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FORM AND PERSPECTIVE IN 2 KINGS V

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The tale of the Syrian leper Naaman and his physical and spiritual transformation at the hands of the prophet Elisha stands out in relief against the larger cycle of stories of which it is a part. Its length and complexity set it apart from the many short, independent episodes in the cycle, in particular from the two which precede it (2 Kings iv 38-41, 42-44) and the one which follows it (vi 1-7). It is thus formally distinct from its context. In content, too, it differs from the other tales. Alone among the prophetic stories, it concerns the healing of a leper (but cf. Num. xii) and worship of Yahweh by a non-Israelite (but cf. 1 Kings xxiv). Though, like many of the short episodes, the Naaman story centers on a miracle, the storyteller presses beyond the miracle to its moral significance. Our understanding of the characters in this narrative does not depend upon information given outside it; they function independently here. The kings of Syria and Israel, who appear as main characters elsewhere in the Elisha cycle, here play minor roles on a tableau where politics recedes to the background. The character of the righteous Naaman does not appear outside this chapter, prompting Rashi to identify him as the slayer of Ahab. The last scene, focusing on Elisha's servant Gehazi, links the narrative to the two other stories in which Gehazi figures (iv 8-37, viii 1-6), yet Gehazi is represented differently here from there. The negative image of the rejected leprous Gehazi does not comport well either with the loyal, if insensitive, Gehazi of the Shunammite tale (iv 8-37) or with the, apparently, reinstated Gehazi who sings Elisha's praises to the king (viii 1-6). The distinctiveness of 2 Kings v, in both form and content, suggests that it merits analysis as an independent story.

In fact, though at first glance 2 Kings v appears to be a single, continuous story focusing on Naaman, closer study reveals that it is comprised of three distinct units, each centering on a different character: unit A, Elisha (*vv.* 1-14); unit B, Naaman (*vv.* 15-19);

unit C, Gehazi (*vv.* 20-27). Unit A recounts the power of the prophet Elisha to cure Naaman's leprosy. It is divided into two subunits of equal length: the first (*vv.* 1-7) details Naaman's journey to the prophet, while the second (*vv.* 8-14) relates Elisha's healing of Naaman's leprosy. But Naaman's transformation is more than physical; unit B records Naaman's confession of faith in Yahweh and its consequences. Finally, unit C narrates the efforts of Elisha's servant Gehazi to enrich himself at Naaman's expense and the resulting rebuke by Elisha, who causes Gehazi to inherit Naaman's leprosy as a punishment.

Like the life of the persona in Emily Dickenson's poem, the narrative "closed twice before its close". Unit A would seem to be a complete story in itself and logically concludes with the successful healing of Naaman. Unit B, however, extends the narrative but appears to end it a second time when Elisha grants Naaman's request and sends him off in peace. Unit C is dependent upon B, for Gehazi pursues the departing Naaman, yet also rounds off A by concluding with a return to the subject of leprosy. Without B and C, A would be a different story with a different meaning. B and C do not simply extend A; they transform A into a new tale by setting it in a new context. Moreover, A is not complete without B, nor B without C. The two intermediate endings are only pauses allowing for momentary relief until the issue is attacked from another angle. In fact, through the skillful use of repetition and contrast, of narration and speech, the author creates a single narrative fabric which allows us to understand the action of the story from ever wider horizons.

If we are to be sensitive to the literary dimensions of 2 Kings v, we must ask what function each element of the narrative serves. This question may be focused more clearly by posing its converse: how might the story have been rendered differently? Despite their reliance on tradition, biblical authors appear to have been quite free to mold stories according to their own lights. Why, in a particular setting, have they chosen dialogue or narration, detail or summary, character sketch or development, repetition or variation?[1] By imagining how a narrative might have been, we gain a firmer grip

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[1] Such literary questions have been raised and artfully used to analyse biblical narrative in several essays by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981) See also Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York, 1979), pp 1-76

on how it is. Let us then examine each unit in turn to see how it functions in itself and as a part of the entire narrative.

