Harping on the Past, Drawing Truth from the Lyre:
Seeking King David in Literary Oeuvre

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Abstract

This thesis project seeks to comment on the treatment and reception of biblical literature generally and on the characterization and narratives of King David found in First and Second Samuel in particular. Using as primary sources biblically inspired fiction, visual arts, music, theatre and television, I aim to show the longevity and interest ascribed to David across time and into the modern day. I suggest that David's narrative among the genre of biblical literature is not only topical but instrumental as a source of teaching and inspiration.

The body of this thesis covers three main sections. Respectively, I consider each of the two main foci of the David Story: first, David's combat and conquest of Goliath the Philistine Giant, and second, David affair and subsequent scandal with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite.In the third section, I consider the case study of *The Secret Chord*, a novelization of the David Story told from the perspective of Natan the prophet by writer Geraldine Brooks.

The contribution of this thesis is to broach the place of biblical literature such as First and Second Samuel in Reform Jewish contexts and support the conversation around potentially problematic characters, like King David in a sensitive, egalitarian, and post #metoo era.

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"Lately I've been thinking a lot about King David
Not the one who is alive forever in the song,
And not the one who is dead forever…"
~Yehuda Amichai, David, King of Israeli is Alive: Thou Art the Man[1]

Introduction

The character and narratives of King David capture collective imagination and remain pertinent in popular culture. David receives more coverage in biblical literature than does any other King. Scenes from his life adorn the Sistine Chapel and myriad Renaissance canvasses. His life has been set to song, portrayed onstage, and retold again and again as history and creative fiction. To what do we attribute this timeless relevance? The answer depends on myriad factors. One must consider both the internal meaning of the verses and the external reputation attributed to the character post hoc.

The lives of David and Moses are the two key biographies that shape the Hebrew bible, dividing between them the two major episodes of Jewish identity: receiving the law and ultimate messianic redemption.[2] Moses' story is the better known while David is the less familiar due to his placement in the Books of Samuel rather than first five books of Torah. Both leaders demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses and yet, David's story is more thrilling, war-torn, scandalous, and provocative. The events of David's life are not linear, nor are they pointed toward a singular goal.

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[1] Amichai, Yehuda, Chana Bloch, and Chana Kronfeld. Open Closed Open: Poems. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2006. Pp. 51.
[2] Wolpe, David. "Book of David." Washington Examiner, February 5, 2016. https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/book-of-david.

When discussing David, there are multiple figures under consideration. Young shepherd David differs from the upstart political fugitive. Victorious military King David differs from morally questionable adulterer David. The Davidic line of immediate descendants differs from the messianic promise assigned to King David's line. David is credited with recovering the Ark of the Covenant and gathering the materials and plans for the Holy Temple. Therefore, one must read David as multivalenced, both as the many faces portrayed in the Books of Samuel and Kings and the larger significance religious communities attribute to his reign. Even among these religious adherents, there are diverse motivations for projecting connection between David and a later messianic figure.

The text of the King David narrative, spanning 1 Samuel 16[3] through 1 Kings 2 and recounted in the Book of Chronicles, portrays a dramatic tale of rise to power from poverty. The transformation of a young shepherd to a wealthy king is the ultimate rags to riches story. However the complicated character psychology and romance, the nuanced relationships of fathers and sons, and the ultimate quest to attain and secure power support the longevity of the David narrative as personal, entertaining, intriguing, and timeless.

Although the saga around King David is rife with intrigue and interest among Jewish readers, the texts are largely absent from traditional recitation. With few exceptions, the David narrative is not recited as haftarah reading on Shabbat or covered within liturgy. Some biblical history courses might cover the most popular episodes, but the corpus is heavily excerpted for use by religious education and Sunday Schools.

[3] Though the pertinent material begins with Saul's sovereign ascendancy (1 Sam. 8-12) and later fall from grace (1 Sam. 13-15).

David is known for his militant mind as well as his poetic proclivities[4] and musical skill on the lyre[5]. Much of the Psalms are attributed to David and almost half open with the provenance in his name: לְדָוִד מִזְמוֹר, לְדָוִד שִׁגָּיוֹן, לְדָוִד תְּפִלָּה, or לְדָוִד תְּהִלָּה. Several Psalms are traditionally identified with specific moments described in David's life.[6] Even so, Dr. Steven McKenzie argues these attributions were appended to the Psalms subsequently. As a result, it is impossible to positively connect the authorship of any of the Psalms to David.[7]

The historicity of King David's reign and the events of the Torah broadly have been alternately affirmed and called into question by the Tel Dan Stele. The victory stone, erected by an early 8th century BCE king of Damascus is inscribed with the phrase in Hebrew: ביתדוד, bytdwd, This could mean "House of David", or the name of a Judean Dynasty whose lineage was traced back to David's reign. The archaeological proof for an actual King David remains circumstantial. As a result, much of what is known about David and his kingdom are the product of the books of Samuel and Kings.

The authors and editors of these biblical works did not aim to produce a record of history. Rather, the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are the product of editorial ideology. Parts of Samuel invoke an anti-monarchial polemic. Other parts seek to endorse David as divinely ordained king whose rule is both natural and inevitable. David must play the parts of interrupter to the reign of Saul and of usher into that of Solomon. But his own lengthy reign reveals he is no mere literary device, marking time as an interstitial throne occupant. The biblical narratives about David cannot be read as purely didactic,

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[4] 2 Samuel 23:1
[5] 1 Samuel 16:15–18
[6] McCarter, Jr., P. Kyle. *Commentary on II Samuel 22*, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 9. II Samuel. New York: Doubleday, 1984
[7] McKenzie, Steven L. King David: a Biography. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

propagandistic, ideological or apologetic. David is a nuanced individual portrayed by murderous schemes, heroic bravery, venerable piety, and hegemonic conspiracy. Any effort to simplify the character flattens the sophisticated portrayal in the Tanach.

David thus must be read as his own character with lessons to teach about pursuing and defending a mission; navigating family dynamics and royal court politics; romance, love and lust; reconciling with one's failures; and establishing a legacy. This thesis is presented around two prongs that make up the most well-known and constitutive components in the life of David. First, I consider David's role in the Battle of Elah, facing the Philistine champion Goliath in single combat. This scene offers the lesson of ingenuity in the face of resistance and the power of youth. Secondly, I consider the Bathsheba episode in which David faces his human weakness and must own his failure. Natan the prophet confronts David about his moral failings David in spite of the potential for personal harm. This is the lesson of speaking truth to power. In both cases, I analyze substantive works of art inspired by that scene. While it is not possible at this juncture to offer an exhaustive litany, I chose the most representative and popular works. The third section of this thesis brings together the first two in the context of one particular work built around the corpus of the David Story. Geraldine Brooks's novelization of the narrative, *The Secret Chord*, is a recent and successful reinterpretation of the biography of David from youth through his final days. With her modern novel, Brooks offers an accessible and scholarly, yet creative and enthralling work rife for analysis.

Focus 1: David and Goliath: Single Combat, Multiple Perspectives

Among the quintessential conflicts in Tanakh, the meeting of David and Goliath endures as a scriptural encounter and a metaphorical concept. David's triumph over Goliath stands in for any unexpected comeuppance, underdog victory, or challenge to status quo. Such encounters fascinate and entertain. There is nothing novel about a stronger party besting their challenger in sport or battle. But when a result runs counter to expectation, there persists an element of wonder and surprise. Perhaps it is easier to identify with the David persona than with that of Goliath. David is smaller and inexperienced, yet cunning and brave. From a psychological perspective, humans often see themselves as flawed yet capable and thus more akin to David than the treacherous, intimidating Goliath.[1] At least at his point in the narrative of David, readers might sympathize with the plight as a youngest son and mere shepherd, on the outskirts of a society, drawn to the allure of battle.

The David and Goliath episode spans 1 Samuel chapter 17. From verse 1, the armies of the Israelites and the Philistines gather in the hill country, surveying their opponents from opposite heights with a valley in between. This description of the topography also sets the stage for the coming single combat encounter. With both armies positioned as such, all soldiers are in position to notice Goliath of Gath enter the no-man's-land Valley of Elah.

Goliath is described as אִישׁ־הַבֵּנַיִם literally meaning "the man in between" i.e. "the middleman", although most translations render this phrase as "the champion"[2]. Goliath – whose name is synonymous with largeness – is described in the Masoretic text as follows:

[1] Bernstein, Julia. "Why Do We Root for the Underdog?" BCM News - Psychiatry and Behavior. Baylor College of Medicine, January 25, 2018. https://www.bcm.edu/news/psychiatry-and-behavior/why-we-root-for-underdog.
[2] 1 Sam 17:4

וְזֶרֶת אַמּוֹת שֵׁשׁ גָּבְהּוֹ, meaning he stood **six** amot or cubits and a span tall[3] – equivalent to more than nine feet in height. However, this figure may have become emphasized over time. According to the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, Goliath's is described as **four** cubits and a span in older manuscripts including the Dead Sea Scrolls, the works of Josephus, and Septuagint texts[4]. This figure is closer to 6 feet and 9 inches, dimensions no less impressive but within the scope of possibility.

Goliath is rendered for the purpose of intimidation. Subsequent to his height, the biblical authors describe his armor; Goliath wears a bronze helmet and greaves, scaled chainmail, and hefty weapons – both sword and spear of impossible size. The purpose of this litany continues the theme of impressive stature and fearsome military prowess. This section serves to contrast with David's later declaration: "Not by sword or spear does Adonai deliver"[5]. Goliath's dependence on exorbitant military implements is further amplified by verse 7: his shield bearer precedes him in procession onto the battlefield. In verse 8 and hereafter, Goliath is referred to as הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי, the Philistine, making room for Goliath's persona to be superimposed onto the tale of a generic Philistine aggressor. Goliath the Philistine issues his challenge of hand to hand combat.

