

## Admiring Our Savvy Ancestors: Abraham's and Jacob's Rhetoric of Negotiation (Gen 23, 33)

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### Introduction:

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM'S PURCHASE OF THE CAVE AT MACHPELAH (GEN 23) RESEMBLES, in many features, that of Jacob's dealings with Esau upon their reunion (Gen 32-33). This resemblance is found in a shared rhetoric of negotiation, in which what is said frequently does not match precisely what is meant, but by which deceit is not intended, and in which meaning is successfully communicated. In fact, because of the public venue of these negotiations, the characters' intended meanings can only be honestly communicated in just such an oblique manner. I will first survey in brief some possible approaches by which Genesis 23 and 32-33 might be compared, and suggest that the narrative category of "type-scene" is useful, especially in combination with some (greatly simplified) principles of speech-act theory. I will then demonstrate that such a reading sheds light on the speech both of Esau and Jacob as they conclude their reunion scene, specifically showing that Jacob does not actually dissemble when he offers follow Esau to Seir, and that no offense is taken by Esau when Jacob fails in fact to follow him.

### *This Reading Among Historical Critical and Literary Approaches:*

To anticipate somewhat, it will be shown that the two stories show a number of shared narrative features, and that these features have to do with a rhetoric by which the main characters attain what they want in negotiation. Such similarity of pattern might suggest a historical-critical approach, the goal of which would be to determine whether such patterns of negotiation can be situated with confidence in a particular social historical setting. Westermann

names the Neo-Babylonian dialogues as only one example, with the suggestion that the pattern of negotiation in Gen 23 is characteristically Near Eastern (Westermann 1985:372). The Amarna Letters<sup>1</sup> are also a source of information regarding the rhetoric of negotiation in the ancient Near East; for example, such apparently solicitous speech-acts as a “get well card” serve to position oneself advantageously with respect to one’s partner in negotiation. It is true that such historical data provides a valuable context within which to read Gen 23 and 32-33. But, although historical evidence may either challenge or support the plausibility, or the coherence, of my reading, that reading ought not to be thought to depend on the historical existence of tight and precise forms of negotiation matching those discerned in these texts. The same caution works the other way: the existence of historical patterns of negotiation ought not to be proposed simply on the basis of the patterns seen in these tales. These stories do not present themselves as historiography but as story, and good storytelling principles may inform the minor details of narrated events as much as, or more than, a desire to accurately represent observed commercial transactions. Thus, it is clear that no historical conclusions can or ought to be drawn from the literary findings of this paper. In a similar vein, my comparison of these two texts does not mean to suggest that the intent of either of the writers (of Gen 23 or of Gen 32-33) was to evoke the other’s tale in any way, even if he or she knew of that other tale. I should say that what is interesting about these correlations is not that the writer may have planted them consciously, nor that they reveal a concrete genre of story to which the writers felt constrained to adhere—I think it unlikely that either is the case—but rather that they arise of themselves in the context of what Martin Buss refers to as “general human processes,” such that an examination of texts like these provides insight into such shared “human processes” (Buss 1993:77). This affinity with Buss’s work may in turn suggest some kind of form-critical approach.

The “basic human processes” involved in these tales involve the process of negotiating for one’s needs from some standpoint of relative disadvantage, or more especially “outsidership,” and especially doing so in such a public forum that issues of reputation are at stake. Perhaps here these basic human processes are intersected by the attempt to make some kind of home for

<sup>1</sup>Letters, dated around the 14th century B.C.E., in part between the pharaoh of Egypt and his Palestinian vassal kings.

oneself where one is not at home, whether in a foreign land (Abraham), or among one's family to whom one has become foreign (Jacob). This is very promising, but differs from Buss's thought, and from form-criticism generally, in that for our purposes the "human processes" imagined are not the context in which the stories may have once been told, but rather the context within which the characters act in the stories themselves. That is, any *Sitz im Leben* of commercial rhetoric relevant to our study is not the setting of the stories' "tellings," but of the stories told. This distinction takes us out of the proper sphere of form-criticism and into that wide field of literary approaches generally called "narrative studies." Because my reading will find a number of similarities between two narrated tales, both of which are "ancestor stories" from Genesis 11-36, Robert Alter's use of "type-scenes" is promising.