Unit A is the longest and most complex section of the narrative. The problem of the tale, Naaman's leprosy, is related in the first verse, while the solution, Naaman's cure, occurs only in the last verse (*v.* 14). Between these verses a carefully constructed tale records the stages from problem to solution. In the first half (*vv.* 1-7) Elisha is the unnamed object of the plot, the goal toward which Naaman moves, while in the second half (*vv.* 8-14), Elisha is the named subject whose instruction leads to Naaman's health. Elisha, therefore, is the center of gravity in the unit. The basic story is a very simple one, which the author, conceivably, could have compressed into a few verses, like many of the other Elisha stories. It might, for instance, have run as follows:

> Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, was valorous but leprous. When he heard of the power of Elisha, he went to Samaria to be cured. Elisha said to him, "If you would be clean, wash seven times in the Jordan." And Naaman did as the prophet said, and, behold, he was clean.

This condensed version would seem to include the important elements, and it moves us from problem to solution, yet it is not equivalent to the biblical story. By weaving plot, characters, and speech around these bare bones, the biblical author has created a different story, an artful narrative. When we ask at every step *how* it is different, we begin to understand the way it functions as literature.

The initial verse sets out the problematic of the story by contrasting the fame and valor of Naaman with his disease: "Now Naaman, field-marshal of the king of Aram, was a great man (*ʾîš gādôl*) before his lord (*lipnê ʾădōnāw*) and of high renown (*nĕśûʾ pānîm*), because through him the Lord gave victory to Aram, and the man, though a valorous hero (*gibbôr ḥayil*), was leprous." In contrast to the usual pithiness of biblical character description, this author expands upon the praiseworthiness of Naaman. In fact he reverses the normal word order (consecutive verb-subject) in each half of the verse in order to underscore the distinctiveness of the subject, Naaman. This distinctiveness, however, consists not only in his fame but also in his disease. By concluding this long and impressive list of attributes with the single word "leprous", juxta-

posed to *gibbôr ḥayil*, the author shocks the reader with the irony of Naaman's predicament. The careful description of Naaman has a further purpose in the narrative. In it are planted a number of key words and ideas which will occur later in the narrative, like seeds which germinate and sprout. The first verse thus acts as a kind of *précis* in code, not deciphered until the story is complete. For instance, the term *gibbôr ḥayil*, literally "man of substance", directs our gaze ahead into the story. Though, in its immediate context, it denotes Naaman's military "substance", his victories, it also hints that he might have other "substance" as well.[2] Indeed, a main issue of the story is just what substance Naaman is made of.

With Naaman introduced and his problem stated, the effort to solve it can begin. But, in contrast to our hypothetical short version, here Naaman does not encounter Elisha directly but only after a series of intermediaries intervene: an Israelite captive, Naaman's wife, the king of Syria, the king of Israel, Elisha's messenger, and Naaman's servants. The actions of these minor characters both advance and delay the approach of the foreign commander to the Israelite prophet Elisha, thereby introducing an element of tension into what the author might have portrayed as a direct journey.

The first character, the instigator of Naaman's journey, is the captive Israelite maiden, the description of whom parallels that of Naaman and thus heightens the contrast between them. While he is a "great man" (*ʾîš gādôl*), she is a "little maiden" (*naʿărâ qĕṭannâ*); he a commander, she a captive; he a Syrian, she "from the land of Israel"; as he is "before (*lipnê*) his lord", she is "before (*lipnê*) the wife of Naaman". Yet, despite her lowly position, her remark to Naaman's wife begins the series of direct and indirect communications which result in the cure of Naaman. Her words, in fact, travel like lightning. To emphasize their power, the author skips over the transmission of the message from Naaman's wife to Naaman and does not repeat the message when Naaman reports it to the king: "Thus and so said the maiden from the land of Israel" (*v.* 4).[3] In two verses the maiden's information has reached the ears of the

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[2] Edward F. Campbell interprets *gibbôr ḥayil* to have this connotation in its application to the character of Boaz in the book of Ruth. *Ruth* (Garden City, N.Y., 1975), pp. 90, 109.