At verse 12, the narrative shifts to that of David, his father Jesse, and his brothers, the three oldest of whom serve in Saul's army. David, as the youngest, tends to the sheep when he is not playing his harp in the court of Saul. David "would go back and forth from Saul's side to tend his father's sheep in Bethlehem" reads 17:15. Though not permanently in the King's employ, David is portrayed as a known commodity of the monarch's court at this

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ehrlich, C. S. "Goliath (Person)". In D. N. Freedman (ed.), The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary (Vol. 2, p. 1073). New York: Doubleday, 1992.
[5] 1 Sam. 17:47

point. Such a reading is in contrast with the coming verses. By 17:55, Saul has witnessed David in action on the battlefield and inquires of his commander, "Whose son is the lad, Abner?". This is no mistaken identity; in 17:58, "Saul said, הַנַּעַר אַתָּה בֶּן־מִי - 'Whose son are you lad?'" and David identifies himself directly. Here is a version in which the King encounters his eventual successor for the first time. In other words, chapters 16 and 17 of Samuel are the composite of two or more narratives of David's introduction to King Saul. The pen of an editor or redactor is evident here, yet the presence of these two contradictory chronologies defies explanation. The rationale for retention of both versions according to Robert Alter is to place these texts in conversation. Chapter 16 offers a "vertical" deployment: God elects David to Saul's court, providing an entrée by calming the King's spirit through music. This later "horizontal" tale requires David to prove his martial power to be deemed worthy of note.[6] It is interesting which of the two is more deeply ensconced in common parlance and portrayed in art.

Returning to the narrative, David enters the war camp with provisions for his older brothers and he learns of the single combat challenge issued by Goliath the Philistine.[7] More specifically, David learns of the potential reward Saul would grant anyone who accepts the challenge and bests the Philistine warrior: "…the man who strikes him [Goliath] down the king will enrich with a great fortune, and his daughter he will give him, and the father's household he will make free of levies in Israel."[8] Without question, David knows of this reward and it stokes his interest, as evidenced in the text by David confirming the information from multiple sources among the Israelite troops. David's true motivation is here

[6] Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
[7] 1 Samuel 17:17 – 17:24
[8] 1 Samuel 17:25

in question– is David thirsty for the power, wealth, and status afforded to the victor, or is he carrying the banner of God? The text is peppered with references to both mundane reward and the divine nature of this encounter, as in 17:26: "What will be done for the man who strikes down yonder Philistine and takes away insult from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should insult the battle lives of the living God?" These are David's first spoken words recorded in the narrative; if this introduction follows the biblical convention of exemplifying David's character, he portrayed as power hungry and politically minded. The repetition and isolated nature of accompanying references to God leads me to suggest later emendation by one or more Deuteronomistic writers, in order to emphasize a religious reading of the text (and downplay David's materialism). These writers sought to characterize David as pious, further distinguishing him from Goliath and his ungodliness.

David could not be more unlike Goliath. As discussed above, Goliath is intimidating of height where David is a mere shepherd boy. David is described as good looking and ruddy – this is a point of contention for Goliath[9], suggesting he lacks such debonair appearance traits. The Philistine is heavily armed and armored; when Saul offers David his own armor and sword, David demurs because he is unable to walk under the weight. David states "I cannot walk in these, for I am unused to it"[10], but even the king's armor is too large, for Saul is also a tall man. As we will see in the visual artworks, this physical contrast between David and Goliath will be emphasized on canvas.

David approaches Goliath on the battlefield.[11] Eschewing King Saul's sword, David is armed with his sling, five smooth stones from the creek bed, and his shepherd's staff[12].

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[9] 1 Samuel 17:42
[10] 1 Samuel 17:41
[11] There exists textual evidence undermining David's victory over Goliath. 2 Samuel 21:19 credits Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim the Bethlehemite, with killing Goliath the Gittite. Baruch Halpern writes that redactors chose to

Given that his attack will require only sling and stone, the staff is a tactical diversion; David conceals his intended ranged attack to maximize the element of surprise. The tactic is successful; Goliath believes David intends to attack with his staff. He rebukes his opponent, "Am I a dog that you should come to me with sticks?"[13] Their ensuing exchange is dominated by vindictive demonstration of divine belief. David practically quotes Zechariah 4:6[14] in his diatribe against the Philistine. He speaks as if his victory is assured and divinely ordained. Depending on interpretation, either David is correct in his assertions and his subsequent victory stands as proof of God's intervention or David uses his speech as further strategy, baiting Goliath into dropping his guard and stepping away from the shield bearer for prime sling attack potential.

David succeeds in striking Goliath on the forehead with slung stone, then decapitates the Philistine with his own blade. Verse 17:52 suggests the projectile killed Goliath, while 17:53 implies the beheading "finished him off". Some visual representations, like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling illustration of this episode portray a still-living Goliath at David's foot. This interpretation heightens the drama of the final kill stroke, but ultimately these verses reinforce David's victory. Both causes of death – a shepherd's slingshot and one's own sword – are sources of indignity for the Philistine falling in battle.

At the end of the episode, David encounters Saul (again or for the first time) and presents the Philistine's head to his king. The image of David with lifeless head in hand is a

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reassign the deed from obscure Elhanan to the more famous David. (Halpern, Baruch (2003). David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. p. 7-10.) Such a conclusion is supported by the explanatory notes in 1 Chronicles 20:5, in which Elhanah in credited instead with slaying a brother of Goliath named Lachmi. This named appears to come from the final syllables of Bethlehemite, i.e. בֵּית הַלַּחְמִי. Later editors accept this explanation, but the retention of Elhanan's victory in 2 Samuel by redactors defies logic. Elhanan's existence invites readers to consider the symbolic need for David to conquer Goliath.

[12] 17:42

[13] 1 Samuel 17:45

[14] "אִם־בְּרוּחִי כִּי בְכֹחַ וְלֹא בְחַיִל׳ לְא" – "Not by might, nor by power, but by [divine] spirit"

frequent motif chosen in depicting this scene. Though the obvious skirmish takes place against Goliath, David's contest with Saul for power and ultimately the throne is inaugurated in this scene. Saul is tasked with leading the Israelites into battle as their king, yet when he receives Goliath's challenge, he refuses his duty. Saul is himself a tall man, described as standing a head taller than anyone else in Israel.[15] Such stature of position and physicality would make Saul a worthy match for Goliath. Like the Philistine champion, Saul wears armor and helmet of bronze, suggesting they would be at least equally equipped. In verse 17:36, David presents his qualifications, describing how he protected his flock of sheep against lion and bear, striking down the predator and killing it when necessary. Saul has been remiss in protecting his own flock, the people of Israel. This adversity will only be heightened in the coming chapter; Saul is incensed when he hears celebrants chanting "Saul has struck down his thousands, / and David his tens of thousands."[16] David's victory consecrates his confrontation with Saul.

David engages Goliath in single combat and emerges victorious. His triumph invigorates the Israelite troops and compels the retreat and subsequent defeat of the Philistine forces. Some modern military strategists might suggest that this battle technique was ill-advised – why leave the whole contest to a single champion when a fully armed battalion stands at the ready? The practice has regional precedence, enabled conservation of resources, and produced decisive victories. To this end, consider the Ancient Near East context for single combat. *The Story of Sinuhe* presents the likely fictionalized tale from Egyptian Literature of an official who flees his homeland, settles in Upper Retjenu (the Egyptian name for Canaan), and becomes son-in-law to Chief Ammunenshi. Sinuhe battles rebellious tribes

[15] 1 Samuel 9:2. Saul's exact dimensions are not given. By one estimate, standing a head taller than his peers would measure Saul over six feet in height.
[16] 1 Samuel 18:7

on behalf of Ammuneshi, notably through single combat. Overcoming one particularly powerful enemy motivates Sinuhe to pray for and return to Egypt and his ultimate redemption[17].

Single combat is also evident in Greek literature (dated later than 1 Samuel) including *The Iliad*. David and Goliath's skirmish is mirrored by the story of Nestor conquering the giant Ereuthalion in *The Iliad*. In both cases a heavily armed giant issues a challenge that is eschewed by frightened seasoned warriors but taken up by a youngest son despite lack of battle experience. Both young boys are cautioned by a senior guide (Nestor's father/ King Saul) yet reach victory with divine assistance. Nestor assumes Ereuthalion's chariot while David takes the sword of Goliath. In both stories, the enemies flee, the victors pursue them, and the boy-hero gain fame thereafter.[18] Single combat is also prevalent in history of Ancient Rome and in the Hindu epics of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Ramayana*. Episodes of single combat precede battle in the Chinese epic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.[19]

David's confrontation with Goliath has been a popular subject of visual arts. Osmar Schindler created a lithograph in 1888 emphasizing the incredible odds against which David stood. Schindler, a German painter of the Dresden Academy school, uses a style mixture of Art Noveau and impressionism. The *David and Goliath* lithograph is neither ornamented nor dreamlike in its depiction of a waif-like emaciated David with lilywhite skin standing before the monumental Goliath and the Philistine army. Goliath holds his spear in one hand, the other cocked at his hip near his sheathed (phallic) sword. The shield-bearer stands to one

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[17] Barta, M. *Sinuhe, the Bible and the Patriarchs*, Czech Institute of Egyptology/David Brown Book Company. 2003

[18] West, M.L. *The East Face of Helicon,* West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997 pp. 370, 376.

[19] "Single Combat." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, December 19, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_combat.

side, providing a comparison for Goliath's height. Even in the muted sepia, there is a graphic distinction between the two sides. David is especially youthful, yet he stands at the ready, stone already primed for release from the sling. Goliath leans back, laughing with his head tipped up in mirth – this posture evokes overconfidence and invites the observer to guess the ensuing action. Goliath's inattention to the coming projectile expediates his downfall. Schindler's portrayal stays close to the source – he includes the shield bearer and marks the physical distance between David and Goliath. However, Schindler also accentuates the drama by adding rocky terrain and flowing water. By depicting David alone and Goliath among his soldiers, the physical disparities are emphasized.

