

Humor in the Bible

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Humor in the Bible – Prof. E.L. Greenstein – 2010

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Introduction

Gary Herion stated, “Because humor requires a somewhat ‘playful’ disposition and a willingness (at least temporarily) to suspend all seriousness, many people – especially those with strong and well-defined religious beliefs – may be reluctant to admit that portions of Scripture may be funny or may have been written by someone trying to be humorous.” (Herion ABD III p325) While this may be true, any pious church-goer who has sat through a long dry sermon, knows that the crowd will laugh at even the worst joke or piece of humor therein. Such is the effect of ‘comic relief’. The Bible is overall a serious book, but nonetheless contains humorous elements. These elements would be less humorous if they were placed outside their serious context of Holy Writ. Below I will discuss the book of Jonah. In it I find several humorous elements, however, were they not found within a book of the Bible and within the Bible as a whole, would doubtfully strike one as funny. Indeed the whole idea of the book of Jonah being a parody, relies on the existence of the other prophetic books and characters which it parodies. Even the idea of dressing cattle and animals in sackcloth (3:8) as a sign of repentance would lose its ‘punch’ were it not within the context of the Holy narrative.

#1 – Conditions in which Humor can take place

Economy of Delivery

The book of Jonah has always made me laugh. One of the key elements is the economy of the delivery. The dialogue in the book is brief and to the point, thus allowing for humor to take place. Of course taking time to analyze what is said only destroys the

atmosphere in which humor can take place, so ironically this paper itself actually works against appreciating the humor in the book! Nonetheless...

Mechanical Behavior

Jonah is funny not because he is attempting to amuse anyone, but rather, because he is completely unaware of the ridiculousness of his own behavior. "...a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself." (Bergson p71). Beginning with trying to run away from the Word of the LORD by fleeing to Tarshish, when he himself knows that God is over all creation: "...I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." (Jonah 1:9). Jonah 4:2ff shows that Jonah didn't flee because he thought he could really get away from the Creator, but rather because he hated the Assyrians so much and didn't want God to be kind to them. So much so that he says that it would be better for him to die. In fact his repeated desire "to die" rather than see the Ninevites repent or to live without the weed that gave him shade for a day is typical of the idea that humor takes place when behavior is automatic or expected – 'mechanical'.

This desire to die rather than see God be kind to his enemies has Jonah telling the sailors to kill him by throwing him into the sea, rather than simply to turn around and head for Nineveh (1:12). This ridiculous unconscious behavior continues and culminates in the end of the book where Jonah sits outside the city like a pouting child at a sports game where the umpire lets the other team get away with blatant infractions of the rules. God provides Jonah an object lesson in the form of a shade plant that makes the pouting prophet happy. When God takes the plant away, Jonah gets so angry, he says he would rather die than to live (4:8-9). Like a father to a whining child, God asks, "Is it right for

you to be angry about the plant?” (4:9a). Jonah, still unaware of his ridiculous behavior, says in response to God, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!” (4:9b). This sort of behavior on the part of Jonah is truly humorous, but only because Jonah is completely unconscious of himself and mechanical in his behavior. Had he at any point become aware of himself, he would have changed or attempted to change himself, and would have ceased to be humorous.

Still the funniest part of the whole story for me is Jonah’s reaction to the repentance of the Ninevites:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD, and said, ‘Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live! (Jonah 4:1-3)

Jonah effectively says to God ‘I knew you were going to be nice to them, I hate those people, I’d rather be dead than see you be kind to THEM!’. Additionally Jonah here complains to the All-Knowing, that he he (Jonah) knew this was going to happen.

Marcus points out that the casting of lots by the sailors to find out the culprit was “incongruous”, since it is likely that other ships suffered from the storm as well and there was no reason to believe the culprit was on board this ship (Marcus p108). However this fits well with the ‘self-centered’ theme in the book. Jonah thinks only of himself and his own comfort. The sailors assume that whatever the reason for the storm, it must be because of one of them, as though God would bother raising up a storm just for them!

Though this is in fact the case here, it is typical of human behavior, and therefore is also humorous. Such self-absorbed self-centeredness is similar to the baseball team that prays that it will not rain, even when the whole land is in a drought, just so they can play ball.

I see Jonah as similar to Samson, in that both have a notoriously bad temper, which can easily be laughed at.¹ One can picture Samson in such a bad mood that he actually takes time to collect 300 foxes and to tie them tail-to-tail with a torch between them (Judges 15:3ff). This is not to say that Samson didn't have a right to be angry, but the visual picture of him taking his time to catch 300 foxes, which would at least take weeks, if not months and meanwhile housing them, giving them food and water, finally after getting gathering 300 together he can begin assembling and preparing 150 torches, getting all 150 pairs of foxes ready, lighting all 150 torches and setting the foxes loose...² Similarly, Jonah is not only mad for a little while when he flees to Tarshish, but he stays so mad that he would rather be thrown overboard than for the ship to turn around and head to Ninevah³, and he continues in his bad temper till the end of the book. Personally I find the anger of both these men amusing, in that it seems to be a major character flaw of childish inability to overcome their own feelings. Their mechanical behavior blinds them to their own silliness. Of course every one of us has done the same, though maybe not on such a grand scale. This too adds to the humor, the writer is cleverly making us laugh at ourselves, unaware of course are we upon whom we really laugh.

¹ Marcus states "Another of the characteristics of parody is that it attacks its target by contrasting him in a distorted manner with other well-known figures" (p130). In my relating Jonah to Samson, this characteristic is not fulfilled, rather both figures are distorted images of what one would expect in a biblical hero or prophet.

² Perhaps this is not exactly how it happened, but hopefully I have pointed out how strange the visual picture can be.

³ Though here it might be argued that the men did try this in their attempt to row back to shore, which Marcus says is contrary to good sailing rules (Marcus p109), therefore may be indicative that they wanted to help Jonah head to Nineveh, or at least get back to where he started fleeing from God.

Hyperbole and Surrealism

As Greenstein points out, hyperbole and surrealism can produce humor (Greenstein ABD III p332). The dressing of the cattle in sackcloth (3:8) is just such a case. The people of Nineveh are merely repenting in the usual form, but the king commands that even the cattle should fast and be dressed like the people, in sackcloth. The visual picture borders on the ridiculous especially considering the Hebrew text, which could literally be understood to say that the cattle were to ‘dress themselves’ due to the reflexive tense of the verb. Just the act of an animal appearing in human clothes is itself funny, but dressing in sackcloth as though the animals knew good from evil is even more humorous and is itself a parody or satire of all the other stories of repentance. More than this, those who read the story and laugh may fail to realize that the author has just made the unrepentant reader even lower than the cattle of Nineveh! The Israelites would hardly repent for all the prophets and many messages they were sent, but the Ninevites and their animals repent at just five words from the mouth of Jonah!

Hyperbole is found throughout, with every thing in the story being either very large or very small. As Marcus points out, “the greatest of creatures, a large fish, and the smallest of creatures, a worm” (Marcus p101). The word גדול is used 14 times in the book to describe various things: the fish, the wind, the storm, the sailors’ fear, Jonah’s distress, Jonah’s joy, etc... (see Marcus p101). The use of hyperbole can lend itself not only to humor but also to good storytelling in general, which is why this story makes for such a good story for children, whose minds are full of imagination. No wonder it is one of the first bible stories we teach our children.

Irony

Marcus points out (p107ff) several ironic elements in the story of Jonah. For example, he points out that in the Bible the verb **נָדָם** only refers to involuntary or divinely sent sleep. Thus God who sent the storm, presumably because Jonah fled, also put Jonah to sleep. Thus the very person the storm was intended for was unaware of what was happening. Ironically it is a pagan captain who has to rouse Jonah to pray. The pagan captain ironically uses the same language God did in the opening verses ‘rise...call!’.

Marcus also points out (p108) the irony of the questions the sailors ask. Instead of sticking to the point of ‘what have you done’ – compare Joshua 7:19 – the sailors ask additional questions about Jonah’s occupation, where he comes from, his country, and his people. What kind of answers could they have expected to receive that would help them figure out the reason God sent the storm? Of course the answers play an important part in the message of the book, yet it seems ironic for the sailors to be asking about someone’s job at that hour, in the midst of a life-threatening storm.

Ironically the remedy that Jonah prescribes is to be jettisoned just like the cargo that was thrown overboard. In this Jonah, who knows that he is the cause of their distress, doesn’t throw himself overboard, but requires the sailors to throw him off the ship. This brings in a human sacrifice element. Jonah doesn’t commit suicide but rather offers himself to be killed by the sailors as a sacrifice to YHVH to save their lives.

Marcus calls the sailors attempt to save this Hebrew man ironic (p109). However it is apparent that they had some sort of conversion experience (1:14) upon finding out that Jonah’s God was the one who sent the storm. This is reinforced later when they offer sacrifice to YHVH. Thus their actions of trying to save Jonah, who had caused the trouble, are not strongly ironic by themselves, but when compared to Jonah’s

unwillingness to simply preach so that the Ninevites might be saved, it is highly ironic – pagan sailors willing to risk their lives to save Jonah, yet Jonah the believer being unwilling to do the least thing to save the pagans of Nineveh.

Ironically, God foils the human sacrifice of Jonah, just like he foiled the sacrifice of Isaac, – He provides a fish to save Jonah alive and an angel (and a ram) to rescue Isaac.⁴

Marcus (pp110-111) also points to the Psalm of Jonah (chapter 2) as being ironic in that it is a Psalm of thanksgiving rather than lament, considering it is offered while Jonah is still in the fish. However this irony doesn't seem laughable or entertaining.

It is also interesting that Jonah who receives a direct message from God refuses to obey, and the Ninevites who only receive the word of God indirectly through Jonah do obey. This is ironic, but is also a satire on the human condition and particularly that of the Israelites (here represented by Jonah) – even a word from God directly doesn't convince obedience.

Perhaps the most ironic moment is Jonah's prayer for death after his prophecy is successful. From Jonah's point of view it was actually unsuccessful, for he had prophesied Nineveh's destruction, so his prophecy actually failed. Perhaps Jonah was angry not just because his enemies were forgiven, but because his prophecy didn't come to pass. Perhaps this struck at his pride. As I mentioned above, this is also a matter of being self-absorbed, and thereby ignorant of ones own silly behavior.

⁴ It is possible that Jonah died and was resurrected – notice his statements in 2:3(2) about being in Sheol and also in 2:7(6) about being raised up from the 'pit'. The concept of 'three days' is found in both the story of Jonah and of Isaac.

Parody or Satire?

Miles has suggested (p205) that the story of Jonah is a parody because it is a retelling of Hebrew literature and not of Jewish life. This may not be entirely correct, it may simply be a satire, for the story of Jonah does not re-tell another literary work, though it does have many of the same characters of other literary (prophetic) works. Namely God, a prophet, wicked people who need repentance, corruption being found in cities, etc... In some sense it may still qualify as a parody since it is similar to the stories of Elijah and Elisha and even the other prophets/judges found in the narrative sections of the Bible. In the call of Jonah by God to prophesy against Nineveh, the expectation, might be for the prophet to protest such as Jeremiah⁵ did (Jer.1:6) or as Moses did several times (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10 and finally 4:13), after which point God becomes angry with Moses. Even Gideon was reluctant in God's call on his life (Judges 6:15ff)⁶. Yet in the end God's prophets normally obey after being strengthened by God. Jonah instead breaks from the expected and flees! In this sense the book of Jonah is a parody. Though Jonah's issue is not one of timidity like these men⁷, rather his is a problem of too much

⁵ Of course claiming Jonah is a Parody of Jeremiah is slightly anachronistic since Jeremiah lived long after Jonah. If our Jonah is the same one as in 2nd Kings 14:25, which thing seems implied by the connection of the names, then he must have prophesied before the end of the reign Jeroboam son of Joash (c. 782 BC) and possibly much earlier. However, by Jeremiah's time, Assyria was no longer the arch-enemy of Israel, rather Babylon was. While the actual dating of the book of Jonah is a matter of debate, it seems clear that the writer is identifying this Jonah with the Jonah of 2nd Kings 14:25, therefore regardless of when the book was written, the story itself is set in a time preceding Jeremiah, so the chronology problem remains.

⁶ Barak in Judges 4:8 might also be included among those resistant to receive the call of God on their lives due to being timid. Though he did not receive the call directly as these did.

⁷ Marcus includes Isaiah among the reluctant prophets (Marcus p133 / Isaiah 6:5) and he may be right depending on whether Isaiah 6:8 refers to the prophet himself or to someone else (i.e. the messiah – Jesus applies 6:10 to his teachings). “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” If Isaiah is speaking of himself, he doesn't seem very reluctant.

confidence in God's character. He flees because he knows God will make him successful,⁸ the other men doubted God could work through them.

Miles is right to point out that the humorous element in the opening of the book of Jonah – God's call to Jonah and his running away to Tarshish – only works because “parody cannot begin from any subject matter but that which requires no introduction” (Miles p205). In this sense the book relies on previously known *literature*.

However I believe the book of Jonah lends itself more to satire than to parody for it addresses Jewish life and attitudes more than their literature. Specifically attitudes towards their enemies that they expect God also to embrace, as well as their refusal to be willing to repent of their own sins and instead run away from God.

Marcus states, “the book displays all the formal characteristic features of a satire. There is a clearly defined target; the techniques of satire predominate in the work: preponderance of absurd, fantastic, or distorted elements; scores of ironies and incongruities, and many instances of ridicule and parody.”(Marcus p95). The target of the satire is of course Jonah himself, which as Marcus points out is only enhanced by his full name, which means ‘dove, son of faithfulness’ or ‘dove, faithful son’ (Marcus p96). The play on his name is further enhanced by the fact that the name Jonah and the name Nineveh share the exact same Hebrew letters (yud-vav-nun-hey).

Jonah's attitude is different from that of many of the other prophets, who largely mourn un-repentance and coming destruction, even though in the case of Nineveh, we do see Nahum saying, “All who hear news of you will clap their hands over you, for upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?” (Nahum 3:19b) But even Nahum

⁸ see also Miles (p206) who point out that “Jonah may think himself perfectly worthy of his prophetic call. He is simply perfectly determined not to accept it.”

seems to be warning the Ninevites rather than rejoicing to see them destroyed. Jonah on the other hand mourns when Nineveh actually repents and only takes joy in the idea of God destroying them. Instead of being glad at people turning from evil and being spared destruction, Jonah instead is concerned with his own comfort under the shade of the plant. Meanwhile prophets such as Isaiah are walking around in sackcloth (and later even naked! – 20:2) trying to convince people to repent; Ezekiel is forced to lie on his side for more than a year, cooking his food over dung (4:1ff); Jeremiah is thrown into a pit; and even the great Elijah flees for his life. I don't believe the author is trying to ridicule or make fun of the other prophets by his parodical or satirical representation of Jonah, but rather is making fun of Jonah himself.

The satire is further enhanced by the fact that any Israelite of the time would have thought the whole-hearted repentance of Nineveh and YHVH's forgiveness of them to be an absurd idea. The Ninevites not only repent and dramatically so; they also repent quickly. Notice that in 4:1-5 Jonah is still inside the city, which is a three days walk across (or around), and already he is complaining to God that the Ninevites repented and God already forgave them.

Interestingly, the only other mention of Jonah is in 2 Kings 14:25, where it says that his prophecy of good for Israel came true. This is also strangely unusual, for most prophecies towards Israel by other prophets were bad.

Word Plays

Word plays can be a big part of parody and of humor in general. The book of Jonah has several word plays including words that are spelled the same or similar and/or which sound similar, such as the 'decree' of the king not to 'taste' anything. Both the word

‘decree’ and the word ‘taste’ have the same three root letters in the same order.

Elsewhere, one word can be understood in two different ways⁹. For example the word ‘overthrown’ in Jonah’s prophecy against the city (3:4) could also be understood that Nineveh would be drastically changed (made the opposite of what it is). Thus Jonah’s prophecy did come true, but not the way Jonah expected, if we understand the word to refer to Nineveh’s drastic repentance. Marcus goes into a longer discussion on word plays (p139ff) and the reader is referred there. He includes discussions on the symmetry in the number of words used by Jonah and the LORD as well as the use of key words in the text that occur frequently. Word plays not only help with humor, but also show the skill of the writer.

Retelling Jonah as a Parody

If the book of Jonah is itself a parody, it is possible that it too is parodied.

While the Jonah story may parody other prophets, what is the episode of Jesus asleep in the bow of the boat during the storm: Mark 4:36ff: (also Matt 8:24ff)

Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How [is it] that you have no faith?" And

⁹ See Freud p49 for an interesting discussion on word plays.

they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Compare Jonah 1:4-16:

But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that [was] in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."... So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

Notice the similarities of the disciples and the captain waking up the one sleeping in the ship, yet the response is much different. Do we think any of the disciples had in mind to throw Jesus overboard? Probably not. Did the story of Jonah come to their minds?

Probably not at the time. Did the gospel writer intend for the story of Jonah to come to the mind of the reader? Probably so, due to the similarities of the stories and since the readers of the gospel would have likely known the story of Jonah well. Jesus, when awoken, rebukes them for their lack of faith, then he himself orders the winds and waves to be calm! The account demonstrates not only the divinity of Jesus, but also is a type of parody on the book of Jonah, though not strictly in a humorous sense, it does bring a smile to the face of the reader. This connection between Jesus and Jonah goes even

further in that it points not only to the divinity of Jesus but also points to the human sacrifice element – Jonah gives up his life to save others (the sailors), Jesus gives up His life to save others (mankind).¹⁰

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be remembered that the purpose of the story of Jonah is not primarily humor, but rather that the author uses the elements of irony, satire, parody, hyperbole, etc. in order to convey the message of God’s mercy. “...by making Jonah appear ridiculous, the author simultaneously makes Jonah’s ideas appear ridiculous” (Marcus p147). Thus God’s mercy is highlighted. Since the book was initially directed to an Israelite audience, one must conclude that the real message is one of an example to the Israelites – if there was hope for Nineveh when she repented, there is still hope for wicked Israel if she repents.¹¹ An anonymous author of a famous midrash states “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...” (Letter to the Hebrews 1:1). The book of Jonah is definitely one of those ‘various ways’! – using humor to convey God’s message.

Additionally, if the book of Jonah is indeed a satire of Jewish life and attitudes, then it is likely that the author would have used a contemporary enemy of the Jews in his satire. In other words, if the book were written in the late Babylonian or even in the Persian period, then one would expect the author to have used one of those nations or one

¹⁰ Elsewhere Jesus had said “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” - Matt 12:39ff, repeated in brief in 16:4 – notice 16:17 where he calls Peter Simon Bar Jonah this is after 14:28ff where Peter starts to walk on water.

¹¹ If Jonah here is the same as Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25, then it seems that Israel at the time was wicked, considering 2 Kings 14:23-24.

of their great cities in story. One would not expect him to use the city of Nineveh, which by the 6th or 5th century BC was ancient history. I believe this points to an earlier date for the story of Jonah, at least in its origin, and likely in its popular dispersion among the Jewish people. I do not agree with the idea that the fact that Nineveh was destroyed already, would help the humor for a 6th century or later reader, for this would run contrary to the point of the book. It would send the wrong message. It would be a bit like writing a story to encourage repentance by doing a parody of the Sodom and Gomorrah story. Such a hypothetical parody would have Sodom and Gomorrah repenting the first day Lot came to town, upon his encouragement for them not to sin.

Though to this point, Miles almost makes a strong argument that if the book was written in the 5th century, a parody based on Babylon would have been too close to recent Jewish experience, therefore the author chose an older enemy that was already defeated and not so recent.¹² In modern times the television series *Hogans Heroes* parodied Nazi Germany's prisoner of war camps. The show was extremely popular because Nazi Germany was defeated by Allied forces and the war had happened decades earlier. On the other hand, no one is making a parody of the events of September 11, 2001, at least no one in America.

One final point: Perhaps the book of Jonah was not intended to be humorous at all and in fact is simply a serious story. In such a case, the humor comes not from the story itself, but rather from analyzing the story! The story of Jonah can contain all real,

¹² Miles' argument would become stronger had he argued for a 6th century date rather than a 5th century date, since once the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, they themselves would have been a good subject for the parody. In a different vein, if the story is written during or after the Babylonian period, then one must consider the idea that the book is actually about Nebuchadnezzar's repentance, and Jewish feelings about that. Here the book of Daniel chapters 2 and 4 come to mind.

historical elements of a serious subject matter and still it can become humorous upon analyzing it. The humor helps the story become more memorable, and therefore even more effective.¹³

#3 – Humorous situations turned sour -

Certain potentially humorous situations in the Bible do not develop into actual humorous scenes. This is often due to the tragedy involved in the scene. And particularly a tragedy that happens not to the enemy but to those of your own kindred. For example, we read the story of Absalom son of King David who had long beautiful hair (2 Samuel 14:25ff). Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel and sought to overthrow his father's throne. When war broke out, this prideful and rebellious son was eventually caught by his hair in a tree so that "he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which was under him went on" (2nd Samuel 18:9). This scene is rather humorous and would have remained so if Joab, the captain of David's army, had obeyed king David's command and spared Absalom's life. Indeed the first person to find Absalom refuses to harm him, even if offered a reward. The scene could have remained humorous, if King David had arrived and found his son still alive though humiliated and still hanging in the tree. David could have reproved his rebellious son who was helplessly trapped by his good looks, suspended above the ground. Instead the king ends up weeping over his son's death, saying "O my son Absalom – my son, my son Absalom – if only I had died

¹³ By way of example, recently my friend drove to the mall with her trunk absolutely packed full of stuff, so full that if it were opened, stuff would go flying out making a mess. The mall security was asking all drivers to open their trunks for inspection upon entering the parking garage. My friend pulled up to the security guard and explained in all seriousness that if she opened the trunk it would "simply explode"! Though she obviously didn't mean to imply to the security guard that she had a bomb, and was eventually able to make that clear, a later analysis of her words 'simply explode' made us burst out in laughter. Perhaps this is the case with the story of Jonah – real events that when reflected upon and retold, contain humorous elements.

in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” (2nd Samuel 18:33). The text goes on to state, “And Joab was told, ‘Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.’ So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, ‘The king is grieved for his son.’ And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.” (2nd Samuel 19:1ff). It is easy to imagine the situation bringing joy instead of sadness if Absalom had simply been humiliated. The people would have mocked this usurper and would have rejoiced in their victory, and the king would have been glad his son was still alive; laughing in his heart at the way his foolish son was trapped. Indeed is it not the nature of the elders in society who are mocked to rejoice and laugh when those who mocked them are put to shame by their own pride?

Likewise, had Absalom instead been a Moabite, an Ammonite, Edomite or one of the other enemies of Israel, the story still would have remained somewhat humorous, even if he was killed. He would have been mocked as Eglon had been mocked by the writer of the book of Judges (3:15ff).

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