[3] The LXX reads *v.* 4: "And she came and told her lord ..." The message is summarized by Naaman's wife in reporting to Naaman rather than by Naaman in reporting to the king. In this case the transmission of Naaman to the king, rather than the wife to Naaman, is implicit rather than explicit.

king; ironically, the lowest of the low, a female Israelite captive, is heeded by the great king of Syria.

After the rapid transfer of the message to the king, he announces his intention to send Naaman with a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. The author then pauses to detail Naaman's preparations for the journey, his gathering together of tribute for the foreign king: silver, gold, and fine raiment. Though this detail seems unimportant, the author recurs to it later, in unit C (*vv.* 22f.). It functions as an anticipatory device, piquing our curiosity and contributing to the unification of the narrative. Despite this pause, the author maintains the momentum by not revealing the contents of the letter of introduction until Naaman has brought it to the king of Israel. By delaying the text of the message until its delivery, the author not only keeps us in suspense but also focuses attention on the reaction of the person addressed.[4] And the reaction is dramatic. The king, intimidated by what he understands to be a challenge to *him* to cure Naaman's leprosy, rips his garments and cries, "Am I God to kill and to make alive?" (*v.* 7). Somehow the Israelite maiden's assurances about the prophet in Samaria have been sidetracked by an official royal memorandum caught up in formality but lacking any mention of the prophet. "And now, when this scroll comes to you, behold I send to you Naaman my servant to cure him of his leprosy" (*v.* 6). In the mind of the king of Syria, the miraculous curative powers of which the Israelite maiden spoke must surely be found under royal auspices.[5] In fact, her identification of Elisha as "the prophet who is in Samaria", the Israelite royal city, would signal to the king of Syria that this prophet operated under royal patronage. But the king's powerlessness demonstrates that the elaborate memorandum introduced him to the wrong person. The author mocks the impotence of royal authority, of official channels. Naaman's journey would appear to have reached a dead end; the Masoretic *pisqa*ʾ at the conclusion of *v.* 7, indeed, confirms the stop in the narrative motion.

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[4] Ann M. Vater, "Narrative Patterns for the Story of Commissioned Communication in the Old Testament", *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 365-82, analyses eight patterns of commissioned communication used in biblical narrative. *Vv.* 5-7 follow her Pattern IV: "The message is narrated in the situation of its delivery, which is preceded by a brief notice that a message or messenger was sent" (p. 367).

[5] See the comments of Gerhard von Rad, in his essay on Naaman in *Gottes Wirken in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974), p. 55, E. tr., *God at Work in Israel* (Nashville, 1980), p. 49.

When the story resumes in *v.* 8, it is Elisha, now named for the first time, who initiates the action. Though the king of Israel, by his own admission, is not God, the prophet Elisha, the narrator assures us, is a "man of God". Though the king is powerless, the prophet is powerful, hearing somehow of the king's dismay and requesting that Naaman be sent to him. We could, of course, picture a version of the story in which the message of the king of Syria requested the king of Israel to guide Naaman to Elisha to cure him. But the present story seems designed to depict the prophet breaking through the royal authority structure. The author shifts the emphasis from the cure to the source of the cure; not the king but the prophet holds sway: "Let him come to *me* that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel" (*v.* 8). Not "in Samaria" (*v.* 3) under royal patronage, but "in Israel" at large Elisha's power reigns. The prophet issues orders to the king, not the reverse. As elsewhere in the Elijah-Elisha cycle, the king of Israel is depicted to be ineffectual, powerless, the tool of his wife (1 Kings xxi), his allies (1 Kings xxii) or the prophet (2 Kings i). In fact, the king now fades from the scene and the prophet assumes control.