Gustave Doré illustrated the gruesome end of this episode in his 1866 wood etching for an illuminated bible. David hoists the severed head of Goliath above his own, Goliath's lifeless body at his feet while the Philistine army retreats and the Israelites cheer from behind. The geography of the scene departs from the described valley no-man's-land; here David stands on a rise while the two armies are situated below. The immensity of Goliath's weapons is showcased at the bottom of the panel. The scythe-like sword lies between David's legs, suggesting recent use liberating Goliath's neck from shoulders, yet the sword is impossibly as long as David stands tall. The spear adjacent is even longer. David wears a simple toga and rests his bare foot on Goliath's armored body. The grayscale woodcut is made more dramatic when colorized, as Josephine Pollard did for her 1899 children's bible illustrations. Here, the visceral nature of the scene is made obvious by the red of the blood and entrails. The facial expressions are evident; David stands passive and calm despite the enormity of the task he has done while the post-mortem expression of Goliath's face suggests regret and despair. None of the retreating Philistines has a readable countenance, but the two

Israelite youths (here replacing the elder soldiers) appear jubilant. Doré was a prolific French illustrator and artist of the 19th century known for choosing and interpreting literary themes. Pollard thus chose a well-known source to adapt for her book – she is best known as a writer of hymnals and religious articles. Given that both Pollard and Doré created biblical illustrations, their works follow closely with the text.

Like Pollard and Doré, Italian painter Michel Angelo Merisi da Caravaggio also considered the scene of David with the head of Goliath. He painted the episode three times (1599, 1607, 1610) each to different effect. Each composition features Caravaggio's characteristic use of light and darkness, known as chiaroscuro. Caravaggio exaggerates this dramatic lighting with close observation of human figures, a popular Baroque technique called tenebrism. David is cast in a glowing light against a gloomy background, almost as if lit on a stage. The 1599 depiction features David bent over the body of his foe; Goliath's head has been severed form his neck and now sits at an awkward angle. Despite detachment, Goliath maintains a forlorn expression below his evident forehead injury. Goliath's face is visible while David leans into shadow. David stares intently down as he holds a string, presumably about to hoist the head for transport. Featured here are David's arm, shoulder, and lower leg. His muscles are not prominent, yet his physique is defined in the shadow light.

The next two compositions portray David more clearly. In both 1607 and 1610 versions, David stands upright with Goliath's head held aloft by the hair. His face is divided by illumination and shadow. No environment is visible. David wears a white garment over only one shoulder, exposing a diagonal swath of chest. In 1607, David looks ahead with a resolute expression. Here, Goliath's sword rests on his shoulders – the stance is heroic and accomplished. In the 1610, David is more reserved; he glances down at Goliath with evident

trepidation. Here he holds the sword down by his thigh. All these versions enable Caravaggio to explore David's emotional state in the aftermath of confrontation, a status not specified by the biblical text. Caravaggio seems to ask whether David proud of his conquest or whether he regrets the lethal force required.

Two more artists consider the subject of David conveying the head of Goliath. Tanzio da Varrallo was an Italian painter of the late Mannerist period. He lived subsequently to Caravaggio and this 1624-26 work seems to emulate the themes and qualities of the tenebrist style. Il Tanzio is one of the few artists to feature David's red hair. David appears forlorn – his youthful face mismatched with his muscular physique. David's skin is iridescent and at odds with the grotesque visage of Goliath, almost out of frame. The portrayal of a muscular David, as seen here and in Michelangelo's famous sculpture, casts doubt on the assumed weakness of the text. David appears capable of evoking mortal damage in this painting, with his fist on Goliath's lifeless head and his ease at wielding the giant's blade.

The next depiction of note is that of another Italian Baroque painter, Andrea Vaccaro, who created his David around 1635. Vaccaro was a prolific and successful artist of Naples, known for covering religious subjects. He touched on this contest with multiple works including *The Triumph of David*, in which David holds Goliath's head on by the tip of his sword while surrounded by dancing women, though I focus on the work entitled *David with Head of Goliath*. The name is apt, for Vaccaro exaggerates Goliath's stature; his head alone reaches David's mid-thigh. David struggles under the burden of dragging the enormous cranium, yet his face remains impassive. Like the previous Italian works, here light is at play, shining only on the subjects and leaving the environment largely in shadow. The setting is mostly inscrutable – part of a tree, a man's face, a dark floating shape. In totality, these

elements defy expectation and physics, placing the episode in a mystical category and suggesting that David did not accomplish his feat alone – helped by outside forces, human or divine.

In the 20th century, Marc Chagall considered biblical subjects anew. Chagall was a modernist who worked in many media, incorporating his personal identities as a Russian, a Jew, and his later life in France and the US. Unlike some Jewish art peers, Chagall embraced his identity publicly and features religious symbols in his art, even when not covering scriptural subject matter. Chagall's studies of David showcase his unique style. He embraces color in novel formulations and expressive figural lines. Many viewers characterize Chagall's work as "dreamlike" or "fantastical". Two pieces consider David holding Goliath's head aloft. The works, from 1955 and 1957 respectively are at once simplistic in construction and evocative in power. The basic pose is the same in both; David stands upright, almost a continuous curve, with Goliath's head in his lifted right hand and sword in the left hand. The works are dominated by primary colors and dark outlines. David is triumphant yet also looks away from the head, as if ashamed of his task. By reducing the scene to its bare components yet allowing the characters to remain identifiable, Chagall considers the elemental nature of conflict between man and giant, good and evil.

The myriad artistic representations of David and Goliath reveal the enduring mystery and intrigue ascribed to this fateful meeting. These paintings invite viewers to consider elements beyond the scope of the text regarding David's motivation and disposition during his tactical assault. Visual depictions must convey David's facial expressions and thus also his emotional temperament in taking a human life, entering a public spotlight, and challenging the authority of a sitting king. Most visual representations focus on the human

element, yet this is a scene laden with spiritual significance. Many readers of 1 Samuel deem David's victory as divinely ordained, perhaps even assisted to the point of God guiding the slung stone to the only vulnerability not protected by armor – Goliath's forehead. And yet most of the artists considered here do not include Goliath's helmet at all, making David's crucial target more feasible, and more human. In so doing, David's accomplishments are relatable and attainable with sufficient courage. Readers and viewers can feel a kinship with the subject and apply the morals of this biblical tale to their quotidian pursuits.

In this episode, David is a mirror for individuals facing impossible odds and for the Jewish people as a whole in every instance of imperial rule. He is young, and yet clever, cunning, and driven. As an impassive figure on the canvas, he is himself blank slate on which a new era is etched. At his point in his life, he portends of possibility, legitimacy, power, and faith. He later actions would form the contours of his character and complicate his memory, but in this moment, David's rise is inevitable.

Focus 2: Bathsheba: Temptation and Redemption

If David's conquest of the giant Goliath is his most renowned accomplishment, his affair with Bathsheba is his most notorious folly. David saw Bathsheba bathing while walking on his castle roof. He knew she was married and that her husband Uriah was one of his soldiers who was at that moment fighting at war on his behalf. Even so, David sent messengers to summon Bathsheba and he slept with her.[1] When she discovered she was pregnant, David attempted to cover his act by convincing Uriah to sleep with her. When that ploy failed, he contrived to have Uriah killed on the battlefield. David then takes Bathsheba as his wife and she conceives a child.[2] God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David about the error of his ways. David repents and accepts the consequences, including the death of Bathsheba's child. Bathsheba becomes pregnant again and conceives a second child – Solomon.[3] From this point, Bathsheba is largely absent from the narrative until David is on his deathbed. She then reappears to advocate for Solomon to inherit the throne.[4] These are the textual facts of the episode, yet the intricacies are much more complicated.

Bathsheba herself is not granted much autonomy in the biblical narrative. She is first identified by her relationships to other men – "daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite".[5] It is unusual in biblical parlance to identify a woman by both her husband and her father. Perhaps this serves to doubly indicate the connection with David's elite fighting force. To David as well, she becomes a vessel, first for his lust, and later for his line. The biblical text

[1] 2 Samuel 11:2-5
[2] 2 Samuel 11:6-27
[3] 2 Samuel 12:1-24
[4] 1 Kings 11-31
[5] 2 Samuel 11:3

lacks speech in Bathsheba's name; even when she communicates with David, a messenger acts as intermediary. From this silence, the biblical reader does not know of Bathsheba's degree of consent – was she an unwilling participant or complicit in conspiracy? The consequences of this possible compliance spell the severity of David's initial crime – adultery in the one case versus rape if the King abused his position of power. 2 Samuel 11:4 features a string of verbs in quick succession, a common feature of biblical literature. וַיִּשְׁלַ֣ח דָּוִ֔ד מַלְאָכִ֖ים וַיִּקָּחֶ֑הָ וַתָּבֹ֥א אֵלָ֖יו וַיִּשְׁכַּ֣ב אִתָּ֑הּ וְהִ֣יא מִתְקַדֶּ֔שֶׁת מִטֻּמְאָתָ֖הּ וַתָּ֥שָׁב אֶל־בֵּיתָֽהּ׃. "David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her—she had just purified herself after her period—and she went back home." What is unique about this syntax is the shift of verb subject between David and Bathsheba. The very words are mingled between the two. One phrase in particular, וַתָּבֹ֥א אֵלָ֖יו, seems to indicate double entendre through feminine subject and masculine object. Perhaps the biblical writer is suggesting with Bathsheba's silence an active participation? This silence continues in reference to David's dealings with Uriah; we have no indication of Bathsheba's complicity in attempting to deceive her husband. Of the plot to cause Uriah's death in battle – murder by military contrivance – Bathsheba is likely safe from suspicion. However, given the circumstances, timeframe, and her awareness of the kingdom power structure, Bathsheba was likely aware of David's role in the scheme. Later, when Bathsheba hears of Uriah's death, she mourns him for the proscribed period[6] – she does not rejoice.

A feminist reading of this scene empowers Bathsheba with control of the encounter. Supposing the City of David was densely populated, the buildings would have been

[6] 2 Samuel 11:26

constructed in proximity.[7] Furthermore, the fashion of the time would be exceptionally modest; neither men nor women would readily display their bodies publicly. As a result, citizens would take precaution against accidental voyeurism. And yet, the text reveals that David could easily see Bathsheba bathing from the vantage point of his roof. Kenneth E. Bailey suggests that Bathsheba calculated the summons. She knowingly positioned herself on her own lower roof or in front of an open window facing the palace. Perhaps Bathsheba knew of David's sexual energies; she suspected she could allure the king and later depend on his motivations to control the situation. She used her physical beauty as bait for the King and as a launching point for improving her own quality of life.[8] David issues the summons, but Bathsheba is the one who moves to and from the palace. She thus escaped the household of a low-paying foreign soldier for the comforts of the palace, albeit at the cost of scandal, a lost child, and her first husband's life.

