said, "you also will show kindness" (v. 12), and the spies say, "we will deal kindly and truly with you."

After the spies give their word to Rahab, she again takes up the reins: "Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall" (v. 15).⁶ Nothing can stop Rahab from fulfilling her plan to save herself and her family; even the locked gate will not prevent her from sending the spies away safely. Samson overcame the closed gate in his own way: his great physical strength enabled him simply to take it with him (Judg. 16:3). Rahab uses her wits. This manner of escape again emphasizes the passivity of the spies. Like marionettes they are dependent on Rahab's graces, their lives hanging in the balance every moment. Of course, the spies promise to spare Rahab, but that time is yet to come. In the meantime they are saved by her resourcefulness. Michal, Saul's daughter, rescued David in the same way: "So Michal let David down through a window" (1 Sam 19:12).⁷ There, however, the picture is balanced further on in the text when David becomes the subject: "And he went and fled and escaped," a series of three verbs emphasizing David's own initiative. Also, in the story of David's spies the woman does not expect to benefit from her actions. When the danger is past, the two come up out of the well on their own and proceed on their way: "Now it came to pass, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went . . ." (2 Sam 17:21).⁸

However, in our story the spies are so valuable to Rahab that she leaves no detail to chance or to their initiative and supplies them with specific instructions: "And she said to them, 'Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way'" (v. 16). Rahab understands human nature better than the Israelite secret service men. If they valued their lives they would do wisely to go in the opposite direction. They should not hurry to return to the east bank of the Jordan but go up to the mountain and wait three days until their pursuers give up the search. Like our spies, Samson also goes up to the mountain when he leaves Gaza; but this he does on his own initiative, and not out of fear of his pursuers. As opposed to our

⁶The words "for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall" were omitted from the text reflected in the LXX in order not to contradict chapter 6; cf. above, n. 1.

⁷In the LXX of Josh 2:15 the rope is not mentioned, and it is possible that it was omitted to assimilate it to the story of David and Michal. For the phenomenon of literary assimilation, cf. Zakovitch, 1985b.

⁸Cf. the influence of this story-type on the story of Paul's escape from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25), and especially: "But his disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket" (v. 25). Cf. further 2 Cor 11:32-33.

⁵For a characteristic formulation of the notion of *lex talionis* cf. Exod 21:23; Lev 24:18; Deut 19:21; and cf. further 1 Kgs 20:39, 42.

heroes, Samson climbs the mountain only in order to aggravate the failure of his enemies and to taunt them: "And he took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron" (Judg 16:3). Verse 22 shows to what extent the spies take pains to heed the harlot's instructions to the letter: "Then they departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers went back."

The continuation of the story presents a new puzzle. After the spies have been lowered and stand outside the wall in the dark, their dangerous predicament demands absolute silence. Yet it is then that they choose to speak with Rahab. On this problem Abarbanel comments: "Why did they not say all this while they were on the roof, when she adjured them, but after she let them down through the window with a rope they exchange words with her and make conditions, while the place and the time were not so appropriate for conversation." Josephus, also sensing this problem, solves it offhandedly in his paraphrase of the passage. He places the entire (abbreviated) conversation prior to the lowering of the spies: "So having made this compact, they departed, letting themselves down the wall by a rope" (*Antiquities*, Book v, 1.2). Note that Josephus represents the spies in a more honorable light and attributes action to them! But Josephus' solution conflicts with the biblical story,⁹ in which the spies later direct Rahab to: "Bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down" (v. 18). Abarbanel solves the difficulty in a different way: "Any vow or oath a man makes while under bondage or duress will not be fulfilled, and for this reason, after they left her house and were already outside the city, they said to her 'do not think that what we vowed to you when we were hidden on the roof is valid. It is not, for we are absolved from our oath since we were coerced there. But now, while we can freely choose, we will make the vow anew . . .'" This solution serves nicely to answer another, more serious question also noted by Abarbanel: "Why did they repeat here things that they already said on the roof?" It fails, however, to solve his initial question, concerning the dangerous timing of the spies' speech-making. And, indeed, it seems to me that vv. 17-21 are a secondary addition to the story, intended to integrate into the story the matter of the scarlet cord. The cord, tied in the window, is meant to insure that Rahab and her house will not be harmed, a sign similar to the mark of blood on the Israelites' doorposts in Egypt, the blood indicating that God is to pass over the Israelites' houses and prevent the destroying angel

⁹Accordingly, one should be restrained from being as overly-sophisticated as Martin (1969).