This control is further emphasized by the pattern in which the prophet's message to the king is narrated (*v.* 8). The message is simply recorded apart from scenes of either commissioning or delivery as if it were spoken directly by Elisha to Naaman.[6] Though the recipient of the message is the king, he drops out of the action; it is Naaman who immediately reacts to the message. The emphasis is upon the words of the message which redirect Naaman's journey from king to prophet: "And Naaman came ..." (*v.* 9).

The same pattern repeats itself in Elisha's next communiction with Naaman. Though Naaman stands at the door, Elisha sends a messenger to him announcing what he must do to be cured. Again, neither commission nor delivery is reported, only the message in the imperative mood. Though in general this message pattern serves to join the two parties, here it precisely separates them by indicating that Elisha will not speak directly to Naaman. Instead Elisha displays courtly behavior by first summoning Naaman and then communicating with him through an intermediary. Naaman

[6] This is Vater's Pattern VI: "A brief notice of a message being sent is followed by the message, narrated neither in the commissioning nor the delivery situation, but cited with no mention of its delivery" (p. 367). See the discussion of this pattern on pp. 378-9.

may have come like a conquering hero "with his horses and chariot", but Elisha insists upon his own superiority by dismissing him without an audience. The author implicitly contrasts the impotent king with the confident prophet who, unlike the king, actually exercises royal authority.

Naaman's angry reaction to Elisha's instruction makes plain his discomfiture: "and Naaman fumed" (*v.* 11). Two verses are devoted to Naaman's sulking reflections on Elisha's instruction to wash seven times in the Jordan river. They take us into the mind ("and I said to myself") of the heathen warrior and reveal its arrogance. First, Naaman had expected a personal and direct healing at the "hand" of the prophet. Second, he cannot fathom how the puny Jordan waters of Israel can have curative powers superior to those of the mighty rivers of Damascus. As an *ʾîš gādôl* ("great man"), he had expected a *dābār gādôl* ("great thing") (*v.* 13), but his servants convince him to yield to the simple instruction of Elisha. The stridency of Naaman's attitude demands some reformation and thus points beyond the mere physical cure.

The healing process is as simple as Elisha's instruction: "and his flesh returned to being like the flesh of a young boy (*naʿar qāṭōn*), and he was clean" (*v.* 14). The narrator here repeats Elisha's account of the promised cure ("and your flesh will return to you and you will be clean", *v.* 10) but inserts the descriptive phrase "like the flesh of a young boy". In so doing, he rounds off unit A in two ways. First, the term *naʿar qāṭōn* forms an *inclusio* with *naʿărâ qĕṭannâ* ("young maiden") in *v.* 2. The young maiden initiates the action which results in the figurative transformation of Naaman into a young boy. Moreover, he who is now described as a *naʿar qāṭōn* was initially introduced in *v.* 1 as an *ʾîš gādôl* ("big man"). Our last view of Naaman thus contrasts dramatically with the first view. On the way to a cure from leprosy the great military hero has been forced into submission to the prophet whose reputation had lured him like a magnet but whose methods, conversely, repelled him. Yet as he heeded the wish of the Israelite maiden, so too, he yields to the urgings of his servants and "goes down" (*wayyēred, v.* 14) to the Jordan as Elisha instructed. Though Naaman has been cured outwardly, his attitude remains a mystery. This mystery finds its solution in unit B.

If unit A focused on the healing power of Elisha, unit B centers on the spiritual transformation of Naaman. As his flesh "turned

around" (*wayyāśob*), now Naaman the man "turned around" (*wayyāśob*) to face his healer. Now, at last, the Israelite maiden's wish is fulfilled, for Naaman "stood before" (*wayyaʿămōd lĕpānāw*; cf. *v*. 3, *lipnê*) the man of God. The bitter arrogance of *vv*. 11-12 has become reverent humility before the prophet and his God. For the first time the author creates a dialogue between two characters rather than a monologue or announcement by one character. The very use of dialogue signals the change in Naaman who, without intermediaries or formal fanfare, approaches the prophet to confess: "Now I surely know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel, and now please accept a gift from your servant" (*v*. 15). Naaman, the lord of the Israelite maiden, has become the "servant" of the Israelite prophet. To the prophet, not to the king, he offers tribute and thereby acknowledges his new status as vassal. Moreover, Naaman's recognition of Yahweh's power echoes the narrator's affirmation in *v*. 1 that Yahweh worked through Naaman to give victory to Syria.