In Alter's view, the presence of very similar patterns in a number of narratives may suggest that a certain "type-scene" was in the mind of the writer (Alter 1981:50-51). In our case, the "type-scene" might be that of an ancestor negotiating to meet a particular need, in a public venue, from a position of disadvantage relative to his partner. I will show that such a type-scene could be proposed for these two tales, with the qualifier that these patterns of negotiation may not have constituted, for the writers, a conventional storytelling formula to which they felt compelled to adhere. Rather, these patterns may have been simply taken for granted by the writers of each of these tales. That is, while each writer indeed meant to write about a particular negotiation, the details of the narrated negotiations were likely "transparent" to them in a way they are not to us, and comprise a pattern that to us suggests a type-scene.

Finally, alongside the concept of the type-scene, it will be helpful to bear in mind the ways in which speech is believed to function in the context of speech-act theory. James F. Harris presents clear examples of locution, illocution and perlocution which are based upon President Gerald Ford's pardon of President Nixon (Harris 1980:169-170). Here I offer a paraphrase, using instead Gen. 33:9:

Locution: "I have enough, my brother: let what is yours be yours."

Illocution: Esau thereby *pardoned* Jacob of his debt to him; or, put another way, he *offers* his pardon for Jacob's earlier theft free of charge.

Perlocution:

(a) Esau *forced* a decision on Jacob: whether to offer payment again or not.

- (b) Esau *jeopardized* his prospects of financial gain.  
 (c) Esau *impressed* the onlookers with his magnanimity.

It can be seen from this example that, as Harris puts quite clearly, “Locutionary acts are simply sets *of* saying something meaningfully. Illocutionary acts, by comparison, are acts performed *in* saying something, and perlocutionary acts are acts performed *by* saying something (Harris 1980:170).” For another example, to say, “I now pronounce you man and wife” is a locutionary act; its illocution is to bind two persons together in marriage; and among its perlocutionary acts might be to make the bride’s mother weep. It should be clear that almost any theory of rhetoric will accept these functions of speech, whatever they be called, and whatever their proper venue.

I will now show the similarities which exist between Gen 23 and 32-33 in detail, with special attention to the shared narrative context of negotiation and its associated rhetoric.

#### THE STORIES AND THEIR SIMILARITIES:

At the beginning of Gen 23, the scene is set by the death of Sarah. This death is reported in a formal manner by the Priestly hand, tallying the number of the years of Sarah’s life. Likewise, Abraham’s response is reported as being in accord with the proper contemporary forms of mourning: he went in to keem (*sāpad*) for her, and to weep (*bākā*) for her.<sup>2</sup> Only after fulfilling this obligation does Abraham address the separate issue of securing a burial plot. As a landless foreigner who is not a citizen of his land, this issue has both commercial and political dimensions.

Similarly, Jacob in 32:4-6<sup>3</sup> takes care to notify Esau of his return from sojourning with Laban (and of the prosperity he now enjoys) with a message “to my lord” (*lā’ dōnī*),<sup>4</sup> and declaring his desire to “find favor” in his

<sup>2</sup>With the accusative object, *bākā* typically denotes the formal mourning for which a specified period of time is expected. See Gen. 50:3; Num. 20:29; Deut. 21:13; Jer. 8:23; perhaps Gen. 37:35 and Lev. 10:6. Exceptions include perhaps Isa 16:9.

<sup>3</sup>Where the BHS varies in its chapter and verse divisions from some English translations, the BHS is followed. All chapter and verse references hereafter will be from Genesis, except where indicated

<sup>4</sup>All translations are my own; exceptions will be so indicated.

eyes. Jacob comes from the North, whereas Esau is said to live in Seir, well south of Succoth where Jacob will eventually settle. The geography suggests that there was for Jacob no practical necessity to inform his brother of his return from Haran, and to request his “favor.” Yet it is only after he willingly fulfils this moral obligation that, learning of Esau’s movement toward him from Seir in force, he begins to negotiate for that favor with an offering of goods.

A surface reading of 23:3-4 in English may suggest that Abraham has asked for a burial site from the Hittites as a free gift: “Give me a holding...” However, in biblical Hebrew, the verb *nātan*, or “give,” is not sharply distinguished from the concept of “selling,” any more than in English. While it can indicate a free giving, it can also indicate the act of trading or selling (e.g., Gen 23:9; 29:27; 30:28; 38:16). Abraham himself will use it so in a later verse, in the phrase “for its full price give it” (*bēkéseḅ māle’ yittēnēnāh*; compare 1 Kgs 21:6; Deut 2:28; others; compare also Akkadian *ana kaspim nadānum*). As he here initiates the negotiation for a burial plot, it may be that he states his intentions with some vagueness out of caution, in order to gauge the response of the Hittites. He may not yet know how they will prefer a landless foreigner to secure such a burial plot. However, there is no reason to think that Abraham fails to mention silver as a ploy to actually receive his plot for free; this will be shown by his later refusal to accept such a gift.

As it happens, such a free offer is the first response of the citizens. This response is in two parts: Abraham is called “my lord” (*’ādōnī*), and a “great prince” (*nēšī ’ēlōhīm*) in their midst; and the citizens make their personal sepulchers available to him in his need (23:6). That this offer represents their actual wishes is unlikely, if only because the citizens will not continue to press the offer as the negotiation continues. Thus, apparently the purpose of the flattering preface is not to explain the cause of this ostensible generosity toward Abraham, but has some other function. It may be that they call him “my lord,” and a “great prince” who is “in their midst” in order to build him up, so to speak, and so to indicate their willingness that he trade for his property needs with the citizenry. As a foreigner and a landless sojourner, this is not a permission which Abraham can have taken for granted; hence his initial caution. If this rhetorical intent were perceived by the hearer, then the granting of this permission would be an illocutionary function of the citizens’ speech act. Of course, the hyperbole (“lord,” “prince”) has the added rhetorical function of suggesting to any bystanders that Abraham will be able not only to pay, but to pay handsomely (similarly, in the Amarna correspon-

dence, pharaoh praises the greatness of his vassal kings in order to suggest that they should easily keep up their payments of tribute). Also, the ostensible offer of their own sepulchers to Abraham serves to showcase their generosity to any witnesses to the transaction. These last two functions represent the perlocutionary force of the speech act.<sup>5</sup> There is a risk to the citizens, though: should Abraham be sufficiently dense or opportunistic to accept their offer at face value, they may be honor-bound to make it good. Of course, Abraham would thus purchase his burial plot in exchange for the good will of his neighbors. He would also (publicly) prove wrong their stated estimation of him as a formally knowledgeable merchant of a social status comparable to their own.

Returning to Jacob's case, some parallels may be seen. In 32:13-21, Jacob sends an offering to Esau of more than 540 head of livestock. This is sent in a series of droves, each with a message to Esau that they are an "offering (*minhā*) to my lord Esau" (*la 'dōnī lē 'ēsāw*). Esau is delivered that one message multiple times, and yet when he meets Jacob, he will ask about those droves as if he does not yet know their meaning. In fact, his language suggests that the livestock belongs to Jacob: "What of yours is all this camp which I have met?" (33:8).<sup>6</sup> Like the response of the Hittites to Abraham's tentative opening offer, Esau's question certainly gives Jacob an opening to "put his money away," so to speak. This is especially likely in light of Esau's emotional greeting in 33:6, and its truth will be borne out by Esau's next speech. However, like Abraham, Jacob wisely chooses not to take advantage of this opening; if Esau here has indicated that Jacob may have forgiveness and also keep his offering (that is, if this is Esau's illocutionary intent), it may be because Esau wishes to highlight his own prosperity by a demonstration of indifference (a perlocutionary effect). Further, Esau may indeed mean to indicate to Jacob that Esau's forgiveness is at least theoretically detached from Jacob's willingness to make material amends. Finally, as with the Hittites, it may have the added rhetorical purpose of making clear to all listeners the extent of Esau's magnanimity.

As negotiations continue with Abraham, the basic rhetorical moves already drawn previously are adhered to, and heightened. In the face of the

<sup>5</sup>Meir Sternberg's assessment of the text, especially as regards matters of "face" and of indirect speech, has points of contact with my own (Sternberg 1991).

<sup>6</sup>*mī lēkā kol hammahāneh hazzeh āser pāgāšū*. The initial clause is similar to the idiom, *mahlī wālāk* (1 Kgs. 17:18; cf the Greek of Mk. 1:24 and 5:7); this fact, and the context, may suggest the translation, "What do you mean by" (NRSV). Since, though, our clause is not identical to that idiom, the precise meaning of the clause is uncertain.

citizens' offer to bury Abraham's dead free of charge in their own sepulchers, Abraham "prostrates" himself before them,<sup>7</sup> and makes plain his desire to purchase a burial cave of his own—indeed, he has already chosen a particular landholder to approach. Whether coincidentally or by prior agreement, that landowner, Ephron the Hittite, son of Sohar, is already present. Answering Abraham directly, he employs the same formulations of address with which both Abraham and the citizenry had prefaced their speech to this point: "Hear me" (*šēmā ʿēni*), and, "My lord" (*ʾādōni*). Also, the narrator takes pains to underscore here (23:10) and later (23:13, 16), the public venue of the negotiation. As had the citizenry before, and despite Abraham's stated desire to pay money, Ephron gives him outright the means to bury his dead. What's more, the site is to belong to Abraham, instead of being a mere plot in another man's burial site. Finally, he makes clear that the entire field is to be Abraham's own.

It may be that Ephron here adds the field to the cave in a way that goes beyond Abraham's own wishes (so von Rad 1961:243); after all, of what use is the field to Ephron without the cave? Or, it may be that when Abraham named the cave by its district, the inclusion of the field was understood (so Westermann 1985:374)—in this case, Ephron is simply describing his "gift" in somewhat expansive terms. In either case, the perlocutionary effect of Ephron's offer is roughly equivalent to that of the citizenry's previous offer: "See, I am wealthy and magnanimous; I offer you a free gift which befits a prince such as yourself; and, being a prince, you no doubt are able to pay, and will recognize the importance of doing so, my spoken words notwithstanding." Because the gift offered is greater than that offered by the citizenry, and because the "sons of my people" are explicitly called as witnesses to the offer (23:11), all rhetorical effects are heightened. But, so then is the risk to Ephron. Although he does cut a better public profile than did the other citizenry, and increases the pressure on Abraham to rise to the fineness of Ephron's praise, he also stands to lose more, financially, if he has overestimated Abraham's grasp of the situation, or has underestimated Abraham's greed. Abraham has only to say, "I accept," and apparently the cave, field, and purchase price are all his to keep. Again, though, it would be only a foolish

7 *ḥwh* (hishtafel stem), an act native to the act of appeal, which is to say, the act of negotiating from a position of disadvantage; compare to the "prostrations" of Jacob and his family in 33:3, 6-7.

ancestor who would make such a brazen and public ploy; he would, in effect, be selling the good will of his neighbors for silver, as well as showing himself ignorant of proper market rhetorical form. As it turns out, Ephron's estimation of Abraham's rhetorical savvy and good sense is justified.

Abraham prostrates himself again before the assembly, and to Ephron he repeats again the formula, "If only you will hear me" (23:13 *lû šēmā' ēnt*). The narrator duly reminds the reader of the audience at the gate, as Abraham reiterates—now for the third time, and most explicitly—his desire to purchase the field, for its value in silver, that he might bury his dead. Ephron answers in kind (23:14-15; perhaps read here and 23:11 *lû for MT lō*; see above 23:13), and then tactfully (and as expected) capitulates. Maintaining his carefully cultivated magnanimity, and also Abraham's neatly contrived status as his social brother, Ephron exclaims that the actual price of the field—400 shekels—is not worth mentioning among such company as theirs. Abraham duly weighs out the silver to Ephron.

The apparently high price paid by Abraham for the field requires some comment. The two texts usually introduced as points of reference are Jer 32:7, in which 17 shekels is paid for a field, and 1 Kgs. 16:24, in which 6000 shekels is paid for the area on which Samaria is to be built (Westerman 1985:375; von Rad 1961:243-4). What is the reader meant to understand from such an exaggerated, even legendary, amount? It would surely be odd if the text seeks to portray Abraham as a fool, all his fine manners only serving to make him a clown before the Hittites. Also, if some polemic against non-Israelite inhabitants of the land were intended, it is odd that the story allows that polemic to lie only implicit in the tale. Perhaps the best explanation is that P means for this to be a story about the burial of the most revered of matriarchs: should her grave be on a common scrap of land, or on the best available? This reading is supported by the fact that Abraham is portrayed as being able to produce such a sum "out of pocket": however high the price, it is not out of reach of the esteemed ancestor. So: is it too high a price? Observe what Abraham has in fact purchased. The field, after all, had been his since Ephron first spoke; but, for his money, Abraham acquired the right to own property in the land of his sojourning, and the chance to publicly show himself "at home" in the cosmopolitan rhetoric of upper-class mercantile discourse.

Returning to Jacob: at 33:8a, Esau had put him in a position perhaps to recant his offering of 540+ head of livestock, with which he hoped to purchase Esau's favor. Although Esau had already demonstrated that favor, inde-

pendently of the livestock offering, Jacob reiterates his desire to give the livestock to Esau: “to find favor in the eyes of my lord” (*līmṣōʿ ḥēn bē ʿēnē ʾādōnī* [33:8b]). If the message(s) he had sent the previous night represent his first effort to make payment for his wrongs, this then is his second attempt.

Esau’s reply is more brief than had been Ephron’s to Abraham’s second attempt at payment, but it is no less magnanimous. First, reminiscent of Ephron’s style, he underscores his own material well-being: “I have much.” He then outright urges Jacob to keep the livestock which he offers: “My brother, let what is yours be yours” (33:9). Esau’s brevity suits the venue of the discourse: this is a family matter, not a trade at the city gate. However, it is not much less public for that, considering the size of each household present. On the writer’s level, too, there is likely also the very public arena of Israel-Edom typology: see Gen. 25:23, 30; 36:1. Therefore, the stakes are similar to those at the corresponding point in the other narrative: by making his generous offer to Jacob explicit rather than only oblique, Esau risks losing what really is his by rights. Further, he should still have to “hand over” the pardon which he has, after all, offered for free. On the other hand, should Jacob make such a play, he would show himself unworthy of Esau’s risk-taking before all the members of both households. Indeed, Jacob being Jacob, the trust which Esau has put in him is remarkable. If the families present aren’t holding their breath at this point, they should be!

Jacob then proves himself worthy of his grandfather’s name (if not in faithfulness, then at least in the beginnings of a mature sense for mercantile rhetoric and responsibility). He names what he had stolen from Esau (“my blessing”: *birkātī*; see Gen. 27:36), attaches that name to his offering (his *minhā*), and presses it, for now the third time, upon Esau. He even declares, not to be outdone by his brother, “. . . I have *all*” (*yeš lī kōl*). Esau then does what they each knew he would from the outset: he takes it.

#### A SUGGESTED READING OF THE BROTHERS’ LEAVETAKING:

The negotiations, and so also the parallels between the stories, seem to end here. Below, I will recapitulate the corresponding elements of these stories in brief. However, better to address right away the way in which the Jacob and Esau story, thus so far told, sheds some needed light on Jacob’s next rhetorical move; that is, that he states his willingness to go on after Esau to Seir, and then goes, instead, to Succoth. In light of Jacob’s well-deserved reputation as the “wily trickster,” the casual reader may be excused for jumping to

the conclusion that this is yet another instance of easy dissembly on Jacob's part. Such a reading is sometimes offered, but is rarely defended with any vigor. Perhaps the strongest argument to be made for it is that by having referred to his gift to Esau as his "blessing" (*birkātī*), Jacob may be understood to have put himself and his goods under the rule of Esau, the once-and-again *pater familias*: hence the need to escape such rule by means of a falsehood. There are, however, a number of difficulties with such a reading, at least in the text as we have received it. If this is a bit of Jacob-style trickery, it must be said that it is not particularly skillful. If, though, the narrator would have us see Jacob as a casual and clumsy dissembler, it would need to be explained how that fits with his other, more straightforward behavior in this narrative. Also, there are items missing which would need to be accounted for if this were a "wily trickster" type-scene after the fashion of, for instance, 25:29-34 or 27:1-45. Particularly, there is no moment of recognition on Esau's part, wherein he laments his loss or vows revenge (27:38, 41); nor does the narrator summarize the loss (25:34b). There is another difficulty with the trickster reading, which only becomes clear in the larger context of the story. In Gen. 32, Jacob has prevailed in a test put to him by God, and that passage was marked by a change in name. Such a change alerts the reader to look for a change in the status or being of the named. It is certain that the chapter following our story (Gen. 34) will show a marked change in Jacob/Israel's behavior: he will forgo rash action almost reflexively (34:5b), and reprimand his sons for such action with an appeal to caution: a caution proper to a sober and temperate ancestor who puts the peace of his house above the vainglory of impulsive retaliation. While I would not insist that the encounter at Peniel must needs amount to a wholesale moral regeneration for Jacob, it must be said that an outright lie makes for an odd transition from the Israel who makes good his honor debt to his brother to the Israel who pragmatically deplores false dealing even with the one who raped his own daughter! I think, therefore, that there is a better reading.

After Esau has accepted Jacob's offering (33:11), the serious business of the encounter is past. Esau immediately suggests that they go on together on

<sup>8</sup> *lēnegdekā*, from the root *ngd*: "be conspicuous, be in plain sight." While the usual meaning of this adverb is "in front of," Jacob's counterproposal that Esau go on "in front of his servant" (*lipnē ʿabdō*) suggests that "alongside of" is a better reading here of *ngd*. So, NRSV.

“their” way, and that he go “alongside” Jacob.<sup>8</sup> It may be observed that Jacob has not to this point indicated a desire to settle in, or even to visit, Seir. He had indeed sent messengers to Esau to inform him of his ability and desire to make amends (though he might have slipped unnoticed into Succoth without having bothered). But, he had said nothing about actually entering Esau’s territory, which again he need not have crossed to reach Succoth from the northeast. However, at the moment of Esau’s invitation, an extremely delicate diplomatic balance had been constructed. Esau’s offer is exactly of a piece with the hyperbole which has preceded it: as one who “has much,” and who has just made peace with a brother (at that brother’s material expense, yet), he has no real alternative but to offer hospitality. To fail to do so would represent a loss of face for himself and possibly an insult to Jacob. This is not to say that Esau’s offer is necessarily insincere. However, my point is that Esau’s position at this point makes the invitation nearly unavoidable, sincere or not. Jacob, apparently inclined to “take a pass,” offers Esau an excuse: the frailty of Jacob’s charges compels him to go slowly, and he will “lead himself gently” at their pace, “until whenever I might come to my lord at Seir” (33:14).<sup>9</sup> The rather transparent lameness (no reference to Jacob’s recent athletics intended) of this excuse supports my contention that no actual deceit is intended; rather, it is meant only as a polite refusal, in a situation where an explicit and public rejection of hospitality might only upset the delicate political balance struck to this point. Esau then offers to leave Jacob “some people” (33:15). On the one hand, this could be taken as a “feeler,” to determine whether Esau should in fact prepare his house to receive Jacob and all his charges. On the other, it could be taken as a friendly offer to part with a few servants to help Jacob settle wherever he is to go, or even to ameliorate the material losses to Jacob represented by the accepted “offering.” It must certainly be said that Esau has little motive to compel Jacob to join him in Seir, unless one takes the view that Esau is again the first-born in fact and in effect, and that he loathes to let slip away those remaining goods of Jacob’s which ought to augment further his own holdings. But again, Esau makes no

<sup>9</sup> It appears to me that the construction *‘ad ʾāšer* elsewhere indicates an indefinite, usually lengthy, amount of time: frequently, it is associated with “tarrying,” or action which occurs “little by little.” My translation, “until whenever,” seeks to reflect the drawn out, “dawdling” quality I find here, which quality suits nicely the meandering imagery which Jacob evokes in his excuse. Compare, for instance, Gen. 27:44; 29:8; Exod. 23:30; 24:14; others.

attempt to secure compliance with any such wish, now or later, though he is obviously able to do so. All the evidence in the text suggests that his offer is benign. In any case, Jacob demurs, suggesting that to accept Esau's offer might diminish the favor which he has found in the eyes of his lord.<sup>10</sup> Thus, with their business complete, and a standing invitation between them, the brothers part: Esau goes on his way to Seir, and Jacob on his to Succoth.

#### *SUMMARY OF THE CORRELATIONS:*

The story of Abraham's purchase has a clear beginning, after the promise of progeny through Isaac (22:15-19), which is capped by news of Rebecca's birth (22:20-24). It begins with Sarah's death, and Abraham's formally correct observance of the expected rituals of mourning. The story of Jacob's reunion with Esau has a clear beginning, after his tale with Laban ends with arrangements for peace, and Laban returns home (31:43-55). It begins with Jacob gratuitously, carefully and correctly notifying Esau of his return, and of his ability and willingness to find favor in Esau's sight (32:4-6).

Abraham sets out to purchase a burial plot with silver; Jacob sets out to purchase forgiveness with livestock. Abraham and Jacob each offer payment three times. Each is twice offered the object of their desire free of charge, and each recognizes the rhetorical intent of these offers. Each is able to respect the need of their bargaining partner to build and keep "face," and each is aware of his own need to pay in full for what is, on the face of things, freely offered.

Each of these exchanges plays to an audience, which fact calls for and shapes the rhetoric employed. The message to the bystanders is that the principals are wise negotiators, who are at home with the manners of the "princes" and the wealthy of the world, and who are adept and graceful communicators. I suggest that this also may be the effect of this rhetoric upon the reading audience, provided that the reader is inclined to appreciate the fine points of the exchange, and highly to esteem skillfulness of such kind. I say also that here we find a link between these narratives and others in the ancestral stories. Those stories may not always present the ancestors as particularly virtuous, but they generally acknowledge the prowess with which Abraham and Jacob "get on" in their world. Consider some of these tales, for

<sup>10</sup>NRSV's paraphrase, "Why should my lord be so kind to me?" while not inaccurate, is unfortunate in that this reference to the ongoing theme of the "favor" Jacob seeks from Esau is lost.

instance: Abraham and Abimelek; the rescue of Lot from the forces of Chederlaomer; Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors; Jacob's deceptions of Esau; Jacob's prosperity with Laban and his subsequent diplomacy. I would, then, distinguish between the type-scene of the "wily trickster ancestor," and that of, perhaps, the "ancestor as sophisticated and high-class negotiator." These would each be a partially-overlapping subset of that brand of tale which depict the ancestors as generally capable, shrewd, wise, strong, subtle, classy: the very models, if you will, of modern major forbears.

I have discerned a common thread of rhetorical function in the speech of the principle characters of Gen. 23 and 33. I have shown that the proper context of study for this rhetoric of negotiation is with a view to type-scenes and in light of some simple categories culled from speech-act theory. The correlations demonstrated between the two tales suggest a type-scene of the ancestor as sophisticated negotiator and master of indirect speech, skills befitting one who deals regularly and easily with the princes of the world. Read in this way, it has been seen that Esau's suggestion that Jacob join him in Seir is benign rather than an assertion of power, and that Jacob's suggestion that he will travel "at his pace," "until whenever" he join Esau, is rather a polite and transparent indication of his own wishes than an attempt to actually fool his brother.

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