The relative silence of Bathsheba leaves room for interpreters to map their own conclusions onto her and fill the void of characterization. According to Sara M. Koenig, Bathsheba is largely neglected or distorted to match narratological or ideological purview.[9] Perhaps Bathsheba is just another female foil for David's development. She, along with Abigail, Michal, Tamar and others remain mere two-dimensional stop-overs on David's journey. The immorality of the Bathsheba incident threatens perception of David as human exemplar, leader of Israel, and God's anointed one. In order to justify David's divine choseness, blame must be outsourced to an acceptable scapegoat; Bathsheba may be held responsible for David's iniquity if she is cast as seductress and negative influence. Some

[7] Archaeological record suggests Jerusalem was between 12 and 15 acres around 1000 BCE.
[8] Bailey, Kenneth E.. Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the *Gospels*. United States: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
[9] Koenig, Sara M. *Isn't This Bathsheba?: a Study in Characterization*. Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2011.

choose to dismiss or blame Bathsheba in order to maintain a positive impression of David. However, such a theological exercise is not truly necessary; the biblical canon is replete with problematic characters who are nevertheless elected by God to be prophets, leaders, judges, and warriors. A morally deficient David is a human David and thus a figure with whom it is easier to relate. Previous episodes cast David as a divinely protected individual – everyone is allured by his charms, he can do no wrong, and his military excursions are always met with success. Efforts to excuse the litany of sins and crimes in this episode are motivated not by attempts to preserve David's reputation, but by an effort to ground David's lineage in a pure and holy foundation. David's potential propensity to err casts aspersions on his descendants including kings like Solomon and later messianic figures.

Apologetic readings of this episode seek to escape from the negative portrayals of David and the depiction of sinful behavior. Note the absence of this episode from retelling in the Books of Chronicles; the content was deemed so injurious to King David that the record was expunged entirely. Later Talmudic sages sought to reduce the negativity of this scene by suggesting that Uriah and Bathsheba had divorced conditional to his military service[10]. Thus, any relations that took place between David and Bathsheba would not be considered adultery. At least David waited to take Bathsheba as his wife until after Uriah was dead and mourned.[11]

David's flirtation and seduction of Bathsheba are objectively immoral. The degree of wrong-doing is not specified by the text and depends on interpretation. David's subsequent attempts to conceal the tryst paint him as penitent yet intent on avoiding discovery. He would

[10] Talmud Bavli: Shabbat 56a. Such an arrangement prevents war widows from the status of *agunah*, here meaning they become trapped in a halachic marriage without potential of receiving a *gett* due to their husbands falling in battle or going missing in action.
[11] 2 Samuel 11:27

not feel the need to bring Uriah home to be with Bathsheba if David was not remorseful or at least afraid of the consequences. He would not coerce his loyal soldier with arguments and with alcohol to go home to his wife against his will. These acts alone are enough to portray David as at fault. When the obfuscation turns to conspiracy and murder, David's offense escalates to criminal. By knowingly sending a trusting man in his employ to his death, David corrupts the position of his kingship.

Uriah is repeatedly identified by the moniker, "Uriah the Hittite". Robert Alter notes that Uriah is a Hebrew name meaning "The Lord is my light", suggesting that the man is a native-born (or at least naturalized) Israelite of Hittite extraction. Yet the designation of a foreign nationality serves to other Uriah, thus making him a mercenary and categorically disconnected from the Israelite nation. This separation may ease, where possible, the crime of murder committed against him. In any case, there is irony in the foreign nature of the loyal soldier of Israel compared to the betrayal of the Israelite King.[12] The chapter of 2 Samuel 11 begins with this exposition:

וְאֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמּוֹ וְאֶת־עֲבָדָיו אֶת־יוֹאָב וְאֶת־כָּל־הַצָּבָא וַיַּשְׁחִתוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיָּצֻרוּ עַל־רַבָּה וְדָוִד יֹשֵׁב בִּירוּשָׁלָ͏ִם׃ וַיְהִי לְעֵת הָעֶרֶב וַיָּקָם דָּוִד מֵעַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ עַל־גַּג בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּרְא אִשָּׁה רֹחֶצֶת מֵעַל הַגָּג וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה מְאֹד׃

> At the turn of the year, the season when kings go out [to battle], David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him, and they devastated Ammon and besieged Rabbah; David remained in Jerusalem.

Although this serves the narrative function of time and place, it also provides a further categorical separation of David and Uriah. While Uriah is among the "officers

[12] Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

and all Israel" David remains behind. Though the season is specifically demarked as a time for kingly military exercises, this particular king is deficient in his duties.

The reading of this section hinges on Uriah's unawareness of David's machinations. If Uriah is not aware of David's relations with Bathsheba, his loyalty paints him as a device of dramatic irony. His naivety and his repeated refusal to go home to his wife (11:9-11:13) exacerbates the situation; it would be comedic if it was not so tragic. However, if Uriah is aware that David has cuckolded him, his behavior indicates contrivance of its own. Such a reading means that Uriah pointedly defies his king's urging to return home, even verbalizing David's implied end goal in 11:11 "…my master Joab and my master's servants are encamped in the open field, and shall I then come to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life, I will not do this thing."[13] Uriah thus tries the King, testing the limits of this charade. If he was so shrewd, he may well also realize his life hangs in the balance; if he has so lost his honor, he may not desire to live on.[14] A composite of this ambiguous reading suggests that Uriah moves from ignorance to vehement awareness between the first and second exhortation by David.[15] Though when he was first beckoned from the front, Uriah was not yet informed of the liaison between king and wife, when he lay among his comrades at the palace gate (11:9) the truth was revealed to him.

The letter sent from David to Joab, ordering Uriah to the front and his death, is carried by Uriah's own hand.[16] The letter would be in the form of a scroll sealed by wax or

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[13] Talmudic Sages read into this passage, noting Uriah identifies Joab and not David as his lord or master. Doing so in the presence of the King is considered treason, a crime punishable by death. Such an interpretation exonerates David's later decision to order Uriah to his death in battle.

[14] Perry, Menahem, and Meir Sternberg. "The King through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process." *Poetics Today* 7, no. 2 (1986): 275-322. doi:10.2307/1772762.

[15] Garsiel, Moshe. "The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1993): 244-62. www.jstor.org/stable/43721228.

[16] 2 Samuel 11:14

string. David here depends on Uriah's participation and on his not reading the letter. If Uriah was unaware of the adultery, this self-sabotaging act of delivering his own death note further heightens the irony of his demise. His very loyalty leads to his undoing. But if Uriah suspects David and still delivers the letter to Joab, this reveals grim resignation to his fate. Such a Uriah has nothing to live for; his murder is unduly also a suicide, though the blame is firmly David's.

The severity of David's wrong-doing is revealed to him by the confrontation of Nathan the prophet. 2 Samuel chapter 12 opens with the seemingly innocuous, "אֶת־ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶל־דָּוִד נָתָן" – Adonai sent Nathan to David. Yet this action playfully marks the narrative shift to the second part of the episode, mirroring the messengers David sent earlier to satisfy his lust. Divine reprimand here takes the form of a parable. In notable rhythm and prose, Nathan tells a tale of a rich man with a large flock and a poor man with but one little ewe. When a visitor comes calling, the rich man prepares the poor man's sheep rather than one of his own. This story enrages the king; he demands justice on behalf of the poor man and four-fold punishment on the rich man. This is Nathan's design; he turns the anger back at his king with accusation: "הָאִישׁ אַתָּה, You are the man". It is notable that David should fall so fully for Nathan's ruse. The tale is decidedly lyrical in style and content. As a prophet, Nathan likely does not often bring matters of civic justice to the court. This is a psychological ploy, given that David has deviated from the task of protecting his citizens with Bathsheba and Uriah. In hearing this case study, David overcompensates in favor of stringent justice and his monarchial duty. The fourfold retribution is biblically mandated, but David condemns the thief to death "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die!"[17] The sentence

[17] 2 Samuel 12:5

David metes out will in time be cast on his own house, not with his own death, but with the deaths of four of David's children: the unnamed first son of Bathsheba as well as Tamar, Amnon, and Absalom.[18]

Nathan's parable conflates David's crimes against Bathsheba with the murder of Uriah. Note how the lamb eats from her master's crust, drinks from his cup, and lies in his lap – actions evoking a conjugal intimacy. Yet the lamb is not merely stolen from the poor man and added to the rich man's flock. Rather, the creature is taken and sacrificed – blood is shed. The parable places the blame fully on David; Bathsheba and Uriah are here compared to pawns in the King's assignations.

Nathan seems not to fear receiving the king's wrath personally, afterall he is but God's messenger. Nevertheless, he couches his speech in God's voice. Following the indictment "You are the man!" comes "Thus says the God of Israel: 'It is I who appointed you king over Israel, and it is I who saved you from the hand of Saul…"[19] The punishments Nathan describes foreshadow the events to come: the rape of Tamar, in-fighting among David's sons, and rebellion of Absalom. Where up until this point David was in control of the events of his life and his kingdom, from this point on, David reacts to events beyond his control.

This episode inspires artistic reproduction and representation. Most often, the moment of David gazing upon Bathsheba from palace rooftop has been the chosen subject, perhaps because this is the turning point of the narrative, or perhaps because of the illicit nature of the scene. According to the conservative sensibilities of the Christian art world during the

[18] Alter, Robert. *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
[19] 2 Samuel 12:7

Renaissance, female nudes were not depicted without due reason. The portrayal of biblical scenes like that of Eve in the Garden and Bathsheba at her bath were deemed acceptable exceptions. As a result, there are numerous portrayals of Bathsheba in various states of undress, sometimes surrounded by servants, with David gazing from afar. Here I review a sampling of these works, focusing on the most indicative and most renowned art pieces who influence reverberates in popular awareness.

The scene of Bathsheba bathing is captured by Hans Memling, a German painter of the 15th century. His is a rare depiction of a nude woman in the 15th century and suggests utility over eroticism. Bathsheba is shown emerging from an indoor bath, assisted by her maid. Though bare chested, Bathsheba is partially covered by a robe. The pair stands before an open window through which it is possible to glimpse a figure in the distance, understood to be King David on his rooftop balcony. The closely cropped wood panel could have been part of a larger work, perhaps a triptych. Memling was known to depict biblical scenes through multipaneled works.[20] The piece emphasizes the quotidian nature of the encounter; Bathsheba is caught in the midst of her normal hygiene ritual. Were it not for the uninvited gaze of the king in the distance (and the viewer) this scene would go unnoticed.