Naaman's subsequent requests demonstrate that he not only believes in Yahweh but wants to worship him. In the first, the request for Israelite soil, Naaman reverses his earlier attitude toward the territory of Israel. Whereas before his "conversion", he denigrates the "waters of Israel" (*v*. 12), now he wants the soil of Israel, presumably to build an altar, in order to worship Yahweh in Syria. Because there is no God "except (*kî ʾim*) in Israel" (*v*. 15), Naaman will offer sacrifices to no god "except (*kî ʾim*) to the Lord" (*v*. 17).[7] The request illustrates the depth of Naaman's "turning", the first word and key theme of unit B.

The second request is a corollary of the first: Naaman asks advance pardon for bowing to the god Rimmon when, in service to his lord, he accompanies him to the temple. Ever the loyal servant before his lord (cf. *v*. 1), Naaman is depicted as a marrano of sorts, forced to feign reverence to Rimmon ("pomegranate", probably a parody on Ramman, the title of Baal-Hadad),[8] while inwardly remaining faithful to Yahweh. The wordy request, though at first

[7] Von Rad notes a contradiction in Naaman's affirmation. If "there is no God but in Israel", then his power must extend across the border, obviating the need for Israelite earth on which to worship. Naaman, however, seeks "a temporary expedient, an insulating layer, so to speak, from on-rushing heathendom" (p. 58; E. tr., p. 52).

[8] John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (London and Philadelphia, 1964), p. 456.

glance needlessly repetitive, in fact betrays careful chiastic framing which envelops the phrase, "and he leans on my hand". To wit:

A For this thing
B may the Lord pardon your servant
C when my lord comes to the house of Rimmon to worship there
X and he leans on my hand,
C′ and I worship in the house of Rimmon (in my worshipping in the house of Rimmon),
B′ may the Lord pardon your servant
A′ for this thing.

The phrase, "and he leans on my hand", appears to be an idiom denoting not that Naaman was his physical support but, rather, his "right-hand man" (cf. 2 Kings vii 2, 17). Why this seemingly innocuous phrase should be so centered becomes clear only later.

In contrast to Naaman's effusive confession and requests, Elisha's responses are brief; this is Naaman's scene, and the author lets him control the dialogue. Elisha refuses Naaman's offer of a gift not, as is often asserted, because the prophet does not accept gifts (cf. iv 42-44) but, rather, because he takes no credit for the healing but attributes it to Yahweh. The author underscores this theological claim by using parallel phrases to establish the line of authority: Naaman "stood before" (*wayyaʿămōd lĕpānāw*) Elisha, but Elisha "stood before" (*ʿāmadtî lĕpānāw*) Yahweh (*v.* 16). Then to Naaman's requests Elisha replies simply, "Go in peace." While Ralbag (R. Levi ben Gershom) comments that the brevity of the reply implies the granting of the requests, von Rad suggests that Elisha here sends Naaman forth in God's hand in the freedom of his new faith without the support he asks for (p. 60; E. tr., p. 54).

Ralbag probably comes closer to the author's intention. Rather than elaborating Elisha's affirmation, the author lets Naaman's humble petition stand as its own affirmation. Elisha's reply suggests that he deems Naaman a loyal and legitimate servant of Yahweh despite his other commitment to his "lord". The scene ends with Naaman's departure, and, for a second time, the author seems to conclude the tale: Naaman has been both cleansed and "converted", and his journey to Elisha is now balanced by his departure. Yet with the tantalizing information, "and he went from him some distance" (*v.* 19), the author hints that the tale is not over.

The departure of Naaman from Elisha makes room for a new character, Gehazi the "young man (*naʿar*) of Elisha" (*v.* 20), whose deceit sets the transformation of Naaman (unit B) and the power of Elisha (unit A) into a broader perspective. His appeal to Naaman elicits the man's genuine charity, while his lie to Elisha provokes the prophet's naked retribution. His actions thus reveal the depth of Naaman's "turning" and the impartiality of prophetic justice. Furthermore, the ignoble Israelite Gehazi serves as a foil to the God-fearing foreigner Naaman.

Gehazi's opening soliloquy exposes to the reader, though not to Naaman or Elisha, his deceitful plot to claim the reward which his master refused. This dramatic irony, not resolved until the end of the tale, sustains the episode's tension. In the soliloquy the character of Gehazi emerges as a contrast to the other figures in the tale. First, by describing Gehazi as a *naʿar* ("young man"), the author plays him against the *naʿărâ qĕṭānnâ* ("young maiden") who was concerned to help, not exploit, Naaman. More significantly, he is a foil to Naaman. Gehazi declares, "Look now, my lord has spared Naaman, this Aramean, in not taking from his hand (*miyyādô*) what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and I will take something from him" (*v.* 20). With the derogatory epithet, "this Aramean", he impugns the man who has declared his faith in Yahweh and who, in response to Gehazi, will act on it. Ironically, his Israelite accuser will prove himself a thief. In their differing attitudes toward their "lords", the contrast between Naaman and Gehazi is extended. Naaman had asked pardon in advance for showing loyalty to his lord, while Gehazi criticizes his lord for sparing Naaman and excuses himself in advance for his treachery. Subtly, the word "hand", highlighted in the chiasmus of Naaman's request above, recurs in Gehazi's plot and reinforces the contrast. The hand with which Naaman supports his lord is the hand from which Gehazi wants to steal.

The soliloquy, finally, serves to oppose Gehazi to Elisha. Whereas Gehazi swears an oath on Yahweh's name to take (*welāqaḥtî*) from Naaman, Elisha had sworn by the same oath to refuse (*ʾim-ʾeqqāḥ*) Naaman's gift. Notably, however, although Gehazi invokes Yahweh's name, unlike Elisha, he does not call him the God "before whom I stand". Clearly, he does not "stand before" Yahweh; instead he "runs after" Naaman. The immoral and secret intentions of Gehazi thus stand in opposition to the righteous and open refusal of Elisha.

Gehazi's subsequent behavior develops the character of the wicked Israelite over the humble proselyte. His hot pursuit of Naaman is juxtaposed to Naaman's gracious reception. Alighting from his chariot to meet him, Naaman shows neither anger nor fear but, rather, concern with his greeting *hăšālôm*, "is all well?" Ironically, *šālôm*, in its literal sense of peace and wholeness, is precisely what Gehazi intends to violate even as he responds *šālôm* (*v.* 22). Not only does he lie about the sudden arrival of two prophets to whom Elisha wants to give gifts, but he places the lie in the mouth of Elisha himself. Set in the pattern of a *commissioned* communication, this message was, in fact, fabricated. Whereas Naaman had, in truth, been sent by his lord to Elisha (*v.* 6), Gehazi has not been sent by his. Although Naaman did not specify to Elisha the *bĕrākâ* ("gift") which he offered, cunningly Gehazi has discovered it and now requests precisely what he apparently knows that Naaman has with him. Interestingly, Gehazi's request alludes to the list of tribute in unit A (*v.* 5) which Naaman prepared for his journey. There the information seemed irrelevant, but now it appears to have been a clue carefully planted for later utilization. It indicates, incidentally, the dependence of unit C on A. Naaman, so loquacious earlier, now replies generously but briefly, " 'Take two talents of silver', and he pressed him" (*v.* 23). Significantly, whereas Elisha refused Naaman when, similarly, "he pressed him" (*v.* 16), Gehazi proceeds to pack the loot, carefully described for maximum effect (*v.* 23). He neither expresses thanks nor sends Naaman off "in peace" (cf. *v.* 19). Instead Gehazi's two young men "carry before him" (*wayyiśʾû lĕpānāw*) the booty. This expression subtly alludes to *v.* 1 where Naaman was described as *nĕśūʾ panîm* ("renowned, of lifted face") because of his victories. Here, in contrast, the young men "lift before his [Gehazi's] face" (*wayyiśʾû lĕpānāw*) the assistant's treachery. While Naaman's good reputation preceded him, Gehazi's crime is carried ahead of him.

Having committed his crime, Gehazi moves swiftly to hide the evidence. With five consecutive verbs the narrator describes the "cover-up": "He came to the hill and he took from their hands and he deposited in the house (*babbāyit*) and he dismissed the men and they went" (*v.* 24). As if to emphasize the surreptitious nature of Gehazi's actions, the direct object of the verbs "took" and "deposited", namely the silver and raiments, is not even mentioned. Also, his criminality is underscored in the repetition of the

physical image "took from their hands" (*miyyādām*) (cf. *v.* 20). In fact, the conjunction of the words "hands" and "house" recalls the earlier conjunction of the same words in the chiasmus of *v.* 18: "when my lord comes to the house of Rimmon to worship there and he leans on my hand." The word choice seems intended to point again, subliminally at least, to the contrast between Naaman and Gehazi. For while Naaman would support his lord with his "hand" in the "house", Gehazi has taken from others' hands and uses his house to betray his lord.

In the final scene the dramatic irony of unit C is resolved as Gehazi is undone. Indeed, the main issues of all three units of the narrative conjoin in this resolution. Elisha once again exercises his power, this time not to cure (A) but to curse and punish the deceitful Gehazi (C) for his crime against the righteous Naaman (B). Elisha's confrontation of Gehazi rings with irony. With his young men gone, the now unnamed "he" came and stood "opposite (*ʾel*) his lord"—not directly "before" (*lipnê*, "in the face of") him as had Naaman before both the king of Syria (*v.* 1) and Elisha (*v.* 15). To Elisha's curt query, "Where from, Gehazi?" the latter replies evasively. But Elisha accuses him bitterly (*v.* 26) juxtaposing Naaman's kindness ("the man [not "this Aramean"] descended from his chariot to greet you") with Gehazi's greed ("to take silver and to take garments"). In fact, Elisha exaggerates Gehazi's crime by listing far more than he took or was offered: "olive trees and vineyards, and flocks and herds, and menservants and maidservants". These items likely constitute a formulaic list, for they are included in the possessions which a despotic king can be expected to take from the people, according to Samuel's warning (1 Sam. viii 14-17). Here they associate Gehazi's crime with the worst excesses of royal corruption. Elisha's curse is the fitting *quid pro quo* for, having stolen Naaman's possessions, Gehazi now inherits his disease as well. With his concluding words, "leprous like snow", the author repeats and intensifies the last word in his introductory verse (*v.* 1) and thus ends with a final *inclusio*.

We have seen that each literary unit of the narrative is carefully constructed and that all three are linked together by thematic and verbal repetitions and echoes. Although unit A would, at first, appear to be independent, the additions of units B and C complete it in ways that surprise and delight. Each successive unit places its predecessor in a different perspective and thus changes its meaning.

Thus, the issue in A is the cure of Naaman's leprosy. But unit B shifts the emphasis away from the physical cure to the spiritual change in the man. Unit B widens the reader's horizon: the healing which Naaman sought becomes propadeutic to the "conversion" which neither he nor we expected. So the climax of the story shifts from Naaman's cure to his confession. Yet, though this turn of events was unexpected, the author subtly prepares for it by dropping hints in A of more to come. The apparent unnecessary dwelling upon Naaman's haughtiness, for instance, is balanced by the stress on his humility in B. Furthermore, the sequence of one-way communications in A builds up to the dialogue in B between Elisha and Naaman.

With the addition of C the focus changes once again. This time the cure (A) and conversion (B) of Naaman are broadened by juxtaposing them to the treachery and diseasing of Gehazi. Now the humble behavior of Naaman, whom Gehazi denigrates as "this Aramean", acts as a backdrop for the despicable action of the insider Gehazi. Though maligned by Gehazi, Naaman emerges as a servant of Elisha more loyal than Gehazi, whom Elisha condemns. Naaman becomes what Elisha calls simply "a man" (*v.* 26), any man, who turns to Yahweh. Not only does the prophet accept the loyalty of outsiders, he also punishes the disloyalty of insiders. Thus the Gehazi episode draws the story of Naaman into a larger arena by spotlighting the universal standard by which Elisha and, by implication, Yahweh, judges both foreigners and Israelites.

As a unified narrative 2 Kings v is a study in reversals. Naaman the leper becomes the servant of Elisha (*v.* 15); the "great man" (*v.* 1) becomes like a "little boy" (*v.* 14); the proud warrior (*vv.* 11f.) becomes the humble petitioner (*vv.* 15, 17f.). Conversely, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (*v.* 20) becomes a leper; the insider is thrust out. Moreover, the unnamed king of Israel exhibits his powerlessness, while "Elisha the man of God" (*v.* 8) exercises authority over him (*v.* 8). The complexity of royal protocol gives way to the simplicity of the cure, and the intricacy of Gehazi's lie is exposed by the directness of Elisha's prophetic insight.

Clearly, this narrative, despite its artistry, is more than "art for art's sake". As a didactic *legendum*, it comes to teach religious truths, expressed especially in the characters' speeches: the power of Israelite prophets (*v.* 8); the universal reign of Yahweh (*v.* 15); the denigration of magic (*v.* 11); the condemnation of theft (*vv.* 11,

20) [9] At the same time, the narrative explicitly approves of the "conversion" of Gentiles (*v* 19) and implicitly assumes the holiness of the land of Israel (*v* 17) A Rofé, in fact, sees 2 Kings v to be characterized by "formulated creeds" in contrast to the "thoughts of individualized characters" in the tale of Elisha and the Shunammite woman in the preceding chapter He claims that the two stories epitomize "the antinomy of art and doctrine" (p 147)

Yet, that a story is didactic need not mean that it is not artistic, all art is didactic to some degree Although, as Rofé illustrates, the characters of Elisha, the Shunammite, and Gehazi emerge roundly in 2 Kings iv, the characterization in 2 Kings v also aims for more than archetypes Gehazi is a "greedy assistant", but his greed expresses itself in a uniquely conniving scheme Naaman is a "proud foreign conqueror", but he is willing to heed the advice of the lowly and to retain loyalty to his king despite his new-found allegiance to Yahweh [10] The "doctrines" of the story, moreover, express themselves *through* its artistry, here "art and doctrine" do not stand opposed

2 Kings v is an especially apt example of a biblical narrative in which art and theology are symbiotically related The artist could have ended his story "twice before its close" and still have created a respectable work But the theologian wanted the moral to transcend the miraculous and so had to balance the healing of Naaman with his conversion and Elisha's acceptance of Naaman with his rejection of Gehazi Accordingly, the artist constructed a three-part tale, none of the components of which stand alone, but each of which is an integral part of a unified whole Within this framework the theologian set the prophet Elisha as the still point to whom two men came and went, each transformed beyond his expectations by the encounter That artist and theologian succeeded so well is testimony to their being one and the same [11]

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[9] See A Rofé's discussion in "Classes in the prophetical stories didactic legenda and parable", *Studies on Prophecy, SVT* 26 (Leiden, 1974), pp 145-8

[10] The archetypal characterizations are Rofé's (ibid)

[11] I am grateful for the suggestions of my colleagues Professors Wolfgang Roth and S Dean McBride

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