from harning them (Exod 12:21-22). Note that just as the Israelites are directed to remain inside their houses in Exod 12:22, so do the spies direct Rahab to remain indoors (v. 19; cf. Zakovitch, 1968:28-30). Rahab's immediate binding of the scarlet cord in the window, however, is rather surprising, since it might arouse the curiosity of the people of Jericho: "and they departed, and she bound the scarlet cord in the window" (v. 21). Again Abarbanel points to the difficulty in interpretation: "Why did Rahab tie the scarlet cord in the window immediately, for this was unnecessary until God would give them the land?" His clever answer: "She in her cunning did not wait to tie the scarlet cord at the time of battle, when it was needed, because then the people of the city would notice the scarlet cord and kill her." The Septuagint translator (or his Hebrew *Vorlage*) already sensed this difficulty, and omitted the concluding words of the addition. The possibility that these words are an addition on top of an addition, whose purpose is to connect together all the loose ends of the reworked story, should not be ignored. A proof that vv. 17-21 is an addition can be found in v. 22, as it is the direct continuation of v. 16; in v. 16 the spies are commanded by Rahab to go to the mountain and hide there, and in v. 22 they do as she says.

In any case, since vv. 17-21 are a part of the final version of the story, we must examine the extent to which these verses fit the rather sorry image of Joshua's two agents. The fact that the spies suddenly open their mouths when they are out of Rahab's house, outside the wall, is certainly not out of character. It is fitting that these two secret agents, who are ignorant of the ABC's of spying and transgress the elementary rules of caution when they enter the city, would also flagrantly disregard the same rules when they leave, shouting at the top of their lungs while being pursued. The capture of the spies is prevented only by the fact that their pursuers swallowed Rahab's bait and went enthusiastically in the direction of the fords of the Jordan. This line of the narrative, then, adds a further humorous element to the story. The sudden talkativeness of the spies also fits in well with the grin-raising picture: only now, when they are again under their own control and outside the city, do they summon the courage (rather unwisely) to make their voices heard. Perhaps the fact that they speak at such length in the dark, and raise their voices (if they did not do so Rahab could not have heard them) is meant to help them encourage themselves, to restore their self-confidence—like children who sing or whistle when they find themselves alone on a dark street.

The spies wish to leave Rahab with the impression that they are men of decisiveness, as if they are now setting the conditions. There is, in fact, no great news in the speech, but in their version the character of the situation undergoes a change; this time the words of the

spies have a more legalistic bearing than the oath they swore while on the roof. They add conditions to the agreement: "So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him" (v. 19). Nevertheless, the confusing style of the spies' speech should be noticed. The beginning of their speech, for example, "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear" (v. 17), is disconnected and incomprehensible until we reach the end of the speech, the closing of the inclusio in v. 20: "And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear" (note the repetition of what was already stated at the beginning of v. 14).

Rahab, aware of the danger of loud chatter in the dark, keeps her words to a minimum, disregarding the additional fact that their words introduce nothing new and, therefore, do not require any detailed answer. Accordingly, Rahab gets rid of them curtly: "According to your words, so be it" (v. 21; cf. Gen 44:10).

With v. 22 we are back to the original layer of the story, and the spies now return to Joshua and give him their report: "and they told him all that had befallen them" (v. 23). The narrator spares us the retelling of their adventure—indeed, what could they possibly have to report at all? That straightaway on their coming to Jericho they went to the house of a prostitute? That before managing to do anything their presence in the city became known and that the harlot was the one who hid them and saved them from their pursuers? That right after their pursuers went off in the wrong direction the harlot lowered them down with a rope through her window and told them to hide out for three days on the mountain? Such a report would amount only to a ludicrous account of the spies' failure. The narrator understates the report, as if out of consideration toward the two ne'er-do-wells, but also because at this precise moment their shameful failure becomes a great success: "And they said to Joshua, 'Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us'" (v. 24). The spies were in one single house and met one single woman—Rahab—but they are nevertheless capable of giving a general report. Note the two-fold occurrence of the word "all" in this verse; the spies have learned a lesson from Rahab. It was she who said to them "the Lord has given you the land," and also "all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you" (v. 9).

The spies are none other than a mouthpiece for Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute from whom Joshua learns his lesson: that God had given the land into the hands of Israel. Joshua, who not only made a superfluous action by sending the spies but even chose a pair of spies

unworthy of the mission, in the end gains an encouraging report. This report is even better than that of Moses' spies, who were properly briefed for their mission but nevertheless gave an evil report of the land and incited the people to rebellion (Num 13:26-33; cf. also Deut 1:28). It is precisely Joshua and Caleb's words in this story, not based on any military logic but on faith, that reflect the biblical belief: "If the Lord delights in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it to us. . . . Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them" (14:8-9). To be sure, a good report from military intelligence is no guarantee of success in the Bible; Joshua's spies to Ai give a properly strategic report, according to their understanding (Josh 7:3), but they do not know that God's will, and his righteous judgment, do not necessarily align with military concerns (v. 4). Only when an optimistic report contains theological elements is the optimism justified, such as in the spy-story of the Danites: "Arise, let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and indeed it is very good. . . . For God has given it into your hands. . . ." (Judg 18:9-10).

Our biblical story, which is none other than a parody of spy stories, comes, then, to a happy ending. God, whose will in any event is to deliver his people, will indeed deliver them. Joshua has finally learned what he should have known from the start, though in an unpleasant way. Rahab and her family, whose lives have been spared, will serve as a universal reminder of this lesson.

James Bond, the archetype of the perfect secret agent in the last decade, is, of course, the absolute opposite of Joshua's two spies. Agent "007" is the symbol of the ultimate spy, whose every adventure—even the most difficult—ends in success. The urgency of his mission does not, as we know, deter him from relations with women; in many cases, it is the woman herself who brings him closer to his goal, even though she may originally have belonged to the enemy camp. No, Bond has no need—God forbid—for prostitutes. The greatest female patriots, not to mention the most beautiful, cannot resist his masculine charms. This is far from being the case with the Israeli secret agents. Our two spies, whose anonymity alone spares them from disgrace, do not even manage to succeed with a small-time harlot. It is precisely the ambivalent wording of the sexual element (hinted at here and there in narratives belonging to the story-type "woman who rescues a man") that presents the spies in such a ludicrous light. Their chain of errors—gross blunders that any novice spy would avoid—almost results in the complete failure of their mission; but it is turned into a stupendous success when, at last, they echo Rahab's words in Joshua's ears.

The author's use of humor well serves the story's theological intent while his manipulation of two well-known story-types, borrowed from the world of folklore, assures the story's success. The story-type of the "woman who rescues a man" is fundamentally a woman's story-type, whereas the "spy" story-type is a man's. In our story roles are exchanged and dominance is given to the woman who robs the male spies of their very identity. Even the sexual element, a fundamental part of the "woman who rescues a man" story-type, is toned down not only in order to fit the conservative character of the Bible but also in order to scorn these military men who do not live up to their more manly prototypes.

In spite of its comic-book characters—a clever, calculating Canaanite harlot and two bungling spies—this story was selected to stand at the beginning of the account of God's saving acts towards Israel, in order that every Israelite might know that there is no wisdom and no heroism apart from God alone. A Yiddish proverb says, "If God wills, even a broom can shoo!" if God wills, even two incompetent buffoons can provide the right message for a leader who sought to act according to military protocol, instead of realizing from the start that success will solely be the result of God's strength and mercy. Our story, then, is an important link in the series of stories which seek to show that "vain is the help of man" (Ps 60:13 = 108:13)—the intelligence branch included—and that "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exod 14:14).

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8. A RESPONSE TO ZAKOVITCH'S "SUCCESSFUL FAILURE OF ISRAELITE INTELLIGENCE"

Frank Moore Cross

Let me begin by applauding Professor Zakovitch's search for humor in the Hebrew Bible. I believe there is a rich vein to be mined. As some of you know, I am particularly fond of the Book of Jonah, a parody of the prophet, which is at once profound and hilarious. The narrative opens with God's command to Jonah to go to Nineveh. Told to go to Nineveh, the metropolis located as far east as known civilization reached, he set out for Tarshish, the farthest known outpost in the west. Farthest east/farthest west: already the broad humor of the book is signaled in the first verse. When he finally goes to Nineveh, after an excessively spectacular ride back to the mainland, he preached a sermon to the Assyrians, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." What is the upshot of Jonah's sermon? Jonah was one hundred percent successful. From the king down, all the Ninevites repented. Even the cattle wore sackcloth and fasted. All converted: the nation reputed to be the most evil and violent on the face of the earth. Wonderful. Conversion with one sermon. Marvelous. Who can read this with innocent credulity? How can the most pious reader miss the author's delight? Jonah succeeded in a fashion which brings even Moses' stock down. After all, Moses could not persuade Pharaoh with ten plagues.

While I have found great pleasure in reading Zakovitch's paper, I have taken my task to be adversarial. My praise will be brief. My critique will be less brief. As noted above, I have no objection to one's finding humor in biblical stories. On the contrary, I welcome the break with German scholarship. Further it seems a plausible enterprise to look for irony or burlesque in a tale of military intelligence (a term some have labeled an oxymoron). Yet I must confess that Zakovitch finds a bit more humor in the story of Rahab and the spies than I do. Our disagreements are based in large part on rather different presuppositions with which we approach the biblical account: in methods of textual criticism with which we establish the text, in the