Bathsheba was a popular subject of Renaissance artwork in the 16th century. One famous example was painted by Paolo Veronese around 1575. Veronese brings his Italian identity to the work, depicting a man and woman at a Venetian fountain in a Classical columned courtyard. Here the female is clothed, though her shoulder is exposed and the background statue is nude. The painting could have been a marriage painting, based on the interlocking arms shown on a water pitcher representing the union of two families – a

[20] "Bathsheba (Memling)." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, November 9, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bathsheba_(Memling).

surprising fact given the adulterous nature of the biblical scene. Although the main female is understood as Bathsheba, some scholars interpret the painting to depict Susannah and the Elders from the book of Daniel, also a tale of adultery. The unknown identities of the subjects provides intrigue and speculation about the nature of the encounter.

Fellow Italian painter Giovanni Battista Naldini preferred the late Mannerist style. He painted *Bathsheba* in the 1570s, playing with shadows and figural bodies. The title woman is featured with radiant skin, dramatic gestures, and a facial expression reflecting disdain. Bathsheba's eyes are raised, though the viewer must decide whether she looks at her attendant maid, up toward King David looming in the background, or up to the heavens imploringly. Bathsheba has four women at her service and a youth in the shadows behind her. These women are all dressed and adorned alike in pink cloth. Though they are dressed, their bare arms and shoulders frame the nude figure at center. Bathsheba wears no clothing, but her posture preserves her dignity. All of the women in the foreground have serious facial expressions.[21] Bathsheba's grimace combined with the shadowy portrayal casts the scene as mysterious and foreboding.

Flemish painter Jan Matsys also captured the Bathsheba scene during his 16th century career; he focused on both biblical scenes and treatment of female nude subjects. Matsys features a sensual style reminiscent of the School of Fontainebleau. With *David and Bathsheba* in 1562, Matsys prioritizes merriment over drama. Accompanied by two attendants on the rooftop, David gazes upon a bare-chested Bathsheba who is with her own two maids, a male youth and a male courtier. All the figures are smiling, while dogs prance at

[21] "Category:Bathsheba by Giovanni Battista Naldini (Hermitage)." https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bathsheba_by_Giovanni_Battista_Naldini_(Hermitage)#/media/File:Giovan_battista_naldini,_Bathsheba.jpg.

their feet. Though ostensibly in the midst of bathing, Bathsheba wears a jeweled headdress, numerous necklaces, a diaphanous gown on her shoulders and a lacy sheet over her upper thighs. Overall, Matsys glosses the lewd nature of the scene and the problematic encounter to come.

Rembrandt van Rijs, Dutch artist of the 17th century, portrayed this scene twice to different effect. His work *The Toilet of Bathsheba* dated 1643 follows the conventions established above. The title woman is depicted bathing out of doors to ensure visibility by a concealed David, who is included on a tower in the background. Despite the nighttime setting, Bathsheba is illuminated while her servants are largely in shadow. The woman arranging Bathsheba's hair appears of African origin. Bathsheba wears a blithe expression here, looking directly out at the viewer while unaware that she is being watched. She sits in the nude, though partially covered by cloth and folded arm.

However, Rembrandt departed from these conventions with *Bathsheba at Her Bath* in 1654. This version focuses on Bathsheba with close framing while eliminating David from view. Bathsheba sits fully exposed, looking downward, her gaze soft while deep in thought. She holds a paper in her hand, the letter from David carried by his messenger. This places the scene later in the story – David has already spied on her and issued his beckons. Now Bathsheba sits in contemplation of how to respond. The text of 2 Samuel does not include this scene – Rembrandt has extrapolated the story to portray this crucial moment of tension between allegiance to king versus fidelity to husband. *Bathsheba at Her Bath* also differs from previous works in the setting, seemingly indoors given the architecture, furnishings, and shallow perspective. Bathsheba's body is not idealized as previous iterations; the female form is exposed and imperfect – the length of the arms, the twist of the torso, the distended

belly. In so doing, Rembrandt brings physical and psychological realism to the character of Bathsheba.

Painting Bathsheba at her bath has become a selection of artists during the ensuing centuries. The subject has been covered by Peter Paul Rubens in 1635, Artemisia Gentileschi in 1637, Francesco Hayez in 1845, Paul Cezanne in 1885, Franz Stuck in 1912 and countless others. This is not an exhaustive list, but it serves to reinforce the claim that the story of David and Bathsheba is firmly planted in the public imagination. And furthermore, retellings are found in all media from literature to music, television and film. Following are a few literary retellings inspired specifically by the David and Bathsheba episode.

David's folly in pursuing Bathsheba highlights one monarch's human capacity for error, but its retelling provides a vantage point for parody and political commentary on later rulers. English dramatist and translator George Peele wrote a theatrical version of *David and Bethsabe,* published posthumously in 1599. Contemporary audiences could view the scriptural subject matter as a gender inverted portrayal of Elizabeth and Leicester – which would render Absalom as Mary, Queen of Scots. Peele's work is unique as a rare extant Elizabethan play based on scripture. Its popularity derived from the same plot elements that enthrall audiences today: adultery, murder, rape, and revenge.[22]

Another literary representation comes in Thomas Hardy's novel *Far From the Madding Crowd.* The love triangle of 2 Samuel 11 and 12 is echoed in the affairs of Hardy's protagonist – here named Bathsheba Everdene. The novel in fictional Wessex Victorian England portrays Bathsheba confronted by the shepherd Gabriel Oak, the soldier Sergeant

[22] "David and Bethsabe by George Peele," ElizabethanDrama.org, accessed January 17, 2020, http://elizabethandrama.org/the-playwrights/george-peele/david-bethsabe-george-peele/)

Frank Troy, and the eligible farmer William Boldwood. The parallels continue, albeit inexactly from the scriptural source and with some literary license. Bathsheba flees to the city of Bath at one point. Troy has a secret affair with Bathsheba's servant, resulting in ill-timed pregnancy and later loss of the child. Jealousy drives Boldwood to kill the soldier Troy. The characters of King David and Uriah are composited across the three love interests in Hardy's novel, but in so doing, the author extrapolates the themes of the original saga.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took a page out of Hardy's book, and out of scripture, when he adapted the David and Bathsheba story in writing *The Adventure of the Crooked Man*. In this short story, published in a collection in 1893, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. James Watson investigate the suspicious death of an army colonel. The circumstances: Colonel James Barclay is found dead in his own blood in a locked room of his villa with his wife Nancy unconscious nearby. The two had been heard arguing by their household staff, leading to suspicion directed toward Nancy. Holmes, suspecting otherwise, deduces that a third party had been present. Holmes and Watson track down a deformed individual named Henry Wood, once a member of Barclay's regiment and competitor for Nancy's affections. During a military operation many years prior, Barclay advised Wood to take a certain safe route, but actually steered him into an ambush by the enemy and left him for dead. Wood's return prompted the argument and Barclay's death by apoplexy.[23] In this retelling, Barclay is King David, Nancy is Bathsheba, and Wood is Uriah – though Doyle altered the course of events to create a satisfying and just conclusion. David's name is explicitly mentioned in the text of the short story as the clue Holmes and Watson use to piece the events together. Placing the biblical events in the context of a mystery heightens the conspiracy of David's actions; the

[23] Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. New Delhi: Om Books International, 2018.

return of Wood in *The Adventure of the Crooked Man* invites readers of Samuel to question the repercussions of Uriah's untimely return during the decades subsequent to his demise.

David's lust for Bathsheba, their forbidden tryst, and the reverberations of immorality and punishment that follow have inspired musical compositions including a few in recent decades. The most well-known piece exploring this subject is Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" from his 1984 album *Various Positions.* According to biographers, Cohen wrote over 80 versions of the song, and many versions of the lyrics can be found.[24] Cohen's original lyrics draw upon multiple tragic biblical love stories including not only David and Bathsheba ("you saw her bathing on the roof, her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you") but also Samson and Delilah ("she cut your hair").[25]

The song, like its scriptural underpinning, defies singular interpretation. "Hallelujah" takes listeners through multiple emotions: nostalgia, joy, pain, suffering, and celebration. The lyrics reference David by name and his musical proclivities. The opening verse offers "Well I've heard there was a secret chord / That David played and it pleased the Lord". David's harp music transcends song and reaches for prayer. The term hallelujah comes from Hebrew prayer, meaning "praised is God" and it evokes the connection to psalms that are ascribed to David's authorship. At the end of the first verse, David is called "the baffled king" which is a fitting title for the monarch who does not know his position with God, with his kingdom, and certainly not with history.

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[24] Maslin, Janet. "Time Passes, but a Song's Time Doesn't." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 9, 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/10/books/the-holy-or-the-broken-by-alan-light.html.
[25] Garvey, Guy. "The Fourth, The Fifth, The Minor Fall." BBC Radio 2. BBC, June 13, 2009. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00f928x.

"Hallelujah" as a song yearns for faith and comes up lacking, an insight into the psyche of both Cohen and his subject in David. The lyrics from Cohen's verse are not found in later versions: "You say I took the name in vain / I don't even know the name / But if I did—well, really—what's it to you? / There's a blaze of light in every word / It doesn't matter which you heard / The holy or the broken Hallelujah".[26] The name refers to haShem, that is God and the sin of saying God's name in vain. Yet the speaker does not even know God and questions the importance of following this commandment. Cohen's theology is here revealed as a personal God yet a connection disrupted and full of doubt. The reference to "a blaze of light in every word" shows the power of language as a tool of creation, and mirrors Cohen's *Anthem*: "There's a crack in everything / that's how the light gets in."[27]

Although Leonard Cohen's recording was not initially commercially successful, a subsequent stark and pure cover by John Cale (1991) and an ethereal and erotic version from Jeff Buckley (1994) brought renewed awareness to the original recording.[28] The poignant subject matter and mix of secular and religious imagery have made "Hallelujah" a favorite selection of movie soundtracks (notably *Shrek,* 2001) and talent competitions. Since 1991, there have been over 300 covers and translations.[29] Of those relevant to a rabbinical thesis, in 2009 Ohad Moskowitz, an Orthodox Jewish singer adapted "Hallelujah" into a setting of "Bo'i Kalah" for accompanying a bride to chuppah. The following year, the Yeshivah

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[26] Cohen, Leonard. *Hallelujah* from *Various Positions,* recorded June 1983, Columbia Passport, 1984, vinyl.
[27] Cohen, Leonard. *Anthem* from *The Future*, recorded June 1992, Columbia Records, 1992, vinyl.
[28] Light, Alan. *Holy Or The Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of Hallelujah*. S.l.: Atria Books, 2020.
[29] Arjatsalo, J., Riise, A., & Kurzweil, K. "A Thousand Covers Deep: Leonard Cohen Covered by Other Artists". The Leonard Cohen files. https://web.archive.org/web/20080607153922/http://leonardcohenfiles.com/coverlist.php?sortby=Song

University acapella group the Maccabeats released their CD *Voices from the Heights* including a cover of "Hallelujah" with the words of the liturgical poem Lecha Dodi.[30]

Alternative rock band, The Pixies, depict the events of 2 Samuel 11 from David's perspective in their song "Dead" on the album *Doolittle* in 1989. Through sparse lyrics and an aggressive delivery, the song considers David's primal need and the dramatic and mortal ramifications for Uriah, Bathsheba's unnamed child, and Bathsheba herself. As illustrated here, David exerts his power over Bathsheba – it is a conquest which serves to elevate David yet degrade Bathsheba in turn. The second verse suggests that David's attraction is purely physical but not felt emotionally: "You get torn down and I get erected / My blood is working but my, my heart is / Dead"[31]. David is portrayed as selfish and callous, even when the evidence of his crime comes to light, ie Bathsheba's pregnancy. The bridge says: "Hey whadaya know / your lovely tan belly / is starting to grow".[32] In a final minimalist tableau, the song reveals Uriah's untimely fate contrived at his king's hands: "Uriah hit the crapper / Uriah hit the crapper / Uriah hit the crapper".[33] Song writer and lead vocalist, Black Francis sought to create a metaphor for sex reduced to the most basic: ugly bad lust with equally bad results.[34]

Rock artist Sting offered a different perspective of the episode in "Mad About You" on his studio album *The Soul Cages.* Although the rest of the album features Sting processing his father's death, this single depicts a lonely King David extolling his love for Bathsheba. In contrast to other depictions, David is not driven by calculated maneuvers or hubris. Here,

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[30] "Hallelujah (Leonard Cohen Song)." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, January 12, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hallelujah_(Leonard_Cohen_song).
[31] Francis, Black. "Dead" from *Doolittle*, recorded 1988, Elektra records, 1989, vinyl.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Francis, Black. Interview in New Musical Express (NME) magazine. Issue April 1989.

David recognizes the folly of his political machinations and declares his desire to be with Bathsheba despite the negative consequences. The song is laden with metaphor and references. The first line "A stones throw from Jerusalem''[35] provides the setting and echoes the Goliath episode. Sting uses the phrase "ancient songs of sadness"[36] which could refer to the Book of Psalms, which David is credited with writing. Phrases like "Though all my kingdoms turn to sand / and fall into the sea" echo Psalms 46:3 - "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, And though the mountains be moved into the heart of the seas". David here accepts the cost of his love, even if it be as great as the sum of his building projects and conquering efforts. Sting shifts the focus from devotion to God and redirects as devotion for a woman. Another Psalms reference is offered with the line "And every star a grain of sand / The leavings of a dried up ocean"[37] which mirrors Ps 66:6 "He turned the sea into dry land; They went through the river on foot". The phrase also draws upon God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:17: "I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore…". While these scriptural quotes evoke God's covenant and capacity, the song turns the same symbols inwards, to portray David's despondency.

Sting's lyrics also reference other works. The lyrics include "They say a city in the desert lies / The vanity of an ancient king / But the city lies in broken pieces / Where the wind howls and the vultures sing"[38] which is reminiscent of the sonnet *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Both consider the transience of material trappings, the impermanence of even the most lavish displays of power. *Ozymandias* is about the statue of Rameses II and the

[35] Sting. "Mad About You" from *The Soul Cages,* recorded 1990, A&M Records, January 1991, CD.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

hubris of a long-defeated ruler. Rameses II reigned some three centuries before the purported dates King David would have taken the throne. Although it is unlikely, it is not impossible that David could have learned from the histories of Egyptian pharaohs. David, in this portrayal, resists the fallacy of his own permanence and even suggests his acceptance of forgoing the success of his empire for the love of Bathsheba. Ironically, it is about David and not Rameses II that musicians like Sting compose their elegies.

Case Study: *The Secret Chord* by Geraldine Brooks

Biblical stories capture the minds of readers. They are more than fairy tales, though the events can be driven by miraculous turn of events. Biblical stories are unlike fables, though they offer insights into the human condition, ethics, morality, failure, sin, and hope. The stories of the bible are not like the histories of record, though they provide an accounting of our people's origins and a sense of chronology, geography, military exercises, and attempts at governance. Bible stories are not liturgy, though they may connect us with prayer, peoplehood, and our collective and individualistic pursuit of God. We cannot file our bible stories under philosophy, sociology, education, or law, yet they offer insights into each facet of our lives.

Bible stories are timeless; they are told and retold in our homes, our houses of worship and schools of literature in the original language and in the vernacular. All translations are interpretations, and yet new versions of the classic stories are written, not to supplant, but to support and explain details of the bible. The language of the bible is terse – subtle details may lack explanation. Modern readers may lack access to the cultural repertoire of the author or authors and so misunderstand that which was intended through implicature. And if there are multiple authors hands at work, or successive emendations of a text, the result has potential for contradictory narratives, structures, or language choices.

When bible stories are retold by modern authors, they necessarily must choose between the ideology of the author (or authors) and those of modern sensibilities. Then, writers must fill in the blanks where the source text is silent, either by making researched

deductions or else inventing material whole cloth. This decision, while diverting away from the authority and authenticity of the original material, is nonetheless worthy of study for its commentary on the modern author, the modern reader, and the ongoing relationship with the characters found in our biblical canon.

The production of scriptural intrigue has a storied history; the line between biblical scholarship and creative reimagination is being challenged by some artistic endeavors, marrying historical context with imaginative speculation. There is precedence for creating new works based on the settings, characters, and themes of the biblical corpus.

Though not the first fictional venture into scripture, Thomas Mann's tetraology *Joseph and His Brothers* stands as a landmark novelization of the biblical source material. The set was originally published in German over the course of a decade from 1933-1943. Mann chose to retell the dramatic relational dissolution of Jacob's sons, Joseph's endeavors in Egypt, and the eventual redemption of fraternal bonds over the course of four novels covering Genesis chapters 27-50.[39] This exploration of the biblical characters sought to contextualize the textual events in the history of the Amarna period. One theme of Mann's work is the role of mythology on the Late Iron Age mindset and the advent of monotheism. The reception of Mann's work shifted the dividing line between literature and biblical scripture.

Several decades after Mann's work, Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*[40] invited feminist reading of Genesis and popularized the genre of fictional imagination in Jewish literature. Rather than retelling the events of the bible, Diamant expands the story of Dinah in a first-

[39] Mann, Thomas, and H. T. Lowe-Porter. Joseph and His Brothers. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1946.
[40] Diamant, Anita. The Red Tent. New York: St. Martins Press, 1997.

person narrative. Dinah, being a relatively minor character, lacks sufficient fodder for a purely intra-textual exploration. Diamant thus creates a back story, building upon midrash, gender studies, and creative imagination to flesh out the women and their place in a world previously depicted only by their male counterparts and forefathers. The 1997 novel expands the dimensionality of Dinah as well as Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah. Diamant's treatment of the Genesis 34 material diverged from traditional scholarship; unlike commentators who interpret Shechem raping Dinah and her brothers coming to her rescue, *The Red Tent* depicts a loving relationship interrupted by rash and racist violence. Diamant's work was popular likely because she offered an avenue into the source text that was altogether different than the source text. A feminist reading allowed readers of all genders to gain a new perspective on well-traversed grounds.

It is on these entrenched and yet inviting grounds that Geraldine Brooks strode with her reimagination of the David narrative, *The Secret Chord*.[41] The David story of Samuel shares with the Genesis material selected by Diamant and Mann exciting and taboo plot devices including violence, sexuality, sibling rivalry, rise to power and comeuppance. However, Brooks was not seeking to offer an invented backstory like Diamant, nor was she commenting on the historical context like Mann. Rather, Brooks seeks to recount the biblical story as it appears in First and Second Samuel, with its complexity, pain, and psychological rigor. In this writing endeavor, Brooks draws upon her journalistic experience and the patterning of her previous novels, in which she expands the life stories of both fictional and real-life entities of previous eras. This trek into the Late Iron Age and the world of David is the furthest back into history that Brooks has reached.

[41] Brooks, Geraldine. The Secret Chord: a Novel. New York: Viking, 2015.

Brooks chose to couch her retelling in the voice and viewpoint of the prophet Natan. Note, this spelling choice is intentional; Brooks used transliterated Hebrew names for all her characters as a means of separating them from the associations readers might have with biblical reputations. In her own words: "I wanted to use the Hebrew names because I wanted to introduce a note of unfamiliarity and to say this is a Jewish story that happened in Israel. These men and women are not funny-looking, bearded or veiled dudes in some Sunday school coloring book. They're sweaty, bloody, dangerous, passionate real people."[42] This means that names like Saul, Samuel, and Solomon appear in her pages as Shaul, Shmuel, and Shlomo.

Geraldine Brooks makes an interesting choice in Natan as her narrator. This selection was shared by Joel Cohen in his own retelling of parts of the David story.[43] Natan plays a pivotal role in the Bathsheba episode, confronting the king about his wrongdoing and foretelling of the divine punishments in store. Natan is also mentioned in the text at the end of David's life, witnessing the transfer of power to Solomon. However, the prophet is not mentioned during the other events of the books of Samuel, or Shmuel as he is called here. When I asked Geraldine Brooks about this narrative device, she said the Book of Natan is missing from Chronicles. "If this was the book by the man who challenged and excoriated a king at the height of his power, and yet was still with him at the end, wrangling the succession, what does that mean for both of them? David's greatness was his willingness to admit his wrongdoing and seek to make amends. Natan was the instrument of that. So I tried to imagine the book that man might have written."[44] In *The Secret Chord*, traumatic

[42] Brooks, Geraldine. Email message with the author, December 23, 2019.
[43] Cohen, Joel. David and Bathsheba: through Nathans Eyes. New York: HiddenSpring, 2007.
[44] Brooks, Geraldine. Email message with the author, December 23, 2019.

circumstances bring Natan into David's orbit. When Natan's father refuses to abet the then-fugitive David in his flight from King Shaul, David's men slaughter Natan's family. At 10 years old, Natan sees a royal future for this outlaw and recognizes his own role in that ascent. David shares that vision and aligns himself with the young man.

Brooks invites some relationships between Natan and other members of the royal court, but also gives the prophet the assignment of creating a biography of the living king. Thus, Natan interviews key players in the story including David's mother Nitzevet and his brother Shammah. Their versions of a helpless and abused youngest son, fending for himself and his sheep flock, undergird the powerful and egotistical man prophet and reader have come to know. Each of David's wives provide their own portrait of the man they knew and loved or grew to hate. Natan meets Avigail, Michal, Batsheva, and Maacah of Geshur. Natan offers us an objective third person perspective yet he is close to the king. Those aspects of the plot not readily observable are here ascribed to Natan's prophetic visions. In this regard, Natan shares insight with the reader knowledable of the source material. Natan, like the reader of *The Secret Chord,* often does not connect to the man David directly, but rather through the stories told about him. Most of Natan's conclusions about the king are derived from personal relationship; he – or really Brooks – captures the complexity of David as a ruler, lover, musician, warrior, father, son, husband, and king.

Brooks trades the terse structure of First and Second Samuel for a lyrical and detailed portrayal of the most compelling moments. This means that her novel does not invite the same mystery and sparseness that forces readers of the bible to interpret and conclude that which is not explicitly stated. It also means that Brooks made conscious authorial choices about the characters portrayed and the scenes depicted. For example, though the relationship

is left ambiguous in the bible, David's love affair with Jonathan is here laid out clearly; like some readers, Natan is caught unawares by the homosexual relationship. Brooks is also graphic in her depiction of the violence of war and betrayal covered during this biblical time. Between episodes of fighting Goliath and the Philistines, running from vengeful Shaul, conquering new lands as King, and retreating from rebellious Avshalom, David and his retinue are constantly at war, fighting on the frontlines, or directing the battle strategy from the palace. The battle scenes are visceral and gory; a early in the text, Natan is described crushing a fallen opponent with his boot. In her own words, Brooks describes the method of reading between the lines of the biblical source material: "It is so rich. And yet incidents that are merely sketches in a couple of sentences imply deeper wellsprings of story. Mical and David is a prime example. How did her abundant love turn to such scalding hatred? It's hinted at but not fully explored in the text. So I did what we do in shul: take the text and squeeze the juice out of it, then hold it up to our contemporary lived experience to see how we can best understand it."[45] Brooks treats the biblical text as sacred, and yet for her this means to consider the hidden richness absent from the *perek*.

The chronicle of David's life that Natan composes is the novelization that readers may hold and enjoy. This metaphysical link allows Brooks to "break the fourth wall" and address the significance of this exercise. "We hear of men like Shalmanezer or Sargon, who won great battles," David concedes when discussing the merits of Natan's biography project. "But these are names only. It would be something, to know their nature. To know them as men… To be known as a man."[46] This is the gift that Geraldine Brooks offers her readers, to feel personally acquainted with the man behind the metaphors and myths. Natan offers

[45] Brooks, Geraldine. Email message with the author, December 23, 2019.
[46] Brooks, Geraldine. The Secret Chord: a Novel. New York: Viking, 2015.

insight into the monumental accomplishments and the depressive episodes, the errors in judgement and the charisma of David's leadership. Exposing David's flaws allows this portrayal to be human and personal. Says Natan: "Indeed, I think they loved him all the more because he was flawed, as they were, and did not hide his passionate, blemished nature."[47] In this Brooks may have placed her own voice in the prophet's mouth. "What I love is that he's… not one thing or the other. Not plaster saint, not unredeemed villain, but a man in full with an abundance of human talents and virtues but also an abundance of human flaws."[48]

The title *The Secret Chord* is drawn from the lyrics of "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen. Brooks acknowledges inspiration for the title and the work as a whole arose when her son Nathaniel began learning to play the harp, including the Cohen melody.[49] Perhaps the choice of title points to the most conspicuous cultural touchstone about King David in the 21st century. But arguably, the two works share more than a leading subject. Brooks peppers the narrative with allusions to Psalms and David's musical proclivities. He plays on a variety of stringed instruments and sings to soothe others and himself, to celebrate military accomplishments, to mourn the deaths of his loved ones, and at moments of moral quandary. These musical interludes variegate the overall image of the man David, at once inviting readers to appreciate the personality contrasts between poet and warrior king, and yet also pulling down a scrim to occlude too-close an analysis.

When asked why she chose to write about the biblical King David, Geraldine Brooks suggested it was necessary. "Stories of power and how it is acquired, how it is used, how it is misused, are timeless. Stories of families, especially complicated, troubled families, are

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Brooks, Geraldine. Email message with the author, December 23, 2019.
[49] Brooks, Geraldine. The Secret Chord: a Novel. New York: Viking, 2015.

timeless. Love stories are timeless. David's story is all of these. It was irresistible."[50] According to contemporary book reviews,[51][52][53] Geraldine Brooks succeeded in her quest to illustrate one of these timeless stories. But Brooks also performs a transcendent and solipsistic act in her creation. In writing *The Secret Chord*, Brooks retells the story she needed to hear, and yet all her readers benefit. The driving forces that animated David's life remain relevant to audiences of 2015 and today.

Conclusions

The epic story of King David speaks to people personally and needs to be told and retold. This periodic reiteration is not for the benefit of the subject or the original framers and redactors of the biblical material in which he figures. Rather, it speaks to the human needs and life development questions universal to aging, seeking validation, struggling, and coping.

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[50] Brooks, Geraldine. Email message with the author, December 23, 2019.
[51] Newhouse, Alana. "'The Secret Chord,' by Geraldine Brooks." The New York Times. The New York Times, October 22, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/books/review/the-secret-chord-by-geraldine-brooks.html
[52] Hoffman, Alice. "Geraldine Brooks Reimagines King David's Life in 'The Secret Chord'." The Washington Post. WP Company, September 28, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/geraldine-brooks-reimagines-king-davids-life-in-the-secret-chord/2015/09/28/e0a4a69c-62de-11e5-9757-e49273f05f65_story.html.
[53] Wolpe, David. "Book of David." Washington Examiner, February 5, 2016. https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/book-of-david.

David operates between the competing poles of humanism as he encounters the visceral truths of war and love and of faith as he contends with the weight of chosenness and the longing of conversing with God. David's is not a uniquely Jewish story or Christian story, and yet people of faith can trace a connection between their own experiences and that of this monumental figure in scripture. For both those who wish to interpret the text literally and those who bask in the figurative morals and metaphors, there is fodder for thought, hope, and dream. Simultaneously, people of no faith can navigate the David Story through the mundane yet never boring politics of power in the context of government and the confines of family. With each new chapter, David offers a model for learning from his successes as well as his failures. David's life is a veritable buffet of ideas from which we may seek our fill, and then return with a new hunger as we grow.

Encountering Goliath and encountering Bathsheba are the metaphorical highs and lows between which a life may oscillate. They are not equal in scale or reciprocal in value, but they represent the respective extrema in the course of life. In the depths of the Valley Elah, David reached one of many personal heights. He accomplished the seeming impossible, and as a result opened for himself new possibilities of the shape of his life. Vanquishing Goliath led to Jonathan's love, Saul's admiration (and subsequent jealousy), and public renown unknown to a mere shepherd boy. David would have further victories, both personal and political, but he would always pursue the feeling he had holding a giant's head aloft and a being briefly certain of his purpose. Perhaps it was that same high that led David to climb to the highest point in his royal palace one night. Maybe David sought that same feeling of catching the impossible in his hand when he sought a liaison with Bathsheba. But David

made a crucial miscalculation, and regardless of his attempts to pick up the pieces or conceal the scope of his failure, this would be his lowest descent.

Life experience may not always follow the pattern of sinusoidal highs and lows, but for those who pursue David's example, living vicariously through this narrative enables new perspectives to be gained. Creators and consumers, writers and readers seek to make this model their own. We have seen how David is found in the expressive language of every era: Renaissance painting, modern writing, rock music, and dramatic representation. Whether or not every endeavor to tell David's story is successful, it portends a greater message. As Geraldine Brooks admitted, this is a story that needs to be told. It is timeless and inevitable. It contains lessons for every age and plot points that maintain their allure. The stories speak to us personally and inspire us to reach for the same heights despite the threat of possible lows.

Geraldine Brooks offers one such attempt. She chose *The Secret Chord* as her title for its cultural valence, but it also offers a telling insight into the body of literature Brooks joined. David's life is like a musical chord – it is multifaceted, constructed of multiple notes that may be at times harmonious or dissonant. While David's life is speaking on multiple levels simultaneously, the listener strives to hear each part in the context of the larger score. But this arpeggio of intrigue may fall on deaf ears – the chord of David is a secret after all. Curiosity is peaked, and we come back to listen repeatedly, hoping to learn the truth, but always caught by the lyre.

Appendix A: Interview with Geraldine Brooks, December 23, 2019.

BA: Your novel is beautiful and poetic, casting the character of David as flawed yet redeemable. How did you come to your understanding of David?

GB: Just from reading all of the text. It's the first complete biography we have, of a man we meet in early childhood and follow through to extreme old age. And along the way, everything happens to him. The best and worst of human experience. Love and hatred. The pain of losing a child. The pain of having a child reject you. The pain of raising a morally flawed child. Success and greatness. Failure and opprobrium.

It is so rich. And yet incidents that are merely sketches in a couple of sentences imply deeper wellsprings of story. Mical and David is a prime example. How did her abundant love turn to such scalding hatred? It's hinted at but not fully explored in the text. So I did what we do in shul: take the text and squeeze the juice out of it, then hold it up to our contemporary lived experience to see how we can best understand it.

What I love is that he's that his not one thing or the other. Not plaster saint, not unredeemed villain, but a man in full with an abundance of human talents and virtues but also an abundance of human flaws.

BA: The prophetic voice is largely absent from the modern day, yet you chose to tell the tale through the eyes of the prophet Natan. How did you come to this decision?

GB: The suggestion in Chronicles that there is a missing account: The Book of Natan. If this was the book by the man who challenged and excoriated a king at the height of his power, and yet was still with him at the end, wrangling the succession, what does that mean for both of them? David's greatness was his willingness to admit his wrongdoing and seek to

make amends. Natan was the instrument of that. So I tried to imagine the book that man might have written.

BA: Why did you decide to write the novel? David's story is timeless, certainly, but do you think it hold special valence for modern readers?

Stories of power and how it is acquired, how it is used, how it is misused, are timeless. Stories of families, especially complicated, troubled families, are timeless. Love stories are timeless. David's story is all of these. It was irresistible.

BA: As a Jewish religious scholar, I was personally moved by the choice to use the Hebrew names. How do you think David is understood differently by readers of different faiths or of no faith?

GB: I wanted to use the Hebrew names because I wanted to introduce a note of unfamiliarity and to say this is a Jewish story that happened in Israel. These men and women are not funny-looking, bearded or veiled dudes in some Sunday school coloring book. They're sweaty, bloody, dangerous, passionate real people.

Appendix B: Interview with Rabbi Jan Katzew, December 10, 2019

BA: I'm learning about King David and the question in my research came up: how does the Reform Movement teach the story of King David? The caveat is: Christian contexts teach David because there's a connection to Jesus and to the lineage that they see and that Jews that believe in the coming of the Messiah would also draw a similar line, albeit one that hasn't yet reached culmination. To Reform Jewish contexts that might not necessarily be seeking that same continuation, why do we value King David?

JK: Since you use the word caveat already, I'll use the same word to begin to respond by indicating that the Reform Movement of course is not a monolith and there isn't something that is the sort of definitive Reform Movement stance on almost anything but certainly with respect to King David in this context in particular. When we were involved in developing the Chai Curriculum, which at least at one point was in well over 1/3 and even close to 1/2 of the Reform congregations in North America, my recollection is that we included King David a few times in the spiral curriculum - from kindergarten really through 8th or 9th grade. The younger age cohort, maybe even in early childhood so that would be between kindergarten and 3rd grade maximally, we included King David sort of as a hero, a leader, an underdog: somebody who sort of embodied – and this is my gloss now – the power of youth. One of the messages that we were seeking to convey, not just in in Chai, but in Jewish life is that – as you studied another context – the world was created for the breath of kindergarten children or school children and the children ultimately are guarantors. That was the overarching message I would say. The enduring understanding for younger ages. What we chose to do - not just with King David but with multiple figures - was to come back to them later so that a middle school student would have hopefully a more nuanced understanding of David and my

recollection is that we sought to portray the text with Natan when he uses a parable to teach King David a lesson about power. In this case, what it means to speak truth to someone who is powerful. And the 2 words which are in Hebrew and which are sort of emblazoned in my memory even though we were talking about this now gosh almost close to 15 to 20 years ago when we were involved in sort of writing the libretto for Chai was “ata ha-eesh”: You are the person, you are the man. So whoever that man is, here is the punishment that needs to be meted out against him. And then what ends up happening, this is what Natan says to David the King that you are the person who in this case sent out Uriah to be killed on the front lines and in order to steal Batsheva. He was the person who had perpetrated the crime that he then had become all exorcised about until he realized that he was the one who was guilty of that crime and it humbled him. That was the other or at least in my recollection that was the other element of the life of King David that as a youth in some respects heroic underdog overcoming Goliath literally and later on in life coming to terms with his imperfections and so prior to bar or bat mitzvah, we were beginning to have people consider you know things like their parents aren't perfect even though they may have thought that when they were 5 or 6 years old or related to the how do we deal with human imperfection and what does it mean to speak truth to power so those were in my recollection some of the issues with King David.

One more thing I wanted to say and this is more I guess it's a little bit both personal and professional. We used to in the context of interviews for HCJR one of the questions used to be a who's your favorite biblical character and why this is for admission this is for admissions to HUC. So I remember this was in 1978 so 41 years ago and I believe it was doctor Barry Kogan who only recently retired asked me that question. And I said King David. And I said King David in in part because of having a great deal of his biography

included in the Bible and both his valorous parts, his virtuous parts as well as his imperfections, his errors were reported. What struck me then and I don't know that I would say the same thing now 41 years later is that he was a learner. He learned from both his failures and his Successes. He paid a price obviously but he learned from both his failures and and his successes. So for example you know he couldn't completely complete building the temple but yet there's Ir David. He still was the one who I think prior to 1967 and maybe even said this at the time I don't remember prior to 1967 the only time Jerusalem was conquered from the South was by King David And I think it was in my recollection of Jerusalem was conquered I don't know 39 or 40 times over the course of the last 3000 or so years and one of the reasons that '67 ended up being successful through the Lions Gate was that they knew the history too. Jerusalem had only ever been conquered from the North basically because of the terrain and so basically there was a sense that you were a sitting duck if you were coming from the lowest part of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is above you you're looking down and say OK there are people who are trying to trying to conquer us there we just picked them off like cherries but what ended up happening was they therefore defended the basically every other part of Jerusalem except for the for this place in the South and the idea that only in basically 1000 BCE and in 1967 almost 3000 year years later those were the 2 times that Jerusalem had become a Jewish city or a basically a Jewish city and it was King David and I don't know Yitzhak Rabin whoever you would want to say Moshe dayan I don't know that ended up leaving a big impression on me is this helpful to you this is very helpful thank you

BA: So I'm looking at the entirety of the David narrative. In art and in retelling it's David and Goliath, and it's David and Batsheba that are returned to over and over and over. Of course

there's so much more to David, of failures and successes. I find it very interesting that we have chosen the most salient episodes, or certainly the most memorable, the most easy to depict. Yet I wonder about the other episodes that most people either don't know because they don't come up in religious school or they're not retold because they're not as glamourous or problematic tales if we look at them too closely. What about the other parts of the story? What about David and Jonathan, David and Absalom, all his other wives and all his other children who kill each other?

JK: I don't know if what I'm about to say is responsive exactly to your question, but I'm thinking about the immediate aftermath of having just given eulogy, when you look back at a person's life. I think one is selective and recognize that you're only sort of ever going to choose episodes out of a movie and the question is, how does one choose salient - and not just salient but also enduring lessons from that person's life? David and Jonathan (and ironically those are the names of the two sons of my rabbi who just died. Jonathan, the younger of the two, is born 3 days after me. We've been friends since we were infants basically. And David the older son is a professor as well a teacher of rhetoric, public speaking, so it's just now that I'm thinking about the family). David and Jonathan is the story of friendship map and I'm trying to remember some of the explicit Hebrew texts that come from it. It is a love story, in a way, and I'm actually reading now a book called *God versus Gay* which is by Jay Michaelson. It's a theology that - I guess it's obvious from the title - is dealing with LGBTQ plus context for understanding Jewish theology and not surprisingly David and Jonathan are involved in this evolving theology. It certainly is a text that leaves open the possibility of homosexual love. I don't know that we said said "Oh we're not going to use that story in Chai". I think maybe we even did, I don't remember, but I would agree

with you that David and Goliath, David and Bathsheba are 2 foci almost of the ellipse of his life. Then there's also the story of power, of how does one acquire power and how is that power limited? Why is it that prior to David, God gives up when trying to convince the people that they don't need a King, they only need Melech haMlachim, they only need the king of Kings. But no, they get Saul. Saul is a very multivalent, complex figure. Does he commit suicide – what does it mean to fall on your sword? Then David, in some respects is the almost antitype of Saul. I think that there are ways in which the course of David's life can be a life lesson for probably a lot of men in terms of how we treat women, in terms of what are our enduring friendships, how we treat our children, how we do or do not have a balance of working and family. I agree with you: there are multiple lessons that can be extracted from from David's life. And I know that you read David Wolpe on David, so I mean there is another artistic poetic example utilizing David's artistic talents, musical talents, psalmist entity. He is an enormous multifaceted figure.

Other people in terms of scholars in the reform movement have written about David in the psalms. Actually my rabbinic mentor who I just saw because his wife just died, Martin Rozenberg and Bernard Zlatowitz, now of blessed memory- they wrote a book on the psalms significantly focused on King David. Martin Rosenberg was on the committee that translated the JPS Hagiographa - the writings and so I ended up studying with him when I was in Port Washington and learning from him some of the psalms. It wasn't specifically about David, but it was about the place of psalmody, of prayer, of personal expressions in relationship to God. That also I think was somewhat compelling in the context of the Reform movement - that there was there has been in Judaism a place for a personal relationship with God, and David again and again and again focuses on that.

I'm thinking lastly of the 23rd Psalm, which also came up at the funeral and studying it and even saying at the *kvura*, at the graveside, that the most important word of that psalm is *eilech,* I will walk, because it describes what David advocates for when you're in a Valley in the course of your life. When you are in pain, when you're experiencing the death of somebody that you love, a significant loss and the word *eilech: ki eilech b'gei tzal'mavet, lo ira ra ki atah imodi:* I will walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for you are with me. This a statement that when you are in pain rather than try to dwell in it or run through it or run around it or avoid it or in some way deny it - you defy it, you walk through it rhythmically and hopefully not alone because as it were at the very least God is with you. I seek at least to learn a great deal of that from that about David, what is it that he did when he was in extremis, when he was in pain at some point in his life and I think that's one of the most powerful important teachings in Torah.

Ironically one of the people who came to the shivah for Rabbi Herman was Rabbi Harold Kushner. Harold Kushner of course wrote a great deal about among other things suffering and the ability to deal with what happens when tzadik v'ra lo - when somebody is a good person and he or she or they are in pain.

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