A King and a Fool?

*Verbal irony in 2 Samuel 11:1-19:8a.*

Virginia Greer Bradley Ingram, B.Theol. (Hons.)

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

*Virginia Ingram*
Abstract
The Succession Narrative portrays King David, Absalom and Amnon as corrupt. This can be stated with certainty. However, determining the genre of the narrative is not so straightforward. Some of the various interpretations of the categories thus far are, national epic, propaganda, wisdom literature, theological ‘history’ writing, literary art, and njals saga. This dissertation starts from the premise that the Succession Narrative is a work of literary art, but goes on to argue that the Succession Narrative is probably a work of satire in particular. The essential feature of satire is a pervasive sense of irony which is intentional and critical. To satisfy the claim that a work is satire one must demonstrate that it has a pervasive and critical sense of irony, provide evidence of a few of the other features of satire, and display an object of attack. This work is focused on irony, as it is the essential element of a satire. Moreover, unlike the other elements of satire, irony is a complex phenomenon that requires detailed scholarly investigation. Further, since verbal irony is the type of irony found in satire, the focus of this work is on verbal irony. Specifically, Douglas Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony has been applied to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. In a lesser way this work has applied David Marcus’ taxonomy of elements of satire to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, to discern the other features of satire including, fantastic events, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features. It is argued that there is a pervasive sense of critical irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, along with examples of the other lesser features of satire, and an object of attack. These findings are sufficient to demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire, and that the Succession Narrative is probably a satire given that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is three quarters of the narrative that is known as the Succession Narrative. It can then be considered that the function of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, in keeping with the function
of satire, is to criticize the abuse of power in the monarchy, and to imply the need for reform.

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On a personal note I would like to thank my family here, in Australia, and back home in New Zealand/Aotearoa.
Abbreviations

BEThL Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium

Bib Biblica

BibInt Biblical Interpretation

BibIntS Biblical Interpretation series

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

CQR Church Quarterly Review

Int Interpretation

JBQ Jewish Bible Quarterly

JQR Jewish Quarterly Review

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

JHScr Journal of Hebrew Scriptures

JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament

RB Revue biblique

SHBC Smyth & Helwyns Bible Commentary

VT Vetus Testamentum

VTSup Supplements to Vetus Testamentum

WBC Word Biblical Commentary

BCE before the Common Era

ISBL International Congress of the Society of Biblical Literature

OT Old Testament

PhD Doctor of Philosophy

SAT Speech Act Theory

SN Succession Narrative

Gen Genesis

Exod Exodus

Lev Leviticus
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“Power [is] always sincerely, conscientiously de tres foi [in very good faith] and believes itself right. Power always thinks it has a great soul, and vast views, beyond the comprehension of the weak; and that it is doing God’s service, when it is violating all his laws.”

John Adams in a letter to Thomas Jefferson (1816).¹

CHAPTER 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The Hebrew Bible presents contrasting depictions of King David. Chronicles is an unmistakably favourable account of David’s Kingship, whereas the narrative in the latter half of the Book of Second Samuel leading into the Book of First Kings presents a very different picture of David. In this account of David’s reign David’s character is explored in more depth, particularly in reference to his transgressions. For example, David is portrayed as having an adulterous affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:4), which he tries to conceal by having Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, executed (2 Sam 11:14-15). Contrary to the favourable account in Chronicles, David is criticised explicitly in this narrative for these transgressions. The narrator writes that God is displeased with David (2 Sam 11:27b), David indicts himself in the Parable of the Rich Man (2 Sam 12:5), Nathan gives God’s adverse judgement (2 Sam 12:7-12), and David himself confesses that he has sinned against God (2 Sam 12:13). Yet, the rest of the narrative that is commonly referred to as the Succession Narrative (SN) is less explicit. There are instances of apparent criticism, such as the contrast between David and Uriah in 11:8-13. There are also verses which only hint at a concern about David’s behaviour, such as 11:1. However, overall it would appear that the SN shows David in a negative light.

With the seemingly unflattering presentation of David in the passage 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2, it is no surprise that the genre of this body of work has been debated extensively. The different genre categorisations of the second half of the Second Book of Samuel have created varying interpretations which range from neutral impressions of

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2 McKenzie writes that the author of Chronicles was most likely a priest, who was interested in documenting the building of the Temple, and the development of the institutions which were associated with the Temple. McKenzie argues that the author of Chronicles did not document David’s transgressions, as they were not the focus of his writing, and to do so would tarnish the reputation of the Temple. Steven McKenzie, King David. A Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.

3 This narrative is usually called the Succession Narrative.
David, impressions of David which are ultimately complimentary despite David’s sins, and interpretations which are highly critical of David’s behaviour.

This dissertation will focus on 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and approach the interpretation of the latter half of the Book of Second Samuel by seeking to ascertain what its most appropriate genre is. The second half of the Book of Second Samuel is generally considered to be a significant section of the SN. Therefore, it may be claimed that the findings regarding genre for 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a are relevant for the entire SN as it would be expected to find consistency in the genre.

1.1. LITERATURE SURVEY

It is the intention of this literature review to examine the different competing views of the genre of the material in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a in particular and more widely the SN, and the varied conceptions of King David and his family within these different genre categorisations of the SN.

In order to examine the history of genre categorisation of the SN (and more particularly 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a) I will begin by examining the origins, and early history of interpretation of the SN, and then move onto a more extensive survey of the different genres potentially applicable to the SN. The genres in question range from national epic to literary art. In some cases scholars have not reached conclusions regarding the genre of the SN or have put forward contentious evidence. For these reasons the genre categorisation of the SN remains a matter of debate. Yet, it is expected that it will be profitable to discuss these works under different, and in some cases imprecise, genre descriptions to examine various trajectories of thought, and to enable gaps in research to be unearthed and considered for future research.
1.1.1. EARLY HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

The argument for the existence of a unified narrative beginning in the Second Book of Samuel through to the beginning of the First Book of Kings has a long history. As early as 1878 Wellhausen proposed that the narrative 2 Sam 9-1 Kgs 2 was a single body of work which documented Solomon’s colourful rise to the throne. He suggests that this body of work has a historical character, as it is a realistic account of events, as opposed to the story of Saul, which Wellhausen claims is more poetic and prone to exaggerations. Yet, although Wellhausen proposes that the SN is pro-David, (and only included an account of David’s transgressions in order to represent a true picture of David), he also suggests that the condemnation of David is in keeping with the pious intent of an editor influenced by the Mosaic tradition.

As scholarship into this body of work developed, the importance of genre began to emerge. In contrast to Wellhausen’s emphasis on historical writing, Bernhard Luther spoke of the text 2 Sam 13-19 as a novella because he believed that the author used historical information to create a literary piece of writing. Luther argues that the Davidic literature shows a clearer use of the novella style of writing than other works in

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4 It is written in Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel that Wellhausen suggests that the end of this narrative is 2 Kgs 2 (262), however, it would appear that this is a typographical error given that it is not consistent with the context of Wellhausen’s discussion. I have come to this conclusion in consultation with my supervisor Dr. Suzanne Boorer.


6 Ibid., 294. Writing later than Wellhausen, Gunkel does not give the narrative in Second Samuel and Kings much consideration. However, like Wellhausen, he does write of the story of Absalom’s revolt as a piece of historical writing in contrast to the narrative in Genesis. For instance, “There no iron floats on water, no snake talks, neither God nor angel appears as one person among others. All happens in just the way that we are accustomed.” Hermann Gunkel, The Stories of Genesis ed. William R. Scott, trans. John J. Scullion. (California: Bibal Press, 1994), 6-7. German original published in 1910.

the Old Testament. This is particularly evident in the passage of David and Bathsheba where the story shows the distinctive elements of the *novella*; such as, interconnected motifs, psychological exploration, suspense, and a core motif which contains a conflict around the central character. The core motif which creates tension within the story is the act of adultery. Through this story David is shown to have a complex character, which Luther suggests is not the usual report of a despot. Instead, David is portrayed as a despot who reluctantly has Uriah killed, and then humbles himself in the face of Yahweh by acknowledging his sin. Thereby, Luther suggests that this story is concerned to show the complexities of David’s nature, as they are understood in the juxtaposition of his despotism and his faith in God. Luther argues that the function of this *novella* is theological, as the audience of this story is reassured that a king who trusts in Yahweh’s justice may have flaws, but ultimately he can be trusted within the framework of Yahweh’s world order. The audience trusts in Yahweh because Yahweh is portrayed as being just by punishing David for his transgressions.

Similarly, Wilhelm Caspari suggests that there is evidence that the story of Absalom’s revolt is a literary fantasy. He claims that the narrator cannot be called a historian as he was not objective in the material he chose. He did not include the dates of the events concerned (as an official recorder might) and he used inaccurate

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9 Ibid., 101-102. Luther suggests that the difference between a ‘narrative’ and a ‘novella’ is the use of motifs. In a narrative the motifs connect to each other, whereas in a novella the motifs are integrated to create a cohesive unit.
10 Ibid., 103.
11 Ibid., 106.
historical material in order to heighten the drama in the story. Caspari argues that the change in literature to a *novella* style of writing came out of a dynamic change in society where a fresher political and economic society reflected on the past in order to heal injustices, and to document the flaws which existed in the community. This new time was pragmatic and concerned more with day to day living, as opposed to the founding time of Israeliite society which expressed itself in mythological stories. Yet, Caspari is not convinced that this story is strictly a *novella*, because of the serious nature of the content. Rather, he suggests that the story of Absalom’s revolt is written in a style which draws on the popular style of *novella* but moves into historiography.

Like Luther and Caspari, Hugo Gressmann suggests that the writing, in what he called, the “time of David” was more novelistic than the history writing which had gone before. The *novella*, differed from earlier work as it was more realistic, it explored the interior world of its characters, and it represented Yahweh as working though ordinary events. Gressmann argues that it is implausible to speak of the later Davidic narratives as strictly history writing, as there are obvious instances of literary invention. For example, the conversations which take place between Amnon and Tamar, and David and the woman of Tekoa must have been crafted by a literary artist, and are more akin to a *novella*. Furthermore, Gressmann suggests that the literary

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13 Ibid., 62. For example, Caspari suggests that the author of this story intentionally, wrongly named Absalom’s daughter (Maacah), Tamar, to dramatize the text.
14 Ibid., 84.
15 Ibid., 82.
16 Ibid., 84.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 21.
20 Ibid., 34-35.
style and psychological detail which can be found in the stories of Absalom’s revolt and the death of Sheba point to novella writing. Yet, although Gressmann identifies these characteristics in the story of David and Bathsheba, he suggests that this story must be called a saga as the leitmotif of a soldier carrying his own death notice is well attested to.

Alfons Schulz interprets the writings of David as being mainly prose, yet, he observes elements in the story which are consistent with the epic genre. However, Schulz notes that the elements which are common to epic writing are used minimally in the Davidic material. This leads him to propose that the poetic elements (2 Sam 20:1) and similes (2 Sam 19:28; 16:9; 17:8-13, and 14:17), which might otherwise be found in epics, are later interpolations. Thereby, Schulz interprets the narrative from 2 Sam 9-20 as novelistic in style. He suggests that evidence of an artistic representation of events can be found in the following features: contrasting characters, the repetition and variation of the same speech or idea, “heightening” of the repetitions, or increased intensity, suspense, “heightening and retardation,” comic relief, the “vividness” of the material, the reluctance of the narrator to pass his own judgement, and the exploration of the interior world of the characters. However, Schulz still has a quasi-historical appreciation of this material as he suggests that the

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21 Ibid., 48-49.
22 Ibid., 28.
24 Ibid., 147.
25 Ibid., 148.
26 Ibid., 151.
27 Ibid., 152.
28 Ibid., 154.
29 Ibid., 157.
30 Ibid., 170.
31 Ibid., 158.
32 Ibid., 147.
motivation behind the writing was to document David’s rule in a detailed and objective manner, albeit with a focus on David as a person.\footnote{Ibid., 122-123.}

The seminal work to grow out of this discussion was Leonhard Rost’s dissertation of 1926, \textit{The Succession to the Throne of David}. In this work, Rost builds on Wellhausen’s proposal that the passage 2 Sam 9-1 Kgs 1-2 is a single authored narrative, by proposing that it is part of a self-contained unit which also includes the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:1b-18a, 19-21; 5:1-11ba, 12; 6:1ba, 4, 10-14, 16; 6:19-7:1; 2 Sam 6:1-15), and the Prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam 7:1-7, 11b, 16; 18-21, 25, (26), 27-29).\footnote{Ibid., 67.} Rost’s major contribution to scholarship proved to be his detailed analysis of the content and style of the passage 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2, which he called the “Succession Narrative.” Rost suggests that there is a uniform structure which links the narrative throughout 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2.\footnote{Ibid., 68.} Rost argues by and large the content and style of the text are consistent throughout the narrative suggesting the unity of the source.\footnote{Ibid.} However, he also argues that the material on the Ammonite war (2 Sam 10:6-11:1; 12:26-31) is from a separate source.

Both Wellhausen\footnote{Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel}, 262.} and Rost see the focus of the content in this narrative as the succession of the throne of King David.\footnote{Rost, \textit{The Succession to the Throne of David}, 84.} However, Rost maintains that it is the content which establishes the boundaries of the narrative. He argues that the material in 1 Kgs 1-2 provides the conclusion to Solomon’s accession to the throne, 2 Sam 10-12

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\footnote{Ibid., 122-123.}
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provides Solomon’s background story, and 2 Sam 9:13:1-20:22 gives the background story of the succession.\textsuperscript{39} Rost also suggests that theological consistency is found in the SN by the representation of Yahweh as the guardian of the moral law who requires submission from human beings, and who expresses himself indirectly in worldly events.\textsuperscript{40}

The other emphasis of Rost’s dissertation is the identification of unity in the text through a consistency of style. He criticizes previous research which identified the unity of texts based only on consistency of vocabulary and thought-content. Rost suggests that these findings are open to debate; as shared vocabulary and shared thoughts might be found in groups of people within the same sphere of influence, and thereby, consistency may not point to a work being written by a single author.\textsuperscript{41} Instead, Rost proposes that although writers may use traditional or learned literary conventions, style is highly idiosyncratic and creative. Rost writes that a single style can be determined by concise vs. expansive writing, a particular use of speech in a narrative, and the way an author chooses to tell a lengthy story (in a seamless block or as smaller stories which are rounded off within a larger narrative).\textsuperscript{42} Rost highlights the difference in style in the work of the Ark Narrative (1 Sam 4:1b-18a, 19-21; 5:1-11ba, 12; 6:1ba, 4, 10-14, 16; 6:19-7:1; 2 Sam 6:1-15) the Prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam 7:1-7, 11b, 16; 18-21, 25, (26), 27-29) , the Ammonite Wars (2 Sam 10:6-11:1; 12:26-31), and the remaining narrative in 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2, to show how these works were authored by different people. In terms of style, Rost notes that the text in the SN is very different from the Ark Narrative which has terse sentences. Instead, the sentences in the SN are long and descriptive, each scene is rounded off, the speeches are used to

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 4.
convey important information, and the narrative is generally more expansive and graphic.\textsuperscript{43} Although Rost does not write in detail about the genre of the text he claims that the SN was written by a member of the royal court,\textsuperscript{44} and is a highly stylized account of history.\textsuperscript{45}

At this stage in the discussion scholars generally agree that the narrative 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2 is a single authored work which was written in order to record the details of Solomon’s rise to the throne; however, scholars were yet to strictly define genre. As mentioned, Wellhausen suggests that the style of writing, of what this dissertation is now calling, the Succession Narrative (SN), is different from other biblical passages which contain fanciful representations of events and is more inclined to ‘historical writing.’ On the other hand, while Luther, Caspari, Gressmann and Schulz all agree that the material in the books of Second Samuel and First Kings contains historical information, nevertheless they interpret the genre of this narrative as having more in common with novelistic writing. Rost’s detailed literary analysis of the SN does not firmly indicate a particular genre.

After the early history of scholarship into the material in the SN, scholars began to make clearer suggestions regarding the genre of the narrative, or spoke of a distinct focus in the narrative which implied a particular genre. In these studies the categories of genre can loosely be grouped under the following headings; National Epic, Political Propaganda, Wisdom Writing, Theological ‘History’ Writing, Literary Art, and \textit{Njals Saga}. Each of these descriptive headings considered on its own is imprecise as it is generally considered that the SN is based on actual historical events, has a theological function, and shows evidence of literary artistry. That is, the SN has key features of

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 104.
multiple genres and, as such, manifest genre overlap. However, consistent with this overlap of genre, it can reasonably be argued that the SN has a dominant focus, and therefore, is a better exemplar of one of these genres than others.

1.1.2. NATIONAL EPIC

In the 1940’s and 1950’s a clear definition of genre was still yet to emerge, however a group of scholars wrote succinctly of the narrative 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2 as a national epic. This interpretation extended the view of the SN as ‘history writing’ but emphasized the author’s intention to document the great achievements of the community. Robert Pfeiffer suggests that it was national pride which inspired the author of this narrative to write the stories of the foundations and the greatness of the monarchy, and in doing so he created history. Pfeiffer posits that this sense of national pride was inspired by the great achievements of King David, and hence he suggests that the history writing of this passage is biographical. Pfeiffer even goes so far as to suggest the ‘biography’ of David was written by somebody close to the king, if not an eyewitness to the events. Thereby, David’s biographer was a fan who sought to create a heroic, but realistic portrayal of the king. This contrast between a heroic but realistic portrayal of the king is evident, for Pfeiffer, in the objectivity of the SN. Pfeiffer argues, “In comparison with other Old Testament historians, our author (like J in the Pentateuch and Judges) is remarkable for his strict objectivity and impartiality. There is


47 Pfeiffer does not reference Rost’s research, nor speak of the ‘Succession Narrative,’ however, he does acknowledge 2 Sam 9-20 as a single source, 359.


49 Ibid., 357.

50 Ibid., 358.
a striking absence of all moralizing reflections, homiletic developments, and ‘philosophy of history.’ Pfeiffer suggests that the author’s only bias is his pride in the nation’s achievements.\footnote{Ibid.}

However, Pfeiffer’s claims are not without criticism. Roger Whybray argues that a national epic must have a national hero and neither David nor the other characters in the narrative are represented as heroic figures.\footnote{R. N. Whybray, \textit{The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2} (Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1968), 48.} Furthermore, there are significant events which have been left out of the narrative in favour of details which would be out of place in such a work.\footnote{Ibid., 49.} An argument for political propaganda as the genre of the SN emerged from this general discussion.

1.1.3. PROPAGANDA

A decade later a body of scholars began to speak of the SN as a work of political propaganda. Timothy Thornton surmised that the SN was written during Solomon’s reign for people who had some knowledge of the events contained within the story. Thornton argues that it was necessary for Solomon to justify his rise to the throne, given that he was not the first in line to be king, and because there were a number of controversial executions at the start of Solomon’s reign, including; Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei.\footnote{Timothy C. G. Thornton, “Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings,” \textit{CQR}, 169 [371] (1968), 159-166, 161.} This emphasis led Thornton to suggest that the question which informed the narrative was not, “Who will succeed David to the throne?” but rather “Why was it Solomon who succeeded David to the throne?”\footnote{Ibid., 160.} For Thornton the bias in the narrative suggests that the emphasis of the story is Solomon’s plotted rise to the throne, as

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opposed to a historical work which outlines a natural contingency of events. Therefore, Thornton suggests that the SN is a form of propaganda similar to court apologetics.  

Harry Hoffner also argues that the SN is a work of political propaganda. Hoffner suggests that political propaganda, or court apologies, were a common form of literature in the Hittite community. These apologies took the form of a defence of a king who had a suspicious rise to the throne, or who usurped a king and needed some kind of legitimation for his reign. Hoffner proposes that this tradition made its way into the communities where the Hittites lived, including ancient Israel. Kyle McCarter builds on Hoffner’s work when he claims that 1 Kgs 1-2 is a court apology for Solomon and David. He suggests that questions of Solomon’s legitimacy to take the throne must have circulated in the community at the time, and as a result, 1 Kgs 1-2 (which vindicated Solomon) was written. Furthermore, McCarter proposes that Solomon’s apology was attached to, or included in, a collection of works which created a narrative in support of David. For example, McCarter argues that the material in 2 Sam 13-20 was written in order to give the impression that David was the victim of Absalom’s unstable behaviour. Moreover, McCarter suggests that the motif of David as the ‘gentle king’, serves to show that he could not have committed any violent deeds.


58 McCarter Jr., “Plots, True or False.” The Succession Narrative as Court Apology,” 357.

59 Ibid., 360. McCarter writes that the material in Second Samuel was concerned more so with David than with Solomon, and that 1 Kgs 1-2 was appended to this work as it created a good framework for the apology. Yet, McCarter writes it is only 1 Kgs 1-2 which were written by the Solomonic apologist. 362.

60 Ibid., 363.
to maintain his throne. Similarly, the presentation of David’s weaknesses when it came to punishing his sons portrays him in a new light as a father who is exceptionally loving. The apologetic tone of these motifs are then, best seen in contrast to Solomon who is perceived to be a strong and decisive leader, who can uphold justice; making this an apology for both David and Solomon. Similarly, McCarter’s student Andrew Knapp claims that the material in the SN is a royal apologetic that was written in order to justify David’s behaviour and to restore his reputation.

Keith Whitelam suggests that the depiction of David in the stories known as David’s rise and the narrative in the SN is a work of royal propaganda. Whitelam argues that it was necessary to manipulate the story of David in order to show that his kingdom was stable, to protect it from threats, and to justify his usurpation of Saul’s throne. He proposes that propaganda was commonplace in ancient Israel and its surrounding nations, and that there would have been an expectation that David release his story in such a fashion. Propaganda at this time was a normal dialogue between a ruler and his audience which often occurred at transitional times. The beginning of the dynastic society would have been one of these times.

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61 Ibid., 365.
62 Ibid., 366.
63 Ibid., 367. See also Noth. Noth suggests that the narrative concerning David’s Kingship in Jerusalem was written in order to record the new political structure which emerged in David’s reign, and the dependence of this new empire on the personality of David who founded it. Thereby, the focus of this narrative is with the theme of succession, and in particular, which son was worthy of succeeding David. Martin Noth, The History of Israel (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), 200-204.
66 Ibid., 64-65. Whitelam suggests that the intended audience were members of the elite who possessed the learning to understand the conversation.
67 Ibid. Whitelam points out that propaganda writing was a learned skill which was in most cases subtle, and not as malicious as the propaganda used in modern regimes such as Nazi Germany. For Whitelam good propaganda has an understanding of its intended audience, and works to draw out the emotions and unconscious desires of that audience, and offers a worldview which satisfies those needs.
Furthermore, Whitelam suggests that the unsavoury deeds in David’s reign, such as the order for Uriah’s death, would have been common knowledge within the elite spheres who were the intended audience of this narrative. Thereby, it was necessary for the propagandist to explain these circumstances in a more positive light. Whitelam suggests that the structure of the narrative, particularly the questions, and the suspense are emotive and elicit from the reader sympathy for David. These literary tools then create a false sense of objectivity. Whitelam argues:

However desperate David’s plight might be, however near death he might seem, he retains his noble bearing and faith in Yahweh to deliver or prove right. David is never reduced to the all-encompassing fear that reduces Saul to such a pathetic state at the feet of the medium Endor…the Bathsheba affair, so problematic for the latter community and canonical writers, reveals David in his frail humanity, able to admit his mistakes, and to grieve for the lost child, while always retaining his royal stature.

Some scholars have questioned the likelihood that the SN is a work of propaganda. David Gunn argues that a classification of propaganda as a genre becomes problematic, given that it cannot be proven that the SN was written in Solomon’s rule, and because there is the possibility of redaction. Gillian Keys maintains that the SN is

68 Ibid. 70. Timothy Thornton, on the other hand, maintains that the author was not interested in sharing David’s vulnerability, but rather that David’s mistakes set in motion Nathan’s prophecies which effectively show David’s older sons to be unsuitable for the throne, and Solomon to be Yahweh’s favoured child. Thornton, “Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings,” 162.

69 Ibid., 77.

70 Ibid., 78.

71 Ibid., 77.

72 Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 26. There is strong evidence for redaction in this material, however, redaction is not a focus of this thesis, which, instead, will look at the material in its final form. Some critics who have applied redaction criticism to this material include; Ernst Würthwein, Die Erzählung von der Thronfolge Davids: Theologische oder politische Geschichtsschreibung? (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974); T. Veijola, Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung (Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemian Toimituksia 193; Helsinki Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975); F. Langlamet, “Pour ou Contre Salomon? La Réduction Prosalomonienne de I Rois, I-II,” RB 84 (1976): 321-79, 481-528, Walter Dietrich, The Early Monarchy in Israel. The Tenth Century B.C.E. Trans. Joachim Vette (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).
too ambiguous to be a form of political propaganda. Whybray suggests that the narrative displays more artistry than the term propaganda might imply. Indeed, Whybray broadly speaks of the SN as being a historical novel, a work of political propaganda, and wisdom instruction in the form of a narrative. However, the emphasis of his research is the influence of the wisdom tradition in the SN.

1.1.4. WISDOM LITERATURE

Whybray suggests that the SN was written at a time of ‘enlightenment’ when Israel was influenced by the wisdom tradition of its neighbours, and when foreign scribes

74 Whybray speaks of the Succession Narrative as a novel, by considering it within the criteria of a novel, which are as follows; “Unity of theme,” (19) “Structure,” (25) “Use of dialogue,” (34) “Portrayal of character,” (35) and “Style.” (45), Whybray writes that the major theme running through the narrative is the theme of succession. However, he also adds that there are sub-themes which contribute to the sense of unity within the narrative. For instance, Whybray writes that the unity of the theme can be identified in the psychological story of the travail of David’s family, and how this travail can be linked to David’s transgressions, (23) the consistency of the characters, (25) and the mini-dramas of Joab, Meribbaal, Absalom etc. (24). The structure of the narrative may be spoken of as a series of smaller units which flow together to make a whole (25). The use of dialogue is notably important to the author as it is within dialogue (and not narration) where the movement of the story takes place, (34). The characters in the narrative are complex, and are portrayed with a level of psychological insight, (35). (This is distinct from the view of Luther, who suggested that the characters in this narrative were represented as ‘types’ of people, with a view to moral teaching. Luther, 193, as cited in, Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2*, 50. Whybray speaks of the style as evident in the artistry of the composition. (45)
75 Ibid., 96.
76 Whybray generally agrees that the narrative from 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1 - 2 is a single authored body of work. However, he suggests that 2 Sam 10:1-11:1a and 12:26-31 are separate war annals; 2 Sam 12:7b-10, 11f, 13b-14 are repetitious and therefore suspicious, and that 1 Kgs 2b:4, and 27 are not original. Ibid., 8-9.
77 Whybray writes that the ‘enlightenment’ in the time of David grew out of an exchange of ideas with neighbouring states, and the need for Israel to match the excellence of other major powers. Whybray builds on the work of Von Rad, who wrote that the court in Israel “was a
would have taught at similar schools in Israel. Such a proposition then leads Whybray to conclude that the author of the SN chose to use a historical subject in order to teach the students wisdom, about the real-life situation that they would find themselves working within. Whybray identifies elements of wisdom tradition in the SN in the following ways; in the use of words, narrative style, the influence of Proverbs, and the content of the story.

In terms of the content and narrative style, Whybray argues that the smaller units which Rost speaks of in the SN are vignettes of wisdom instruction. Moreover, the influence of Proverbs is proposed in the shared theme of retribution. This is expressed in the idea of the inability of the transgressor to sidestep the consequences of his actions in cunning dealings. Whybray suggests that the author of the SN was keen to show the workings of sin and consequence within an understanding of God’s providence. This idea is representative of wisdom tradition in general, which leads him to illustrate a correlation between the wisdom contained within Proverbs and Egyptian wisdom literature. At the heart of both of these spheres is the tension between centre of international wisdom lore.” Gerhard von Rad, “The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel,” in Problem of the Hexateuch, trans. from VT Sup. 1, 1953, 203 as cited in, Whybray, The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2, 1 & 7.

Ibid., 56. Whybray suggests that the international scribes, who taught in Israel, shared a different worldview which embraced intellectual inquiry, and conceived of God as ever-present in the ordinary administration of life, as opposed to working exclusively through a charismatic leader, Ibid., 4-5.

Ibid., 80. Whybray indicates that some of the titles of the officials within David’s court were Egyptian in origin, including; רָוִי, שָׁבָר (שָׁבָר), עֶשֶּר, וֹדֶה, and רָעָה דּוֹד (רָעָה). 56.

Ibid., Whybray compares the wisdom tradition and the Succession Narrative under the headings, “The importance of counsel,” (57) “Retribution,” (60) “Yahweh as the controller of human destiny,” (62) and “Attitude towards the cult” (66).

Ibid., 57-58. For example, Whybray speaks of passages where wisdom is clearly expressed, such as by the woman of Tekoa, who says that the king “has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on earth” (2 Sam 14:20b). Furthermore, Whybray writes that wisdom instruction can be discerned in passages which indicate the consequences of not acting with wisdom, as in David’s act of adultery, and Amnon’s rape of Tamar. He also argues for the influence of wisdom in passages which indicate the actions of ‘wisdom’ without mentioning the word. For instance, Joab’s advice to David in II Sam 19:5-7.

Ibid., 62.
retribution which is natural, and the providence of God. Whybray identifies this same theme as used by the author of the SN.\textsuperscript{84} Yet, in the SN these concepts are played out in an instructive narrative form.\textsuperscript{85}

Whybray notes further Egyptian influence in a comparison of the SN with the royal novel in Egypt. The royal novel recorded the great deeds of a king, in a manner which was artistically pleasing.\textsuperscript{86} The royal novel and the SN are similar documents in that they both have the king as the protagonist of the story, they are both set in the royal court, and they both document uprisings against the king. However, Whybray notes that although there are similarities of themes between royal novels and the SN, the structure of the writing in the SN is very different.\textsuperscript{87} That said, Whybray still concludes that both novels were influenced by wisdom or didactic literature.\textsuperscript{88}

On the other hand, James Crenshaw argues that Whybray’s conclusion is too broad. Crenshaw writes that Whybray fails to identify style and ideas which are fundamentally of the wisdom tradition. Crenshaw writes that the theme of retribution is a staple of legal material, the motif of a controlling God is prominent in most biblical traditions, and the attitude to the cult in Proverbs is not dissimilar to the attitude to the cult in the prophetic tradition. Moreover, he remarks that ethical conduct, humility, and private prayer were as much a focus for the prophets and the priests as they were for the wisdom tradition. Crenshaw also points out that Whybray does not adequately explain

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. Whybray also suggests that the Succession Narrative moves away from the importance of the cult, towards the idea that God’s workings in history are more concerned with righteous behaviour, and prayer (69 & 71). Whybray argues that the comparison of love and hatred (82), contradictory pairs of proverbs, and the themes of “death, knowledge, wisdom, love, and hatred, father and son” (83), all indicate the influence of proverbial thought. The dramatization of the wisdom tradition, Whybray suggests, is evident in three different areas, 1. “Wisdom and folly”, 2. “The education of children” and, 3. “The king” (84).
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 101-102.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 103.
why there are elements in the SN which are not familiar to the wisdom tradition, and why ‘wisdom’ is sometimes portrayed as manipulative. On another note, George Ridout claims that the references to wisdom in the SN are ironic.

The following section concerns the work of scholars who have written of the SN as being a particular style of history writing with a theological intention. This is distinct from what we typically call history writing today.

1.1.5. THEOLOGICAL ‘HISTORY’ WRITING

Von Rad suggests that a society has a ‘historical sense’ when it appreciates the cause and effect of corporate or collective life and when it organises this collective life into a chronological account. These corporate events are usually political in nature, and enhance a society’s understanding of why it finds itself where it is at any given moment. He remarks that it was the ancient Israelite understanding of God as all-pervasive that created this kind of cause and effect thinking which stimulated history writing. By interpreting God as active in all things, the ancient Israelites had a framework which could incorporate a number of seemingly separate events; and in doing so they created long narratives which encompassed a number of shorter stories (such as the SN). Von Rad suggests that the desire to document major historical

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90 George P. Ridout, “Prose Compositional Technique in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2)” (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1971), 127. 90
91 Gerhard von Rad, “The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel,” in From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old Testament Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 125-126. German original, Von Rad ‘Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel’ Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, 32 (1944), 1-42. Von Rad suggests that other contemporaneous civilizations did not document major events in terms of historical contingency, and that this desire to document the development of the nation of Israel was particular to the ancient Israelites. 91
92 Ibid., 128. 92
93 Ibid., 144. 93
events in terms of historical contingency distinguished the ancient Israelites from other contemporaneous civilisations which did not document major events in this way.  

However, for Von Rad, the SN was more than a story which documented the succession to the throne of David. He suggests that in addition to telling the story of the Davidic dynasty, the SN explicated how the new institution of the dynastic monarchy would operate. Thus Von Rad highlights the historical nature of the writing. In theological terms, Von Rad suggests that the SN is a history which not only speaks of the lives of the leaders, but embraces every aspect of life, both sacred and profane. He suggests that the author does this in a style which highlights the psychology or the interior world of the characters.

Walter Brueggemann also suggests that the genre of the SN is historical/theological writing. In particular he maintains that the theme of succession in 2 Sam 9-20; 1 Kgs 1 - 2 is theologically significant as it emphasises the working out of Yahweh’s promise to David, and Israel. The message of the narrative is then God’s gift of life in the face of human freedom. This freedom is distinct from a bond to religious conventions which Brueggemann suggests is contrasted with a charismatic experience of faith. Thus, David’s faith in God despite his humanness is the focus of this narrative. David is free to be human in the knowledge that God is present. Furthermore, Brueggemann suggests that God is passive in the narrative and does not

94 Ibid., 125-126.
95 Von Rad writes that historical writing is a product of the political changes of the day, as it is these changes which constitute what we understand as ‘history.’ Ibid., 145.
96 Ibid., 153.
97 Ibid., 143.
99 Ibid., 6.
100 Ibid., 7-8.
101 Ibid., 8. See also, Walter Brueggemann, David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination and Memory (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 41-66.
102 Ibid., 9.
act in order to preserve the freedom of faith and human expression. Rather, Yahweh is present in Yahweh’s commitment to the dynasty and to established norms of behaviour. These normative boundaries ensure that there are positive consequences for right action, and negative consequences for poor decisions. Ultimately, poor decisions lead to death, and wise decisions are life giving.

Steven McKenzie argues that the SN is a portion of the Deuteronomistic History. He also emphasises the premise that the story is history writing which is theological in nature.

The Deuteronomistic History evaluates Israel’s history according to the law set forth in Deuteronomy, hence its name. It explains national success and failures as the consequences of faithfulness or disobedience to the law. So it is not ‘pure’ history but rather a theological history or even a historical theology. Its goal was less to recount what had happened in the past than to use the past to instruct a later audience.

In a work published in 2013, Steven Mann, who accepts Brueggemann’s idea of David as a model of faith, suggests that the theme of sin and punishment is subordinate to the themes of David’s faith in Yahweh, and David’s hope for God’s mercy. These themes expand into the idea that Yahweh protects all Israelites and brings exiles home. Furthermore, Mann suggests that the illocutionary acts of David, within the

103 Ibid., 10.
104 Ibid., 12-13.
105 Ibid., 13.
110 Ibid., 28.
SN, have a perlocutionary\textsuperscript{112} effect which stimulates the same faith and hope that David has, inside the audience. He comes to this conclusion by applying Speech Act Theory\textsuperscript{113} to the narrative of David’s departure and return to Jerusalem (2 Sam 14-20). SAT concerns itself with speech acts, such as making statements, e.g. God exists, and with the intended effects of those speech acts, e.g. causing the hearer to believe that God exists.\textsuperscript{114} Mann divides David’s speeches up into Searle’s divisions of SAT, which are as follows; assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives.\textsuperscript{115} It is the declarative speeches, which Mann focuses on.\textsuperscript{116} Mann argues that David’s illocutionary acts are theological speech acts, and that theology becomes active in the acceptance of these declarations.\textsuperscript{117} For instance, Mann writes in the case of the woman of Tekoa, it is only on her third attempt to persuade the king that she is successful, by using theology. Thereby, theology can be viewed as a ‘tool.’\textsuperscript{118} In this example the tool of theology is successful in eliciting an oath out of the King.\textsuperscript{119} More so the illocutionary act of the woman of Tekoa has a perlocutionary effect which encourages, a “hermeneutic of self-involvement” from the audience. This self-involvement of the audience is contingent upon the audience sharing the same regard for Yahweh that

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\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 33 An illocutionary act is essentially an ordinary speech, such as making a statement, asking a question or issuing a command. A perlocutionary effect is the intended effect of a speech act. For example, stating that the ice is thin over there might have the effect of causing the hearer to avoid skating in the area in question.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 34
\textsuperscript{113} SAT seeks to describe and analyse speech acts. For example, it analyses an assertion into assertoric force and assertoric content. It also analyses additional acts performed by performing speech acts. For example, the speech act of declaration, ‘I do’ in a marriage ceremony performs the further act of binding a couple contractually. Thus, SAT is concerned with the philosophy of language, rather than with more specific linguistic concerns, such as the details of the syntax of a given language. Ibid., 30-31.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 31. There is a further distinction between so-called performatives and constatives. The latter are speech acts which are either true or false. So commands, for example, are not constatives. On the other hand, arguably all speech acts are performatives in some sense.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 63.
\end{flushleft}
David has for Yahweh, and contingent also upon the audience caring for David (otherwise, the reader will not be moved to change his or her interior world.)

In the case of the original audience, Mann suggests that the narrative of David’s flight from, and return to Jerusalem would give hope to Israelites who were living in exile.

For such an audience, the story of David’s departure and return might open up the possibility within their imagination that Yhwh may yet bring about good to his chosen people, his inheritance, after bringing them distress during a time of exile. They might dare to hope that Yhwh will bring them back to Jerusalem and will bring them good, even after he has worked against them.¹²⁰

Mann suggests that the story of the woman of Tekoa contains the ‘return’ motif in a theological framework, that not only encouraged original audiences, but that also has the power to create hope in people from all generations who share David’s faith in Yahweh.¹²¹

The following section will discuss the emergence of scholarship which draws on the work of scholars who interpreted the SN as a literary piece of work.

1.1.6. LITERARY ART

Otto Eissfeldt suggests that the SN outlines historical events, but does so in a way which is artistically crafted.¹²² He proposes that the SN cannot be called history writing, as it does not document events as annals might, but rather presents events in a

¹²⁰ Ibid., 158.
¹²¹ Ibid., 159. Other studies of SAT in the Succession Narrative include Pyper’s comparison of Nathan’s Parable and the Woman of Tekoa. In this study, Pyper suggests that David’s act of swearing an oath is the performativ element of the speech act. H. S. Pyper, David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1-15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood, BibIntS 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 109 as cited in Steven T. Mann, Run David Run! 50. Bodner applies SAT to the chapters which are concerned with Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom. Bodner uses SAT as a means of discerning character. Keith Bodner, David Observed: A King in the Eyes of His Court, Hebrew Bible Monographs 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005) 2, as cited in Steven T. Mann, Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David’s Departure and Return (2 Samuel 14-20), 51.
deliberate manner with much fictitious ornamentation. Eissfeldt writes that the author of the SN could not have known the private details of the conversations between Amnon and Tamar, David and the woman from Tekoa, Absalom and Ahithophel, and Absalom and Hushai. In addition to these ‘fantasies,’ Eissfeldt remarks that the writer of the SN used a good deal of poetic licence in creating the story.

Gunn builds on these ideas by suggesting that the material in the SN is primarily a work of art and an entertaining story. Gunn argues that this story is traditional in nature, drawing on motifs found in the OT and in other literature. The motifs Gunn mentions are as follows; David’s mercy towards those who want to kill him, “self-indicting parables,” “the woman who brings death,” “the woman and the spies,” “the two messengers,” and the motif of the man carrying his own death letter. Gunn argues that all of these motifs have a literary purpose. For example, whether or not David decides to kill another character heightens the drama in the narrative, and creates interesting love/hate relationships between the characters. Judgement parables (a staple of storytelling in the ancient Near East) are used to add suspense and irony to a narrative. The story of the woman and the spies, (2 Sam 17:17-20) is not only a traditional motif, but has been clumsily constructed in order to

123 Ibid., 48.
124 Ibid., 141.
125 Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 13. Although Gunn does use the term ‘Succession Narrative,’ it is worth noting that he does not believe that Solomon’s ascension is the primary focus of this narrative; indeed, Gunn writes that Solomon is scarcely mentioned in the narrative. Instead Gunn views this as a narrative, where David is the protagonist of the story. 82.
126 Ibid., 39.
127 Ibid., 40.
128 Ibid., 43.
129 Ibid., 44.
130 Ibid., 45.
131 Ibid., 46.
132 Ibid., 40.
133 Ibid., 42.
fit this conventional pattern.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, he interprets the motif of the two messengers who race to tell David the news of the battle with Absalom’s men and of Absalom’s death, (2 Sam 18) as adding entertainment to the story by being ironic (as David’s response to the victory was unexpected).\textsuperscript{135} The story of the man who carries his own death note is another example of an imported motif which Gunn argues is ironic.\textsuperscript{136} Gunn suggests that these traditional motifs may have some basis in historical fact, but that the narrative neglects historical reporting in favour of creating an entertaining story.\textsuperscript{137}

Gunn also suggests that there are passages within the SN which have improbable ‘historical’ similarities, including; 2 Sam 16:1 and 1 Sam 15:18, where the gifts of food are striking,\textsuperscript{138} and 2 Sam 18:6-7, which has similarities to other stories in Samuel.\textsuperscript{139} The implication is then, that these stories are literary fiction. Gunn therefore, concludes that this work finds its origins both in history and the oral tradition of story-telling, which used these literary patterns to provide artistic flair to the material. The highly crafted nature of the narrative and the important story encourages Gunn to call the narrative serious entertainment.

There is entertainment designed for simple amusement, to fill an idle hour and be forgotten and there is entertainment which demands the active engagement of those being entertained, which challenges their intellect, their emotions, their understanding of people, of society, and of themselves. It is in this latter sense that I would speak of our narrative as a work of art and serious entertainment.\textsuperscript{140}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid., 44.
\item ibid., 45.
\item ibid., 46.
\item ibid., 49.
\item ibid., 50.
\item ibid., 51.
\item ibid., 61.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Gunn argues that the focus of this narrative is King David, not Solomon, as the story is framed within David’s kingship, which encompasses Absalom’s rebellion, and Solomon’s succession. Yet, Gunn also suggests that the theme of David as a man is interconnected to the motif of David as a king (due to the fact that David’s family life is intertwined with the premise of dynastic succession, and because David’s failings appear to have been passed onto his children). He also identifies a major theme within the entire narrative as that of “giving and taking.” The overarching theme of giving is seen in Yahweh’s gift of the kingdom to David. The theme of taking is identified in the following ways; the taking of Bathsheba, the rape of Tamar, Absalom’s rebellion, and Solomon’s act of taking the throne. These acts of giving and taking are done within the framework of Yahweh’s actions in human affairs. Furthermore, Gunn points out that Yahweh’s behaviour raises some ethical questions, yet, at its core this is not a moral tale, but a story which, conversely, asks us to reflect on David’s life without moralizing.

Jan Fokkelman also treats the material in the SN as literary art. However, Fokkelman does not agree that the SN is a stand alone narrative. Instead, he argues that the material from the beginning of the First Book of Samuel through to the First Book of Kings can be viewed as 90 literary units that are grouped together in fifteen Acts.

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141 Ibid., 82.
142 Ibid., 89.
143 Ibid., 95.
144 Ibid., 110. Other scholars who have written of the artistic quality of the Succession Narrative include, Thornton, “Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings,” 166 and Whitelam, “The Defence of David,” 76. Thornton writes that although court apologetics can be detected in the Succession Narrative, it is more than likely that the writer was more interested in sharing a good story. Whitelam, on the other hand, suggests that the artistic qualities which can be detected in the SN have been crafted in order to serve the main focus of the narrative, which is propaganda. An interesting expansion of the genre of a work of art/serious entertainment is Van Seters suggestion that the SN is satirical. Van Seters came to this conclusion based on private exchanges he had with Gunn: see John Van Seters, The Biblical Saga of King David (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009), xi.
Fundamental to understanding the connection of the acts is the repitition of the king/prophet conflict in I Samuel with the king/prophet conflict in II Samuel.145 Furthermore, Fokkelman argues that the coherence of I-II Samuel is supported by three pillars which are also the three poems in the narrative (Hannah’s Psalm, David’s dirge and Ps. 18 in II Sam. 22), and by the consistent use of words life and death.146

For Fokkelman the understanding of literary art, as with any other form of artistic expression is best understood in the experience of the artwork. This experience requires the commitment of the readers, feelings, thoughts, and imagination.147 As such the SN is a work of literary art which entreats the reader to participate in the experience of reading it, rather than viewing it as a text with an otherwise prescribed function.

1.1.7. NJALS SAGA

John Van Seters builds on Gunn’s thesis that the SN is a work of ‘serious entertainment.’ In particular Van Seters is attracted to Gunn’s observation that the SN is in some ways reminiscent of Icelandic family sagas. Van Seters makes the argument that the material in the SN (or what he calls the David Saga)148 is akin to Njals sagas.


147 Ibid., 1-19.

Van Seters does not speak of the SN but rather the David Saga. In terms of the boundaries of this work, he includes the boundaries of Rost’s thesis, but also adds 2 Sam 2:8-4:12, and 2 Sam 1:5-10 and 13-16. Furthermore, Van Seters uses the designation “Court History” instead of SN as Van Seters believes that there is less of a focus on the theme of succession then Rost claims. John Van Seters, The Biblical Saga of King David (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009).
which are a particular form of Icelandic family sagas.\textsuperscript{149} He maintains that these sagas are a fictitious account of history.\textsuperscript{150} Yet, Van Seters also suggests that these sagas go towards creating a national identity, albeit a ‘truer’ account of history, which subverts or satirizes the corruptions of the past.\textsuperscript{151} Van Seters takes up Andersson’s view that \textit{Njals sagas} were created to ‘demythologise’ sagas.

Rather than viewing \textit{Njals saga} as the crowning achievement, I suggest that it consciously subverts the narrative positions constructed in the earlier sagas. I consider the author less as the master architect perfecting inherited forms than as a satirist and caricaturist who holds these forms up to searching gaze, revealing what is doubtful and even fraudulent about the older conventions.\textsuperscript{152}

Van Seters prefers the title David Saga as he suggests that the theme of succession is a sub-theme within a wider narrative which presents David’s entire public life, beginning with his rise to power, and only ending with a new king rising to the throne.\textsuperscript{153} David’s Saga, Van Seters suggests, is a parody of an earlier Deuteronomistic document, which was a favourable account of David’s reign.\textsuperscript{154}

Moreover, Van Seters suggests that the Deuteronomistic History of David, which presents David as a just and righteous king, is subverted in the David Saga, where David is shown to be anything but a model ruler.\textsuperscript{155} Instead, he argues that David is shown to be congruent with the worst Kings in Israel’s history including; Ahab, Jeroboam, and Saul.\textsuperscript{156} Consequently, Yahweh makes a judgement over the entire Davidic dynasty.\textsuperscript{157} Van Seters argues that the David Saga parodies the divine promise of the everlasting Davidic kingship, because it portrays David as a king who took the

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 354-355.
\textsuperscript{153} Van Seters, \textit{The Biblical Saga of King David}, 331.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 291.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 343.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 299.
Van Seters then suggests that the over-arching question which arises in this text is; “Is this what you really want?” This question, Van Seters interprets as anti-monarchical and anti-messianic.

1.1.8. SUMMARY

Many different proposals for the genre of the SN have been put forth since 1926, when Rost first coined the phrase, the Succession Narrative. Pfeiffer suggests that the narrative is a national epic which sought to present a true picture of David, who was considered the hero of the story. Thornton, Hoffner, and McCarter all suggest that the SN is a work of propaganda which is similar to court apologetics. Whitelam argues that the SN is royal propaganda which was designed to show David in a positive light, and create stability in the community. Whybray recognises the SN as propaganda, however, he suggests that the dominant element in the story is wisdom instruction. On the other hand, Von Rad, Brueggemann and McKenzie, interpret the SN as a writing which is historical/theological writing. Von Rad emphasises the workings of God as interconnected in the sacred and the profane. Brueggemann suggests that the focus in the SN is the unfolding of God’s promise to David, and Israel, and McKenzie speaks of the SN as being ‘historical theology,’ which was didactic in nature. Mann applies SAT to 2 Sam 14-20 to argue that this narrative is a

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158 Ibid., 357.
159 Ibid., 358.
160 Rost, The Succession to the Throne of David.
161 Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament, 358.
162 Thornton, “Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings,” 161
164 McCarter Jr., “Plots, True and False:” The Succession Narrative as Court Apology,” 357.
166 Whybray, The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam, 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2, 56.
169 McKenzie, King David. A Biography, 27.
‘tool’ of theological discourse.\textsuperscript{170} Eissfeldt\textsuperscript{171} and Fokkelman\textsuperscript{172} suggest that the SN is a literary piece of work, which is artistically crafted, and, in a similar vein Gunn argues that the SN is a ‘serious’ piece of entertainment.\textsuperscript{173} Building on the work of Gunn, Van Seters sees the SN as a \textit{Njals saga} because he believes that it is a parody of an earlier document. For my part, I hold that the SN, or at least 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire. However, in making this claim I do not deny that the SN is also in part an historical account of actual persons and events and that it does have a theological function.

1.2. THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE AS SATIRE?

This dissertation will explore the possibility that the genre of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension of this the SN is a satire (in addition to being an historical account with a theological function). This line of research has emerged from two different lines of inquiry. In the first instance, I have been influenced by the body of research which considers the SN to be a work of literary art, and in particular Gunn’s premise that the SN is ‘serious entertainment.’\textsuperscript{174} The second line of inquiry has been my own research into irony in the SN. In terms of the first line of inquiry, I am most interested in Van Seters’ work which has built on Gunn’s claim that the SN is serious entertainment. Furthermore, Van Seters’ suggestion that the ‘David Saga’ is a parodying work, which subverts earlier ideas\textsuperscript{175} seems to align well with the suggestion that the SN is a satire. This suggestion is particularly evident in Van Seters’ remark,

\begin{quote}
…there is a stratum within the story of David that reflects an attempt to ‘demythologize the tradition’ that is similar to what is evident in the \textit{Njals saga}.
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[170]{Mann, Mann, \textit{Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David’s Departure and Return} (2 Samuel 14-20), 27-29.}
\footnotetext[171]{Eissfeldt, \textit{The Old Testament. An Introduction}, 143.}
\footnotetext[172]{Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & 1 Kgs. 1-2).”}
\footnotetext[173]{Gunn, \textit{The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation}, 82.}
\footnotetext[174]{Gunn, \textit{The Story of King Davud. Genre and Interpretation}, 61.}
\footnotetext[175]{Van Seters, \textit{The Biblical Saga of King David}, 354-355.}
\end{footnotes}
This stratum, which is reflected in the so-called Court History, presents a complete subversion of the older idealized David in DtrH and a parody of many of its major themes, and it does so by means of the same artistic qualities of character portrayal and ‘realistic’ recreation of the past that one finds in *Njals sagas.*

In considering the SN as akin to *Njals sagas* Van Seters has focused on six major features of *Njals sagas.* The six features are as follows: (1) the focus is on the rivalries and feuds of founding families, (2) the *sagas* are based on earlier historical records, (3) the author stresses chronology, genealogy, place names, and memorial markers, (4) the story makes a judgement about the nation’s past which points to the future, (5) the work complies with literary conventions and (6) it is possible (but not always the case) that these sagas are parodies. It would appear that this fits well with the SN, however, I believe that the genre of satire may be more appropriate. Satire, of course, may include some *Njals sagas,* however, *Njals sagas* are not always satirical.

Icelandic sagas also appear to have a geographical specificity as opposed to the more universal term of satire. Moreover, a study in *Njals sagas* would appear to have more of an historical interest, rather than a focus on the literary conventions of irony, rhetorical devices, distortions, grotesqueries etc. Therefore, I believe that satire may be a more appropriate naming of genre for the SN.

The second line of inquiry which led me to suspect that the SN is a work of satire is my own research into irony in the SN. This line of research was largely inspired by Harold Bloom’s work, *The Book of J.* Bloom argues that the author, J, was

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176 Ibid., 48.
177 Ibid., 49.
178 Ibid.
a woman who lived or worked near King Rehoboam (Solomon’s son). Most notably, Bloom argues that the author J was an ironist. Furthermore, he mentions that there is considerable “social irony” in the Second Book of Samuel. However, he writes that the irony is not easily categorized and is best thought of as unique to J, but in the style which we have come to know through Kafka.\(^\text{180}\) Bloom’s claim is supported by my own research which suggests that the SN has a pervasive sense of irony. However, I will argue that the author of the SN (or at least 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a) is an ironist and a satirist, since irony is an essential element of satire. On the contrary Bloom argues that “the book of J” does not conform to any genre, and is not a moral document.\(^\text{181}\)

Therefore, this dissertation will follow the trajectory of thought which begins with the idea that the SN is an artistically crafted piece of work, through to the suggestion that the narrative is serious entertainment, and Van Seters’ argument that the SN is a saga which is satirical in nature. This leads into my own area of research which contends that the 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire.\(^\text{182}\) In order to justify pursuing this line of thought, it is necessary to discover exactly what satire is and if the SN displays features of it. This process will begin with a brief account of the history of satire.

1.2.1. WHAT IS SATIRE?

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 13.  
\(^{182}\) Ibid., 358. See also, Thomas Jemielity, *Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992), 195. Jemielity is another scholar who interprets biblical texts satirically. However, he only touches upon the suggestion that the Davidic narratives contain satire. Jemielity suggests that the pervasiveness of shame in the Hebrew Bible is tantamount to the ridiculing aspect of satire, (particularly as shame presents with judgements) (22-24). In reference to the Succession Narrative shame is found in the case of Ahithophel’s suicide (2 Sam 16:23-17:23), (32) and in the case of Nathan’s judgement against David (2 Sam 11:27-12:13) (38). Jemielity suggests that the latter case is an example of the Hebrew prophet as satirist (85). He also identifies dissimulation in the self-indicting parable in 2 Sam 12:1-14 (194).
It is beyond the scope of this research project to give a full account of satire. Instead, this overview will share the points which are generally agreed upon by scholars, acknowledging that significant debate still exists in the scholarship of satire.

1.2.1.1. HISTORY OF SATIRE
The word satire is derived from the Latin word *satura* which has come to mean brimming with a variety of different things. Gilbert Highet likens the word *satura* to the metaphor of a stew, which is a single unit that is full of different elements. A stew is also rich and earthy as compared to a plate of fine dining, which is sophisticated yet sparse, indicating that satire is coarse and varied.\(^{183}\)

As the word satire was a Roman invention,\(^{184}\) the earliest satirist is sometimes spoken of as Horace (65-8 B.C.E.). However, satiric elements can be discerned much earlier\(^{185}\) in Aristophanes, (446-386 B.C.E.) Old Comedy in Greece,\(^{186}\) the *maqama* tradition in semitic Gadara,\(^{187}\) and as early as (2025-1700 B.C.E.) in Egypt with *The Satire of the Trades*.\(^{188}\) Robert Elliot even proposes that the origins of satire were found in ancient curses. “Even today…we speak of satire as “venomous,” “cutting,” and “stinging,” …Our language preserves the memory of a once-powerful belief:

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\(^{184}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{185}\) It is worth noting that a solid body of scholarship has argued that it is not anachronistic to apply the work ‘satire’ to biblical texts. The most conclusive article on this subject is: M Perry, “Caution a Literary Text,” *Ha-Shifrut* 2/3 (1970), 608-663.


\(^{187}\) Moses Hadas, *Ancilla to Classical Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954). In the *maqama*, a performer uses prose and verse to infuse humour into a serious moral discourse. Menippus adopted this style he had learned in Gadara in what is now referred to as Menippean Satire.

Archilochus’ [680-635 B.C.E.] verses had demonic power; his satire killed.”189 Elliot linked this belief in the power of words to kill, with a belief in magic.190 Of note to this dissertation is Elliot’s suggestion that the understanding of ‘satire’ as deadly magic had transformed into emotional insult by the time of David. He writes that the Arabic hija (which Elliot calls satire) was a curse which tribal poet’s would hurl at each other before a battle. This he contends morphed into bragging, as is demonstrated in the preliminary banter between David and Goliath.191 Yet, it is tempting to suggest that the words which were exchanged between David and Goliath were more than bragging. For instance, Goliath speaks of cursing David (1 Sam 17: 43) and David might be seen to evoke the power of the Lord of Hosts (1 Sam 45-47). Either way, as Elliot mentions, whether this exchange was seen to be a curse or hurtful invective, the commonality in both cases is the desire to harm the opposition, and to gain control over him or her.192

The fear that satires created is well-documented. For instance, S. D. Goitein writes; Muhammad…is reported twice to have ordered the execution of such powerful female satirists, who were greatly dreaded by even such a powerful man as the head of the new Muslim State. This makes it clear why King Saul was so upset when the “dancing women” in their songs of triumph ascribed, or, as the Bible says, “gave” to David the slaying of ten thousands and to him only thousands, or why Barak refused to wage war against Sisera unless Deborah would accompany him. The biting satires of the woman judge, some of which were later included in the so-called song of Deborah (Judges 5) were a most effective means of activating the languid tribes. Prophetesses were consulted or dreaded, up to the very end of the Old-Israelite prophetism, if we may judge from the examples of Hulda, who was approached by King Josiah, and Noadya, who was obviously a great nuisance to Nehemiah, the Governor of Judea in Persian times, even though he was an energetic and rather ruthless man (Nehemiah 6:14).193

190 Ibid., 6.
191 Ibid., 16.
192 Ibid., 292.
It appears that satiric forms were evident in different cultures (including the OT), throughout history. What is significant for this research is the identifying features, and the function of satire. An in-depth analysis of both of these aspects of satire will follow.

1.2.1.2. IDENTIFYING SATIRE

Satire presents in different forms. It may appear as a monologue, a parody of an existing work, a fictitious drama, a biography, or satire might present as history writing. It may be of any length, however, if it is long, it will, (in most cases) be episodic. Thereby, a satire cannot be discerned purely by form, but must also be considered for content. Thus,

When we speak of a satirical novel or a satirical play we probably have in mind a work of art which contains a sharp kind of irony or ridicule or even denunciation…in short, satire has to do with tone and spirit (perhaps also purpose), but hardly with form.

Satire also has a discernible object of attack. The targeted object is usually a political figure. This prompts Highet to suggest that most satire is written of real people, and real life situations, usually involving some kind of corruption which the satirist is railing against.

Traditionally the targets of satire are presented in ways which are humiliating, and debasing. They are violently and perversely violated in the most grotesque

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195 Ibid., 216.
196 Ibid., 213.
197 Ibid., 206.
201 Ibid., 16.
manner in order to strip them (metaphorically) of their social standing. Mathew Hogdart argues, “By using obscenity, the satirist can go even further, reducing man from nakedness to the condition of an animal, in which any claim to social or even divine distinction must appear even more ridiculous.” Other elements which may be present in a satire include “fantastic events,” “distortions,” (which commonly appear as exaggerations and understatements), ridicule and parody, and “rhetorical features,” which show that a work has been artistically crafted. A satire might also use coarse, or obscene language, and revel in graphic and challenging descriptions of events. However, irony is the most important, and most heavily utilised element in satire. The constant use of irony sets up two different levels in a text, one which presents the situation as it appears to the object of the attack, another which is critical of the object of attack. This duality, then represents the struggle of two different perspectives or, indeed, societies. So, irony is essential to satire since it both sets up the two levels and forces the audience to make a judgement between the contrasting values embodied in these two different levels.

The form of irony definitive of satire is verbal irony. Moreover, the irony in instances of verbal irony is always intended; so the irony is not merely the unintended result of some conjunction of action and circumstance as in the well-known case of the pick-pocket whose own pocket is picked as he picks the pocket of others.

205 Ibid., 11.
210 Ibid., 256.
Furthermore, in satire it is necessary that there is evidence of a pervasive sense of verbal irony,\textsuperscript{212} or in Northrop Frye’s words, “militant irony.”\textsuperscript{213} However, upon saying this it is necessary to note that the study into satire is as diverse and unsettled as the study into irony. This dissertation accepts the standard view of satire elaborated above, whilst acknowledging the extensive debate on the subject.

1.2.1.3. FUNCTION OF SATIRE

Highet mentions two types of satirists which he calls the optimist and the pessimist. The optimist, Highet claims, likes people and hopes to cure them of their vices. The optimist uses frank and obscene words, however, he/she does this in order to shock an audience into facing the truth and in order to protest against injustices.\textsuperscript{214} The pessimist on the other hand hates people, as he or she finds them to be incurably evil and foolish. The pessimist thereby, does not hope for the restoration of the world, but conversely hopes to destroy the world through his/her cruel words, and brutal sentences.\textsuperscript{215} Thankfully, most scholars are less familiar with the dark-hearted satirist, and suggest that the primary function of satire is reform.

The satirist is not taken in by the hero of the epic, as the satirist sees through the smokescreen. Instead, the satirist will deflate the (seemingly) heroic in favour of presenting a truer version of events.\textsuperscript{216} It might then be said that the optimistic satirist is an idealist at heart, who hopes that an ideal world will come about through his or her

\textsuperscript{212} Marcus, \textit{From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible}, 13.
\textsuperscript{213} Frye, \textit{Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays}, 224.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 235.
\textsuperscript{216} Hodgart, \textit{Satire}, 30.
denunciation of vice, folly, and injustice.\textsuperscript{217} The satirist is thereby, reformer,\textsuperscript{218} teacher,\textsuperscript{219} healer,\textsuperscript{220} and artist.\textsuperscript{221}

1.2.2. DOES THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE HAVE THE KEY FEATURES OF SATIRE?

Can 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN be interpreted as satire? To explore this idea in further depth, it is necessary to point out particular aspects of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a which are satirical. If it is the case that the features of satire, including the essential feature of irony, are to be found in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, then it would be reasonable to claim that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire and that the SN is probably a satire.

One influential taxonomy of the key elements of satire, including irony, is that of Marcus.\textsuperscript{222} Marcus’ definitions have been chosen over the work of the other scholars mentioned on two grounds. Firstly, Marcus’ methodology gives a clear and comprehensive account of the main features of satire from a standard perspective, as opposed to scholars such as Highet whose work is more niched. Secondly, Marcus’ work discusses the features of satire as they apply specifically to biblical scholarship. The biblical examples he uses to explain his definitions are, therefore, more helpful to this research, than examples which concentrate on broader literature. The features of satire which Marcus speaks of are as follows; fantastic events, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, rhetorical features, and irony.

1.2.2.1. FANTASTIC EVENTS IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Ibid.1956} Ibid., 27.
\bibitem{Hightet1956} Highet, \textit{The Anatomy of Satire}, 243.
\bibitem{Ibid.1956.1} Ibid., 236.
\bibitem{Hodgart1956} Hodgart, \textit{Satire}, 20.
\bibitem{Marcus1956} Marcus, \textit{From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible}.
\end{thebibliography}
Marcus writes that fantastic events are those events which are either impossible or highly improbable. Although there do not appear to be many fantastic events in the SN, there are a few events which have puzzled scholars. For example, it is unlikely that David placed a crown on his head which weighed the same as a human being (2 Sam 12:30). Similarly it is unlikely that Absalom’s hair, when it was cut and weighed annually, weighed four and a half pounds (2 Sam 14:26).

1.2.2.2. GROTESQUERIES IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

Grotesqueries are defined by Marcus as actions which are characterised by violence, violations, or obscenities. Examples of grotesqueries are as follows, “…beatings, mutilations, killings, murder, rape, incest, and cannibalism, and vulgarities such as obscenity, and scatology.” Examples of grotesqueries in the SN are, the execution of Uriah (2 Sam 11:14-17), and the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 11-14).

1.2.2.3. DISTORTIONS IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

Marcus speaks of distortions as largely being either exaggerations or understatements. Examples of distortions in the SN are as follows: 2 Sam 11:1 when the narrator states that ‘all’ of Israel went out to war except David. This must be an exaggeration as in the next few lines the narrator speaks of some of the people who were still in Jerusalem. It could be said that the depiction of David’s grief is exaggerated. For instance, David’s servants are fearful of telling him about the death of his child as David’s grief seems to be so great (2 Sam 12:18b), yet, he recovers with

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223 Ibid., 10.
224 Ibid., 11-12.
225 Ibid., 13.
surprising ease (2 Sam 12:20). Perry and Sternberg write that the ironic understatement in the story of David and Bathsheba is extreme in contrast to other biblical narratives (2 Sam 11:4).

1.2.2.4. RIDICULE IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

Ridicule is making fun of a person by any means. This could take the form of making fun of a person’s name, appearance, characteristics, or by concentrating on the embarrassing, and ignoble, situations which the protagonist finds himself/herself in.

Some examples of ridicule in the SN are as follows: David’s act of adultery with Bathsheba was ignoble at the least and a grotesque rape in the worst case scenario (2 Sam 11:4). The fact that Bathsheba falls pregnant in this single act might indicate that David is particularly virile, or it might be another ridiculing event in this story, as it shows David to be particularly unfortunate (2 Sam 11:5). The efforts that David went to in order to try and coerce Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba reflect poorly on David (2 Sam 11:6-13). In Joab’s message to David, (2 Sam 11:20-21) David is portrayed as quick to anger, and easily manipulated. The ridicule of David continues with Nathan’s Parable, where it appears the only means of bringing David to an awareness of the injurious nature of his actions is to present them as a parable (2 Sam 12:1-4). David is further ridiculed when his judgement on the rich man in the parable is severe (2 Sam 12:5-6). The ridicule continues with the severe castigation that David receives from Yahweh through the prophet, Nathan (2 Sam 12:7-14).

1.2.2.5. PARODY IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

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Parody is primarily the distortion of a known text, expression, or custom. However, parody can also be discerned in puns, paronomasias, and exaggerations, or when an entire narrative, genre, person, or general characteristic is mocked. Marcus writes that a typical means of parody is when a non-Israelite quotes scripture. In the first instance Van Seters argues that the SN is a secondary source which parodies an earlier Deuteronomistic account of the Davidic history. There are also numerous examples of David being mocked in the SN. For instance, David is mocked by Joab because he is does not lead the army in war, and David is shown to take Rabbah in an uninspiring battle (2 Sam 12:26-31). The fact that Yahweh is displeased with David’s interactions with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11:27b), might suggest parody in the form of mockery. 2 Sam 11:11 is clearly a parody, where a foreigner must explain to the King of Israel the laws of ritual purity, and the importance of Yahweh’s presence on the battlefront.

1.2.2.6. RHETORICAL FEATURES IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

Marcus writes that the rhetorical devices which are evident in the Hebrew Bible include: paronomasias, repetitions of verbs, homophones, homographs, colloquialisms, obscene language, hapax legomena, and chiastic patterns. There are numerous examples of rhetorical features in the SN. McCarter suggests that the phrase, בן–מות (2 Sam 12:5) is better translated as the colloquialism “hellfiend.” 2 Sam 11:11 contains a play on words with the word בָּאָסָכֹת which has been interpreted as both “at Succoth”

229 Ibid., 19.
230 Ibid., 19-22.
231 Van Seters, The Biblical Saga of King David, 2.
232 Marcus, From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible, 23.
and “in booths.” Polzin notes that there is an extra aleph in the word which is ordinarily translated kings (2 Sam 11:1), which means that this word (beyond the context) would better be translated as messengers. Polzin remarks; “It may be that there is no more deliciously ambiguous verse in all the History than 2 Sam 11:1…” This same ambiguity is further exploited when David takes Rabbah and places an illustrious crown on his head which is either from ‘their king’ or from ‘Milkom’ the Ammonite God (2 Sam 12:30). The repetition of the verb לשלח in the Bathsheba story is striking, (2 Sam 11:1; 3-6). This pattern resurfaces (with less frequency) within David’s plan to kill Uriah (2 Sam 11:14, 18, 22, 27). Bathsheba’s name has also generated much scholarly discussion, with Camp suggesting (as most scholars do) that, Bathsheba means “daughter of oath.” Moreover, all of the characters in Nathan’s Parable are spoken of in words which are rarely used in, what Polzin calls, the ‘History.’ Perry and Sternberg mention metonymic links within the story of David and Bathsheba which indicate colloquialism in the text, and metaphorical parallelism. Furthermore, Charles Conroy, George Ridout, and Fokkelman Polzin writes that the choice of word for the ewe-lamb (כבשׂה) is only used once in the ‘history.’ The words for the wayfarer and traveller (ארח and הָלָכָה) are also rare, as are the words which represent the otherwise common words rich and poor. The only other place in the OT where this form of poor is used is in 1 Sam 2:7, where the Lord is described as the giver of riches and poverty.

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239 Perry and Sternberg, “The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,”286. Perry and Sternberg write that David’s taking of Rabbah is analogous to David’s taking of Bathsheba, 287.
241 George P. Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2).”
242 J. P. Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2).”
have written entire books on the patterns, word-play and particular language of the material in the SN.

1.2.2.7. IRONY

Many scholars have identified irony in the SN. Edwin Good suggests that there is a hint of critical irony in the story of David and Bathsheba, in particular in David’s neglect of his kingly duties.\(^{243}\) Whybray notes a number of different instances of dramatic irony, including but not limited to the report that David’s sons had been killed when they were on their way to him, when it was only Amnon who had been killed (2 Sam 13:36), and David’s condemnation of the rich man in Nathan’s Parable, who was analogous to David (2 Sam 12:6).\(^{244}\) Ridout has written extensively on thematic irony in the SN.\(^{245}\) Gunn has mentioned numerous instances of irony including the knowledge that it is David’s lack of justice in the case of Absalom which paved the way for Absalom’s revolt (2 Sam 13:21), and the knowledge that Bathsheba, who begins as a victim in the story (2 Sam 11:4), is also the mother of the future King of Israel, Solomon (2 Sam 12:24).\(^{246}\) Brueggemann argues that irony can be found in the SN in a number of ways, including the story of Uriah unknowingly carrying his own death note (2 Sam 11:14-15).\(^{247}\) Perry and Sternberg discuss the possible ironies in the story of Uriah at great length.\(^{248}\) Other scholars who discuss irony in the SN include: Shimon Bar-Efrat,\(^{249}\)

\(^{244}\) Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2,* 46-47.
\(^{245}\) Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2),” 121.
\(^{246}\) Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation,* 93 & 95.
\(^{247}\) Brueggemann, *David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination & Memory,* 50, 58 & 60.
Danna Fewell (with Gunn), Fokkelman, McKenzie, Van Seters, Carolyn Sharp, and myself.

1.2.3 SUMMARY

An overview of satire appeared in section 1.2. The origins of satire were discussed and it was pointed out that satire has a cutting and confrontational quality and is an ancient literary form found in different cultures. It was also pointed out that satire does not necessarily conform to a standard form. However, all satires have at least one object of attack who is usually a political or religious figure. The object of attack is portrayed in a way which is humiliating in order to challenge his or her social position. The function of satire was discussed, and it was established that satire was predominantly used in order to excite reform. It was argued that the satirist hopes for a better world to emerge from the denunciation of injustices and other wrongdoing. The identifying features of satire are generally spoken of as: fantastic elements, distortions, ridicule, parody, rhetorical features, and irony. Of all of these features, irony is the only feature which is essential to satire. However, the irony in satire must be pervasive and critical. The identification of the presence of pervasive critical irony, and the identification of some of the other features of satire in a narrative, along with an object of attack, is sufficient to determine whether or not a work is a satire. All of the features of satire were applied to the SN and it appears that there are enough examples indicating the features of satire.

251 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & 1 Kgs. 1-2),” 172-174.
252 McKenzie, King David, A Biography, 158-160, 164 & 183.
in the SN to warrant further investigation of the SN and in particular 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a in these terms.

The focus of this dissertation will be on irony. The other elements of satire including, fantastic situations, grotesqueries, parody, ridicule, distortions and rhetorical devices, are relatively straightforward. They are also not essential features of satire. Irony, on the other hand, is more complex, and is the central / most important aspect of satire. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation will be primarily on irony, and in particular the type of irony which is characteristic of satire, verbal irony. Indeed this dissertation is the first in-depth scholarly exploration of verbal irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. This has the potential to advance understanding of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a by opening up a fresh perspective, namely, that of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN as satire. In order to facilitate this process I will first delve into the nature of irony, particularly as it relates to satire, and to outline the existing contributions of scholars with respect to identifying irony in the SN.

1.3 IRONY

1.3.1. HISTORY OF IRONY
It is not the intention of this dissertation to give an extensive account of the history of irony,\textsuperscript{256} nor of the comprehensive debate of the mechanics of irony.\textsuperscript{257} Instead, this section, which has loosely been titled the “History of Irony,” will discuss the origins of the word irony, along with some of the important developments in irony. As the study of irony spans millennia, the periods to be discussed, namely, Socratic period, Romantic period, and Post-Modernism, are an incomplete set to say the least. However, this overview of irony will allow for a general understanding of some of the different schools within the study of irony, and how they differ. This appreciation of the varieties of perspectives of irony is a necessary precursor to the in-depth appraisal of irony in the SN. The final section on verbal irony will discuss the type of irony characteristic of satire and how it relates to other types of irony.

1.3.1.1. ETYMOLOGY

Irony can be detected in history before the phenomenon was called irony,\textsuperscript{258} however, the word irony originated in the Greek dramas which revolved around the characters of the \textit{alazōn} and the \textit{eirōn}. The \textit{alazōn} was characterised as being full of pretence and ignorance, whereas the \textit{eirōn} (who appeared to be ignorant) was actually the character with the greater insights who exposed the gaps in the \textit{alazōn}'s argument. The word irony is, therefore, derived from the Greek word \textit{eironeia}, (which is linked to the character of the \textit{eirōn}), and is variously described as dissimulation, feigning ignorance, hiding under a false pretence, hypocrisy,\textsuperscript{259} and deception. The word \textit{eironeia} may also

\textsuperscript{256} For a comprehensive account of the history of irony see Claire Colebrook, \textit{Irony} (New York: Routledge, 2004).
\textsuperscript{257} For a fuller treatment of the mechanics of irony see, D. C. Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony} (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969).
\textsuperscript{258} Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony}, 14.
\textsuperscript{259} Today the word hypocrisy has come to be associated with people whose actions are contrary to their professed beliefs. However, the term irony originated in reference to Greek theatre where it meant both ‘play-acting’ and ‘acting-out,’ and ‘judgement.’ It is suggested that this
be related to the word *eirein* which means ‘to speak.’ 260 Knox suggests that the emphasis here is on asking. 261 This focus on the creative power of language is the cornerstone of irony. For example, Socratic irony is based on the continual process of discovery by dialogue, 262 Romantic irony is based on the premise of irony’s victory over language, 263 and Rorty speaks of irony as the process of language (and consequently society) re-creating itself. 264 The next section discusses the irony associated with the Socratic Method of inquiry.

1.3.1.2. SOCRATES AND QUINTILIAN

The Socratic Method, which is an ironic means of inquiry, was created by Socrates as a tool to use against Sophists who were more interested in the art of creating a persuasive argument than the pursuit of truth. Socrates reacted to the Sophists by focusing on moral uprightness in argument. 265

We are first introduced to a highly stylised representation of Socrates in Aristophanes’ play *The Clouds*. 266 In reference to the irony contained in the narrative, Kierkegaard remarks that the clouds in Aristophanes play reflect images, yet, for

judgement aspect may relate to the need to interpret a dramatic performance or text. Douglas Harper, (2008-2011)
260 Ibid.
266 In *The Clouds* Socrates is portrayed as the greatest sophist. Much of the commentary surrounding this work has focused on Aristophanes’ seemingly negative view of Socrates. Yet, both Kierkegaard (*The Concept of Irony, 166*) and Quintilian (*Wheelock, Quintilian as Educator*, 115 fn. 62), argue that Aristophanes is being ironic when he speaks of Socrates as the greatest sophist.
Socrates the truth is in what lies beyond images.\textsuperscript{267} The need to search for the truth and the reason that the truth is not readily apparent in the case of this play is because there is tension between worldviews. To be specific, a new non-transparent, difficult to discern, order of reality is in competition with the transparent, readily apparent Hellenistic worldview. This difference is famously explored in the dialogue between Phidippides and Strepsiades.\textsuperscript{268}

Yet, the most important representation of Socratic irony is found in the works of his disciple Plato, who represented the Socratic Method under the umbrella of the rational divine. Plato speaks of Socrates being directed by a divine voice which informs Socrates that he is not the fount of all knowledge, but rather that his task is to assist others to think critically.\textsuperscript{269} Plato presents Socrates as believing that his wisdom lies in his own ignorance, and that the Oracle’s vision for him is to help other people to recognise their own wisdom. Socrates achieved this by using dialogue to help people to birth new ideas. In this respect Socrates called himself a midwife.\textsuperscript{270} Thereby, the truth or new birth for Socrates would come forth in searching dialogue rather than authoritative teaching. This evolution in teaching meant that the protagonist or the audience were invited to search themselves and come to their own conclusions about

\textsuperscript{267} Søren Kierkegaard, \textit{The Concept of Irony} (London: William Collins Sons &Co., Ltd. 1966), 166. Kierkegaard spoke of Sophists as being homogenous as opposed to Socrates who was always represented in isolation. He suggests that it is important for ironists to be represented as single entities as, this causes ironists to look into themselves, where they will locate the divine. Sophists on the other hand, are always looking out of themselves, and moving away from the abstract ideal (174). This abstract ideal is the ‘Idea’ which makes the ironist’s own personality disappear as the truth becomes obvious (177).

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 167.

\textsuperscript{269} Surprisingly then, the Oracle of Delphi pronounced that there was nobody wiser than Socrates. Plato, \textit{The Apology of Socrates}, trans. Edward Henry Blakeney (London: The Scholars Press, 1929), 66-68. Kierkegaard saw this suggestion as ironic, \textit{(The Concept of Irony.)} However, Plato presents Socrates as maintaining that his wisdom lies in his own ignorance as a straight-forward assertion.

\textsuperscript{270} The protagonist using the Socratic Method is analogous to that of a midwife (interestingly the profession of Socrates’ mother). This analogy suggests that an ironist is ignorant, or barren as midwives are, and assists another person to give birth to his or her own ideas, all the while guided by a person with the life experience to guide him or her proficiently.
areas of morals and worldviews. These new ideas would come forth through systematic analytical investigation, and would serve to rid people of misconceptions and biases.

This means of exploration became the basis of philosophical definition, which entreated people to state exactly what the virtues were. The resulting definitions were not a representation of the imperfection of changeable life, but rather Forms or Ideas which were abstract entities, and were found ‘out there’ and away from the physical world. Yet, although Forms were represented as not being of the sensible world, they were still considered to be forming it. This transformation came about as people imitated and participated in the Forms. Therefore, in relation to questioning religious or societal views, irony for Socrates was not merely truth oriented but evolutionary, and the ironist not merely truthful in the ordinary sense, but also characterised by dialectical engagement with the Forms. One consequence of this is that, as Vlastos suggests, “Socrates...prompts his participants to think for themselves. They are not told what to think but are awakened from their Dogmatism.”

Writing nearly half a century later than Plato, Quintilian has been criticised for his premise that eironeia is not dissimulation, but rather more like a trope. Yet it is possible that when Quintilian associates irony with tropes he is expressing a concern that irony is weighted too heavily alongside dissimulation and feigned innocence, whereas the emphasis might otherwise be on the ability of irony to point to something greater than itself as a metaphor or trope might. In this regard Quintilian’s movement

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272 Ibid., 14.
273 Colebrook, Irony, 28.
275 Wheelock, Quintilian as Educator, 7-8.
away from dissimulation as a description of irony may be because dissimulation does not encapsulate the entirety of irony. For instance, Quintilian suggests that both irony and tropes contain the truth in the opposite of what is said. Yet, Quintilian goes on from here to remark that the distinction between a trope, and irony considered as a ‘figure,’ is that a trope is a simple word substitution where there can be little doubt to the real meaning, as opposed to the ironic figure which is rather a style of communication. In irony as style, the truth of the message is hidden behind the conflict of the speaker’s speech, cause, and/or identity. The next substantial movement of irony came about in the Romantic period.

1.3.1.3. ROMANTIC IRONY

The German Romantic period saw a distinct change in the perception of irony. No longer was the truth which characterised the Socratic Method an objective, static element, rather the Romantics saw life and art as constantly evolving. This idea of creation and re-creation was the backbone of what has been called the “Ironic Fall.” The Ironic Fall maintained that nature is creative, and that human existence is able to create and also reflect on the creative process. For the Romantics, irony was part of the cultural movement of Bildung. Bildung was a process of self-development which led to a critique of society, and societal growth. Thereby, the Romantic period saw ironic inquiry divine the human condition, as creation was no longer reserved for a distant god.

Schlegel was a major proponent of the Romantic period. Schlegel viewed irony as the synthesis of wit and allegory. For Schlegel allegory was a movement towards God, and wit as a momentary and congenial unity between people and God. The means

276 Ibid.
for drawing closer to God for Schlegel was furthermore identified as philosophy and intellectual activity (but distinct from the Enlightenment emphasis on reason). Schlegel argues that the nature of irony is to present finite possibilities whilst still leaving the potential for infinite possibilities. The dissonance Schlegel identifies in irony is in the tension between order and chaos; “Clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos.”

1.3.1.4. AMERICAN PRAGMATISM

In contemporary scholarship, the most influential philosopher to develop an understanding of irony is Richard Rorty. Rorty identifies himself as a liberal ironist. To be more precise he uses Shklar’s definition of ‘liberal’ which suggests that liberals think cruelty is the worst possible human action. When Rorty speaks of ironists he means a person who can appreciate that his or her beliefs are attached to space and time, rather than to abstract ideals which he believes have no grounding in the contingency of life. For Rorty liberal ironists therefore, are people who hope for concrete change in the world, and in particular, an end to human inflicted pain and suffering. Rorty writes that this Utopian vision of the world can be achieved by an ironic critique of society, as irony always challenges people to stay in their old ways or to push forward to something new. As the purpose of the liberal ironist is to eradicate human cruelty, Rorty believes that irony as a critique of a worldview can be trusted to re-create society for the betterment of humankind and to unite people in a single beneficial goal, which is the solidarity aspect of his work.

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280 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, xv.
The difference between Rorty’s ideas on irony and Socrates thesis are as follows: Rorty suggests that irony is the force which potentially brings about change for the better, whereas Socrates maintains that the truth is ‘out there’ to be found.\textsuperscript{281} Rather than being influenced by the Socratic objective model of ironic inquiry, Rorty’s philosophy is influenced by the Romantic ironists who believed in the creation of subjective ‘truth’. For the Romantics imagination and aesthetics won out over reason and morality when it came to positive change. Rorty integrates this aspect of irony into his work and maintains that the human self is created by vocabulary, rather than being expressed by it.\textsuperscript{282} Moreover, Rorty suggests that we focus on the kind of language we use to create ‘truths’.\textsuperscript{283} The language that Rorty suggests will produce ‘truths’ is poetic in nature and not a reasoned argument.\textsuperscript{284} The dream of the ironist, by Rorty’s definition then, is to create a final vocabulary which is free from any kinds of imperfections as defined by Rorty’s appeal to liberalism, which then in turn would create a world free from cruelty.\textsuperscript{285} This final language Rorty speaks of must come about in reaction to something that has already gone before, hence the contingency factor in Rorty’s work.\textsuperscript{286}

1.3.2. FUNCTION OF IRONY

In its simplest form irony may be no more than a polite or witty expression. It would be a great stretch of the imagination to suggest that the comment “it’s a great day today” on a miserable day was anything more than a light exchange about the weather.

However, when irony is used in a sustained manner, the function of irony is profound.

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid., xvi.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 15 & 21.
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid., 88.
In all three movements which I have discussed, the primary function of irony is to critique and reform society. Irony makes this change through the power of language. For example,

Language makes possible the accumulation and transmission of culture, embodying and shaping that culture in the very process of transmission. Similarly, the formation of identity is at once made possible and radically circumscribed by the structures of language as a primary vehicle of socialization... irony in narrative creates a linguistic matrix in which the imagination can function, and, therefore also a medium with which the community can interact with its tradition, evaluating and shaping its contents, and appropriating them for new and different circumstances.

Thereby, evolution comes about by working through conflicting discourse and not out of thin air. In this regard the old line of thinking always lives next to the new way of thinking, as they are contingent upon each other. Truth seeking, whether truth is objectively or subjectively conceived is then an evolutionary process whereby the ironist works as a critic of society to bring about new understandings.

In reference to the Hebrew Bible, clashing narratives encourage an evolution of religious thought, and not the creation of a new religion. As Rorty explains, “Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are possible only against the backdrop of other old words being used in old familiar ways.” Similarly, Booth speaks of irony as a reconstruction. He sees irony as pulling down an old dwelling place whilst it builds another one, overlooking the old site.

288 Ibid., 33.
290 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 41.
This evolution of society is then crafted by the principle that irony seeks to be constructive analysis. For instance, historically, the higher purpose of irony was for Socrates a static sense of eternal love,\textsuperscript{292} is present to Rorty as the absence of cruelty,\textsuperscript{293} and for Carolyn Sharp as God.\textsuperscript{294} Edwin Good has suggested that the presence of irony is the criterion for “liberating faith.”\textsuperscript{295} In action, the constructive umbrella which oversees ironic dialogue makes the claim that the tension between two streams of thought will be resolved in a way which is constructive for human beings and for society.

1.3.3. TYPES OF IRONY

The history of irony proves that irony is a diverse and ever-changing phenomenon. Therefore, when we speak of irony in an academic sense it is important to be specific. It is generally agreed that there are two different styles of irony: situational irony and verbal irony. Situational irony is described as a state of affairs which is seen to be ironic.\textsuperscript{296} The observer sees the situation as ironic. However, there is no evidence of an ironist who is behind the scenes and who has intentionally presented the events in order to provoke criticism. Dramatic irony is a species of situational irony. Dramatic irony, however, is primarily the irony of the theatre and other dramatic forms, unlike some other forms of situational irony.

\textsuperscript{292} Plato 1963, 563 [211e], as cited in Colebrook, \textit{Irony}, 31
\textsuperscript{293} Rorty, \textit{Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity}, xv.
\textsuperscript{296} In describing situational irony, Muecke gives the example of a pickpocket who has his pocket picked while he is in the process of going about his business of picking pockets. Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony}, 100.
General irony is another species of situational irony, in that it presents situations which are ironic, however, in these cases what is ironic is universal in nature. General irony then, presents itself when people are confronted with the contradictions in situations, which stimulate abstract thought. In this instance, all people are the victims of irony, however, there is never the presence of a critical ironist behind the contradictions. This kind of irony is more philosophical or artistic.

Verbal irony, on the other hand, is distinct because it contains an ironist who is being deliberately ironical, the presence of a specific object of ironic attack, and a corrective intent. It is intentional in as much as there is an object of attack. There is a corrective intent in as much as there is an object of attack who is an object by virtue of having transgressed morally. This is the kind of irony which is found in satire. Frye speaks of irony which is found in satire as “militant” irony. It is militant because it is confrontational. The purpose of this kind of irony is to make moral judgements. The moral stance of the ironist then becomes the norm by which the grotesqueries and other absurdities which feature in satirical writing, are measured against.

In relation to the discussion on the history of irony, the type of irony which is attributed to Socrates is self-disparaging irony, which is a species of verbal irony. A dissimulating character is evident in this type of irony. Romantic irony and Rorty’s notion of irony, on the other hand, can be classified as instances of general irony. Both of these types of irony are concerned with universals and the creative aspect of life itself, but do not involve the intentional criticism of an ironist, or a satirist.

297 Also spoken of as Ironies of Dilemma, Amiel’s Law of Irony, Kierkegaard’s World Irony, Cosmic Irony, and Romantic Irony. Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 120, 147, 159.
298 Ibid., 119-122.
299 Ibid.
1.3.4. THE SCOPE FOR INVESTIGATING VERBAL IRONY IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

In order to demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN is a satire it is necessary to identify verbal irony in the narrative. As mentioned, verbal irony is the irony which is definitive of satirical writings. Moreover, satirical irony must be pervasive, and must not present as isolated occurrences in the text. In the following section this dissertation will catalogue the types of irony that selected scholars have already identified in the SN and discuss the interpretations of irony in the SN. This will be done in order to determine the scope for my proposed in-depth study of verbal irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a.

The first major work to speak of irony in the Hebrew Bible comprehensively was Good’s work, *Irony in the Old Testament.* Good’s analysis of irony in the story of David and Bathsheba is brief, yet, he concludes that the irony in the story rests on the contrast between what David is doing, and what David ought to be doing. Good speaks of the critical type of irony in the story of Uriah (2 Sam 11), Nathan’s Parable (2 Sam 12:7), and in the story of the death of David and Bathsheba’s child (2 Sam 12:22-23). This identified irony may well be verbal irony. However, Good discusses the irony in these examples in an intuitive manner and does not analyse it systematically. Moreover, Good does not attempt to demonstrate that there is a pervasive sense of irony in the SN.

Writing around the same time, Whybray argues that there is irony in the SN in the following examples 2 Sam 12:3-7; 13:36; 14:1-24; 15:7-9; 18:19-23, and I Kgs

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301 Ibid.
303 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kgs 1 and 2*, 46-47
1:41. All of these instances, Whybray argues, are examples of dramatic irony \(^{304}\) which is a species of situational irony, and not verbal irony.

On the other hand, Ridout has written a chapter on irony in his dissertation concerning the SN, and the irony in question could be considered both critical in character and extensive in the SN. Ridout applied Good’s definition of “thematic irony” to episodes in the SN. This definition would seem to be vague and undeveloped. At any rate, Good describes thematic irony as, \(^{305}\) “…the conjunction of a number of episodes all of which point to an ironic theme or motif.” \(^{306}\) Ridout finds irony in the themes of wisdom, fatherhood, kingship, and loyalty. \(^{307}\) In the case of irony and wisdom Ridout offers the following examples: 2 Sam 13:5; \(^{308}\) 14:12-17; \(^{309}\) 15:37; 16:20-17:3; 17:5-14; 17:23; \(^{311}\) and 19:30. \(^{312}\) In the case of irony and fatherhood, Ridout remarks that there is irony in 2 Sam 13:21 and \(^{313}\) 18:5. \(^{314}\) The irony which comes through the narrative in the motif of David the king focuses on the contrast between what a king should do, and what David is doing/not doing. For instance, Ridout mentions, 2 Sam 11:1; \(^{315}\) 11:4; \(^{316}\) 11:1-13; 11:20, \(^{317}\) 11:25, \(^{318}\) 11:26-27; 12:5, \(^{319}\) 12:28-29; \(^{320}\) 15:7-9; 15:14; \(^{321}\) 15:19-

\(^{304}\) Ibid., 46.
\(^{305}\) Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2),” 121.
\(^{307}\) Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2),” 124-125.
\(^{308}\) Ibid., 128.
\(^{309}\) Ibid., 136.
\(^{310}\) Ibid., 133-134.
\(^{311}\) Ibid., 135.
\(^{312}\) Ibid., 140.
\(^{313}\) Ibid., 146-147.
\(^{314}\) Ibid., 150.
\(^{315}\) Ibid., 155-156.
\(^{316}\) Ibid., 153.
\(^{317}\) Ibid., 154.
\(^{318}\) Ibid., 155.
\(^{319}\) Ibid., 156.
\(^{320}\) Ibid., 158.
The irony of loyalty which is Ridout’s last section of thematic irony includes the following examples: 2 Sam 15:32-37; 16:1-4; 16:18; 16:19; 19:24-30; and in 1 Kgs 1:43-48.

Gunn also provides numerous examples of irony, however, like many of the scholars who have written on irony Gunn speaks of irony without discussing what kind of irony is involved and without providing an analysis of it. The examples Gunn gives for irony are as follows: 2 Sam 11:4; 12:1-4; 12:24; 13:21; 14:30; 16:1-4; 16:5-13; 1 Kgs 2:13-17 and 1 Kgs 2:22-24.

Brueggemann has noted irony in the SN in the following examples: 2 Sam 11:14; 11:6-13; and 12:25. Yet, Brueggemann does not detail the irony further. Instead he writes, “there is an irony in the name…”, “the irony is high…”, and

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321 Ibid., 158.
322 Ibid., 159.
323 Ibid., 160.
324 Ibid., 161.
325 Ibid., 167.
326 Ibid., 167-168.
327 Ibid., 161.
328 Ibid., 169.
329 Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 98.
330 Ibid., 95.
331 Ibid., 93.
332 Ibid., 100.
333 Ibid., 97.
334 Ibid., 45.
335 Ibid., 91.
336 Brueggemann, David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination & Memory, 60.
337 Ibid., 58.
338 Ibid., 50.
339 Ibid.
340 Ibid., 58.
“the most ironic mention of Uriah is…” 341 Brueggemann also hints at passages which make striking contrasts, but in these cases he does not mention irony explicitly. 342

Perry and Sternberg, on the other hand, have written a detailed analysis of irony within the narrative of the story of David and Bathsheba. Perry and Sternberg speak of irony in the syntax of the narrative, 343 in parallels, 344 in an escalation of the drama in the story, 345 and most importantly in the gaps in the narrative. 346 They suggest that the gaps in the narrative create a neutral reading experience where the reader must create his or her own judgements. 347 David’s motives in the story can only be inferred by the gaps in the narrative, which create a perception of David which changes from ‘meritorious’ to ‘villainous,’ as the reader expects David to be a just king, only to discover that he is unjust as the story unfolds. It is in this movement that Perry and Sternberg find irony. 348

341 Ibid., 60.
342 Ibid., 62. Similarly, Schulz suggests that the author of the SN is intentionally ambiguous, however, he does not mention that this ambiguity is irony. Alfons Schulz, “Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel,” 131.
344 Ibid., 286.
345 Ibid., 288
346 Perry and Sternberg make a distinction between “gap-filling” which is not informed by the text, with “gap-filling” which is informed by the text. For example, they write that rabbis who have tried to exculpate David from any wrongdoing in the case of the story of Bathsheba and Uriah do so by distorting the text. To say that David did not commit adultery with Bathsheba because soldiers who went away to war left a letter of divorce with their wives (Rabbi Yonathan, Shabbat 56) does not fit well with Nathan’s Parable which castigates David (2 Sam 12:7-12), nor with David’s own admission of guilt (2 Sam 12:13) Ibid., 276.
347 Ibid., 280-281. Perry and Sternberg suggest that the reader will supply his or her own information when the narrative only supplies partial details. This leads them to suggest that, “The main story is for the most part implied rather than stated. The suppression of essentials, the narrator’s pseudo-objectivity, and the tone rendering the horror as if it were an everyday matter all create an ironic tension between the tale’s mode of presentation and the action itself, as reconstructed by the reader” (282).
348 Ibid., 290. For instance, they suggest that David’s initial engagement with Uriah could seem to the reader to be positive (2 Sam 11:6-7). However, this perception changes when the reader realizes that David is trying to manipulate Uriah to cover David’s own transgressions (2 Sam 11:8). The escalation in the drama encourages the reader to condemn David despite the narrator’s objectivity (290-291).
Perry and Sternberg are best known for their suggestion that there are two major hypotheses in the story of David and Uriah with respect to Uriah’s knowledge of the event. The two hypotheses are that Uriah does know what has happened between David and Bathsheba, and that Uriah does not know.\textsuperscript{349} Perry and Sternberg also propose a three-way hypothesis in regard to what David believes that Uriah may know.\textsuperscript{350} In addition to this Perry and Sternberg highlight irony in Joab’s decision to amend David’s plan to set Uriah at the forefront of the toughest fighting, whilst withdrawing the other troops (2 Sam 16-17). Joab’s amendment to this plan shows David’s order to be foolish and unworkable.\textsuperscript{351} Perry and Sternberg perceive irony in the way in which the news of Uriah’s death is relayed to David (2 Sam 11:22-24),\textsuperscript{352} and in Joab’s admonition of David based on the story of Abimelech (2 Sam 11:20-21).\textsuperscript{353} This analysis of irony in the story of David, Uriah, and Bathsheba is comprehensive, and suggests that there is more depth in the irony in the SN than has previously been explored.

Bar-Efrat argues that the irony in the SN is dramatic irony, and not verbal irony, because the characters are unwitting in their irony and instead it is the author

\textsuperscript{349} For example, if it is believed that Uriah does not know that Bathsheba is pregnant, then Perry and Sternberg suggest that the irony which comes through the story is in the contrast of David’s cynicism with Uriah’s idealism. Ibid., 294. In the second instance the irony is apparent in Uriah’s implicit role as David’s judge. Both of these hypotheses then combine together to form a double-irony, which allows the narrator to put forth two propositions at once (299).

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 300. They write that the gaps in the narrative allow for different interpretations including the proposition that David does not believe that Uriah knows of the king’s act of adultery with Uriah’s wife. If this is the case, it is suggested that David is presented as a superficial character whose sole motivation is to clear his name, despite Uriah’s uncompromising idealism (301). The second possibility is that David’s decision to rid himself of his love-rival Uriah, presents David as a passionate lover who will do anything to be with the woman he desires. The third possibility is that David is unsure of what Uriah knows. This proposition does not shed light on any new information regarding David’s character (304-305).

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 305.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 307.

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 310.
who creates the irony. While dramatic irony is a species of situational irony this claim of Efrat can be challenged. For it is not a necessary condition of verbal irony that the characters intend the irony; perhaps the narrator or the author intends the irony. Bar-Efrat argues that Uriah’s statement in 2 Sam 11:11 is not verbal irony as Uriah cannot be sure of the criticism implicit in his words. However, as we have just seen, this is not to the point. Furthermore, Bar-Efrat speaks of the rhetorical question in this verse, which he later suggests is an example of the oppositional element of verbal irony. In effect, this contradicts his earlier claim that the verse does not contain verbal irony. On first analysis it might appear that this example could be either verbal irony or dramatic irony. However, given it occurs in the context of a sustained attack against David, it is far more likely to be verbal irony. Other examples of irony which are cited by Bar-Efrat and deemed to be dramatic irony are as follows: 2 Sam 11:14-15; 11:21; 12:5-6; 15:9; 13:25-27; 18:17-18; 18:27; and 1 Kgs 1:42. In all of these instances Bar-Efrat notes that there is an element of criticism. For example, in the case of Uriah, he argues, “The irony seems to indicate that not only did David sin, but that he did so with unmitigated cynicism.” Given the elements of criticism in these examples and, therefore, objects of attack, they are also more likely to be instances of verbal irony than dramatic irony.

Gunn and Fewell suggest that the entire narrative from Genesis – 2 Kings is rich in irony. Ironies they have discovered within the SN include the following; Uriah carrying his own death note (2 Sam 11:14), David telling Joab not to worry as the

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355 Ibid. 126.
356 Ibid., 210.
357 Ibid., 127.
358 Ibid., 127.
sword takes lives at random (2 Sam 11:25), and the designation of Jonadab as a ‘wise’ man (2 Sam 13:3). These examples are spoken on in a general sense of irony.

McKenzie’s account of irony in the SN lists David’s use of Abimelech’s misadventure as a “lesson of warfare” (2 Sam 11:19-21), Nathan’s Parable (2 Sam 12:1-15), the play on Bathsheba’s name, Absalom’s death (2 Sam 18:9-15), that Bathsheba who was ‘taken,’ (2 Sam 11:4) manipulates David later in life (1 Kgs 15-21), and an interpretation of Uriah as fiercely loyal, whilst David is attempting to corrupt him (2 Sam 11:6-13). Like many of the other scholars mentioned, McKenzie does not provide any analysis of the irony in these examples.


Carolyn Sharp concludes that the prevalence of irony in connection with power suggests that power is a subject which lends itself easily to irony. In connection with David, Sharp writes that the overarching framework of irony within the SN has as its premise that, on the one hand, Israel was under the faithful supervision of God and, on the other hand, Israel was under the questionable leadership of David. She suggests

359 Gunn and Fewell, Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible, 74.
360 Ibid., 61.
361 McKenzie, King David. A Biography, 159.
362 Ibid., 160.
363 Ibid., 164.
364 Ibid., 164.
365 Ibid., 158.
367 Ibid., 312.
368 Ibid., 308.
369 Ibid., 322.
370 Ibid., 358.
371 Sharp, Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible, 45.
372 Ibid., 47.
that the incongruities in the Davidic stories represent the contradictions within Israelite society.\footnote{Ibid., 47-48.} She further suggests that there is a tension between David’s extreme devotion to Yahweh and David’s self-serving actions.\footnote{Ibid., 245.} Sharp also sees irony in the image of Uriah speaking to David and ardently refusing to sleep with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:11) when David has already slept with her (2 Sam 11:4).\footnote{Ibid., 245.} Moreover, Sharp writes of the satirical implications of the parallel between the story of Judah and Tamar and David and Bathsheba, and in particular the ironic perspective which comes from David’s lineage. For instance, she writes, “David is a disaster of a leader, illegitimate and ethnically an outsider (given that Tamar may be a Canaanite and Ruth is a Moabite).”\footnote{Ibid., 96.}

Elsewhere I have applied Muecke’s general definition of irony to 2 Sam 11-14. I suggested that an ironic interpretation of these passages shows that although David’s relationship with God was not meritorious (as opposed to his relationship with Israel), God still expected David to behave in accordance with moral laws.\footnote{Ingram, “David Remains in Jerusalem and Absalom Flees to Geshur: An Ironic Interpretation,” 215.} As a consequence of writing this paper I decided that a more nuanced interpretation could be found by applying a more specific and detailed methodology; the methodology deployed in this dissertation.

In a further paper I have argued that irony is used in the story of David and Bathsheba to soften criticism,\footnote{Ingram, “The Kindness of Irony: A Psychological Look at Irony in 2 Samuel 11,” 269-285.} as per Dews, Kaplan and Winner’s research into what
they refer to as the social function of irony. The social function in question is essentially that of maintaining civility in social exchanges. I note that irony used to soften criticism, even if intended irony, is not verbal irony as defined by Muecke since it does not necessarily involve pejorative criticism. My paper applied this socio-psychological perspective on irony to the story of David and Bathsheba. I now believe this application to have limited utility and that a more sophisticated analysis of the SN can be obtained by means of the methodology proposed in this dissertation.

This survey of irony in the SN shows that scholars who mention irony in the SN universally agree on some of the examples of irony, predominantly in relation to the story of Uriah and Nathan’s Parable. Yet, the interpretations differ in a variety of ways. Some scholars such as Van Seters and McKenzie mention irony without much explanation. Gunn and Brueggemann explain the content of the irony in greater depth but do not provide a taxonomy of irony. Other scholars such as Ridout, and Perry and Sternberg, have provided analyses of irony. However, their analyses are very different from one another.

As we have seen satire is characterised by a pervasive sense of irony, specifically, verbal irony. Moreover, this irony has an object of attack. Good does briefly speak of David as the target of attack, and more generally of the critical aspect of irony. However, he does not argue for a pervasive sense of irony in the SN. Ridout in effect argues for a pervasive sense of irony, however he does not use these words. Ridout also speaks of the critical aspect of irony in the SN, however, he does not speak of verbal irony explicitly. Therefore, there is scope to look at the SN in terms of verbal

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irony. Indeed, no scholar has yet given a thorough-going examination of the SN in terms of verbal irony.

1.4. FOCUS OF THIS DISSERTATION

The literature review revealed that the question of genre has dominated research into the SN. The picture has been complicated by the over-lap between the genres, however, some distinct groupings of genre have emerged. The literature review indicates that the main groupings of genre are as follows: national epic, propaganda, wisdom literature, theological ‘history’ writing, and literary art. This dissertation will focus on satire, and therefore have as its starting point the trajectory of thought which holds that the SN is literary art, albeit literary art with historical content and a theological function. This decision has been made partly on the basis of the literature survey of extant competing views of the genre of the SN and partly on the basis of my own preliminary independent research into the SN utilising Muecke’s taxonomy of elements of satire.

It would seem the SN is not a national epic as David is presented as a complex character, who is not heroic. The SN is critical of David and could therefore fit into a broad category of propaganda. However, in the light of Keys research, it is evident that the SN is too ambiguous to fit neatly into the genre of propaganda. Similarly, satire has a didactic purpose and therefore could align with Whybray’s premise that the SN had a pedagogic purpose. Yet, Whybray’s focus on wisdom literature is inconsistent with the ironic episodes of ‘wisdom’ in the text, as Ridout points out. The idea that the SN is merely theological ‘history’ writing has also been discounted. Certainly, as I have acknowledged, the stories have historical and theological dimensions. However, it appears that the primary purpose of the SN is not to document history. Arguably, the SN has a theological function. The theological material is particularly evident in
reference to God’s punishment of David. However, a question arises as to how this theological function is realised. My suggestion is that it is done so in large measure by means of the genre of satire. At any rate, the claim that the SN is merely theological writing is implausible.

This dissertation starts from the premise that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is literary art (and probably the SN also) but moves beyond this to argue for the view that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a particular species of literary art, namely, satire. The argument that this text is literary art and not merely historical writing is convincing. For the SN is replete with literary flourishes and motifs common in story-telling. Moreover, the plot and character development have more in common with literary art than with the other genres. The most influential scholars to write about this genre in relation to the SN are, Eissfeldt,380 Gunn,381 Fokkelman382 and Van Seters.383

As a preliminary to the proposed detailed evaluation of the view that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is satire, the genre of satire has been explained, and the SN has been examined to see if it contains any of the identifying features of satire. The results of the latter task indicated that there are elements in the SN which satisfy all of the identifying features of satire. Most of these features of satire including, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features appeared to be relatively easy to identify. However, irony proved to be more complex and difficult to substantiate. More importantly, it was established that irony is an essential component of satire. A work which has an object of attack along with evidence of pervasive, confrontational irony, and some of the other elements of satire, is a satire.

381 Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation.
382 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & 1 Kgs. 1-2),”
The discussion of the history of irony suggests that irony is varied in character. As already noted, a distinction can be drawn between verbal irony, where there is the presence of an ironist who is being ironical, and situational irony where the events suggest irony. Verbal irony is the necessary, ‘militant’ or critical style of irony which is essential to satire. The literature review also suggests that irony is ambiguous and sometimes difficult to detect. However, despite these problematic features of irony most of the major scholars who have written on the SN have identified multiple ironic elements in the story. These commentaries have differed with respect to the kind of irony that they have identified, and in the length of their discussions. For example, Van Seters’ account of irony is spoken of in a minimal and non-specific manner, in contrast to Perry and Sternberg who have discussed irony within 2 Sam 11 at great length. That said, Perry and Sternberg’s systematic approach to irony is unusual. Most scholars appear to have an intuitive response to irony which is evident in statements such as, “it is ironic that...” or “it would appear that Absalom is being ironic...” More importantly, none of the scholars mentioned in this literature survey have discussed the SN in terms of verbal irony; the irony characteristic of satire. The proposed investigation on irony in the SN in this dissertation seeks to further the conversation by defining irony more explicitly and in more detail, particularly verbal irony, and by undertaking a thoroughgoing application of the resulting definitions to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a with a view to supporting the proposition that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and probably the SN are satire.

The process of determining whether 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire will utilise Douglas Muecke’s definitions of verbal irony, as they appear in his book, *The Compass*

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384 Van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David.*
385 Perry and Sternberg, “The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Reading Process.”
of Irony, to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. However, it must be noted that identifying irony can never be an exact science, as it is the nature of irony to be ambiguous, take different forms, and because irony is constantly evolving.³⁸⁶ Some purist scholars even suggest that to define irony is a sacrilege as it takes away the freedom of this creative form of expression.³⁸⁷ However, I agree with Muecke, who writes that it is impossible to define irony precisely and conclusively, yet, in order to facilitate an academic conversation it is helpful to work with imprecise definitions.³⁸⁸

I have chosen to use Muecke’s influential taxonomy of irony because it is flexible enough to allow for the variety and vagueness of irony, while sufficiently structured to ensure the notion of irony is kept within reasonable parameters. Moreover, he has created a comprehensive list of categories of the grades and modes of satirical irony, and sub-categories of the modes of satirical irony. However, there is a need to modify Muecke’s definitions of iron in a couple of respects (see below).

Scholars who have written on irony in the SN have not hitherto utilised Muecke’s definitions, or done a thoroughgoing analysis of the SN in terms of verbal irony. Therefore, irony in the SN has not been considered from a strictly satirical position. This dissertation will investigate whether 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is satirical and will do so in a systematic way. If a pervasive sense of satirical irony can be found in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, then the proposition that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire must be considered to be valid. Moreover, if this is the case then it is prudent to assume that the SN is a satire given that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a comprises three-quarters of the SN and it would see unlikely for the narrative to switch genres at this late stage.

³⁸⁶ Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 24.
³⁸⁸ Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 14.
1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.5.1. THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN IRONY ACCORDING TO MUECKE

Before listing the three essential elements of irony it is important to note that Muecke suggests that the ironist is an artist, and that there is an expectation that there be an aesthetic quality to irony.\(^{389}\) Beyond this the essential elements of irony are outlined below.

Muecke claims that there are three essential elements in all types of irony which are as follows: two different levels in the narrative, an opposition between the levels, and the presence of ‘innocence.’ Muecke calls the different levels the “lower level” and the “upper level.” The lower level is explicit and thus known to all participants, including the victim of irony (if there is a victim of irony). By contrast, the upper level is only implicit and, as such, not necessarily known to all participants. The lower level comprises the situation of the victim of the irony (if there is a victim), or the ironist’s dissimulation (if there is an ironist). The upper level, on the other hand, is the situation as it is implied by the ironist.\(^{390}\) Consider the example of a student who is bragging about his superior performance in an exam, not knowing that he has actually failed. The situation as it appears to the student comprises the lower level and, indeed, is known to all participants, namely, that he has sat the exam and that he is bragging about his performance. On the other hand, the upper level comprises the situation as it appears to the ironist and consists of the hubris of the student and the fact that the student has failed. The upper level does not need to be fully or unambiguously ‘presented’ by the ironist; it is sufficient if the ironist evokes the thought in the observer. It may be as simple as a hint that the ironist does not see the situation as it is

\(^{389}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{390}\) Ibid., 19.
presented in the lower level or, e.g. as the student in our example sees it. At the upper level the ironist implies that the victim of the irony does not apprehend his or her situation completely, and that the ironist does not accept the situation as it is presented in the lower level as being correct or complete. At the upper level, therefore, the observer of the irony is aware that the contradiction that he or she perceives is not recognised by the victim of the irony.\textsuperscript{391} By discussing irony in terms of two different stratified levels, the upper level (the explicit level) and the lower level (the implicit level), Muecke is suggesting that the ironist and the observer at the upper level are superior to the victim of irony at the lower level.\textsuperscript{392}

The second element which is essential to all irony is an opposition between the levels. The opposition Muecke speaks of need only be an incongruity, contradiction or an incompatibility. This is usually the opposition between the explicit and the implicit, between what is said and what is meant, and between what the victim thinks or does and what the observer knows and expects of the victim.\textsuperscript{393} However, it is important to note the incongruity must be understood in a wide sense which includes inappropriate or unexpected comments in contrast to the narrow understanding that incongruity means an opposite event. Only the definition in the wide sense can account for overstatement, and understatements which rely on diminishing and exaggerated effects.

I note that there need not be an ironist, i.e. someone intending the irony. Consider, for example, a tiger running down a street in Melbourne shortly after someone had confidently asserted that there are no tigers in Melbourne. Here the irony arises from the two events (the assertion followed by the arrival of the tiger); no-one intends the irony. This is not the case in verbal irony, however.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{392} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 29.
\end{flushleft}
The third element is ‘innocence’. Here we need to be careful. As we have just seen there may not be an ironist. However, if there is one then the ironist always pretends to be innocent with respect to the ironic content. On the other hand, if there is no ironist, as in our tiger example, then there must be a victim of irony in Muecke’s sense of a person who is confidently unaware of the irony. Of course, there can be both an ironist and a victim of irony. Suppose in our above exam example that the examiner – knowing what the student does not yet know, namely, that he has failed the exam - says to the boastful student that his performance exceeded expectations. Here the examiner is the ironist and is feigning ignorance by pretending to endorse the students high opinion of himself but is implicitly disparaging the student. The student is the unknowing victim who is confidently unaware of the irony. The content of the irony arises from the opposition between the student’s boasts and the reality of his failure. Here I note that the victim may be possessed only of confident ignorance which is not necessarily boastful.\textsuperscript{394}

At this point I diverge somewhat from Muecke’s account. Firstly, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the feigned ignorance of the ironist (e.g. the examiner in the above exam scenario) and the actual ignorance of the victim (e.g. the student). Hence, contrary to what Muecke says, in sarcasm and overt irony the ironist feigns innocence, albeit there is typically no victim of irony since the person who is the object of the disparaging remarks is immediately aware of this.\textsuperscript{395} This brings me to a second point of divergence with Muecke. There is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the victim of irony – in the sense of the person who is confidently unaware of the irony – and the object of ironic

\textsuperscript{394} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid., 20.
attack.\footnote{Ibid., 34-39.} Of course, in many instances of irony there is no object of ironic attack. However, in the category of irony of most interest to us in this thesis, namely, verbal irony (see below) there is always an object of ironic attack. The object of ironic attack is always someone or something that is the object of pejorative criticism. In the above exam scenario it is the boastful student; in the case of sarcasm it is the person about whom the disparaging remark is made. Notice that the victim of irony is not necessarily the object of ironic attack. In our exam scenario, the student is both the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim. But suppose the boastful student’s mother is present when the examiner says that his performance exceeded expectations and she suggests that a celebration is in order. The mother is a victim since she has entirely missed the irony of the examiner’s remark but she is not the object of the examiner’s disparaging attack.

All of the examples of verbal irony spoken of in this project are examples of simple irony. Simple irony is characterised by a conflict between the two levels.\footnote{Ibid., 20} For example, in the case of a person saying, “it’s a great day today,” on a day which is overcast and miserable, the conflict may be spoken of as the literal meaning in the lower level which is at odds with the implicit meaning in the upper level – that it is a lousy day. Simple irony occurs in one of three ways.

“(1) An ironist pretends or evokes a duality of opposed ‘valid’ and ‘invalid’ levels, at the same time pretending, more or less covertly, not to be aware of the ‘valid’ level.
(2) A person with a sense of irony sees in a situation or some accidental sequence or concurrence of events a contradiction of some kind, at the same time perceiving that some other person is confidently unaware of it.

(3) A person consciously opposes in his mind one situation or event or idea with another which invalidates it, at the same time being aware that there are those to whom such an invalidating opposition would not occur.”

1.5.2. THE ELEMENTS OF VERBAL IRONY

Thus far the discussion on irony has focused on the three elements which Muecke suggests are essential to all types of irony. The following discussion will concentrate on the elements which are characteristic of verbal irony which is the irony to be found in satire. This is the irony which Muecke suggests is characterised by the presence of an ironist who is intentionally being ironical. This is in contrast to situational irony where it is “a condition of affairs” or “outcome of events.” Here we need to keep in the mind the threefold distinction made above, but not always made by Muecke, between the feigned innocence of the ironist, the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony. Consistent with what Muecke says, the object of ironic attack can be something general and impersonal, such as an entire philosophical system, or it may be personal and specific, such as a particular person, e.g. David. On the other hand, victims of irony are always persons, i.e. beings capable of knowing.

Let me stress at the outset that as Muecke points out verbal irony always involves an ironist and, therefore, the irony is intentional, and always also an object of ironic attack – someone or something that is pejoratively criticised. Moreover, the

398 Ibid., 20-21. Muecke also speaks of double irony which concerns a double opposition which usually occurs in the lower level (24-25). This is not relevant to this thesis.
399 Ibid., 34.
ironist always engages in feigned innocence. However, there is not always an unknowing victim of irony, although there frequently is. In the Second Book of Samuel, for example, David is sometimes the object of ironic attack without being the unknowing victim of the irony.

As just mentioned, verbal irony always involves an ironist who intends the irony, however the ironist is not necessarily a character; the ironist can also be a narrator (whether understood as the author or not) or, indeed, the author him/herself qua author. Moreover, in the case of impersonal irony the author as ironist communicates the irony via the characters and events; so the persona of the author is manifest in the speech and actions of the characters and/or in the presentation of events. Thus, as Muecke points out, an inherently humorous event might be narrated by the author in a grave and detached tone.

Verbal irony is used in satire in order to challenge a point of view or expose folly, hypocrisy or vanity. However, as mentioned, verbal irony can be a direct opposition between what is said and what is meant, or the intended meaning may present as a subtle suspicion that everything is not what it seems. Given these differences, verbal irony is divided into different grades depending on how apparent the irony is. The three grades of irony which Muecke speaks of are: Overt, Covert, and Private Irony.

(1) Overt irony is immediately apparent, and is not ambiguous.

(2) Covert irony is ambiguous and needs to be uncovered. It is suspected that most of the irony in the SN will be of this grade. An awareness that the

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400 Ibid., 232.
401 Ibid., 53.
402 Ibid., 55.
author’s opinion or line of argument contradicts the context within which the opinion or line of argument is presented suggests covert irony. Covert irony can be found in the ‘whole’ context in the following ways:

(a) “What we already know about the writer and the subject.”

(b) “What the writer tells us about himself and the subject over and above his pretended meaning.”

(c) “What we are told by the way in which he expresses his opinion, presents his case, or conducts his argument. That is to say, what is ostensibly said may be contradicted or qualified by:”

1. “Our prior knowledge as to,”

(a) “It’s truth eg. ‘Hitler was kind to Jews,’ and/or,”

(b) “The author’s real opinion, eg. ‘God is good,’ said by an atheist, and/or,”

(c) “The author’s real character, if he presents himself as other than he is,”

and additionally or alternatively by:

2. “What the author says or implies over and above what he seems to be saying. This internal contradiction may be,

(a) “A contradiction of facts or opinions,”

(b) “A logical contradiction”

(c) “A discordant tone in speaking or,”

(d) “Any discrepancy between what is said and the language in which it is expressed, eg. unsuitable metaphor or choice of words, or”

403 Ibid., 57.
404 Ibid., 58.
(e) “Any discrepancy between what is ostensibly said and what is revealed of the author’s real character”\textsuperscript{405}

(3) Private irony, (which will not be discussed in this dissertation) is irony which is known only to the ironist.\textsuperscript{406}

Together with the three grades of irony which describe the difficulty of discovering irony, Muecke speaks of four modes of verbal irony. The four modes of irony are the modes in which the ironist operates. The four modes of irony are: Impersonal Irony; Self-Disparaging Irony; \textit{Ingénu} Irony; and Dramatized Irony.\textsuperscript{407}

(1) Impersonal irony is irony which does not have a particular character in the narrative who is the ironist, as Socrates is in Plato’s plays. Instead, in cases of Impersonal Irony the reader is aware of an ironist within the text as an authorial ‘\textit{persona}.’ This is the ironist as either author, narrator or character.

In cases of Impersonal Irony there are a number of sub-categories which apply and are as follows:\textsuperscript{408}

I “Praising in Order to Blame”\textsuperscript{409} This may present in different ways.

(a) “Praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking”\textsuperscript{410}

(b) “Praise for having undesirable qualities or for lacking desirable qualities”\textsuperscript{411}

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 59. 
\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., 59. 
\textsuperscript{407} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{408} Ibid., 64. 
\textsuperscript{409} Ibid., 67. 
\textsuperscript{410} Ibid., 67. 
\textsuperscript{411} Ibid.
(c) “Inappropriate or irrelevant praise”\textsuperscript{412}

II “Blaming in Order to Praise”\textsuperscript{413}

(a) “Blame for undesirable qualities known to be lacking”\textsuperscript{414}

(b) “Blame for having desirable qualities or for lacking undesirable qualities”\textsuperscript{415}

(c) “Inappropriate or irrelevant blame”\textsuperscript{416}

III “Pretended Agreement with the Victim”\textsuperscript{417}

IV “Pretended Advice or Encouragement to the Victim”\textsuperscript{418}

V “The Rhetorical Question”\textsuperscript{419}

VI “Pretended Doubt”\textsuperscript{420}

VII “Pretended Error or Ignorance”\textsuperscript{421}

VIII “Innuendo or Insinuation”\textsuperscript{422}

IX “Irony by Analogy”\textsuperscript{423}

X “Ambiguity”\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{418} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{419} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{420} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{421} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{424} Ibid., 71.
XI “Pretended Omission of Censure” (Or pretended lack of disappointment, when disappointment would be appropriate)\textsuperscript{425}

XII “Pretended Attack upon the Victim’s Opponent”\textsuperscript{426}

XIII “Pretended Defence of the Victim”\textsuperscript{427}

XIV “Misrepresentation, or False Statement” (When the ironist denies what is true, with the knowledge that the reader is aware of this anomaly).\textsuperscript{428}

XV “Internal Contradiction”\textsuperscript{429}

XVI “Fallacious Reasoning”

XVII “Stylistically Signally Irony”\textsuperscript{430} This presents in the following ways:

(a) “The Ironical Manner”\textsuperscript{431}

(b) “Stylistic Placing”\textsuperscript{432}

(c) “Parody”\textsuperscript{433}

(d) “Mock-heroic” (When a lowly figure is presented ironically as a hero)\textsuperscript{434}

(e) “Burlesque” (When a high character is presented in a lowly way)\textsuperscript{435}

(f) “Travesty” (The intentional parody of a high style of writing)\textsuperscript{436}

XVIII “Understatement”\textsuperscript{437}

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid., 72
\textsuperscript{426} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., 76.
\textsuperscript{431} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{434} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{435} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{436} Ibid.
XIX “Overstatement”\textsuperscript{438}

XX “Irony Displayed.” (This is similar to Situational Irony, however, it can be distinguished by the identification of the ironist being ironical, or critical in the arrangement of events).\textsuperscript{439}

(2) “Self-Disparaging Irony” can be detected when the ironist is present in the narrative as a person.\textsuperscript{440} This type of irony does not present in the Succession Narrative.

(3) \textit{Ingénue} irony presents when a true innocent is apparent, instead of a person who is dissimulating.\textsuperscript{441} In this type of irony the ironist withdraws further, and instead of feigning innocence uses a true innocent or an \textit{ingenue} to expose the truth.\textsuperscript{442} The child in the story of the emperor’s new clothes is a good example of a true innocent.

(4) The fourth mode of irony is “Dramatized Irony,” where the author intentionally arranges events in order to expose the victim of irony to the audience.\textsuperscript{443}

Of special note are the similarities between “Irony Displayed” and “Dramatized Irony.” Both of these types of irony use events which are deliberately arranged to bring out the irony. The difference, as mentioned by Muecke, is that the ironist in Irony Displayed feigns detachment, and is motivated by contempt. Whereas, the ironist in Dramatized Irony really is detached and does not pretend to be earnest while he or she

\textsuperscript{437} Ibid., 80.
\textsuperscript{438} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{439} Ibid. 82.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{442} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{443} Ibid., 92.
is being contemptuous. Instead, the ironist accepts the irony for what it is, and is less outraged than the ironist in Irony Displayed. For instance, “But we are more likely to find an Impersonal Ironist using irony to satirize, say, vanity, hypocrisy, and rationalizing, and more likely to find a Dramatizing Ironist looking upon manifestations of vanity, hypocrisy, and rationalizing as being in themselves instances of irony and content simply to present them as such.”

Also of note, in concluding this section it is necessary to mention that Muecke is certain that his list is incomplete and that every instance of irony presents in a unique manner which requires a flexibility of interpretation.

This dissertation began with a literary survey of the different interpretations of genre of the SN. The genre of satire emerged as an appropriate genre to consider for further research for reasons which have already been discussed. Thus far, scholars have not suggested that the SN is a satire. The elements of satire were compared with the events in the SN and it appeared that all of these elements were satisfied. The essential element of irony was considered further, and a literature survey revealed that scholars had not looked at irony from the perspective of verbal irony. A discussion on irony revealed that verbal irony is the type of irony which is used in satire. This dissertation then explored Muecke’s essential elements of all ironies, and the further categories which are specific to verbal irony.

This research project will apply Muecke’s generic definition of irony, and the specific grades, modes, and sub-categories of verbal irony to a sequential reading of the final form of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a which is a considerable section of the SN. This dissertation will largely ignore the discussion of disputed verses within the narrative, in

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444 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 93.
445 Ibid., 83.
the hope that a comprehensive study into irony in the final form of the SN may (at a later date) lend weight to the work of redaction critics. For instance, if disputed verses do not fit easily with the rest of the work in terms of irony, then it would be prudent to suggest that they are interpolations.

It is expected that the dominant grade of irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is covert. This can be assumed because of the varied suggestions for irony in the text, and from the extensive debate surrounding the genre of the narrative. Had the grade of irony been predominantly overt, it would be immediately obvious and not such a cause for speculation. Private irony will not be mentioned at all in this dissertation, as it requires a good understanding of who the author is to suggest this type of irony. In terms of the modes of irony it is expected that the predominant mode will be impersonal irony, as there does not appear to be a distinct character who is a consistent ironical personality throughout the text. It is expected that there will be evidence of most of the sub-categories of impersonal irony. In the instance that these sub-categories overlap, the focus of the claim for verbal irony will be on the dominant sub-category. Furthermore, the author of this dissertation recognizes that Muecke’s taxonomy rests in part on the assumption that there is authorial intention. I recognize the controversy and debate surrounding authorial intention, however, this argument is not the focus of this work.\textsuperscript{446} Moreover, it would be unreasonable to reject research involving the application of the taxonomy of a major figure in the field on the basis of a controversial doctrine, such as the rejection of authorial intention.

1.6. BOUNDARIES

\textsuperscript{446} A discussion on the arguments for and against authorial intention can be found in the following book. Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller, \textit{Re-Thinking Theory. A Critique of Contemporary Literary Theory and An Alternative Account} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
Rost’s argument for the existence of the SN has proven to be an enduring argument. Take for example, Walter Dietrich’s following comment, “To this day Rost’s careful and impressive reasoning has granted his thesis almost canonical standing at least within German Old Testament scholarship”. Given the general acceptance of Rost’s thesis, this dissertation will accept the existence of the SN, whilst acknowledging the disputed boundaries of the narrative, and the question of whether or not the narrative is much longer than Rost suggests or whether or not it exists. However, it is not the intention of this dissertation to give a comprehensive account of scholarship into redaction in the SN. In order to do a sequential interpretation of the final form of the SN in terms of verbal irony it is more important to give a justification of the boundaries of the study. Ideally this research would apply Muecke’s taxonomy of irony to the entire SN. However, to do so, given word restrictions, would mean to compromise on a thorough-going examination of irony. The decision has thereby been made to exhaust the methodology on the material 2 Sam 11-19:8a, with a suggestion that an ironic interpretation of the remaining narrative would be a profitable avenue for future research. It is anticipated that this decision will be of more benefit to scholarship in this area, in contrast to a more cursory look at verbal irony in the whole SN (given word restrictions).

As it is necessary to select texts from the SN, this dissertation will not apply Muecke’s definition of verbal irony to the narrative in 2 Sam 9-10, as these verses are generally agreed to be largely war annals. It is expected that war reports would present themselves without the flourishes of irony, or with less irony. However, upon saying

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this, I have decided to include 11:1, which is widely accepted to be a part of the war annals which begin at 2 Sam 9. The inclusion of this verse seems necessary as it begins chapter 11 which introduces the story of David and Bathsheba with a prologue which appears to set the tone for the rest of the narrative. Moreover, 11:1 is the verse which has been spoken of extensively as being ironic in nature. This interpretation will then begin at 2 Sam 11:1.

The end point has been chosen as 2 Sam 19:8a as two narrative sub-plots are completed in 2 Sam 19:8a; namely the sub-plot of David’s transgressions, and the sub-plot of Absalom’s revolt. For example, chapter 11 discusses David’s transgressions, chapter 12 speaks of God’s punishment, and 13:1-19:8a could reasonably be viewed as the effects of David’s punishment. Moreover, in the final verse David is restored to his position as king after fleeing from Absalom’s revolt. 2 Sam 19:8a is a decisive dramatic ending for these sub-plots. Therefore, 2 Sam 19:8a has been chosen as the closing verse of the boundary selection in this dissertation. As stated above, the final verse would ideally be 1 Kings 2:46 (the final verse in the SN) where the kingdom is established in Solomon’s hands. However, due to word restrictions a different closing verse was necessary. The primary limitation of the selection of this passage is that the focus on succession is diminished somewhat.

1.7. THE LAWS IN 2 SAMUEL 11:1-19:8A

It is impossible to analyse the narrative 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a faithfully without reference to the customs or laws of the day. Yet, this undertaking is fraught with difficulties. Saliently, it cannot be stated with certainty which laws were in place at the time that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a was written. This is due partly because the laws cannot be dated with certainty and partly because the narrative 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a cannot be dated with
certainty. The arguments that are concerned with dating this narrative fall into two general theses, (1) that the narrative is pre-exilic\textsuperscript{449} and (2) that the narrative is post exilic\textsuperscript{450}. In the first instance it is generally argued that moral principles were judged according to customs. In the latter case it is generally argued that moral principles were judged according to formal laws. This thesis contends that there was a formal set of laws in place at the time of writing as is congruent with David’s advice to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:3 (the latter portion of the SN). There it is written, “And keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn…” Whether or not this statement suggests that the SN is pre-Deuteronomistic and therefore (late) pre-exilic, or post-Deuteronomistic and post-exilic, it still stands to reason that it was important for the king to follow a formal set of laws. Given this was an important requirement of a king in the Ancient Near East, this thesis will explore 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a from a fuller perspective of the laws. In doing so, this thesis is aligned more with scholars who argue for a later date for the material in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. However, the findings of this thesis are still relevant to scholars who argue for an earlier date for the material in the Book of Second Samuel, as formal laws are created from social customs. In order to accommodate this ambiguity this thesis will assume that the common social taboos such as murder, rape, theft, and adultery were accepted in the time of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. In cases where it cannot be known whether specific laws were in place or not, this thesis will treat both perspectives.


\textsuperscript{450} For a fuller discussion of a post-exilic dating please see, Gunn, \textit{The Story of King David}, Van Seters, \textit{The Biblical Saga of King David}, and Steven L. McKenzie, \textit{King David. A Biography}.
1.8. CHAPTER OUTLINE

The next major section of this dissertation will be chapter two, which will be a comprehensive study of 2 Sam 11-12. These verses outline David’s transgressions in 2 Sam 11 which are condemned by God in 2 Sam 12. Both of these passages will be presented as a unit because together they set the scene for the following chapters. 2 Sam 13 will be a stand-alone chapter. This will be chapter three of this dissertation. 2 Sam 13 is to be presented on its own, as it recounts the story of Amnon’s transgression and the consequences of these actions. This chapter is a unit of its own as the story ends with Amnon’s death. Chapter four is a large chapter which will be divided into two sections for ease of reading. An interpretation of 2 Sam 14 is the first section as this chapter brings Absalom back to Jerusalem, where the story of his revolt begins. The second section of chapter four is 2 Sam 15-19:8a. This section recounts the story of Absalom’s rebellion against David, which leads to Absalom’s death. Chapter five will present the characterisations which arise from an interpretation in terms of verbal irony, and the miscellaneous findings of this research. Chapter six will discuss the findings of this research as they concern the genre debate, and chapter seven will present the findings as they relate to irony, suggest recommendations for future research and present the general conclusion of the dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO – DAVID'S SINS AND PUNISHMENT

In this chapter Muecke’s definition of verbal irony will be applied to 2 Sam 11-12. 2 Sam 11-12 has been chosen as a unit as 2 Sam 11 is the story of David’s transgressions, and 2 Sam 12 is the narrative which speaks of David’s punishment for the transgressions in 2 Sam 11. This section concludes at the end of 2 Sam 12 in preparation for the narrative which outlines Amnon’s transgressions and punishment in 2 Sam 13.

The discussion of verbal irony in chapters 2-5 will concentrate on verbal irony as it appears in single verses or small groupings of verses. These small sections have been chosen in order to investigate irony with precision. This analysis will include a discussion of the three essential elements of irony including; (1) two different levels in the text, (2) an opposition in the levels, and (3) the presence of innocence. The element of innocence is always present in the ironist’s dissimulation (where the ironist feigns innocence) and is present in the unknowing victim of the irony (if there is a victim). The victim of irony is a person who is “confidently unaware” of the irony, and not a person who is just deceived. On the contrary, the victim of irony is typically an arrogant character who is confidently unaware of the incongruity in a situation.

This project will also include a discussion of the elements of verbal irony which are characteristic of satire. These include: the object of the ironic attack, and the identification of the grade and the mode of the irony. These latter categories will be applied systematically. For ease of reading the differences between the levels of simple irony and the differences between some of the sub-categories of the modes of impersonal irony will be outlined repetitively up to the point at which it can be reasonably expected that the reader no longer needs this assistance.
Due to the vague and ambiguous nature of irony, including verbal irony, evidence of the verbal irony in the following sections will be stronger in some examples than in other examples. The examples for which the evidence is weaker will still be included in this analysis in order to provide a comprehensive account. Another difficulty which arises from the vagueness and ambiguity of irony is the presence of overlapping sub-categories of verbal irony. When this overlapping occurs the dominant sub-category will be identified, if possible. However, the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of irony means that some sub-categories of verbal irony are spoken of and other possibly equally valid categories ignored. However, this process is not ideal it, nevertheless, is a process which identifies instances of verbal irony. Uncertainty with respect to which sub-category of verbal irony an instance of irony belongs is merely a residual matter.

Note that the lower level will be discussed without recourse to the clues of irony, in order to present this level as the uninitiated might view it.

2.1: 2 Samuel 11:1-27a

2.1.1: 2 Samuel 11:1

The lower level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the victim of the irony, or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist, and may be spoken of as the explicit text. At the lower level of 11:1 David sends Joab, his officers, and all of Israel to war, whilst David stays behind in Jerusalem. The upper level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the ironist (be the ironist a character, the narrator or the author), and may be spoken of as the implicit message in the text. This need only be a hint that all is not what it seems in the lower level. In this instance, the ironist emphasizes that David does not lead the Israelites in war even though he was expected to do so (2 Sam 5:2-3). The
incongruity in this passage is between what is said and what is meant. The statement of facts at the lower level seem to be a morally neutral presentation of facts, however, the message of this verse is that David should have been fighting with his troops.

The verbosity in 11:1 and the pointed comment that David remained in Jerusalem, may be interpreted as the ironist’s mode of dissimulation (as discussed below). David is considered to be the object of attack. The irony is an instance of simple irony arising from the incongruity between the levels. At the upper level the ironist’s criticism which is informed by the background knowledge of David (and expressed in the anomalous language), invalidates the moral neutrality at the lower level. This tension then points to the criticism that David is not living up to his covenant with the Israelites, nor is he living God’s favour seriously.

The grade of the irony in this narrative is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. Instead, the irony is conveyed in the specific use of language in the narrative, and with the help of the background knowledge that the reader has of David.

The unusual language which has been used in this verse has been discussed extensively by Perry and Sternberg in their paper, *The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process*, and will be outlined briefly. Perry and Sternberg suggest that the syntax in 11:1 points to irony, and can be spoken of in reference to the two proposed sections in 11:1a which ends with the comment that Rabbah was besieged, and 11:1b which states, רוד ויוש בירושלם. 11:1a is prolix and 11:1b is curt. It is argued that when a prolix comment is combined with one which is curt, it is the shorter section which is emphasized, as the reader is compelled to give the

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second segment the same attention as he or she gives to the first section, (pausing after reading each word). The emphasis of 11:1 is that David remained in Jerusalem.

Perry and Sternberg claim that after the reader is aware of the anomaly in the syntax, he or she will refer back to the wordiness of the first section to evaluate it for subtext. In this case the reader will notice the excessive amount of information which is given in 11:1a and identify it as ironic exaggeration. The verbosity in the middle of the verse thereby adds irony, as the criticism is delivered with “who-what-where details” which seem to suggest an innocent arrangement of facts, or in other words, point to the dissimulation of the ironist with respect to the content of the lower level; a dissimulation which is communicated, albeit implicitly, in the upper level of the narrative.452

The background knowledge which aids the irony is the knowledge that David acts contrary to the expectation that he would lead the Israelites out to war. This expectation is documented in both of the books of Samuel. In the First Book of Samuel, Israel wants a king to go out before her and to fight her battles (1 Sam 8:20), and in 1 Sam 18:16 the Israelites begin to shift their allegiance to David as it was, “he who marched out and came in leading them.” In the Second Book of Samuel the Israelites make a covenant with David and anoint him as the King of Israel because he led them out to war ahead of Saul (2 Sam 5:2-3). This background knowledge of David creates the conflict in 11:1, as David is loved by Israel for leading the army out to war, yet, in this verse David sends Joab and his officers and all of Israel out to battle, while David stays in Jerusalem. This not only demonstrates a conflict between the expectations that

452 Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 1985), 193-194. Moreover, the ironic context points to the interpretation of ‘I’ (11:1b) as ‘but’ rather than ‘and’, highlighting the ironist’s criticism of David.
Israel had of David and David’s actions, but it also confuses the idea that Israel won battles with David as “the LORD was with him” on the battlefield (1 Sam 18:14).

The mode of verbal irony in this case is impersonal, and the specific sub-category of the mode of impersonal irony is irony displayed. In this instance of irony displayed the ironist has presented the situation of all of Israel at war, yet with David remaining in Jerusalem, as a close confrontation of incompatibles. All of Israel at war is incompatible (in terms of the expectations of the time) with David remaining in Jerusalem. The present example is not unlike the example of irony displayed which Muecke uses in *The Compass of Irony*. In this latter example Cicero gives the following commentary at great length:

I asserted my belief that, one of these days, communities from the provinces would send deputations to the people of Rome requesting that the extortion law and its court should be abolished. For if no such court existed, they suppose that each governor would only take away with him enough for himself and his children. At present, on the other hand, with the courts as they are, a governor takes enough for himself, and his protectors, and his counsel, and the president of the court, and the judges! After this verbose commentary Cicero then restates his position without the “obscuring irrelevancies,” and remarks, “A greedy man’s lust for gain they could satisfy, but they cannot afford a guilty man’s acquittal.” In the case of Cicero and the commentary in 11:1 the incompatibles are side-by-side and ambiguous, so the ironist’s contempt is implied. In the commentary in 11:1 the incompatibles which are side-by-side are, all of Israel are at war, and David in Jerusalem.

The specific object of attack in Sam 11.1 is David and the ironic object more broadly understood (the ironic content, so to speak) is David’s broken promise to the

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454 Ibid.
455 Ibid.
Israelites. I note that the object of attack should be distinguished from the victim of irony. The victim of irony is sometimes also the object of attack; arguably, David, who is the object of attack may also be the victim of irony if it can be demonstrated that he is confidently unaware of the irony. In this instance we do not have enough evidence to claim that David is the victim of the irony, however it is evident that David is the object of the ironist’s attack. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is not necessarily the victim of irony. For the victim of irony could be a bystander, e.g. someone other than David, who does not perceive the irony of the situation.

At this point it is helpful to consider the results of this discussion in the light of the debate surrounding the interpretation of 11:1a. The mainstream interpretation of this verse is, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle…”\footnote{See also Good, \textit{Irony in the Old Testament}, 35-36.} This interpretation has been widely contested and needs further discussion. The difficulty in translation arises as \(וַיְהִי לְתִשׁוְבָהָּ הָשָׁנָה\) is literally translated to mean “And it was the turn of the year,” however, the text is ordinarily interpreted to mean, “In the spring of the year.” The latter interpretation has been favoured as military campaigns were traditionally held in springtime when the conditions were optimal for fighting. The word \(מַלְאכֵים\) which is literally translated as ‘messengers’ is ordinarily interpreted as ‘kings’ for the same reason.\footnote{McCarter, Jr. \textit{II Samuel}, 284.} However, David Clines makes a persuasive argument that the New Year came around in autumn at the time of this verse.\footnote{David J. A. Clines, “The Evidence for the Autumnal New Year in Pre-exilic Israel Reconstructed,” \textit{JBL}, 93, no. 1 (1974), 22-40, 22.} Given this ambiguity, McKenzie suggests that the text is referring to David’s battle with the Ammonites, when the army went out to war without David (2 Sam 10:7), and where the
author does not appear to be critical of David’s decision to remain in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{459} Furthermore, with the later interpretation a contrast cannot be assumed between King David and other kings, (which Robert Polzin suggests destroys the irony).\textsuperscript{460} Instead, McKenzie argues that 11:1 points ahead to what happens whilst David stays at home.\textsuperscript{461} However, Muecke’s methodology still finds ironic criticism in this passage regardless of this ambiguity, as David did not meet the expectations that the Israelites had of him. This incompatibility remains regardless of the narrator’s lack of commentary in 2 Sam 10:7, and is not dependant on a comparison of David with other kings. Thus, “In the return of the year when the messengers march out to battle, David stayed in Jerusalem,” is equally as damning as “when kings march out to battle.” It has even been suggested that the ambiguity surrounding the word kings/messengers heightens the irony in the text as it contains the additional irony, that when kings are meant to go to war, messengers go out instead.\textsuperscript{462}

2.1.2: 2 Samuel 11:2

At the lower level (or the explicit level) of 11:2 David arises from his couch, walks around on the roof of the palace and sees a beautiful woman bathing. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist, who has criticized David because he did not lead his troops in battle (11:1), is similarly critical. This time the criticism arises in the implication that David is more interested in a nap and a beautiful woman than the war effort (11:2). This incongruity is an incongruity in the narrative between what is said and what is meant. Although David is portrayed (explicitly at the lower level) as doing rather


innocuous things such as napping, walking, and looking from his palace, the message of the verse (implied at the upper level) is that David is cavalier and lascivious. The innocence in the narrative is present in the dissimulation of the ironist who pretends that he/she is unaware of the conflict in the narrative. David is the object of the irony as he is spoken of ironically.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. However, irony is conveyed through the context of the narrative, through the choice of language used, and in the contrast with 11:1. For instance, המשב indicates that David was taking a siesta prior to spying the woman from the roof of the king’s palace, and the היטפאל of הלך suggests that he was casually strolling around the roof of the palace. These words which denote relaxation heighten the stationary appeal of יושב in 11:1a and contrast with the frenetic energy of the Israelites in war (2 Sam 11:1a). This adds to the contrast between the self-indulgence of David and the self-sacrifice of the Israelites who are in battle. 463

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the innuendo. An innuendo may be assumed given the emphasis of the verse which follows the same pattern as 11:1. 11:2 may also be broken into two smaller sections; 11:2a which is prolix, and 11:2b which is the curt statement, והאהו תשת מראה מקה.

In keeping with Perry and Sternberg’s suggestion, this pattern indicates that there is ironic exaggeration in 11:2a and an emphasis which should arouse suspicion in 11:2b. Of note, although there is a commonality in the language in 11:1 and 11:2, this verse is better interpreted as an innuendo as there is less of a clash of incompatibles

463 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 51.
(however, this still exists) and more of a suggestion of David’s weakness for a beautiful woman.

Pairing the presentation of David as a self-indulgent king who is not concerned with his responsibilities to the Israelites, with the emphasis in 11:2b leads the reader to suspect that the woman’s exceptional beauty is a temptation to David. The innuendo in the verse is that David is attracted to the woman. The innuendo in 11:2b coupled with the exaggeration in 11:2a leads the reader to identify the implicit message at the upper level of the narrative as being critical of David’s self-indulgent behaviour, particularly when all of Israel is at war. This in turn is the content (or object, broadly understood) of the ironic message, David himself being the specific object of ironic attack.

2.1.3: 2 Samuel 11:3

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:3 the (explicit) content is that David sends a person to discover the identity of the woman he sees bathing. The servant tells David that the woman’s name is Bathsheba, and that she is the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the detail of the men associated with Bathsheba (which will be discussed shortly), is important as they are presumably members of David’s elite troops and are presumably at war when David is not. Moreover, if the innuendo in 11:2 is correct, and if it can be assumed that David is tempted by Bathsheba, it may then be inferred that David is guilty of coveting another man’s wife (Exod 20:17, Deut 5:21). This is a further implication.

In 11.3 there is an incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The messenger gives David a detailed explicit description of Bathsheba and her family, however, the messenger implicitly passes judgment on David by way of his rhetorical question to David, “Do you not know that she is the wife of….” (of which more
below). For it may be inferred that the messenger wanted to communicate, but would be afraid to explicitly state, that it would be deeply immoral for David to sleep with Bathsheba.

David may be spoken of, not only as the object of ironic attack, but also as the victim of irony as he is spoken to ironically, and does not appear to understand the implied content and, therefore, the significance, of the messenger’s speech. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is implied by way of the context and the language of the narrative. In this instance, the background knowledge of Bathsheba’s family suggests irony. The most damning information in this passage is that Bathsheba is married, and that David has begun to pursue a married woman. However, the implied criticism of David is amplified in the knowledge of Bathsheba’s family, of which there is a discussion to follow.

Bathsheba is identified as the daughter of Eliam. The identification of a married woman with her father is unusual, and suggests that Eliam was a man of considerable importance. Given this, it is possible that Eliam was Ahithophel’s son, and also a member of David’s elite troops, as is mentioned in 2 Sam 23:34. However, there is not enough information in the text to positively identify Eliam. More information is known of Uriah the Hittite, who is clearly spoken of as Bathsheba’s husband. It is unknown whether Uriah was born in Israel or if he was a foreigner. Uriah’s name, “Yahweh is my light” would suggest that he was born in Israel, however, the title Hittite may indicate that he was a foreigner. It is also possible that the reference to

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464 A. A. Anderson. WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989), 153. Anderson remarks that there have been various translations of Bathsheba’s name, including “daughter of Sheba,” “daughter of oath,” and “the daughter born on the seventh day.” In the context of this study, the translation “daughter of oath,” does create a stinging contrast with David’s behaviour in 11:1, (where he breaks a contract).

Uriah being a Hittite may be a marker of his heritage. Regardless, Uriah is still thought to be one of David’s elite warriors called the Thirty, as his house was in close proximity with the palace, which suggests that he was of the elite class. It has also been suggested (and would be further damning) that Uriah was associated with nobility, however, this is questionable as this assumption rests on scant biblical proof (Ezek 16:3). Given what is known of Bathsheba, Eliam, and Uriah, it would be immoral for the king to pursue.

The mode of verbal irony in question is that of impersonal irony, and it could be argued that the sub-category of verbal irony is that of rhetorical question. However, this remark is not without contention. Most translations present the messenger’s response to David as a statement of fact, yet, it is more persuasive to interpret the speech in 11:3 as an interrogative. For instance, הלוא זאת appears to indicate that this is a “speculative inquiry.” Moreover, the placement of the verbcedes after the verbדרש suggests that David is the subject of the inquiry. It has even been suggested that this might better be translated ‘thought,’ leading this verse to read as David’s own conscience speaking. Yet, as the context does not support the strength of David’s conscience, it is more persuasive to suggest that the messenger spoke to David with a rhetorical question. The use of a rhetorical question creates a subtext, and emphasises the details of the remark. The emphases of the verse are that Bathsheba is married and that her husband and father are men of great stature in the community. This justifies strong criticism of David. This justified criticism of David forms the ironic content and the connection with 11:1 strengthens this criticism. For Uriah is at war, and Eliam can be

466 Ibid.
assumed to be at war, whilst David is not. In 11:3 David ‘sends’ someone to inquire about the beautiful woman he sees bathing, which contrasts with the image of the Israelites whom he ‘sent’ to war in 11:1. The object of ironic attack is David and the ironic content (object, broadly understood) is that David is coveting the wife of a soldier who is at war.

2.1.4: 2 Samuel 11:4-5

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:4 David sends messengers to get Bathsheba, she comes to him, he lies with her, and she returns home. In 11:5 she realises that she is pregnant and sends a messenger to tell David that she is pregnant. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level of the narrative the ironist represents the incongruity in the situation: the King of Israel, who is called to uphold the laws, commits adultery. However, this immoral act has been implicitly communicated by way of understated language.470

David is the object of ironic attack. The criticism of David that he has broken a law is made at the upper level and this criticism contrasts with the understated events at the lower level. The irony is covert irony as it is not immediately apparent, and the identification of the irony relies on background knowledge in the text, and the language used.

The background knowledge is best understood with reference to the laws which prohibit adultery. Exod 20:14 and Deut 5:18 clearly state that adultery is a sin against God. The death penalty for adultery can be found in Deut 22:22 and Lev 20:10.

However, there is debate surrounding the actual enforcement of these laws. Henry

470 The subject of Bathsheba’s complicity in the affair will not be discussed in this dissertation, as the ironic criticism appears to be directed towards David. See the following article for a full discussion of Bathsheba’s role in the act of adultery; Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined,” VT, 61 (2011), 1-15.
McKeating argues that there is no account in the OT of a person being executed for committing adultery, and therefore, the enforcement of these laws cannot be taken at face value.\textsuperscript{471} Rather, it has been suggested that they may represent ‘ideals’ to be strived for.\textsuperscript{472} On the other hand, it has been argued that the laws governing adultery were concerned with protecting a man’s property,\textsuperscript{473} or protecting the paternity of a man’s children.\textsuperscript{474} In these cases adultery was viewed as a crime rather than a civil matter, which would make adultery a community concern potentially requiring the death penalty.\textsuperscript{475} Regardless of the gravity of the transgression, or the punishment for the action, it can still be said that a negative view of adultery informs this text, this conflict is then heightened by the knowledge that the adulterer is the King of Israel.

The anomalies in the use of language are best understood in terms of ambiguity and understatement. An example of ambiguous language can be found in the word שכב. This word can mean to sleep, or lie down in illness, as well as being a euphemism for sexual intercourse. In this case, it is clarified unambiguously by the context, which relates that Bathsheba conceived (11:5).\textsuperscript{476} However, the more striking anomaly in the

\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{473} E. Neufeld, \textit{Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws} (London: 1944), 163ff.
\textsuperscript{475} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{476} Yet, there is less certainty when it concerns the curious line in the text after the sexual intercourse in 11:4b. This sentence is ordinarily translated as, “(Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house.” Most scholars cite this parenthetical note as being retrospective, and thereby, referring to the bath that Bathsheba had prior to her intercourse with David. For instance, McCarter argues that this interpretation suggests that Bathsheba was past the seven days of ritual impurity which are outlined in Lev 15:19 and therefore, her intercourse with David occurred at a time where she was most likely to fall pregnant. This interpretation suggests that the sentence clearly states that Uriah could not be the father of the child. (McCarter, Jr. \textit{II Samuel}, 286). However, there are a number of other interpretations of this ambiguous sentence which lend a different emphasis to the passage. Guttmann argues that this sentence indicates that David had defiled himself by having intercourse with a woman who was in a state of ritual impurity (Lev 15:24). (Guttmann (1964:7) as found in McCarter, Jr. \textit{II Samuel}, 286). This assessment would not only be more critical of David, (as he would have made Uriah’s wife pregnant and defiled himself), but it
narrative is the understated language. The curt presentation of facts is not only striking considering its contrast with the verbosity in the first few verses, but also, given the importance of the events which are being described. Most saliently, the King of Israel commits an act of adultery which results in a pregnancy. This leads Cheryl Exum to remark, that the scene, “…is the biblical equivalent of ‘wham, bam, thank you ma’am.’”

Therefore, the verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. According to Muecke understatement is not always ironic, for instance, “I am not feeling the best” is better understood as a common expression of direct language without a hidden meaning. By contrast, ironic understatement is found in situations which call for strong emotional language but which are made light of. The king’s act of adultery which left a married woman pregnant should have been expressed with strong language, and therefore the designation of understatement is appropriate. The content or broad object of the irony is David’s act of adultery.

would add a further element of obscenity which is that trademark of satirical writing. Another interpretation (which rests on the assumption that the word מתקדשת means consecrating or self-sanctifying) asserts that Bathsheba is presented in this narrative as the sanctified “mother of Israel.” (J. D’Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11,” JSOT. 2008, 32, 339-352, 339). This claim does not fit readily with Deut 22:22 where Bathsheba would have been considered guilty of adultery, and would have received the same punishment as David. This background knowledge contradicts the argument that Bathsheba is presented as the sanctified “mother of Israel” in this narrative. A less clumsy interpretation might be that this sentence refers to Bathsheba’s act of purification after she had been involved with David. This interpretation is possible as the noun משמאתה combined with מתקדשת can suggest cleansing which follows sexual relations. (J. D’Ror Chankin-Gould, et al, “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11,” 351). Regardless of the ambiguity, it can still be said with certainty that David and Bathsheba had intercourse, and that Bathsheba fell pregnant. This is the damning information as far as the ironist is concerned.

478 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 80.
2.1.5: 2 Samuel 11:6-8

At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:6 Joab sends Uriah to David, on David’s command. In 11:7 David asks Uriah how Joab is, and how the war is going. In 11:8 David tells Uriah to go home and wash his feet, and Uriah finds a present awaiting him as he leaves the palace. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level there is a dual meaning in David’s suggestion that Uriah wash his feet. This suggestion could mean that Uriah should wash his feet since his return to Jerusalem has been tiring. However, there is another meaning; one damning for David. For this comment could be taken as a directive for Uriah to go home and have sexual relations with Bathsheba. This claim can be made with some degree of certainty. First, הרגלים in other biblical references connote the genitals (Ruth 3:4, 7; Ezek 16:25). Second, there is the allusion to sexual relations in 11:4; so it would be consistent if this verse was an allusion to sexual intercourse also.

David’s comment to Uriah that he should have intercourse with Bathsheba and defile himself points to the incongruity in the narrative, as David is known as a person who is very strict when it concerns the rules of ritual purity (1 Sam 21:5), and the customs of hospitality (1 Sam 25:13). This opposition indicates that David is the object of ironic attack. Of note, Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony as he is not arrogantly unaware.

The grade of irony is covert, and is conveyed by the anomalies in the language, and by recourse to the background information. 11:6 begins with the familiar word שלח. So far in the narrative this word has been attached to all of the tension surrounding David’s actions. For example, David ‘sent’ Joab and all of Israel out to war when he ought to have been leading the army (11:1), David ‘sends’ the servant to inquire about
the woman he sees bathing (11:3), David ‘sends’ for the woman (11:4), and she ‘sends’ word back to David that she is pregnant (11:5). Thereby, the use of שלוח three times in 11:6 is significant. In the following verse, in contrast to the three mentions of שלוח there are three mentions of the word שלוח. This contrast, and the repetition of the word שלוח point to the insincerity of David; for the narrative thus far suggests that David is not concerned with the harmony that the word שלוח implies.479

The pertinent background information of the narrative is that David is otherwise excessively concerned with the standards of sacral law. In 1 Sam 21:5 David assures Abimelech that the soldier’s כלי (which means ‘vessels,’ another euphemism for genitals)480 were קדוש or ‘holy’ on ordinary journeys, and especially when the soldiers were on active duty. David’s extreme (if not overstated) assurance to Abimelech of the soldiers’ purity in 1 Sam 21:5 then calls into question his insistence that Uriah go to his house for sexual relations. If Uriah were to do as David instructs he would be guilty of contravening the strict sacral regulations of soldiers in battle. This knowledge was fully known to David. The gift which David has presented to Uriah is, in context, best considered as a bribe, which makes the criticism of David even sharper.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of verbal irony is irony displayed. In this instance, the close confrontation of incompatibles is best understood in the contrast of David’s apparent concern for Joab, the Israelites at war, and the war itself in 11:7 with his directive to Uriah to compromise himself and the war effort by lying with his wife in 11:8 (particularly, when this is considered with

479 Perry and Sternberg argue that it is possible to view the king at this point in the story in a positive light as he may be sending for Uriah to apologise to him, and therefore, there is an irony as David turns from “the meritorious to the villainous.” (Perry and Sternberg, “The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,”299).

the knowledge of David’s reported concern for the purity of soldiers in battle). This contrast is heightened by the three mentions of שָׁלוֹם in 11:7, with the lack of שָׁלוֹם in 11:8. The content of the irony is David’s attempt to cover-up his transgression, and his abuse of hospitality in the process.

2.1.6: 2 Samuel 11:9-11

At the lower (explicit) level of 11:9 Uriah sleeps at the entrance of the king’s palace instead of going home. In 11:10 the servants tell David that Uriah did not go down to his house, and David asks Uriah why he did not go home to his house. In 11:11 Uriah asks David if David thinks it would be inappropriate for him to go to his home and enjoy the comforts of his wife. At the upper (implicit) level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is immoral for asking Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. This irony is evident in Uriah’s rhetorical question in 11:11:

ואני אבוא אל־ביתי לאכל ולשׁתות ולשׁכב עם־אשׁתי

This question can easily be identified as a rhetorical question as Uriah does not wait for an answer from David, and Uriah answers his own question in the following way,

חיך וחי נפשך אם־אעשה את־הדבר הזה

Also of note is the damning information which prefaces Uriah’s rhetorical question in 11:11,

הארון וישׁראל וישׁייחודה וישׁייחודה בחום והארון וישׁייחודה\

Mention of the ark is significant, as it strengthens the pejorative content of the irony displayed in the previous passage. For the presence of the ark in battle required that all soldiers be ritually pure, and abstain from sexual activity (Deut 23:9-14). Thereby, it
would seem that David put his need to cover-up his transgression above the need for ritual purity in soldiers, and presumably therefore, potentially compromised the war effort. The fact that it is a foreigner, or a soldier of foreign descent who has to inform the king of Yahweh’s rules for ritual purity could be classified as a parodying feature of satire.

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Uriah says and what he means. Uriah asks David a question, however, Uriah does not want an answer from David. The irony in the question is twofold. First, there is the simple irony arising from the juxtaposition of the lower and upper levels. This involves the incongruences between what Uriah says as opposed to what Uriah means. Uriah’s rhetorical question in this context is an implicit criticism of David for suggesting he should go to his wife rather than to war. Moreover, this rhetorical question in this context renders the implied criticism fairly obvious. So the form of verbal irony is overt.

However, there is a second irony. This arises from the juxtaposition between the fact that Uriah could well be committing an act of treason by ignoring the king’s implicit command, and yet, be righteous in the eyes of Yahweh at the same time. This is ironic, given it is David’s role to uphold God’s law among his subjects, including Uriah rather than the reverse. While the juxtaposing elements that give rise to this irony are obvious, the irony itself is covert. However, David is clearly the object of the ironic attack.

In both these instances of verbal irony the mode of irony is impersonal irony and needs to be supported by the context of the narrative. A relevant anomalie in the text is Uriah’s mention of Joab as his lord. This is the correct form of address to a commanding officer, however, as Perry and Sternberg have mentioned, the reader is
inclined to see this as a declaration of Uriah’s allegiance to Joab over David.\textsuperscript{481} This claim is difficult to substantiate, however, Uriah’s speech in 11:11 indicates that Uriah does not trust David.

The sub-category of the mode of verbal irony is that of rhetorical question which has already been discussed. The rhetorical question creates a stark contrast between Uriah’s upright behaviour and David’s duplicity.\textsuperscript{482} Uriah is not prepared to enjoy the luxuries of civilian life whilst all of Israel is away fighting, nor is he prepared to breach any rules which may be damaging to the army and Israel as a whole. Whereas, David is presented as living in self-indulgent luxury and being injurious to those he is meant to administer justice to. The personal pronoun “אני” in 11:11b creates a contrast between Uriah, who righteously will not lie with his wife, with David who has already done so illicitly. The pejorative criticism here is heightened by a further contrast between Uriah and David, in the exaggerated vow that Uriah makes in David’s name.\textsuperscript{483} David is obviously the object of ironic attack and the content of the irony is David’s attempt to defile Uriah which would compromise the war-effort.

2.1.7: 2 Samuel 11:12-13

\textsuperscript{482} Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2),” 124. For a different perspective of the irony in this passage see Perry and Sternberg’s three-way hypotheses which presents different nuances in the narrative based on David’s possible motives. For example, (1) David may think that Uriah is not aware of his transgression, and if this is the case then the focus of David’s decision to have Uriah killed is to preserve his reputation, (2) if David thinks that Uriah is aware of the adultery, then David is imagined as a king who kills a servant who mocks him, and (3) if David does not know whether or not Uriah knows of the adultery then David is shown to act out of the fear of what is unknown. Furthermore, “The Two-fold Hypotheses” is based on Uriah’s possible knowledge of David’s motives. This hypotheses examines the narrative from two perspectives, (1) Uriah did not know of David’s act of adultery with Bathsheba, and (2) that Uriah does know of the adultery. In the second instance Uriah is presented as an idealist which creates a strong ironic contrast between the image of a perfect warrior, and David as an imperfect king. Perry and Sternberg, “The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process,”275-322.
\textsuperscript{483} Bar-Efrat, \textit{Narrative Art in the Bible}, 127.
At the lower level of 11:12 David requests that Uriah stay in Jerusalem for an extra day. In 11:13 David invites Uriah to eat and drink with him and David makes Uriah drunk. However, Uriah does not go home and sleep with Bathsheba. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that David actions are underhanded, and that although he appears to be showing hospitality to Uriah, David’s real and deceptive intentions are contrary to his apparent innocuous intentions. The ironist insinuates that David gets Uriah drunk in another manipulative attempt to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. The opposition in this passage concerns the difference between the matter-of-fact presentation of facts, with the real message of this section; David who is otherwise strict when it comes to matters of hospitality is a hypocrite.

Yet again, David is the target of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert as it is conveyed by relying in part on the background knowledge concerning David. In particular, the irony relies on features of the context of the narrative, specifically, two stories which display David’s knowledge of the importance of showing hospitality to a guest. In 2 Sam 9:11 David shows the חסד of a host to Mephibosheth. Moreover, in 1 Sam 25 David demonstrates how important hospitality is to him when Nabal refuses David hospitality. In this narrative Nabal refuses to feed David and his men, in the rhetorical question in 1 Sam 25:11. David is so angered by Nabal that he is prepared to kill Nabal for ignoring the proper customs of hospitality (1 Sam 25:34). Both of these stories combine to give a comprehensive understanding of how important hospitality is to David.

The story of Uriah is different from both of the narratives which have been previously mentioned, however. David does provide Uriah with food, drink, and the

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484 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 59.
offer of shelter. Yet, the חסד which is an inherent part of hospitality is not demonstrated in David’s actions. In 11:11-12 the offer of food and alcohol is given to Uriah in order to make him pliable so that David can manipulate him into sleeping with Bathsheba, so that he might cover up his own transgression. The offer of shelter in this instance further heightens the criticism of David, as Uriah is not offered to sleep in the palace, which would protect Uriah from tainting his reputation. Instead, David commands that Uriah go to his own house (11:8). Thereby, the ironist in this passage is critical of David’s decision to extend the acts of hospitality, but not the חסד which is an inherent element of hospitality. This too is the content of the irony. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, as the ironist is not a character in the narrative as Socrates was, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles in this instance is best expressed in 11:13. In 11:13a the King of Israel acts in a manner which is contrary to the conventions of Israel. By contrast, Uriah, who may be a foreigner, or is at least of foreign descent, nevertheless lives in accordance with the standards of Israelite law.

2.1.8: 2 Samuel 11:14-15

At the lower level of 11:14 David writes a note for Joab, which he gives to Uriah to deliver to Joab. In the note David commands that Uriah be placed at the front of the heaviest fighting, and that the other troops withdraw from Uriah in the fighting (11:15). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist does not see the situation as David sees it, as the ironist factors in important background information that the ironist has with respect to God’s laws and the expectations of David as a king. David’s request for Joab
to, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die,” (11:15) is shocking, as the reader expects the king to administer justice, and be obedient to the laws. The opposition in this section concerns the difference between what David does with what is expected of David.

David is the target of ironic attack as his actions are in breach of God’s laws and, as king, he has a special – indeed, God-given - duty to see to it that Joab complies with these laws. Crucially, David is not only breaking the law himself and not doing his duty to ensure others comply with the law, he is strenuously trying to cause others to break the law; in this instance he is trying to cause Joab to break the law. Moreover, David is trying to cause Joab to break a central and important law. This is not only ironic, but morally wrong and profoundly corrupt.

Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony, as Uriah merely follows a command to deliver the letter and is unaware of the contents of the letter. Nor is Joab the victim of irony. For while the irony of the situation may escape him, this ignorance is not the product of arrogance or stupidity, i.e. it is not in Muecke’s terms, “confident unawareness”.

The irony is a simple irony between the two levels. At the lower level David, in effect, orders the killing of an innocent, at the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity between David’s actions and the expectation that the king administer justice (as explained above).

The grade of irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be understood in context. As already mentioned, the King of Israel is meant to uphold the laws. In 1 Sam 8, the Israelites demand a king to govern them and deliver justice, as Samuel’s sons were corrupt (1 Sam 8:5). Yet, in 11:14 David is presented as a king who views himself as above the law and readily breaks and causes others to break the
law when it suits him.⁴⁸⁵ Instead of providing justice David signs the death warrant of an innocent man. This puts Israel at risk, as bloodguilt has not been properly regarded.⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, David’s instruction to kill an innocent is incongruous as he is called to be a king who administers justice (2 Sam 8:15) but is, in this instance, a king who the innocent need protection from!⁴⁸⁷

The mode of irony in this instance is irony displayed, and the confrontation of incompatibles can be seen in the contrast of the King of Israel sending a note with an upright soldier to take to the general (11:14), with the knowledge that this note was a death warrant (11:15). The object of irony, or that which the ironist is being ironical about is David’s act of ordering Uriah’s execution.

Of note, in isolation the motif of Uriah carrying his own death note,⁴⁸⁸ could be considered situational irony. In situational irony the state of affairs brings forth the irony of the cosmic order, rather than the critical irony of a satirist. In the first instance, it might be said that something is ironic but not a cause for moralizing, as opposed to impersonal irony where the ironist is being deliberately critical of someone’s moral defects.⁴⁸⁹ However, as argued, it is preferable to speak of this verse as an example of

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⁴⁸⁶ Walter Brueggemann, Deuteronomy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 199. However, it is worth considering that the laws which prohibit the killing of an innocent in Deuteronomy might provide David with a loophole which he takes advantage of. Deut 5:15 succinctly states, “You shall not murder.” Num 35:16-34 on the other hand is more detailed, yet, it still only speaks of direct killing, and not the kind of execution that David has devised. Even Deut 27:25, which does speak of third-person murder, only speaks of an executioner who accepts a bribe to kill somebody. Given this, it is worth considering that David’s manipulation extends to the modern-day legal definition of chicanery, where a person uses loopholes in the law deceptively. Yet, it would seem that David was more concerned with concealing his transgression, rather than manipulating the laws to suit himself.
⁴⁸⁷ It could also be argued (if it could be established that Uriah was a foreigner), that David has breached Israel’s strict laws of hospitality (Judg 19).
⁴⁸⁸ The motif of a soldier carrying his own death note is a well-known in world literature. See McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 287.
⁴⁸⁹ For a fuller account on the differences of what is ironic, and what is an example of “the ironist being ironical,” read, D. C. Muecke, Irony, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970) and, D. C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony.
verbal irony. For one thing, the event is not to be taken in isolation of background facts about the role of the king. For another, it is possible to detect the impersonal ironist’s criticism of David which has been consistent throughout the narrative.

2.1.9: 2 Samuel 11:16-17

This episode extends the verbal irony in 11:14-15. At the lower level of 11:16 Joab places Uriah in the heaviest fighting. In 11:17 some of David’s servants are killed along with Uriah in the fighting. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist’s emphasis is on the number of soldiers who had to die to conceal David’s transgression. The opposition in the narrative concerns the incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The facts are presented without a moral judgement, however, the moral judgement is revealed in the anomalous language in the verses. David is the target of ironic attack, as his attempt to cover-up his sin by recourse to, in effect, causing soldiers engaged in fighting on Israel’s behalf to face inevitable death, is spoken of ironically. The grade of irony is covert, as the irony is conveyed in the language and the context of the narrative. For example, Uriah’s death in 11:17 almost reads as an after-thought. However, this verse conforms to the same structure as 11:1, and 11:2, where the emphasis is contained in the shorter section. Thereby, the emphasis in this verse is that Uriah is killed (11:17b). Yet, there is still another damning proposition which comes through in 11:17a, namely, that some of the servants of David were sacrificed in order to implement his plan. This contrast makes the verbal irony in this section impersonal irony and irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles, which is a necessary element of irony displayed, could best be described as the contrast of the Israelites dying in a battle the king sent them to fight, with the knowledge that the King of Israel was responsible for their deaths not because they died in the service of Israel but rather in order to conceal his transgressions.
This verse reflects on the criticism in 11:1 where it is plainly stated that the servants of David, and all of Israel went out to war as David stayed in Jerusalem. Now the reader is aware that not only did David stay behind in luxury when there was an expectation that he would lead the army out to war, but that David from the comfort of Jerusalem, caused the death of a number of elite soldiers in order to conceal his transgressions. This verse then heightens the irony displayed in 11:1, and adds a more sinister edge to it, as the criticism of the ironist is now two-fold, (1) David did not lead the Israelites out to war, and (2) David culpably caused the deaths of a number of the soldiers he sent out to war. These events conflict with the expectations that Israel had of David, and Yahweh’s expectations as they are laid out in the laws.

There is a further ironic twist. David’s original plan to conceal his transgression involved only Uriah being exposed to certain death. Joab immediately recognised that this would not work since singling out Uriah in this manner would raise widespread suspicion and draw attention to David’s transgression rather than conceal it. Thus Joab modified David’s plan by exposing not only Uriah but also some of the elite soldiers. This episode is ironic in that David’s original plan far from concealing his transgression would have exposed it to all and sundry. Here David is the target of ironic attack; his foolishness is implied. Moreover, he is the unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of his foolishness.

2.1.10: 2 Samuel 11:18-21

At the lower level of 11:18 Joab decides to tell David all the news of the fighting. In 11:18-21 Joab warns the messenger that David may become angry when he hears the news of the war. (Note that we learn later in 11:24 that the Israelites sustained many losses in the battle, in part because they got too close to the enemy’s wall and were
killed.) Joab informs the messenger that David may tell the messenger the story of Abimelech. (Note that it is well-known that Abimelech got killed when he got too close to the enemy’s wall (Judg 9:52-54).) Joab advises the messenger to tell David that Uriah the Hittite is also dead - if David gets angry. At the upper level of the narrative there is more than meets the eye in Joab’s mention of Abimelech. Abimelech created a kingdom through murder and deceit (Judg 9:1-6). However, he was killed at a battle in Thebez when a woman threw a millstone at his head from a tower, and he asked his armour-bearer to kill him with a sword, lest people find out a women killed him (Judges 9:51-54). Abimelech’s death was attributed to divine justice: “Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers; and God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbal” (Judg 9:56-57).

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. In Joab’s speech he refers to Abimelech, the unrighteous king, however, the truth of his message is that he believes that David is as unrighteous as Abimelech. The innocence in the narrative is the ironist’s dissimulation in the rhetorical questions. The grade of irony is covert, as it is conveyed through the ambiguity in the passage, in particularly in Joab’s mention of Abimelech.

This message will be discussed further, as the meaning of this message is the subject of debate. McCarter suggests that the ambiguity in this passage is designed to convey a message to the king, whilst hiding it from the messenger. Carole Fontaine expands on this idea and remarks that Joab’s reference to the woman who killed Abimelech, leads the reader to believe that Joab is aware of David’s activities with

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490 Note that Uriah the Hittite is mentioned as Joab’s armour-bearer in 4QSam 11:3.
Bathsheba. The reference to the woman who brings death is then a metaphor which veils Joab’s knowledge of the crime from the messenger, but allows the king to know of his disapproval. However, these interpretations rest on the assumption that Joab is telling the messenger to relay the information about Abimelech to David, whereas, Joab suggests that the messenger may mention Abimelech’s misfortune, if David is angry.

Furthermore, Joab lets the messenger know that David’s anger will be assuaged by the knowledge of Uriah’s death (11:20; 21b). Joab also lets it be known to the messenger that Joab is well aware of the dangers of fighting too close to the city and that, nevertheless, Joab went ahead and did it anyway (11:20-21). Thereby, the interpretation that Joab coded his message to David in order to conceal the truth from the messenger, is not correct. Instead, it might be argued that the reason for Joab’s outburst of rhetorical questions can be attributed to the presence of impersonal irony. That is, criticism of David is to be found in the rhetorical questions in Joab’s speech, making the sub-category of rhetorical question the primary sub-category of verbal irony found in this passage. Therefore, the ironic content in this passage is to be found in Joab’s rhetorical questions, and in particular in Joab’s mention of Abimelech. Here clearly David is the object of ironic attack.

The allusions, and criticisms in Joab’s rhetorical question are heightened by the same pattern of verbosity and conciseness that have been mentioned in other passages. Going by this pattern, the emphasis in this narrative is that Uriah is dead (11:21b), and it is the exaggeration in 11:20-21a which contains the ironist’s criticism of David. The exaggeration in the first section can point in a number of different directions. Fokkelman suggests that the main criticism in this narrative is that David has allowed

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492 Carole Fontaine, 65.
himself to fall victim to a woman.\textsuperscript{493} So too has Blenkinsopp, and Gunn who mentions the ever-present motif of “the woman who brings death.”\textsuperscript{494} While this claim has merit, it is not the only interpretation of this verse. Up to this point in the narrative, pejorative criticism has concentrated on David, and in an unmitigated way. In the case of Abimelech’s death, although, it was a woman who killed him, his death is also recorded as God’s repayment for Abimelech’s iniquity. The curse of Jotham, then, is a stern warning that kingship which is dishonourable will be met with a violent end.\textsuperscript{495} This curse addresses the need for an honourable relationship between the king and his subjects, otherwise, the entire community is at risk of God’s wrath.\textsuperscript{496} Thereby, Joab’s rhetorical questions (and the ironist’s criticism of David) surely is not only the criticism that David has allowed a woman to get him into trouble, but also that David has gotten himself into an unrighteous relationship with God.

2.1.11: 2 Samuel 11:22-25

At the lower level of 11:22-24 the messenger gives David the news of the war. In 11:25 David tells the messenger to relay a message of encouragement to Joab. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist contrasts the messenger’s troubling report to David of Israelite deaths and David’s off-hand message to Joab that is dismissive of these deaths. There is an opposition in the narrative between what David says and the grim reality behind these deaths. At the lower level, David’s message is that it is the nature of war

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\item \textsuperscript{493} Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 67-70.
\item \textsuperscript{494} J. Blenkinsopp, “Jonathan’s Sacrilege. 1 SM 14-46: A Study in Literary History,” \textit{CBQ} 26 (1964), 52-56. See also the motif of “the woman who brings death” in David Gunn’s article, “Traditional Composition in the ‘Succession Narrative,’” \textit{VT} 26, no. 2 (1976), 214-219: for example, “But Bathsheba is only one woman who brings death in the story of King David. Each of the women listed above is a catalyst in a story of death. The quarrel over Rizpah leads, indirectly but relentlessly, to the destruction of both Ishboseth (the owner) and Abner (the claimant); the rape of Tamar leads to the death of Amnon (the claimant) and Absalom (the protector); and finally David’s concubine Abishag, is the occasion of the deaths of Adonijah (the claimant) and Joab.” 222.
\item \textsuperscript{495} Susan Niditch, Judges (London: Westminster Knox Press, 2008), 116.
\item \textsuperscript{496} J. Clinton McCann, \textit{Judges} (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 73.
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to consume men, yet at the upper level, the ironist knows that it is David’s desire to conceal his transgressions and resulting command to Joab that was the cause of the deaths in 11:17.

The striking contrast is between the messenger’s report that Uriah is dead (11:24b) and David’s understated response in 11:25,

אלירע בהעקר אתHeroes whoプリエヘル והרות

In this sentence, it would appear that David is suggesting to Joab that he need not be concerned as men die all the time in battle. This verse, then points back to 11:1, where there was only a hint that David was doing anything wrong by not leading the Israelites in war. Verse 11:25 suggests that David’s character is worse than was originally thought. Now, David is responsible for the deaths of his own men, despite being far away in Jerusalem. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative then has a complex grouping of criticisms of David, most recently that he is ambivalent about the lives of his soldiers. David is the victim of irony, as he is unaware that his own words betray him. The messenger is not the victim of irony, because, although the messenger is unaware of David’s conspiracy, the messenger is not ‘confidently’ unaware. Or in other words, there is no indication of intellectual hubris in the messenger. The verbal irony may be spoken of as covert as it needs to be discovered. The irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. In this kind of irony a situation which calls for a strong emotional response is made light of. Note, although, David may not have a strong emotional response to Uriah’s death (or may even be pleased that Uriah has died) in the lower level of the text, the comment may also be understood to be understated in the upper level of the text. The object of the irony is David’s coldness in response to Uriah’s death.
2.1.12: 2 Samuel 11:26-27a

The verses 11:26-27a are transition verses. However, these verses may still be spoken of as examples of impersonal irony. The sub-category of impersonal irony in question is that of understatement. 11:26-27 are not dissimilar from 11:4-5, which contain a good number of events which are spoken of concisely. In some regards, these verses are a counterpart to 11:4-5. For example, in 11:4-5 Bathsheba goes to her house, and informs David of her pregnancy, in 11:26-27a, David takes Bathsheba to his house, and she bears him a child. This is all spoken of in understated language which gives the impression that everything is back to normal for the king. It may even be suggested that he has come through his transgressions unscathed, or in a better position than before his sins.

2.1.13: Summary of irony in 2 Samuel 11:1-27a

Verse 11:1 begins this section with irony displayed. The ironist is critical of David’s decision not to honour the covenant he made with the Israelites (2 Sam 5:2-3). Whilst remaining in Jerusalem, David is presented as a self-serving king in the innuendo in 11:2. The rhetorical question in 11:3 adds a further ironic criticism that David is coveting the wife of another man. The knowledge that Uriah and Eliam were away fighting when David was organising a tryst with Bathsheba, adds depth to the criticism that David did not go out to war, when it was expected that he would. Pejorative criticism of David is further strengthened in the understatement in 11:4-5. Not only has David refused to go to war, and coveted another man’s wife, the seriousness of the
ironic criticism increases as he commits an act of adultery with Bathsheba, and impregnates her.

In 11:6-8, the ironist is critical of David’s disregard for the rules of ritual purity for soldiers. This is expressed by means of irony displayed. The criticism of David’s disregard for the laws of ritual purity is further explored in 11:9-11, where Uriah communicates by means of a rhetorical question which criticises David’s intentions and creates a contrast between Uriah who is righteous with David who is corrupt. David’s manipulations continue in 11:12-13, when David gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to make Uriah do David’s will. These verses are instances of irony displayed as they suggest a contrast between the righteousness of Uriah with the corruptness of David. For instance, Uriah remains in a right relationship with Yahweh when he refuses to break the laws of ritual purity. This creates a broader contrast with David who appears to be falling away from Yahweh. David’s behaviour declines further when he sends Uriah out to battle carrying his own death-note (11:14-15). The criticism in this section emerges by means of irony displayed, as David is shown to be a king who has no regard for administering justice, and who, in this instance, became a king who killed an innocent man and put all of Israel at risk of bloodguilt. The same criticism follows through to 11:16-17 when David’s command to have Uriah executed costs the lives of more soldiers.

Verses 11:18-21—which include Joab’s rhetorical question which alludes to Abimelech’s kingship - point to the dire consequences for the monarchy and its subjects if the king is not in a right relationship with God’s laws. This criticism is then applied to David. The irony in 11:22-25 is an understatement. The ironic criticism in this section suggests that David does not care for the lives of the soldiers that he sends out to war, as he is the cause of their deaths. Throughout these verses there is a pattern
of consistent and somewhat relentless pejorative criticism of David in the form of verbal irony. Thereby, at this stage in an interpretation it can be concluded that there is a militant form of verbal irony throughout the narrative.

2.2: 2 Samuel 11:27b-12:31

2.2.1: 2 Samuel 11:27b

2 Samuel 11:27b states,

וירע הדבר אשר־עשה דוד בעיני יהוה

This statement links back to David’s cavalier remark that Joab need not see the death of Uriah as anything evil. In this regard, God voices the ironist’s criticism of David explicitly. Given that God’s evaluation of the events is representative of absolute moral authority, it can then be assumed that the ironist’s criticism is in keeping with the integrity of the narrative.

2.2.2: 2 Samuel 12:1-6

At the lower level of 12:1-6 God sends a message to David via Nathan. Nathan tells David a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man is accused of stealing the poor man’s ewe lamb and feeding it to a traveller. In 12:5-6 David is made angry by the story and requests that the rich man make severe restitution. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is a connection between the situation of the parable and David’s own life. David is the object of ironic attack since the parable is about him. He is also the victim of irony as he is confidently unaware that the parable is about him. The ‘confident’ element is expressed in the extreme sentence that David

Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 19.
gives to the rich man who resembles David (12:6). The opposition in the passage exists in the difference between what is said and what is meant.

The grade of the verbal irony is covert, and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is irony by analogy. Irony by analogy can be detected when the ironist presents an imaginary situation in order to criticise one that is real. There are no strict rules for irony by analogy, as it can take a number of different forms. However, in all instances of this sub-category of verbal irony one situation (or action, pattern of behaviour etc.) that is explicitly spoken of implicitly points to a secondary situation. Moreover, it is implied that the second situation is analogous to the first one.

498 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 304-305. This speech also referred to as a ṣesh which is a “judgement-eliciting” device in the Hebrew Bible, as opposed to parable which is a Greek term. However, both terms have a similar meaning which Kruschwitz has written as being, “similarity or comparison.” (Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, “2 Samuel 12:1-15: How (Not) to Read a Parable,” Review and Expositor 109, no. 2 (2012), 253-259, 254.) Uriel Simon writes of this parable as belonging to the genre of a “judicial parable.” Simon argues that the basis of a judicial parable is that the person who is on trial, so to speak, is unaware that they are passing judgement on themselves when they pass judgement on the person in the case who represents them. (Uriel Simon, “The Poor Man’s Ewe Lamb: An Example of a Judicial Parable,” Bib 48 (1967), 220-221.) Jeremy Schipper entertains the thought that this might be a prophetic parable. Schipper comes to the conclusion that David could not understand this as an historical case due to the poetics contained within the parable. Schipper also suggests that it is more likely that David is aware this is a parable, yet, that he over-interprets it and levels the blame for Uriah’s death on Joab. (Jeremy Schipper, “Did David Overinterpret Nathan’s Parable in 2 Samuel 12:1-6?” JBL 162, no. 2 (2007), 383.) It might be said that in the interests of the aesthetic value of the piece of writing it is possible for this to be presented as a judicial parable, and also as an aesthetically pleasing piece of writing. (Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 41-42.) Bailey, suggests it may be an example of case law. (Randall C. Bailey, David in Love and War. The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 106). Gunkel writes that this is most likely a well-known folktale, which did not correspond exactly with David’s misdeeds. (H. Gunkel, Das Märchen im Alten Testament. (Tubingen: Mohr, 1921), 35-37, as cited in Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 161). Pyper writes from the perspective that this is a legal narrative which is used to get an oath from David which will force him to follow a certain course of action. This Pyper writes, comes about when David sees that the story of the rich man is an analogy to his own course of events. (Hugh Pyper, “The Enticement to Re-Read: Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel,” BibInter 1, no. 2 (1993), 153-165, 154).
In the case of Nathan’s Parable, most scholars have tried to match David’s misdeeds in 2 Sam 11 exactly with the events in 2 Sam 12. However, it would appear that the allusions are more complex. Although there does appear to be similarities in these stories, it does not seem to be possible to create an absolute equivalent.

To get around this difficulty, it has been suggested that the narrative is disguised in order to keep David from identifying it as his own case. However, the problem with this interpretation, is that, if the crime differs too much from the parable then the analogy breaks down and, as a consequence, the corrective self-judgement cannot take effect. David Daube, presents a number of interesting interpretations which allow for a broad understanding of the text, including the idea that a simile need not be created with exactitude, that the generic character of the parable engenders creative analogical interpretation, or that the author was plainly inept. The most

499 For example, most scholars consider that Uriah represents the poor man in the narrative, and that Bathsheba is analogous to the ewe (Jeremy Schipper, “Did David Overinterpret Nathan’s Parable in 2 Samuel 12:1-6?” 384 & Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, “2 Samuel 12:1-15: How (Not) to Read a Parable,” Review and expositer 109, no. 2 (2012), 254). Yet, Blenkinsopp, remarks, “…Bathsheba was Uriah’s wife not his daughter, she was destined for David himself not a visiting guest, and it was Uriah not Bathsheba who ended up dead.” (Joseph Blenkinsopp, Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament. The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism, Revised edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40). Rabbinic writers Rashi and Kimchi speak of the poor man as Uriah, and the traveller and wayfarer as “the Evil Inclination.” (As cited in, Peter W. Coxon, “A Note on ‘Bathsheba’ in 2 Samuel 12, 1-6,” Bib 62 (1981), 248). Yet, Uriah has also been placed in the position of the traveller, as has David. Schipper suggests that Joab is the rich man as he is the one who ultimately organises Uriah’s murder; David is the traveller, Uriah the lamb, and Bathsheba the poor man. (Shipper, 384). Gunn suggests that Uriah is the lamb. (Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 41). Lienhard Delekat writes that God is the rich man, as God was the transgressor because he could have saved Uriah. (Lienhard Delekat. ‘Tendenz und Theologie der David-Solomo-Erzählung,’ in Das ferne und nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 30. November 1996 Ed. Fritz Maass; BZAW 105; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967, 33. David Janzen, “The Condemnation of David’s “taking” in 2 Samuel 12:1-14,” JBL 131, no. 2 (2012), 213). Daube has suggested that Saul is the rich man, David the poor man, and Michal the ewe, and that this is a parable which David was previously aware of, and which suggested that David had become as oppressive as Saul whom he replaced. (David Daube, “Nathan’s Parable,” Novum Testamentum 24, no. 3 (1982), 275-288, 281-282). Polzin suggests that God is the rich man, the poor man is a metaphor for Saul’s kingdom, and the wayfarer is David. (Polzin, David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History, 124).


persuasive argument must be that it is not necessary to try and harmonize all of the elements of the events in the parable with David’s crime, quite simply, as an exact match cannot be found. It might also be noted that an exact duplication of David’s crime would not work as a corrective, as David’s comment in 11:25 suggests that he is in no way troubled by his actions. Accordingly, the parable that is analogous to David’s behaviour needs to be both similar and different to David’s behaviour. It needs to be similar in order for a comparison to be drawn. It needs to be different – and pointed – in order for corrective self-judgement to be possible.

Irony by analogy does not require an exact representation of events and characters. Instead, its focus is to set up an analogy by means of which to make a criticism of the object of ironic attack. This can be achieved by means of two sets of events and characters which mirror each other perfectly. Alternatively, the analogy might be imperfect and the explicitly described situation might only hint at the situation that it seeks to criticise. The difference in these possibilities is the grade of irony which is used. In this case the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be uncovered.

It is possible that the parable of the rich man reflects on two prior stories; the story of David and Nabal, and the story of David and Bathsheba. An outline of the encounter of David and Nabal follows. Nabal was a rich man who had three thousand sheep, along with a thousand goats (1 Sam 25:2), yet, he would not provide for David and his soldiers who were travelling through (1 Sam 25:11). David armed himself with his sword to approach Nabal (1 Sam 25:13). David suggested that Nabal had repaid David’s good with evil (1 Sam 25:21). Yet, Abigail intervened and provided food for David and his soldiers and thus saved David from the bloodguilt of killing Nabal (1

Sam 25:23-26). Abigail calls upon Yahweh to bless David and save him from having a guilty conscience for shedding blood without cause (1 Sam 25:28-31). Nabal dies and David says (1 Sam 25:39),

בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱשֶׂר רֶבֶנְעָד שֵׁרַע נָבָל וַתִּשָּׁכֶם וַתִּשְׁכַּר נָבָל יַחַד בְּרֵאשִׁי וַתִּשַּׁכֶּר וַתִּשְׁכַּר נָבָל יַחַד בְּרֵאשִׁי בְּרֵאשִׁי.

David marries Abigail (1 Sam 25:39b).

Knowing how inflamed David was by Nabal’s refusal to provide for him in a fair manner, (and that this narrative shared the themes of hospitality and bloodguilt with the story of David and Bathsheba), it would be reasonable for the storyteller to incorporate this story into the overall narrative of David’s transgressions (in 2 Sam 11). For doing so might serve the purpose of getting David to see the error of his ways and make a corrective self-judgement.

If we assume, as other scholars have not, that this story (i.e. the story of David and Nabal) informs Nathan’s Parable – and does so in addition to the story of David and Bathsheba – then we can provide a richer and more adequate interpretation of Nathan’s Parable. From this perspective, reference to the rich man and the traveller in Nathan’s Parable hint at the David and Nabal episode in which Nabal was the rich man and David was the traveller. Yet, in Nathan’s Parable, David is the rich man, and also the fool. By comparison, in the David and Nabal episode, Nabal is the fool for not providing hospitality to David; after all, David and his soldiers will kill Nabal if he fails to provide food etc. Given this, let us now reconsider Nathan’s Parable. In Nathan’s Parable it is David who is the rich man. Therefore, by analogy with the David and Nabal episode, it is David who is the fool. נבל means fool in Hebrew.
Characterising David as a fool fits well with the fact that he is the object of criticism in Nathan’s Parable; something most commentators agree on (albeit they do not necessarily agree with me that David is the object of *ironic* attack). However, an exact comparison between the episode in David and Nabal and the episode in Nathan’s Parable is not possible. Whereas Nabal did not offer hospitality to David (1 Sam 25:11), the rich man in Nathan’s Parable does offer hospitality to the traveller. However, the hospitality in Nathan’s Parable is given without חסד (2 Sam 12:4). Moreover, to bring in the David and Bathsheba episode, when David extends hospitality to Uriah he does so without goodwill. A further point, again relying on the story of David and Bathsheba, pertains to the poor man and the lamb. In Nathan’s Parable the poor man has his lamb taken from him. Yet in the David and Bathsheba story, Uriah has Bathsheba taken from him. Accordingly, there is an analogy between Uriah and the poor man, and between Bathsheba and the lamb. I note that the analogy is strengthened by the fact that Bathsheba, like the lamb, would have been regarded as property and, therefore, taking her is akin to theft (as in the case of taking the lamb).

A somewhat tangential point about the relation between the David and Nabal story and the David and Bathsheba story, concerns the criticism of Bathsheba. In 1 Sam 25:32-34 David recounts that God sent Abigail to intervene on Nabal’s behalf in order to prevent David from incurring bloodguilt. However, there is a noticeable absence of any intervention by Bathsheba on Uriah’s behalf, which would have prevented David from incurring bloodguilt.

Returning to Nathan’s Parable or, at least, its aftermath, not only is David oblivious to the analogy between himself and the rich man, David imposes an excessive
punishment upon the rich man: the death penalty. The irony here is that David is imposing an excessive penalty on the rich man in the context of his own transgressions being analogous to those of the rich man. A number of scholars have mentioned the disproportionate sentence in relation to the crime in 12:5. Janzen remarks that the only crime the rich man was guilty of was to steal a lamb, which is not punishable by death. These interpretations align with an ironic interpretation which views David’s exaggerated response as another indication that he is the object of ironic attack as well as being the unknowing victim of irony in this passage. The excessive punishment is also an illustration of David’s failings to administer justice adequately. Daube, on the other hand, suggests that while the death penalty is too extreme for the killing of a lamb (one of the rich man’s crimes) it is entirely fitting for David’s own transgression of murder. Moreover, the fine imposed on the rich man for theft of the lamb is also excessive and certainly the theft of Bathsheba would warrant a heavy fine.

A further point not entertained in previous interpretations of Nathan’s Parable relies on invoking the story of David and Nabal. This point pertains to David’s strictness in respect of breaches of principles governing the provision of hospitality, i.e. that hospitality be provided and that it be provided ethically and lawfully, e.g. Not by theft of someone else’s lamb. In the David and Nabal story, David responds to Nabal’s lack of hospitality by sentencing him to death (1 Sam 25:13; 34). In Nathan’s Parable, David sentences the rich man to death; the rich man having stolen and killed a lamb to provide hospitality to a traveller. However, David himself breaches the principles of

503 Cartledge writes that interpreting the “son of death” (12:5) as an invective takes away the incongruity of a death sentence sitting alongside a small fiscal restitution. Cartledge, SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel, 515. Yet, this interpretation diminishes the irony which is pronounced with the overstatement.
hospitality when he offers Uriah hospitality but does so only to conceal his own transgressions. Presumably, this warrants the death sentence, at least by the lights of David’s strict understanding of the principles of hospitality. The irony here is irony by analogy and the ironic content pertains to David’s behaviour with respect to the principles of hospitality. David is the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of irony.

The upshot of this novel strategy of identifying connections between all three stories, i.e. David and Nabal, David and Bathsheba, and Nathan’s Parable, is as follows. First, David is the object of multiple ironic attacks on his moral character – all being instances of verbal irony - including: murder of Uriah; ‘theft’ of Bathsheba; violator of hospitality customs; punitive judge of the transgressions of others. Second, David is the object of ironic attack with respect to his foolishness, in particular - a further instance of verbal irony. (Note that communicating the latter defect in David relies on connecting the story of David and Nabal with Nathan’s Parable).

2.2.3: 2 Samuel 12:7-15a

The following passage is not verbal irony, as the criticism in these verses is explicit, and not hidden. Instead, the criticism in this passage is direct and the reader has no doubt of the severity of the situation. The explicit criticism begins with the indicting words, שאיתל וא יודעים (12:7). This reference creates a contrast between David, who is the man who is meant to follow divine laws, with Yahweh who is the God, and creator of the laws. Yahweh then makes the judgement in clear and unambiguous terms. This speech begins with a formal address from אלהי ישראל which means that David is being judged as a king, and this speech has implications for all of Israel. 507 Most importantly,

507 Fokkelman,“King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 83.
David is shown to be the king because Yahweh has given him the kingship and all of the trappings which come with it (12:7-8). Thereby, although David is the king in this passage, Yahweh is the higher authority.

The explicit criticism takes shape in 12:9 when Yahweh says,

מָודֵעְךָ בֵּית אָדָם דַּעְתִּי הַעֲשָׂרָה הֲרֵעָה בָּעָנָי

The דָּרַךְ הָאֱלֹהִים refers to the law, which David has plainly disregarded. This criticism, then, outlines David’s infractions. David has ‘despised’ Yahweh for seeing Yahweh’s authority as not worthy of obeying, and scorned God because David has acted as though God’s authority is not worth fearing. These judgements are in reference to David’s order to execute Uriah, and his ‘taking’ of Bathsheba (12:9-10).

Verse 10 points to David’s comment in 2 Sam 11:25b,

אָלָיוּךְ בָּעָנָי אֲחֹד הָאֱלֹהִים הָאָרֶץ הָפִלְפִּיס בָּעָנָי

This comment shows David to be completely oblivious of Yahweh’s potential judgement, despite Yahweh’s insistence that he would punish David for his iniquities (2 Sam 7:14). Since Yahweh’s warning is quite clear and yet David is oblivious to it, it follows that, David is being shown to be the fool. Clarity is also evidenced in the

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508 Yahweh’s giving or favour to David is also expressed in Nathan’s Oracle (2 Sam 7) which although offering unconditional regard to the House of David, also contains God’s warning, “When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings” (2 Sam 7:14).

509 The root word נתן (12:8) contrasts with the rich man in the parable who takes (לקה) (12:4b) and David who Yahweh accuses of ‘taking’ in verses (12:9-10). This emphasis may suggest the fulfilment of Yahweh’s warning that the king that Israel asked for will take Israel’s sons and send them off to war (1 Sam 8:11-12), take Israel’s daughters as servants (1 Sam 8:13), and take their possessions (1 Sam 8:14-17). Therefore, it could be suggested that the allusions in the explicit criticism radiate out beyond David’s misdeeds to include the establishment of the monarchy, and Israel’s rejection of God in wanting a king like other nations to rule over them. (1 Sam 8:7). Thereby, it may be argued that although David is the victim in this narrative, he is also symbolic of the monarchy in general.

510 Cartledge, SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel, 517.

revelation of Yahweh’s punishment. Yahweh’s punishment of David will be transparent in contrast to David’s conspiracy with Uriah which was hidden from Israel. Yahweh will create trouble within David’s house in front of all Israel, (12:12) as opposed to all of Israel (11:1) who were at war when David committed his transgressions.

At this juncture it would appear that David ceases to be the unknowing victim of irony as he develops a degree of self-awareness when he remarks, הטאתי ליהוה (12:13). However, Hugh Pyper is still doubtful in relation to David’s self-awareness. Pyper suggests, “David both acknowledges and fails to acknowledge the hand of God in Nathan’s intervention. ‘I have sinned against the Lord,’ he says in (12:13), but such recognition is not necessarily repentance. This ambivalence may be reflected in God’s double-edged forgiveness.”

David will not die for his transgressions, instead, David’s הטא will be transferred onto the child of the illegitimate union who will die (12:13b-14). Moreover, the text relates that the death of the child merely prevents David’s death (12:14) and must be considered in addition to the punishment in 12:11.

In 12:11 Yahweh’s actions of raising calamity and the ‘taking’ of David’s wives mirrors David’s misdeeds, and also suggests that there will be a challenge to David’s kingship, as taking a king’s harem was one method of claiming the throne.

2.2.4: Samuel 12:15b-18

In this and the following sections in this chapter we return to verbal irony. At the lower level of 12:15b Yahweh strikes Bathsheba’s child to David. In 12:16 David pleads with

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513 McCarter Jr. suggests that the preferable translation of the word העביר is ‘transferred’ as the essence of this Hebrew word is that sin has been forgiven but that it must still be atoned for. McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 301.
514 Ibid., 300.
God to spare the life of the child, and fasts and lies on the ground. In 12:18 the servants fear telling David that the child has died. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity in David’s behaviour towards the child. Thus far in the narrative David is shown not to care for the deaths of innocent people, however, in 12:16 David desperately implores Yahweh to show mercy to the child of his union with Bathsheba. This is somewhat suspicious, given that David is otherwise described as ambivalent, since he tried to trick another man into accepting the paternity of this child (11:6-13). Thereby, the vision of David prostrating himself in the dirt, whilst the elders try to rouse him from his supplication becomes somewhat comical by virtue of being an exaggerated event (an instance of overstatement in Muecke’s terminology).

David can be described as the object of ironic attack as he is spoken of ironically. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-categories of impersonal irony are overstatement and the rhetorical question.

However, the claim that the language is overstated is contentious. The child dies on the seventh day (יָמִים שְׁבִיעִים) which has prompted much discussion. Peter Coxon suggests that the reference to the seventh day may be an allusion to Bathsheba’s name (בָּתְשֵׁבָה). Veijola suggests that the term refers to the child’s age at the time of the child’s illness. McCarter, on the other hand suggests that this reference to seven days might signify ‘proleptic’ mourning, as seven days was the traditional mourning period.

Yet, the argument put forth in this thesis, that the time period of David’s prostration is exaggerated and that the ironic device of overstatement is being used, is

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515 Coxon, “A Note on ‘Bathsheba’ in 2 Samuel 12, 1-6,” 249.
supported by the presence of the rhetorical question in 12:18b. The rhetorical question indicates the fear that the servants have of telling David that the child is dead, for they worry that David will harm himself.\textsuperscript{517} This indicates that David’s supplication is exaggerated. It may also be suggested that this is a sarcastic jibe, as self-mutilation, although a customary mourning ritual in the Ancient Near East, was not permitted by the Israelites, (Lev 19:28 and Deut 14:1). It was thought that the practise identified the mourner too closely with the dead person, rather than with the holiness of God.\textsuperscript{518}

Thereby, the object of ironic attack is David, and the ironic content is David’s grand, yet token, act of obeisance. Furthermore, the ironist implicitly makes the pejorative criticism of David that the child has absorbed the punishment of death which David rightly should have suffered (12:13) and that this is yet another example of a life which has been ruined because of David’s transgression.

2.2.5: 2 Samuel 12:19-20

At the lower level of 12:19 David asks the servants if the child is dead, and the servants tell David that the child is dead. In 12:20 David arises, washes, anoints himself, and changes his clothes before going to the house of the Lord to worship; he then goes to his own house and eats. At the upper level of the narrative there is an implicit incongruity. For David who pleads excessively for the life of the child in 12:17, does not appear to mourn the child’s death at all in 12:20.

\textsuperscript{517} This may also be seen as a case of situational irony where the reader is aware of information which is not known to some of the characters in the story. In this narrative the reader and David know that God has foreordained the child’s death as atonement for David’s sin. However, this information is not known to the servants in the story. Thereby, the servants, seem to view David as mourning excessively when the child is alive (which is not customary), and not mourning at all after the child’s death (which is similarly out of custom), when it seems apparent the David is not mourning at all, but rather engages in an act of supplication. However, it is more persuasive to consider this an example of verbal irony, as there is a discernible object of ironic attack – David.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken of ironically and disparagingly. He is also the unknowing victim of verbal irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert. The anomalous language is particularly notable in the cluster of words (2 Sam 12:20) which are otherwise used in biblical stories of feasts and festivities. The placement of these words, which are ordinarily associated with banquets, after the death of David’s child emphasises what Diane Sharon calls a “contextual dissonance” between the expectations that the servants had of David, and David’s behaviour in the narrative.  

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed, as the reader expects that David will mourn the loss of his child, but instead David feasts. However, there has been debate regarding the significance of David’s lack of mourning after the death of the child, and this must be discussed further.

Most scholars agree that David’s behaviour is not customary. Baruch Halpern suggests that this action is an example of David’s ‘modernity’ and practical nature. He reasons that there is no point making a petition to God after the child has died, nor is there any point in mourning as the child cannot return. This presupposes, however, that the point of mourning is to try and restore the dead back to life. David Bosworth argues that David’s indifference is symptomatic of his psychological resilience which can be misinterpreted as cold-indifference but is rather a coping strategy for grief. Yet, it would appear that in this narrative which contains parables and scant

psychological data Bosworth’s argument might be a case of over-interpretation. Moreover, this interpretation overlooks David’s lacklustre character in the preceding chapter, and the general sense of criticism towards David which is woven into chapters 11 and 12. Bosworth’s argument that children died often in the ancient world and therefore, attachment was less, is tenuous at best. This argument does not answer the servants’ surprise that David ate heartily when the child died (12:21). Nor does it explain why Bathsheba mourned (12:24). On the other hand, Diane Sharon suggests that fasting is not a normative action associated with mourning in the OT, however, in regards to David’s character fasting is a normative response whilst mourning (2 Sam 1:11-12; 1:15-16; 1:19-27; 3:28-39; 3:33-37). Therefore, as David does not fast or weep after the child’s death, this would indicate that David does not mourn for the child at all. The clash of incompatibles - which is a necessary component of irony displayed - is as follows. David’s knowledge of the death of the child (11:19) followed jarringly by David’s act of feasting (11:20). The content (or broad object, in Muecke’s terminology) of the irony is David’s cool reaction to the child’s death. This reaction alludes to David’s indifference to Uriah’s death in 11:25.

2.2.6: 2 Samuel 12:21-23

At the lower level of 12:21 the servants ask David why he fasted when the child was alive, but then ate food as soon as the child died. In 12:22 David tells the servants that he was fasting because he believed that it might change God’s mind. In 12:23 David tells the servants that he does not believe that there is any need to mourn, as mourning

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522 Bosworth, “Faith and Resilience: King David’s Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba’s Firstborn,” 701.
523 Sharon, “When Fathers Refuse to Eat: The Trope of Rejecting Food and Drink in Biblical Narrative,” 138-139.
524 Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 164. Anderson also refutes the claim of Hertzberg that this is representative of a child sacrifice, and Fokkelman’s claim that David mourns ‘proleptically’ for the child.
will not change the situation. At the upper level of the narrative there is a hint that David is a king who is self-interested, and is not remorseful concerning his crimes. Had David had an appreciation of the harmful impact of his sins, it would be expected that he would mourn for the child, particularly with the knowledge that his rightful punishment was transferred onto the baby. The opposition in the passage concerns the difference between what the servants say and what they mean in their rhetorical question.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken to ironically and implicitly criticised. He is oblivious to the servants’ concern (12:21) and here his own words betray him (12:22-23). He is, therefore, also an unknowing victim of this verbal irony. The irony is a simple irony manifesting a contrast between the lower explicit level and the upper implicit level. The grade of irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the rhetorical question. The main criticism of David is contained in the servant’s rhetorical question and statement of fact in 12:21, which is as follows:

מה הדבר הזה אשר עשיתה בעבואר הילד וקמת ותאכל לחם

The criticism of David inherent in this question has been explored in the previous section. However, in 12:22-23 David explains the reasons for his actions, and in doing so further demonstrates his uncaring nature and his lack of the appropriate emotional response of grief. Moreover, his use of three rhetorical questions, following on the servants’ rhetorical question, amplifies the irony. David’s first rhetorical question is in 12:22b.

מי ידע יתבנני יהודה והידך
At first glance this sentence seems to be favourable to David, as it appears to express that David was concerned for the welfare of the child. However, it may also be suggested that David was requesting that God be ‘gracious’ to him, not merely by not killing the child, but more importantly (from David’s perspective) by not following through with the additional punishments in store for David (listed in 12:13-14). For the child’s death is only part of this punishment and one that is not directly harmful to David. However, whether or not David is simply being self-interested, as I have suggested, can be confirmed by analysis of the rhetorical questions in 12:23,

Brueggemann argues that David mourns the child’s death in a manner that is contrary to the conventions of the time, and that David has a revolutionary outlook on life and death. He suggests that David has learnt to live life as it comes, so to speak, and to embrace the freedom which comes with faith. Brueggemann’s assessment, then, is that David’s behaviour is a demonstration of “profound faith.”525 However, the problem with this proposition is that there is no evidence to suggest that David was so touched by the death of the baby. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary: (2 Sam 1:11-12; 1:15-16; 1:19-27; 3:28-39; 3:33-37). These verses indicate that David is not mourning the death of the child. Moreover, the rhetorical question in 12:23, which suggests David’s lack of caring for the child, is not unlike David’s reaction to the news of Uriah’s death (11:25). Accordingly, we should conclude that David is the object of ironical attack and that the focus of the ironist’s criticism is the lack of concern that the king has for his subjects. David appears to view the death of the child who absorbed his sin, as unworthy of mourning, and Uriah’s execution as collateral damage.

2.2.7: 2 Samuel 12:24-25

The verses 12:24-25 do not readily show forth irony. Fokkelman argues that these verses indicate that David had begun to envision Bathsheba as his wife to be respected, and that peace had finally come about after the tragedy of the Uriah affair. Bathsheba is referred to as David’s wife, instead of the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and David’s actions in this verse, contrast with his cold behaviour in 11:27.526 Heinz Fabry, on the other hand, is more scathing. He writes that David’s ‘consoling’ of Bathsheba is nothing more than a veiled sexual advance. Fabry is also quick to mention that David’s act of consoling of Hanun (2 Sam 10:3) can be considered ‘suspect’.527 The fact that two very different interpretations arise in these verses suggests the presence of ambiguity in the text, which is an indicator of irony. Yet, the other criteria for verbal irony are not readily apparent. However, it is still helpful to discuss this section as it will inform later commentary.

After David’s act of ‘consoling’ Bathsheba, Bathsheba then gives birth to a child who is named twice. In 12:24b it is said that the child is named לְוָלָם, and more importantly, that “the Lord loved him.” In 12:25 the child is named Jedidiah which means, “Beloved of Yahweh.”528 So it would appear that the word אהב in 12:24 should be interpreted in a political sense,529 implying that God’s allegiance is now with

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526 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 91-92.
528 Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 165.
Solomon, as opposed to being with David’s other sons. Honeyman even suggests that Jedidiah is the private name given to the child and that Solomon is the throne name.\(^{530}\)

2.2.8: 2 Samuel 12:26-29

At the lower level of 12:26, it is reported that Joab has fought successfully against the Ammonites. In 12:27-28 Joab sends a messenger to tell David to collect the rest of the people and take the town or else he, Joab, will do so and name the city after himself. In 12:29 David collects his people and takes the city. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is implicitly communicating the incongruity that David, who was once a great warrior leader is now being told what to do by his general. The opposition in the narrative is between what Joab says, and the implicit message in Joab’s speech. David is the object of ironic attack and is also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The irony is a simple irony between the levels. At the lower level Joab tells David to take the city or Joab will take it and name it after himself. This utterance can be assumed to be a mere statement of fact and provision of advice and encouragement at the lower and explicit level. However, at the upper and implicit level, given Joab is David’s subordinate, Joab’s statement manifests contempt. The grade of irony is overt as the criticism is immediately obvious.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. In this category the advice which is given in the lower level of the narrative may seem like good advice to the victim of the irony. However, in the upper level of the narrative the advice brings

with it pejorative criticism. Arguably, David overlooks the pejorative element, given it is good advice and the situation is urgent. Therefore, he is an unknowing victim.

In the following section the pretended advice is found in Joab’s comment to David in verse 12:27b-28,

The repetition of the first person pronoun in 12:27, and the reference to I myself in 12:28 hint at an ironic exaggeration. Joab says, ‘I have fought…I have taken…or I myself will take the city, and it will be called by my name’ (12:27b-28). This emphasis on what Joab has done highlights what David did not do in 11:1 and builds on the irony in that verse. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative is therefore, not only critical of David for not leading the army out to war (11:1), but also for only managing to join in the fighting at the final stages and as a result of Joab’s advice and encouragement. This advice and encouragement may be considered to be pretended as it is accompanied by a profound criticism, and is not merely advice and/or encouragement. If it was merely advice and/or encouragement, there would not be an emphasis on what Joab has done (12:27), in contrast to what David had not done and was expected to do. The object of ironic attack is David who is also the unknowing victim of irony. The ironic content is David’s absence from the war and, therefore, David’s breaking of his covenant with the Israelites.

2.2.9: 2 Samuel 12:30-31

At the lower level of 12:30 David takes a crown and puts it on his head. He also takes the spoils of war. In 12:31 David deals with the Ammonite people in the city, and then
returns to Jerusalem. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implicitly communicates the incongruity between David’s behaviour and the expectations that the Israelites had of their kings. David is the object of ironic attack.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and is conveyed in the ambiguous language in the narrative. The ambiguous language is best recognised in the following example. The crown that David places on his head is described as being ככר זהב which is approximately the weight of a man. In terms of verbal irony this exaggerated situation would be spoken of as an overstatement, which is used to make a pejorative criticism of the protagonist of the story. This interpretation consists of a contrast between the decadent vision of David putting on an oversized crown and the Israelites hope for a king in 1 Sam 8:20,

והירן הנאמנים כל הדורות והמשתנים מלכון ורגו לפניון מלכון ולחמה את necessitàננו

Gnana Robinson even suggests that the implicit criticism in this verse is that David has become a “king like a king of the other nations.”

Yet, there is debate concerning the interpretation of the word מלכון. Some translations favour the translation Milcom whereas others, consider malkam to be the correct interpretation. The reason for the uncertainty stems from the weight of the crown, which has been described as seventy-pounds, and too large for a person to wear. The most popular argument then appears to be that the crown was the crown which sat atop the statue of Milcom the God of the Ammonites. Joyce Baldwin is

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531 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 313.
533 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 313.
critical of the suggestion that David would have put the crown of the Ammonite God on his head.\textsuperscript{535} However, this interpretation is consistent with satire, as there could be no greater way to ridicule David than to have him wear the crown of a different God. Moreover, even if the interpretation of מלכם is ‘their king’, and not Milcom, the text still manifests pejorative criticism of David as he symbolically puts on the crown of a different nation.

The narrative lingers over the event of David putting the crown on his head, by including excessive detail of the crown. This information is an overstatement. For instance,

\begin{quote}
ורקה אדרתנחת ימלכם פועל ראשיו ושכקלו הער אביו יקר (12:30)
\end{quote}

This same overstated language is also found in the excessive detail of what David did to the people of Rabbah.

\begin{quote}
ואתעם אשריהת ושם בסנה ובשרר בסנה ובחורי הואו ונתם אנכון (12:31)
\end{quote}

Therefore, the mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of irony is overstatement. The use of ironic overstatement is used to draw attention to the incongruity in the text. In these verses the incongruity consists in the contrast between the expectations that the Israelites and Yahweh had for a king, and David’s actual behaviour. It has already been argued that David has not been a just king who leads the Israelites out to war (11:1), and the image of David taking the city only when Joab pressures him to leave Jerusalem (12:28) reinforces this criticism. The image of David putting on the Ammonite crown escalates this criticism to the level of ridicule.

This criticism may also be extended to include David’s efficiency in taking the spoils of war. Brueggemann suggests that David is still a ‘taker’ yet in this instance his behaviour is completely appropriate, as taking a city is acceptable behaviour in war, and there appears to be no such criticism in this narrative.\(^5\) However, although there is no explicit criticism in this narrative, it may be argued that the verbal irony in this passage is covert and points to the idea that David is not living up to expectations. This incompatibility can best be understood in reference to Yahweh’s rejection of Saul as a king who enjoyed the spoils of war and disobeyed the word of Yahweh (1 Sam 15:10-33). This rejection of Saul is followed directly by the anointment of David as king (1 Sam 15:34-16:13). The anointing of David implies that there was an expectation that David would not act as Saul did – i.e. would not take the spoils of war – and would, therefore, not be rejected by Yahweh.

In 12:31 David and *all* of the people returned victorious to Jerusalem. This alludes to 11:1 when all of the people went out to war, yet David remained in Jerusalem. This strengthens the evidence for the claim that the dominant sub-category in this section is an overstatement of events; this builds on the criticism in 11:1. The material in 12:31 also offers a further criticism of David, namely, that he delighted in the spoils of war.

In summation the object of ironic attack in 12:30-31 is David. The ironic content is that David puts on the crown of another God (or nation) while continuing to be a transgressor of the laws of the God of the Israelites, despite acknowledging his sin in 12:13.

2.2.10: Summary of irony in 2 Samuel 11-27b-12:31

11:27b is the explicit criticism of David by Yahweh, which confirms the ironist’s hidden criticism. 12:1-6 is an instance of irony by analogy, where the stories of David and Nabal, and David and Bathsheba join together to unravel the story of Nathan’s Parable. In this episode David is criticised implicitly for taking Bathsheba, having Uriah executed, not showing proper hospitality to Uriah, and for making punitive and excessive legal judgements. The commentary in 12:7-15a is God’s direct criticism of David for taking Bathsheba, and ordering Uriah’s execution. This section also reveals God’s judgement on David. Part of this judgement is the death of the child who was conceived in the illegitimate union between David and Bathsheba. The criticism in 12:15b-18 concerns the overstatement of David’s act of supplication, which appears to be a token gesture. This is confirmed in the following section where David is shown not to mourn for the child who dies. The ironist’s criticism in 12:19-20 is therefore, that David is indifferent to the suffering of the people who suffer from the consequences of his decisions not to follow the laws of Israel. This pejorative criticism follows through to 12:21-23 where David is shown to be unrepentant and self-interested. Irony is not readily apparent in 12:24-25 where God gives God’s favour to Solomon. The commentary in 12:26-29 reminds the reader of the incompatibility in 11:1 where David did not go out to war with the Israelites. In this instance, David meets the Israelites in the final stages of the battle, but only after Joab’s suggestion, which suggests that the sub-category of irony in this instance is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. This criticism continues in 12:30-31, which also contains the incongruity that David enjoyed the spoils of war, contrary to the knowledge that it was for this reason that Saul was rejected by Yahweh. The pejorative criticism of David in 2 Sam 12 is more explicit than the criticism in 2 Sam 11, which is predominantly hidden. This
explicit criticism then reinforces the hidden criticism in the previous chapter, and adds further stories of David’s actions which suggest that David is not a just king.
CHAPTER THREE – AMNON’S SIN AND ABSALOM’S REVENGE

3.1: 2 Samuel 13:1-39

2 Sam 13 is considered to be a unit in itself as it discusses Amnon’s transgression and Absalom’s punishment of Ammon. This is similar to Chapter Two which discusses David’s transgressions and punishment.

3.1.1: 2 Samuel 13:1-2

At the lower level of 13:1 the reader is told that Amnon fell in love with his sister Tamar. In 13:2 the reader is made aware that Tamar is a virgin and therefore unavailable to Amnon. At the upper level the ironist implies that Amnon is interested in Tamar sexually. This implication is informed by background knowledge of the narrative. Saliently, 13:1 opens with the words ויהי אחרון which link this passage with the story which has gone before. The narrative of Amnon’s desire for Tamar is then told as a continuation of the story which includes David’s adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah’s death, and God’s judgment of David. The narrative is also informed by the ironist’s implicit pejorative criticism of David, and the explicit condemnation of David, in the previous chapters. Thereby, the knowledge that Amnon desires a woman who is unavailable seems like a case of déjà vu, and the reader expects a similar outcome for Amnon as there was for David.

Therefore, at the upper level of the text the ironist insinuates that Amnon will make the same error as David, (by having an illicit sexual encounter). The ironist also draws attention to the possible consequences of this action. David, as the king of Israel was disobedient to the laws of Israel, and thereby, sinned against God, and threatened
the reader can now assume that Amnon, who is the next in line to
the throne is about to do the same thing.

The opposition in the narrative emerges in the difference between what is said
and what is meant. It is explicitly stated that Amnon loved Tamar and that she was a
virgin, which frustrated Amnon. However, there is an insinuation in the narrative that
Amnon’s interest in his sister was morally unacceptable.

The ironic content is that Amnon is going down the same path as David.
Amnon is therefore the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert, and the
mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is
insinuation, as the ironist anticipates that Amnon is going to do something immoral as a
consequence of his frustrated desire, especially when considered in the context of
David’s sexual transgression in chapters 2 Sam 11-12.

Of particular significance in this section is the knowledge that Tamar is a virgin
and that it seemed impossible for Amnon (13:2). Suggestions why it
was difficult for Amnon to be with Tamar vary. Hans Hertzberg argues that virgins of
the royal household were often guarded, meaning it would be physically impossible for
Amnon to get to Tamar. Yet, a man was permitted to have sex with a virgin if he
married her (Deut 22:28-29); thereby, it would seem that Amnon did not wish to marry
Tamar. The text does not tell the reader why Amnon did not want to marry Tamar.

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537 Phillips, “Another Look at Adultery,” 3-25. It has been suggested that the main allusion in
this verse is to succession, as Absalom and Amnon were both in line to take the throne. Amnon
was the first in line to the throne, and Absalom was the next in line, as Chileab was believed to
have died (Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 172). However, as Bar-Efrat argues, the
narrative does not indicate that there is a political rivalry between the brothers, and only
stresses the familial connections (Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 241).
539 Mauchline, I and 2 Samuel, 259.
540 Tamar was Absalom’s full sister by David and Maacah, and Amnon’s half-sister, as Maacah
was not his mother (McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 320).
however, the laws state that incest is forbidden (Lev 18:6; 9; 11, 20:17, and Deut 27:22).\(^{541}\) The consequences of transgressing these laws was severe. In Leviticus it states that anybody who commits incest has defiled themselves and must be exiled from the community (Lev 18:29); in Deut 27:22 an incestuous person is cursed.

The implication then is that Amnon is obsessed with his sister who is not available to him sexually. As stated, the irony of Amnon’s situation emerges in the context of the relationship of this narrative with the story of David’s sexual transgression (11:4). Moreover, by framing this story in the context of David’s act of adultery, the narrator has provided background knowledge which strengthens the idea of these verses fitting into the sub-category of insinuation. For not only is Amnon David’s son, but this story is told in the context of Yahweh’s punishment of David for his sexual and other transgressions. Yahweh said in 2 Sam 12:11 that trouble will arise in David’s family.

Allusions to David’s transgressions in chapter 11 are made in 13:1. David’s name is mentioned twice in 13:1, both Tamar and Bathsheba are spoken of as being pleasing in appearance,\(^ {542}\) and, the preposition ל indicates that Tamar belonged to Absalom, just as Bathsheba belonged to Uriah. This preposition reminds the reader that a woman’s sexuality in ancient Israel was the property of a man (Deut 21:10-14). It also alludes to Yahweh’s punishment of David, as Yahweh clearly objected to David’s act of taking Uriah’s wife to be his own (2 Sam 12:9). This act of ‘taking’ referred to the act of sexual intercourse between David and Bathsheba, as sexual relations with a

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\(^{541}\) The contradiction that the laws prohibit incest, despite Abraham and Sarah’s union in (Genesis 20:12) is impossible to resolve completely in a literary critical approach. This interpretation would benefit from a thorough-going historical/redaction analysis.

\(^{542}\) However, Bathsheba is considered to be of exceptional beauty, as it is written that she was טויב מראה מאד (11:2).
woman in the Ancient Near East identified the ownership of a woman.\textsuperscript{543} Therefore, taken together, it is likely the various allusions in the Amnon story to David’s transgressions, strongly imply that Amnon is also going to transgress sexually. In short, there is an ironic implication that Amnon will do as his father David did; and this implication is an insinuation as Amnon will be a transgressor (a sexual transgressor).

3.1.2: 2 Samuel 13:3-4

The ironic content of 13.3 parallels that of 13:1-2. Nevertheless, some remarks are in order. In 13:4 Jonadab asks Amnon why he is haggard, and Amnon replies that he is in love with Tamar.

As far as the language is concerned, the emphasis of this section is found in Amnon’s response, which is as follows:

\begin{quote}
ויאמר לו אמנון את־תמר אחות אבשלום אחי אני אהב
\end{quote}

(13:4b)

Of special note in this sentence is the use of alliteration. McCarter mentions that there is an exaggerated use of א in this verse, along with ‘ו’ and ‘א’ sounds.\textsuperscript{544} Of further interest is the unusual word order which puts Tamar’s relationship with Absalom before the verb אמה. This word order then emphasizes Absalom’s relationship to Tamar, or in other words, repeats the understanding that Tamar belongs to Absalom. The emphasis is significant to the reader who remembers the rich man’s act of taking in Nathan’s Parable (2 Sam 12:4), and God’s judgement against David for taking Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:9). The presence of אני in this section, which emphasizes Amnon, suggests that Amnon is set to be the ‘taker’ in this instance. Thereby, the idea that

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\textsuperscript{544} McCarter Jr., \textit{II Samuel}, 321.
Amnon loved Tamar must be considered with suspicion, and it may be surmised that this would be better read as Amnon wished to have sex with Tamar. Moreover, the contrast of the formal address to Amnon (13:4) with language which presents him as constantly weak, hints at a criticism of Amnon, (as it suggests that Amnon is not fit to be a king).\footnote{Phyllis Trible, Texts of Terror (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 40.}

3.1.3: 2 Samuel 13:5-7

At the lower level of 13:5 Jonadab tells Amnon to pretend to be sick in order that Amnon can get close to Tamar. In 13:6 Amnon enacts Jonadab’s plan, and in 13:7 David sends Tamar to Amnon’s house to prepare food for him. Our background knowledge (prior to the SN) is that David is extremely astute and not easily tricked. Accordingly, the irony of this incongruity is implied at the upper level of the narrative. David is the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of irony is covert, and is implied in the language in the passage. The different wording in the requests for Tamar to tend to Amnon are particularly relevant to the irony. Amnon’s repetition of Jonadab’s plan is different from Jonadab’s original plan and David’s understanding of what Amnon says is different again. Jonadab’s rendering of the plan is verbose and rich in sensual imagery (לעיני, אכל מידה,), and he suggests that Amnon requests that Tamar perform בריה for him (13:5). It has been argued that בריה is not merely food but a healing ritual which was carried out by women.\footnote{Adrien Janis Bledstein, “Was Habbirya a Healing Ritual Performed by a Woman in King David’s House?” Biblical Research 38 (1992), 15-31, 15. Bledstein writes that the definite article indicates the name of the ritual and the name of the food offering, 16.} By mixing the sensual allusions with the healing ritual, Jonadab’s version of the request is sophisticated. Amnon’s request to David is coarse and carries a sexual connotation (13:6). Amnon does not ask for בריה to be performed, but rather asks that
Tamar create for him לבבות which may be hearty or heart-shaped cakes. There is a sexual connotation to the word לבבות. On the other hand, David merely instructs Tamar to prepare המריה for Amnon, which suggests that David has missed the sexual overtones in Amnon’s request (13:7).

David’s words to Tamar begin with לך which is a royal order (13:7). This royal command in effect weds Tamar to Amnon’s deception and is given without insight and due consideration, presenting David as a fool. The familiar word שלח precedes David’s careless command (13:7), which connects this event with David’s other transgressions (2 Sam 11:1, 3, 4, 6, 14), when David is shown to be a king who does not make commands with good judgement.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category is the pretended defence of the victim, as David is deceived in the narrative, and the ironist pretends to defend David’s foolishness, by presenting him as being at the mercy of a conspirator who is חכם מאד. David’s foolishness is then in stark contrast to the wisdom or craftiness of Jonadab who created the ruse. Mark Gray stresses this obliviousness of David when he suggests, “…David is either presented as innocent to the point of gross naivety or blind to a degree that stretches credulity.” McCarter merely suggests, “…there is no violence or vengeance in him, but he is carelessly compliant (13:7).” It is expected of the king that he be careful and certainly not careless. Given that a reasonable person would be expected to see through the

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547 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 322.
549 Ibid.
550 The word חכם can mean wise or crafty. It is traditionally translated to mean wise, as wisdom is not dependant on morality. It may be argued that this designation of Jonadab as wise is ironic, given that his plan has disastrous results for the royal family.
551 Ibid.
552 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 327.
deception, the defence of David is merely pretended. In this category the victim of irony is ‘defended’ in the ironist’s faux-support. The effect of this, is to point to the victim’s extreme foolishness. The opposition in this sub-category then, is that the victim is being defended in the lower level, and criticized pejoratively in the upper level.

3.1.4: 2 Samuel 13:8-9

At the lower level of 13:8 Tamar goes to Amnon’s house and bakes cakes for him. At the lower level of 13:9 Amnon refuses to eat the cakes and sends everybody except for Tamar out of his house. At the upper level the ironist implies that Amnon is about to mistreat Tamar, and cross the boundaries of acceptable social standards in Israel. Moreover, this passage contrasts Tamar’s genuine act of hospitality with Amnon’s lack of חסד.

There is an opposition in the narrative between what is said and what is meant. The author gives a detailed explicit account of Tamar’s labours and implicitly contrasts them with Amnon’s abrupt action of sending away everyone but Tamar. The author does not explicitly say that Tamar is innocent and Amnon morally culpable; nevertheless, this is implied. The ironic content is that Amnon is about to violate hospitality laws and harm Tamar, notwithstanding her conscientious compliance with these laws in Amnon’s interest. Amnon is the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert and is, therefore, conveyed through the language and background information of the text.

As far as the language is concerned, 13:8-9 follows the same pattern of verbosity and then curtness as has been described in verses 11:1 et. al. To begin with,

553 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 73.
the wordiness of 13:8-9a can be found in the belaboured description of Tamar’s food preparation. Bar-Efrat observes,

> It should be noted, however, that the narrator presents events to us relatively slowly (again, thereby heightening the tension): details are recorded to such an extent that instead of ‘and she kneaded the dough’ we find, ‘And she took dough and kneaded it’, and instead of ‘and she emptied the pan out before him’ we read, ‘And she took the pan and emptied it out before him’. 554

This verbosity creates the perception of Tamar labouring to prepare food for Amnon, which is contrasted with Amnon who is lounging around and feigning illness (13:8a). The prolonged effort that Tamar puts into food preparation then emphasizes her wasted efforts as Amnon refuses to eat (13:9).

The curtness is found in the indicting sentence, הוציאו כל איש מעלי (13:9b). Given what the reader already knows of Amnon’s strong sexual desire toward Tamar (13:1-2), and his plan (expressed earlier with sexual overtones) to get Tamar into his house (13:6), Amnon’s request to be left alone with Tamar creates suspicion. The curt sentence in this linguistic context together with the background knowledge of his plan generate the implication that he is about to do Tamar harm. So we have an example of the sub-category of insinuation. The reader expects Amnon to harm Tamar, because of what the reader has learned of Amnon’s character, and because of the immediate context of Amnon’s plan.

Furthermore, the insinuation that Amnon is going to harm Tamar links Amnon further with David, and David’s transgressions. For instance, in 2 Sam 12:12 Yahweh protests that David has sinned in secret, e.g. with respect to Bathsheba. In the context of the knowledge of David’s secret sin and the insinuation that Amnon is about to harm Tamar – and do so in secret, since having commanded others to leave the house, he

554 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 256.
and Tamar are alone (13:9b), the reader anticipates that Amnon will make a similar error to the one made by his father. This anticipation is strengthened by the presence of the superfluous report in the verse that everybody followed the prince’s order and left the chamber (13:9c). This episode also foreshadows the ire of Yahweh in relation to Amnon, given Yahweh’s ire in relation to David. The content of the irony is Amnon’s violation of Tamar’s hospitality, in the context of her provision of hospitality to him, along with the insinuation the Amnon is about to harm Tamar in secret.

Of note, although Tamar is ‘tricked’ she is not the unknowing victim of verbal irony (as David was in the previous section), as Tamar is not ‘confidently’ unaware of what is going on. Or in other words, there is no hubris in Tamar’s character.

3.1.5: 2 Samuel 13:10-11

At the lower level of 13:10 Amnon asks Tamar to bring him the cakes she has made. In 13:11 Amnon restrains Tamar and tells her to lie with him. At the upper level there is an implication that he is about to rape her. Note, although, there is an explicit reference to the family relationship between Amnon and Tamar, the use of anomalous language adds emphasis. In 13:10 it states that Tamar brings the cakes to אַמְלַנְו אֵלְהָה. In 13:11 Amnon says, בַּאָהוּ שְׁכֶבֶּנְתִּי אַחָּהֲךָ. At this point a further implication at the upper level of the narrative is that the Prince of Israel is about to rape his own sister. Such an act is of great significance since it threatens all of Israel. For Amnon has proven that he is not interested in upholding the laws which protect Israel yet he is next in line to be king. Moreover, he has no concern for his own sister. It follows that he cannot be trusted to be a just king for the rest of the community.

There is an incongruity between the levels. At the lower level Tamar is handing out cakes and being told to lie down with Amnon; a seemingly banal episode.
However, at the upper level it is implied that the Prince of Israel is about to rape his own sister; an evil act of profound significance. The ironist feigns innocence of the significance of Amnon’s act by merely emphasizing the family relationship and implying that there is about to be a rape, without explicitly condemning Amnon.

Amnon is the object of ironic attack. The irony is a simple irony between the levels. The grade of irony is covert and, therefore, uncovered by recourse to the language and background information in the text. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement.

Of particular interest is the understatement of Amnon’s action of restraining Tamar and telling her to lie with him; it is after all, a rape. This understating of the event is facilitated by the prior somewhat repetitive discussion of the trivial matter of the preparation of cakes. The use of these rhetorical devices continues the pattern of verbosity followed by a curt statement (see 11:1). The verbosity also draws attention to the well-intentioned and conscientious labour of Tamar, and the contrasting lack of חסד in Amnon. The verbosity in this section is in 13:10-11a, and curt language is in 13:11b:

בֹּאוָשׂ שָׁכְבִּי עָמִי אָهوֹתִי

The repetition of the yod at the end of each of these words produces a rhythm which emphasizes each word in this highly significant single sentence and, thereby, emphasises what the sentence implies – that Amnon is about to rape Tamar.555

3.1.6: 2 Samuel 13:12-13

555 Of note, Mark Gray suggests that Amnon’s decision not to eat the cakes that Tamar made for him (13:9, 11), can be contrasted with David’s decision to fast for the life of the illegitimate child born from his union with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:17). For Gray, David’s decision to fast is honourable, whereas, Amnon’s reasons for fasting are deceitful. This proposition suggests that Amnon was more corrupted than David (Gray, “Amnon: a chip off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy 13.7-15 the Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor,” 46-47). However, Gray’s claim can be disputed. I have previously argued for David’s manipulative reasons for fasting, and his coolness in not mourning for the child that died in section 2.2.5.
The message of Tamar’s words in 13:12-13b is overt. Tamar’s plea for Amnon not to rape her is immediately apprehended and forceful, as would be expected. This is evident by the number of negations which appear in 13:12. For instance, the words אל or לא appear a total of four times in this verse. Moreover, it is made evident in Tamar’s response to Amnon that what Amnon is intending to do, namely, rape Tamar is a sin, and contrary to the social customs of the day. This warning is evident in the following verses:

לאירעשת כל ישראל אלא עתשה אתייובלת נאהת (13:12)
ואני אנה אוליך אתחרפתי (13:13)

Tamar’s direct moral criticism of Amnon strengthens the notion of the ironist’s implied criticism in the previous sections relating to this rape scene. However, despite the clarity of Tamar’s pleas for Amnon not to rape her, the nature of Tamar’s solution to her predicament is problematic and an instance of covert verbal irony. For instance, in 13:13c Tamar begs Amnon to talk to the king as she is convinced that the king will permit a marriage between the two. However, this is against the laws which prohibit incest (Lev 18:9, 11, 20:17 and Deut 27:22). Upon saying this, it is worth noting that this is an area of contentious debate. Some of the concerns in this debate will be outlined below.

It has been suggested that Abraham’s marriage to Sarah is evidence that it was permissible for siblings to marry (Gen 20:12). On the other hand, it has been argued that the story of Abraham and Sarah was an ancestral legend that was designed to keep the lineage pure. Being only a legend this is not decisive in the case of Amnon and Tamar. However, it is possible that unions within the royal family might have been considered differently to other unions. Yet, the severity of the penalty for incest, which
is permanent exile (Lev 18:29) would seem contrary to this argument. Moreover, if a marriage were permissible between Amnon and Tamar, then Amnon would not have had to resort to Jonadab’s plan. The fact that he does not ask David if he can marry Tamar indicates that either marriage is not a possibility (even though he wants to marry her) or that Amnon does not want to marry Tamar but merely have sex with her.

Other possibilities are that the prohibition against incest happened at a later stage, or that incest was only an infraction between siblings of the same mother. McCarter’s four propositions are as follows:

(1) The laws of Lev. 18:9, 11 were not in effect in the time of David. In this case Tamar’s words are a forthright appeal for reason, and Aminon’s crime consists ‘not in casting his eyes on his half-sister, but by violating her without having contracted a marriage and contracting no marriage after violating her’ (Daube 1947:79). (2) The laws were in effect but not recognized in Jerusalem. In this case Tamar’s words are, as in the first case, a sincere appeal, and Aminon’s crime rape, not incest (Conroy 1978:17-18 n.3). (3) The laws were in effect in Jerusalem, but their purpose was not to regulate marriage but to prevent casual intercourse with women a man could expect to encounter in his household. In this case Tamar’s words are again an appeal for reason, and Aminon is guilty of violating the laws of Lev 18 but, because he could not have married her, not of committing incest (Phillips 1975:239) (4) The laws were in full effect. In this case Tamar’s words, unless she is temporizing, imply that David would have been willing to permit the marriage despite its illegality, and Aminon is guilty of both rape and incest.

All of the examples discussed can be divided into two sets of interpretations, (1) that marriage between siblings was legal, and (2) that it was not. If it was the case that marriage was legal between a brother and his sister, then the irony arises as Tamar, Amnon’s would-be rape victim, becomes Amnon’s protector and voice of reason

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557 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 239-240.
560 McCarter Jr., I Samuel, 323-324. Note, McCarter suggests that the spelling אֲמִינָו in 2 Sam 13:20 points to the translation Aminon. McCarter argues that ‘defective spelling’ הָמִינָו has led to the popular translation Amnon. This dissertation will follow the translation Amnon as this translation is generally accepted in scholarship.
whose sound advice – not to transgress the law by raping her - he is oblivious to. In this instance, Amnon is the object of ironic attack and probably also the unknowing victim. The second interpretation, (2), that marriage was unlawful, has two versions, (a) and (b): (a) that marriage between siblings was unlawful but Tamar believed that David would break this law by allowing the marriage, or (b) that marriage between siblings was unlawful and Tamar did not think that David would allow Amnon and Tamar to marry or, at least, could not be sure of this. (2)(b) Seems the most plausible interpretation. At any rate, by the lights of interpretation (2) (a) Tamar believes that David would break the law to allow Amnon to marry her and the following irony arises. It is ironic that in order to prevent a transgression of the law (Tamar being raped) it is necessary to transgress the law (David to allow marriage between siblings). On the other hand, by the lights of interpretation (2) (b), Tamar knows that a marriage between herself and Amnon would be unlawful and that David would not, or probably would not, allow such a marriage. So Tamar is pretending that marriage to Amnon is a possibility and the irony is an instance of pretended error or ignorance. Her pretence is undertaken in order to shock Amnon into an awareness of the gravity of the crime he is potentially about to commit. For she knows that Amnon knows not only that incest is a crime, but also that he would not be able to make restitution for his crime of raping Tamar by means of marriage to her (Deut 22:28-29); for she also knows that he knows that marriage between siblings is unlawful.\footnote{I note that the other elements of the restitution which would be applicable if Amnon were to rape Tamar are that he must pay a large bride price, and relinquish the right to divorce the her (Deut 22:28-29).}

The scenario is consistent with Muecke’s sub-category of verbal irony, pretended error or ignorance, for the following reasons. If Tamar is pretending that a marriage between herself and Amnon is possible, then the opposition in the narrative is
between the lower level in which Tamar is communicating that marriage is possible and the upper level in which Tamar is trying to convey the opposite thought to Amnon, namely, that marriage is not possible. Thus on interpretation (2) (b), it is ironic that Tamar intends to realise her purpose of preventing herself being raped by communicating a falsehood to Amnon (namely, that they can get married) yet with the intention to cause Amnon to come to his senses and realise the truth of the matter (namely, that they cannot get married) and, thereby, not rape her. So Tamar says something false to prevent the rape, but ironically it is the truth of what is said that is to prevent the rape. On interpretation (2) (b), Tamar is pretending ignorance (with respect to marriage to Amnon) and Amnon is the object of ironic attack and possibly also an unknowing victim.

Also of note in this section is the emphasis on the word נבל. In 2 Sam 13:12 Tamar warns Amnon not to be a נבל. This mention of the נבל leads onto Tamar’s rhetorical question (13:13), as the sacrilege of the fool brings shame (Ps 39:8, 74:22, 1 Sam 25:39), and Tamar repeats the word נבל a second time, highlighting this connection. In 2 Sam 13:13 Tamar warns Amnon once again not to be one of the נבל. Other passages which speak of הנבל בישראל indicate that this phrase is used in connection with sexual transgressions (Jer 29:23, Judg 19:23, and 20:6). However, the word נבל in isolation is ordinarily translated ‘folly.’ Better still, the word נבל is considered ‘sacrilege,’ which points to a transgression which destroys existing relationships and order. The נבל applies to a person who is not in the right relationship with God in his thoughts and actions, with the consequence that the disadvantaged suffer since the fool disregards the interests of the community (Isa 32:6).

McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 322-323.
This kind of person relates to ‘Nabal,’ who rejected important social norms and paid the price of his life for his foolishness (1 Sam 25:2-44).

It was claimed in my interpretation of Nathan’s Parable that the analogy of Nathan’s Parable to the story of David and Nabal allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the analogy of David with the rich man in Nathan’s Parable. In my interpretation, David was not only pejoratively criticized for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed, but also for his violation of hospitality customs. I now suggest that the story of David and Nabal is alluded to in the Amnon/Tamar episode. Certainly, Tamar’s plea to Amnon not to rape her is reminiscent of Abigail’s plea to David in 1 Sam 25:25 not to kill Nabal. In 1 Sam 25:25 the word נבל is mentioned twice and the word נבלה is mentioned once.

Given this allusion to Nabal, and the parallels between Amnon and David as transgressors,\(^56^3\) arguably Amnon is condemned alongside David, not only because Amnon’s transgression was preordained as a consequence of David’s transgressions (12:11) but also because Amnon is a transgressor in his own right and, as such, condemned by God (as David was). This connection between Amnon and David is implied by virtue of Amnon being connected to “the rich man” in Nathan’s Parable. For both the rich man and Amnon have breached hospitality customs (12:7). For his part Amnon violates Tamar’s hospitality. In addition, both the rich man and Amnon take another man’s ‘property’; the lamb in the case of the rich man, Tamar in the case of Amnon. Crucially, the rich man is condemned by God for his transgressions.

\(^{563}\) Moreover, there is a similarity in the law which David transgressed, and the laws which pertain to virgins. For example, the laws which discuss sexual transgressions that involve adultery, and sex with virgins are found in Deut 22:13-30. It could be suggested that this cluster of laws are concerned with sexual purity. The maintenance of sexual purity in ancient Israel was important as it was believed to keep order in families and keep evil out of the greater society. J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible. A New Consideration* (London, Praeger Publications, 2006), 71.
Therefore, by implication, Amnon is also condemned by God. This aligns Amnon with David as a transgressor condemned by God. And, of course, Amnon is aligned with David by virtue of serial transgressors of God’s laws.

3.1.7: 2 Samuel 13:14

The information in 13:14 is clear; Amnon is not moved by Tamar’s plea and he rapes her. However, given all of the detail which has been presented in previous verses regarding Jonadab’s plan (13:3-7), Tamar’s preparation of the food (13:8), and Tamar’s plea to Amnon (13:12-13), the account of Amnon’s rape of Tamar is all too brief. Thereby, the verbal irony in this instance is covert, impersonal irony that uses the subcategory understatement. The object of ironic attack is obviously Amnon. The incongruity in the narrative is the brevity of the report of the rape - an extremely important event – in the context of the detailed and lengthy recording of less significant events. Understatement emphasizes the pejorative criticism of Amnon by the ironist; criticism implicitly communicated at the upper level of the narrative. The brevity of the report of the rape surprises the reader, causes a re-rereading and, thereby, emphasises the damning nature of the information.

In this case, the emphasis has two elements: (1) that Amnon would not listen to Tamar’s wisdom (13:14a), and (2) that Amnon raped Tamar (13:14b-c). In the first regard, Amnon shows himself to be the יְהִי by ignoring Tamar’s warning, and in doing so, he is also the victim of the irony in this passage as he confidently ignores the good advice which will prevent him from significant trouble in the future. After all, Amnon has now indisputably transgressed the laws of rape and incest. In doing so Amnon has damaged his sister irreparably, but more significantly, in terms of the irony, he has also damaged his own reputation irreparably and is sure to have caused future suffering to
himself. Regarding the understated language it is worth noting the extent of the transgressions which are contained in this brief verse. For instance, Amnon has just committed rape and incest, and possibly shown contempt for an important sacred rite, if Bledstein’s suggestion that Tamar was doing נכירה is believed. Therefore, it would be expected that these event would be spoken of in much greater detail.

3.1.8: 2 Samuel 13:15-16

In part this section is an amplification of the pejorative criticism in the previous sections, ie, Amnon is the object of ironic attack by virtue of his multiple transgressions of God’s laws. Of note, Tamar cautions Amnon further, that by sending her away he is committing a worse sin than rape (13:16). However, Amnon sends her away regardless, thereby strengthening the idea that Amnon is the disparaged object of ironic attack.

However, the irony which is specific to this narrative is that of misrepresentation or false statement. Muecke notes that this form of impersonal, verbal irony is evident when a person asserts something which is known to be false, but relies on the reader’s prior knowledge of what is written in the text in order to convey the contradiction. At the lower level we are told of Amnon’s change of feelings for Tamar (13:15). Yet, most scholars interpret this verse as evidence that Amnon did not love Tamar at all and that he was only struck by lustful feelings for her. Given the turn of events, including the rape, it would seem judicious to say that Amnon certainly did not love Tamar. However, that is no reason to interpret אהבה as ‘lust’ (as the SBL

564 Bledstein, “Was Habbirya a Healing Ritual Performed by a Woman in King David’s House?” 31.
565 In Deut 22:29 it states that a man who sleeps with an unbetrothed virgin must marry her and not divorce her.
566 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 73.
NRSV Bible does). At the upper level the word ‘love’ is used as a misrepresentation, which ridicules Amnon’s declaration that he loved Tamar (13:4). The opposition in the narrative is between the explicit message that Amnon’s love turned to hatred and the implied truth that Amnon never really loved Tamar. Rape is not an act of love. Amnon is then the object of the ironic attack. Amnon’s hatred of Tamar is emphasized in the repetition of the word מנהה and the adjective [גדולה] (13:15).568

Also of note, the narrator no longer speaks of Tamar as Amnon’s sister, but rather refers to Tamar, three times, as ‘her.’ This change of style and repetitive language creates a metaphorical divide between Tamar, on the one hand, and on the other, David and Amnon.569 Both of these men are dangerous to Tamar. It was David’s command which put Tamar in a vulnerable place with Amnon, (13:7) it is now Amnon’s command to “get out” which seals her to a life of desolation (13:15).570 Again, the content of the irony is Amnon’s hateful and dangerous character.

3.1.9: 2 Samuel 13:17-19

At the lower level of 13:17 Amnon calls a servant and commands him to lock Tamar out of the house. In 13:18 the reader is told of the royal virgin’s robe that Tamar was wearing. In 13:19 Tamar intentionally tears the robe, puts ashes on her head and weeps. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist emphasises Tamar’s new status, i.e. that she is no longer a prized royal virgin but rather an unwanted victim of incestuous rape. The incongruity in the narrative is between the violation, discarding and humiliation of the prized royal virgin, on the one hand, and on the other, the unnecessary and belaboured description of Tamar’s robe.

568 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 266.
569 Gunn and Fewell, Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible, 149.
570 Gray, “Amnon: a chip off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy 13.7-15 the Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor,” 44.
As mentioned, the irony is emphasized in the unnecessary description of Tamar’s robe. At the lower level the mention of Tamar’s robe is purely informative as it merely tells us she was wearing the robe that royal virgins wore. Yet, the reader already knows who Tamar is, because of all of the family references in the story. Therefore, the emphasis on the royal robe is unnecessary unless this mention is to stress Tamar’s royal virginity before her act of tearing the robe signifying that she is no longer a virgin.

The grade of verbal irony is covert. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the dominant sub-category of impersonal irony is overstatement. The overstatement consists of the detailed account of Tamar’s robe. Amnon is the object of attack since not only has Amnon raped his sister, but also a royal virgin. The ironic content is that one of the most prized royal virgins has been raped by her own brother, summarily discarded and publically humiliated. Tamar has now became a woman with no chance of marrying or having children. As Anderson argues, Tamar is described as mourning as though she is a widow.\(^{571}\)

A further point in the arrangement of events is the knowledge that Amnon makes his crime a public affair by sending Tamar from his house. This reminds the reader of Yahweh’s claim that although David sinned in secret, Yahweh would make David’s punishment clearly visible to all (12:12), further hinting at the connection between Amnon’s sins and David’s condemnation. Phyllis Trible makes a keen observation when she remarks, “...when the servant does obey, Amnon ironically imprisons himself behind a locked door while releasing the proof of his crime.”\(^{572}\)

3.1.10: 2 Samuel 13:20

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\(^{571}\) Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 175.

\(^{572}\) Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 49.
At the lower level of 13:20 Absalom asks Tamar if Amnon has been with her, and Absalom encourages Tamar to be silent about the rape. Tamar remains a desolate woman in Absalom’s house. At the upper level of the narrative is a rhetorical question. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is meant in Absalom’s rhetorical question. What Absalom says is, “Has your brother been with you?” However, this is not in essence a request for information. Rather Absalom is expressing his outrage, albeit implicitly.

The grade of verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apparent that Absalom is not asking Tamar a straightforward question. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the primary sub-category of impersonal irony, as mentioned, is the rhetorical question. The rhetorical question is in 13:20a when Absalom asks Tamar,

The reader knows that this is a rhetorical question, as Absalom does not wait for Tamar’s affirmation before giving her advice. Furthermore, the use of a rhetorical question and the allusions to Amnon as her brother (Amnon is spoken of as Tamar’s brother two times (13:20)), highlight two possible criticisms of Amnon, which have been discussed throughout this chapter. The first possible criticism is the transgression of incest, and the second is the harm done by Amnon to the family order—a most egregious crime. (It may also be the case that both of these criticisms are being alluded to). Whichever of these criticisms of Amnon is being made, he is the object of ironic attack.573

3.1.11: 2 Samuel 13:21-22

573 Another possible interpretation of the irony in this passage has an insinuation as the sub-category. The insinuation is found in 13:20b when Absalom cautions Tamar to be silent for the time being. This sentence alludes to further action; the insinuation suggests that something bad will happen. The ironist implies that Absalom will be the next royal member to act unlawfully.
Irony is not readily apparent in this passage. However, a commentary is needed to inform the discussion of irony detected in future passages. In 13:21 David is portrayed as being very angry when he hears what has happened. In 13:22 Absalom hates Amnon for raping Tamar. On first sight these responses appear to be appropriate. However, neither of these responses are truly appropriate. In the case of David the statement that he was very angry is doubtful, given that he does not punish Amnon as he should do. However, even if David is truly angry, it is still his responsibility to administer the law including in relation to the transgressions of Amnon. In the case of Absalom, his hatred is unlawful. In Lev 19:17 it states, לא תȘוֹנא את אֵחְכָּר כְּלֵבָּךְ. This contrasts with 13:22 where Absalom is portrayed as hating Amnon. We know that Absalom knows that he should not hate his brother in his heart because of his comment to Tamar in 13:20 IE. “He is your brother; do not take this to heart.”

Both the King of Israel and the Prince of Israel act contrary to their responsibilities; David does not administer the law as he should, and Absalom does not follow the law, as he should. David’s response to the crime is too weak, as he does not punish Amnon. On the other hand, Absalom’s response is too strong as he has hatred for his brother (even if we may understand this reaction). Both responses are contrary to the law, the function of which is to preserve social order.

At this juncture it is helpful to outline the laws concerning the installation of a king and the rules which govern the office of a king. Deut 17:18-20 state:

When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to face the lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the left or to the right, so that he and his descendants may reign over his kingdom of Israel.
Of note, the difficulty for David in terms of Amnon’s punishment, is that the laws are contradictory in this instance. For example, as mentioned previously, the punishment for rape according to Deut 22:28-29 is that the rapist must marry the victim and not divorce the victim. However, this cannot be enforced in the case of Amnon and Tamar as they are siblings. If David were to follow the punishment for incest, Amnon and Tamar would both be exiled (Lev 18:29) which would mean that restitution would not be provided for Tamar’s situation. However, it would be expected that David would do something to punish Amnon. In not doing anything David has allowed hatred to develop in Absalom’s heart. This is significant, as Absalom’s hatred for his brother is contrary to the laws

3.1.12: 2 Samuel 13:23-26a

At the lower level of 13:23-24 Absalom invites the king and his sons to a sheep-shearing festival. In 13:25 David tells Absalom that the king and his servants would be burdensome to Absalom. In 13:26 Absalom asks if Amnon can go to the sheep-shearing festival alone. At the upper level there is an insinuation that Absalom is about to harm, indeed, kill Amnon, particularly in the context of our background knowledge that Absalom hates Amnon. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is explicitly presented in the text and what is implied. It is somewhat ironic that Absalom has as his end to do harm to Amnon – indeed to kill him - but his means is the offering of a benefit, namely, hospitality. Moreover, it is implied that Absalom believes he is acting righteously by exacting revenge for Amnon’s rape of Tamar. Here there is the irony of Absalom being about to commit an even greater crime, namely murder, to revenge Tamar’s rape. Absalom is the object of these ironic attacks.
The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is conveyed by the language in the context of our knowledge of the background information provided in the text. As far as the language is concerned, it is possible to separate this passage into two sections which fit the pattern of irony which was described in reference to 11:1. If so the two sections could be marked as 13:23-25 (verbose section) and 13:26a (concise section). In this case, emphases Absalom’s intention to get Amnon to the festival and, thereby, render him vulnerable. This in turn generates the insinuation that Absalom is going to harm Amnon.

As far as the background information is concerned, it may be suggested that the mention of the sheep-shearing festival in 13:23-24 alludes to the story of Nabal (1 Sam 25:4). This connection has run throughout the narrative (2 Sam 12:1-6; 13:12-14), and when it appears, it signifies wrongdoing, in particular, the breach of hospitality customs. Thereby, it would be consistent if this motif continued to signify wrongdoing in the case of Absalom. To be more precise, the allusion to Nabal would appear to indicate a violation of hospitality customs. For instance, Nabal did not offer hospitality to David when he should have (1 Sam 25:5-11), David provided Uriah with hospitality, but for his own manipulative purposes (2 Sam 11:6-14), Amnon requested Tamar’s hospitality in order to take advantage of her (2 Sam 13:8-15), and similarly, it would seem that Absalom was offering tainted hospitality. Given the remark in 13:22 that Absalom hated Amnon, it would seem unlikely that Absalom would want to celebrate with Amnon. Thereby, the irony in this passage is an insinuation, since the reader...
assumes that Absalom is going to harm Amnon on the back of Absalom’s invitation to Amnon.

However, the claim that Absalom wished for Amnon to attend the festival alone is not without debate. Scholars have suggested that Absalom’s motive for inviting the king and his sons to the festivities was to stage a challenge to the throne. The evidence for this proposition is as follows; David is spoken of excessively as the ‘king’ (13:23-24), which may indicate that this interaction with David was political rather than family oriented. Moreover, past stories of rape in the Hebrew Bible indicate that there is a strong connection between rape and escalating political tension (Gen 34, Judg 19). Yet, it is also possible that Absalom did not expect the king to go to the celebration, but rather created a devious plan to ensure that Amnon (as the crown prince), would go in place of David. This proposition (which is consistent with what is argued in this section) indicates that the focus of Absalom’s attention was to have Amnon come to the festivities alone. This insinuation builds on the insinuation in 13:20, when Absalom tells Tamar to be quiet for the time being. Thereby, the ironist at the upper level of the narrative hints that Absalom is being deceptive, and using hospitality under false pretences, not unlike David (2 Sam 11:13). This view of the matter is confirmed in 13:32 when Jonadab says to David that Amnon was killed because he raped Tamar.

3.1.13: 2 Samuel 13:26b-27

In discussing 13:26b, it is necessary to re-iterate that the impersonal ironist is not a character in the narrative, but rather the author or the narrator. However, the ironist’s criticism and persona is manifest in the speech and actions of the characters, regardless

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575 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 250.
of the moral standing of these characters. Thereby, in 13:26b the ironic criticism is contained in the rhetorical question that David asks Absalom. Yet, this does not mean, as Ridout suggests, that the rhetorical question implies that David knows of Absalom’s intention.\textsuperscript{576} There are two levels in the text. The lower level of the narrative is the situation as it is explicitly presented. From the perspective of the character of David, the question is a straightforward question. This is later confirmed by the narrative which strongly implies that David was not aware of Absalom’s intentions (13:36).\textsuperscript{577} (Making David the unknowing victim of irony in this instance). However, the ironist’s persona is also evident in David’s question and is, thereby, critical of Absalom. This penetrating question points back to the insinuation in the previous sections. The rhetorical question, \textit{למה ילך עמך} asked in this context and with reference to the impersonal ironist is an indicting remark, since it is not a request for information, but rather a challenge to Absalom’s intentions. The answer to the question, given the insinuation in the previous section, must be that Absalom wishes to harm Amnon. The ironist is then critical of Absalom’s intentions which are driven by hatred (13:22) and not by good judgement, or חסד.

3.1.14: 2 Samuel 13:28

At the lower level of 13:28 Absalom tells his servants to kill Amnon when Amnon is drunk and when Absalom gives the command to kill him. Absalom also asks the rhetorical question, “Have I not myself commanded you?” At the upper level Absalom’s rhetorical question, taken in conjunction with his admonition to the soldiers to be valiant, is used in order to reassure the soldiers who are to kill Amnon that Absalom is taking responsibility for the killing and that the killing is righteous. On the

\textsuperscript{576} Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2),” 147.
basis of background knowledge we know that the killing is unlawful. Absalom in effect makes a confident declaration that the killing is righteous because he says so; however, ironically, this confident declaration is false. So he is the object of his own ironic attack and he indicts himself in asking the rhetorical question,

אָל־תִּרְאוּ הָלוֹא כִּי אֲנִי צוּいくつか יָוִית

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent and is dependent upon certain background knowledge of the text. Moreover, the irony is the irony of self-betrayal and Absalom is a victim of the irony since he almost certainly is unaware of it because of his hubris.

In 13:28 Absalom’s manipulation of Amnon is in some ways reminiscent of David’s attempt to make Uriah pliable with alcohol and festive fare (11:13). However, there is a marked difference in the moral characters of Uriah and Amnon. As far as the narrative is concerned, Uriah would appear to be beyond criticism, whereas Amnon is guilty of raping Tamar. Yet, despite the differences in their moral characters, they share something in common; Uriah and Amnon are both killed unlawfully.

Yet, is it fair to suggest that Amnon’s murder was an unlawful killing? Because there is no law governing restitution in cases of rape by a sibling, the proper recompense for Tamar’s rape is unknown. It can be assumed that David’s decision not to punish Amnon and provide justice for Tamar, leaves Absalom hungry for blood vengeance. However, Absalom’s decision to take blood vengeance is unlawful as the law in Lev 19:18 states that vengeance should not be taken against the בני עמך.

Moreover, acts of blood vengeance were thought to have ceased when the monarchy
became responsible for administering justice. However, since David did not administer justice as he should have, the question arises of whether or not it was then rightful for Absalom to seek blood vengeance. A discussion of Amnon’s offence is necessary to try to adjudicate this matter. If Amnon’s act is just considered as an act of rape, then it is a minor offense (Deut 22:28-29), and in having Amnon executed, Absalom would be in the wrong. If Amnon’s act is taken to be the more serious offence of incest then the punishment is that both participants in the act i.e. Amnon and Tamar, be exiled (Lev 18:29). Therefore, Absalom is not legally permitted to take Amnon’s life, and the implied criticism in this passage is that Absalom has broken the laws which relate to unlawful killing (Exodus 20:13, Deut 5:17).

As we saw above, the rhetorical question, הלוא כי אנכי צויתי אתכם (13:28b) is the indicting question. Absalom is now responsible for an illegal execution, much in the same way that David was responsible for killing Uriah by commanding others to kill him (11:15). The connection with Uriah, taken together with the allusion to Nabal in 13:23, now point to Nathan’s Parable. As we have seen, the rich man in Nathan’s Parable is analogous to Nabal and to David (2 Sam 12:1-7). The following passage (12:8-14) explicitly describes God’s adverse assessment and punishment of David’s actions in the narrative. Being explicit, the criticism anchors the implied criticism of David. However, this explicit criticism taken in conjunction with the parallels drawn between David, on the one hand, and on the other, Amnon and Absalom (via Nathan’s Parable etc.), also add weight to the implied criticism of Amnon and Absalom. In summary, there are multiple parallels between David, on the one hand, and on the other, Amnon and Absalom, from which conclusions can be drawn with respect to the interpretation of these passages.

579 It is possible that the rape of a royal virgin warranted a heavier penalty but this is unknown.
of the text. Specifically, the text implies that not only David, but also Amnon and Absalom, have broken God’s laws and, as a consequence, will suffer God’s adverse judgement and be punished. David is analogous to the rich man in Nathan’s Parable, who offered hospitality without חסד (2 Sam 12:7). David is also judged for taking Bathsheba, and having Uriah killed (2 Sam 9). Amnon, who Tamar cautions will become the נבלת, (2 Sam 13:13) might also be considered as “the man” in Nathan’s Parable as he approaches hospitality without חסד, and he can be judged along with David for taking a woman who belongs to another man. Absalom, is similarly “the man” in Nathan’s Parable as he offers hospitality without חסד, and can be judged according to God’s judgment because he unjustly orders the execution of another (13:28). Of particular interest, is the knowledge that David has been afforded a special concession for his sins, as the judgement of death that he unwittingly passes on himself (2 Sam 12:5) is transferred onto the child of his first encounter with Bathsheba (2 Sam 21:14). However, this is not the case with Amnon and Absalom.

In the light of this implied criticism of the key members of the monarchy, David and his sons, we can infer that the text is pointing to deep-seated corruption in the institution of the monarchy. There is a further point to be made here in relation to verbal irony. The Israelites expected the royal family to uphold God’s laws; this is the most important function of the monarchy. As it turns out, ironically, the monarchy far from upholding the law is undermining it.

3.1.15: 2 Samuel 13:29

13:29 explicitly states quite concisely that Absalom’s servants killed Amnon in accordance with Absalom’s command. The other major transgressions in the SN thus far, including David laying with Bathsheba (11:4), Uriah’s death (11:17b), and the rape
of Tamar (13:29), have similarly been reported in clear and concise language. I have made the case that these latter verses are examples of ironic understatement. If so, the understatement serves to trivialise an event which is of great importance, and therefore complies with the traditional view of irony whereby the truth is found in the opposite of what is presented. Hence, if an event is understated, then it is of great importance. The sting of the irony is found in the act of trivialising catastrophic events. 13:29 is also an example of ironic understatement since, as noted, an event of great importance, the killing of Amnon, is reported in unduly concise terms.

The understated catastrophic events in all these verses are not only devastating for the individuals involved, they also question the integrity of the House of David. Of the greatest importance in these transgressions is the disregard which David, Amnon, and Absalom all show to the laws, especially in regard to the expectation that the Israelites had of the monarchy as they are outlined in Deut 17:14-20. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is the corrupt monarchy.

3.1.16: 2 Samuel 13:30-33

At the lower level of 13:30 David hears a report that all of his sons are dead. In 13:31 David and his servants tear their robes. In 13:32-33 Jonadab tells David that only Amnon is dead, and that his murder was conceived because Amnon raped Tamar. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies by the use of unusual language and innuendo that David is a fool for thinking that all his sons are dead rather than merely thinking Amnon is dead. He would have inferred the latter if he had understood the hatred that Absalom had for Amnon; but David was oblivious to this. The opposition in the narrative is between Jonadab’s perceptiveness and David’s lack thereof. Ironically,
although David as the king is meant to be wise, and as a father ought to understand his own sons, David is the unknowing fool.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is implied in the language and background knowledge. 13:30-33b comprises two instance of the pattern of verbose language followed immediately by concise language. The first instance is 13:30-32a. In 13:30-32aa the verbosity is a detailed description of the report that all of David’s sons have been killed etc.; the curt remark is, כי-אמנון לבדו מת (13:32ab). 13:32ab emphasizes Absalom’s act of unlawful killing, and the reason for Absalom’s murderous act, which is Amnon’s unlawful sexual transgression. The second instance is 13: 32b-33b. The verbosity consists in Jonadab’s description of Absalom’s motives etc.; the curt remark is once again, “Absalom alone is dead”. This pattern of verbose and concise language is the same as, can be found in 11:1 et. al.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is innuendo. The innuendo is that David is a fool for not realising that Amnon alone is dead. The knowledge that Amnon alone is dead can be assumed to be important as it is repeated. In the second verbose section Jonadab explains to David that Absalom had been planning to kill Amnon since the time of Tamar’s rape. This observation contrasts Jonadab’s wisdom with David’s foolishness, strengthening the idea that David is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, as Jonadab is חכם it may be assumed that his observations are trustworthy, which seems to discount the theory that Absalom sought to kill Amnon in order to take the throne, as has been suggested. Instead, the

580 Andrew Hill suggests that Absalom intended to kill Amnon so that he would be the next in line to the throne, and that Jonadab assisted him with this conspiracy. “A Jonadab Connection in the Absalom Conspiracy?” *JETS* 30, no. 4 (1987), 387-390. There is merit to this argument given that Absalom does challenge David’s Kingship later on in the story. However, this interpretation requires a retrospective analysis of the text, and may miss the incidents which build to create the desire in Absalom to attempt to take the throne. Gunn suggests that Absalom
knowledge of the motives of Absalom’s execution of Amnon highlight the ironist’s criticisms throughout the narrative that David does not administer justice effectively. It is reasonable to assume that Absalom executed Amnon because of the hatred he felt for him after the rape of Tamar (13:22), and that David could have calmed Absalom’s hatred, if he had punished Amnon. If David followed the punishment for incest in Lev 18:29 Amnon would have been expelled from the community and it is reasonable to assume that Amnon would still be alive, and Absalom would not be responsible for the unlawful killing of Amnon. Having said this, there is no fair solution in the law for Tamar’s position; for she would also have been exiled according to Lev 18:29. Notwithstanding the unfairness of exiling Tamar, the outcome of exile for both Amnon and Tamar seems preferable to the actual course of events involving, as it did, Absalom’s killing of Amnon and, thus keeping evil in Israel. It may also be argued that Tamar may have been able to remain in Jerusalem.

3.1.17: 2 Samuel 13:34-36

13:34-36 do not readily show signs of irony, however, they do resolve some controversies in the previous commentary. The passage opens with the comment that Absalom had fled (13:34). 13:35 confirms Jonadab’s prediction in 13:33, that it was, indeed, only Amnon who was killed. These verses confirm the view that the execution killed Ammon in order to progress in line to the throne. Gunn argues that Absalom’s ambition is the theme of the narrative as the focus of the stories concern Kingship and succession, and thereby, it might be deduced that Absalom’s intention is to secure the throne. Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible, 151. On the other hand, McKane suggests that although there is a focus on succession in the narrative, there is no indication in the text that Absalom killed Amnon in order to become first in line to the throne. McKane rather, points out that the focus of the narrative is that David did not punish Amnon (McKane, I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary, 242-243). Trible suggests that Absalom’s motive for killing Amnon was to avenge the rape of Tamar. Absalom’s intentions might then be discerned in the naming, and the sole mention of, Absalom’s daughter, Tamar (Trible, Texts of Terror, 55).
of Amnon was not lawful and that his intention at this point was not to secure the
throne but rather to avenge Tamar’s rape.

Notwithstanding the above, it may be argued that there is some irony. For there
is an element of overstatement in this section. In 13:34 it is stated that the young boy
noticed the arrival of a group of people, 13:35 states that it is the king’s sons, minus Amnon, who have returned and in 13:36 the king’s sons arrive. This overstatement not
only highlights Amnon’s death, but also Jonadab’s wisdom, and in contrast, David’s
foolishness. David is, thereby, the object of ironic attack since he was previously
tricked by Absalom into letting Amnon go to the sheep-shearing festival (13:24-27),
and only now is aware of the consequences of this because Jonadab makes him aware
(13:35). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist’s ongoing pejorative criticism of
David now has even greater weight.

3.1.18: 2 Samuel 13:37-39

These verses have a transitional role. 13:37 and 13:38 repeat the fact that Absalom fled. (This was also mentioned in 13:34.) It can therefore be assumed that this piece of
information is significant. The significance may relate to the punishment for unlawful
murder, i.e that Absalom did not want to be put to death. For instance, Lev 24:17 calls
for the murderer to be put to death. In this narrative it is also apparently, albeit
ambiguously, reported that the hostility between David and Absalom abated after
David had mourned the death of Amnon (13:39). I return to this controversy in the next chapter.

In the opening verses of this chapter (13:1-2), there is an insinuation that Amnon will act similarly to David and commit a sexual transgression. 13:3-4 is an amplification of the verbal irony in the previous section that emphasizes Amnon’s sexual desire for his sister. This irony concerns the laws which prohibit incest. The pejorative criticism of the ironist then begins to align Amnon’s emerging intentions, with David’s actions in chapters 11 and 12. This connection between the criticism of David, and the criticism of Amnon is exploited further in 13:5-7 where David is tricked by Amnon into sending Tamar to offer hospitality to him. The sub-category of verbal irony in this section is pretended defence of the victim. In 13:8-9 there is an insinuation that Amnon is going to rape Tamar. In 13:10-11 Amnon refuses Tamar’s offer of hospitality (the irony in this section is understatement) and in 13:12-13 he rapes her. At this point in the narrative Amnon is shown to be the object of ironic attack and he is called the Ῥιβαλ. This strong reference to Nabal and Nathan’s Parable, shows the strength of the ironist’s criticism, which is conveyed in Nathan’s Parable, in reference to David. The criticism in this section is brought out by the use of a rhetorical question and pretended ignorance (13:13). The rape of Tamar in 13:14 is spoken of succinctly, and might otherwise, be described as ironic understatement. 13:15-16 are an amplification of the verbal irony in the previous section, and an ironic misrepresentation as Amnon does not ‘love’ Tamar.

In 13:17-19 Amnon is pejoratively and implicitly criticised because he raped a royal virgin. The verbal irony in this section is overstatement. Moreover, the public display of Amnon’s sins alludes to God’s judgement upon David (2 Sam 12:12). In 13:20 Amnon is criticised further by way of a rhetorical question. 13:21-22 put forth two criticisms, the first criticism is that David did not punish Amnon, the second criticism is that Absalom is guilty of hating his brother. 13:23-26a insinuate that
Absalom is about to commit murder. 13:26b-27 build on the insinuation in the previous section by way of a rhetorical question which challenges Absalom’s intentions. In 13:28 Absalom acts not unlike David, and uses hospitality as a means of obtaining an illicit end. This criticism emerges by way of a rhetorical question.

13:29 emphasizes the unlawful killing of Amnon by way of understated language. In 13:30-33 the verbal irony is an innuendo that David is a fool since he did not realise that Absalom had hatred in his heart for Amnon. 13:34-36 presents an overstatement which similarly presents David as a fool. There is no discernible irony in 13:37-39.
CHAPTER FOUR – PART ONE: ABSALOM’S REVOLT

Chapter Four will be divided into two large sections. The first section will include a discussion of 2 Sam 14, which comprises an assessment of Absalom’s punishment for his transgression and his return to Jerusalem. The second section of this chapter will discuss Absalom’s revolt against David which takes place in 2 Sam 15-19:8a. The discussion in the second section relies upon the discussion in the first section.

4.1: 2 Samuel 14:1-33

4.1.1: 2 Samuel 14:1-3

At the lower level of 14:1 Joab is apparently aware that David is thinking of Absalom. (I return to the precise interpretation of this claim below). In 14:2 Joab sends for a wise woman of Tekoa and commands her to pretend that she is a mourner, and in 14:3 Joab tells the woman what to say to David. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that David is about to be fooled once again. David has already been deceived by Amnon (2 Sam 13:1-7) and Absalom (2 Sam 13:24-27). In both of these instances, ironically, David, the supposedly wise king, was easily fooled by a subordinate. Moreover, he was spoken of in a ridiculing manner because he was fooled easily.

Further, David was the unknowing victim of the irony. Now there is a further contrast; this time between David and Joab. For Joab is about to fool David. This contrast is emphasised by the use of incongruous language, especially in the context of our background knowledge that David has been fooled by Amnon etc. The incongruous language is particularly notable in the pattern of verbose language immediately followed by curt language. The verbose language in 14:1-3a (the detail of the ruse) is followed by the curt statement in 14:3b that Joab put the words into the woman’s
mouth. This incongruity emphasizes Joab’s action or, to be more specific, that David was about to be tricked by his subordinate, Joab, the general of his army.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is implied in the language in the context of our background knowledge. Indeed some of this background knowledge is actually alluded to in 14:1-3. Notably, the narrative in 14:1-3 alludes to the narrative in 13:3-5. In 13:3-5 Jonadab and Amnon conspire to trick David. Thus, in 14:1 Joab perceives that the king is thinking of Absalom: כילב המלך עליאבשלום. This alludes to 13:4 where Jonadab notices that something is troubling Amnon:

אשה חכם

In 14:2 we are introduced to the אשה חכם from Tekoa who will pretend to be a mourner. This alludes to 13:3 in which Jonadab is described as being איש חכם who persuades Amnon to pretend to be sick (13:3-5).

The parallels that I have just drawn between 14:1-3 and 13:3-5 may suggest that the correct interpretation of על (14:1) is that David was thinking of Absalom. Other scholars have argued that the preposition על, in this context, means that David longed for Absalom,581 that David’s thoughts were against Absalom,582 or that David was thinking of Absalom.583 At this stage in the narrative there is not enough background

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582 Anderson argues that it is most likely that David was hostile towards Absalom, not only for the presence of על but also because it was necessary for Joab to persuade David to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. (Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 187). Fokkelman argues that it is improbable to assume that David longed for Absalom given the length of time that David refused to see Absalom (14:24, 28), and in the manner in which David accepts the oath (14:21), but then bans Absalom from his presence (14:24). The whole ruse might also seem unnecessary if David truly longed for Absalom. Instead, Fokkelman suggests that this sentence would be better read that David longed to march out against Absalom, as David mourned for Amnon (Fokkelman,“King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 126-127).
583 McCarter suggests that this sentence does not indicate the nature of David’s thoughts, but rather the idea that David was thinking of Absalom, which meant that it was an opportune time for Joab to enact his plan. (McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 344).
knowledge to provide a definitive interpretation of David’s intentions. However, as argued, the episode in 14:1-3 parallels events in 13:3-5. These parallels support McCarter’s suggestion that the preposition יָבִיא indicates that the king was thinking of Absalom; thereby, creating an opening in the narrative for Joab to put forth his plan to ensure that David permits Absalom to return to Jerusalem. This mirrors 13:4 in particular, where Jonadab is aware of Amnon appearing to be troubled thereby creating an opening for Jonadab to put forth his plan to Amnon.

In summation, 14:1-3 alludes to 13:3-5 and, thereby, adds weight to the ironist’s implied pejorative criticism of David, namely, that he is foolish because he is easily deceived. The sub-category of impersonal irony, in this instance, is insinuation.

4.1.2: 2 Samuel 14:4-7

The narrative in 14:4-7 is not an instance of irony by analogy as is found in Nathan’s Parable but instead involves a deception, not unlike the cases which

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584 Ibid.
585 Another allusion which is present in this section is the reference to mourning (14:2). The theme of mourning has followed all of the major transgressions in the narrative, which have been discussed previously. Bathsheba mourned the death of Uriah (2 Sam 11:25). In 2 Sam 12:21 the servants criticize David because he does not mourn the death of the child who absorbs David’s punishment. Tamar mourns publicly after she is raped by Amnon (2 Sam 13:19). David mourns the imagined death of all of his sons (2 Sam 13:31) and the real death of Amnon in 2 Sam 13:36. The presence of mourning in this passage (14:2) reminds the reader of the previous transgressions in the narrative.
586 This narrative is not easy to interpret, and Hugh Pyper’s suggestion that this story is a parody of Nathan’s Parable must be investigated further. Most saliently, parody is ordinarily employed to ridicule an original document (Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* 78). In the usual use of parody the story of the woman of Tekoa would be used to poke fun of Nathan’s Parable. This is inconsistent with the narrative, given that Nathan’s Parable highlights the criticism of David (2 Sam 12:7-14). It would, thereby, seem incongruent that the narrative would make fun of God’s judgement that David has violated laws by taking Bathsheba and having her husband killed. However, Pyper argues that a parody of Nathan’s Parable draws the reader’s attention to the message in the original document (Pyper, “The Enticement to Re-read Repetition as Parody in 2 Samuel,” *BiblInt* 1, no.2 (1993), 153-165, 161). This argument is consistent with the narrative, however, it is not the common use of parody. Pyper argues that the parodying features in the opening verses of chapter 14 are as follows; the substitution of Joab for God (14:1), the substitution of a woman for a prophet (14:2), and the account of a woman as חכם (given the historical context) (14:2) (Pyper, “The Enticement to Re-Read Repetition as Parody
are spoken of in 2 Sam 13:1-7 and 24-27. Similarly, in 14:4-7, David is tricked into making a poor decision, is the object of ironic attack and is the unknowing victim of the irony. The ironist’s device in this case is the pretended defence of the victim, as it was in 2 Sam 13:1-7; 24-27. Of particular note, is the similarity of this episode where David is tricked by the ‘wise woman of Tekoa,’ with 13:3 where David is tricked, in essence, by Amnon’s ‘wise’ friend Jonadab. The contrast here is between the cunning of the wise woman of Tekoa and the foolishness of David. This contrast sets up the ironic content for the pretended defence of the victim. Thus the ironist pretends to be defending David against the crafty woman of Tekoa. However, David is actually the object of ironic attack since a reasonable person would have seen through the ‘crafty’ woman’s ruse.

At the lower level of 14:4-7 the wise woman of Tekoa acts out her part in Joab’s ruse. In 14:4 she does obeisance to David. David asks her what is troubling her, and she tells him that she is a widow (14:5) and that she had two sons who were playing in the field when one struck the other and killed him (14:6). In 14:7 the woman tells David that the entire family were inflamed by the killing and wanted to kill her son in revenge, even though he was her only remaining son. The woman tells David that this act would leave her husband without an heir.

The situation outlined by the woman is obviously analogous to David’s, indeed deliberately so. Therefore, David should have been suspicious. Ironically, however, David – who as king is supposed to be wise - is confidently oblivious to the deception,
and, hence, is the unknowing victim of irony. (Note that this is not an instance of irony by analogy since the analogy is merely in the service of the deception).\textsuperscript{587} The incongruity in the narrative is the fact that the king is foolish and the woman of Tekoa crafty. The grade of irony is covert, as the irony is not immediately apparent, and is only apprehended with knowledge of the background story of David and his sons.

In the story of the woman of Tekoa, David would seem to be analogous to the woman of Tekoa, and the sons who fought in the field appear to be analogous to Absalom and Amnon. Yet, there are some striking differences between the story of the woman of Tekoa and David’s own situation. These differences ultimately obstruct a correct judgment by David in respect of Absalom’s punishment notwithstanding that a correct judgment by David in this matter appears to be both the woman’s and Joab’s goal.

In this respect the woman of Tekoa’s story contrasts with Nathan’s Parable. In Nathan’s Parable there are, of course, differences in the story of the rich man, and the story of David and Bathsheba. However, as we saw in the discussion in 2 Sam 12:1-6, these differences do not obstruct a correct judgement on the part of David and, indeed, the analogies between the stories facilitate a correct judgement.

In the story of the woman of Tekoa, the woman of Tekoa only had two sons (14:7), whereas David had many sons. This is significant, as the woman of Tekoa would, potentially, lose the sole heir to her husband’s inheritance (14:7). This would not be the case for David. Moreover, the woman was a widow (14:6), whereas David was not. This is particularly pertinent given that an אָלֶםֶנָה was a woman who did not have a male within a broader kin-group to look after her. This meant that an אָלֶםֶנָה was

\textsuperscript{587} Note in irony by analogy, the analogous story is used to criticize the original story. Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony}, 70-71.
one of the most vulnerable people of the community.\textsuperscript{588} David was the most powerful man in Israel. Given these differences between the story of the woman of Tekoa and David’s situation the judgement to be made in the case of her son is quite different from the judgment to be made in the case of Absalom. In other words, the analogy being drawn between the woman of Tekoa’s story and David’s situation is likely to obstruct David’s correct judgement in respect of Absalom. Therefore, the story of the woman of Tekoa should not be considered analogous to Nathan’s Parable, but instead to the other instances of deception in the narrative, such as Jonadab and Amnon’s deception, and Absalom’s deception of David to get Amnon to the sheep-shearing festival.

Other significant differences between Nathan’s Parable and the story of the woman of Tekoa include the following. In Nathan’s Parable, God was known to be the architect of the Parable. In the case of the story of the woman of Tekoa, Joab was the author of the story and the story was a complete fabrication intended to deceive David. In Nathan’s Parable the agent who delivers the Parable is a prophet; in the woman of Tekoa, the agent is an actress. Furthermore, the episode in Nathan’s Parable can be considered irony by analogy as it seeks to criticize the analogous situation (David’s situation), and to bring David to an awareness of his unlawful actions through self-judgement. In the story of the woman of Tekoa, as in the case of the other deceptions mentioned, the deceivers (Joab and the woman of Tekoa) use deception to manipulate the king.

Further, the other episodes of deception have had disastrous outcomes. For instance, Amnon’s deception leads to a rape and ultimately ends in his own death.

Absalom’s deception leads to the murder of his brother and, ultimately, exile for him. In the next section, I will argue that the desired outcome for Joab’s ruse is unlawful and potentially disastrous.

Notwithstanding what I have argued thus far, the ruse of the woman of Tekoa does resemble the story of Nathan’s Parable in one significant less obvious respect (leaving aside the obvious similarities); it alludes to a previous story. In Nathan’s Parable the story of David and Nabal (1 Sam 25) is alluded to (and utilised); in the story of the woman of Tekoa, the story of Cain and Abel is alluded to. However, in the case of Nathan’s Parable, the analogy to David and Nabal is (as we have seen) helpful, whereas, in the woman of Tekoa, the analogy to the story of Cain and Abel is unhelpful. For the story of Cain and Abel involves a reduced punishment for Cain whereas the woman of Tekoa is requesting no punishment for her son and, likewise, Joab and the woman of Tekoa are seeking to cause David to permit Absalom to go without any punishment.

I now argue that it would have been inconsistent both with God’s law and with the rules of blood vengeance for David not to punish Absalom for killing Amnon. To facilitate the argument I provide a comparison between the story of the woman of Tekoa, David’s situation, and the story of Cain and Abel. The story of Cain and Abel is relevant because it functions as a quasi-legal precedent in a context in which the application of God’s law and the rules of blood vengeance are otherwise unclear. In 14:6 the woman of Tekoa tells David that she had two sons and one of the sons killed the other son in a שְׂדוֹת. In the story of Absalom and Amnon, Absalom orders Amnon’s execution (13:28). In the story of the brothers Cain and Abel, Cain lured Abel out into a שְׂדוֹת and killed him (Gen 4:8). In 14:7 (in overstated language) the woman tells David that all of the clan have risen up against her, as they wish to kill her son to avenge a
murder he has committed. The clan are prepared to kill her son even though he is an heir. This would eliminate the woman’s husband’s line (14:7).

In 14:7 the wording נָשָׁמְדוּתָהּ וְנָשָׁמְדוּתְוָהֵי in the women’s story suggests that the clan are trying to kill the son in order to take the inheritance, and not necessarily on the basis of their moral judgement. This is not in keeping with the rules of blood vengeance which suggest an appropriate punishment for a crime (Deut 19:6). In the example of the ruse, the blood avenger it is not within his rights to kill the woman of Tekoa’s son in order to benefit from the inheritance. Similarly, Absalom’s hatred which fuelled Amnon’s murder is not within the bounds of blood vengeance, which limits violence and does not accept retaliation which is driven by unfettered rage. However, in 14:7 there is no explicit statement that David’s clan are planning to kill Absalom in order to take his inheritance. Indeed, Absalom’s death may be warranted, even if this means that the clan must kill one of its own, because the preservation of the clan is contingent upon protecting itself from internal threats. So while there are some similarities between the situation of the woman of Tekoa’s son and Absalom there are important differences, including some additional to the ones already mentioned.

The outcome of the story of Cain and Abel is that God punishes Cain (Gen 4:12) by sending him into exile rather than by killing him. Moreover, God protects Cain by way of the mark of Cain (Gen 4:15). Notably, Cain is the only remaining son of the original human beings. Hence it is crucial to protect Cain. Likewise Absalom flees to Geshur (2 Sam 13:37) and is in exile. Absalom does not have the protection

589 It is possible that Joab, who created the ruse, believed that Absalom killed Amnon in order to take his inheritance. This is not the case as Absalom killed Amnon out of hatred because Amnon raped Tamar (2 Sam 13:22, 32). However, as Absalom told Tamar not to mention the rape (2 Sam 13:20) it is possible that Joab would not know this. The confusion adds to the comedy of events.

that Cain had but, crucially, he is not the only remaining son of David, let alone of the human race. The situation of the remaining son of the woman of Tekoa is somewhat similar to that of Cain, although obviously his death would be far less significant.

So in the case of the woman from Tekoa it may be valid to protect her last remaining son; moreover the intentions of the blood-avenger are corrupt, and the clan would be damaged by killing her son. In the case of Absalom, there are other sons. Moreover, the blood-avenger’s motives (assuming that there is a blood-avenger who seeks vengeance for Amnon’s murder) are correct. Furthermore, Absalom’s killing of Amnon was unlawful in that he did not have the support of other family members; rather Absalom had to trick David into allowing Amnon to go to the sheep-shearing festival where he was killed (2 Sam 13:26-27). Therefore, the clan would be protected from not having Absalom in the family, given his propensity to engage in unlawful killing motivated by brooding anger (2 Sam 13:22). In conclusion, while there are similarities between all three stories, each story is different from the other two in some important respects. Therefore, the story of Cain and Abel cannot be used to determine the appropriate punishment for Absalom.

4.1.3: 2 Samuel 14:8-11

At the lower level of 14:8 David tells the woman of Tekoa to go home, and that he will give orders concerning her situation. In 14:9 the woman says to David “On me be the guilt, my lord, the king, and on my father’s house; let the king and his house be guiltless” (14: 9). David tells the woman he will protect her (14:10). The woman implores David “to keep the Lord your God in mind” (14:10) so that the blood-redeemer will not kill her son. David assures her that her son will be safe (14:11). At

Note the additional irony in David’s statement in 14:11. In this verse David tells the woman of Tekoa that not a hair of her son’s head will fall to the ground. This is ironic given that
the upper level of the narrative the implication is that David has made an oath to protect her son. Moreover, the ironist implies, by way of analogy, that David will ‘take on the guilt’ in the case of the decision concerning the fate of Absalom.\(^{592}\)

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. However, the irony is highlighted by the exaggerated language. This suggests that the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category is overstatement. For instance, David commands the woman to go to her house while he considers her request in 14:8; yet, instead of following David’s orders, the woman makes a dramatic, overstated declaration that she will take on the guilt of David’s decision, so that the royal house will remain guiltless (14:9):

עלי אדני המלך העון על־בתי אב המלך וכסאו נקי

This comment is unclear. It may be the case that the woman has given her assurance to David that she will bear the guilt if the king’s judgement proves to be in error;\(^{593}\) it may express the formal language which was used in the court;\(^{594}\) or it may be an extra plea for forgiveness.\(^{595}\) However, regardless of the intention of the statement, the remark is

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Absalom, David’s son, eventually did die by his hair being entangled in a tree so that he literally did not fall to the ground. For this observation I am indebted to David Marcus’ comments on this thesis.

\(^{592}\) When the woman of Tekoa says that she will ‘take on the guilt’ of the decision that David makes in respect of the fate of her son, she is being utterly insincere; after all, the entire episode about an alleged son is a fabrication. On the other hand, the woman of Tekoa actually does desire David to ‘Take on the guilt’ in relation to Absalom, albeit she does not communicate this desire of hers to David. At any rate, the implication is that the woman of Tekoa believes that the analogy between the story about her son and the situation of Absalom is sufficiently clear that David will ultimately see it and accept that his adjudication in the case of Absalom ought to be same as in the case of her son.

\(^{593}\) Anderson, \textit{WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel}, 188.


overstated. Schulz likens this remark to Abigail’s speech to David (1 Sam 25:31) which he argues is also illogical, gushing, and calculating.596

The implications of the overstated language are best considered within the framework of the previous section. If the woman of Tekoa is a metaphorical reference to David, then it is possible that the woman’s comment that she will take on the guilt implies that David should take on the guilt of Absalom. Schulz explains this in detail below.

The woman’s offer to assume the bloodguilt of her son is ultimately paradoxical. “Let the sin be upon me, my lord the king, and on my father’s house; the king and his throne shall be clear” (14:9) sounds generous, until we consider that in the parable the woman is the king. David, in other words, will incur bloodguilt if Absalom is allowed to live. Such a stain according to Gen 9:5-6; Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16-21, 31; Deut 19:11-13, can be dissipated only by blood, not by forgiveness. Again, the message is that David must kill Absalom to eliminate bloodguilt.597

According to Schulz’s assessment of the analogies, if David takes on the bloodguilt of Absalom then the message is that David should die instead of Absalom.598 However, as has been mentioned previously, it cannot be certain that this amount of stress is intended in the speech of the woman of Tekoa (14:9).

The narrative then progresses as David reassures the woman that he will keep her free from any harassment (14:10). It is only in 14:11 when the woman asks David

597 Ibid., 52.
598 This idea may be substantiated by 1 Kgs 2:5-6, 31. The language that the woman of Tekoa uses in 4:9 is reminiscent of Abigail’s speech in 1 Sam 25:24:

In this narrative David is spared from committing an act of bloodguilt, as he does not kill Nabal (1 Sam 25:26). Similarly, Abigail remains unharmed (1 Sam 25:34). Instead God strikes Nabal and Nabal dies (1 Sam 25:38). It may then be inferred that it is possible for David to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, without David taking on the guilt of blood-vengeance. However, in the story of David and Nabal, David is not the King of Israel. In his new position as king, David is responsible for enforcing the laws, and David would have to ignore the laws of Israel were he to return Absalom to Jerusalem.
to ensure that the blood avenger does not destroy her son, that David responds with, what Alter calls the “hyperbolic declaration.” This is not only an overstated declaration, it also signifies the progression in the narrative as the mention of Yahweh implies that David spoke an oath in God’s name. Thereby, David is tricked into taking on Absalom’s bloodguilt by the lowly figure of the woman of Tekoa.

Ironically, David has now solemnly committed himself to protect ‘someone’ from a non-existent threat in a non-existent situation. Moreover, given the differences between the circumstance of Absalom and that of the woman of Tekoa’s son (differences elaborated above), David has been tricked into making an adjudication in the case of Absalom based on an erroneous comparison between Absalom’s circumstance and that of the woman of Tekoa’s son. Moreover, in doing so he has ‘taken on the guilt’ of his decision in respect of Absalom with the possible consequence that David himself might need to be killed.

The opposition in the narrative is between what is said and what is meant. The woman says that she will ‘take on the guilt’ of the decision in the case of her son,

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600 Hoftijzer, “David and the Tekoite Woman,” 428 n.1
601 In addition to the argument that this narrative is a parody, it has also been suggested that this narrative is a ‘juridical parable.’ The essence of the juridical parable is that it concerns a legal issue and a judge making a self-judgement (Simon, 207-242). The problem with this assessment, as Gunn argues, is that it presupposes the legitimacy of a litigant putting their case to a king or a judge in the dock. Gunn offers an alternative suggestion that this story is a narrative convention which he calls a ‘judgement-eliciting parable.’ This definition has a broader appeal as Gunn argues that the legal element of the juridical parable is a co-incidence based on the king’s position as the administrator of justice. Moreover, Gunn’s argument includes the narrative purpose of the parable. For example he remarks, “The suitability of the motif for storytelling is obvious: it has, built in, the favourite ingredients of deception and irony, while an element of suspense, the risk of death, say, may also play some part, depending on the version. In addition, the construction of the parable is a challenge to the artistic skill of the narrator.” (Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 41-42).
however, the implication is that David will take on the guilt of the decision in the case of Absalom. David is the object of ironic attack, and the unknowing victim of irony.

4.1.4: 2 Samuel 14:12-14

At the lower level of 14:12 the woman of Tekoa asks David for permission to speak to him. At the lower level of 14:13 the woman of Tekoa tells David that in giving his decision with respect to her son he has, convicted himself in as much as he does not bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. She also asks David ולמה חשׁבתה כזאת על־עם אלהים (14:13). At the upper level the ironist implies that it is a rhetorical question and, therefore, that she is actually making an implicit statement. If the question were to be perceived as a straightforward question, then the assumption would be that the woman of Tekoa would wait for a response from David; instead she continues her argument in the speech. Being a rhetorical question, there is an opposition between what is said and what is meant. In asking this particular rhetorical question she is, in effect, implying that David does not administer justice impartially. Therefore, David is the object of the ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is overt, as it is immediately apparent.

The woman’s reproachful rhetorical question (and expansion thereof) is not unlike the reproachful rhetorical questions (and expansions thereof) of Uriah (2 Sam 11:11) and Tamar (2 Sam 13:13). However, in the cases of Uriah and Tamar, it is clear that they were both fighting an injustice and imploring righteous behaviour. In the case of the woman of Tekoa, this conclusion cannot be established. There is a debate regarding whether David should have allowed Absalom to be killed or left in exile.\footnote{Anderson argues that the woman’s parable serves as an apologia for David, as the rightful course of action for David would have been to leave Absalom in exile. Thereby, the knowledge that David was tricked into allowing Absalom to leave exile exonerates David of not rightfully following the law. However, the knowledge that David can be easily manipulated does not inspire confidence in the king, therefore, the suggestion that there is irony in this passage is preferable (Anderson, *WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel*, 186).}
Propp suggests that the very nature of the parable, which matches Absalom with the murderous son of the woman of Tekoa, convincingly indicts Absalom as a murderer. Indeed, Propp argues that the proper course of action to take in regards to Absalom, is to kill him in line with retributive justice.

In terms of the legal texts Gen 9:5-6; Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Num 35:16-21, 31; Deut 19:11-13 the right course of action is to kill Absalom, as he lay in wait to kill Amnon out of anger (2 Sam 22-23). However, the woman of Tekoa appears to be asking the king for mercy for Absalom (as well as (explicitly) for her son). This implicit request is made by means of an allusion to the story of Cain and Abel, where God is merciful to Cain. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit our commentary on the story of Cain and Abel in order to determine the proper punishment for Absalom.

The outcome of the story of Cain and Abel is that God punishes Cain (Gen 4:12), however, God also protects Cain (Gen 4:15). In the case of Absalom, it may be argued that his state in exile is not unlike Cain’s situation. Both men should have received the punishment of death, however, instead they are exiled. God’s mercy in the story of Cain and Abel consists in a reduction of punishment. The woman of Tekoa requests that David do away completely with any punishment for Absalom. One difficulty with this request is that David is being asked not to punish Absalom, yet

604 Ibid., 51.
606 Larry Lyke suggests that the theme of sibling rivalry is commonly found in Genesis, including the stories of Isaac/Ishmaael, Jacob/Esaau, and Joseph and his brothers. He argues that this broad theme and the tradition inform this text. Larry Lyke, King David with the Woman of Tekoa. The Resonance of Tradition in Parabolic Narrative, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 28. This thesis is valid, however, it creates a complexity in interpretation which may not be necessary as the primary allusion in this text would appear to be Cain and Abel given the striking similarities which are discussed throughout this chapter of the dissertation.
607 J. L. Jensen’s suggestion that Absalom is “less guilty” as he did not kill Amnon with his own hands has merit. “Desire, Rivalry and Collective Violence in the “Succession Narrative,”” JSOT 55 (1992), 39-59, 54.
Absalom has committed the serious crime of murder. A second difficulty is that David is himself implicated in this crime since it was David’s decision not to punish Amnon which caused Absalom to kill Amnon (2 Sam 13:21-22). A third difficulty is that God did not lift his punishment from David (2 Sam 12:10-14) when David implored God to let the child from his illegitimate union live (2 Sam 12:22). Thereby, although God is merciful, God still punishes both David and Cain. Surely David should act as God did.

It may also be suggested that only God had the authority to reduce Cain’s punishment and, therefore, only God – and not David – has the authority to reduce Absalom’s. In response it might be said that in swearing חֶי־יהוה David swears an oath to protect the woman’s son, and (according to the woman of Tekoa) on pain of inconsistency Absalom also (14:12). However, we have pointed to important differences in the two cases; so arguably David ought not to swear to protect Absalom even if it is reasonable for him to swear to protect the woman of Tekoa’s son.

In conclusion, we saw above that David was the object of the woman of Tekoa’s ironic attack (by means of her rhetorical question). However, ironically, it is the inadequacies of the woman of Tekoa’s analogy and perspective that have now been revealed; the ironist has herself become the object of irony. Moreover, she is evidently confidently unaware of this; therefore, she is also the victim of irony.

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608 It could also be argued that there is an allusion to the story of David in Nabal in this narrative. If this is considered to be the case, it may be argued that David could follow the outcome in Nabal’s case, and allow God to punish Absalom. However, it is not acceptable for David to follow the case of Nabal and assume that God will correct the situation if David does not pass judgement, as David’s role as king makes him the administrator of justice.

609 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 348.
4.1.5: 2 Samuel 14:15-17

At the lower level of 14:15 the woman of Tekoa tells David that she has come to tell David these things, as the people have made her afraid, and because she believes that David will grant her request. At the lower level of 14:16 the woman tells David that he will protect her and her son from the blood-avenger. In 14:17 the woman tells David that his word will set her at peace, as the king’s judgement is like the lord’s, and that David’s word is like the angel of God, which discerns “good and evil.” At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is not a good administrator of justice. The opposition in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is implied. David is the object of ironic attack, and the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is praise in order to

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610 There is a discussion regarding the ordering of the woman’s speech. Most scholars tend to agree with Cook that the true order of this chapter is as follows: 13:38-14:7, 15-17, 8-14, 18-33. In this ordering of events the king gives his orders and the woman responds to those commands (14:8-14) at the completion of the woman’s plea (“Notes on the Composition of 2 Samuel,” AJSL, XVI (1899-1900), 145-177, 158. On the other hand Ridout (137) argues that the woman of Tekoa reverts back to her plea in verse 14:15 in order to divert David’s attention from Joab’s role in the drama. The verses in the story of the woman from Tekoa do appear to be presented in a disjointed order, and redaction criticism may alleviate this clumsiness. However, in an ironic interpretation this clumsiness may go towards indicating that the woman of Tekoa is not such a smooth operator. This presentation of the woman of Tekoa is important when we understand the analogy in comparison with Nathan’s Parable (12:1-15). The distinction of a prophet speaking God’s judgement must be described with distinction from the trickery of a human agent. If this narrative is compared with the story of Jonadab and Amnon, it can be noted that there is a similar pattern of repetition in the outworking of the plan (13:5-6). Similarly, Absalom’s plan to invite Amnon to the sheep shearing festival is not without a degree of persuasion (13:23-27). This technique of repetition not only adds suspense to the story, but also emphasizes the strength of the deception. Ridout (137) suggests that the ‘wise’ advice of Jonadab and the woman of Tekoa ends in unmitigated disaster indicating an irony (Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2)”). Rendsburg argues that “disordered speech and storytelling” is not uncommon in biblical stories and cites the following examples: Gen 37:28, 30; Ruth 2:7. Judg 18:14-20, 1 Sam 9:12-13, 1 Sam 17:38. G. A. Rendsburg, “Confused language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” JHScr 2.6 (1999). Online: http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/.
blame. This sub-category of irony praises the object of ironic attack for qualities which are known to be lacking.  

Praise in order to blame is particularly evident in 14:17 where the woman of Tekoa says, הַמֶּלֶךְ לַשֵּׁם הָטְבָּה וּרְעוֹר. Anderson argues that the terms “good and evil” may be a merismus which refer to all of the law. In this case, the use of the term merismus would suggest that David is an exceptional administrator of justice. Cartledge suggests that this verse should not be interpreted as a merismus, but rather as an indication of the king’s sound judgement in legal matters. Either way, the verse must be interpreted as ironic given that the narrative thus far suggests that David is not a good administrator of justice, (including God’s disapproval (2 Sam 12:9)). Moreover, the use of flowery language by the woman of Tekoa emphasises the irony and, thereby, serves to heighten the criticism of David. It is a further issue whether or not the woman of Tekoa intends to be ironic rather than merely intending to flatter him. At any rate, what is evident is the presence of an ironist in the form of an authorial persona. Therefore, this is an instance of impersonal irony and the sub-category is praise in order to blame; more specifically, praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking.

The content of the irony is that David is not a good administrator of justice and, of course, David is the object of ironic attack. This has been a common theme of criticism throughout the SN. The irony is heightened by the woman’s remark in 14:17

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613 Cartledge, *SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel*, 550. Cartledge argues that this verse points to the Israelite theology of Kingship, which imagined the king as semi-divine.
4.1.6: 2 Samuel 14:18-20

At the lower level of 14:18 David asks the woman of Tekoa to be truthful to him, and the woman agrees. In 14:19 David asks the woman if Joab is responsible for the ruse, and the woman replies that Joab is responsible for the ruse and that Joab told the woman what to say. At the lower level of 14:20 the woman tells David that Joab wanted to change the course of events. She also says that David is wise and all knowing. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is, in fact, not wise and all knowing. The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what is said and what is known of David, i.e. that he is not wise and knowing. David is the object of the ironic attack and probably the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apparent. The mode of irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category is praise in order to blame.

In 14:20 this praising in order to blame continues on from 14:17. The woman says,

ואדו תמכ חכמך שלך אלהים להשת אדכלאשך באהר"מ

Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History*, 141. Also of interest, there appears to be a cautionary tone in the woman’s speech. In 14:16 the woman suggests that it is not only her son who is at risk but also her own welfare.

כ ישמע המלך לشرعו האדמלו מכך לאית לשהלמי את א戕ביג ידה מנהלת אלהים

If it is the case that the woman represents David and her son represents Absalom, then her comment that the blood-avenger wants to ‘eliminate’ her and her son from the heritage of God, could be interpreted to mean that David was the one who was at risk of being cut off from God’s inheritance. The expression מנהלת אלהים is best interpreted as the religious and political community of Israel. (McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 346).
However, the content in 14:20 is different from 14:17, as this verse is not specifically concerned with David’s ability (or rather, the lack thereof) to administer justice, but rather with his wisdom and knowledge (or rather, the lack thereof). The content of the irony is that David is not wise and all-knowing. As Hugh Pyper suggests, “It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is ironic when she has just succeeded in hoodwinking him into recalling Absalom. Even his apparent astuteness in identifying the hand of Joab in her intervention comes too late to prevent him from swearing the oath that traps him.”

4.1.7: 2 Samuel 14:21-23

At the lower level of 14:21 David allows Absalom’s return. In 14:22 Joab prostrates himself in front of David, does obeisance to David, blesses the king, and tells David that he has found favour in the sight of David as his request has been granted. At the lower level of 14:23 Joab goes to Geshur and brings Absalom back to Jerusalem. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that although David has granted Absalom’s return, Joab has not found favour in the sight of David. The opposition in the narrative can be found in the difference between what Joab explicitly says (that Absalom’s return is because Joab has found favour in David’s sight) and the implied truth of the situation (that Absalom’s return is due to Joab tricking David into swearing an oath).

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent, and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category of verbal irony in these verses is praise in order to blame. However the previous instances of this sub-category were cases of praise for desirable qualities known to be lacking, whereas this instance of this

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sub-category is, ‘Inappropriate or Irrelevant Praise.’\textsuperscript{616} The irrelevant praise is expressed in Joab’s response to the king in 14:22,

ָיהוּדָן יְדֵעַ עָבָדְךָ וְצִכְּרֶתְךָ אִשָּׁר־עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־דֶּבֶר עָבָדְךָ

This praise is patently irrelevant as Joab did not gain the king’s favour. Instead David was tricked into making an oath, and David had no option but to follow Joab’s plan. Therefore there is no basis whatsoever in the praise. The content of the irony is that David has been tricked into permitting Absalom to return. David is the object of ironic attack since he has been tricked by a subordinate who now makes him look foolish by praising him.

4.1.8: 2 Samuel 14:24

Verse 14:24 is not obviously ironic. Nevertheless, a brief commentary is helpful in relation to instances of irony to be discussed in other verses. In 14:24 David tells Joab to direct Absalom to go to Absalom’s house and not to come into the king’s presence. Of note, David does not act according to the law by allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem. Similarly, David does not act according to the oath he swore to the woman of Tekoa, as he does not allow Absalom to participate fully in the community.

Fokkelman remarks, “David has not executed the spirit of the oath, merely its letter.”\textsuperscript{617} Yet, in fairness to David, what was he to do? Absalom’s return to Jerusalem indicates that there is no guilt in him. David’s oath suggests that he has taken on Absalom’s guilt unwittingly (14:13), which may indicate that Absalom’s position is restored. However, as has been discussed, it is impossible for Absalom to be righteously restored. As I

\textsuperscript{616} Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony}, 67.

\textsuperscript{617} Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 147.
have noted earlier, the deception of Joab and the woman of Tekoa has left David in an invidious position, not unlike the other deceptions in this narrative.

4.1.9: 2 Samuel 14:25-26

At the lower level of 14:25 Absalom is spoken of as being the most beautiful man in Israel, without any physical blemishes. At the lower level of 14:26 there is a description of Absalom’s hair, which is said to grow very heavy on him, requiring it to be cut annually. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that Absalom could potentially try to usurp the throne. This insinuation is conveyed in the excessive mention of Absalom’s beauty, and in the reference to his plentiful hair. The incongruity in the narrative concerns the difference between what is said and what is meant. Although the ironist stresses Absalom’s physical attractiveness, a quality associated with kings, the ironist is really trying to convey that Absalom is a threat to David. Absalom is the object of the ironic attack.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category of impersonal irony in this instance.

618 It has been suggested that Absalom’s act of shaving his hair indicates that he is a temporary Nazarite. If this is true, it may be the case that Absalom had become a temporary Nazarite in order to quiet his ‘distemper’ (JosephusL.cht://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11395-nazarite), which may point to repentance in Absalom. It may also be the case that Absalom is a Nazarite who has dedicated himself as an offering to God. The act of shaving his head each year would be a renewal of his dedication (Eliezer Diamond, “An Israelite Self-Offering in the Priestly Code: A New Perspective on the Nazarite,” JQR 88, no. ½ (1997), 1-18, 17-18). It may then be surmised that Absalom took the vow of the Nazarite after ordering the execution of Amnon to do penance. If this is the case then the extreme representation of Absalom’s perfection, and the sacrifice of his hair may point to the strength of his remorse. Another consideration is that the emphasis of Absalom’s hair points to his pride, which is his sin. This would suggest that Absalom was not holy, but conceited (Gregory Spinner, “‘Absalom Glorified in His Hair’: On the Midrashic Transvaluation of Nazirites.’ https://www.academia.edu/6823188/_Absalom_Gloried_in_His_Hair_On_The_Midrashic_Tran svaluation_of_Nazirites). The narrative does not give enough information at this stage for the reader to know if he is remorseful and holy or vain and unholy. However, David Marcus does make the interesting observation that the hair which Absalom is so proud of is ultimately the cause of his undoing.
is a combination of an overstatement and an insinuation. The overstatement is evident in the excessive description of Absalom’s physical appearance, which begins in 14:25:

This praise of Absalom, although relevant in the context, is clearly overstated, as 14:25 goes on to state that Absalom was without blemish from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. In 14:26 the excessive description of Absalom’s physical appearance is extended to include a detailed description of Absalom’s hair, which was cut and weighed yearly. The overstatement here concerns the weight of Absalom’s hair. It was cut annually and weighed and found to weigh in the order of four and a half pounds; but one man’s hair could not possibly weigh that much.619

The overstatement of Absalom’s physical appearance suggests that Absalom had gained great favour in Jerusalem. Bar-Efrat even argues that the mention of Absalom’s perfection and luxurious hair is an indicator that fate favoured Absalom.620 Indeed, the overstatement may be implying something more than this, namely, that Absalom had the properties of a king. The idea that Absalom had the properties of a king is strengthened when we compare the explicit physical description of Absalom with the explicit descriptions of David and of Saul. In all cases they are extremely flattering, as befits someone about to be anointed king.

Consider, for example, the following description of David just before he is anointed as Saul’s successor in 1 Sam 16:12:

619 Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 334.
620 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 50.
This description is also comparable to the description of Saul in the story leading up to Saul’s anointing (1 Sam 9:2):

וַלְיָהָה בֶן שֵׁם שָׁאוֹל בָּחוֹר וַתּוֹב אֵין אַחֵר מֵבֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל טוב מֵשַׁמוֹ מֵעָלֶה מֵכֶלְעֵהוֹ

We can conclude from this that those who were about to be anointed as kings were portrayed as being exceptionally physically attractive. Therefore, the overstatement of Absalom’s physical attractiveness not only has the implication that he may be next in line to be the anointed king, but also potentially generates the insinuation that Absalom was seeking to take the throne from David.

4.1.10: 2 Samuel 14:27

At the lower level of 14:27 it is reported that Absalom had three sons, and a beautiful daughter named Tamar. At the lower level of the narrative the ironist does not mention the sons’ names but does mention Tamar’s name. This is anomalous as it would be expected that, if anything, Absalom’s son’s names would be mentioned rather than that of the name of his daughter. The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what is said, and what is meant. At the lower level there is a report of Absalom’s children, at the upper level of the narrative there is the anomalous stress on Tamar’s name. This anomalous stress alludes to Tamar, Absalom’s sister, and by extension her rape, and the aftermath of the rape. Here the author as ironist is feigning ignorance of the allusion. As such, the author is an apparent unknowing victim of irony. Yet since the author is only pretending to be unaware of the irony – having intentionally created it – the author is merely a faux-victim of the irony. If this was not a case of dissimulation by the author it would be assumed that either the stress would be on the children equally or there would be more stress on the boys. The object of the ironic attack is Absalom, who is consumed with thoughts of vengeance.
The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed in the language and our background knowledge. As already mentioned, the verbal irony is communicated by the pointed reference to Tamar (his daughter), and the additional mention of Tamar (his daughter) as a "אשה יפת." This alludes to Absalom’s sister, Tamar, who is also described as being beautiful (13:1). Yet, the greater anomaly is in the listing of Absalom’s children; as mentioned, as Absalom’s sons are not referred to by name, however, his daughter is named. Caspari suggests that the attention given to details about Absalom’s daughter is particularly suspicious, as elsewhere her name is Maacah (1 Kgs 15:2). He writes, “…one therefore gains the impression that it pleased the narrator to name the daughter after the avenged sister; this would have been a moment when his predilection for conclusions rich in affinities and ideas sent him beyond what the official documents said.”

However, this matter requires further discussion. Hertzberg suggests that the mention of Absalom’s daughter does not involve an allusion to his sister, and that a more plausible explanation for Absalom’s sons not being mentioned by name is it is likely that they died young. For Hertzberg, the mention of Tamar as Absalom’s daughter is highlighted because she is his only remaining child. Ackroyd argues that the text may be confused, and the truth may have been that Amnon raped Absalom’s daughter, rather than his sister. On the other hand McCarter suggests that the extended mention of Tamar, Absalom’s daughter, is an allusion to Tamar, Absalom’s sister. It would seem that McCarter’s proposition is the most plausible. It is possible that Absalom’s sons had died young as Hertzberg argues, however, this does not

621 Caspari, “The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15-20,” 62.
622 Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 334.
624 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 350.
explain the anomaly that Absalom’s daughter is named as Tamar and not Maacah, in this instance. Similarly, there is an inconsistency in Ackroyd’s interpretation as Tamar is continually referenced as Absalom’s sister in the story of Amnon and Tamar. It is more likely, in keeping with the portrayal of Absalom, that the mention of Tamar, his daughter, is best understood as an allusion to his sister, Tamar.

Absalom’s anger over Tamar’s rape (13:22) precedes verse 14:27 and this, taken in conjunction with the allusion to Tamar (his sister), implies that Absalom’s anger has not abated, presumably at least in part because the situation has not been resolved. 625 The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category is innuendo.

4.1.11: 2 Samuel 14:28-30

At the lower level of 14:28 it is reported that Absalom lived for two years in Jerusalem without visiting his father. In 14:29 Absalom sends twice for Joab, so that Joab might arrange for Absalom to go to David, but Joab does not come. At the lower level of 14:30 Absalom orders his servants to burn Joab’s property which is next door to Absalom’s property. The opposition in the narrative concerns these different representations of Absalom. Specifically, there is a close confrontation of incompatibles. In 14:28-29 Absalom sends for Joab in a civilized manner, in 14:30, by contrast, Absalom is shown to be as violent and uncompromising as David is. Absalom is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, with the dominant sub-category of irony displayed.

625 It has been suggested Absalom ordered Amnon’s execution as he sought the throne (Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 331), however, it is more prudent to assume that Absalom sought revenge against Amnon.
At first glance Absalom’s decision to light a fire in the field next to his own field is comical, as he is presumably putting himself in danger. However, the confrontation of incompatibles implies that the real focus of this passage is Absalom’s anger, as opposed to his foolishness. Fokkelman suggests that this act of arson on Absalom’s account points to his aggression.\textsuperscript{626} Similarly Alter remarks, “Absalom’s Samson-like burning of the field is a strong indication that he is a man prepared to use violence to achieve his ends: Mafia style, he presents Joab with an offer he can’t refuse.”\textsuperscript{627} Caspari suggests that Absalom’s failing in this case is ‘intransigence.’\textsuperscript{628}

Absalom’s behaviour is not unlike David’s behaviour toward Uriah. Uriah resists David’s two attempts to manipulate him (2 Sam 11:8; 13); in frustration David implements the violent plan on the third attempt (2 Sam 11:14-15).\textsuperscript{629} Thereby, it may be argued that the ironist at the upper level of the narrative is critical of Absalom’s scheming and violent behaviour which is not unlike David’s modus operandi (2 Sam 11:6-15). Accordingly, just as the narrative implies that David and Amnon are indistinguishable from one another in terms of their bad character (2 Sam 11:6-15, 13:1-14), so too does it imply that Absalom is as morally flawed as David and Amnon (2 Sam 14:28-32). Ultimately, therefore the content of the irony is corruption in the monarchy.

4.1.12: 2 Samuel 14:31-32

\textsuperscript{626} Fokkelman,“King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 150.
\textsuperscript{627} Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam, 281.
\textsuperscript{628} Caspari, “The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15-20,” 72.
\textsuperscript{629} Schulz, 152. Absalom’s violent character is also found in Absalom’s plan to kill Amnon (13:23-28). This incident is alluded to in 14:30b, for just as Absalom sent his servants to kill Amnon, after two years of brooding, so too did he send his servants to set fire to the field.
At the lower level of 14:31 Joab goes to Absalom and asks him why he has set Joab’s field on fire. At the lower level of 14:32 Absalom replies to Joab that he sent for Joab so that Joab may send a message to the king. Absalom tells Joab to ask the king why Absalom has come from Geshur. Absalom then tells Joab to tell the king that Absalom would have been better off living in Geshur than at a distance from the king, and that if there is any guilt in Absalom then David should kill him. At the upper level of the narrative the question to the king with respect to Absalom leaving Geshur is a rhetorical question; and, as such, ironic. The opposition here is the difference between what Absalom says and what Absalom means. Absalom’s question explicitly asks why he has come from Geshur, however, he implies that he wants to know why David has not permitted him to participate fully in the community. David is the object of ironic attack as the ironist, Absalom, implicitly makes a pejorative criticism of David.

The grade the verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apprehended that Absalom is asking a rhetorical question with an implicit criticism of David. The mode of the irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category, as mentioned previously is the rhetorical question. However, there are two questions asked. The other question is asked by Joab; Joab asks Absalom why he set Joab’s field on fire. This is merely an inquiry; it is not a rhetorical question. By contrast, the other question, Absalom’s question for David (14:32) is a rhetorical question. This question is:

למה באתי מגשור

As we have seen, Absalom is not intending Joab to ask David why Absalom came from Geshur since this is already known to both Absalom and David. This rhetorical question is an element of Absalom’s speech to Joab expressing his anger that his predicament has not been resolved by David.
However, there is an additional implication, namely, that there is no easy answer to Absalom’s predicament. As has been discussed, the proper course of action for David to take in response to Absalom’s unlawful act of killing Amnon, was to have Absalom killed, or to leave Absalom in exile (in keeping with the story of Cain and Abel). In ordinary circumstances there would be guilt in Absalom. Thus Absalom’s remark in 14:32 is as follows:

Given the outcome of the ruse of the woman of Tekoa, David has sworn to take on Absalom’s guilt, and thereby, David himself, rather than Absalom, should rightly be killed (or, at least, exiled). Therefore, there is no easy solution to Absalom’s predicament.

4.1.13: 2 Samuel 14:33

Identifying irony in 14:33 is difficult, and it is likely that this verse is a straightforward narration of events. However, there is also a possibility that irony arises from the understatement of David’s act of kissing Absalom. If there is irony perhaps it is as follows.

At the lower level of 14:33 Joab goes to the king and tells him what Absalom told him to tell David. David summons Absalom, and Absalom comes to David and prostrates himself before David. David then kisses Absalom (14:32). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist emphasises the significance of this event by portraying it in understated language. After all, restoring Absalom is contrary to the laws and even, it would appear, to Absalom’s expectation of his own treatment!

In 14:32 Absalom’s remark, “Let him kill me” supports the idea that death is an appropriate punishment for Absalom killing Amnon.
The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed in the language and by recourse to background knowledge. As far as the understated language is concerned, Schulz notes that 14:33 is the climax of chapter 14, yet he also notes that Absalom’s reconciliation with David is described fleetingly.\(^{631}\) However, regardless of the understated representation of this event, it might also be added that the wording is to some extent belaboured. In this respect Perry and Sternberg’s pattern of verbosity and curt expression is helpful. The verbosity is evident in 14:33a, and the curt expression is in 14:33b. The curt expression is as follows:

變ך המלך לאבשלום

David’s kiss has variously been interpreted to mean that Absalom had been restored to favour,\(^{632}\) that Absalom was kissed in order to seal his place as the future king,\(^{633}\) and that the kiss was a simple greeting gesture as can be seen in Gen 33:4; 50:1; Exod 18:7.\(^{634}\) However, given that the entire chapter has been concerned with the appropriate treatment of Absalom, it is reasonable to interpret the kiss as restoring Absalom to favour. This is in keeping with Bar-Efrat’s suggestion that the mention of מָלֵךְ three times in this verse, emphasizes an official atmosphere, and is otherwise devoid of the personal warmth that may be expected of the reunion of a father and son.\(^{635}\)

The complexity in respect of Absalom’s restoration has been handled by David in an injudicious manner, as was the manner in which David chose to deal with the situation of Uriah and Bathsheba.\(^{636}\) The criticism in this regard, then, is that David has unrightfully restored Absalom as the heir to the throne, and even though in doing so

\(^{632}\) Conroy, Absalom Absalom! 103.
\(^{634}\) Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 191.
\(^{635}\) Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 157.
\(^{636}\) Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 335.
David has been true to his oath, nevertheless, it has been brought about only through trickery. This does not portray a king who administers justice adequately for the good of the community. The content of the irony is David’s inability of administer justice effectively and David is the object of ironic attack. An addition irony is supplied by Marcus who suggests that it is ironic that David kisses Absalom as a sign of restoration given that Absalom later (2 Sam 15:5) uses kisses as a means of gaining support for his revolution.\textsuperscript{637}

4.1.14: Summary of 2 Samuel 14:1-33

This chapter is full of characters who act deceptively and or immorally. Joab tricks David into swearing an oath that David does not want to uphold. The woman of Tekoa is the agent of Joab’s deception. Even the fictitious blood-avenger is motivated by inheritance. David upholds the oath that he is held to, however, he appears to do it begrudgingly, and Absalom can be accused of being deceptive when he tricks Joab into championing him further to David. The ironic criticism in the text might then concern the matrix of corruption, as opposed to obedience to Yahweh, which comes through in this narrative.

In 14:1-3 there is an insinuation that Joab’s plan is deceptive. 14:4-7 is an example of the sub-category of impersonal irony; pretended defence of the victim, where David’s incompetence is ‘defended’. 14:8-11 is an example of overstatement. In this instance, David, who is the victim of the irony, is tricked into taking an oath which absolves Absalom of any punishment for Amnon’s death. 14:12-14 use a rhetorical question to highlight the oath which David has taken on. In 14:15-17, the sub-category

\textsuperscript{637} I am indebted to David Marcus for this comment on my thesis.
of irony called praise in order to blame, suggests that David is not a good administrator of justice.

In 14:18-20 the sub-category of praise in order to blame highlights that David does not know what is going on around him. In 14:21-23 irrelevant praise is given by Joab, which makes the sub-category of irony, praise in order to blame. Joab thanks David for his favour, despite knowing that he tricked David. In 14:25-26 Absalom’s perfection is overstated. This leads into an insinuation that Absalom is planned to take the throne. In 14:27 there is an innuendo which comes with the mention of Absalom’s daughter, Tamar. 14:28-30 is an example of irony displayed, which point to Absalom’s aggression. In 14:31-32 a rhetorical question elucidates the confusion of the narrative by suggesting that Absalom should not have left Geshur, and that David has not successfully administered justice in this instance. 14:33 closes the chapter with understated language which points to an unresolved reconciliation between Absalom and David.\footnote{At this stage in the narrative it is worth noting the parallels between the story of Saul’s demise and the present story of King David. In doing so, the reader becomes aware that David is failing as a king in this narrative, from the perspective of a parallel narrative. In 1 Sam 14:1 Jonathan does not tell Saul that he is fighting with the Philistines, just as Absalom kept his intentions regarding Amnon a secret (13:23-27). Saul commits himself to a rash oath which ends up having implications for his son (1 Sam 14:24). Similarly, David is tricked into committing to an oath which involves his son (14:10-11). Jonathan does not know of Saul’s oath (1 Sam 14:27), just as Absalom did not know of David’s oath (14:32). Jonathan rebels against his father’s oath (1 Sam 14:29), Absalom rebels against David’s decision (14:32). Saul builds the first altar to the Yahweh (1 Sam 14:35), David wants to build the first temple to the Yahweh (2 Sam 7:2). God does not answer Saul (1 Sam 37), just as God does not respond to David’s fasting (2 Sam 12:22-23). God discerned that guilt was in Saul and Jonathan, but not in the people (1 Sam 14:41), similarly, the guilt in Absalom is reputed to have been transferred to David (2 Sam 14:9). In 1 Sam 14:44 Saul attempts to take on Jonathan’s guilt. The people of Israel rescued Jonathan from God’s judgement so that not one hair should fall onto the ground (1 Sam 14:45), David ensures that not one of Absalom’s hairs should fall to the ground (2 Sam 14:11). In 1 Sam 15:9 Saul takes the spoils of war, and in 2 Sam 12:30 David takes the spoils of war. Saul is rejected in 1 Sam 15:10, and David is rejected in 2 Sam 12:24-25. Saul did evil in the sight of the Lord (1 Sam 15:19), as David did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Sam 12:9). Saul recognises that he has sinned in the eyes of God (1 Sam 15:24), just as David did (2 Sam 12:13).}
CHAPTER FOUR - PART TWO: ABSALOM’S REVOLT

4.2: 2 Samuel 15-18

4.2.1: 2 Samuel 15:1

At the lower level of 15:1 it is reported that Absalom obtained a chariot, horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom intends to mount a challenge to the throne, given that the chariot, horses, and running men constitute a small army. Here there is an opposition between what is explicitly reported and what is implied. Absalom is the object of ironic attack since the implication, indeed insinuation, concerns his treasonable actions. The content of the irony is Absalom’s intended challenge to the throne.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of the verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is insinuation. As stated above, the insinuation is that Absalom’s display of chariot, horses, and running men constitutes a royal challenge. This insinuation is consistent with Mauchline’s remark that Absalom’s retinue was in fact a private army, and also with Anderson’s comment that חמשים is a standard military unit as found in Exod 18:21.

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12:13). Saul’s sin leads to his rejection (1 Sam 15:26), and into the narrative of the anointing of David in 1 Sam 16.

639 Insinuation is the dominant sub-category of irony in this verse. However, an argument may also be made for overstatement as a lesser sub-category of irony in this instance. Baldwin argues that Absalom’s attendants were extravagant and theatrical (Baldwin, I and 2 Samuel, 257). Similarly, Hertzberg (336) argues that Absalom’s display was propaganda (Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 336).

640 Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam, 283. Alter also suggests that this verse makes a mockery of the praise from the woman of Tekoa who speaks of David as knowing everything which is going on around him (2 Sam 14:20). This claim supports the irony in this verse which is spoken of in-depth in the previous chapter.

641 Mauchline, I and 2 Samuel, 269.
and Deut 1:15.\textsuperscript{642} The insinuation claim is more plausible than the claim that horses and chariots were merely symbols of royal status and that, therefore, Absalom’s retinue did not indicate the signs of the beginning stages of a revolt.\textsuperscript{643}

Furthermore, the argument that Absalom was in the early stages of mounting a challenge against David’s throne is strengthened by 1 Sam 8:11, which strongly implies that Absalom was acting as a king might:

\begin{quote}
וראמר זה יהוה משׁפט המלך אشور ימלך עליכם ואחר יקאח והدراجתוכו יהוה ראה לפני מרכבתו ויפרשו וידם לПетербург
\end{quote}

The insinuation (that Absalom will act unlawfully) is strengthened by the allusion to 1 Sam 8:11, since not only is Absalom acting as a king might act, but he is acting as a corrupt king might act. It is also worth noting that the information in this verse strengthens the claim that David’s judgement to return Absalom to Jerusalem was ill-conceived.

Of note, there is a complexity in this verse as Absalom’s threat to David’s kingship is in keeping with David’s punishment in 2 Sam 12:10-11. Thereby, although the challenge to David’s throne comes in the distinct form of Absalom, who is dissatisfied with David’s inability to exercise judgement correctly (2 Sam 13:21-22, 13:23-37, 14:32), Absalom’s discontent is actually part of God’s punishment (2 Sam 12:10-11), and is therefore preordained.

4.2.2: 2 Samuel 15:2-3

At the lower level of 15:2 Absalom arose early, stood beside the road near the gate of the city, and asked the people who had come to bring a case before the king for

\textsuperscript{642} Anderson, \textit{WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel}, 194.
\textsuperscript{643} McKane, \textit{I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary}, 248.
judgement, what city they were from. When the people answered that they were from a tribe of Israel, Absalom responded that their cases were “good and right,” but that nobody had been appointed by the king’s office to hear the cases (15:3). Absalom’s assertion is not credible since there is evidence of the king exercising his personal judgement in three verses in 2 Samuel. In 8:15 it is reported that David administered justice to the people, in 12:1-6 David passes judgement in the case of the rich man, and in 14:10 David passes judgement in the case of the woman from Tekoa. Therefore, it can be assumed that there was somebody to hear the people’s claims. Moreover, Absalom would have known this and, crucially, also known that it was the king and not some appointee who exercised judgement in these cases; indeed, this was a critical role of the king. Further, the people who had come to bring their case before the king would also have known all this. Therefore, Absalom’s assertion is a pretence. Specifically, he is pretending that he does not know that it is an important role of the king to exercise judgment in these cases. So Absalom in performing this act of pretended ignorance is implying that David is an incompetent administrator of justice, and by extension, an incompetent king. In dismissing the king in this manner, Absalom sets himself up as a perfect replacement (or at least according to Absalom) in the next episode.

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. Although Absalom says that there is nobody deputed by the king to hear their claims, the evidence suggests that the king would hear the people’s cases and that they would know this. Absalom’s remark that a position existed whereby a representative of the king would hear claims is plainly a deceit. No position is mentioned in the lists of David’s officials (2 Sam 8:15). David is the object of Absalom’s ironic attack. However, there is a further irony; and Absalom is the object of this second ironic attack. Absalom himself is the confidently unaware victim of
irony. For Absalom takes a stance of moral superiority in relation to David, despite the fact that he is the beneficiary of David’s incompetence. Specifically, as previously discussed, Absalom was responsible for the unlawful killing of Amnon, and the just outcome of Amnon’s unlawful killing was either death or exile for Absalom. But David permitted Absalom to go unpunished and did so as a result of trickery – trickery that Absalom is blissfully unaware of. It can be assumed that Absalom wrongly believes that there is no legitimate guilt in him (14:33), for the reason that David has restored him in Jerusalem. Yet, the reader knows that Absalom is only in Jerusalem because David was tricked by the woman of Tekoa.

Further discussion is needed in reference to Absalom’s ironic attack on David. Here the grade of verbal irony is overt as Absalom’s’ pretence will be immediately apparent to his audience, given their background knowledge. Moreover, it belongs to the sub-category of pretended ignorance. As far as the background knowledge of the narrative is concerned, 15:2 indicates that Absalom positioned himself in the context of a formal legal setting. Meir Malul remarks,

This court of law was convened in the שער (gate), the known place of judgement and other legal transactions in ancient times, and early in the morning…, when courts of law used to convene in ancient times. The Judges (and litigants/defendants) are said to stand to pass judgement, as it is said about Absalom too.644

Yet, the irony arises in 15:3 as Absalom tells the people;

האמר אלי עבשלום ראה דברך טובים ונכהים ושמע אין‑לך מאת המלך

The common translation, “see, your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you” (NRSV), is problematic, as the people are waiting for

judgement from the king (15:2). This difficulty has led to the argument that David had begun to neglect administering justice, or that it was difficult to get a hearing before the king because of bureaucratic incompetence. These comments are potentially true. However, it cannot be denied that Absalom’s words are misleading since the people had come to put their case before the king as was customary.

Absalom’s dismissiveness of the king as incompetent, taken in context, implies that Absalom wanted to be the king. For instance, the people did not come to Absalom but instead he called out to them (15:2). This suggests that he redirected the people from where they intended to go, which was presumably to the king so that their claims could be heard (15:2). The insinuation here is that Absalom was actively vying for the king’s role as judge. The evidence for such an insinuation is strengthened by our knowledge of Absalom’s anger towards David described in the previous chapters (2 Sam 14:32).

4.2.3: 2 Samuel 15:4-6

At the lower level of 15:4 Absalom remarks that if he were judge he would give justice to everybody who brought cases to him. In 15:5 Absalom kisses the hands of the people who come near to him to do obeisance. In 15:6 it is reported that Absalom treats every Israelite who comes to the king for judgement in this way and that he stole the hearts of the people of Israel. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom’s actions were manipulative and that he was seeking to ingratiate himself with

647 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 257.
648 Interestingly, the only plaintiff with a ריב in the books of Samuel is David. In 1 Sam 24:16 David implores Yahweh to judge his complaint against Saul, and in 1 Sam 25:39 David gives thanks to God for settling his complaint by killing Nabal.
the people. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant.

Absalom’s attempt at ingratiation, in the context of our background knowledge of the text, suggests that Absalom is vying to be king. For instance, although Absalom tells the people in 15:3 \( ושׂמע אין־לך מאת המלך \) in 15:4 he does not suggest that he should be a hearer for the king, but instead a שׁפט. This indicates that Absalom is making a claim for the throne.\(^{649}\) We can assume this because when the Israelites asked Samuel in 1 Sam 8:5 to give them a king, their sole request was that he would be their judge. Moreover, in 1 Sam 8:20 the Israelites ask Samuel for a שׁפטנו מלכנו and to go out to battle before them. In short, the Israelites want a king who has both the role of a judge and that of a military leader. Arguably, Absalom’s small army (collection of a chariot, horses and running men in 15:1) is a symbolic reference to the request for a military leader. Evidently, then, these verses challenge Herrmann’s argument that Absalom was appealing to the tradition of the judges, over the tradition of kings.\(^{650}\)

We have seen that the ironist is implying that Absalom is trying to steal the throne. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is insinuation. The insinuation is heightened in 15:5. In this verse Absalom acts as a modern-day politician on a campaign trail might; garnering popularity in an attempt to secure power.\(^{651}\) This way of proceeding is in itself inappropriate since it is God who chooses the king; it is not meant to be a popularity contest. Like David in 2

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\(^{649}\) Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 270.


\(^{651}\) Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 145.
Sam 14:33 Absalom’s kisses to the people of Israel are insincere, indeed manipulative. The deceptiveness is further explored in 15:6b:

וַיִּגְנֹב עֶבֶר־לָבָב עַל־בָּנוֹ הַגֵּרָא הַיָּמִים

This expression does not mean that Absalom captivated the hearts of the people, but rather that Absalom deceived the people or stole their will. The antecedent of וַיִּגְנֹֽב is found in Gen 31:20 where Jacob clearly deceives Laban:

וַיִּגְנֹֽב יוֹגֵנֶב יִצְעַק אֶת־לָבָּן לֶב

In 15:4-6, Absalom is the object of ironic attack, and the unknowing victim of irony as it would appear that Absalom is confidently unaware that he does not display the right characteristics to be a good judge or king. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is conveyed in the language and is informed by the background knowledge of the text.

It might also be argued that David is implicitly criticized in the section as his failings as a king have paved the way for an uprising. The current discontent may be traced back to David’s transgressions in chapter 11 where David committed adultery.

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652 Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Sam, 284, and Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel, 258.

653 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 356. The extent of Absalom’s deceit is debated. In 15:2 Absalom asks the people where they are from, and when the people tell him they are from Israel, he shows partiality in his judgement towards them (15:3). In 15:6 the Israelites are mentioned twice. Thereby, there is an emphasis on the people of Israel. This emphasis has led scholars to debate who Absalom was trying to gain favour with. McKane argues that Absalom is only speaking to the men of Israel as the northern tribes, given that the supplicants had travelled to Jerusalem to have their complaints heard (McKane, I & II Samuel: Introduction and Commentary, 250). Similarly, Mauchline argues that it would appear in 15:6 that Absalom is addressing the tribes of northern Israel, given that he was more popular there (Mauchline, I and 2 Samuel).
with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:4), and gave orders for Uriah’s execution (2 Sam 11:14-15). As a result of these transgressions Yahweh tells David in 2 Sam 12:11:

This is confirmed in chapter 13 when Amnon rapes Tamar (2 Sam 13:14), and in the retaliatory killing of Amnon (2 Sam 13:29). It could be said that Absalom’s anger would have been abated had David punished Amnon (2 Sam 13:21-22). It can certainly be maintained that Absalom was frustrated that David would not pass a definitive judgement in his own case (2 Sam 14:32), and that this fuelled his present subversive action. This narrative then outlines the extent of the troubles which are brought about by disobeying God’s laws.

4.2.4: 2 Samuel 15:7-9

At the lower level of 15:7 it is reported that after forty years Absalom asked the king if he (Absalom) could go to Hebron and pay the vow that he had made to the Lord. In 15:8 Absalom goes on to say that he made a vow while he lived in Geshur: if the Lord brings him back to Jerusalem, Absalom will then worship the Lord in Hebron. In 15:9 the king tells Absalom to go in peace, so Absalom goes to Hebron. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom intends to go to Hebron for the purpose of usurping the throne. This implication is strengthened by the consideration that in the past when David’s sons have asked permission from him to do something, they have been engaged in deceiving David (2 Sam 13:6-7, 24-27). Moreover, it is a matter of our background knowledge that Hebron is the place where David was anointed king. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. The irony is twofold: insinuation and pretended defence of the victim.
In relation to pretended defence of the victim, as we have just seen, it is implied that David is about to be duped by Absalom. However, it can be reasonably expected of David that he should see through this deception, given Absalom, Joab etc. have deceived him before and given that Hebron was where he, David, was anointed king. So David is both the object of ironic attack as well as being the unknowing victim of irony.

Of note, this passage may also be spoken of as a deception which is not necessarily ironic. However, as already mentioned, the king is continually tricked in this narrative, which not only adds a comical element to the story, but also presents an implicit criticism of the king. This critical element lends itself better to irony and satire, than it does to a plain deception.

In relation to insinuation, a sub-category of impersonal irony, the ironist insinuates that Absalom is going to Hebron to usurp the throne. The grade of the verbal irony, in this instance, is covert as it is conveyed in the language and only fully understood with reference to the background knowledge of the text. As far as anomalous language is concerned, 15:7 begins this section with the difficult statement that Absalom went to speak to the king at the end of ארבעים שׁנה. It would seem implausible to suggest that Absalom waited forty years to do this, which has commonly caused scholars to suggest that this is an error which is better read as four years, as it is written in the Syriac versions and the Vulgate, except for the Codex Aminatinus, which records the time as being forty years.654 In line with verbal irony it is argued that forty

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years may be an exaggerated amount of time or an overstatement. The overstatement
draws attention to the insinuation that Absalom is going to challenge the throne. It is
also worth noting the additional irony that the number of years that Absalom waited to
commence his revolt against David is the same number of the years of David’s reign
over Israel (forty).  

The background information which indicates an insinuation in the narrative
concerns David’s history with Hebron. Absalom’s decision to go to Hebron is striking,
given David’s history with the city. In 2 Sam 2:1 the Lord tells David to go to Hebron,
where David became the king of Judah in Hebron for seven years and six months (2
Sam 2:11). In 2 Sam 5:3 the elders of the Northern tribes of Israel came to Hebron, and
David made a covenant with them. This resulted in David being anointed as the king
over all of Israel. Furthermore, Hertzberg suggests that the Hebronites were hostile
towards David for moving the holy capital to Jerusalem.  

Thereby, it can be assumed that Absalom’s actions are provocative and that his intention may be to usurp the
throne, strengthening the idea of an insinuation in this passage.

However, the nature of Absalom’s vow is unclear. Alter suggests that this vow
may have been a vow of penance; it may also be the case that Absalom was making a

Barthelemy, Critique. 271-272; P. K. McCarter, II Samuel. A New Translation with
Introduction, Notes, and Commentary (AB 9: Garden City 1984), 355; R. P. Gordon, I & II
Samuel. A Commentary (Exeter 1986), 271; Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 193. n.7a; The
New International Version (Grand Rapids 1978); The New Jerusalem Bible (London 1985);
The Revised English Bible (Oxford 1989)” Robert Althann, “The meaning of ‘rb’y m shnh in 2
Sam 15:7,” Bib 73, no.2 (1992), 248-252, 248-249. It may be more plausible to argue as
Althann does, that שׁנה is better interpreted as a verb which repeats or intensifies an expression,
and that the amount of time is better interpreted within the context of the narrative. Althann’s
interpretation of this verse is, “And at the end of forty days Absalom spoke insistently to the
king, “Please may I go and fulfil my vow, which I made to the Lord, in Hebron”” (Althann,
248). However, Forty days would appear to be a short amount of time for Absalom who has
previously been shown to brood for some time (2 Sam 13:23; 14:28).

A comment by David Marcus.

Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 337.

Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, 284.
routine vow as a temporary Nazirite. McCarter argues that the vow that Absalom made was to the Hebronite Yahweh and could therefore not be honoured in Jerusalem. Yet, Fokkelman suggests that Absalom is feigning piety in order to trick David into allowing him to go to Hebron where he intended to uphold the vow that he made to himself to take revenge and usurp David’s position. This latter interpretation would seem to be correct in the light of Absalom’s small army, efforts at ingratiation with the people of Israel etc.

Let me now turn to the ironic content of the insinuation that Absalom is intending to usurp the throne. In 15:8b Absalom says; 

אִם יֵשׁ הָיָה יְהוָה יְרוּשָׁלָם וְעָבֹדָתי את־יְהוָה

This verse suggests that Absalom believes that God is on his side; specifically, that Absalom is righteous since God has chosen to restore him to Jerusalem. However, the reader knows that the only reason that Absalom is back in Jerusalem is because the woman of Tekoa tricked David into bringing Absalom out of exile in chapter 14. This indicates that Absalom is confidently unaware that it was not at Yahweh’s instigation that he was returned to Jerusalem. Instead, Joab was the architect of Absalom’s return, as Joab hired a successful actress and counted on David’s

658 McCarter Jr., Il Samuel, 356.
659 Fokkelman,”King David (Il Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 170-171.
660 This complexity could be a case of dramatic irony whereby, the character in the narrative is unaware of an important element of the story which is known to the reader. However, to call this event an example of dramatic irony is to downplay the arrogance of Absalom and the critical message of the impersonal ironist. Although these forms of irony can be similar, distinctions can be made in the different functions of the irony. For example, impersonal irony moralises, whereas dramatic irony is comical. Furthermore, impersonal irony is concerned with the message of the narrative, and the hope that vices will be exposed in order in order that they may be learned from, whereas dramatic irony is more concerned with irony for its aesthetic appeal.
foolishness. If it were the case that Yahweh brought it about that Absalom was returned to Jerusalem, then God’s laws and punishments would have been compromised.

Absalom intends to usurp the throne and does so in the belief that he is God’s chosen one since God is responsible for returning him from exile. However, it is a trick played on David by Joab that has in fact caused him to be returned him from exile. So, ironically, Absalom’s intended action, far from being righteous is actually treasonous. In this episode Absalom is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, Absalom’s confident unawareness of what is actually going on makes him a victim of irony.

4.2.5: 2 Samuel 15:10

At the lower level of 15:10 Absalom sends messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to tell them to shout that Absalom has become the king at Hebron and do so as soon as they hear the trumpet. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist knows that David is the king of Israel and, indeed, the rightful king, and that there is no credible evidence to suggest that Absalom has gained Yahweh’s favour. Of course, Absalom wrongly suspects that his return to Jerusalem is a result of God’s intervention and that, therefore, he is the rightful king. As already mentioned, it is clear that God works through human agents, and God’s actions can be seen in events, but it would be inconsistent for God to initiate action that is contrary to the law, i.e. returning Absalom to Jerusalem. The opposition in the narrative is between Absalom’s claim to be the rightful king and our background knowledge that he is not. It is ironic that Absalom, a transgressor and beneficiary of trickery, believes himself to be the rightful king. Absalom is, therefore, the object of the ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of the irony since it is his hubris that causes him to think that he has God’s favour.
The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent, and is implied in part by our background knowledge and in part by the language used in the narrative. As has already been mentioned, we know that Absalom is not the rightful king. At the lower level this verse could be interpreted as a straightforward deception or misunderstanding on Absalom’s part. However, in the text there is an emphasis on the words מֶלֶךְ אבֶּשְׁלֹם בַּהֲרֵם. This emphasis implies that Absalom is a fool since the stress is on his declaration that he is the rightful king when, of course, he is not. This ironic attack on Absalom ridicules him by way of his own misrepresentation of himself as king. Therefore, the sub-category of impersonal irony involved is misrepresentation or false statement. This sub-category of irony draws attention to what is true by way of emphasizing what is not true. The content of the irony is Absalom’s belief that he is the rightful king and the fact that he is acting on this belief.

Of note, 15:10 confirms that Absalom’s intention in going to Hebron was to create an uprising against David, and that he was not going for religious reasons. Absalom was similarly deceptive in 2 Sam 13:24-27 when he tricked the king into sending Amnon to an ambush, albeit not in the service of usurping the throne but rather to avenge his sister. Absalom’s deceptiveness can also be discerned in 15:6, when he steals the hearts of the people of Israel. This pattern of deceptive behaviour on the part of Absalom suggests that his actions of cutting his hair (in 2 Sam 14:26) was not an expression of public piety, even supposing he was a Nazarite.

4.2.6: 2 Samuel 15:11

At the lower level of 15:11 it is stated that two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom as invited guests but had no knowledge of what was going on. At the upper
level the ironist is feigning ignorance and pretending that the men do not have any knowledge of Absalom’s intentions, when they actually do.

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. The narrator tells us the men had no knowledge of what was going on, when they really did. The evidence that they did know what Absalom intended is our knowledge that Absalom sent messengers to all the tribes of Israel to declare himself to be king. Thereby, in 15:11 the ironist is feigning ignorance; so the ironist is the source of the innocence in the narrative. Moreover the grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony; the sub-category of impersonal irony being pretended error or ignorance. In this sub-category of impersonal irony the ironist pretends not to know the truth. The object of ironic attack is the two hundred men from Jerusalem. They are the object of pejorative criticism since they were implicated in Absalom’s attempt to usurp the throne. Contrary to the above view most scholars hold that the two hundred men from Jerusalem were in fact unaware of Absalom’s plans. As stated above, this does not accommodate the fact that Absalom sent messengers to all the tribes to declare himself to be king.

Of note, Fokkelman argues that the ‘innocence’ in this verse highlights David’s ignorance to what is going on around him.

Their innocence חוסר is so strongly emphasized…that I find the designations ironic. The naivety of these simpletons recalls David’s blind spot, which he shows by his apparent surprise in 15:13.661

I agree with Fokkelman that the men’s ‘innocence’ is emphasised and is an indicator of irony. However, in my view, and for the reasons given, this innocence is only pretended.

661 Fokkelman,”King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 172-174.
4.2.7: 2 Samuel 15:12

At the lower level of 15:12 Absalom offers sacrifices and sends for Ahithophel the Gilonite who is David’s counsellor from Giloh. Verse 15:12 also states that Absalom’s conspiracy grew, and more people joined him. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom is sending for someone to act as his war counsellor. Moreover, at the upper level the ironist insinuates that Absalom is a fool, given this counsellor rejoices in a name that means “My brother is folly.” The opposition in the narrative is the incongruity in the prince’s decision to send for a counsellor – someone who is to provide advice – yet whose name means, “My brother is folly.” In this episode Absalom is both the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony. The irony arises from the opposition between the two levels. The grade of verbal irony is overt and is apparent from the language, including the use of a name meaning “My brother is folly”.

The evidence in respect of the meaning of Ahithophel’s name is as follows. Hertzberg argues that Ahithophel is translated to mean “My brother is folly.” McCarter suggests that the name means “foolishness, insipidity.” Both men agree that Ahithophel is a play on the proper name Eliphelet, which translates as “God is release” or “deliverance”. McCarter writes, “…Ahithophel might be a deliberate distortion satirizing the man’s ill-used wisdom.”

Although the name “Absalom” is not in itself satirical it has a satirical connotation in this context; indeed, its use in this context is ironic. For the name means

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662 Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 338.
663 Ibid.
664 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 357.
665 Ibid.
“Father is peace,” and yet David (Absalom’s father) is known for being a military king, and in this instance, Absalom is setting out to wage a war against David!

The upshot of all this is that Absalom is the object of a twofold ironic attack. It is insinuated that he is a fool for seeking war counsel from Ahithophel, but also a war-monger for planning to wage an unjust war against his father. Therefore the symbolism arising from the combination of the meanings of the two names in this context – the meanings, “Father is peace” and “foolishness” - is deeply ironic.

The mode of verbal irony in this verse is impersonal, and the sub-category is insinuation. The insinuation is that Ahithophel is not only a fool but a war-monger.666

4.2.8: 2 Samuel 15:13-17

This passage involves two distinct instances of irony. The first of these is present in the form of ridicule or “low burlesque” writing. In this form of verbal irony a person of high status is presented in a manner ordinarily reserved for a person of low status.667

At the lower level of 15:13 a messenger tells David that “the hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom.” In 15:14 David tells his officials that they must flee or Absalom will attack them and bring disaster on them and the city. In 15:15 David’s officials tell him that they are ready to do whatever David tells them to do. In 15:16 the king leaves Jerusalem with his household, except for ten concubines who are

666 Of note, in the beginning of 15:12 Absalom sends for Ahithophel who is spoken of being an advisor to David. It is possible that this Ahithophel is the same man who is spoken of in the genealogy in 2 Sam 23:34 which lists Ahithophel as Eliam’s father. This suggests that the man Absalom sends for is Bathsheba’s grandfather (McCarter J., II Samuel, 357). If this is the case then Absalom has sent for the man who is the grandfather of the woman that David took (2 Sam 11:4), the grandfather-in-law of the soldier that David had executed (2 Sam 11:14-15), and unbeknownst to Absalom and Ahithophel, the man who is the great-grandfather to Yahweh’s favoured prince, Solomon (2 Sam 12:24-25). Given Ahithophel’s unique family connections, arguably the presence of Ahithophel in the story of Absalom’s conspiracy against David, is an allusion to David’s misdeeds, which pave the way for Absalom’s revolt.

667 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 79.
left to look after the house. In 15:17 it is stated that David left with all of the people and they stopped when they came to the last house. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the king is a coward or is at least acting contrary to his warrior image. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what David does in this passage (act in a cowardly manner), and what the ironist otherwise knows of David (that he is a great warrior).

David is the object of ironic attack and the grade of verbal irony is covert. The irony depends in part on our background knowledge and in part on the kind of language used. For instance, 15:14 is replete with overstated language showing David to be in an uncustomary panic:

Not only is the language overstated in 15:14, but it is also in stark contrast to David’s controlled remark in 2 Sam 11:25:

Therefore, the portrayal of David in 15:14 is radically different from in earlier verses. In earlier verses he is portrayed as calm and self-possessed. Ironically, the composed military leader is now a foolish coward. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category of impersonal irony is low burlesque.

The second instance of irony in the passage is as follows. These events narrated in 15:13-17 connect back to chapter 12. In chapter 12 God promised to punish David for his transgressions. Specifically, God said that David’s wives would be taken from him (2 Sam 12:11). However, as we saw above, the events narrated in 15:16 include
David deliberately leaving his concubines behind to look after the house in the context of his panicky flight from Absalom:

In short, ironically, David is the architect of God’s punishment of him; for it is David who decides to leave his ‘wives’ behind for Absalom to take.

This irony is not merely situational but is intended by the author. For it is incongruous that in the midst of fleeing Jerusalem in a panic to save his life David would organise for a group of women to remain in Jerusalem to look after the house. Moreover, this incident explicitly connects to God’s punishment described in chapter 12. In 2 Sam 12:11 God says that David’s wives will be given to somebody else who will take them before everybody in Israel.

In addition, in 2 Sam 12:10 God says that the sword will never leave David’s house. In 2 Sam 12:11 God says that trouble will be raised from within David’s own house. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, if David had punished Amnon then it might be assumed that Absalom’s rage would be assuaged. If David had killed Absalom or left him in exile, the revolt would not have begun. If David had taken his concubines with him then they would not be vulnerable to possible attack. Taken together, all these events suggest that David is the instigator of his own punishment.

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668 15:17 is emphasized by a ‘resumptive repetition’ whereby, the information about the concubines is sandwiched between the knowledge that David left (15:16a; 17a). (Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, 286).

669 The change in circumstances of David and Absalom is highlighted in 15:17 where it is stated that David stopped at the distant house. Fokkelman argues that the house in the distance is symbolic of David’s new found status as an exile (Fokkelman,“King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kgs. 1-2),” 179. Thereby, David and Absalom have reversed positions, and David who was once the king is now in exile.
4.2.9: 2 Samuel 15:18

At the lower level of 15:18 it is stated that David left Israel with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all of the six hundred Gittites who followed him from Gath. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is about to wage war against Israel. Importantly, he is about to do so with mercenaries who previously were prepared to fight for the Philistines with David and against the Israelites (1 Sam 27:2, 29:8). This portrayal of David is in stark contrast with the portrayal of David in the legend of David’s rise. In the legend of David’s rise David defied the Philistines and saved the Israelites. For instance, in the rise of David, David became a hero when he killed a giant Philistine with only a slingshot (1 Sam 17:49). David slays Goliath with the following declaration (1 Sam 17:45):

אתה בא אלי בחרב ובתנית ובכידון ואנכי בא־אליך בשׁם יהוה צבאות אלהי מערכות ישׁראל אשׁר חרפת

In contrast, the mention of the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites in the current verse, is a reminder of David’s days of fighting on behalf of the Philistines. For instance, Auld suggests that the word פלשתי is an alternative spelling for פל磌, and therefore it would seem reasonable to assume that these were the men who fought with David and the Philistines.670 Moreover, it is documented that six-hundred men followed him to Gath (1 Sam 27:2). These men are presumably the same men who are mentioned in 15:18. Further, David was told by Achish, the king of the Philistines that it was necessary for David to fight with the Philistines against all of Israel (1 Sam 28:1) and David was prepared to do this. However, David was dismissed from the Philistine army (1 Sam 29:1-11), despite his protestations because Achish did not trust him. (1 Sam 29:8). The implication of 15:18 – taken in conjunction with 1 Sam 28:1; 29:1-11, is that

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David is disloyal to Israel and generally untrustworthy. This portrayal of David is a parody of David in the legend of David’s rise – a heroic figure steadfastly loyal to Israel.

In 15:18 David is the object of the ironic attack and the grade of verbal irony is covert. The irony relies on background knowledge. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is parody.

4.2.10: 2 Samuel 15:19-20

At the lower level of 15:19 David asks Ittai the Gittite why he is coming with them. David tells him to go back and stay with the king because Ittai is a foreigner and an exile. In 15:20 David says that Ittai came to Israel not long ago and asks Ittai if David should make him join David in exile. David tells Ittai to go back and to take his kinsfolk with him, and gives him a blessing. At the upper level of the narrative, in asking these questions David is implicitly making statements, i.e. these are rhetorical questions. As will shortly emerge, the implication of these rhetorical questions is that David does not trust Ittai and would like him to return to Israel. The opposition is between what David explicitly says in his questions to Ittai and what David implies.

The implied content of these rhetorical questions relies in part on our background knowledge and in part on features of the language used in the passage. For instance, the words that David uses in his command to Ittai are unusual, notably, David’s mention of Absalom as king. There is confusion in the story as the narrator speaks of David as the king, and David speaks of Absalom as the king. Hertzberg argues that this is not an instance of irony. Instead, he argues that David’s speech is the
appropriate manner to talk to a foreign soldier. However, this argument presupposes that David recognises Absalom as the king. If this is not the case, reference to the king may either be seen to be sarcastic, or a test of Ittai’s loyalty. It is difficult to know which interpretation is better in this case. Fortunately, the rhetorical questions give us additional clues.

The first rhetorical question in this section is as follows (15:19):

למה תלך גם־אתנו

In this instance it can be assumed that David is not truly interested in why Ittai is going with him. If this were to be the case it would seem logical that David would wait for a response to the question. David does not wait for a response but instead commands Ittai to return to Jerusalem (15:19).

The second rhetorical question arises in 15:20. In 15:20 David says: “You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, while I go wherever I can?” David is clearly not interested in determining whether Ittai wants David to make him follow him around. After all, immediately prior to asking this rhetorical question David had told Ittai to return to Jerusalem. Moreover, David told Ittai to return to Jerusalem because of Ittai’s status as a foreigner and an exile who has not been in Israel long. In 15:18 we learnt that the majority of people who went with David, were in fact, exiled foreigners. The difference between Ittai and these other exiled foreigner’s rests, then, on the amount of time that Ittai had lived in Jerusalem. Ittai had only been in Jerusalem for a short amount of time (15:20), whereas David’s other soldiers had been with him for a long time (8:18).

671 Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 342.
Baldwin takes the majority position and argues that this episode is a good example of David’s kindness. Indeed, she remarks, “[Such thoughtfulness in a time of stress shows David at his best.”672 The difficulty with this proposition however, is that it is not consistent with how the narrative has portrayed David thus far. It is unlikely that the narrator would suddenly and radically change David’s behaviour and character in the midst of the narrative. Therefore, it is reasonable to look for other reasons why David suggests to Ittai to turn around and return to Jerusalem.

One possible answer is that Ittai had not been in David’s company long enough to earn his trust. Thereby, it would be risky to keep an unknown person close-by given the political situation. However, it would not be risky to send Ittai back to Jerusalem believing that David is doing him a favour. This claim is in keeping with Campbell’s suggestion that the dialogue between David and Ittai is an example of diplomatic discourse.673 Thereby, the message in the first rhetorical question is “Do not come with us.” The message in the second rhetorical question is, “I have not known you long enough to trust you as I hide from Absalom.”

The passage concludes with David’s seemingly heartfelt farewell blessing of Ittai:

However, arguably, this is a politically motivated act on the part of David. David is the object of the ironic attack, as he acts as a devious politician might. Ittai may or may not be the unknowing victim of irony depending on whether or not he apprehends the implied content of David’s rhetorical questions. We return to this matter in the next

672 Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel, 260.
673 Campbell, 2 Samuel, 147.
section. The grade of verbal irony is covert as the implied content of the rhetorical questions is not immediately apprehended.

4.2.11: 2 Samuel 15:21-22

At the lower level of 15:21 Ittai says to the king that as long as the king lives and wherever the king will be, Ittai will be the king’s servant. In 15:22 David says to Ittai to pass by, and Ittai and everybody with Ittai pass by. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Ittai ingratiates himself with David. The opposition in the narrative arises from the subtle difference between what is said and what is meant. Ittai says that he is loyal to the king, however, as mentioned, he is ingratiating himself with David. David is the unknowing victim of irony, since his own ironic rhetorical questions (15:19-20) have left him vulnerable to Ittai’s flattering response. Whether or not Ittai was aware of David’s dissimulation in the previous section cannot be answered with certainty. If Ittai is aware of David’s dissimulation then he is not a victim of David’s ironic rhetorical questions. Moreover, it can be assumed that Ittai is dissimulating in response and, therefore, is merely a faux-victim, i.e. he is pretending to be an unknowing victim. If, on the other hand, Ittai did not grasp the ironic content in David’s rhetorical questions then Ittai’s response is sincere and he is an actual unknowing victim of David’s ironic rhetorical questions. Given the overstatement in the language used by Ittai it is more likely that Ittai was in fact dissimulating and is, therefore, merely a faux victim.

Campbell gives a good suggestion of Ittai’s intentions. “Equally diplomatic, Ittai is given a heroic response: ‘wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be (v.21). The inevitable question for any diplomat or counsellor is whether these statements are to be taken at face value or understood as courtly diplomacy. Ittai professes heroically unswerving loyalty; no reason is given why he should. Is his profession of loyalty backed by his political and military acumen? Does he expect David to emerge as winner from the confrontation ahead? Does the elegance of his language conceal shrewd judgement that backs a winner? We are not told. Ittai’s speech favours loyalty; the narrator’s context may be thought to favour shrewdness and acumen. It may have been both.” Ibid.
The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is overstatement. The overstatement in this verse relies on repetition and the placement of words. The repetition is evident with respect to key words. The word מַלֵּךְ appears three times, references to life similarly appear thrice (2x חי and חיים). The word מַרְוִי appears twice, as does the word יהוה. Another anomaly in 15:21 is the placement of the word death before the word life.

4.2.12: 2 Samuel 15:23

It might be suggested that there is no irony in 15:23. However, there is still an obvious incongruity in the situation.

At the lower level of 15:23 the country weeps as David passes over into the wilderness. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is officially an exile when he crosses theנחל קדרון which is considered to be the boundary of the city.675 This event is juxtaposed with Absalom’s return from exile (2 Sam 14:21). The commonality in both of these situations is that they are unlawful events. Absalom’s return has no basis in either the laws of Israel, or the case study of Cain and Abel. David’s exile, although brought about by his failure to administer justice, is unlawful, as there is no evidence to suggest that God has marked Absalom as the new king. Absalom’s belief that it was God who brought him back from exile (2 Sam 15:8) is erroneous, as it was the trickery of Joab and the woman of Tekoa which facilitated his return (2 Sam 14:1-21). Absalom’s return is in fact contrary to God’s decrees. Arguably, the ironist is feigning ignorance of the incongruity. If so then the ironist is the faux-victim in the narrative. The grade of verbal irony is covert. The mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is irony displayed; a category in which the irony

675 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 184.
arises from the events of the narrative. The content of the irony is the instability in the monarchy.

4.2.13: 2 Samuel 15:24-29

At the lower level of 15:24 Abiathar, Zadok, and all of the Levites come up carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set the ark down until all of the people pass by. In 15:25 David tells Zadok to return the ark of the covenant back to the city. David reasons that if he is in God’s favour, God will return him to Jerusalem where he can see the ark and the city. In 15:26 David says, if God is not pleased with him then God should do what he wants with David. At the lower level of 15:27 David tells Zadok to go back to the city with Abiathar, and their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. In 15:28 David says that he will wait at the fords of the wilderness until Zadok brings back word to David. In 15:29 Zadok and Abiathar return the ark of the covenant of God back to the city and stay there.

It is a matter of background knowledge that there is a tradition of the king having the ark with him in battle since it indicates God’s presence. Therefore, we can assume that David would want the ark to be with him in battle. Nevertheless, at the explicit level, David sends the priests away with the ark because he says that he has faith that God will restore him in Jerusalem, if this is part of God’s plan. However, at the implicit level of 15:27-29 it appears that David had a different reason for sending the priests back to Jerusalem; he wanted to use them as spies. In this regard, returning the ark acts as a cover-story. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what is said and what is meant. What David says is that he wants Zadok and Abiathar to return the ark to Jerusalem, as it is God who will decide if he is

\[676\] Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 204.
to see the city again of not. However, it can be assumed that David does want the ark to be with him in which case David has decided that a spy network is more useful to him at this point than the ark. The implication of David’s organizing a spy network is that he ultimately wants to return from exile. Yet this decision in favour of the spy network does imply a lack of faith in the traditions of Israel since, as mentioned, the ark of the covenant was thought to indicate God’s presence on the battlefield. Moreover, David is in effect using the transport of the ark of the covenant by the priests as a cover for the creation of his spy network. Ironically, then, David is displaying a lack of faith in God, indeed disrespecting God’s sacred object (the ark), while claiming to be motivated by faith in God. Therefore, David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the communication of the ironic content relies on the language used and on our background knowledge.

Regarding the language used, the rhetorical question in 15:27 is somewhat unclear:

There is a debate concerning the exact translation of it. De Groot and Carlson translate it to mean, “You are no seer, are you?” On the other hand, Anderson interprets this statement as “Are you not an observant man?” Either way, this statement is a rhetorical question. This is consistent with the verse being ironic. However, Anderson’s interpretation that David is implicitly asking the men to be spies is more plausible. For one thing, David would need to avoid explicitly instructing the priests to

679 For a different perspective, see J. Hoftijzer, “A Peculiar Question: A Note on 2 Sam. XV 27”, 606-609.
be spies, using the ark as their cover; instead, he would need to imply this. For another thing, the spy interpretation is supported by David’s statement that he will wait to meet them; for he would need to meet them in order to hear their intelligence report (15:28).

Baldwin provides another perspective. Baldwin suggests that David is not superstitious in relation to the ark and does not see the need to have it with him in battle. However, the suggestion that David is not superstitious in relation to the ark is not consistent with David’s past behaviour in relation to the ark; behaviour which manifested his superstition.

Consistent with Baldwin’s view, Fokkelman argues that David surrenders himself to his faith in Yahweh. Fokkelman goes on to argue that it is indicative of David’s maturity that he has faith in God yet does not rely on God to realise his plans. He speaks of this as ‘synergism’. As a general theoretical point concerning the relationship between faith in God and human action, Fokkelman’s argument is in my view unexceptionable. However, I do not accept that David’s behaviour displays this level of maturity. David’s behaviour is disrespectful to the traditions of Israel;

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680 Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel, 261.
681 At this juncture it would be helpful to outline David’s history with the ark. Most notably the ark had been unfavourable to the Philistines, who captured it, but were forced to release it due to the negative consequences they suffered for having taken it in their midst (1 Sam 5-6). The knowledge that David’s retinue consisted largely of foreigners, and particularly Philistines cannot be overlooked in this regard. However, David’s own difficult history with the ark is more elucidating. Previously David sought to bring the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1-5). Yet, Uzzah was struck by the Lord when he reached out to steady the ark (2 Sam 6:6-7). This made David fearful of taking the ark to Jerusalem and he left it in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite who was blessed for having the ark (2 Sam 6:10-11). Upon hearing this David retrieved the ark and brought it to the city (2 Sam 6:12). However, his lewd dancing along the way upset his wife Michal who despised him from that day onwards (2 Sam 6:16). David then decided to build a house for the Lord so that the ark would not have to reside in a tent (2 Sam 7:2). In response to David’s initiative God made a covenant with David that his ‘house’ would be secure and enduring (2 Sam 7:16). However, David was also told that David would not be the person who would build the house, but that his son would do it instead (2 Sam 7:5; 13).
682 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 186.
683 Ibid., 187.
specifically, his cynical use of the priests and the ark in the service of his spy network. Such disrespect is not the same thing as not being superstitious.

4.2.14: 2 Samuel 15:30

There is no apparent irony in 15:30, however, it is still helpful to provide a brief commentary on this verse to put it in perspective with an ironic interpretation. 15:30 is traditionally viewed as a display of great emotion which restores David’s image to the reader. For instance, Fokkelman writes, “He had egotistically misused his kingdom and that is why it is now lost, but as a result of that loss there remains only one path open: to be a man.”\textsuperscript{684}

However, before David’s image is entirely restored it is worth remembering other instances of mourning thus far in the SN. These allusions inform David’s present situation. In 2 Sam 11:26 Bathsheba mourns the loss of her husband Uriah. David orders his illegal murder (2 Sam 11:14-15). Yahweh kills the son of the illegitimate union between David and Bathsheba, and Bathsheba mourns the lost child in 2 Sam 12:24. In 2 Sam 13:19 Tamar mourns her new lowly status. It could be argued that she was in this predicament because David failed to see through Amnon’s ruse (2 Sam 13:1-7). Moreover, David did not punish Amnon (2 Sam 13:21). Similarly, it cannot be ignored that this episode may be considered part of David’s punishment in 2 Sam 12:11. The motif of mourning continues when Amnon is murdered by Absalom in response to the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13:36). The woman of Tekoa uses mourning as a pre-text to put forth her case to David (2 Sam 14:2); a dangerous ruse that David falls for. It may also be argued that Absalom has become embroiled in David’s punishment (2 Sam 12:11).

\textsuperscript{684} Ibid., 190.
Thereby, David’s act of mourning is in some regards indicative of the come-uppance that God’s punishment suggests in chapter 12. This is congruent with the images of shame in this verse (weeping, walking barefoot).\(^685\) This verse in isolation may garner sympathy for David, yet, can also be described as an innuendo which serves to criticise David’s behaviour. The criticism arises as David’s present pitiful situation has been brought about by his arrogance and misdeeds.

4.2.15: 2 Samuel 15:31

2 Sam 15:31 confirms the irony in 2 Sam 15:25-26. In 2 Sam 15:25-26 David sends the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem and says that he has faith that God will restore him in Jerusalem, if this is part of God’s plan. Yet, in 2 Sam 15:31 David implores God to help him. Mauchline has identified this inconsistency when he argues, “His prayer that Ahithophel’s wisdom should be turned to foolishness shows that David could not accept this news [the news that Ahithophel is conspiring with Absalom against David] with the equanimity and trust in God which he had shown in sending the Ark back to Jerusalem.”\(^686\) This inconsistency supports the view put forward in my above discussion of 2 Sam 15:25-26 according to which these verses involve verbal irony. As stated, on my view, David did in fact want the ark to be with him, nevertheless, he deemed a spy network to be more useful to him than the ark at that point.

Of note, David’s desire for God’s help is given emphasis by the irregular language in this verse. For instance, the verse begins with the words, וַיֶּעַלֶּה הָאָדָם and repeats the word אמר just before David says, סָכַל־נָא אֶת־עָצוֹת אֲכִיתפֶּל יְהוָה. The repetition of “David says”, etc. emphasizes the content of what David says, which in this instance

\(^{685}\) Campbell, 2 Samuel, 148.

\(^{686}\) Mauchline, 1 and 2 Samuel, 274.
may be translated as, “O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of my brother of folly into foolishness.”

4.2.16: 2 Samuel 15:32-37

It is explicitly stated in 15:32 that David comes to the summit where God is worshipped and Hushai appears in a dishevelled state. In 15:33 David tells Hushai that if he goes with David he will only be a burden. In 15:34 David tells Hushai to return to Jerusalem, become Absalom’s servant, and defeat Ahithophel’s advice. In 15:35 David tells Hushai to relay whatever he hears from the king’s house to Zadok and Abiathar. In 15:36 David says that the sons of Zadok and Abiathar will relay everything that Hushai tells them to David. In 15:37 Hushai returns to the city as soon as Absalom returns. In 15:32 there is an apparent implication that David’s prayers to God are to be answered by means of Hushai; after all, Hushai appears to David at the summit where God is worshipped. However, this implication is only apparent, given that typically in the SN David’s prayers are not answered (2 Sam 12:16-22). Indeed, God has promised to punish David rather than to answer his prayers.

Thereby, the idea that this passage is an exposition of the interface of divine favour and self-help must be debated further. Von Rad argues that the Davidic narratives are an example of double causation, whereby, political realism is combined with God’s plan. This is a popular interpretation. However, it is questionable since double causation requires that the action of each party would cause the outcome, irrespective of the action of the other party. This is not the case in this narrative if it is

687 Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 338.
688 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 193.
assumed that Hushai’s appearance was providential. In other words, David could not have achieved the outcome without God’s intervention. An alternative interpretation involves partial causation. In instances of partial causation, the action of each party is necessary but neither is sufficient. However, this account diminishes God’s power since God acting alone cannot achieve the outcome. This conundrum involving David, Hushai and God cannot be resolved at this point in the narrative. However, I return to this issue in the next chapter.

4.2.17 Summary of 2 Samuel 15:1-37

In 15:1 Absalom is depicted with a chariot, horses, and running men. This retinue implies that Absalom intends to challenge the throne, and may also be interpreted within God’s warning about kings in 1 Sam 8:11, suggesting an insinuation. The insinuation in 15:1 is followed by pretended error or ignorance in 15:2-3. In this instance, Absalom remarks that there is nobody to hear the claims of the people of Israel, even though this is the king’s role. This gives rise to the insinuation, that Absalom thinks that he would be a better judge and therefore a better king than David. The criticism in this regard points in two different directions. David is implicitly criticized as he paves the way for Absalom’s revolt. Absalom is criticized for manipulating the situation.

15:4-6 present the insinuation that Absalom, like David is more concerned with garnering political power rather than dedicating himself to faith in Yahweh’s laws. Thereby, Absalom is similarly criticised for (potentially) being an opportunistic king.
In 15:7-9 the irony is the pretended defence of the victim and an insinuation. In the first case, Absalom tricks David into allowing him to make a vow in Hebron. In the second case, the insinuation develops with an understanding of David’s history with Hebron, and of Absalom’s conviction that he is in God’s favour. 15:10 is a case of a misrepresentation as Absalom gets others to declare him to be king, despite the fact that David is the king. This verse points to Absalom’s deceptiveness, and his foolishness.

Absalom’s deceptiveness along with David’s obliviousness is further highlighted in 15:11 which is an example of the sub-category of verbal irony, pretended error or ignorance. The ironist implies that the two hundred guests who accompany Absalom to Hebron (where Absalom seeks to mount his challenge against David), do so with full knowledge of what they are doing. In 15:12 there is an insinuation that Absalom is sending for a war counsellor. Ahithophel’s connection to Bathsheba reminds the reader of David’s transgressions. Ahithophel’s current position emphasizes Absalom’s deceitfulness. Together, there is a suggestion that both ‘kings’ are not in Israel’s best interests. David cannot administer justice adequately, and Absalom is delusional. However, Israel wanted a king despite God’s protestations. Therefore, it could be argued that David, Absalom, and Israel are all victims, as they are all oblivious to God’s warnings (1 Sam 8:11-18).

15:13-17 is a case of low burlesque, where David is spoken of as being a low character. The irony criticizes the poor decisions that he makes. 15:18 is an example of

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690 At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that the Israelites are the real losers in this story as they find themselves caught in the middle of a king who does not administer justice and a prince who is angry vengeful and delusional. The pejorative criticism of the ironist is that the Israelites are not receiving good governance. Yet, it was the Israelites who wanted a king despite Yahweh’s warnings (1 Sam 8:11-18). Thereby, in a broader sense the Israelites may be considered to be the victims of the irony, as they were confidently unaware of the consequences of their decision to have a king, despite being warned in detail of the dangers.
parody which reflects on David’s time fighting with the Philistines. This section also hints at the idea of David’s past catching up with him. There are allusions to the sword, which bring to mind David’s transgressions, and his punishment. It may also be suggested that David is in some regards the instigator of part of his punishment, as he fails to administer justice correctly even after Nathan’s castigation, which in turn produces the antagonism in Absalom which was predicted by God.

15:19-20 are an example of the sub-category of impersonal irony, the rhetorical question. David appears to be generous to Ittai, however, David uses double-speak to protect his position. 15:21 includes an overstatement which highlights the politicking which had become a staple of David’s communication. 15:21-22 is an example of overstatement. 15:23 uses irony displayed to emphasize David’s new status in exile.

15:24-29 is an example of a rhetorical question. In this case David’s new-found situation in exile and Absalom’s growth in popularity in Jerusalem are striking, as is David’s decision to dismiss the ark. In 15:27-29 it appears that David is cynical of traditions as a rhetorical question emphasizes the incongruity of David sending the ark back in the hope that the priests attending to it will become his spies. In this regard the ark is used as a cover-story. In 15:30 there is no evidence of irony, however, the mourning in the verse alludes to David’s major transgressions.

15:31 confirms the irony in 15:25-26, where David speaks of trust in God’s decision, yet, organizes a spy system. This is followed in 15:32-37 which is ambiguous.

4.3: 2 Samuel 16:1-23

4.3.1: 2 Samuel 16:1
At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity in this setting. Here we need to rely on background knowledge of the characters. It is not necessarily incongruous in itself that a king is fleeing from an uprising; nor is it incongruous that a fleeing king is met by a servant who brings supplies. Yet, it is incongruous for David, who has been told that he is God’s chosen king (2 Sam 12:7), to be fleeing from his own son, who also believes God to be on his side (2 Sam 15:8). Furthermore, it is incongruous that David is met by Ziba with supplies, as Ziba was previously the servant of Saul (2 Sam 9:2), whom David usurped (2 Sam 5:2-3).

The innocence in the narrative is provided by the ironist’s dissimulation. In 16:1 the innocent encounter of David and Ziba at the lower level, is modified by the background knowledge that informs the upper level. From this perspective the tenuous nature of the monarchy, the dilemma of chosen-ness, and David’s decline are all highlighted.

The irony is not immediately obvious, and is therefore a covert grade of verbal irony. In this instance the verbal irony is revealed in the unusual use of language and in particular in the use of an unsuitable metaphor. In this case the metaphor is שׁמהרא. Polzin suggests that references to שׁרא are both symbolic and ironic. The symbolism concerns the connection between a head and a political leader. The irony which emerges for Polzin is that David is not the ‘head’ of Israel at this stage, as he is fleeing from Jerusalem.691 This interpretation is in keeping with the present analysis. The significance of שׁרא is also experienced in the knowledge that David has now made

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691 Polzin suggests that the symbol of the head is central in the story of David’s flight from Jerusalem. David and his followers cover their heads as they leaves Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:30), Hushai puts dirt on his head (2 Sam 15:32), and Hushai and Ziba are met near the head of the mountain (2 Sam 15:32, 16:1). Polzin also argues that the focus on an elevated landscape supports the head motif. Polzin, David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History, 150.
his way into Saulide territory. 692 This places David into the area of the king he usurped, and highlights the instability of the monarchy in general.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of irony is irony displayed. In this sub-category of impersonal irony the irony emerges in the events which have been displayed in order to expose the object of verbal irony. 693 The close confrontation of incompatibles which is necessary for irony displayed can be observed in the King of Israel fleeing from his son, who also believes he is the King of Israel, and encountering the servant of the King of Israel, whom David usurped. The content of irony, as mentioned, is the instability in the institution of the monarchy.

4.3.2: 2 Samuel 16:2

At the lower level of 16:2 is David’s question to Ziba; מה אתה-Nazi לך. At the upper level of the narrative the question has a political implication, since evidently Ziba is doing David a favour. So it is a rhetorical question with ironic content. The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what David says and what David means.

At the lower level Ziba takes the question in its literal sense. Ziba’s apparent innocence is emphasized in the comedy of Ziba’s exaggerated response which outlines in detail that the donkeys are to be ridden, the food is to be eaten, and the wine is to be drunk. The question now arises as to whether Ziba’s innocent response is merely apparent. For Ziba may have understood the implication behind David’s question and, therefore, responded innocently to avoid explicitly stating that his intention was to gain favour with the king. If this is the case then Ziba is not an unknowing victim of irony.

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692 Auld, I & II Samuel, 514.
693 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 82.
The proposition that Ziba, far from being an unknowing of irony, is a crafty operator, is supported by 16:4 in which we learn that David grants Ziba another man’s estate.

The grade of verbal irony is overt as it is immediately apparent. For example, it would not be ironic if a Martian from outer space asked Ziba what the items were for. However, obviously David knows how the items are used and the servant knows that David knows this. Accordingly, the inquiry must have some other, presumably political – given David is the king - intention lying behind it. This view is strengthened by our background knowledge of the relationship between David and Ziba. Ziba is a mere servant and, therefore, the produce could not belong to him; so whose produce is it? David made Ziba a servant of Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:10). So it is probable that Ziba brings forth produce which would have been from Mephibosheth’s estate to give to David. This produce is not for Ziba to give, and it can be assumed that David wants to know who is behind the gift. In short, the knowledge of this relationship strengthens the assumption that David’s question was political in nature.

4.3.3: 2 Samuel 16:3

At the lower level of 16:3 David asks Ziba where his master is. At the upper level, the ironist implies that David’s real interest is in the loyalty of Mephibosheth. Therefore this is a rhetorical question and the opposition between the upper and lower levels consists of the incongruity between an explicit question about geographical location and an implicit one about political affiliation.

At the lower level of 16.3 Ziba replies to David that his master is in Jerusalem declaring that Jerusalem will be returned to the House of Saul. At the upper level of the

694 Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 262.
695 This situation is reminiscent of Abigail’s gift to David (1 Sam 15:18-19). Abigail gave her gift to David because she knew that Nabal was a fool, and would have been killed by David’s men if she did not provide sustenance to David and his men (1 Sam 25:24-26).
narrative the ironist implies that Ziba’s interest is in winning David’s favour since Ziba not only tells David the location of his master but also provides intelligence about his master’s political loyalties. This indicates that Ziba, far from being the unknowing victim of irony, is well aware of the intention behind David’s rhetorical question. This view is confirmed by later events, notably, when David gives Mephibosheth’s estate to Ziba.

The view that this dialogue is ironic political discourse is indicated by the language in the narrative, and in particular in the pointed use of the word מֶלֶךְ. In 16:2 the ‘king’ speaks to Ziba, in 16:3 the king speaks and it is written that Ziba answers to the ‘king.’ This linguistic usage is distinct from the preceding verses where the king is referred to primarily as David (2 Sam 15:32-16:1). If this is indeed irony then it is verbal irony in the impersonal mode since the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The sub-category is the rhetorical question.

4.3.4: 2 Samuel 16:4

At the lower level of 16:4 David gives Ziba Mephibosheth’s estate, and Ziba does obeisance to David. At the upper level the ironist implies that the reason David is giving Mephibosheth’s estate to Ziba is that Ziba informed David of Mephibosheth’s betrayal of David; the latter being a matter of our background knowledge.

Nevertheless, David’s act of giving of the estate to Ziba is surprising since David does not adjudicate the case with witnesses, as he should. It is even more surprising given David’s history with Mephibosheth. Previously, David had given everything that belonged to Saul to Mephibosheth in order to pay חָסֵד to Jonathan (2 Sam 9:7), Mephibosheth’s father.
David’s kindness to Mephibosheth and the far-fetched nature of Ziba’s claim about Mephibosheth, has led scholars to suggest that there is something suspicious in 16:4. Alter observes that it is unlikely that Mephibosheth could have come to David himself, as he was crippled in both of his feet; a disability that David was aware of.\textsuperscript{696} This gives Ziba an opportunity to act on his own behalf. Stuart Lasine argues that David acts in haste, and suggests that it was likely that Ziba was lying.\textsuperscript{697} Fokkelman also remarks that Ziba’s statement is false and a betrayal of Mephibosheth.\textsuperscript{698} Auld claims that Ziba is rewarded for lying.\textsuperscript{699} Mauchline suggests that David is a fool for believing Ziba.\textsuperscript{700}

Therefore, it is likely that Ziba is lying. This is supported by future events, specifically, in 2 Sam 19-26 where Mephibosheth says that Ziba deceived him. Moreover, even if Ziba was not lying and Mephibosheth was disloyal to David, it can still be argued that David did not give Mephibosheth a fair trial as he should have. Therefore, the inconsistency in David’s judgements is once again on display since previously David treated Mephibosheth with excessive kindness (2 Sam 9:10), whereas in the present verse David is very unfair to Mephibosheth. This whole episode is yet another example of David being easily deceived and making foolish judgements. As with the other examples, this is an instance of the sub-category of impersonal irony, pretended defence of the victim. At first blush David is the unfortunate victim of Ziba’s deception. However, the ironist implies that he ought not to have been deceived. The upshot is that David is the object of ironic attack.

\textsuperscript{696} Alter, \textit{The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel}, 291.
\textsuperscript{697} For a comprehensive discussion on this topic see, Stuart Lasine, “Judicial Narratives and the Ethics of Reading: The Reader as Judge of the Dispute Between Mephibosheth and Ziba,” \textit{Hebrew Studies}, 30 (1989), 49-69.
\textsuperscript{698} Fokkelman,“King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 195.
\textsuperscript{699} Auld, \textit{I & II Samuel}, 514.
\textsuperscript{700} Mauchline, \textit{I and 2 Samuel}, 275.
4.3.5: 2 Samuel 16:5

At the lower level of 16:5 Shimei, a supporter of Saul, curses David in Bahurim (which means ‘chosen’). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David, the “chosen” king, is an exile being cursed. The opposition between the levels arises from the incongruity between David being a cursed exiled king and David being the chosen king. Ironically, then, David the chosen king is in exile and being cursed. Therefore, David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert as the irony is implied by way of an unsuitable metaphor. At the beginning of 16:5 David reaches a place called Bahurim that can be translated to mean ‘chosen’.701

In 16:5 there is also an emphasis on the curse conveyed by way of stylistic placing. The stylistic placing conforms to Perry and Sternberg’s pattern of irony, whereby the prolix language is followed by the concise remark (see 11:1). The prolix expression is found in 16:5a which is as follows:

ובא המלך דוד אל בחרים והנה משם איש יוצא משם בית שמעי בן גרא

The concise remark in 16:5b emphasises the curse:

יצא יצוא ומקלל

This emphasis on the curse amplifies the above-mentioned irony of David the chosen king being a cursed exile. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the dominant sub-category of impersonal irony is stylistically signalled irony. In this verse the sub-category of stylistically signalled irony is (b) stylistic placing.702

701 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 196.
702 Of note, in other sections where Perry and Sternberg’s pattern of irony has been spoken of it has not been the dominant sub-category of verbal irony.

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Of note, is a general implication of the verse, given our background knowledge of Absalom etc., namely, that the status of David as the chosen king is being called into question. For David is fleeing the royal city at a time when Absalom is making a claim to the throne (2 Sam 15:10), and Mephibosheth is allegedly claiming the throne (16:3). Thereby, the chosen king’s son is against him, as are his followers in Israel; also the Saulides are making their displeasure with David known to him.703

4.3.6: 2 Samuel 16:6

At the lower level of 16:6 Shimei throws stones at David and his army. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is not the heroic king he is otherwise portrayed to be. The incongruity is as follows. On the one hand, David was Saul’s and Israel’s champion because he killed the Philistine warrior Goliath with a single stone (1 Sam 17:49). On the other hand, David, is now fleeing Israel in the company of mercenaries (who went with David to fight with the Philistines (1 Sam 27:1-3, 2 Sam 15:18)704) while a single Saulide pelts them all with stones. David is the object of the ironic attack, and possibly also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The ironic content is communicated in large part by our background knowledge but also to some extent by the language used. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony. The sub-category is parody. The episode being parodied is David’s encounter with Goliath (1 Sam 17).

703 David’s reversal of fortune is also alluded to in a comparison of 16:11 with 2 Sam 3:16. Both events are set in חורורים. In 2 Sam 3:16 Michal’s husband is in a state of mourning as he loses his wife to David who claims her as though she is a prize (2 Sam 3:14). Timothy Simpson suggests that David similarly approaches חורורים as a king who is mourning the loss of his kingdom. Timothy Frederick Simpson, “Paradigm Shift Happens: Intertextuality and a Reading of 2 Samuel 16:5-14,” Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies, 17 (1997), 55-70, 55.

704 See commentary for 2 Sam 15:18.
The parody begins in 16:5 with the curse linking this story with the story of David and Goliath. Like Goliath’s curse, Shimei’s curse is by-and-large ineffective, however, the parallel of the curses brings forth the parody. In 1 Sam 17:43 it is a Philistine who curses David – David being Saul’s champion. In 16:5, a Saulide curses David - David being the ‘leader of Philistines’, at least in the sense that David’s army comprises soldiers who previously fought with David on behalf of the Philistines.

In the story of David and Goliath David was portrayed as a hero when he hurled a single, well-aimed stone at the forehead of Goliath (1 Sam 17:49). In 16:6, David is the object of ironic attack since him and his entire army are pelted with stones by a lone ‘heroic’ individual. This parody of David can be understood in two different ways: (1) that David was never heroic, and that earlier accounts of David’s heroics are inaccurate, or (2) that David was once heroic but has ceased to be so.

4.3.7: 2 Samuel 16:7-8

At the lower level of 16:7-8 Shimei shouts at David that he is a murderer who is responsible for murder in the House of Saul and for usurping the throne. Shimei shouts that this is why the Lord has given his kingdom into the hands of Absalom. Contrary to what Shimei claims, the narrative presents the taking of Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah as the reason for David’s predicament (2 Sam 12:10-11). Therefore, there is an element of Shimei’s curse which is incorrect. However, consistent with Shimei’s curse,

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705 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 196.
706 The confusion over Shimei’s character can be observed by contrasting Brueggemann and Simpson. Brueggemann suggests that Shimei is representative of the older order who were strict adherents of retributive justice, and is contrasted with David who stands for a newer relationship with God. (Walter Brueggemann, “On Coping with Curse: A Study of 2 Sam 16:5-14,” *CBQ* 36, no.2 (1974), 175-192). Simpson, on the other hand, argues that Shimei stands for a new group of people who were openly opposed to the wrong-doing of the kings, and were compelled to speak out against abuses of the Torah. From this perspective Shimei can be interpreted as being prophet-like, which suggests that the narrative is critical of David. Simpson, “Paradigm Shift Happens: Intertextuality and a Reading of 2 Samuel 16:5-14,” 68-69.
albeit contrary to the legend of David’s rise (1 Sam 31: 4-6; 2 Sam 3:30-32; 4:8), it could still be the case that David usurped Saul’s throne and was implicated in the murders of members of the House of Saul. The opposition in this section is the difference between what is said and what is implied. At the lower level Shimei says that David is being punished for his part in the Saulide’s deaths, yet it is known that David is being punished for his part in Uriah’s death. At the upper level, it is implied that David was implicated in the Saulide deaths, and that he was not punished for his part in these deaths. Indeed, he is strenuously defended from such an accusation (1 Sam 31:6; 2 Sam 3:30-32; 4:8).

Moreover, as we have seen above, the ironist has been utilising Shimei to parody the legend of David’s rise. Arguably, therefore, the ironist is implying that Shimei is correct in claiming that David usurped Saul’s throne, notwithstanding the reader’s initial contrary impression. So the verse is an instance of innuendo and David is the object of ironic attack. The verbal irony is covert since it is not immediately apparent, indeed it could well be contested. The verbal irony is heavily reliant on background knowledge and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony.

The claim that David may have been involved in the murders in the House of Saul is supported by the untrustworthiness of David’s character, and has been noted by a number of different scholars. Alter alludes to it when he writes:

The blood that, according to the narrative itself, David has on his hands, is that of Uriah the Hittite, and the fighting men of Israel who perished at Rabbath Ammon with Uriah. But the Benjamite Shimei clearly believes what David himself, and the narrative with him, has taken pains to refute – that the blood of the house of Saul is on David’s hands: Abner, Ish-bosheth, and perhaps even Saul and Jonathan (for David was collaborating with the Philistine Achish when they fell at Gilboa). Hence the phrase Shimei hurls at David in his next
sentence, “all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you became king,” suggesting a conjunction of murder and usurpation.\textsuperscript{707}

Campbell is more forthright when he argues that this section highlights David’s ruthless ambition which has caught up with him.\textsuperscript{708}

However, whether or not David is responsible for the killing of the Saulides, it still stands that Shimei is unaware that David is responsible for Uriah’s death, and that Uriah’s death, in as much as it is the reason for God’s punishment of David, is partly responsible for Absalom’s revolt (2 Sam 12:10-11). Shimei’s ignorance of the Uriah event, and his confident, but incorrect (albeit unknowingly consistent) remark make him the victim of verbal irony.

4.3.8: 2 Samuel 16:9

At the lower level of 16:9 Abishai asks why Shimei should be allowed to curse David. This is obviously a rhetorical question since it is well-known that it is a crime to curse the king and, therefore, subject to severe punishment. This confirms that his question was purely rhetorical and that he actually had in mind to kill Shimei. Therefore, at the lower level Abishai is implying that Shimei should not be allowed to curse the king. At the upper level, Abishai proposes that he should be allowed to kill Shimei. In respect of the rhetorical question, the opposition in the levels is between Abishai saying one thing, while he means another thing.

David is the object of ironic attack since as the king he cannot allow someone to curse him with impunity. Yet it appears only Abishai and not David is aware of this. The grade of the verbal irony is overt, as it is immediately apparent. This assumption is

\textsuperscript{707} Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, 292.

\textsuperscript{708} Campbell, 2 Samuel, 150.
supported by Abishai’s reference to Shimei as a כלב המת, and by his follow-up statement:

Furthermore, Abishai’s remark is in keeping with the laws. In Exod 22:28 it states:

Not only is this law a prohibition against cursing a king, but the strength of the commandment may be assessed in its connection with the prohibition not to revile Yahweh. This leads Simpson to suggest that Abishai is not acting recklessly, but is rather sticking to the Torah tradition and aligning himself with God. Thereby, the criticism emerges that David has not acted according to the laws thereby strengthening the above criticism that he was not acting with appropriate kingly authority.

4.3.9: 2 Samuel 16:10

At the lower level of 16:10a David responds to Abishai by asking what he should do with the sons of Zeruiah. In 16:10b David asks Abishai that if it is because of the Lord that Shimei is cursing, then who should challenge Shimei. Both of these questions are rhetorical. At the upper level of 16:10a the ironist implies that although David is asking what he should do with the sons of Zeruiah, the implicit message is that David would like to distance himself from the violence of the sons of Zeruiah; or, at least, he would like to do so in public. This implication is strengthened by David’s apparently placatory question in relation to Shimei’s cursing of him. I note that there are laws which prohibit people from cursing the king (Exod 22:28). Therefore, not only is it entirely unlikely

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that God has caused Shimei to curse David, but David would need a very good reason for making this claim.

The opposition in the narrative emerges in the incompatibility between what David says and with what David means. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apprehended. The ironic content is conveyed by the use of the rhetorical questions together with our background knowledge. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category rhetorical question.

The first rhetorical question that David uses to respond to Abishai is as follows:

In asking this question David appears to distance himself from the sons of Zeruiah, who, in the past have been described by David as being difficult (2 Sam 3:39). This has led scholars to look favourably upon David, as it appears that he is not as bloodthirsty as the sons of Zeruiah, or that he is calm and in control. However, this interpretation ignores David’s propensity for violence and retaliation when it suits him.

Moreover, it also ignores the fact that the sons of Zeruiah are part of David’s trusted army. It may even be argued that the violence that David deplored in the case of Abner’s death by the hand of Abishai was in David’s favour (2 Sam 3:25). In some respects David’s response to Abishai goes towards confirming this. For example David says in 16:10:

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710 Mauchline, 1 and 2 Samuel, 276.
711 Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel, 263.
David’s response to the cursing is revealing. Anderson argues that David’s reply may go towards implicating him in the Saulide murders.\(^7\)\(^\text{12}\) As we saw above, David is seeking to distance himself from Abishai’s violent disposition and David is being uncharacteristically, indeed culpably, placatory in respect of Shimei’s cursing of him. This is understandable if David knows that Shimei’s accusation is correct.

Moreover, this act of distancing himself from his crimes, presumably in order to avoid bloodguilt, is but one instance of a pattern in David’s behaviour. Consider the death of Uriah (2 Sam 12:9). This murder was not a direct killing by David, but an execution which was carried out on David’s orders by another one of Zeruiah’s sons; Joab (2 Sam 11:14-15). It may then be argued that it was always possible for David to keep himself free from the guilt of bloodshed, as he surrounded himself with people who were happy to take this on for him.\(^\text{7}\)\(^\text{13}\)

\section*{4.3.10: 2 Samuel 16:11-12}

These verses do not appear to be ironic. However, a commentary is still in order. In 16:11-12 David tells Abishai to leave Shimei alone, because Absalom seeks David’s life so it is not surprising that Shimei seeks David’s life also. Moreover, David says that the Lord has bidden Shimei to curse David (16:11). David also suggests that the Lord will look upon David’s distress, on account of the curse, and repay David with good. This speech of David seems to implicate him in the murders of members of the House of Saul and the usurping of Saul’s throne. After all, David says Shimei has reason to want to curse him and is doing so at the bidding of God.

\footnote{Anderson, \textit{WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel}, 206-207.}

\footnote{Abishai encourages David to let him kill Saul in 1 Sam 26:8, as he believes that God has given Saul to David to kill. Yet, David stops him, as David does not want to take on the guilt of killing Saul, and would prefer to see Saul die by God’s hands by another method; possibly at the hands of another warrior in battle (1 Sam 26:9-10). David is saved from taking on the blood guilt of Nabal in the previous chapter (1 Sam 25:33-38). These events show David to abrogate his responsibility.}
In relation to 16:5-14, Brueggemann suggests that David’s faith revolutionises the understanding of God’s grace. Brueggemann argues that David knows that he has done wrong and that David expects to be punished for what he has done, however, he hopes for God’s mercy. Thereby, David attributes a freedom to God. This freedom to act Brueggemann considers to be evidence of God’s grace. However, Brueggemann’s impression of David can be countered. As we have seen, there is reason to think that David was involved in the deaths of the Saulides to a greater extent than the story of David’s rise portrays. It also must be pointed out that David is ultimately ‘unkind’ to Shimei in 1 Kgs 2:8-9 when he orders his execution on account of this cursing of David.

4.3.11: 2 Samuel 16:13-14

The parody of David (as the heroic warrior) in the story of Shimei is continued in these verses. So the sub-category of verbal irony, parody, is applicable here.

At the lower level of 16:13-14 David and his men march on as Shimei proceeds on the hillside opposite them throwing stones and flinging dust at them and cursing David. In 16:14 David and his men arrive at their destination tired. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David and his men are tired in large part because of their treatment at the hands of Shimei.

4.3.12: 2 Samuel 16:15-16

At the lower level of 16:15 Absalom and all the Israelites, including Ahithophel, come to Jerusalem. In 16:16 Hushai comes to Absalom and repeats, יהי המלך יהי המלך. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Hushai remains loyal to David (2 Sam 15:32-37) and is referring to David rather than Absalom in saying, “Long live the

king”. The opposition in the narrative is between what Hushai says and what Hushai means. It can be inferred that Hushai intends for Absalom to believe that he is speaking about Absalom, when it can reasonably be assumed he is referring to David. So Absalom is the object of ironic attack. If Absalom believes that Hushai is referring to him, then perhaps he is also the unknowing victim of irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it needs to be uncovered by way of background information. For instance, 2 Sam 15:37 informs the reader that Hushai is David’s friend, which is repeated in verse 16:16 where it is written:

ויהי כאשׁר־באה הושׁי הארכי רעה דוד

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is pretended agreement with the victim, since Hushai pretends to be on Absalom’s side, whilst the implication is that he is not.

4.3.13: 2 Samuel 16:17

At the lower level in 16:17 Absalom asks Hushai if this is the loyalty he shows to his friend, and asks him also why he did not go with his friend. At the upper level Absalom is implying that Hushai’s friend is David and is, therefore, also implying that Hushai is still loyal to David. So Hushai is the object of ironic attack. Moreover, we can conclude from this that Absalom was not the unknowing victim of irony in 4.3.12. above. Further these questions are rhetorical questions and so the opposition in the narrative is between what Absalom says and what he means. The implied criticism of Hushai by Absalom in this verse is heightened by the pairing of the words רעה and חסד, and the

715 Anderson has suggested that this verse is an elliptic oath, whereby, Hushai puts himself under Absalom’s control, but that it can be reasonably assumed that Hushai is thinking of David as he makes the statement (Anderson, WBC, Vol. 11. 2 Samuel, 213).
repetition of the word יְשָׁרְתָי in 16:17b. Thereby, it is unlikely that Hushai will mistake the implied meaning of Absalom’s words. So the irony is overt.

4.3.14: 2 Samuel 16:18-19

At the lower level of 16:18 Hushai states to Absalom that he is loyal to the person who Yahweh and the Israelites have chosen. In 16:19 Hushai asks two questions: (1) Who should I serve? and; (2) Should it not be his son? In 16:19 Hushai says that he should serve Absalom just as he has served David. It can be assumed that Absalom, if he is the victim of the irony, would imagine that Hushai would be speaking of him when he talks of the person that Yahweh and the Israelites have chosen. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies, indeed insinuates, that Hushai is still loyal to David and, therefore, that this statement does not apply to Absalom. So the opposition in the narrative is between what Hushai says and what he means.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and it relies on background knowledge and the language used, specifically, ambiguous words. As far as the background knowledge is concerned, the narrative does not express Absalom’s view (presumably) that Yahweh was on Absalom’s side. Instead, there is evidence that Absalom has misinterpreted God (2 Sam 15:8). Furthermore, instead of there being any evidence that the people chose Absalom, there is only evidence that Absalom “stole their hearts” (2 Sam 15:6). David is still the one that Yahweh and the people of Israel chose. This supports the proposition that Hushai is referring to David when he says that he is loyal to the person that Yahweh and the people of Israel have chosen.

In the above verses there are two rhetorical questions asked by Hushai and there is an insinuation arising from Hushai’s statement that he is loyal to the person that
Yahweh and the people of Israel have chosen. We have discussed the insinuation. The rhetorical questions are found in 16:19;

והשנית לדר אתי אבד הלאו לפני בנו

The opposition in this verse is between what Hushai says and what Hushai means. The question ‘Who should I serve?’ is not an inquiry. Instead, Hushai knows who he serves, namely, David. The question, ‘Should it not be his son?’ taken as a rhetorical question with ironic content, implied that Hushai should not serve David’s son.

4.3.15: 2 Samuel 16:20-23

At the lower level of 16:20-23 Absalom asks Ahithophel for his counsel. Ahithophel tells Absalom to go to David’s concubines. Absalom takes David’s concubines on the roof of the palace in full view of all of Israel. The narrator says that Ahithophel’s counsel was as though he had consulted the word of God. At the upper level the ironist implies that Ahithophel’s counsel was not like the word of God. The opposition in the narrative is between what is said and what is meant. Ahithophel is said to be giving advice as if he had consulted the word of God, however, Ahithophel’s advice is contrary to God’s laws. In effect, Ahithophel advises Absalom to commit treason, and sexual crimes. Ironically, the content of Ahithophel’s counsel is contrary to God’s laws, notwithstanding that he is said to have provided advice as if he had consulted the word of God.

However there is a second irony. Ironically, although Ahithophel’s advice is against God’s laws it is actually in keeping with God’s promised punishment of David (12:11). Both ironies are covert and depend on background knowledge of the text.
In the case of the first irony, Ahithophel’s advice is sound in as much as taking the king’s concubines is a challenge to the throne. 716 Thereby, this act would not only sever the relationship that Absalom had with his father, but it would also convince Israel that there is no chance of a further reconciliation between Absalom and David. Yet, as mentioned, Ahithophel advises Absalom to commit treason, possibly incest, and either adultery, rape or both. In terms of incest, it may be argued that having sex with a father’s concubines is an act of ‘incest’. In Lev 18:7-8 there is a prohibition against having sexual relations with a person’s mother. The prohibition against having sexual relations with a person’s mother, may extend to include a prohibition against having sexual relations with a father’s concubine. This argument is strengthened by the story of Rueben. Rueben sleeps with his father’s concubine (Gen 35:22), and incurs a curse for doing so (Gen 49:4). Therefore, even though David took Saul’s concubines (2 Sam 12:8), it is still unlawful for Absalom to do the same thing. (It was also unlawful in respect of David). Regardless of whether this act is an act of incest, it is most certainly an act of adultery. 717 It is also an act of rape and treasonable.

The irony is impersonal as the ironist is not a character in the story, and the sub-category is inappropriate or irrelevant praise. Ahithophel’s advice was not as if he had consulted the word of God. For it was contrary to God’s laws.

Let me now consider the second irony. As has already been discussed, there is a prohibition against sexual relations within families. However, in 2 Sam 12:11-12, God states:

716 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 384.
This suggests that God had preordained Absalom’s public raping of David’s concubines; after all, this event is in essence a fulfilment of God’s promised punishment of David. However, there is a hitch. Absalom is breaking a law by having sexual intercourse with his father’s concubines and, more importantly, committing treason by challenging the throne of David. Moreover, Ahithophel is implicated as a co-conspirator. Ironically, therefore, if this punishment is wholly dependent on God, then apparently God is pleased to contravene God’s own laws!

However, David abandoned the concubines (15:16) that Absalom rapes and, as previously argued, in doing so is the architect of his own punishment by God. Of course, God inflicts his punishment on David through the actions of Absalom. However, like David, Absalom is the author of his own actions; likewise, his co-conspirator, Ahithophel. So David, Absalom and Ahithophel are all culpable for breaking God’s laws and, presumably, therefore, cannot absolve themselves by ascribing responsibility for their actions to God.

4.3.16: Summary of 2 Samuel 16:1-23

In 16:1 the sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed, points to instability in the monarchy. In 16:2 and 16:3 rhetorical questions highlight political manipulations. In 16:4 an example of pretended defence of the victim portrays David as a fool. In 16:5 the stylistic placing highlights the idea of chosen-ness in the monarchy. In 16:6 David’s lack of heroics emerges in the parody in the verse. In 16:7-8 there is an innuendo that
David is ultimately responsible for a number of Saulide deaths. In 16:9 David’s failure to act according to the laws is implicitly criticized in a rhetorical question. 16:10 stresses David’s inability to recognise and then administer the laws, in another rhetorical question. There is no irony in 16:11-12. In 16:13-14 David’s heroic image is parodied. In 16:16 the irony that portrays Absalom as a fool is pretended agreement with the victim. In 16:17 there is a rhetorical question and an insinuation that Hushai is not Absalom’s friend. In 16:18-19, yet again, the confusion over the rightful monarchy emerges in rhetorical questions. In 16:20-23, the feature, inappropriate or irrelevant praise implies that Ahithophel’s advice is not like the word of God.

4.4: 2 Samuel 17

4.4.1: 2 Samuel 17:1-4

This section does not readily show forth irony, however, it is important to give a commentary as it aids the interpretation of irony in past and future sections.

Most scholars agree that the advice that Ahithophel gives to Absalom is good advice if he is to win the battle.\(^\text{718}\) An army of twelve thousand men would be a formidable force against David and his soldiers, especially if they were tired and unprepared for the confrontation. It is also good advice to restrict the casualties of war, as Ahithophel suggests (17:2). However, Ahithophel’s advice that Absalom stay removed from the battle is problematic, given Israel’s expectation of her kings (1 Sam 8:20; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:2-3). At this stage of the narrative this does not seem to be

\(^{718}\text{Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 350; Mauchline, I and 2 Samuel, 279; Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of I and 2 Samuel, 296; McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 381 et al.}
appreciated by Absalom and the elders of Israel; for they say that they are pleased with
Ahithophel’s advice (17:4).\textsuperscript{719}

In short, the advice that Ahithophel gives Absalom is not good advice,
assuming Absalom is to remain with honour in the eyes of the people of Israel.
However, it is good tactical advice in terms of overcoming David and his army. Of
note, the ‘good’ advice which Ahithophel gives to Absalom is the same military tactic
that David used in 2 Sam 11:1. The problem of David failing to lead his army into
battle has already been discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. This includes the
criticism of David in 2 Sam 11:27-28 where in the final stages of the battle Joab tells
David to join the war and to take Rabbah. Indeed, perhaps Ahithophel counselled
David to take the action he took in 2 Sam 11:1, given Ahithophel was David’s
counsellor at the time.\textsuperscript{720}

4.4.2: 2 Samuel 17:5-7

At the lower level of the narrative Absalom calls Hushai (17:5), and tells him the plan
that Ahithophel has put forth. Absalom then asks Hushai what he thinks of
Ahithophel’s plan (17:6). Hushai tells Absalom that Ahithophel’s advice is not good
advice (17:7). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is aware that the advice that
Ahithophel gives Absalom is tactically good advice, yet poor advice as far as the
expectations of the Israelites are concerned. Therefore, if Hushai is to counter this

\textsuperscript{719} However, it may be suggested that this affirmation cannot be entirely trusted as Absalom
ultimately takes a different course of action (17:23-24).
\textsuperscript{720} Despite the argument that there is no discernible instance of verbal irony in this section,
there are other anomalies in this passage which suggest that all is not what it may seem. For
instance, Alter suggests that the image of a single man being struck down whilst the army flees,
ironically mirrors David’s plan for Uriah (Alter, \textit{The David Story: A Translation with
Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel}, 296). Mauchline argues that it is unusual for a wise man to
lead an army (Mauchline, \textit{1 and 2 Samuel}, 279). Auld observes that David is still spoken of as
the king, despite the fact that Ahithophel is addressing Absalom, who clearly views himself as
the king (Auld, \textit{I & II Samuel}, 521).
advice (2 Sam 15:34), he must give poor tactical military advice, and good advice regarding honourable fighting, in order to frustrate Ahithophel’s plan.\textsuperscript{721}

The opposition in the narrative is the incongruity between the need for Hushai to give Absalom good advice (i.e. to act honourably in the eyes of the Israelites (1 Sam 8:20; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:2-3)),\textsuperscript{722} when Hushai’s goal is to counter-act Ahithophel’s good advice (i.e. with respect to Ahithophel’s military tactics). So ironically, Hushai must give good advice to undermine good advice. Furthermore, Ahithophel is an object of ironic attack since he is advising Absalom to act in a manner that the people of Israel will regard as dishonourable. Yet Hushai is also an object of ironic attack since he is advising Absalom to act in a manner that the people of Israel will regard as honourable. Both Ahithophel and Hushai are the unknowing victims of irony. For in both cases they are confidently unaware that their advice is ironic. Of note, the issue of David failing to lead his army into battle has been a major source of criticism of David throughout this narrative. Hence the importance of this issue in the above episode in 17:5-7.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and is conveyed with reference to the overall narrative context. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal as the ironist is not a character in the narrative, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed, as the arrangement of the events brings forth the irony.\textsuperscript{721}

4.4.3: 2 Samuel 17:8-13

\textsuperscript{721} The real boon for Hushai is that Absalom tells him Ahithophel’s plan. With this knowledge, Hushai can pass on both possible scenarios to David, and David can plan accordingly.

\textsuperscript{722} A difficulty does arise in this interpretation given that Absalom is not the true king. However, the tide of popular opinion did change when David led the Israelites out to war (1 Sam 18:5-7), and it may be assumed that this would be the correct course of action for Absalom to take in the present circumstances.

\textsuperscript{723} Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony}, 82.
At the lower level of 17:8-13 Hushai explains his plan to Absalom. Hushai argues that David will not spend the evening with the soldiers (17:8), that David is hidden, and that fear could set into Absalom’s army at the fall of their first troops (17:9). Hushai also reminds Absalom that David and his soldiers are fierce fighters (17:10). Hushai advises Absalom to go into battle himself with a much larger army, an army it will take some time to amass (17:11).

At the upper level of the narrative Hushai’s advice to Absalom is merely pretended advice as he intends to deceive Absalom. Therefore, this is an instance of the ironic sub-category of pretended advice. The sub-category of pretended advice or encouragement to the victim is evidenced in part by the fact that Hushai is pretending to give Absalom good advice. However, in this form of irony the character pretends to give advice to the victim of the irony in a highly stylised manner. Irony, in this instance, may be favoured over straightforward deception because of the flowery and verbose language; particularly when this language is considered along-side Ahithophel’s concise advice (2 Sam 17:1-3).

An important element of Hushai’s pretended advice to Absalom concerns David. David and his army are spoken of in exaggerated terms. Not only does Hushai speak of David in verbose and flowery language, but the content of what he says creates an image of David as a warrior. This is in stark contrast to the image of

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724 Recall that Muecke conflates the object of ironic attack with the unknowing victim of irony. See Chapter 1 Section 1.5.1. In this instance, Absalom is the unknowing victim of an unknowing victim of the irony.
726 Throughout 17:8-13 a range of different rhetorical devices are used. Song-Mi Park notes the paronomasia of verbal roots and oppositions, and the heightened or exaggerated speech. Ronald Hyman notes (a) metaphor (even the valiant men with a lion’s heart (17:10)); (b) simile (troops as numerous as the sand by the sea (17:11)) and (c) alliteration. All of these rhetorical devices point to irony in the passage.
David in chapter 11 and 12, when David does not go out to war until he is called to capture a city at the end of difficult fighting (2 Sam 11:1, 12:27-28).

As far as the portrayal of David is concerned, a number of unusual words are used as similes to contrast David’s past as a warrior with his present situation. For instance, the unusual word מַר (2 Sam 17:8) is also used in 1 Sam 22:2, where David becomes the captain over a group of fugitives. Similarly, the unusual word דב (2 Sam 17:8) is used in 1 Sam 17:36, where David boasts that he has killed a lion and a bear, and that Goliath would meet the same fate. The unusual wording ואיש מלחמה (1 Sam 16:18) is also in 2 Sam 17:8. Similarly, the mention of hiding (17:9) hints at David’s battle with Saul (1 Sam 26:1). On this subject, Bar-Efrat writes, “Hushai may be referring associatively to the heroic period when David showed quite clearly that he had both courage and initiative and was able to prevail in difficult and highly dangerous situations.” By contrast Park is more cynical when he argues, “Hushai’s rhetoric serves to evoke images of a different David of a bygone era – not the weary, lusty, old king who stays at home to seduce another man’s wife, but the mighty and cunning warrior who wrestled the throne from Saul.” Either way, it is clear that Hushai’s current somewhat glowing appraisal of David is overstated.

4.4.4: 2 Samuel 17:14-22

At the lower level of 17:14-22, in general terms, Hushai’s advice, rather than Ahithophel’s advice, is taken by Absalom (17:14). In 17:14 Absalom and all of the men

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727 Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, 297-298.
728 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 232.
of Israel say that Hushai’s advice is better than Ahithophel’s advice. It is also written that Ahithophel’s good advice was defeated by the Lord so that Absalom would be destroyed (17:14). Hushai relays the content of both Ahithophel’s counsel and his own to David via the spies, Zadok and Abiathar (17:15-21), David acts on this information and leaves his vulnerable location immediately (17:22). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the real boon for Hushai, and ultimately for David, was Absalom’s foolishness in making Ahithophel’s plan known to Hushai (17:6) who in turn informed David via the spy network. This undermines the prevailing view among commentators that God defeating the counsel of Ahithophel brought about Absalom’s demise. This latter view relies on the background information in 5:31 where David says, “O Lord, I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” In 17:14 it would appear that God is answering David’s prayers. However, as explained above, Absalom is the architect of his demise by virtue of his foolishness in informing Hushai of Ahithophel’s counsel of war. More specifically, Ahithophel advises Absalom to immediately go and ambush David. However, an ambush relies on catching the enemy off-guard. But due to Absalom’s foolishness in informing Hushai of this plan, David was forewarned and made his escape. Therefore, regardless of whether Absalom accepted Ahithophel’s tactical military advice or not, Absalom was unable to act on it.

It might be argued that Absalom’s assent to Hushai’s plan in Hushai’s presence was insincere. Verse 16:17, for example, strongly suggests that Absalom did not trust Hushai. So it is possible that Absalom said he would act on Hushai’s plan in order to deceive Hushai. Hushai certainly does not take Absalom’s assent to his plan as necessarily sincere. For Hushai informs David of Ahithophel’s counsel as well as his own. Accordingly, Hushai provides for all possibilities, i.e. for the possibility that Absalom will act on Ahithophel’s military plan, for the possibility that Absalom will
act on Hushai’s plan, and for the possibility that Absalom will act on a combination of the advice given to him by Ahithophel and Hushai.

Ironically, then, Absalom is the architect of his own demise and, as such, the object of ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of irony since he is confidently unaware of the threat he poses to himself. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode is impersonal. The sub-category is irony displayed as the irony is displayed in the sequence of events.

4.4.5: 2 Samuel 17:23

There is no apparent irony in 17:23. Ahithophel sees that his advice has not been followed and travels to his home city, puts his affairs in order, and commits suicide. It has already been noted that the tactical military advice that Ahithophel gave to Absalom was the best advice for Absalom to succeed in battle, however, Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom not to lead his army into battle was not good advice as far as the expectations that the Israelites had for their leaders is concerned. It must also be noted that Ahithophel’s ‘wise’ advice was an act of high treason,\(^{730}\) as he advised Absalom to implement a subversive plan to kill the true King of Israel.

Of note, it may be suggested that the narrative which has focused strongly on the rightful king to sit over Israel, may be alluding to Saul’s suicide in this passage (1 Sam 31:4).

4.4.6: 2 Samuel 17:24-29

\(^{730}\) Fokkelman,“King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 230.
There is no apparent irony in the following verses. However, a brief commentary may be helpful to put the rest of the narrative in perspective.

In 17:24 it is reported that David has moved to Mahanaim while Absalom has settled in Gilead with all of the men of Israel. There Absalom gives to Amasa Joab’s role as captain of the army (17:25). Meanwhile, Shobi, Machir, Barzillai bring supplies for David and his men. The supplies allow David and his men to restore their energy, and the break allows them to regroup. Therefore, it would appear that Ahithophel’s tactical military advice was the correct advice to win the battle. Indeed, Ahithophel had warned Absalom that David and his army would be tired and weary. This is confirmed in verse 17:29:

4.4.7: Summary of 2 Samuel 17:1-28

There is no apparent irony in 17:1-4. In 17:5-7 Hushai seeks to frustrate Ahithophel’s advice, and in doing so gives Absalom advice which is poor tactical advice but good advice regarding honour in fighting. The type of irony in this section is irony displayed. In 17:8-13 Hushai gives Absalom his counsel. This advice ends up being poor tactical advice, and good advice if Absalom is going to lead his men out to war according to the expectations of Israel. The verbal irony in this section is pretended advice to the victim. In 17:14-22 a case of irony displayed illustrates that Absalom is a fool for letting Hushai know Ahithophel’s counsel. There is no further discernible verbal irony in this chapter.

4.5: 2 Samuel 18:1-19:8a

4.5.1: 2 Samuel 18:1-2a
At the lower level of 18:1-2a David organises his troops and appoints captains to lead thousands and captains to lead hundreds (18:1). In 18:2 it is reported that David divides his army so that it is under the joint control of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David’s decision to appoint Joab and Abishai as captains is a poor one. For in Exod 18:21, and Deut 1:15, it is said that only honourable men should be given leadership positions. Yet ironically Joab and Abishai, who David appoints to lead the hundreds and thousands are men of questionable character. The opposition in this narrative arises from the incompatibility between the conception of wise and upstanding men leading others (Exod 18:21, Deut 1:15) and David’s choice of Joab and Abishai to be his leaders (18:2). David is the object of ironic attack since he makes these appointments. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is implied by the use of the language and our background knowledge of the narrative. In all three verses (18:1-2a, in Exod 18:21 and Deut 1:15-18) the same language is used. The words which are common to all three verses are:

Arguably, there is an allusion to the sage advice of Jethro (Exod 18:21) and Moses (Deut 1:15-18) and David’s decisions are inconsistent with this advice. Indeed, at least two out of the three officers that David puts in charge of his army are known to be ruthless and reckless. Joab is complicit in Uriah’s unlawful death (2 Sam 11:16-17). Joab is also guilty of masking David’s incompetence (2 Sam 12:27-28). However, Joab’s greatest failing in the narrative thus far is his decision to trick David into bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 14). This ruse paved the way for the success of Absalom’s revolt.
Although not much is written about Abishai, it is implied that he is less than wise, honest, and God-fearing. McCarter writes, “The stories present him [Abishai] as heroic and fiercely loyal (cf. II Sam 21:16-17) but rash and rather cold blooded in dealing with enemies, often requiring restraint (I Sam 26:8-11; II Sam 16:9-12, 19:21-22).” Of all of the sons of Zeruiah, McCarter argues, “Here and elsewhere the sons of Zeruiah-prefer violent, swift action to reason and restraint.” Less is known of Ittai the Gittite. However, in 2 Sam 15:19-22 it is implied that Ittai is opportunistic.

The mode of verbal irony in this verse is impersonal and the sub-category is insinuation, since it is implied that the leaders in David’s army are corrupt.

4.5.2: 2 Samuel 18:2b-4

At the lower level of 18:2b David tells his soldiers that he will march out with them. The men tell David that he must not march out with them as his life is too valuable (18:3). In 18:4 David tells the soldiers that he will do as they requested. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David ought to lead them in battle since it is previously stated that Israel appointed David king because he leads his soldiers in battle (2 Sam 5:2-3). Not unlike the story of the woman from Tekoa (2 Sam 14:12-21), it would appear that David initially tried to do the right thing, yet is dissuaded from doing so, by the encouragement of subordinates.

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731 McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 95.
732 Ibid., 97.
733 Fokkelman suggests that the soldiers’ request for David to remain absent from the war provides “an ironic connection” with 2 Sam 17:2 where Ahithophel wanted David to be separate from his men. Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 238.
734 This may also have been the case in 2 Sam 11:1 where David does not go out to battle but remains in Jerusalem. The narrative informs the reader that Ahithophel was David’s counsellor (2 Sam 15:12), so it is possible that Ahithophel would have given David similar advice to the advice that he gave to Absalom (2 Sam 17:1-3). Ibid., 238.
The incongruity here is between David’s preparedness to fight honourably (18:2b) and the fact that he allows himself to be diverted from the honourable course of action by his men (18:3). So, ironically, David who is all too often inclined to do the wrong thing, is in this instance desirous of doing the right thing, but is persuaded by his subordinates to do the wrong thing. David is the object of ironic attack and the unknowing victim of irony.

The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is implied by the use of language and our background knowledge. As far as the language used in the narrative is concerned, Auld argues, “David’s insistence that he join the battle…is triply underscored linguistically: the verb is doubled by use of the infinitive absolute; the independent pronoun is used to stress the subject; and even that is further emphasized with the added “also” (gam).”\(^735\) This use of language highlights the incongruity mentioned above. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is insinuation. There is an insinuation that David is not the warrior king he once used to be.

4.5.3: 2 Samuel 18:5-7

At the lower level of the narrative David instructs his commanders to be gentle with Absalom, and all of Israel hear the command (18:5). The battle between the men of Israel and David’s troops is fierce, and David’s troops slaughter a great number of Absalom’s army (18:6-7). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is unable to discharge his responsibilities when it involves his family. After all, Absalom is committing treason for which the punishment is death (1 Kgs 2:25) and Absalom’s treason is a threat to David’s kingdom. Of note, Ahithophel’s decision to

\(^735\) Auld, I & II Samuel, 539.
hang himself (2 Sam 17:23) was in keeping with this punishment.\(^{736}\) Moreover, the ironist also implies that Absalom’s revolt was fuelled in large part by David’s inability to administer justice adequately. This implication relies on our background knowledge (2 Sam 15:3). Further, the ironist implies that David is quite happy to put the lives of his own men at risk while attempting to spare that of his enemy. The incongruity in the narrative is between David’s plea for the army to be gentle with Absalom and the implications with respect to Absalom’s treason and David’s own men just mentioned.

The inconsistency in David’s judgments has been a strong theme throughout the narrative. In some cases his punishment is too severe (2 Sam 12:5-6), and in other cases he does not administer justice at all (2 Sam 13:21, 14:33). The leniency David shows is predominantly to his own family members (2 Sam 13:21, 14:33). However, in this narrative the lives of David’s soldiers are at risk (18:4) and, indeed, David’s kingdom itself is at extreme risk, from the actions of his son, Absalom. Ironically, then, David is at his most lenient when the threat to his own men and his kingdom is at its most extreme.

David is the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is irony displayed.

4.5.4: 2 Samuel 18:8-9

At the lower level of these verses the forest is reported as being responsible for more victims than the sword (18:8). 18:9 describes how Absalom’s head/hair became entangled in a tree whilst his mule rode out from underneath him, leaving him hanging in the tree. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Absalom’s over-

\(^{736}\) Death by hanging is also the punishment for treason in Esther 2:23.
zealous, self-righteous vigilante mission has come to an absurd, if fitting, end. The incongruity here is between the earlier portrayal of Absalom as the just avenger of his sister, Tamar, and the current portrayal of him as a pathetic, treasonous criminal who has come to the end of the line. This is symbolised by Absalom’s hanging in the tree. This is significant, as treasonous kings were routinely hung on trees (Joshua 8:29; 10:26).

Absalom is the object of ironic attack. He is also the unknowing victim of irony as he is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content is dependent on our background knowledge concerning the sequence of events that began with the rape of Tamar.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of irony is irony displayed. However, this instance of irony displayed is different to the previous examples of irony displayed discussed in this thesis. In respect of this species of irony displayed Muecke says: “The other way is to accept the situation or the victim’s position but develop it according to the victim’s premises until the absurdity of the conclusion confronts the plausibility of the beginning.”37 In our example, the irony displayed involves Absalom. The initial position is that of Absalom’s hatred of Amnon for raping Tamar and his sense of outrage that David did nothing about it. The absurdity develops as follows. Absalom is originally portrayed as a character who is over-zealous when it concerns justice, but who then devolves into a person who is entirely unjust, even more unjust than David. So the greatest absurdity is that Absalom’s behaviour is in some cases more corrupt than David’s, despite Absalom’s apparent resentment towards David’s unjust behaviour. The absurdity in Absalom’s

37 Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 82.
extreme and corrupt behaviour confronts the plausibility of his initial intention to avenge.

Ironically, Absalom’s character and David’s character eventually become somewhat similar. Moreover, again ironically, Absalom’s vigilante behaviour which is initially fuelled in reaction to David’s unlawful behaviour, ends up being far worse than David’s behaviour. Absalom is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation.  

It might also be argued, that there is an allusion to the story of the woman of Tekoa in this verse. Notably, David swore an oath to the woman of Tekoa that he would ensure that not one hair from the head of her son would fall to the ground (2 Sam 14:11). Absalom is analogous to the woman’s son in the ruse of the woman of Tekoa. In the story of the woman of Tekoa, David promises to protect her son; in the current situation, David commands that Absalom be protected. In the story of the woman of Tekoa David’s decision to save her son is foolish since it leads to the return of Absalom from exile. Likewise David’s decision to protect Absalom is foolish. For Absalom should have been killed in line with laws which prohibit murder. By allowing him back to Jerusalem the inevitable was delayed, amidst much damage to the kingdom. So the allusion to the woman of Tekoa highlights David’s foolishness in protecting Absalom in the current situation.

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A summary of Absalom’s situation may be helpful to highlight the absurdity of the situation. In 2 Sam 13:28 Absalom orders that Amnon is killed in what could be called vengeance because of the rape of his sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:32). Yet, Absalom acts out of anger (2 Sam 13:32), and not according to good judgment, which means that Absalom’s actions are not sanctioned by the law (Lev 19:17). Absalom angrily demands that David give him justice in his own case (2 Sam 14:22), notwithstanding that justice in his case requires that Absalom is killed. Absalom then tricks the Israelites into following him, because he tells them that there is nobody to administer justice in Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:1-6). This is a manipulative comment. A further absurdity may be considered in the knowledge that Absalom appeared to believe that God was on his side (2 Sam 15:8), however, the reader knows that Absalom is only returned to Jerusalem because David is tricked into returning him (2 Sam 14:11-17).
In summation, neither Absalom nor David are obedient to the laws. The absurd outcome of Absalom’s vigilante behaviour has been discussed, as has David’s incompetence; specifically, his failure to administer the law adequately. Moreover, it is David’s incompetence that has enabled Absalom’s behaviour. The result of all this has been disastrous, as Israel is engaged in civil war.

Of note, the typical irony which is spoken of in this passage is the fact that Absalom was riding a mule. Auld suggests that there is irony in the contrast of Absalom behind a horse and a chariot (2 Sam 15:1) and Absalom riding a mule (2 Sam 18:9). Auld argues that the mule is a lesser animal which was also used by the princes when they fled from Amnon’s assassination (2 Sam 13:29). However, in this period mules were the traditional transport of princes and kings. Mules would have been a better choice for this battle as their dietary needs are easier to meet, and they are more surefooted than horses on uneven terrain. The terrain was known to be difficult as it is stated that the forest claimed more lives than the sword did (18:8). It might also be said that Auld’s observation that the princes fled from Amnon’s assassination on mules reinforces the idea that mules were thought to be special animals fit for royalty. Thereby, it is unlikely that there is irony in the mention of the mule.

4.5.5: 2 Sam 18:10-11

At the lower level of 18:11 is Joab’s response to the man who announced to Joab that Absalom was hanging in a tree (18:10). Joab asks the man why he did not kill Absalom, and Joab tells the man that he would have rewarded him, had he done so (18:11). At the upper level of the narrative Joab is implying that the man should have killed Absalom. Since Joab’s comment is not a strict request for information. Joab is

739 Auld, I & II Samuel, 541.
740 Alter, The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel, 304-305.
instead making a rhetorical question. In addition, Joab is implying that would still be prepared to pay the man if he kills Absalom. So his statement about the past is also an offer with respect to the future. This view is supported by Fokkelman who argues that Joab’s comment ינה ראית (18:11) is a cutting response to the soldier’s remark והנה ראית (18:10); that 18:11c (מדוע לא-כיתו שם ארצה) is a reproach in the form of a rhetorical question; and that 18:11d is an inducement.741

The opposition in the narrative arises from the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. Arguably, Joab is not asking the soldier why he did not kill Absalom because he is genuinely interested to know the man’s motivation; instead Joab is taking the opportunity to induce the soldier to kill Absalom. The grade of verbal irony is overt in the case of the rhetorical question but is covert in the case of the inducement. The implied inducement is not immediately apparent and is dependent on the use of language as well as the context.

On the other hand, Baldwin suggests that Joab’s question is sarcastic,742 however, it is more appropriate to argue for a subtler irony in this instance, given that the rhetorical question is followed by an inducement. Since the inducement is to perform an act that is contrary to the king’s command and is, therefore, unlawful, it is not merely an inducement but a bribe. The bribe is as follows:

ועלי לתת לך עשׂרה כסף וחגרה אחת

That Joab is offering a bribe supports the irony in 18:1-2a concerning David’s appointment of corrupt captains. For in Exod 18:21 it is stated that Jethro chose men to lead hundreds and thousands who were trustworthy and hated bribes whereas David

741 Fokkelman, “King David (II Samuel 9-20 & I Kings 1-2),” 243.
742 Baldwin, 1 and 2 Samuel, 270.
appointed Joab to lead over hundreds and thousands. The fact that Joab is offering a bribe makes him the object of ironic attack in this verse (18:11).

4.5.6: 2 Samuel 18:12-13

At the lower level of 18:12-13 the soldier that Joab was speaking to tells Joab that he would never kill Absalom, as David commanded the troops not to (18:12). The soldier also makes a point of telling Joab that it is his belief that if he had killed Absalom, Joab would not have protected him (18:13). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that the soldier would have killed Absalom and accepted Joab’s bribe if he had believed that Joab would have protected him. This implication arises from the incompatibility between the following statements. Firstly, the soldier boldly tells Joab that he would not kill Absalom as this is the king’s command, even going so far as to suggest that he could be given “a thousand pieces of silver” and still refuse to disobey David’s order (18:12). This remark is an overstatement as the soldier restates Joab’s offer tenfold.\(^743\) However, secondly, in the next sentence the soldier suggests that he would not kill Absalom because Joab would not protect him if he did (18:13).

The opposition in the narrative arises from the incompatibility with what the soldier says and what the soldier means. The grade of verbal irony in this instance is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. In 18:12 the soldier adamantly tells Absalom that he will not kill Absalom. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and as stated the sub-category of irony is overstatement. The object of ironic attack is the manipulative nature of the soldier.

4.5.7: 2 Samuel 18:14-17

\(^{743}\) Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, 305.
At the lower level of 18:14 Joab strikes Absalom in the heart with three spears, and ten of Joab’s armour-bearers strike Absalom and kill him (18:15). In 18:16 the troops come back from chasing the Israelites, and in 18:17 Absalom is buried while the Israelites flee the war and return home. At the upper level it is implied that Joab has committed an act of treason because he has not followed the king’s orders and that he is partly responsible for Absalom’s attempt to usurp the throne. In 18:5 it states that the king ordered Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to deal gently with Absalom. Thereby, ironically, Joab has followed the correct course of action by killing Absalom since this saves the kingdom, but he does so by way of an act of treason since he directly disobeyed the king’s command. Moreover, Joab is complicit in Absalom’s revolt since he engineered Absalom’s return to Jerusalem. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of verbal irony is impersonal. The sub-category is irony displayed. Joab is the object of ironic attack and is also he unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of the irony of the situation.

Of note is an irony that emerges out of some features of the war fought between David and Absalom that resemble features in the content of Ahithophel’s counsel to Absalom in 2 Sam 17:1-3. Ahithophel suggests that Absalom should allow Ahithophel to go after David without Absalom (2 Sam 17:3). Similarly in 18:3 Joab and the army go out without David. In 2 Sam 17:2 Ahithophel predicts that David’s army would be in a panic. It could be suggested that Absalom’s army was in a panic (18:7-8). Ahithophel says that he will only kill the king (2 Sam 17:3). Although a large number of Absalom’s army die (18:7), the battle ceases after Absalom’s death (18:16). Ahithophel predicts that all of the people will flee (2 Sam 17:2). In 18:17 all of the people with Absalom flee. In the light of the above, we can now see that Absalom was defeated by the very advice which he decided not to follow, namely, the advice from
Ahithophel that Absalom should not lead his men into battle. Moreover, the things that Ahithophel predicted would happen to David and his army (if Absalom followed Ahithophel’s advice) actually happened to Absalom and his army. This is all very ironic. Indeed, since Absalom is the object of ironic attack by virtue of his foolishness, the category of irony is verbal irony. The irony is greatly strengthened by the following consideration. Presumably, Absalom led his men into battle against Ahithophel’s advice because he wanted to do the honourable thing. If so, he was acting honourably in the course of engaging in an unjust and treasonable war. This fits the image of Absalom as the self-righteous vigilante whose ‘honourable’ response to his sister’s rape leads to an unnecessary and disastrous war.

Of note, it may in fact also be the case that David actually acted on Ahithophel’s advice; the advice that he had clandestinely received via Hushai. Therefore, by providing Hushai with Ahithophel’s counsel, Absalom not only gave David the advantage of knowing what advice Absalom had been given, but also the winning strategy. If so, this adds yet another ironic layer.

4.5.8: 2 Samuel 18:18

This verse is not ironic, but instead is an aetiology which explains the origins of Absalom’s monument.

4.5.9: 2 Samuel 18:19-23

At the lower level of the narrative Ahimaaz asks Joab if he (Ahimaaz) can be the messenger to tell David that the Lord has delivered David from his enemies (18:19). Joab tells Ahimaaz that he will not tell David the news of the war on this day, as the king’s son has been killed (18:20). Joab orders a Cushite to tell David what he has seen,
and the Cushite runs off (18:21). Ahimaaz asks Joab again if he can run to tell David the news of the war. Joab replies to Ahimaaz with a question asking him why he wants to tell David the news, given that Ahimaaz has nothing to gain\(^{744}\) by telling David the news (18:22). Ahimaaz responds that he is adamant that he would like to run, and Joab tells him to run. Ahimaaz then outruns the Cushite (18:23).

At the upper level of the narrative Joab’s question is rhetorical and he is implying to Ahimaaz that it would be dangerous for Ahimaaz to inform David of Absalom’s death since David may respond violently. The opposition arises from the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. Joab asks Ahimaaz why he wants to run as he has nothing to gain, whereas the implication is Joab tells him not to run as he will likely be harmed.

The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. As mentioned, Joab asks a rhetorical question in his speech. Joab’s question in 18:22 is a rhetorical question since it is a warning rather than a request for information. The rhetorical question, which is spoken by Joab, is as follows:

למה־זה אתה רץ בני ולכה אין־בשׂורה מצאת

The claim that this question is rhetorical is confirmed in 18:23 where Ahimaaz does not respond to Joab by giving him extra information, but instead replies to the implicit warning in Joab’s comment by saying, “Come what may, I will run”. McCarter

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\(^{744}\) There are difficulties with the translation of the word בְּשׂוֹרָה. The traditional interpretation suggests that this word may be translated as reward, however, this suggests that the messenger may miss out on something that would be given to him; for example a monetary reward. The interpretation that the messenger has nothing to gain, suggesting that there will be nothing favourable in telling the king that his son is dead, would seem to be a clearer interpretation. (McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 402).
adds that Joab’s use of the word בני in this sentence is either patronizing, condescending, or ironic.\textsuperscript{745}

4.5.10: 2 Samuel 18:24-27

At the lower level of the narrative a sentinel sees somebody running (18:24) and tells the king. David responds that he believes the runner is bringing news of the war (18:25). In 18:26 the sentinel sees another man coming and he informs the gatekeeper. The king believes that the second person is also bringing news of the war. The sentinel suspects that the first runner is Ahimaaz which comforts the king who expects him to bring good news (18:27). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that while Absalom’s death is bad news for David it is in fact good news for Israel. There is an incongruity between what the runners presumably believe they are bringing, namely, the good news of victory, and David’s assumed response, namely, the bad news that Absalom has been killed. David’s response can be assumed because he commanded the chiefs to be gentle with Absalom (18:5). The opposition in the narrative arises from the incongruity that the news is both good and bad at the same time. David is the object of ironic attack since he thinks what is actually good news is bad news. For not only is the victory good news but also Absalom’s death, given the threat he posed to the kingdom. Thus David says in 18:27,

\begin{quote}
אישׁ טוב זה ואל־בשׂורה טובה יבוא
\end{quote}

Presumably, David’s interpretation of good news is not only that the war is won, but also that Absalom is alive. However, objectively the better news is if Absalom is killed, as he is a threat to the king, his men and Israel.

\textsuperscript{745} Ibid., 408.
The grade of verbal irony is covert and the ironic content depends on the use of language and our background knowledge of the narrative. The emphasis on the news being good is particularly present in the word טוב/טוב which is repeated in 18:27. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal, and the sub-category is ambiguity, since the news is both good news and ‘bad’ news. David is the object of ironic attack since he sees Absalom’s death as bad news and cannot see that it is actually good news (or, at the very least is both bad (Absalom being his son) and good).

4.5.11: 2 Samuel 18:28-32

At the lower level of 18:28-31 both of the messengers report the events of the war to David. In 18:28 Ahimaaz prostrates himself in front of David and tells him that he has won the battle. Ahimaaz blesses the Lord for freeing David of his enemies. In 18:29 David asks Ahimaaz if Absalom is well and Ahimaaz replies that he saw a scuffle with Absalom, but that he could not be sure of what happened. David tells Ahimaaz to stay where he is and to stay still (18:30). In 18:31 the Cushite tells David that the Lord has judged David and freed him from those who rose against him. David asks the Cushite if Absalom is well, and the Cushite tells David that Absalom is dead (18:32). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David perceives Absalom’s death as a bad thing, whereas the runners perceive Absalom’s death as a good thing.

The dominant irony in the narrative arises from the use of the word שׁפטך. The messengers interpret God’s judgement to be in favour of David, as David’s enemies have been killed. However, the ironist implies that far from God’s judgement being in favour of David, the war and the death of Absalom are all part of God’s punishment of David for his transgressions (2 Sam 12:7-12). The opposition in the narrative arises
from the contrast between the messenger’s account of God’s judgement as being favourable to David and the implied account that God’s judgement is against David and God is carrying out his promised punishment of David.

The innocence in the passage comes through the innocence of the messengers. However, they cannot be spoken of as confidently unaware, but are instead ingenus. In the mode of irony which is ingenus irony, the ironist does not feign ignorance, but instead uses a true innocent to expose the incongruity in a situation. Although Ahimaaz dissimulated somewhat with respect to Absalom’s death he, nevertheless, is truly innocent in relation to any knowledge about God’s punishing of David. The grade of the verbal irony is covert, and is dependent on the use of language and our background knowledge of the text. An anomaly in the language concerns the emphasis on the word שלום (18:28; 18:29; 18:32) and the mention of אבשלום (father of peace) (18:29; 18:32). There is a feeling of completion in this section, where שלום has been restored, and the punishment of David has been resolved.

4.5.12: 2 Samuel 18:33/19:1

At the lower level of 18:33 David goes up to his chamber and weeps. He then says:

בני אבשלום בני בני אבשלום מי יתן מותי אני תחתיך אבשלום בני בני

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is reminded of David’s punishment in 2 Sam 12:14:

אפס כי נאץ נאצת את אבי יהוה בדבר הזה גם הבן הילוד מות ימו

Although this verse is followed by the death of David’s illegitimate child with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:15) – the child being the apparent victim of David’s transferred punishment - allusions to Absalom’s death are also evident. Certainly, Absalom’s
revolt is implicitly predicted in 2 Sam 12:11-12. Moreover, David’s own proclamation in 18:33 alludes to this punishment. Not only is the word יִשְׂרָאֵל mentioned five times, but David says that he would have died instead of Absalom. As has already been mentioned, death was the appropriate punishment for David’s transgressions (Lev 20:10).

The opposition in the narrative arises from the incongruity between David’s grandiose remark that he would have died instead of Absalom (18:3) and the fact that David actually should have died, given that it was David’s transgressions which led to Absalom’s death (2 Sam 11-12). Indeed, this incongruity is ironic. David is the object of ironic attack. The sub-category of verbal irony is pretended defence of the victim, as the ironist defends David in the lower level, yet, is pejoratively critical of David in the upper level.

4.5.13: 2 Samuel 19:1-3

At the lower level of 19:1 Joab was told that the king was grieving for Absalom. In 19:2 it is stated that the day which should have been a day of victory for all of the troops was instead a day of mourning because of the king’s grief. In 19:3 the soldiers secretly made their way into the city as though they had fled from the battle and were ashamed. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is more concerned about his personal grief than he is for the kingdom. The opposition in the narrative concerns the contrast of David’s grief with the soldier’s shame. The soldiers should have marched into the city jubilantly, yet they are forced to move into Jerusalem silently and unsure of their reception. The news that the soldiers bring is good for David as a king, but not good news for David as a father. However, the focus of this narrative has been David’s failings as a king, and David’s failure to lead his people
competently, which may go towards addressing Brueggemann’s concern that nobody is reported as comforting David in his time of grief.\(^\text{746}\) The implication is that while David is understandably grief-stricken, Absalom died as a result of trying to usurp David’s throne and, more generally, the interests of the Israelites as a people outweighs the well-being of either David or Absalom. The Israelites have just been engaged in a civil war, which was not of their making.

David is the object of ironic attack since, yet again, he manifests deficiencies as a king. He is also the unknowing victim of irony as he is confidently unaware of both his shortcoming in this context and the irony it gives rise to. The grade of irony is covert as it not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal and the sub-category is irony displayed. The irony emerges from the arrangement of the events in which David’s grief is contrasted with the shame of the soldiers, who should have returned triumphantly.

4.5.14: 2 Samuel 19:4-8a

At the lower level of 19:4 David cried out for Absalom in a loud voice. In 19:5 Joab came to the king’s house and spoke to the king. Joab told David that he had covered all of the officers in shame despite their efforts to save David’s life. Joab also mentions that David has covered the lives of his sons, daughters, wives and concubines in shame. In 19:6 Joab states that David has shamed these people out of love of those who hate him and he has earned the hatred of those who love him. Joab mentions that David’s actions have made it clear to the commanders and officers that they do not mean anything to David, and that he believes that David would be happy if all of the army were dead so long as Absalom remained alive. In 19:7 Joab tells David to go out and

\(^{746}\) Brueggemann, \textit{First and Second Samuel}, 324.
speak kindly to his servants because if he does not all of his servants will desert him that night, and if that were to happen it would be the greatest disaster ever to befall David. In 19:8 David takes his seat at the gate. The troops are told that David has taken his seat and they come before the king.

At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that Joab has once again saved David; in this case by reminding him of his obligations as king and warning him of the political consequences of him not doing so. Similarly, in the Uriah narrative Joab changes David’s command to make a situation workable (2 Sam 11:16-17), and Joab warns David to join the war in Rabbah (2 Sam 12:27-28). The implied pejorative criticism of David relies in part on the word choice and the exaggerated language in Joab’s speech.

McCarter argues that the words love and hate in 19:6 are political terms.\(^{747}\) The relationship between David and his soldiers and the relation between David and Absalom is also political (albeit, not entirely so, given Absalom is his son.) Accordingly, Joab is warning David to act in favour of those to whom he owes his primary political allegiance in this situation, namely, his soldiers.

Moreover, Joab’s warning to David is emphasised by his use of exaggerated language. Anderson writes, “Joab’s scathing rebuke of David contains a number of exaggerations. It is questionable (although, not impossible) whether Absalom would have really exterminated the house of David in its entirety, including his wives, concubines, and daughters.”\(^{748}\) The warning is also emphasised by his use of the scathing language which follows in 19:6. Furthermore, in 19:7 Joab swears an oath and continues his diatribe.

\(^{747}\) McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, 409.

The substance of what Joab says to David is true. David does have a disposable attitude towards the troops and has an unwarranted regard for Absalom who was trying to kill him and usurp his thrown. Although Joab and the soldiers who killed Absalom have directly opposed David’s command, it must be stressed that Absalom was fixated on destroying David and usurping the thrown. Even if it were the case that David genuinely believed that he would have been prepared to die in place of Absalom, (18:33), he would still be culpable for failing to discharge his duties as king. Moreover, David is contemptuous of the people who serve and protect him.

As detailed above, the ironist in 19:4-8a implies that Joab has saved David by reminding him of his obligations as king and in warning him of the political consequences for him and the kingdom of his not doing so. Ironically, although David is the king and, as such, supposedly wise and politically astute, it is his subordinate whose actions are necessary for him to act as a king should. David is the object of ironic attack. While David understands Joab’s warning and, and as a consequence, goes to meet the soldiers, it is doubtful that he grasps the irony of the situation. Therefore, he is probably the unknowing victim of irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode is impersonal. The sub-category is overstatement, albeit the substance of what Joab says is true.

Of note, it is also ironical that Joab, the current saviour of David, was the person who was behind the ruse which tricked David into bringing Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 14:2).

4.5.15 Summary of 2 Samuel 18:1-19:8a

In 18:1-2a there is an insinuation that David appoints thugs over his army instead of wise and upstanding men. In 18:2b-4 there is another insinuation that David is not the
warrior king he once was. In 18:5-7 an example of irony displayed shows that David does not administer justice effectively.

Verses 18:8-9 show irony displayed as the absurdity of Absalom’ situation is played out. In 18:10-11 it is Joab’s rhetorical question which is ironic. Joab asks the soldier why he did not kill Absalom. The soldier replies in 18:12-13 in an overstatement that he would not kill Absalom because of David’s command, and because Joab would not protect him if he did. In 18:14-17 the major irony is irony displayed as Absalom was defeated by the advice that he did not follow.

In 18:19-23 a rhetorical question challenges Ahimaaz’s intention to share with David the news of the war. In 18:24-27 there is an ambiguity concerning whether or not the news that the messengers bring to David is good or bad. Verses 18:28-32 are a case of *ingenu* irony, where it is the true innocent who exposes David’s confused response to Absalom’s death. In 18:33 the sub-category of verbal irony is pretended defence of the victim. In 19:1-3 the irony displayed suggests that David’s decision to ignore the troops was a great insult. Verses 19:4-8a show David to have his judgements confused as he weeps for Absalom who has set out to destroy him, and David is angry at his army who have saved his life. This irony comes through in the use of overstated language.
CHAPTER FIVE – CHARACTERISATIONS AND MISCELLANEOUS FINDINGS

This chapter will explore the characterisations which have emerged as a result of considering the narrative in terms of verbal irony. These characterisations will be grouped together under the headings of the major characters in the narrative. These characters are David, Amnon, Absalom, and Joab. Following this section will be a grouping of miscellaneous new findings which have come out of looking at the text in terms of verbal irony. These findings will be grouped according to the biblical chapters to which they belong.

5.1 CHARACTERISATIONS FROM CONSIDERATION OF THE TEXT IN TERMS OF VERBAL IRONY

Various different criticisms of the characters in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a have emerged in the body of this thesis. These criticisms arise as a result of taking the ironic perspective; specifically, the perspective of verbal irony. The characters, notably David, are the objects of frequent ironic attack at the hands of the ironist; be the ironist the author, the narrator or another character in the text. When these criticisms are grouped together they point to a certain pervasive critical tone in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. This critical tone emerges from the ironist’s ongoing, irony-based pejorative criticism of central characters in the narrative.

It is worth noting at this point that some instances of criticism are made exclusively through irony and, therefore, the criticism is only implied. However, in other cases the irony merely adds an emphasis to the criticism which is already explicit or otherwise transparent. All the identified instances of both kinds of irony-based criticism have been collected in this section. This has been done in order to establish
those characterisations in the narrative which depend upon verbal irony. For more in-depth accounts of the instances of irony referred to in this chapter please refer to relevant sections in the body of the thesis; i.e. the sections corresponding to the verse numbers in the characterisations.

5.1.1. DAVID

This inquiry has as a main focus the character of David. As has already been discussed David is variously interpreted to be a character who is heroic, a character who is criticised, and a character who is shown to be flawed but ‘human’ and ultimately redeemed. The result of this inquiry is as follows. David has been found to be a character with many vices. Sometimes he acts in cold indifference, sometimes he is portrayed as being foolish and easily manipulated, at other times he is shown to be the manipulator and oppressor. It must also be added that David is portrayed as a character who repents and maintains a relationship with God. Yet, David’s acts of repentance are few and far between, do not issue in a change in his behaviour, and his relationship with God is marred by misunderstandings and a flagrant disregard of the laws. David’s character will be discussed under the following headings: David as a king, David as a transgressor, David as a fool, David as a danger to others, David and justice, David as a corrupt politician, David and God, and Suspicious events in David’s history.

5.1.1.1. David as a king

As far as the findings of this research are concerned, the most salient criticism of David in his role as a king is that he does not live up to reasonable expectations. The irony in the SN emphasizes David’s failings as a king. This section can be divided under two major headings: David does not live up to the expectations that the Israelites have of him, and David does not live up to God’s expectations of a king.
5.1.1.1.1. David does not live up to the expectations that the Israelites have of him

In 11:1 the mode of irony displayed emphasizes the pejorative criticism that David does not lead the Israelites out to war as a king should. In 12:27-8 there is an instance of pretended advice. It involves Joab’s pretended advice to David (the victim of ironic attack) that he will name the city of waters after himself if David does not join the battle. In a move that discounts the argument that David could not lead his men out to war, David rides out to the battle and takes the city in an unacceptable manner, including taking the spoils of war. This pejorative criticism is emphasised by the use of overstatement (12:29-31). In 15:14 David flees Jerusalem, which is contrary to the expectation that the Israelites had that David would lead them in battle and be a warrior king. In this verse the irony emerges in the style of low-burlesque. In 18:3 David is persuaded not to lead his men out to war, despite this being the reason why he was anointed as a king in the first place. This criticism emerges by way of an insinuation. In 19:1-3 David grieves for Absalom instead of receiving the troops, in a case of irony displayed. In 19:4-8 Joab tells David, in overstated language, to go out and receive the soldiers.

5.1.1.1.2. David does not live up to God’s expectations of a king

David’s major affront to God lies in the fact that he regularly breaks God’s laws. These instances are spoken of ironically and will be discussed under the next heading, “David as a transgressor.” However, the clearest indication that David does not live up to God’s expectations is found in 12:7-14 where God explicitly condemns David. Although the language in this section is belaboured, it has been argued that the language is proportionate to the sentiment. Moreover, such explicit condemnation has more in common with the criticism used in satire than the dissimulation of an ironist
engaged in satire. Nevertheless, 12:7-14 does add weight to the criticisms which emerged from the ironic interpretation provided in this thesis.

5.1.1.2. David as a transgressor

David’s transgressions can be divided into three different categories which are as follows: David is unequivocally guilty of breaking a law, David is guilty of breaking a social convention, and David does not break a law yet is punished by God. In the following cases the irony is used in different ways. Either the transgressions are spoken of ironically, or the irony brings the transgression to light.

5.1.1.2.1. David is unequivocally guilty of breaking a law

In 11:3 David is guilty of coveting another man’s wife. This event is criticized in a rhetorical question. Furthermore, David commits adultery (11:4), and the criticism of this event emerges in the form of understatement. David takes the spoils of war in Rabbah (12:30-31). This is subjected to ironic criticism by way of an overstatement.

5.1.1.2.2. David is guilty of flouting a social convention

In order to cover up his transgression David withdraws Uriah from the war and tries to coerce Uriah into sleeping with Bathsheba, including leaving a ‘present’ for Uriah (11:6-8). It is implied that this gift is a bribe. This implication is an element of David’s attempt to manipulate Uriah contrary to the laws. This manipulation is communicated by way of irony displayed. In 11:11 by means of a rhetorical question Uriah criticizes David in relation to David’s suggestion that Uriah sleep with Bathsheba when all of Israel are at battle with the ark. If Uriah were to do as David suggested he would violate the rules of ritual purity which soldiers were expected to uphold. This makes David’s previous insistence on strict ritual purity for soldiers suspicious (1 Sam 21:5).
Regardless of Uriah’s protestations, and the fact that Uriah reminded David of the rules of holy war, David invites Uriah to a feast and tries to weaken Uriah’s resolve so that he will sleep with Bathsheba. This is another example of irony displayed (11:13). In 15:24-29 David sends the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem with two priests in order to create a spy network. The irony in this criticism is a rhetorical question.

5.1.1.2.3. David does not break a law, yet is punished by God

In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note, because David could not corrupt Uriah. It may be argued that David does not break a law in this instance since David does not kill Uriah personally. However, David’s sin is confirmed by God’s punishment (12:10). This section is an example of irony displayed. This decision not only resulted in Uriah’s death but also claimed the lives of a number of other loyal soldiers (11:17). Joab reacted to all this with a scathing rhetorical question (11:18-21).

5.1.1.3. David as a fool

In the preceding sections David does not live up to the expectations that the Israelites and God had of David, and David proves to be guilty of a number of different transgressions. David is also portrayed as a fool. This section will concentrate on the instances where verbal irony has portrayed David as being particularly idiotic. The ways in which David is shown to be a fool are as follows: David’s acts of stupidity, David is spoken to in a parable and misses the point of the parable, David is tricked by his sons and Joab/ the woman of Tekoa, and David is not in tune with those around him.
5.1.1.3.1 David’s acts of stupidity

This section is focused on particular instances where David is shown to be foolish in light of what a reasonable person would be expected to understand or do. David’s plan to cover-up his transgressions as manifest in Uriah’s death note is unworkable and, therefore, shows David to be a fool. This is a case of irony displayed (11:15). Thus, if Joab were to put Uriah in the front of heavy fighting and order the troops to withdraw from him, the troops would know that Uriah was being killed intentionally. Joab’s rhetorical question, which alludes to corrupt kings, points to this stupidity (11:18-21).

Another act of stupidity by David is his decision to leave ten concubines behind in Jerusalem to look after the palace while he flees (15:16). This stupidity was conveyed by means of irony displayed. David knew that it was customary for a challenger to the throne to take a king’s concubines and usurp his position, as this was what David did to Saul. David also proves himself to be a fool when he argues that God would turn Shimei’s curse to good, despite this being contrary to the laws (16:11-12). The narration of this event involves the ironic mode of parody.

5.1.1.3.2. David is told a parable and misses the point of the parable

In 12:1-6 David is oblivious that the parable he is told is analogous to his own situation. The ironic content of this instance of the sub-category of irony by analogy consists of pejorative, indeed scathing, criticism of the actions of the character who represents David. In 12:5-6 David orders that the character who he is analogous to be put to death; this also involves ironic overstatement.

5.1.1.3.3. David is tricked by his sons and Joab/the woman of Tekoa

In 13:6 David is tricked by Amnon. In 13:7 the irony continues on from 13:6 and is best described as pretended defence of the victim. Here David is portrayed as a fool
who could not see through a ruse which the ordinary person would penetrate. In 13:23-27 David is manipulated by another son, Absalom. Absalom tricks David into sending Amnon to be ambushed and killed (13:28). The insinuation in this narrative, namely, that Amnon is to be executed, is missed entirely by David. David is then tricked by the woman of Tekoa, working in collaboration with Joab, into taking on the guilt of Absalom’s transgression. Her speech uses overstated language (14:11). David is also tricked into swearing an oath to enable Absalom’s return to Jerusalem (14:13). This time the woman of Tekoa makes use of a rhetorical question. In 14:23 Joab uses inappropriate praise to get David to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (14:23). This is not the best course of action to take, as it means that Absalom is not punished for his role in Amnon’s death. David is tricked once again by Absalom. This time David is tricked into allowing Absalom to make a vow to Yahweh in Hebron (15:7), despite the dangers of allowing him to do so (15:8). The sub-category of irony is an insinuation.

5.1.1.3.4. David is not in tune with those around him

David appears to be oblivious to Absalom’s anger. Indeed Jonadab has to tell David why Absalom has arranged Amnon’s murder (13:32-33). The irony in this section contrasts Jonadab’s wisdom with David’s foolishness. In 14:15-17 the woman of Tekoa tells David that he is wise and all-knowing. This is an ironic statement, which makes use of the sub-category of impersonal irony; praise in order to blame.

5.1.1.4. David as a danger to others

David’s foolishness has profoundly harmful effects on individuals and the community. So too does David’s immoral and unlawful decisions. These harmful effects will be outlined under the headings, David as a danger to his troops, and David as a danger to his family.
5.1.1.4.1. David as a danger to his troops

David is guilty of coveting another man’s wife. In particular David is guilty of coveting a woman who is the wife of an esteemed soldier, and the daughter of one of David’s elite soldiers; and both of these men are at war (11:3). This criticism arises from the rhetorical question the messenger addresses to David. In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note; David is seeking to kill Uriah because he could not corrupt him. The pejorative criticism in this section arises out of the placement of events; a feature of irony displayed. Joab revises David’s unworkable plan – the plan to put Uriah at the forefront of heavy fighting whilst withdrawing the other troops. However, under Joab’s revised plan a number of soldiers die (11:17). As has already been mentioned, the criticism of David in this section emerges from Joab’s rhetorical question. It must also be added that David coldly looks upon these soldier’s deaths as a case of collateral damage (11:25). This irony is emphasized in a case of understatement.

5.1.1.4.2. David as a danger to his family

The punishment for David’s sins is transferred onto the unnamed child of the illegitimate union of David and Bathsheba (12:13-14), and the child dies (12:19). The criticism of David’s reaction to the child’s death arises from the arrangement of events whereby David makes a grand display of repentance prior to the baby’s death (12:16) but does not mourn after the baby’s death (12:20). This criticism emerges in a combination of irony displayed and a rhetorical question. David orders Tamar to serve Amnon; as a consequence, she is raped (13:7). A reasonable person would have been suspicious of Amnon’s plan. This criticism of David is made by way of an instance of the sub-category of pretended defence of the victim. David is also tricked by Absalom.
Absalom tricks David into sending Amnon to be ambushed (13:23-26a), and killed (13:28). This is another ruse which a reasonable person would detect. It is also a case of pretended defence of the victim. In 15:10 David’s own son declares himself to be the King of Israel, and begins a revolution against David. Yet, David leaves ten concubines behind in Jerusalem to look after the palace (15:16), leaving the concubines vulnerable to rape. The irony in this instance is low burlesque.

5.1.1.5. David and justice

One of the salient irony-based criticisms of David is his poor administration of justice. The problems with David’s judgements in this respect can be categorised under the following headings: David’s administration of justice is too harsh, David’s administration of justice is too lenient, and David’s administration of justice is inconsistent.

5.1.1.5.1. David’s administration of justice is too harsh

In 12:5-6 David orders the rich man in Nathan’s Parable to be put to death for a minor offence. The pejorative criticism of David in this example emerges by way of irony by analogy. In 16:4 David gives away Mephibosheth’s estate to Ziba without witnesses and a proper court case. This is both a breach of procedure and an excessively punitive measure taken against Mephibosheth. Both of these examples involve ironic overstatement.

5.1.1.5.2. David’s administration of justice is too lenient

In 13:21 David does not punish Amnon for raping Tamar, nor does he award any compensation to Tamar or her guardian. While there is no easy solution to this problem, David could have exiled Amnon. In another complex case David chooses not
to punish Absalom for ordering the execution of Amnon (14:13). This criticism of Absalom emerges by way of a rhetorical criticism. In 16:10 David allows Shimei to curse him as he believes that God is causing Shimei to curse. The irony-based criticism in this example is made by way of a rhetorical question. Similarly, David commands his soldiers to act gently with Absalom, despite the fact that Absalom has committed treason (18:5-7). This is a case of irony displayed.

5.1.1.5.3. David’s administration of justice is inconsistent

In 14:24 David brings Absalom to Jerusalem but he keeps Absalom out of his sight. This is inconsistent with the oath that he has made to the woman of Tekoa. The criticism of David in this example arises from an ironic insinuation.

5.1.1.6. David as the corrupt politician

David is better spoken of as a corrupt king rather than a corrupt politician. Nevertheless, there are a number of similarities between David and modern-day corrupt politicians. These similarities are best discussed under the titles: The cover-up, David as an opportunist, and David’s political double-speak. The verbal irony in the narrative emphasizes David’s corrupt nature.

5.1.1.6.1. The cover-up

In order to cover up his transgression David withdraws Uriah from the war and tries to coerce Uriah into sleeping with Bathsheba, including leaving a bribe for Uriah (11:6-8). The irony on this occasion is irony displayed. Uriah refuses to sleep with Bathsheba, and David pushes Uriah further by asking why he did not go down to his wife (11:10). Uriah scolds David by means of a rhetorical question for suggesting that he sleep with Bathsheba when all of Israel is at war with the ark at their side (11:11). Regardless of
Uriah’s protestations, and the fact that Uriah reminded David of the rules of holy war, David invites Uriah to a feast and tries to weaken Uriah’s resolve so that he will sleep with Bathsheba, but Uriah steadfastly refuses to do so (11:13). This is another example of irony displayed. In 11:15 David sends Uriah back to battle with his own death-note, because David could not corrupt Uriah. The irony in this example arises from the incongruity between David’s corrupt behaviour with Uriah’s uprightness. This is another instance of irony displayed. Furthermore, Joab’s revised plan to conceal David’s transgression results in the death of a number of soldiers (11:17). Again, the criticism of David’s decision is implied by way of an instance of the sub-category of irony displayed. David coldly looks upon the soldiers deaths as a case of collateral damage (11:25).

5.1.1.6.2. David as an opportunist

In 12:27-28 Joab tells David that if he does not enter the battle and take the city of Rabbah Joab will name the city after himself. This is an example of pretended advice to the victim. David only enters the battle at this late stage and David takes the spoils of war (12:30-31). The irony-based criticism of David is made by way overstatement. An instance of parody occurs in 15:18 when David leaves Jerusalem and is stoned by a Saulide. The ironic implication is that David usurped Saul’s throne. In another political move which is contrary to the conventions of Israelite society, David sends the ark back to Jerusalem to provide a cover for his spy network. (15:25-29). A rhetorical question emphasises the criticism of this action of David. Finally, in 18:1-2a there is an insinuation that David appoints men of questionable character to lead his army.
5.1.1.6.3. David’s political double-speak

David’s duplicity is further evidenced in David’s first interaction with Ittai. The ironist implies that David is engaged in political double-speak in this encounter (15:19-20).

The irony-based criticism of David is made by way of rhetorical questions. In 15:24-29 David’s request for the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, to act as his spies is another example of political double-speak. The irony in this instance is similarly made by way of a rhetorical question.

5.1.1.7. David and God

Of note in the SN is David’s relationship with God. Although God is not a main character in this narrative, God is a pivotal character as far as understanding the pejorative criticism of David is concerned. For God criticises David explicitly. Because God criticizes David directly there is little irony in the following section. However, the explicit criticism has been combined with the implicit irony-based criticism. For it is the cumulative effect that reveals the strength of God’s disapproval. This section will be divided into two sections: God’s displeasure with David; and Ambiguous encounters with God.

5.1.1.7.1. God’s displeasure with David

In 11:28 it is clearly written that God is displeased with David. God promises to punish David for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed (12:7-15). God recounts all of the things that God has given to David (12:7-9) and suggests that David is ungrateful. God scolds David and holds him responsible for Uriah’s death (12:9). God tells David that the sword will never leave his house now that David has taken Uriah’s wife, and that David has despised Yahweh (12:10). After hearing God’s promised severe punishment (12:11-12), David finally appears to be repentant in 12:13. However, an ironic
interpretation suggests that David’s admission of guilt should not be entirely trusted. In 12:16 David prostrates himself on the ground and asks God for mercy. However, I have argued that the inordinately lengthy period of time during which David prostrates himself is comical. This is an instance of the sub-category of overstatement. In 12:20 there is an instance of the sub-category of irony displayed. This emphasizes both the fact that David does not mourn the death of the child, and that God does not grant David mercy (12:20).

5.1.1.7.2. Ambiguous encounters with God

In 15:31 David implores God to turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness, despite David previously stating that he would accept without question whatever outcome God favoured (15:25). This shows David to be a hypocrite. The irony-based criticism emerges by way of a rhetorical question. David’s prayers seem to be answered when Hushai appears in a place where God is traditionally worshipped (15:32), and David adds Hushai to his spy network (15:33-37). However, there is an ambiguity here and God’s actions are regularly misinterpreted by the characters in the SN.

5.1.1.8. Suspicious events in David’s history

There are a few events in the SN which either call into question David’s past behaviour, or remind the reader of David’s past. The irony in the narrative brings these events into the foreground.

5.1.1.8.1. Events which call into question David’s past

If Uriah were to sleep with Bathsheba as David suggests (11:8), he would violate the rules of ritual purity which soldiers were expected to uphold. David’s behaviour here contradicts David’s claims in 1 Sam 21:5; the claims that his soldiers are and ought to
be ritually pure. This irony-based criticism of David is an instance of irony displayed. A further criticism of David emerges in 16:7-8 when Shimei curses David, and states that he believes that David’s current predicament is because of David’s treatment of the Saulides. The irony-based criticism of David in this section consists in the implication that there is likely to be some truth in Shimei’s allegation. The irony-based criticism in this instance is an innuendo. In 16:10 David criticizes the sons of Zeruiah for their bloodthirsty nature (16:10), despite the fact that their actions benefited David and kept him free from bloodguilt. David’s rhetorical question highlights David’s close connection to the sons of Zeruiah. David’s past glory of successfully fighting Goliath is parodied; a weak old Saulide pelts stones at David and his men as they flee (16:13-14).

5.1.1.8.2. Events which remind the reader of David’s past

In 15:18 David’s loyal troops are revealed to be men who fought with him when he fought with the Philistines. This reminds the reader of David’s own mercenary rise to the throne. The irony-based criticism of David is made by way of parody.

While the above-mentioned events imply pejorative criticism of David, the keenest criticism of David is to be found in the other characters own comments concerning David. The following section lists the characters who are critical of David.

5.1.1.9. Characters who are critical of David

The characters who are critical of David can be divided into two different categories: Characters who are explicitly critical of David, and Characters who are implicitly critical of David. In the examples described in 5.1.1.9.1, the irony enhances the explicit pejorative criticism made by the characters. These instances of explicit criticism support the finding of this thesis that the SN, or at least 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, is very critical of David. The verses mentioned in 5.1.1.9.2. describe characters who are
implicitly critical of David but whose criticism needs an ironic interpretation to be visible.

5.1.1.9.1. Characters who are explicitly critical of David

Uriah’s criticism of David is explicit since he tells David that it would be inappropriate for him to sleep with his wife when the soldiers are away at war with the ark of the covenant by their side (11:11). In 11:28 it is clearly written that God is displeased with David. Nathan is explicitly critical of David when he tells him that he (David) is the rich man in the parable (12:7). It is explicitly stated that God punishes David for taking Bathsheba and having Uriah killed (12:7-15). God recounts all of the things that God has given to David (12:7-9) and states that David is ungrateful. God scolds David and says that he holds him responsible for Uriah’s death (12:9). God tells David that the sword will never leave his house now that David has taken Uriah’s wife, and that David has despised Yahweh (12:10). Absalom is explicitly critical of David’s decision not to administer justice in Absalom’s own case (14:32). Absalom is explicitly critical of David’s inability to administer justice generally (15:3). Shimei curses David in Bahurim and is explicitly critical of David’s treatment of the Saulides (16:5). In 19:6 Joab is explicitly critical of David when he mentions that David loves those who hate him, and hates those who love him.

5.1.1.9.2. Characters who appear to be critical of David

In 11:3 a rhetorical question implies that the messenger is critical of David’s interest in Bathsheba. Similarly, Joab’s rhetorical questions in 11:19-21 appear to be a scathing response to David’s corruption. It cannot be said with certainty that David’s servants are critical of David when they express surprise at his lengthy period of prostrating himself (12:18). However, there is a strong implied criticism of David when the
servants express surprise that David feasts when there is an expectation that he mourns (12:21). The irony-based criticism of David in these examples are made by way of rhetorical questions. Joab is implicitly critical of David for not participating in the war when Joab says to David that if he does not come out and take the town, Rabbah, Joab will name the town after himself (12:27-28). The irony in this example is a case of overstatement. In 14:18 the woman of Tekoa is critical of David. Her ironic and undeserved praise of David implies that he is not a good administrator of justice.

The above-mentioned body of evidence supports the conclusion that the SN is generally very critical of David. Yet, David is not the only character who is portrayed unfavourably. The development of the other major characters in the SN will be presented in detail, beginning with Amnon.

5.1.2. Amnon

Although Amnon only appears briefly in the narrative, Amnon’s character can be spoken of in the following ways: Amnon is weak-willed, Amnon is a fool, Amnon is manipulative and Amnon is a danger to others. These groupings show the commonalities in David and Amnon’s natures.

5.1.2.1. Amnon is weak-willed

Amnon is described as having a perverse attraction to his sister, Tamar, which is so intense that it is described as making him sick (13:4). This attraction is emphasised by the use of irony displayed.
5.1.2.2. Amnon is a fool

Amnon is portrayed as being foolish in 13:5 in an example of pretended defence of the victim. Amnon does not listen to Tamar’s protestations in the form of rhetorical questions (13:12-13) and rapes her regardless, proving himself to be a fool (13:14). Amnon is shown to be capricious as his ‘love’ turns to loathing and he then throws Tamar out of his house despite her warning that this is worse than the rape (13:15). The irony-based pejorative criticism is made by way of overstatement, thus emphasizing Amnon’s crime. Consequently, Amnon is murdered by Absalom’s soldiers, because he raped Tamar (13:28).

5.1.2.3. Amnon is manipulative

In 13:6 Amnon is himself manipulative when he tricks his father into ordering Tamar to tend to him. The sub-category of verbal irony, insinuation, brings this point out.

5.1.2.4. Amnon is a danger to others

Amnon rapes Tamar in 13:11.

5.1.2.5. Amnon as lawbreaker

Amnon’s rape of Tamar contravenes the laws of rape and incest (13:11).

There would appear to be no redeeming qualities in the characterisation of Amnon. This is not so easily said of Absalom.

5.1.3. Absalom

The first impression of Absalom in the SN is that he is protective of his sister, and angered at the rape. However, just like David and Amnon before him, Absalom is shown to react without appropriate restraint and to act contrary to the laws and
conventions of Israel. The pejorative criticism of Absalom can be grouped under the following headings: Absalom is a law-breaker, Absalom is deceitful, Absalom’s foolish misunderstandings, and Absalom is a danger to others.

5.1.3.1. Absalom is a law-breaker

Absalom’s initial transgression is his deep hatred of Amnon, even though this developed in response to the rape of Tamar (13:22). The sub-category of irony which is used to emphasize this is that of an insinuation. It can be assumed that Absalom broods over this incident for two years (13:23). However, Absalom’s pivotal transgression is the order to his servants to kill Amnon (13:28). Absalom’s complicity in this event emerges by way of a rhetorical question. In 13:34 Absalom flees Jerusalem. This event is emphasized in overstated language. Absalom then begins to mount an insurrection against the throne (15:1). There is an insinuation arising from Absalom’s actions. In 16:20-22 Absalom takes Ahithophel’s advice to set up a tent on the roof of the palace and have sex with David’s concubines. The pejorative criticism of Absalom is emphasized by way of the use of the sub-category of verbal irony, praise in order to blame. Furthermore, this act means that Absalom is guilty of adultery, rape, and possibly incest. In 18:6-7 it is reported that Absalom is guilty of committing treason, as he and his men go to war against David’s army. This is an example of an irony displayed. The irony-based pejorative criticism in these examples concerns the incongruity between the king’s and the prince’s (in line for the throne) duty to uphold the laws and their flagrant flouting of these laws.

5.1.3.2. Absalom is deceitful

Absalom is portrayed as similar to Amnon in his ability to manipulate David (13:24-26). This commonality presents as an insinuation in the text. So too, an insinuation
presents in 14:28-30 when Absalom broods for two years and then explodes in violence (14:28-29). He orders his servants to set Joab’s property on fire by way of summoning Joab (14:30). The irony in this case is a rhetorical question. Absalom manipulates the people of Israel. He implies by way of an innuendo that there is nobody to hear their claims (15:3). Absalom then ingratiates himself to the people of Israel, and gains their trust through deception (15:5-6). This process of ingratiating is emphasized by way of an insinuation. Absalom tricks David into allowing him to make a vow in Hebron (15:7). This involves a further insinuation. Absalom instructs a messenger to declare Absalom to be the king even though in fact David is still the king (15:10). This involves an ironic misrepresentation of the facts. Absalom manipulates, or gains favour with, (depending on which interpretation is preferred) a large number of people (15:11). The irony-based pejorative criticism of Absalom is made by way of irony displayed.

5.1.3.3. Absalom’s foolish misunderstandings

Absalom believes that he is back in Jerusalem at God’s instigation (15:8b). This is insinuated. However, he is unaware that he is back only because David has been tricked (14:10-14). Absalom is then met by Hushai (16:16) who has been sent as a spy to trick Absalom (15:33-36). Absalom is not immediately taken in by Hushai’s deceit in an example of pretended agreement with the victim (16:15-16). However, Absalom proves himself to be a fool by providing Hushai with the advice provided to Absalom by Ahithophel (17:5-7). Absalom also proves himself to be a fool by telling Hushai that his advice is better than Ahithophel’s advice, notwithstanding Hushai’s apparent insincerity (17:14). This is a case of irony displayed.
5.1.3.4. Absalom is a danger to others

Absalom is responsible for the unlawful murder of Amnon (13:28). This pejorative irony-based criticism emerges in a rhetorical question. Absalom mounts a challenge against the throne endangering numerous people (15:1). The pejorative criticism of Absalom in this section emerges by way of an insinuation. In 16:20-22 Absalom takes Ahithophel’s advice, sets up a tent on the roof of the palace and has sex with David’s concubines; this may be considered to be rape. The irony-based pejorative criticism of Absalom is by way of the sub-category of praise in order to blame. Most grievously, Absalom is responsible for a civil war in which there are a number of deaths (18:5-7). The irony-based criticism in this instance is made by way of the sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed.

A comparison of the characters of David, Amnon, and Absalom demonstrates that all of these men are law-breakers, who are dangerous to others, who are easily fooled, and who are happy to manipulate others for their own gain. In some cases the pejorative criticism of these characters is explicit, still in other cases the criticism is merely implicit. In the latter cases, either the criticism is itself implicit or prior explicit criticism is emphasised by implication. In both kinds of case the pejorative criticism is irony-based and relies on ironic interpretation.

5.1.4. Joab

The character of Joab cannot be pigeon-holed. At times the narrator appears to be critical of Joab, at other times Joab is presented as a character who is trusted and, in some instances, even prepared to take David to task for his transgressions. Yet, despite this varied portrayal of Joab’s character, it is clear that Joab takes upon himself the role of managing David, for good or bad. The existence of this role points to David’s need
to be managed. The headings which will be used to facilitate discussion of Joab in further detail are: Characters who hold Joab in high regard, Joab as David’s manager or spin-doctor, Joab tricks David, Joab is dishonest, and Joab is a danger to others.

5.1.4.1. Characters who hold Joab in high regard

In 11:11 Uriah holds Joab in high regard, however, it may also be the case that Uriah merely holds Joab’s office in high regard.

5.1.4.2. Joab as David’s manager or spin-doctor

In 11:17 Joab revises David’s plan to kill Uriah. In doing so Joab makes himself complicit in the deaths of a number of soldiers, not just Uriah. Joab speaks about the corruption of Abimelech and warns David against God’s punishment. In doing so he makes use of rhetorical questions (11:19-21). In 12:27-28 Joab advises David to enter into the fighting at Rabbah in the final stage and claim the city; if he does not do so Joab says that he will name it after himself. This involves another rhetorical question. In 19:4-8 Joab convinces David to take the seat of the king at the gate and receive the soldiers. Here the irony-based pejorative criticism of David makes use of overstated language.

5.1.4.3. Joab tricks David

Joab manipulates David when he sends the wise woman of Tekoa to speak his words to the king (14:1-3). This irony is insinuated. Joab tricks David, through the wise woman of Tekoa, into swearing an oath to have Absalom returned to Jerusalem (14:13).

5.1.4.4. Joab is dishonest

In 14:22 Joab does obeisance to David and showers David in inappropriate praise when David tells him that his request has been granted. Joab proves himself to be disobedient
to David when he implicitly asks a soldier to kill Absalom (18:10-11) despite David’s order that Absalom should not be killed (18:5). The irony-based pejorative criticism in this instance is made by way of irony displayed. In 18:12-13 Joab tries to bribe the soldier to kill Absalom (by way of a rhetorical question). The soldier implies that he does not believe that Joab would protect him if he did so. Here the implication is conveyed by way of an overstated response. In 18:24-27 Joab commits an act of treason by going against the king’s wishes and killing Absalom. However, it might be argued that this is the correct action to take in the circumstances.

5.1.4.5. Joab as a danger to others

Joab’s re-working of David’s plan to kill Uriah means that a number of soldiers are perniciously sent to their deaths (11:16-17). The criticism in this section is by way of irony displayed. In 16:10 the sons of Zeruiah (including Joab) are implied to be blood thirsty by means of a rhetorical question. There is also an allusion in this verse to the deaths of Abner and Abishai which were caused by the sons of Zeruiah. In 18:24-27 Joab is responsible for Absalom’s death.

5.1.5. SUMMARY

As mentioned in the first chapter, the study of irony is not an exact study since irony is implicit and somewhat ambiguous. However, Muecke’s influential taxonomy of irony has provided a sound and comprehensive framework. The research project of this thesis consists in large part in the application of Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony, in particular, to the SN. This application has yielded some important results. Specifically, a very large number of central and credible examples of verbal irony have been identified. This demonstrates the presence of pervasive verbal irony in the SN; irony that is ‘militant’ in Frye’s terms. As the above extensive collection of characterisations
shows, the central characters in the SN, notably David, are the objects of sustained ironic attack. The implications of this for the question of the genre of the SN will be discussed in the next chapter. There I argue that the SN is in fact a satire, albeit a historically-based and theologically driven satire.

5.2. MISCELLANEOUS NEW FINDINGS

As we have seen 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is very critical of David, Absalom, Amnon, and Joab. What follows here is a discussion of miscellaneous findings that have resulted from the application of Muecke’s taxonomy to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. Some of these findings have emerged directly from the application of the taxonomy; these consist essentially in the identification instances of verbal irony. Other findings have emerged indirectly. The latter have arisen in the course of the application of the taxonomy but also through a close examination of the text itself. These do not in themselves consist of instances of verbal irony. Nevertheless, they do have implications for the ironic tone of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and, therefore, for the proposition that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and the SN is satire. As these findings are disparate they have not been grouped in themes, but will instead be spoken of in the sequence in which they appear in the text.

5.2.1. MISCELLANEOUS FINDINGS IN CHAPTER TWO

5.2.1.1: 2 Samuel 11:1

The emphasis arising from the verbal irony in 11:1 focuses on the knowledge that David was not living up to the expectation that the Israelites had of him (1 Sam 8:20; 1 Sam 18:16; 2 Sam 5:2-3). These aforementioned verses are concerned with the reasons why the Israelites anointed David. In these verses it clearly states that Israel wanted a king who led them in battle (1 Sam 8:20); also that David did lead the Israelites in
battle before he was anointed (1 Sam 18:16), and that David was anointed as a king because he led the Israelites in battle (2 Sam 5:2-3). However, this emphasis on David as both king and military leader is in contrast with the expectations that God had for a leader in Deut 17:18-20. Accordingly, the expectations that the Israelites had for their leadership was not well considered. There is some security in having a king who leads the troops in battle. However, what happens when he does not lead the army in battle? Moreover, what if he is a good military but not a good political leader? In the case of David, he was not a good political leader; indeed, he was corrupt and oppressive. If, on the other hand, the king were to reign in accordance with the laws, as per Deut 17:18-20, then certainly the king would be a better peacetime leader. What of war? Arguably, the political and military leadership should be split, as in many contemporary nation-states. If so, the death of the military leader in war would not threaten the stability of the polity and the polity would be less vulnerable to a rogue military leader with an armed force.

5.2.1.2: 2 Samuel 12:1-6

The conclusion that the story of Nathan’s Parable is analogous not only to the story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, but also to the story of Nabal (1 Sam 25:3-25:39) is a new and important finding. This finding provides a new lens through which to interpret the SN as a whole. Specifically, the themes of hesed, hospitality, and bloodguilt become far more prominent. Moreover, as we saw, additional ironies are unearthed; ironies that have the effect of strengthening the pejorative criticism of David. Finally, this additional analogy provides a thread linking the three stories of (respectively) David’s, Amnon’s and Absalom’s transgressions (and, subsequent punishments).
5.2.1.3: 2 Samuel 12:18b

A minor finding is that the servant’s rhetorical question in 12:18b constitutes, in this context, a joke. The effect of this joke is that David may be about to undergo self-mutilation; self-mutilation being a mourning ritual banned in Israel at that time.

5.2.2. MISCELLANEOUS FINDINGS IN CHAPTER THREE

5.2.2.1: 2 Samuel 13:12-13

In the narrative of Amnon and Tamar there is an allusion to the story of Abigail and Nabal (1 Sam 25:3-25:39). This allusion adds weight to the proposition advanced in this thesis that the themes associated with the story of Nabal (primarily the theme of hospitality conventions) are more important than have previously been thought by scholars. In the story of Amnon and Tamar there is a violation of hospitality conventions; this is also the case in the story of Nabal and David. Other examples of this theme in the SN can be found in the story of David and Uriah, and the story of Absalom and Amnon. These additional examples, which demonstrate the importance of hospitality with hesed, add further weight to the proposition that the background story of Nabal is more significant than has previously been thought (by virtue of the various interconnected allusions in respect of the breach of hospitality conventions).

5.2.2.2: 2 Samuel 13:22

In 13:22 Absalom’s hatred of Amnon provides the motivation for Absalom’s command that Amnon be executed. The importance of this verse has been underestimated by scholars. Not only have I suggested that Absalom’s hatred of his brother is against the law, but also that it causes a disproportionate punishment for Amnon’s crime; a punishment which is carried out at Absalom’s instruction.
5.2.2.3: 2 Samuel 13:26b-27

In this section Absalom offers hospitality without hesed. This has not been noted in previous scholarship. The prominence of this theme in the SN has already been discussed.

5.2.3. MISCELLANEOUS FINDINGS IN CHAPTER FOUR

5.2.3.1: 2 Samuel 14:12-14

Although there are some scholars who correctly maintain that the rightful punishment for Absalom was exile or death and not restoration in the kingdom, the research in this thesis has identified an important ironic consequence of this point. For, as argued in Chapter 4, David is here the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of irony. For not only does David make the wrong decision in allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem unpunished but also, in doing so, he reveals himself to be a fool who is easily manipulated (in this instance by Joab and the woman of Tekoa). Moreover, the research in this thesis identifies the Joab/woman of Tekoa deception of David as not unlike the Amnon/Jonadab deception of David and Absalom’s deception of David. Importantly, in all of these cases David made the wrong decision and disaster followed. Previous scholars have incorrectly assumed that the story of Joab and the woman of Tekoa is akin to Nathan’s Parable and that, therefore, David did the right thing in allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem unpunished.

5.2.3.2: 2 Samuel 15:11

An ironic interpretation suggests that the two hundred men who ostensibly went with Absalom unwittingly may have actually been aware of their actions. It is argued that it
is possible that this misrepresentation is a case of the ironist dissimulating. The importance of this suggestion is that it would make the Israelites deliberately complicit in the revolt. However, it was mentioned in 15:6 that the Israelites were tricked by Absalom; so this finding is uncertain.

5.2.3.3: 2 Samuel 15:19-20

The exchange with Ittai is usually interpreted as revealing David’s benevolence. However, Campbell suggests that there is a political dimension to this conversation. This point is taken even further in this thesis. It is argued that David cannot afford to take an unknown person with him merely on trust. However, it would be prudent for David to send Ittai back to Jerusalem full of admiration for David. The irony-based implication of this decision is that David is not intending to be benevolent but is rather motivated by self-preservation.

5.2.3.4: 2 Samuel 16:3

The comical aspect of David, Absalom, and Mephibosheth all simultaneously believing that they were the rightful King of Israel (2 Sam 12:7, 15:8, 16:3) is emphasized by means of verbal irony. This comedy brings the theme of succession into sharp focus. It also hints at the difficulties with ‘chosen-ness.’ David believes he is the chosen king because he has been anointed by God and Israel (1 Sam 16:13, 2 Sam 5:2-3). Absalom thinks that he is chosen because he believes that God has brought him back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:8). The problem with this suggestion however, is that David brought Absalom back to Jerusalem on the counsel of Joab/ the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:21). Mephibosheth believes that he is the rightful king because he is in the line

749 Campbell, 2 Samuel, 147.
of Saul and Saul was illegitimately usurped (or, at least, that is what Ziba leads David to believe.)

5.2.3.5: 2 Samuel 16:11-12

The incompatibility between David’s statement that God allowed Shimei to curse David and the fact that cursing the king is against the law is a new insight. This insight provides a different perspective on this section of the SN. Thus far scholars have generally viewed this scene as either a profound example of David’s repentance and self-reflection or a pitiful expression of David’s situation. On the contrary, I have argued that this is another example of David being foolish. The suggestion that this episode points to maturity in David’s character is problematic (to say the least). For, his position as king secured, David ultimately kills Shimei for making this curse.

5.2.3.6: 2 Samuel 17:1-4

A new perspective has emerged in relation to Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom. Hitherto, scholars have universally agreed that the advice that Ahithophel gives to Absalom is simply better than the advice that Hushai gives to Absalom. However, I have argued that Ahithophel’s advice that Absalom not lead his army in battle is contrary to the expectations that the Israelites had for their king (1 Sam 8:20, 5:2-3) and is, to this extent at least, deficient as advice. On the other hand, Ahithophel’s advice that David be ambushed has the virtue that it might lead to David’s death while limiting the overall numbers killed. Moreover, Ahithophel’s advice raises the general moral question: Is it acceptable to win by fighting dishonourably?

Of note, Ahithophel, who was David’s previous counsellor, may have been responsible for counselling David to remain in Jerusalem rather than fight by the side

of his troops (2 Sam 11:1). If so, this adds weight to the proposition that David was unduly influenced by the corrupt plans of his advisors. Thus David contravened a covenant he had with the Israelites (2 Sam 5:2-3) when he listened to his men (2 Sam 18:3); Joab’s words as spoken through the wise woman of Tekoa lead David to make a mistake (2 Sam 14:3-24). However, David cannot be presented entirely as a man who is easily manipulated. For he engages in immoral acts of manipulation in the case of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:4) and Uriah (2 Sam 11:14) and does so against the warning of his messenger (2 Sam 11:3).751

5.2.3.7: 2 Samuel 17:5-7

There is another new insight pertaining to Ahithophel’s advice, namely, that, in order to counter Ahithophel’s advice, Hushai gives poor tactical advice but also good political advice. For while he advises against the ambush of David he, nevertheless, advises Absalom to lead his troops into battle (thereby, meeting the expectations of the Israelite people). However, the crucial new insight that I wish to stress here is as follows. Ironically, the major advantage that comes to Hushai and, ultimately, David is provided by Absalom. For Absalom provides Hushai (and, therefore, David) with the advice that he (Absalom) has received from Ahithophel. This has been overlooked by scholars. Importantly, this indicates that it was definitely human error that assisted David. It might also have been a matter of divine intervention, as some scholars suggest. But, if

751 A general point to be extracted from this section pertains to David’s faith in God and obedience to God’s laws. David is happy not to lead his troops into battle, if he thinks it is not in his personal interest to do so, notwithstanding that his presence would signal to his troops and to all Israelites that God is with them (2 Sam 11:1); David is not committed to going into battle with the ark at his side, notwithstanding that the ark signifies the Lord’s presence on the battlefield (2 Sam 15:25-27); David is unconcerned with Uriah’s claims of ritual purity (2 Sam 11:11). So David does not evidence a strong faith in God or a strong commitment to God’s laws. In short, David does not wage holy war.
so, this divine intervention must somehow be reconciled with the exercise of freely undertaken human action.
CHAPTER SIX - THE GENRE DEBATE

The primary purpose of this dissertation was to explore irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. As discussed, an examination of the irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a revealed numerous important instances of verbal irony and, thus demonstrated a pervasive sense of irony. Verbal irony is the main type of irony used in satirical attacks. I conclude, therefore, that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, and by extension the SN, is a satire. I note that this is consistent with 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a being an historically based narrative and with it having a primarily theological purpose. For although satire is a form of literary art it can, nevertheless, be based on actual events. Moreover, satire frequently serves a larger purpose, be that purpose political or, in the case of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, theological. This overall finding that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire leads us into the genre debate. However, in order to make a stronger argument for 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN as a work of satire, in this chapter I provide a comparative discussion of the various competing genres: satire; national epic; propaganda; wisdom literature; theological history; literary art. I begin by providing an account of satire, including the non-essential elements of satire previously been discussed in 1.2.1.2.

6.1. SATIRE

6.1.1 IDENTIFYING SATIRE

As already mentioned, the findings of this research demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire. As already discussed (1.2.1.2.), satire does not adhere to a strict form. For satire can take the form of an essay, a theatre production, a cartoon or, an entire narrative. However, in the case of a narrative, satire can be identified by its content. Moreover, satire has a clear object of attack.\(^{752}\) This thesis has demonstrated

that David is a clear object of attack and, indeed, the primary object of attack. It has also been demonstrated that Absalom, Amnon, and some other members of the royal court are clear objects of attack. Furthermore, the object of satirical attack is usually a political or religious figure. In this case, David is the King of Israel, which is both a political and a religious position. Moreover, the object of satirical attack is usually a real person, as David was.

The thesis has demonstrated that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a has a pervasive sense of irony and, indeed, of verbal irony. The application of Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a revealed numerous important examples of verbal irony. This finding in itself is probably sufficient to demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire. However, to demonstrate with certainty that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire it is necessary also to provide evidence of at least some of the other features of satire (i.e. other than verbal irony and an object or satirical attack). For the description of these additional features I rely on Marcus. Marcus’ additional features of satire were mentioned in chapter one and are as follows: fantastic events; grotesqueries; distortions; ridicule; parody; and/or rhetorical features. 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a has been mined for the presence of examples of these additional features of satire. These examples are listed below. Of note, some of the examples which have been listed could fit into more than one category. For instance, in 2 Sam12:30 David puts onto his head a crown which weighs the same as a person. This could be interpreted as a fantastic event since this is an impossible thing to do, or as a distortion since this is an exaggeration.

753 Hodgart, Satire, 189.
754 Highet, The Anatomy of Satire, 14.
755 See 1.2.2.1.
756 See 1.2.2.2.
757 See 1.2.2.3.
758 See 1.2.2.4.
759 See 1.2.2.5.
760 See 1.2.2.6.
An issue arises with respect to one of these additional features of satire, namely, parody. Marcus has a description of parody. However, Muecke also has a description of parody. Their descriptions for the most converge; for example, both Marcus and Muecke hold that parody is primarily the distortion of a known text, expression or custom. However, Marcus’ description of parody\(^{761}\) differs in some respects from Muecke’s. Marcus’ description of parody includes puns, paronomasia, exaggeration and general mocking. By contrast, Muecke locates the latter phenomena outside his description of parody in stand-alone sub-categories of impersonal irony (at least in most cases.) The consequence of this for us is that one and the same example will be classified as parody by the light of Marcus’ taxonomy but not necessarily by the lights of Muecke’s. Therefore, the classification of some of the episodes mentioned below may involve a double description (one being Marcus’, the other Muecke’s). However this classificatory anomaly does not signal substantive disagreement in respect of the episode classified. In any case, there are very few such cases. I emphasise that all that is required from this section – in the context of my demonstration that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire - is that there are elements of some of these features in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. For it is the pervasive sense of verbal irony that carries the burden of the argument that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is satire. Moreover, even if some of the more contentious examples are removed there would remain an overwhelming number of examples evidencing satire.

6.1.1.1. FANTASTIC EVENTS IN THE SUCCESSION NARRATIVE

Marcus writes that fantastic events are those events which are either impossible or highly improbable.\textsuperscript{762}

12:30 – David puts the crown which is the weight of a human being on his head. 14:26 – the annual clippings of Absalom’s hair is said to weigh four and a half pounds, which is inconceivable. The presence of God might be considered a fantastic event. 18:9 – it might be considered to be a fantastic event that Absalom was hung in a tree by his head.

6.1.1.2. GROTESQUERIES

Grostesqueries are defined by Marcus as actions which are characterised by violence, violations, or obscenities. Examples of grotesqueries are as follows, “…beatings, mutilations, killings, murder, rape, incest, and cannibalism, and vulgarities such as obscenity, and scatology.”\textsuperscript{763}

11:4 – it may be assumed that adultery is a grotesquery, as it is contrary to a stringent moral norm, and the punishment for this act is the death penalty. 11:5 – if David defiles himself by sleeping with Bathsheba when she is in a state of ritual impurity, then this is a grotesquery. 11:8 – David suggests that Uriah defile himself by sleeping with Bathsheba when Israel is at war. 11:14-15 – David writes a note that Uriah is to be killed in fighting; David is attempting to cover-up his own transgression. 11:16-17 – Uriah is killed, as are other innocent soldiers. 11:25 – David’s message to Joab that men die in war all the time is grotesque. 13:11 – Amnon restrains Tamar. 13:14 Amnon rapes Tamar. 13:15-16 – after raping Tamar, Amnon throws her out of the house, knowing that her life is ruined. 13:29 – Amnon is executed on Absalom’s

\textsuperscript{762} Marcus, From Balaam to Jonah. Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible, 10. \textsuperscript{763} Ibid., 11-12.
command. 14:30 – Absalom’s decision to burn Joab’s farm, might be considered a grotesquery since it is a violent act. The war itself is, of course, violent and, therefore, a grotesquery.

6.1.1.3. DISTORTIONS

Marcus speaks of distortions as largely being exaggerations or understatements. 764

11:1 – there is an exaggeration in the verbosity in verse 11:1a and an understatement in 11:1b. 11:2 – 11:2a is prolix, and 11:2b is curt (when David spies Bathsheba). 11:3 there is an exaggeration in the messenger’s response to David about Bathsheba’s family. 11:4-5 – the adultery with Bathsheba is spoken of in understated language. 11:11 – there is an exaggeration in the vow that Uriah makes on David’s name. 12:5-6 – David’s sentence placed on the rich man in the parable is exaggerated. 12:16-17 – David’s act of supplication after God’s punishment is an exaggerated act. 12:27-28 – the repetition of the word ‘I’ is exaggerated. 13:11 –11a there is an overstatement in Tamar’s language. 13:11b is curt. 13:16 – there is an overstatement of Tamar’s language. 13:18 – the detail concerning Tamar’s robe is overstated. 13:23-26a -13:23-25 – Absalom uses overstated language, 13:26a is curt. 13:29 – the language detailing Amnon’s murder is understated. 13:30-33 -13:30aa – is verbose language (David is told that his sons have been killed), 13:32ab – is curt, also 13:32b-33a is verbose, and 13:33b is curt. 13:34-36 – is overstated (report that it is only Amnon who was killed). 14:9-11 – the woman of Tekoa uses overstated language. 14:20 – there is an overstatement in the woman of Tekoa’s comment that David is all knowing. 14:22 – Joab’s actions are exaggerated. 14:25-26 – the description of Absalom is overstated. 14:28-30a – there is verbosity in the description of the incident of Absalom setting fire

764 Ibid., 13.
to his property, 14:30b, the conciseness in the same episode is an indication of a distortion. 14:33 – there is an understatement in David’s reconciliation with Absalom. 14:33a prolix, and 14:33b curt. 15:7 – the forty years that Absalom waited to ask David if he could go to Hebron is an exaggeration. 15:14 – there is overstated language when David explains that his army must flee. 15:21 – Ittai’s response to David is overstated. 16:5 – 16:5a prolix, and 16:5b curt. (Shimei is cursing David) 17:8-13 – Hushai’s advice to Absalom is verbose. 18:13 – the soldier response to Joab’s bribe is overstated. 19:4-8a – there is overstatement in Joab’s speech.

6.1.1.4. RIDICULE

Marcus claims that ridicule is making fun of a person by any means. This could take the form of making fun of a person’s name, appearance, characteristics, or by concentrating on the embarrassing, and ignoble, situations which the protagonist finds himself/herself in.\(^{765}\)

11:2 – David is presented as a self-indulgent king who is more interested in taking a nap and looking at a beautiful woman than the war effort. 11:3 David is ridiculed in this verse since the messenger has to stress the high status and loyalty of Bathsheba’s family members. 11:5 – it might be ridiculing (of David) that Bathsheba falls pregnant to David through the act of adultery. 11:8 – it is ignoble for David to bribe Uriah and suggest that he defile himself. 11:2-3 – David’s attempts to get Uriah drunk, so as to manipulate him into sleeping with Bathsheba, are ignoble. 11:14-15 – the act of David sending Uriah with his own death warrant is ignoble. 11:16-17 – the death of Uriah and the other innocent soldiers is ignoble. 12:7-15a – God’s punishment of David ridicules David. 12:27-28 – David must be told to take the town or Joab will

\(^{765}\) Ibid., 18.
name it after himself. 13:6-7 – David is tricked by Amnon. 13:23-26 – David is tricked by Absalom. 13:13:32b-33a Jonadab needs to tell David that it is only Amnon who has been killed. 13:34 – Absalom flees Jerusalem. 14:4-7 – David is tricked by the woman of Tekoa. 15:1 – Absalom’s entrance into Jerusalem with chariots and running men ridicules David. 15:3 – The innuendo is that David is not competent to carry out his job as the administrator of justice. 14:4-6 – ridicules Absalom because he has to steal the hearts of the Israelites. David is also ridiculed by his son. 15:7 – David is tricked by Absalom into letting Absalom go to Hebron. 15:8 – Absalom is ridiculed since he believes that God has brought him back to Jerusalem. 15:10 – Absalom’s erroneous claim that he is king ridicules both to him and David. 15:11 – it ridicules David that two hundred men went with Absalom. 15:11 – it ridicules Absalom if he had to manipulate men to join his revolt, particularly given that Absalom believed that God blessed his actions. 15:14 – David flees Jerusalem. 15:16 – for David to leave the concubines behind to look after the house was foolish. 15:31 – David’s prayer for God to turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness appears to contradict David’s acceptance of God’s outcome. 16:5 – David is cursed by Shimei who is a Saulide. 16:9 – David allows himself to be cursed by Shimei. 16:10 – David’s suggestion that God has caused Shimei to curse David is foolish. 16:11-12 it is ridiculing that David allows Shimei to curse him. 16:18-19 – Absalom is ridiculed by Hushai. 18:1-2a – David is ridiculed in his choice of leaders for his army. 18:9 – it is ignoble that Absalom is hung by his head in a tree as his mule rides off. 18:11 – Joab is ignoble in attempting to bribe the soldier
6.1.1.5. PARODY

For Marcus, parody is primarily the distortion of a known text, expression, or custom. However, parody can also be discerned in puns, paronomasia, and exaggeration, or when an entire narrative, genre, person, or characteristic is mocked.  

11:11 – Uriah is either a foreigner or of foreign descent. Thereby, it is a parody that he informs the King of Israel of the rules for ritual purity with respect to the presence of the ark in battle. 11:19-21 – David is mocked in Joab’s monologue about Abimelech, and in Joab’s assertion that the death of Uriah will take away suspected anger. 12:6 – David is mocked in Nathan’s Parable, particularly when he sentences the rich man to death. 12:18b – the sarcastic remark which identifies David with banned, self-mutilating, mourning rituals, is parody. 12:19-20 – David is mocked when David appears to mourn before the child dies, but does not mourn after the child’s death. 12:22-23 – David’s response to the servants after the child’s death is a distortion of the custom of mourning. 13:8-9 – Amnon abuses the custom of hospitality. 13:23-26 – Absalom uses a sheep-shearing festival as a means of ambushing Amnon thereby distorting a custom. 14:11 – a foreigner (the wise woman of Tekoa) tricks the King of Israel into swearing an oath. 14:13 – the woman of Tekoa tells David that he has convicted himself in giving his judgement since he has not returned Absalom to Jerusalem. 14:17 – the woman of Tekoa tells David that his word is like the angel of God who discerns good and evil. 15:12 – “Ahithophel”, the name, means “my name is folly.” 15:12 – “Absalom”, the name, means “my father is peace,” yet in this passage he is waging war. 15:18 – David’s loyal men are mercenaries who sided with him, when he sought refuge with the Philistines. 15:24-29 – returning the arc of the covenant to Jerusalem to act as a cover for his spy network is a parody. 16:3 – parodies the

766 Ibid., 19-22.
monarchy, as David, Absalom, and Mephibosheth all believe that they are the rightful King of Israel. 16:4- David gives away Mephibosheth’s estate without due process. 16:13-14 – the story of David and Goliath is parodied in the story of Shimei pelting David and his army with stones. 16:20-23 – Absalom’s act of taking David’s concubines means that he is now a rapist and has committed incest, just like Amnon. 16:20-23 - arguably the laws are being mocked throughout this narrative. 17:1-4 – Absalom’s acceptance of Ahithophel’s advice might be parodying David’s earlier situation in 11:1. 17:5-7 – In order to counter Ahithophel’s advice Hushai must give poor tactical advice, but good advice regarding the expectations of the Israelites. Absalom provides Hushai with Ahithophel’s advice. 18:14-17 – Absalom is defeated by the same advice he chose not to follow.

6.1.1.6. RHETORICAL FEATURES

Marcus writes that the rhetorical features which are particular to the Hebrew Bible include: paronomasia, repetitions of verbs, homophones, homographs, colloquialisms, obscene language, hapax legomena, and chiastic patterns.767

11:1; 11:3; 11:4; 11:5; 11:6 (x3) 13:7 13:16 – repetition of the verb send/sent. 11:11 – the word סְכוֹת is the name of a town and also refers to the festival of booths, making this a (possible) homophone. 13:4b – the use of alliteration. 15:31 – there is a repetition of speaking verbs in this verse. 16:1 – the use of the metaphor שְׁמָהְרָעָן. 16:5 – the use of an unsuitable metaphor, בחורים, which means chosen, however, David is fleeing from Absalom who believes he too is chosen. 17:8-13 – paronomasia of verbal roots and oppositions, metaphor, simile and alliteration.

6.1.1.7. CONCLUSION

767 Ibid., 23.
In conclusion, there are a very large number of instances of the non-essential features of satire present throughout 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. Thus, the SN meets the requirement of the presence of non-essential features of satire. It has already been demonstrated that the SN meets the primary requirements for it to be satire, namely, the presence of a pervasive sense of verbal irony and, therefore, an object of ironic and satirical attack. Accordingly, I conclude that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire. Given that this is a large portion of the SN, it is reasonable to draw the further conclusion that the SN as a whole is a satire.

6.1.2. FINDINGS AS THEY RELATE TO THE WORK OF OTHER SCHOLARS

6.1.2.1. EARLY HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

In 1.1.1 this dissertation outlined scholars who contributed to the emergence of the SN, including Wellhausen, Luther, Caspari, Gressmann, Schulz, and Rost. These scholars discussed the possible genre of the SN and the purpose of the SN. The following section will compare and contrast the findings of this research project with the findings of the scholars mentioned, particularly with reference to genre and the overall purpose of the narrative.

The claim with the most traction in the study of the SN is that the purpose of the narrative is to portray the events which led to Solomon’s rise to the throne. The limited breadth of this dissertation renders it largely unhelpful in respect of this issue. The chapters examined in this thesis do not discuss Solomon beyond the mention of his

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768 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel.*
769 Luther, “The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas.”
770 Caspari, “The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15-20.”
771 Gressmann, “The Oldest History Writing in Israel.”
772 Schulz, “Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel.”
773 Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David.*
774 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel,* 294 and Rost, 105.
birth (2 Sam 12:25). According to the findings of this thesis, the SN contains sustained pejorative criticism of David, Amnon, Absalom, and other corrupt members of the royal court. This is in keeping with the idea of Solomon’s succession as the focus of the narrative. For the SN portrays Solomon as being free of the outworking of evil which affected David, and also his sons (by virtue of David’s punishment). However, it could equally be suggested that this sustained pejorative criticism is entirely distinct from the emphasis on Solomon’s Succession.

The findings in this thesis oppose Wellhausen’s suggestion that the narrative from 2 Sam 9-20-1 Kgs 2 is simply history writing. The irony in 2 Sam 9-20-1 Kgs 2 is too pronounced to support the claim that the documentation of history is the primary focus of the narrative. For the portrayal of David and the events in the SN is highly stylised and focused on the pejorative criticism of David rather than portraying a detailed and entirely accurate historical account of events. Moreover, Wellhasuen’s claim that the narrative is pro-David cannot be sustained, given the findings of this thesis.

Luther’s suggestion that the narrative in Second Samuel and First Kings is an example of novelistic writing has some commonality with the findings of this research. Certainly, there is evidence that the narrative has been crafted to create a story with suspense, psychological tension, and a conflict around the central character. These features are features of satire and the novel. However, unlike novelistic writing, the primary purpose of a satire is not to create an entertaining story but rather to offer a critique of some aspect of society or, at least, of the protagonist of the story. The research in this thesis demonstrates that large chunks of the SN are intended to heavily

775 Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel, 262.
776 Ibid., 294.
criticize David, Absalom, Amnon, and certain other members the royal court in Israel. Contrary to what Luther claims, the SN is not complimentary to David. Luther claims that the juxtaposition of David’s despotism and his faith\(^{778}\) show the complexities of David’s character as though this narrative is a biography of David. On the contrary, I suggest that the portrayal of David as a despot is quite simply done because the author believed that David was in fact a despot. Moreover, David is not shown to be particularly faithful. He does not adhere to the laws, he does not accept God’s punishment without reservation (2 Sam 12:22), he creates spy systems rather than trusting in God’s favour (2 Sam 15:24-29), and in the story of Shimei, although David mentions that Shimei’s cursing is an act of God (2 Sam 16:10), he later has Shimei murdered for this same act of cursing (1 Kgs 2:8-9). Moreover, God is critical of David’s behaviour (2 Sam 11:27, 12:7-13). Luther’s argument that this narrative has been crafted to highlight David’s faith is therefore unsound. Nevertheless, Luther is arguably correct in claiming that ultimately God can be trusted because God punishes David.

The findings of this thesis are congruent with Caspari’s claim that the narrative is not history writing for the reasons that (a) the author was not objective in the material that he/she chose to include in the drama, and (b) the material is presented in a dramatized manner.\(^{779}\) Caspari suggests that although the narrative in Second Samuel and First Kings has elements in common with the novella, it is more likely to be historiography.\(^{780}\) The purpose of a satire is similar to that of a novella. Both genres reflect on past or present injustices in order to aid the progressive evolution of thought, and of institutions. However, satire is the more serious genre. Caspari suggests that this

\(^{778}\) Ibid., 101-106.
\(^{779}\) Caspari, “The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15-20,” 68.
\(^{780}\) Ibid., 82-84.
narrative is too serious to be a novella and, therefore, it should be regarded as
historiography.781 The findings of this thesis support the conclusion that the SN is a
more serious piece of writing than a novella. Nevertheless, it does not follow that it is
historiography. Indeed, as has already been made clear, there are simply too many
literary flourishes and, in particular, too much irony, for the claim that the SN is
historiography to be persuasive. Rather the claim that the genre of the SN is satire is far
more compelling.

Gressmann’s view on the genre of the SN (or, at least, the narrative which will
later be called the SN) is not dissimilar to the views of Luther and Caspari.
Gressmann’s only departure from Luther and Caspari is his claim that there are
elements of the narrative which conform to the genre of saga. An example of this is the
story of Uriah carrying his own death note.782 Although in the SN there is the presence
of themes which are consistent with sagas, the findings of this thesis undermine the
proposition that the SN as a whole is a saga. For sagas are not normally heavily ironic.

Schulz argues that the material in Second Samuel and First Kings is mainly
prose.783 As previously noted, this suggestion is not inconsistent with a finding in
favour of satire. Satire can exist within a work of prose, notwithstanding the presence
of the satirical elements of verbal irony etc. Moreover, some of Schulz’s claims about
the artistic representations in the story apply to the genre of satire. For instance,
repetitions, “heightening,” “heightening and retardation” “comic relief,” and
“vividness,”784 are consistent with satirical writing. However, Schulz’s argument that
the narrator was reluctant to pass judgement on David, for example, is not consistent

781 Ibid.
784 Ibid., 147-158.
with the notion of the SN as a work of satire. It is true that the author’s judgement in a
satire can be masked by the use of irony. For the ironist dissimulates and does not
explicitly convey judgement, except in cases of overt irony. However, in a satire it is
likely that there is explicit condemnation of the protagonist of the narrative at some
point. In the SN David is explicitly criticized on a number of occasions, most notable
by God (2 Sam 12:7-14).

6.1.2.2. NATIONAL EPIC

The suggestion that the SN is a national epic has proved to be an unpopular one. The
discussion in this thesis of the genre of the national epic has focused exclusively on the
work of Pfeiffer, who argues that the SN was inspired by national pride, and sought to
show the greatness of the monarchy. I strongly oppose the classification of the SN as
a national epic. The pejorative criticism of David, Absalom etc. inherent in the SN
negates the view that this narrative was written in order to document the great
achievements of the monarchy. Specifically, the SN is not a heroic portrayal of David.
Pfeiffer confuses the historically known achievements of King David with the portrayal
of David in the SN. Certainly there is an argument that David was a successful
statesman who united Israel and secured Israel’s borders. However, regardless of these
impressive feats, the author of the narrative is extremely critical of David; as the
research in this thesis has shown. Pfeiffer’s claim that the author of the SN is usually
objective and only biased in so much as he displays national pride, is not persuasive.
It would seem highly unlikely that the author of the SN was primarily motivated, or
even strongly influenced, by national pride.

6.1.2.3. PROPAGANDA

Pfeiffer, Introduction to the Old Testament, 357-358.
Ibid., 358.
1.1.3. focuses on the work of Thornton,\textsuperscript{787} Hoffman,\textsuperscript{788} McCarter,\textsuperscript{789} and Whitelam.\textsuperscript{790}

That the SN belongs to the genre of propaganda is in some ways supported by the findings of this research; specifically, it is supported if the propaganda is considered to be anti-David, Absalom, and Amnon. On the other hand, the proposition that the SN is pro-David propaganda is obviously false. As we have seen, this research demonstrates that the SN is highly critical of David, his sons Absalom and Amnon, and various other members of the royal court. Yet, even if the propaganda in question were to be considered to be anti-David, the view that the SN is propaganda is somewhat implausible. There are striking differences between propaganda and satire. Propaganda is largely explicit, and the criticism in satire largely covert or implicit. Since the criticism in the SN is in large part irony-based implicit criticism, the SN is more plausibly regarded as satire than propaganda.

Thornton’s idea that the SN was written in order to show that Solomon was the rightful heir to the throne\textsuperscript{791} has merit. Solomon is spoken of as God’s favoured son of David (2 Sam 12:24), and Solomon is portrayed as being free from the matrix of sin and punishment which surrounded David, Absalom and Amnon. However, as stated, if the SN was propaganda, it would more explicit and less ambiguous, and more inclined to direct statements than to dissimulation.\textsuperscript{792} Thereby, satire is a stronger candidate for the genre of the SN, since satire while critical is also in large part, indirect.

\textsuperscript{787} Thornton, “Solomonic apologetic in Samuel and Kings.”
\textsuperscript{788} Hoffner, “Propaganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography.”
\textsuperscript{789} McCarter Jr., “Plots, True or False:” The Succession Narrative as Court Apology.”
\textsuperscript{790} Whitelam, “The Defence of David.”
\textsuperscript{792} Gillian Keys, \textit{Wages of Sin}, 22.
Similarly, Hoffner takes the approach that this writing is a court apology which was written in order to legitimise Solomon’s rise to the throne.\(^793\) As has already been mentioned this argument has merit, however, it is not the only argument. It is worth noting Gunn’s remark that Solomon is rarely spoken of in the SN. Therefore, it is plausible that the focus of the SN was David.\(^794\) In this dissertation it is argued that the function of the SN is to critique David, not necessarily for the purposes of legitimising Solomon, but certainly in order to highlight the deficiencies of David’s reign in and of themselves. However, as mentioned, this line of inquiry is limited to the narrative 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, and therefore, is not entirely germane to the discussion on Solomon’s rise to the throne.

McCarter’s argument that the SN is propaganda serving to show Solomon as a decisive king.\(^795\) may well be true, but the SN does not show David to be a gentle king. In order to make this latter suggestion plausible McCarter would have to ignore David’s treatment of Uriah (2 Sam 11:14) among others. Similarly, Whitelam’s suggestion that the SN is a piece of royal propaganda which is designed to present the stability of David’s kingdom\(^796\) is questionable, given that David fled from Jerusalem (2 Sam 15-16) and almost lost the kingdom to Absalom (2 Sam 15-18). Moreover, arguably the SN is not pro-David propaganda since it does not give the impression that David was the innocent victim of Absalom’s unstable behaviour, but rather that David was the cause of it.

6.1.2.4. WISDOM LITERATURE

\(^{793}\) Hoffner, “Propaganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography,” 49-62.
\(^{794}\) Gunn, The Story of David, 82.
\(^{795}\) McCarter Jr., “Plots, True or False.” The Succession Narrative as Court Apology,” 362-363.
\(^{796}\) Whitelam, “The Defence of David,” 62.
Whybray’s suggestion that the SN was written as a teaching guide for students who were due to work in the royal court is intriguing. There are certainly examples in this narrative which present as pedagogic. However, if this were to be the case, it would be expected that there would be clear and unambiguous outcomes in the narrative. More often the outcomes are unresolved. For instance, the story of Amnon and Tamar does not resolve the question as to the correct punishment for the rape of a sibling.

Therefore, it is unlikely that SN could function as a guide to students in respect of the law. Moreover, the illustrations of wisdom are few and far between. For example, the putatively wise characters of Jonadab and the ‘wise’ woman of Tekoa do not prove to be wise at all but rather crafty and manipulative. Indeed, Ridout’s claim that the instances of apparent wisdom in this narrative are actually ironic is consistent with the findings of this dissertation.

6.1.2.5. THEOLOGICAL ‘HISTORY’ WRITING

1.1.5. focuses on the work of Von Rad, Brueggemann, McKenzie, and Mann. Von Rad was only discussed briefly, however his claim that the main purpose of the

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797 Whybray, *The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings 1 and 2*, 56.
798 Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 7, 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2),” 125-139.
799 Von Rad, “The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel.”
802 Mann, *Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David’s Departure and Return (2 Samuel 14-20)*.
SN was to document history is somewhat implausible, given the extent of the irony in the narrative. Brueggemann’s claim that the SN displays a charismatic understanding of God and is not concerned with traditions is also somewhat implausible, given the emphasis in the SN on the transgressions of David and others, and the disastrous consequences of these transgressions, notably David’s punishment. David’s alleged profound faith in God is also implausible, given that the occasions in the narrative which refer to David’s faith present it as at best ambivalent, if not insincere (2 Sam 12:18-21, 15:25; 33-37) and, indeed, ridicule David rather than praise him for this faith.

McKenzie’s claim is that the SN is part of the Deuteronomistic History. McKenzie suggests that the latter is a theological history which sought to show the dangers of disobeying the laws, and which became instructive for later generations. This view is highly plausible as far as it goes. Certainly the SN portrays the dangers for the moral order of breaking the law, especially by kings and other leaders. However, McKenzie has not focused on the ironic dimension of the SN, let alone characterised the SN as satire. However, the findings of this thesis, namely, that the SN is a satire, are consistent with McKenzie’s view of the SN as theological history. For the events depicted in the SN are historically based. Moreover, satire serves a purpose, and in the case of the SN, this purpose is theological.

Mann’s claim that the theme of sin and punishment is subordinate to David’s model faith in Yahweh is diametrically opposed to the findings of the research in this thesis. Mann’s claim is not plausible given that David’s faith is evidently weak, used by David to manipulate others and/or misguided (2 Sam 12:18-21, 15:25; 33-37).

805 McKenzie, King David. A Biography, 27.
806 Mann, Run, David, Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David’s Departure and Return (2 Samuel 14-20), 7.
Moreover, the severe punishment of David’s sins (2 Sam 12:7-14), and the playing out of this punishment in terms of the death of Absalom etc., do not point to David’s faith but instead to the problem of David’s transgressions. Mann’s theory that the SN, when considered as a theological tool encourages a “hermeneutic of self-involvement,” is problematic as it is contingent upon the reader caring for David, and David caring for Yahweh. This is highly contestable given that David does not follow the laws, nor is David shown to be grateful to God (2 Sam 12:8-9). Similarly, Mann’s claim that this narrative is a narrative of hope is not persuasive in the sense that David is a model of faith. It may, however, be argued that the SN is a narrative of hope in so far as it points to the need for political, social, and theological reform. Such is the purpose of satire.

6.1.2.6. LITERARY ART

This dissertation builds on the trajectory of thought that the SN is a work of literary art. However, this dissertation goes further and argues that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and probably the SN are satire. In section 1.1.6. the primary scholars spoken of were, Eissfeldt, and Gunn. The research in this thesis supports Eissfeldt’s claim that the SN contains historical information combined with literary fantasy. However, Eissfeldt does not mention irony when he speaks of literary fantasy, but rather focuses on private conversations. Nor does Eissfeldt characterise the SN as satire.

Gunn’s argument that the SN is a work of art and an entertaining story which is serious, greatly influenced the research in this thesis. Indeed, Gunn’s view was the starting point for the development of my own view that the SN is a satire. However,

807 Ibid., 158.
809 Gunn, *The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation*.
taking the SN as a work of satire means that this dissertation has diverged from Gunn’s views. Gunn does recognise episodes of irony within the narrative. However, Gunn does not argue that David is the principal object of sustained ironic attack in the SN by virtue largely of his moral transgressions. Instead Gunn argues that although David’s behaviour raises some ethical questions, the SN does not moralise. If Gunn is right then the irony in the SN is presumably merely situational irony rather than verbal irony. For situational irony does not necessarily involve authorial intention, let alone a moralising author. Contrary to Gunn’s perspective, this thesis has interpreted the SN from the perspective of verbal irony. Moreover, the findings of this thesis include the proposition that the pejorative criticisms of David, Amnon, and Absalom are moral criticisms since they point to their moral failings. Despite this divergence of views, the research in this thesis owes a debt to Gunn’s research, and to his long-standing conversation with Van Seters; specifically, to the argument that the SN is akin to the kind of writing which is found in *Njals Sagas*.

6.1.2.7. **NJALS SAGA**

The suggestion that the SN is a saga in the tradition of *Njals Sagas* is compatible with the conclusion of this dissertation. Van Seters’ argument that the SN, or what he calls the ‘David Saga,’ is a fictitious account of history, which subverts or satirizes an otherwise accepted account of history is in keeping with satire. However, whereas, Van Seters suggests that the ‘David Saga,’ parodies an earlier document, my argument is that the SN offers a different perspective much in the same way as a political satirist

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812 Ibid., 45, 91, 93, 95, 97, 98, 100.
813 Ibid., 110.
815 Ibid., 354-355.
today might. Parody is certainly an element of the findings of this research, but it is only one element amongst many. In any case, the existence of such an earlier document is contentious.

Van Seters’ proposal that the material in SN is anti-monarchical\textsuperscript{816} is broadly supported by my findings. However, it is more correct to say that the material is anti-David, Amnon, and Absalom. After all, the SN is not anti-Solomon. Indeed, Solomon is portrayed as being in God’s favour. The findings of this research diverge decisively from Van Seters’ views with respect to the claim of this thesis that the genre of the SN is satire. Van Seters does not make this claim. Moreover, the elements of satire are different to the features of \textit{Njals Sagas}; the latter are not always satirical in nature. In this thesis it has been argued that the traditional features of satire, particularly verbal irony, pervade the SN.

6.1.3. CONCLUSION

It has been argued that there is a pervasive sense of verbal irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN and, therefore, an object of sustained ironic attack, primarily King David. Moreover, it has been argued that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a contains multiple instances of the other elements of satire. These findings in themselves are sufficient to demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire and that the SN is likely to be a satire given that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is the greater portion of the SN. This argument has been strengthened by way of a comparison between the findings of the research in this thesis (specifically, that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire) and the alternative extant proposals in respect of the genre of the SN.

\textsuperscript{816} Ibid., 358.
In relation to the early history of interpretation of the SN, the research in this thesis emphasizes David’s disobedience to the laws over and against the theme of succession. However, the research in this thesis has limited breadth; succession does not feature as strongly in this research. The findings of this research contrast with Wellhausen’s interpretation of the stories in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a as history writing which is pro-David.\textsuperscript{817} The caustic expression which is directed at David would seem to counter this argument. Luther’s suggestion that this same writing is novelistic in style, and is concerned to show the complexities of David’s character,\textsuperscript{818} is also challenged by the interpretation of SN as satire. In particular, it has been argued that David is not portrayed as being as faithful as Luther suggests, and that David’s despotism is emphasized more than Luther allows for. Caspari, on the other hand, argues that the narrative is too serious to be called a novella and that it is more akin to historiography.\textsuperscript{819} An interpretation of satire is compatible with the degree of seriousness that Caspari was grasping for, and is indeed more serious that a historiography since satires call for reform. Similar comparisons are made with the work of Gressmann and Schulz.

Pfeiffer’s argument that the SN is a national epic\textsuperscript{820} is refuted by the findings of this research which show that David is not portrayed as a heroic king. As far as the genre of propaganda is concerned, the interpretation of the SN as satire compliments the thesis that the SN is anti-David, Absalom, and Amnon propaganda. Yet, although satire is similar to propaganda in some respects, it is also different. Specifically, satire seeks reform and a considered response from the audience, whereas propaganda does not encourage objectivity. The idea that the SN is pro-David propaganda is, therefore,

\textsuperscript{817} Wellhausen, \textit{Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel}, 105.
\textsuperscript{818} Luther, “The Novella of Judah and Tamar and Other Israelite Novellas,” 101-106.
\textsuperscript{819} Caspari, “The Literary Type and Historical Value of 2 Samuel 15-20,” 82-84.
\textsuperscript{820} Pfeiffer, \textit{Introduction to the Old Testament}, 357-358.
refuted. It is similarly argued that the SN is too ambiguous to serve as a pedagogic resource in line with Whybray’s argument that the SN is wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{821}

The idea that the SN is theological ‘history’ writing as has been argued by Von Rad, Brueggemann, McKenzie, and Mann, is compatible with the findings of this research, e.g. that David is criticised for not following the laws, and that the flow of events consists in the outworking of God’s punishment of David. However, except in the case of McKenzie, these theorist offer more benign interpretations than does satire. This is evidenced by the findings of Brueggemann and Mann who interpret this narrative as portraying the strength of David’s faith. On the other hand, my own interpretation of SN as satire suggests that the author of the SN is heavily critical of David’s transgressions, and his lack of faith. The findings of this thesis support the proposition that the broad genre to which the SN belongs is that of literary art, given the aesthetic quality of the narrative. Most saliently, this research supports Gunn’s proposition that the SN is a serious work of art.\textsuperscript{822} However, my own interpretation involves the common-sense acceptance of an author and, therefore, of authorial intention. Moreover, this author intends to be highly critical of David’s moral transgressions. So my interpretation of the SN differs from that of Gunn. Gunn argues that the SN is not a moral tale.\textsuperscript{823} The findings of my research have the most in common with Van Seters’ argument that the material in the SN is satirical.\textsuperscript{824} However, whereas Van Seters suggests that this material is akin to a \textit{njals saga}, according to my own interpretation 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire. I argue that the designation of satire is more precise than that of \textit{njals sagas} since the latter are not always satirical in nature.

\textsuperscript{821} Whybray, \textit{The Succession Narrative. A Study of II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings 1 and 2}, 56.
\textsuperscript{822} Gunn, \textit{The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation}, 13.
\textsuperscript{823} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{824} Van Seters, \textit{The Biblical Saga of King David}, 354-355.
CHAPTER SEVEN - FINDINGS

In this chapter I situate my findings of verbal irony in relation to the major scholars who have spoken of irony in the SN. I also, offer recommendations for future research.

7.1. IRONY

The aim of this research project has been to determine whether or not there is a pervasive sense of verbal irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and thus whether or not the SN is a satire. In order to achieve this aim Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony was applied to the narrative in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. This taxonomy includes the three essential elements of irony: two levels in the narrative (explicit and implicit), an opposition between the levels, and the presence of innocence. Moreover, this taxonomy distinguishes the different grades of verbal irony, the different modes of verbal irony, and the sub-categories of impersonal irony (impersonal irony being one mode of verbal irony). This research has yielded new insights in relation to the SN, and specifically 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. Moreover, the application of this taxonomy to this narrative has not been previously undertaken. In undertaking this task new insights have emerged regarding our understanding of important events depicted in the narrative, of major characters in this narrative, particularly David, and with regard to the genre debate.

This undertaking is based on the identification of verbal irony throughout the narrative. This has emerged from my systematic treatment of verbal irony in the narrative. Moreover, this is the first work to provide a thoroughgoing analysis of irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. The result is that irony has been found to be a pervasive feature of the narrative rather than merely to be present in a few isolated examples. Further the irony in question is verbal irony. Therefore, the irony is intended; the author is intentionally ironical. The presence of verbal irony indicates that the ironist is seeking
to make the audience (presumably, including the Israelites) aware of the vices of the characters, notably David and other leaders of the Israelites. In so far as the audience is made aware by the ironist of these vices of the leaders and other characters, they are in a position, at least potentially, to correct these vices, especially if in some cases they recognise the vices in themselves. Of course, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is part of the point of verbal irony, and satire, to bring about the correction of vices. This being so, the SN has a moral purpose (albeit, in the case of the SN, within a theological framework).

7.1.1. VERBAL IRONY: SITUATING THE FINDINGS OF THIS THESIS

Good’s findings of irony in the Book of Second Samuel are largely consistent with the findings of this research, (albeit Good does not discuss irony in the Book of Second Samuel at length). In the following commentary I compare the findings of this research with Good’s conclusions.

In his commentary, Good argues that the irony in 2 Sam 11:1 (2 Sam 11:1 being the primary focus of Good’s discussion) is an example of implied irony as it is not immediately apparent. This claim is consistent with my claim that the irony in 11:1 is covert irony, as covert irony is not immediately apparent. Yet, in relation to the interpretation of the ironic content of 2 Sam 11:1 the findings of this dissertation go further than Good. For instance, Good makes the intuitive remark that it seems irregular, and therefore ironic, that David would remain in Jerusalem when it is usual for kings to go out to battle. However, I provide an analysis of this episode based on Muecke’s taxonomy. Thus I emphasize the incongruity between David’s action and the expectations that Israel had of her king and so on and so forth. My interpretation of 2

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826 Ibid.
Sam 11:1 is not reliant on the interpretation of מלאכים as ‘kings’ as Good’s findings are. As discussed at length in my interpretation of 2 Sam 11:1, there is a long-standing debate concerning the correct translation of מלאכים. However, Muecke’s sub-category of impersonal irony, irony displayed, (when applied to 2 Sam 11:1) emphasizes the incongruity in all of Israel being at war, when David is not – as opposed to ‘kings’ being at war when David is not. The pejorative criticism in my interpretation is that David has broken a covenant he made with the Israelites. The implication of Good’s interpretation is simply that David is not acting as other kings act.

Good also mentions Uriah’s loyalty to David as being a case of irony, since his loyalty leads to his death. Similarly, my interpretation has identified this irony. However, in my research, the irony is identified by reference to Uriah’s rhetorical question, the rhetorical question being a sub-category of impersonal, verbal irony. Yet, regardless of this difference, I agree that the irony in this section mentioned is pejoratively critical of David’s behaviour. This finding supports Good’s research which argues that the broad purpose of the irony in the story of David, Uriah, and Bathsheba is to imply that there is a difference between what David is doing as opposed to what he ought to be doing. However, the findings of my research are more detailed than Good’s findings, primarily as a result of my using Muecke’s detailed taxonomy.

The differences in the findings of my research and Good’s findings are as follows. Good mentions that Joab complies with David’s command to kill Uriah. This is partially correct as Joab does orchestrate Uriah’s death, but he does not follow the instructions in David’s letter entirely. Instead, Joab re-works David’s plan and, as a result, more soldiers die (11:16-17). My finding strengthens the pejorative criticism of

827 Ibid.
828 Ibid.
David, since it is argued that not only is David ruthless, but he is also foolish. David’s plan would have exposed David’s crime to the entire army and thus thwarted his goal of concealing the crime. Moreover, my interpretation involves a criticism of Joab’s moral character. For Joab is not only complicit in David’s crime as a subordinate, but has a central initiating role in the cover-up of the crime; for it is his ingenuity that enables David’s crimes to go undetected by the Israelites. However, despite Joab’s complicity in David’s cover-up, my interpretation suggests that David’s request to put Uriah at the forefront of the heaviest fighting and to withdraw from him angers Joab. Joab reacts with exaggerated speech and rhetorical questions about Abimelech who was a corrupt king who ultimately lost his throne because of his misdeeds (11:19-21). I argue that this section serves as a pejorative criticism of David since it implies that his kingdom is as corrupt as that of Abimelech’s. Good’s argument that Joab sent the news of Uriah’s death to David in a casual manner is thereby disputed. As I have argued, the seemingly casual mention by Joab of Uriah’s death, which Good has interpreted as an after-thought, is only an after-thought at the lower and, therefore, explicit level of the narrative. At the upper and implicit level of the narrative the mention of Uriah’s death is better understood as the ironic focus of the speech; the focus is on the pejorative criticism of David. This finding is in keeping with Perry and Sternberg’s research that the emphasis in ironic speech is conveyed by the use of curt expression.

In this thesis it is also argued that David’s response to Joab “…the sword devours now this one, now that one” (11:25) portrays David as the object of ironic attack. This is opposed to Good’s suggestion that David’s comment is a rationalization in order to calm his conscience which is bothering him. Contrary to Good’s suggestion, it would appear that David is not bothered by his actions. For David needs

829 Ibid.
830 Ibid.
to be told a parable which is analogous to his actions, and the explicit condemnation of Nathan/God to bring him to any awareness of his misdeeds (2 Samuel 12:1-13). My claim that David is not bothered by his action is in line with Good’s comment, “The irony of the episode is, I think, evident. The incongruity between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ is perceptible to any reader from the beginning, but ironically it is not perceptible to David until he is told in plain language.”

However, by Good’s own admission we should expect to find the odd error in his work. Consider the following statement in the introduction of the revised edition of his work, *Irony in the Old Testament*.

> When republication of this book was first proposed, I began to think of what I would like to change. It was soon clear that some of my changes of mind since 1965 would involve not merely touching up and referring to works that have appeared in the interim but completely rethinking and rewriting some parts. The upshot is that, save for the correction of a few errors, the text remains intact…I suspect that the flaws in the first chapter could be removed only by rewriting it. The issues in irony set out there still seem to me the right ones, though they could have been stated more cogently and illustrated more aptly.

Whybray, writing about irony around the same time as Good, only refers to situations which he suggests are examples of dramatic irony. According to Muecke, dramatic irony is irony which is revealed in events which are known to the audience but not known to characters. This is in keeping with Whybray’s examples of irony. However, Muecke also adds that dramatic irony is not usually focused on a single character, nor does dramatic irony moralise. Here we need to recall the distinction

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834 Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 104.
between moralising in the sense of merely passing informed moral judgements, and moralising in the sense of excessive, self-righteous moral criticism motivated by an unfounded sense of one’s own moral superiority. It is moralising in the former sense that is at issue here (and in this thesis more generally). In terms of the difference between dramatic and verbal irony, Muecke claims that the first difference is between saying, “isn’t it ironic,” in the case of dramatic irony, as opposed to a situation where an ironist is being deliberately ironical, in the case of verbal irony. The second difference for Muecke relies on the first one. It consists in the ironist passing moral judgment. This is a feature of verbal irony but not dramatic irony.

In this thesis it has been argued that the examples of irony that Whybray cites as dramatic irony have the features of an object of ironic attack and a moralising ironist behind the scenes. Therefore, these examples are instances of verbal irony. These examples are Nathan’s Parable (12:1-6), the story of the woman from Tekoa (14:4-20), Amnon’s request for Tamar to tend to him (13:6-7), and Absalom’s request that David allow Amnon to visit him at a sheep-shearing festival (13:24-27).

Nathan’s Parable might be interpreted as a case of dramatic irony on the grounds that while David is unaware that the parable is analogous to his own situation the reader knows that it is parallel. However, the presence of innocence, and a possible unknowing victim of irony, is a general requirement for all types of irony. However, whether or not an instance of irony is dramatic irony (“isn’t it ironic”) as opposed to verbal irony (“the ironist being ironical”) depends, as we have seen, on the answers to the following questions. (1) Is there an object of ironic attack? and (2) Is there an

835 Ibid., 42.
836 Ibid. 99-100.
837 Ibid., 42.
838 Ibid.
ironist who deliberately moralises? If the answer to both of these questions is ‘yes’ then the irony is an example of verbal irony.

In the case of Nathan’s Parable the object of ironic attack is clearly David. David is shown to be foolish for not recognizing the parable as being akin to his own situation, even culpably so – given he is a king and supposedly, therefore, wise. It is also evident that David is being morally criticized for his adultery with Bathsheba and for the execution of Uriah. This narrative content does not lend itself readily to the purely comedic purpose of dramatic irony. Instead, the king, who is meant to administer the laws, flouts the laws in the most egregious way. After all, we are talking about a murder and a deeply corrupt leader. Any comedy in this situation is the biting comedy of satire – a bitter comedy that makes us complicit in the condemnation by way of our own laughter. This is how the satirist shocks us into an awareness of what is going on around us. The moralising aspect of the narrative can persuasively be argued for, as the parable is focused on David’s moral failings. Moreover, this episode is followed directly by God’s punishment of David for his transgressions. Surely, this indicates that there is a moral purpose in this narrative. Therefore, it is preferable to categorise this passage as an instance of verbal irony rather than dramatic irony.

The story of the woman of Tekoa (14:4-20) is a complex story and is not as easy to pigeonhole as Nathan’s Parable (12:1-6). However, it is evident that David is the object of ironic attack, and it may be argued that the content of the parable is morally focused given that it concerns crimes in both the legal and moral senses. The implicit criticisms of David which arise in this episode include the suggestion that he does not make just adjudications, and that David is culpably unaware of what is going on around him. These moral failings of David have implications for all of Israel.
Whybray also suggests that dramatic irony can be found in the scene where David is tricked by Amnon (13:6-7). As far as the case of Amnon and Tamar is concerned there is certainly a moral undertone. For Amnon rapes Tamar and this leads into a dialogue concerning morally-based social conventions and laws. The object of ironic attack in this episode is primarily Amnon – for raping his own sister. It may also be argued that David is the object of ironic attack as he culpably sends Tamar to tend to Amnon despite the sexual overtones in Amnon’s request. David is similarly culpable, in allowing Absalom’s request for Amnon to join him at the sheep-shearing festival (13:24-27); Jonadab certainly implies this (13:32). The consequence of David’s obliviousness to Absalom’s treachery is serious as it ultimately results in a civil war; a morally horrendous outcome. Therefore, this example is best interpreted as an instance of verbal irony, and not dramatic irony.

Ridout’s research findings, like Good’s which he builds on, is more in line with the findings in this thesis. In the first page of Ridout’s discussion on irony, he makes a commitment to the “ironical man” who dissimulates in order to expose the pretensions of others. According to Muecke the presence of an ironical man indicates a species of verbal irony. Furthermore, Ridout’s findings in relation to “thematic irony,” suggest that the irony is pervasive in the SN. Similarly the findings of my research are of a pervasive and critical sense of irony in the SN. Yet, Ridout’s definition of irony focuses solely on ironic themes, and uses only the notions of contrast and incongruity. In my research, by contrast, I make use of Muecke’s far more detailed taxonomy. As mentioned in the discussion on Good, the application of Muecke’s more detailed taxonomy has afforded me a wider range of more specific findings. Of note, Ridout’s

839 Ridout, “Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 7, 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2),” 122.
840 Ibid., 125.
841 Ibid., 123.
methodology is in large part taken from Good’s book, *Irony in the Old Testament*. As such Ridout’s work has been compromised by the errors in Good’s work.\(^{842}\)

For Ridout the themes which show irony in the SN are; wisdom, fatherhood, kingship and loyalty.\(^{843}\) Selected representative examples are discussed here. In reference to wisdom, Ridout argues that the primary irony to emerge in the story of Jonadab and Amnon, is that Jonadab is a wise man, yet his counsel is folly.\(^{844}\) Since Ridout is arguing for an ironist being deliberately ironical, we should conclude from the above that the object of ironic attack is Jonadab, and that the moral criticism is that he is not wise when he is in a position which requires wisdom. This argument has merit. However, the difficulty with this interpretation is that Ridout rests on the disputed interpretation of חכם as wise instead of crafty. I have taken the word חכם to indicate a craftiness or cleverness which is morally neutral. Therefore, Jonadab is presented as more clever than Amnon (2 Sam 13:3-5), and also David (2 Sam 13:32). However, Jonadab is not, thereby, presented as morally superior to Amnon and David. On the other hand, even if it is the case that Jonadab is thought to be lacking in moral integrity, the suggestion that the incongruity identified by Ridout is the focus of the narrative overlooks Amnon’s and David’s failings in this narrative. Surely, Amnon (and to a lesser extent David) is the focus of this narrative, and the object of ironic attack, as he rapes Tamar.

In the case of Ahithophel, Ridout claims that the irony emerges from the fact that although Ahithophel’s advice was good advice Absalom did not take it.\(^{845}\) The difficulty with this claim, as has been argued in this thesis, is that Ahithophel’s advice


\(^{843}\) Ibid., 124-125.

\(^{844}\) Ibid., 133.

\(^{845}\) Ibid., 133-134.
was not entirely good advice, as it contradicted the expectations that the Israelites had for their kings. The irony in the story of Ahithophel and Absalom needs to take into account the criticism in 11:1 (which Ridout otherwise acknowledges)\(^\text{846}\) that David does not lead the army out to war. When this is taken into account the irony in this story is revealed to have a more complex form, as I have discussed at length in Chapter 4.

Ridout claims that the primary irony in the story of the woman of Tekoa is that David only recognizes the correct course of action regarding his own son as a consequence of being tricked.\(^\text{847}\) This claim is disputed in this dissertation. However, the story of the woman of Tekoa is complex and I believe nowhere unravelled entirely.

However, I strongly agree with Ridout that David’s transgressions are displayed in a parallel fashion to his sons.\(^\text{848}\) Ridout’s conclusion emphasizes David’s passivity as a sign of weakness,\(^\text{849}\) rather than, as I argue, David’s culpable failure to administer justice albeit in difficult cases. However, I support Ridout’s suggestion that the irony in the SN portrays David as a poor king.\(^\text{850}\)

Perry and Sternberg’s research into irony in the story of David and Bathsheba has influenced this dissertation. I have used their findings on the phenomenon of a pattern of prolix followed by curt language indicating irony. However, my own research project has taken a different approach to that of Perry and Sternberg. The latter have argued for (i) \textit{The Twofold Hypothesis}, concerning what Uriah knew of David’s

\(^{846}\) Ibid., 153.
\(^{847}\) Ibid., 138.
\(^{848}\) Ibid., 142-143.
\(^{849}\) Ibid., 152.
\(^{850}\) Ibid., 152.
encounter with Bathsheba,\(^{851}\) and; (ii) *The Three-Way Hypothesis*, which concerns what David thinks that Uriah knows.\(^{852}\) This concentration on the beliefs of the characters is a unique and valuable contribution to scholarship. However, the *Twofold* and *Three-way Hypotheses* have no bearing on the findings of this thesis. For this thesis maintains that the major issue in the story of David and Bathsheba is the incompatibility between David, the King of Israel’s, responsibility to uphold the law and his actual behaviour of breaking the law with confident abandon. Whether or not Uriah knows that David has slept with Bathsheba, or whether or not David has any knowledge that Uriah knows this, does not change the pejorative criticism of David in the text; criticism which is emphasized by way of verbal irony.

Bar-Efrat does not speak of irony in the SN at length, however, he does claim that the SN does not have examples of verbal irony, but only dramatic irony. Bar-Efrat argues that the reason there is no verbal irony in the narrative is because although the irony is spoken with forethought, the characters are not aware of the irony in their words; rather it is the author who gives the character the ironic expression.\(^{853}\) This account is at odds with Muecke’s definition of verbal irony. According to Muecke, the ironist in verbal irony need not be a character in the narrative, it can be the author or narrator. Moreover, Bar-Efrat contradicts himself. He states that 11:11 is not a case of verbal irony, but then goes on to note the rhetorical question in the verse. Yet in his section on verbal irony Bar-Efrat argues that rhetorical questions are an indication of verbal irony.\(^{854}\)

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\(^{852}\) Ibid., 300.

\(^{853}\) Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 125.

\(^{854}\) Ibid., 126 & 210.
Sharp only pays cursory attention to the material in the SN, however, her assessment of the irony in the story of King David is worth noting, as her perspectives on irony is different to the scholars previously mentioned. Sharp focuses on the parallels between the story of Judah and Tamar, on the one hand, and David and Bathsheba on the other. Amongst other things, Sharp argues that ironically David’s shady ancestors were more morally upstanding than David. This avenue has not been explored in the body of this thesis and I do not dispute the existence of this irony. Certainly, Sharp’s general findings in respect of David are in keeping with the findings of this dissertation.

While it is possible that the rhetorical motivations for such a story linking Tamar to David are supportive of the Davidide monarchy, it seems more likely that this odd and embarrassing story yields devastating satirical implications. The unspoken here? A minor point may be that just like Judah, David foolishly risks everything for the fulfilment of his own sexual needs (with Bathsheba). Robert Alter’s label of Genesis 38 as “a tale of exposure through sexual incontinence” can certainly be applied to the Bathsheba affair as well. A more far-reaching ironic perspective might be sketched as follows. David is a disaster as a leader, illegitimate and ethnically an outsider (given that Tamar may be Canaanite and Ruth is Moabite).\textsuperscript{855}

This section will not discuss scholars who have only mentioned irony in the SN in passing, including, Gunn,\textsuperscript{856} Brueggemann,\textsuperscript{857} