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MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH: THE STORY OF ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW'S SON IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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According to La Rochefoucauld (1950: 247), neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily. Therefore, if we want to examine death we need to do so indirectly, in the way that people view solar eclipses using a projection made through a pinhole onto a sheet of paper. This essay investigates the concept of death projected by 1 Kings 17 and other accounts of miraculous resuscitation. Viewed as a medical case history, Elijah's reviving of the widow's son raises difficult questions. Was the boy really dead or merely gravely ill? Scholars often answer such questions by claiming that ancient Israelites regarded death as "the weakest form of life" (Johnson 1957: 86) and "made no absolute distinction between disease and death" (Martin-Achard 1960: 60). In what follows, I will challenge such claims by comparing Elijah's actions to those of other biblical and ancient Greek healers, as well as to Mesopotamian and shamanic healing practices.

I will also ask why healers like Elijah actually *get into bed* with their patients. Ancient and modern examples suggest that the answer involves two key factors. The first is the kinship between the healer and the scapegoat. In the Hebrew Bible, bringing the dead back to life would seem to be God's prerogative.¹ Jehoram thinks so: "Am I God to kill and to bring to life?" (2 Kgs 5:7). The fate of Asclepius shows the danger; Zeus killed him with a lightning-bolt for such successful malpractice.² If successful healing can be a dangerous business, the same is true for failure to heal. The second factor is that the bedded healers in modern stories by Flaubert and Kafka display personality traits which can best be described as narcissistic. Both the Elijah narratives and Greek

¹ See Deut. 32:39, 1 Sam. 2:6, and Hos. 6:1-2.

² E.g., Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1019-24; Euripides, *Alceste* 122-29; see Edelstein and Edelstein 1945b: 46.

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sources suggest that this may also be the case for many ancient miracle-healers, and that narcissism is itself a defense against death.

I

Many strange and paradoxical things have been asserted about life and death. Euripides wonders “if life be death, and death be life?” (qtd. in Plato, *Gorgias* 492e-493a). “Your friend here is only mostly dead,” says Miracle Max in the film version of *The Princess Bride*.³ We shouldn’t be surprised at such peculiar-sounding statements. The “nature of the dead can only be grasped through images with contradictory traits,” says classicist Wilamowitz (1927: 193). And, he adds, this is not simply true for the ancient Greeks: “people of all periods—and therefore also today—stand equally helpless before the eternal riddle” of death (emphasis added). Thus, we who attempt to investigate biblical conceptions of death “today”—both as writers and as readers—must acknowledge at the start that we will interpret the data in accordance with our own assumptions, attitudes, and fears concerning death.

It is often claimed that denial of death has increased in the West in recent times. In Freud’s classic formulation, whatever we modern *Kulturmenschen* may say about accepting death, our actions show the unmistakable tendency to shove death to the side, to eliminate it from life, and to “hush it up” (*ihn totzuschweigen*; 1915: 341). According to scholars like Gorer (1965) and Ariès (1974), death came to be viewed as dirty or even “pornographic,” and then became “invisible” as hospitals replaced the home as the place where death occurred.⁴ Sociologists and social historians who dispute this reading of today’s Western culture argue that theories conflate the denial of death at the personal level with societal

³ According to the munchkin Coroner in the film version of *The Wizard of Oz*, one must distinguish between a person who is “only merely dead” and one who is “really most sincerely dead”—at least when the deceased is a wicked witch.

⁴ While Seale acknowledges that there has been a sequestration of mortality in modern times, he nevertheless contends that even on the personal level, a “full square and unflinching facing of death” characterizes modernity (1998: 53-54). Although Ariès still contends that “the invisible death continues to characterize the current attitude in most of the West, he concedes that death, having been “shown the door by society, ... is coming back in through the window” (1981: 560).

attitudes which are much more “death accepting” (Seale 1998: 52-55; 70; cf. Dollimore 1998: 120-27).⁵ However, on the most personal level of all, “our unconscious has as little room now as in the past for the idea of its own mortality” (Freud 1919: 255; cf. 1915: 341, 354). Nor do people generally enjoy blurring the boundary separating life and death,⁶ except through explorations of their relationship in narrative forms such as myths, scripture, poetry, and, of course, Gothic tales. We like to know which is which, and that the boundary is as sturdy and impermeable as the walls of Gilgamesh’s Uruk are supposed to be.

If death is an elusive object of study, so is the narrator of 1 Kings 17 elusive concerning the intent and result of Elijah’s actions, as well as the feelings and future of the revived boy. Is the narrative rhetorically designed to cast doubt on the effectiveness and necessity of Elijah’s actions, other than his appealing to Yahweh for help? Is the boy a mere prop needed to teach a lesson about the power of Yahweh’s prophet, or is he a prop because the narrator’s silence mirrors *Elijah’s* lack of interest in the child?

On a more general level, does this reticence create a vagueness which serves to blur, and thereby explore, the boundary separating life and death, as well as the relationship between doctor and patient? This last issue is central to the story of Elijah and the widow’s son, because of the ambiguity concerning the death of the child *and* the fate of his healer. In contrast, the boy revived by Elisha is unequivocally said to be dead, and 2 Kgs 8:1-6 hammers this fact home by repeating four times that Elisha is he who brought the boy back to life. The unambiguous sickness, death and burial of the healer Elisha (2 Kgs 13:14-21) also contrast sharply with the ascension of his mentor Elijah, although a new paradox arises when the dead Elisha’s bones unambiguously bring a dead man back to life. Finally, the fact that Elijah’s action is totally unprecedented increases the elusiveness of the story. No

⁵ Elias (1985: 12-16) also disagrees with Ariès, but for a different reason. He believes that Ariès’ selection of evidence is based on the preconceived “Romantic” notion that the past was better than the present. Elias agrees that death was spoken of more openly and frequently in the past, but not that people died more serenely and calmly. Elias also criticizes Ariès for failing to see that changing attitudes towards death are part of a larger “civilizing process,” which includes a transition from “highly institutionalized, collective [immortality] fantasies” to “individual, relatively private immortality-fantasies” (1985: 36-37 n. 9).

⁶ Thus, one biblical scholar is so troubled by Elijah’s bringing a dead child back to life that he calls it an “immoral” activity (Overholt 1996: 55).

report of prophetic activity prior to this episode could have prepared readers for *this*. By the time we encounter the life-giving activity of Elisha's bones in 2 Kings 13, we are well-prepared for future tales of prophetic resuscitation, but there are none.

1 Kings 17 is not the only resuscitation story which exhibits no interest in what the returnees might have to say about their experiences, or how they viewed being alive again. The same is true of the boy revived by Elisha and the man revived by his bones, as well as most stories of resuscitation in the NT. Even when the Septuagint version of 1 Kings 17, Luke 7:15, and other stories⁷ report that the revived person spoke, readers are not told what they said. Even in the case of the Shunammite's son, whom we encounter years later with his mother in 2 Kings 8, the child is not described as doing anything; he just stands there in silence,⁸ like Alcestis, when she first returns as a *deuteropotmos*, a "second-fated one."⁹ It is also remarkable that readers are not given any information about how long the revived persons went on to live, what they did during their new lives, or how others viewed and treated them. That such omissions were noticed and cared about is obvious from later attempts to fill in the blanks, such as the tradition that the widow's son turned out to be the prophet Jonah, that the man revived by Elisha's bones married the prophetess Huldah, and that Lazarus became the first bishop of Marseilles!¹⁰ These stories also testify to readers' desire to view the returnees as "really alive," perhaps because they had turned out not to be "really dead," that is, *irreversibly* dead.

Within the textual world of 1 Kings 17, both the widow and Elijah apparently believe that the boy has died.¹¹ Ben Sira also has

⁷ Including the LXX version of 1 Kgs 17:22 [ἀνεβόησε τὰ παιδάριον] and Philostratus' report about Apollonius of Tyana (Conybeare 1948: 459).

⁸ Even Lazarus, whom we are told is present at a meal with Jesus and his sisters after he emerged from his tomb, is not reported as saying or doing anything (John 12:1-2). Cf. Collins: "[Lazarus] never makes an explicit profession of faith in Jesus, nor does he ever speak. The gospel shows no particular interest in his person or his personal history" (1992: 265), in spite of the fact that he is said to a friend of Jesus (11:11) and loved by him (11:3, 5, 36).

⁹ Euripides, *Alc.* 1143-48. The returned Alcestis *will* speak, however, on the third day following her return, after "she has been 'deconsecrated' (*aphagnistetai*) to the underworld gods" (Garland 2001: 47). However, we are not allowed to hear what she might have to say, because the play ends just after her return.

¹⁰ For Jonah, see, e. g., *j Sukk.* 5, 55a and Ginzberg 1969: 6.318; for Shallum, Huldah's husband (2 Kgs 22:14), see Ginzberg 1969: 4.246; for the Lazarus legend, see Siebald 1992: 439.

no doubt that the child was dead: "You [Elijah] raised a corpse from death and from Hades, by the word of the Most High" (48:5, NRSV). Among modern commentators, however, there is no consensus concerning either the boy's condition or Elijah's deed. Some take it for granted that the boy died, while others insist that he did not. In fact, Cogan (2000: 428) and Brichto (1992: 126) both point to the same phrase ("until he had [to the point of] no breath left in him"; *עד אשר לא יתחיה בו נשמה* [v. 17]) to support opposite conclusions. According to Nelson, "there was no sharp line between life and death in OT thought and corpses were not considered to be 'totally' dead for a couple of days" (1987: 111). As evidence, both he and Jones (1984: 309) cite the Lazarus story (John 11:6, 17) rather than OT texts. Pidoux goes further, asserting that "death is *not* the antithesis, the opposite of life."¹²

In one sense, Montgomery and Gehman (1951: 296) make an even more wide sweeping generalization when they state that antiquity as a whole recognized that "the fact of death was not certain until after a certain delay." At the same time, this is claiming much less than the others. There is ample evidence from the ancient world that seemingly dead people might merely be in a state of coma or reversible illness, making a delay in burial prudent. For example, this is why Plato recommends the third day after death for burial (*Laws* 959a).¹³

For scholars like Martin-Achard and Pidoux, there is much more at stake than the fear of premature burial.¹⁴ For them, the reason

¹¹ However, when the boy is resuscitated, the narrator does not report what specific signs of life may have been evident. We are merely told that the boy's *nephesh* returned and that he lived. Elijah then says to the woman: "See, your son lives" (v. 23), but we are not told what signs of life she may be seeing. This is in sharp contrast to the story of Elisha's reviving of the Shunammite's son, in which specific signs of life are given: warming, sneezing, and opening of the eyes (2 Kgs 4:34-35). Specific indicators of *death* are also mentioned in the later story, namely, the absence of voice, lack of attentive response (*קשב*) and inability to awaken (4:31). The absence of these three qualities also characterizes the impotent god Baal, when Elijah harasses the god's prophets in 1 Kgs 18:26-29.

¹² For Pidoux, death "is conceived of ... as a sleep from which one may awake" (qtd. in Martin-Achard 1960: 17). Martin-Achard (1960: 60) agrees that Elijah's resurrection of the boy "does no more than 'revive sleeping powers'."

¹³ Cf. *Šemahot* (Tractate "Mourning") 8.1: "One may go out to the cemetery to visit the dead up to thirty days [variant: three], without fear that this smacks of the ways of the Amorite. For it happened that a man was inspected after thirty days, and he went on to live twenty-five years; still another went on to have five children and died later" (Zlotnick 1966: 57).

¹⁴ On the rise in fear of premature burial in modern times, see Iserson 1994: 24-39 and Ariès, 1981: 397-99.

that Elijah was able to revive the boy was *not* because child wasn't really dead, but because *being really dead isn't really being dead*. That is, they do not concede that death is irreversible, and it is irreversibility which modern physicians consider to be the ultimate indicator of death (Iserson 1994: 13), although medical resuscitation has complicated the concept of irreversibility (Corr 1997: 233-34). As far as the death of the individual *as a person* is concerned, ancients and moderns have both focused on the cessation of the heartbeat and breathing, although for moderns, the cessation of brain activity has become equally crucial (see, e.g., Iserson 1994: 14-18, 609-11). When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh notes that his friend is now "dark" or "gloomy," (*ta-'a-ad-ram-ma*), presumably meaning unconscious (VIII 55; Parpola 1997: 100). He realizes that Enkidu does not hear him, and that his heart beats no longer. Yet he refuses to surrender the body to burial for seven nights, "until a maggot dropped from his nostril" (X. 60; George 1999: 78). Only then does he acknowledge that his death is irreversible, and that he too has the same fate in store for him.

For Gilgamesh, it is the processes of decay, infestation, and putrefaction which ultimately mark the finality of death. The absence of such definite signs in 1 Kings 17 allows Kittel (cited in Martin-Achard 1960: 60) to suggest that the widow may have thought that her son was "really dead" when he was actually still dying. In other words, the widow might have made a medical mistake. In contrast, De Vries (1985: 222) believes that the widow and Elijah make a *theological* mistake when they assume that the boy is dead. They are expressing "bad theology to the effect that Yahweh might actually kill little boys." There is no need to cite the first-born of Egypt and Job's children in order to cast doubt on De Vries' view. A bit earlier in his commentary, De Vries (1985: 177) himself had referred to Yahweh "striking down" Jeroboam's son. One might object that it was Jeroboam's sinning which *caused* the boy to die, not Yahweh. Nevertheless, Yahweh is the one who chooses and inflicts the penalty, which is exactly what the widow herself is saying in 1 Kgs 17:18.

II

There is also a wide variety of opinion about the method used by Elijah to revive the boy. Some scholars believe that he is practic-

ing “contactual magic,”¹⁵ “symbolically transferring his life-force” to the boy (Cogan 2000: 429), or his energy, in a “*Synanachrosis-Ritus*” (Stipp 1999: 64). Others claim that Elijah is “acting like a witch-doctor” (Jones 1984: 308) or “shaman” (Overholt 1996: 37; cf. 29) who “seems to possess the power of bringing the soul back into the body of the departed” (Martin-Achard 1960: 58).

1 Kings 17 provides no *explicit* evidence that Elijah transferred his life-force or energy into the boy *or* that he extracted a pathogenic influence from him.¹⁶ Did he return the boy’s “soul” to him? We are told that the boy had no breath (נשמה) left in him (v. 17) and that his נפש returned into his body, and he lived (v. 22). Can we really stretch the meaning of the word נפש here to mean “soul” in the sense that shamans return dead individuals’ “souls” to them? Perhaps we can gain clarity by focusing for a moment on the fact that Elijah puts the child in the prophet’s own bed and then joins him there, “measuring himself” upon the child three times (v. 21). In his discussion of the Elijah story, Overholt (1996: 30-32; 62 n. 15) cites several cases from different cultures in which shamans lie down in bed with the person they are attempting to heal or revive. However, these are all explained in terms of the shaman returning the soul, and do not involve the healer and patient lying together in the *healer’s* bed.

These are not the only cases in which a healer, or healing agent, is placed in bed next to a patient. Examples can be found both in ancient Mesopotamia and in modern European literature. In

¹⁵ J. Gray 1970: 382; cf. Beck 1999: 164, 172; Jones 1984: 308.

¹⁶ In general, there is a fundamental difference between healing which puts something *into* the patient (the healer’s energy or the patient’s lost soul) and that which takes something *out* (a demon or other pathogenic influence). De Heusch has highlighted this distinction most clearly. In his schema, “Shamanism A” involves return of the soul and “Shamanism B” involves the extraction of a presence that is alien to the subject. Similarly, “Possession A” involves injection of a new soul and “Possession B” involves extraction of a soul that is alien to the subject (1981: 158; cf. Lewis 1996: 109, 153, 156). However, his schema does not provide a place for healing by the simple transfer of power. It cannot account for the paradoxically reviving effect of the dead Elisha’s bones on another corpse. Nor does it allow one to classify Jesus’ healing of the hemorrhaging woman, where either the narrator (in Mark) or Jesus himself (in Luke) explicitly reports that when the woman took the initiative to touch Jesus (in Luke) or his clothes, (in Mark and Matthew) power went forth from him, while the woman immediately felt in her body that she was healed (Mark 5:29) and her hemorrhage immediately stopped (Luke 8:44). The stories do not make it clear whether Jesus’ power *extended* to the woman or was *transferred*, which raises the possibility that Jesus’ power was “drained” from him by the woman.

Mesopotamia it is a substitute victim, *not* the doctor, that lies in bed next to the sick person. The victim is usually a young goat, which has been dressed in the sick person's clothes, sandals, and turban, "made up" with eye-black and oil on its head.¹⁷ Eventually, the throats of both are cut simultaneously, the human with a wood dagger, and the goat with a bronze dagger. The goat is then treated like a dead human and buried.¹⁸

In one sense, the shaman must "identify" with the ill person in a way which is reminiscent of the Mesopotamian rituals. For example, Frazer relates that "a Dyak medicine-man ... will lie down and pretend to be dead. He is accordingly treated like a corpse, is bound up in mats, taken out of the house, and deposited on the ground. After about an hour the other medicine-men loose the pretended dead man and bring him to life; as he recovers, the sick person is supposed to recover too" (Frazer 1994: 30; cf. 562ff). According to Eliade (1964: 236), the reason that the shaman is able to take evil spirits into his own body, torture, and expel them "is because he shares their nature," because he too is free to leave his body. In some cultures, Eliade observes, the shaman "struggles and suffers more than the patient himself" (229; cf. Frazer 1994: 30). In Girard's view (1977: 286-87), shamans also share the experience of playing the victim role when they undergo their grueling initiation. Thus, a spirit-mastering shaman bears resemblance both to the spirit afflicting the patient and to the patient being afflicted.

An anecdote from thirteenth-century France shows how literally the healer may be cast into the role of victim. Bloch (1973: 42) notes that during this period, priests were sometimes viewed

¹⁷ See Saggs 1968: 295-96; Bottéro 1992: 143; Rouillard and Tropper 1987: 347-48. Later, the sick person and the goat also lie down on the ground together outside.

¹⁸ Opinion differs about whether the goat is made to wear the sick person's clothes as an attempt to deceive the spirits who have made the person sick. Thus, Saggs (1968: 298) believes that deception is involved, while Bottéro (1992: 143) thinks the purpose is simply "to enable the gods to realize their wish, ... on another 'basis' as close as possible to the one they originally had in mind, even if it was materially different." In their analysis of 1 Sam. 19:13-16 in terms of Mesopotamian healing rituals, Rouillard and Tropper acknowledge the element of deception in the case of "real substitution" we now find in Michal's actions (1987: 350). However, they argue it is only on the "primitive level," that is, in relation to rituals in which a figurine is placed in bed in contact with the sick person, that the process described in 1 Sam. 19 becomes fully coherent and possesses fully verisimilitude (1987: 347-50).

as being similar to magicians, and therefore viewed ambivalently. In one instance, “an epidemic broke out in a certain village, and to put an end to it, the villagers could think of nothing better than to sacrifice their *curé*. One day, when he was wearing his robes and conducting a funeral, they threw him headlong into the grave alongside the corpse.” Apart from sounding like a bizarre reversal of the *corpse* being thrown into Elisha’s grave, there is no explicit evidence that either Elijah or Elisha was in danger of being made the victim of their community. It is true that both the widow and the Shunammite display some ambivalence toward the prophets, especially when they blame them for the death of their sons (1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 4:28). Nevertheless, this hardly implies that the roles of healer and scapegoat are reversible, as does the story of the *curé*.

III

There is, however, one modern tale of a would-be healer who both ends up in bed with his patient *and* who views himself as the victim of his community. This is Kafka’s country doctor, who makes an emergency “house call” to a neighboring village on a snowy winter night, leaving behind his long-ignored maid-servant in the hands of a bestial groom who is about to rape her. Pitying himself for the “sacrifice” he has made, this self-absorbed healer muses that others desire the impossible from him because old beliefs have been lost, leaving the parson with nothing to do, and making medicine the new religion. Although he insists that he is not a world-reformer, he also believes that his community is “misusing him for sacred purposes” (1970: 127). When he accuses the whole district of torturing him (“*martert mich der ganze Bezirk*”; 1970: 126), he is, in effect, viewing himself as a quasi-religious scapegoat for the medical profession, a fate which he claims to accept. The fact that the doctor narrates his own story, mostly in the present tense, helps to communicate his narcissistic self-absorption, his lack of concern for others (at the same time that he is insisting on his caring for others rather than his own needs), and his tendency to project his assumptions onto the world (see n. 19, below), which we see only through his eyes. We have only his word for the fact that he is the victim of his patients, the “agile pack of riff-raff” (1970: 128) who allegedly refuse to lift a finger to help him.

The doctor remains passively detached even when his patient's family and the village elders undress him, take him by the head and feet, and put him into bed with the sick child, on the side of the boy's hideous worm-infested open wound—the same wound the doctor had initially been unable to see, thanks to his assumption that the boy was healthy.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the school chorus and teacher stand before the house, singing "Take his clothes off, then he will heal (or save; *heilen*), and if he doesn't heal, then kill him! It's only a doctor, only a doctor!" (1970: 127).²⁰ Finally, the doctor escapes out a window, still naked, with his wagon pulled by "unearthly horses," fearing that he will never come back home. Behind him he hears the children singing, "Be joyful, you patients, the doctor has been put in bed beside you!" (1970: 128)²¹ By the end of the story, readers cannot be certain whether the boy has died or whether the doctor ever will. However, they *can* rest assured that *this* healer feels himself to be near kin to the *curé* whose community threw him into the grave of those whom he could not heal.²²

Another modern story which closely echoes the healing methods of Elijah and Elisha is Flaubert's "*La Légende de St. Julien L'Hospitalier*."²³ Here the healer is an elderly parricide who had

¹⁹ When the doctor lays his head on the boy's chest, it "confirms what he knows" (*es bestätigt sich, was ich weiss*; 1970: 126), namely, that the boy is healthy, with nothing more wrong than slightly poor circulation!

²⁰ According to Hanlin (1978: 337), the doctor is *not* attempting to transfer his life force or spirit to the patient. Rather, "the action described might reflect superstitious ritual in the attempt to transfer the patient's illness to the healthy doctor."

²¹ "*Freuet Euch, Ihr Patienten, der Arzt ist Euch ins Bett gelegt!*" This lyric simultaneously recalls Luther's hymn "*Nun freut euch, Christen, insgemein*" (Hanlin 1978: 339) and the traditional secular song "*Freut euch des Lebens*" (Marson and Leopold 1964: 157).

²² Kafka was familiar with Polish Jewish legends which recount healings by wonder-working rabbis. Some of these contain elements which resemble "Ein Landarzt." In one tale, the Polish king's personal physician also echoes Jehoram's question in 2 Kgs 5:7 when he sees a sick man's condition and exclaims, "*Bin ich denn ein Gott ... daß ich einen Toten lebendig machen soll?*" (Eliasberg 1916: 110). On the possible influence of these legends on Kafka's work, see the discussions in Binder (1966: 53-55) and Robertson (1985: 182). Among Kafka scholars who have noted the resemblance between 1 Kgs 17:17-24 and "Ein Landarzt" are Barzel (1975: 92-3) and Musurillo (1958: 335). Spann (1976: 128) goes so far as to assert that even the village elders within the world of the story have "the miracle cure of the prophets Elijah and Elisha in mind ..."

²³ Kafka scholars who have cited Flaubert's story in connection with "Ein Landarzt" (usually to contrast the success of Julien and the failure of Kafka's

spent his early life killing as many animals as he could and is now a hermit operating a primitive ferry across a raging river. In effect, he has driven himself into the wilderness like a guilt-loaded goat. One stormy night he conveys a repulsive leper across the river and takes him into his hut. The leper's face is like a "plaster mask"; in place of a nose he has a hole "like a skeleton" (1953: 77). The leper asks Julien to feed him, give him wine, place him in Julien's bed, and then warm him by lying naked beside him. The details recall Elisha's procedure in 2 Kgs 4:32-35 in particular: "Julien lay spread out (*s'étala*) entirely upon him mouth *against* (*contre*) mouth, chest *upon* (*sur*) chest" (1953: 78).²⁴ In this way, Julien has intimate contact with a sick man who resembles an already-putrified corpse more than a living person. His appearance blurs the distinction between life and death. Moreover, he is not even a real "man." The distinction between human and divine is blurred as well. Once he is embraced by Julien, the leper shows himself to be Jesus, the ultimate healer and the ultimate sacrificial victim.

In this scene Julien is the one who is initially in the role of healer. Julien's own "sickness" is spiritual in nature, infected as he is with a terrible blood-guilt. In playing the healer, Julien does not transfer his power to the leper as Jesus does to the hemorrhaging woman. He does not return Jesus' soul to him; if anything, Jesus returns Julien's soul to him. And unlike the biblical Jesus—but like Elijah—Julien is not said to feel any compassion for his patient. Nevertheless, Julien is "rewarded" with being translated to heaven as was Elijah, although in Julien's case he is carried in a faint by Jesus, not taken by Yahweh in a storm. In the end, there is no "real" irreversible death for either Jesus or Julien, the sacrificed and the sacrificer, the victim or the former victimizer. Readers are not told whether Julien is rewarded because he passively obeyed the order to come into intimate contact with death, be-

doctor rather than to discuss their similarity) include R. Gray (1973: 138-39) and Robertson (1985: 181).

²⁴ Sartre (1971: 2114) points out that Flaubert's choice of the verb "*s'étaler*" conveys a sense of "passive activity" as Julien "weighs" (*pèse*) on the decayed body of the leper. Grimaud (1982a: 266) notes that the leper has asked Julien to lie close to him, though *not* "on top" of him, as Julien decides to do. In the thirteenth century prose life of St. Julien, the leper says that he must lie with the saint's *wife* in order to get warm. However, just as she is about to lie down she discovers that the leper has disappeared. The leper then speaks to her from outside. See Bart and Cook 1977: 25, 135-37.

cause he faced what seems most loathsome (if not impure), because he is putting another's good ahead of his own, or merely because he is the star of his own narcissistic fantasy.

The last suggestion might seem far-fetched, until we take into account what the narrator tells us about Julien's upbringing and his personality as an adult. Shortly after Julien's birth, each of his parents receives a vision of uncertain origin telling of their son's future glory (1953: 53-4).²⁵ Viewing Julien as someone "marked out by God," they treated the baby with "infinite consideration." Three nurses rock him in his little bed. In his expensive clothes and down-filled bed, he looks like "*un petit Jesus*" (1953: 54).²⁶ In effect, Julien's parents raise their son in the manner Freud describes for "His Majesty the Baby":

[Affectionate parents] are under a compulsion to ascribe every kind of perfection to the child ... [The child] shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as dominant in life. Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will, shall not apply to the child; the laws of nature and of society shall come to a halt before him; he shall once more really be the center and core of creation. 'His Majesty the Baby', as we once imagined ourselves" (1914: 157-58).

The parents' purpose is to rediscover their lost narcissism through their child. His Majesty the Baby will fulfill the parental wish-dream to become a hero in place of the father. The ultimate benefit of this procedure involves the transcendence of death: "the most ticklish point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the self"²⁷ which is hard pressed by reality, achieves security by

²⁵ Barnes (1981: 331) describes the behavior of Julien's parents in entirely positive terms, using language reminiscent of Freud's account of His Majesty the Baby: "the son is the center of existence for the gentle, adoring pair." The negative side of such narcissistic parenting is noted by Berg (1982: 44): "Julien's family situation one of exaggerated dependence and weakness, imposed by rigid restraint."

²⁶ Within the world of the story this comparison is prophetic, setting up a comparison and contrast between the later Julien and the leper, whose bearing had something "like the majesty of a king" (1953: 77). The majestic leper in the story turns out to be Jesus, he who must reign until death, the last enemy, is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:25-26). While Julien the "little Jesus" grows up to kill his father, the biblical Jesus grows up to be killed according to his father's plan.

²⁷ German: *das Ich*. According to Yorke (1991: 36), "in the early papers, the 'ego,' though often ill-defined, usually stands for the 'self.'" Strachey (1960: xiv n. 1) notes that he has translated "*das Ich*" as "the self" in a few places in the *Standard Edition*, and points to a sentence in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* in which Freud himself explicitly equates the self and "*das Ich*": The sentence reads: "Normally nothing is more certain to us than the feeling of our self, of our own 'I' /

taking refuge in the child" (1914: 158). And indeed, the parents' later behavior implies that their whole existence was focused on Julien, and that their lives were empty without him.²⁸

If Julien's parents brought up their only child in a way that allowed them to recover their lost narcissism and thereby gain immortality, their pampered son grows up obsessed by death and mortality. In this respect, and in others, Julien shows definite signs of narcissism, both during his youth devoted to slaughtering animals and after he has slaughtered his parents in his own bed, mistaking them for his wife lying with another man. This double murder had been prophesied by a great stag that Julien was once in the process of killing, together with its family. As a hunter, Julien had engaged in orgies of killing, never wearying of slaughter: "All he knew was the fact of his own existence, and everything was happening as easily as in a dream" (1953: 60). The hope of causing such carnage made him "choke with pleasure."²⁹ Later, when he has given up hunting in fear of accidentally killing his parents, his dreams pervert biblical stories into a series of bloody narcissistic fantasies. He would see himself "like our forefather Adam" in Paradise, among all the animals, putting them to death. Or else they would file by two by two as onto Noah's ark and he would kill them all (1953: 66). In the paradise of Genesis 2, death does not yet exist. This inverted Adam kills all the animals instead of naming them (Gen. 2:19). Considering that Adam is alone (2:18) with the animals prior to Eve's creation, an Adam who exterminated all the animals would be totally and utterly alone. In the Bible, it is of course Yahweh himself who kills all the animals, through the Flood. In that sense, Julien's dreams of Eden and the Flood have him playing the role of God.

Eventually Julien takes up hunting again, and, as prophesied, kills his parents (1953: 72). After the parricide, he tells his story to strangers "in a spirit of humility" and all run away. Rejected everywhere, he keeps away from people. Julien does feel a need

ego" (*Normalerweise ist uns nichts gesicherter als das Gefühl unseres Selbst, unseres eigenen Ichs*) [Freud 1953: 66]).

²⁸ After Julien leaves home to avoid fulfilling a prophecy of killing his parents, they give up everything else in their lives, including all their vast wealth, in order to search for their son. They live through their child, yet their child is the one who violently ends their lives.

²⁹ Grimaud (1982b: 220) suggests that Julien's acts of destructive rage should not be viewed as the result of jealousy and hatred of the parents, "but as *narcissistic* rage, that is, as rage due to a feeling of injury to the self."

to share the existence of others, but disdains their company because he finds their faces to be “beastlike” and their conversation to be “trivial chatter” (1953: 74). Later on, the idea of using his remaining life to serve others “occur[s] to him” (Krailsheimer 1991: 66) as he examines an old abandoned boat—hardly a description of a heartfelt or spiritual choice of vocation. Julien chooses to practice his vocation of ferryman in barren plains, along a river which no one had dared to cross in a long time. In all these ways, Julien’s behavior seems designed to repel and avoid others so that he might be left alone. To be utterly alone is to be special, unique, and, in a sense, to be above ordinary human life. And, as I will discuss below in connection with Elijah, it is also a narcissistic fantasy.

IV

In general, ancient resuscitation stories display little interest in what the healers themselves experienced during their acts of healing, in the sense that anthropologists relate what shamans report about their spirit journeys. To this extent, the stories do not seem to be focusing on exploring (or even blurring) the boundary between life and death or on giving us a glimpse into the nature of life after death. If that were the case, we would have healers who were shamanic versions of Gilgamesh, and patients who were all as talkative as Plato’s returnee Er, who revived after being dead for twelve days without putrifying (*Rep.* 614b-621b).

Nevertheless, these narratives do show interest in the personalities of the healers. Earlier I mentioned Asclepius, the Greek healer whose ability to revive the dead³⁰ leads to his own death from a lightning bolt hurled by Zeus. If Asclepius arrogated a divine prerogative by reviving the dead, was his *intention* to be viewed as a god? The Christian writer Cyrillus is quite suspicious of Asclepius’ motives. He not only accuses Asclepius of “being extraordinarily a slave to shameful gain,” but also of becoming “exalted” and “pompous” because of his art. To make matters worse, exclaims

³⁰ Others do not accept that Asclepius has the ability to revive the dead. According to Diodorus, Asclepius “advanced so far in reputation as to cure many of the sick who had been despaired of ... and for this reason he seemed to revive again many who had died” (Edelstein and Edelstein 1945a: 10).

Cyrrillus, “he even called himself a god and foolishly boasted that he could raise people from the dead.”³¹

Cyrrillus’ charges recall Empedocles, who viewed himself as traveling as an immortal god (Fr. 102 [112] 4; Wright 1981: 134) and claimed to be able to teach someone to “lead from Hades the life-force (μένοϛ) of a dead man” (Fr. 101 [111]. 9; Wright 1981: 133). According to Diogenes Laertius (60, 61, 67; Wright 1981: 12-13), Empedocles revived a woman who had been dead for thirty days without sign of breathing or pulse (ἄπνοϛ καὶ ἄσφυκτοϛ). Far from wanting to keep his miraculous act a secret, Empedocles revealed the facts of the case to his pupil Pausanias, and he became famous among the people for having sent a dead woman away alive. In this sense, Pausanias serves the same function as Elisha’s servant Gehazi in 2 Kings 8, when he tells Jehoram about his master’s “great deeds” (הַגְּדֹלֹת; v. 4), specifically, his reviving of the widow’s son.³² Empedocles himself proudly declares that people “follow me in countless numbers ... some seeking prophecies, others ... ask to hear the word of healing for all kinds of illnesses” (Fr. 102 [112]; Wright 1981: 264).³³ Gregory of Nazianus, for one, is not impressed. He charges that Empedocles (and others like Aristeas of Proconnesus³⁴) themselves suffer from a “dis-

³¹ *Contra Julianum*, VI, 805-808; Edelstein and Edelstein 1945a: 15-16. The Edelsteins point out that Cyrrillus is apparently the only writer to say that Asclepius proclaimed himself a god during his lifetime (1945b: 91 n. 2).

³² Later in the chapter, we learn that Elisha enjoys an international reputation as a healer, when the sick king Ben-Hadad hears that “the man of God” (v. 7) is in town; it isn’t even necessary to identify Elisha by name. In contrast, unlike some shamans, Elijah does not seem concerned with playing for an audience in 1 Kings 17, and there is no mention of the prophet’s reputation as a miracle working healer playing a role in later events. Apart from the story of the widow’s son, none of the Elijah narratives shows Elijah acting as a healer. The absence of other acts of resuscitation by Elijah certainly attracted the notice of the rabbis. According to one midrash, the reason that Elijah resurrected the hostess’s boy instead of his own dead parents was to show the importance of gratitude for hospitality. (*Sh. Rab.* 4.8; Ginzberg 1969: 6.318 n. 11).

³³ Rohde (1966: 2.378) seems convinced by Empedocles’ self-promotion. He describes Empedocles “as a unique and unparalleled being, a self-confident personality of the greatest force and weight [who] impressed himself masterfully both as mystic and politician upon ... his contemporaries.”

³⁴ Like Empedocles and Elijah, in some traditions Aristeas is also said to have been translated. See Bolton (1962: 125). For a detailed analysis of 2 Kings 2 and texts reporting the translations of Aristeas and a number of other Greek and Near Eastern personages, see my paper entitled “Translating Death: Elijah’s Ascension in Comparative Perspective,” presented at the 2003 international meeting of the SBL in Cambridge, UK.

ease,” namely, “the same disease of self-importance” (ὕπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς νόσου καὶ Φιλαυτίας; Bolton, 1962: 213; cf. 123-24).

In addition, some legends suggest that in his departure Empedocles “did not have to suffer death; he had vanished, ‘translated’ body and soul together” (Rohde 1966: 2.379; cf. Wright 1981: 15-16).³⁵ It is difficult not to think of Elijah, who also brought the dead to life and did not die himself in the normal sense. Heraclides Ponticus reports that after an initial search, Pausanias organized a second search for Empedocles on his subsequent disappearance (Diog. Laert. 8.68; Hicks 1925: 383). However, he later told the people not to bother looking for Empedocles. While this recalls Elisha’s words to the sons of the prophets (see 2 Kgs 2:15-18), Pausanias says specifically *why* they should not bother. It is because things beyond expectation had happened to Empedocles, and that they must sacrifice to him since he was now a god (Diog. Laert. VIII 68-69; Hicks 1925: 383).³⁶ This is one thing which Elisha did *not* say to the sons of the prophets after Elijah’s disappearance.

V

Does Elijah have the kind of self-important and self-promoting personality attributed to healers like Empedocles and Asclepius? Does he exhibit the narcissism of Flaubert’s and Kafka’s healers?³⁷ Like Julien and the country doctor, Elijah is portrayed as a “round”

³⁵ In one tradition, the healer Apollonius of Tyana was also translated (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*, 8.30; Conybeare 1950: 401).

³⁶ According to Berossos, a vain search was also made for Xisouthros after his disappearance, and then a voice from the air told the searchers that Xisouthros, his family, and the steersman had gone to the dwelling place of the gods (Verbrugghe and Wickersham 1996: 50).

³⁷ When I presented a truncated version of this paper at the 2002 SBL meeting in Toronto, Prof. Diana Edelman asked whether physicians need to be narcissistic in order to carry out their tasks, which often involve matters of life and death. In one recent study, researchers were “struck by the prevalence of narcissistic traits among leaders of the [medical] profession” (Lowe, et al. 2001: 406-407), but go on to ask: “if we reject the narcissists, do we lose valuable future leaders who through their own egotism try new ideas and procedures that others do not dare?” (2001: 407). This leads to the question whether biblical prophet-healers like Elijah and Elisha also require a bit of narcissism in order to accomplish their mission. On narcissistic traits in American male surgeons in particular, see Cassell 1991: 33-59.

character, that is, a character which is “capable of surprising in a convincing way” (Forster 1927: 118).³⁸ It is at Horeb that we can learn most about Elijah’s surprising personality and Yahweh’s opinion of him. The majority of recent commentators on 1 Kings 19 have no doubts at all about the prophet’s personality traits. They echo one another in describing Elijah as being “plagued by his own ego and exaggerated importance,” displaying “arrogance” and “hubris,” or having a “messianic complex.”³⁹ Robinson goes so far as to call Elijah a “tetchy and arrogant prima donna of a prophet” (1991: 535). Similar appraisals were made by some of the rabbis, who accuse Elijah of overidentifying with Yahweh, or, at least, with *his* image of Yahweh.⁴⁰ Finally, several rabbinic sources assert that even though God consoled the prophet and granted him a theophany in spite of his complaints (1 Kgs 19:11-12), Elijah remained in the same bad mood even after God waited for three hours, hoping that the prophet would calm down and seek mercy for Israel (e.g., *Tanna Debe Eliyyahu*, Zuta 8, 186; Braude and Kapstein 1981: 397; cf. Wiener 1978: 49)!

A full discussion of all the textual cues in 1 Kings 19 which might have led these commentators to make such definite—and negative—judgments about Elijah’s narcissistic personality is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴¹ Certainly Elijah’s repeated insistence on being the only prophet left is among these cues (1 Kgs 19:10, 14;

³⁸ Forster’s categorization of “flat” and “round” characters has been refined and expanded by critics such as Chatman (1978: 131-34) and Hochman (1985: 42-49).

³⁹ Gregory 1990: 102-103, 124; Olley 1998: 48; cf. Walsh 1996: 273; Robinson 1991: 528.

⁴⁰ For example, Elijah is accused of slandering God’s servants, the children of Israel. Citing 1 Kgs 19:14, God is portrayed as chiding Elijah: “Is it My covenant or thy covenant? ... My altars or thy altars?” ... “They are My prophets; what concern is it of thine?” (*Cant. Rab.* I. 6. 1; M. Simon 1939: 56). In rabbinic times, the rain-producing wonder-working Honi (see *b. Ta’an.* 19a-23a) was probably viewed “as a type of Elijah” (Urbach 1987: 574), and he too is often portrayed as a “special ... spoiled child in the heavenly household” (Neusner 1981: 318).

⁴¹ Although none of these scholars uses the term, their descriptions strongly suggest that the character Elijah has a narcissistic personality, although “narcissism” as a pathology is *not* synonymous with extreme self-love. Rather, it should be equated with “painful and chronic shortage of self-love and endless efforts to substitute love with external admiration” (Šrakic’, 1990: 192). For the various senses in which the term “narcissism” has been understood and used, see Lasine 2001: 6 n. 8 and *passim*. A detailed discussion of textual (and intertextual) cues related to Elijah’s personality in the Horeb episode is included in a paper entitled “‘Psychologizing Elijah’: Prophecy and Personality in 1 Kings 19,” which I will present at the 2004 Central States SBL meeting in St. Louis.

cf. 18:22), in light of the fact that readers have been made well aware that this is not the case (see 1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 19:18; cf. 20:13, 28, 35-42; 22:6-28). Nor does the text support all the self-justifying charges which Elijah lays upon his people when he complains to Yahweh at Horeb, although some commentators have made valiant attempts to corroborate Elijah's accusations.⁴² However, the cue which most strongly invites readers to seek an explanation in terms of Elijah's personality is the prophet's sudden wish to die because he is no better than his fathers.

By focusing on the relationship between narcissism and death, we may be able to answer some of the most puzzling questions raised by Elijah's behavior in 1 Kings 19: What kind of person would want to die so soon after a great victory, and immediately after he has fled precisely in order to *save* his life? Why would he apparently view himself as a failure and experience such great despair at precisely this point?⁴³ What kind of person would seek

⁴² For example, U. Simon (1997: 206) attempts to justify Elijah's claim that the Israelites killed Yahweh's prophets by claiming that "the Israelites" actually "refers to" Jezebel killing the prophets in 18:13. Similarly, he asserts that the king is seen as "the embodiment of the collective personality of the people" by both Elijah and the narrator. This allows him to conclude that the king's alleged "recidivism" in informing Jezebel indicates a similar falling back on the part of all who had been present at Carmel. This, in turn, is said to explain Elijah's "bitter disappointment" and subsequent despair (1997: 207). Brichto also seeks to avoid having to take Elijah's charges literally in order to justify his surprising change of mood. He describes the picture given of Ahab, Jezebel, and Baal as "hyperbole," reasoning that if "Jezebel and the Baal prophets served but as a metaphor for pagan influence, it is Israel that has breached its covenant with God" (1992: 138-39, 142). This hyperbole "*must* serve to explain why a prophet made invulnerable by an omnipotent God has decided to throw in his hand ..." (1992: 143; emphasis added). Brichto affirms Elijah's claim that he is the only prophet left by assuming that "every last one" of the hundred prophets saved by Obadiah "was hunted down or driven out save for Elijah" (1992: 131), even though this is nowhere stated in the books of Kings, other prophets of Yahweh are active in 1 Kings 20 and 22, and large groups of prophets are present in 2 Kings 2. Clearly, one cannot simply dismiss the problems posed by 1 Kgs 19:10 by claiming that the king and queen represent the entire nation. In 18:18 Elijah had already singled out Ahab and his father's house for "troubling" Israel by abandoning the commandments of Yahweh and by engaging in Baal worship. Yet when he speaks to Yahweh in 19:10, not only do Ahab and Jezebel go unmentioned; so do the Baalim, the Asherah, and the prophets of Baal. Far from relating facts, Elijah offers Yahweh a view of his situation which has been distorted by his emotional state.

⁴³ Good (1981: 51), like many other scholars, assumes that, in contrast to Jonah, Elijah's despair is "genuine." He also assumes that Elijah is in fact a failure, in spite of the fact that nothing in 1 Kings 19 indicates that the people had deviated from their unanimous affirmation of Yahweh in 1 Kgs 18:36-39. More-

to prove himself in the eyes of others, and at the same time dismiss all others as disloyal or pronounce them dead? Why would he lament his aloneness, and yet seek to be alone and apart from others?

First, what should we make of Elijah's desire to die because he is not better than his fathers? For some scholars, this suggests that Elijah had begun to "rank himself above the first fathers of his faith" (Auld 1986: 123), or that he had seen himself as "the bearer of a special relationship" with Yahweh (Cogan 2000: 451). Provan suggests that the egocentric prophet thought himself "much better than his ancestors," only to be "reduced to the self-loathing of the high achiever who thinks he has failed" (Provan, 1995: 148). The reference to the failed high achiever recalls what Tartakoff (1966) has dubbed "the Nobel-prize complex," namely, the feeling of being singled out for special recognition and entitlement.

Elijah's desire to die does not come because success makes him feel guilty over having surpassed his fathers, like the people Freud (1916: 370) calls "those wrecked by success." Elijah's fear⁴⁴ seems to indicate a growing awareness of vulnerability, in spite of the aura of invincibility surrounding his masterful behavior over the king, the people, and the Baal prophets in the preceding chapter.⁴⁵ Only Jezebel refuses to submit. Apparently this one dissenting voice issuing hollow threats⁴⁶ is enough to prevent Elijah's grandiose self-image from being reflected in the world, transforming his success into an experience of total failure. It is then that he presents himself to God as a sole survivor and victim, a supposedly isolated and abandoned victim who, in reality, had recently made four hundred and fifty Baal prophets his victims, by single-

over, we do not know what specific mission Elijah might have failed to accomplish—if God had given him any such mission.

⁴⁴ 1 Kgs 19:3 reads "afraid" (*wayyira'*) in most ancient versions, and "saw" (*wayyar'*) in the MT. Most modern commentators prefer the former reading.

⁴⁵ The people and the king obey all of Elijah's orders in ch. 18. He gives orders in at least once in vv. 8, 19, 25, 27, 30, 34, 40, 41, 43, 44 (cf. v. 23). All are obeyed. Moreover, ch. 18 leaves open the possibility that the contest of Carmel is Elijah's own idea, rather than an event commissioned by Yahweh. Elijah is similarly masterful with Ahaziah's men later (2 Kgs 1:10-15).

⁴⁶ As pointed out by Walsh (1996: 265-66) and Cogan (2000: 451), by sending a messenger to threaten Elijah verbally, Jezebel is, in effect, warning the prophet that he should flee. After all, she could have dispatched the messenger to assassinate the prophet, as did Saul when he sent "messengers" to David to kill him. The only reason that David escapes is because Michal warns him and helps him to flee in order to save his life (1 Sam. 19:11).

handedly slaughtering them (18:40; וַיִּשְׁחָטוּם) with the assistance of the same people he now claims are disloyal and out to kill him.

Annie Reich notes that with people whose apparent self-absorption and grandiosity mask feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, even a seemingly minor disappointment of expectation can lead to feelings of failure, despair, and mortification severe enough to lead to suicide (1973: 301; cf. Tartakoff 1966: 237-38). Kohut (1972: 386) points out that if such a person views himself as having an enemy, that adversary will be seen “as a *flaw in a narcissistically perceived reality* ... whose mere independence or other-ness is an offense.”⁴⁷ Elijah’s adversary Jezebel is an independent “other” in precisely this sense. Ultimately, there are two possible “remedies” for Elijah’s perceived plight: what has been called the “negative narcissism” of death (Green 1983: 278) or translation as the unending equivalent of the seemingly godlike invulnerability he had enjoyed earlier.

As Otto Rank dryly observes, “the idea of death ... is extremely painful to our self-esteem” (70, cf. 83). Rank associates “the narcissistic attitude” with the “strange paradox of the suicide who ... seeks death in order to free himself of ... intolerable thanatophobia” (1989: 78). He contends that such people are tormented by the idea of their “eternal ... inability to return, an idea from which release is only possible in death” (1989: 77-78). The fact that Yahweh does *not* allow Elijah to die becomes ironic if “release is only possible in death.” In this light, it is doubly ironic that Elijah is the only personage in the Hebrew Bible whose future return is mentioned (Mal. 3:23-24).

In spite of Elijah’s expressed fears and wish to die, his life resembles a narcissistic fantasy. In a 1908 essay, Freud described the hero of popular novels as the center of interest, whom the author seems to “protect as though with a special providence” (219). In these “egocentric narratives” a feeling of security accompanies the hero through his dangerous destinies. The invulnerability of the fictional hero betrays the presence of “His Majesty the Self,” the hero of all day-dreams as it is all novels (1908: 219-20). Up to the

⁴⁷ Kohut also notes that when such “absolutarian expectations” are disappointed, the resulting despair may lead to suicide, particularly in later middle age. The suicide is not an expression of guilt “but a remedial act—the wish to wipe out [an] unbearable sense of mortification and nameless shame” (1972: 386; 1977: 241).

end of 1 Kings 18 Elijah had already succeeded in living like the invulnerable literary heroes cited by Freud.⁴⁸ He too is protected by a special providence.⁴⁹ In fact, Elijah has even exhibited god-like qualities. He has acted as Yahweh's agent in returning the widow's son to life. He has proved invulnerable to the dangers supposedly posed by his many enemies. His mysterious disappearances imply that he has mastered the divine art of becoming invisible.⁵⁰ He is never said to be ill or grow old.⁵¹ And, finally, by his translation he has achieved the ultimate divine trait of immortality. Put another way, Yahweh has lent Elijah traits and powers which uniquely mirror his own. For his part, the "man of God" Elijah enhances this aura of divinity by identifying strongly with the emotions experienced by his divine father, and by acting as Yahweh's agent on the basis of those emulated emotions.

VI

Can—and *should*—Elijah's apparent narcissism in the chapters following 1 Kings 17 be read back into his behavior with the widow and her son? The evidence within ch. 17 is predictably elusive. Is

⁴⁸ Cf. Nell (2002: 17-23), who extends Freud's analysis to folktale heroes.

⁴⁹ Canetti's portrait of the "survivor" also describes the life of a unique individual toward whom "the higher powers are favorably disposed (*gewogen*)," although here uniqueness is achieved only through the death of others: "it is important that the survivor is *alone* ... One not only wants to be there always, one wants to be there when others are no longer there ... it is as though the battle were fought so that he could survive ... It is a feeling of chosenness among many ... In some way one feels oneself to be *better*, simply because one is still there" (1980: 249-50). Like Canetti's survivor, Elijah seems to have considered himself "better" than his fathers. Moreover, he not only sees and feels himself as alone, but arranges a kind of "battle" in which he alone challenges four hundred and fifty opponents and personally slaughters every one of them, just as he later demonstrates that he is a "man of God" by killing over one hundred more men (2 Kgs 1:9-12). Seale (1998: 58) compares the feeling of being alone in the world caused by "facing up to our mortality" to "that which is achieved by killing everyone." On the narcissistic fantasy of killing everyone and being the sole survivor in Homer's *Iliad*, the book of Isaiah, and the records of Ramesses II, see Lasine, 2001: 239-53.

⁵⁰ On invisibility, omnipotence, invulnerability and immortality as qualities associated with the ideal king as well as with gods, see Lasine 2001: 5-15, 18-28.

⁵¹ The absence of reference to Elijah's aging contrasts sharply with the prophets who appear just before him, namely, the old prophet from Bethel (1 Kgs 13:11, 25, 29) and Ahijah (1 Kgs 14:4), as well as the great prophets of earlier times, Moses and Samuel (Deut. 31:2; 34:7; 1 Sam. 8:1, 5; 12:2; 28:14).

Elijah acting like a shamanistic showman out to impress his audience with his powers? It would *seem* that he is not. He cries to Yahweh—twice—and the boy's life-force returns when Yahweh responds to his plea (17:20-22). Even the words he addresses to Yahweh are quoted, which is not the case when Elisha's prayer is briefly alluded to in 2 Kgs 4:33. On the other hand, even though Elijah's only audience is one non-Israelite widow, she herself views what happened as validating Elijah as a man of God, precisely because the word of Yahweh in *Elijah's* mouth is truth (17:24; cf. v. 18). Her reference to the "true word" recalls Elijah's earlier declaration that there would not be rain "except at the mouth of *my* word."⁵² He does not say "the mouth of Yahweh's word."

Possible evidence of Elijah's narcissism within 1 Kings 17 is also present if the narrator's lack of interest in the widow's son is designed to reflect the Elijah's lack of interest in the boy. Narcissists do not acknowledge others as independent feeling subjects, let alone empathize with them. The fact that Elijah shows no interest in the boy he revives or compassion for his mother becomes more striking when the story is compared to Jesus' healing of the widow's son in Luke 7. This passage, which Brodie (1986) calls an "*imitatio*" of 1 Kings 17, demonstrates Jesus' superiority over Elijah when Luke reports Jesus' gut-wrenching compassion for the widow (ἐσπλαγγνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτῇ; 7:13).

Given the skewed way in which Elijah recounts his recent personal history to Yahweh at Horeb, one wonders how he might report his resuscitation of the widow's son, if he were telling Yahweh—or us—about *that*. If we look at 1 Kings 17 through Elijah's eyes, that is, in the same way that Elijah himself rereads his relationship with the Israelites in 1 Kgs 19:10, we might indeed find ourselves looking at an "exalted" and "godlike" healer reminiscent of Empedocles or Asclepius, a healer who at the same time resembles Kafka's country doctor in feeling himself to be the victim of the people he supposedly serves.

⁵² וְיָ, אֱלֹהֵי דְבָרִי, 17:1; for the translation, see Walsh 1996: 232. Walsh (1996: 234) also points to the appearances of "the motif 'word'" in vv. 2, 5, 8, 13, 15, and 16.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of death projected by 1 Kgs 17:17-24 and other accounts of miraculous resuscitation. Viewed as a medical case history, Elijah's reviving of the widow's son raises difficult questions. Was the boy really dead, "only mostly dead," or merely gravely ill? Scholars often answer such questions by claiming that ancient Israelites did not consider corpses "to be 'totally' dead for a couple of days," and regarded death as "an enfeebled form of life." This paper challenges these claims by comparing Elijah's actions to those of other biblical and ancient Greek healers, as well as to Mesopotamian and shamanic healing practices. Why do healers like Elijah end up getting into bed with their patients? Examples in modern stories by Flaubert and Kafka reveal the kinship between the healer and the scapegoat, and suggest that miraculous healers tend to display narcissistic personality traits. Analysis of Greek sources and the Mount Horeb episode (1 Kings 19) indicates that this may also be the case for ancient healers like Elijah, Empedocles, and Asclepius, and that narcissism is itself a defense against death.

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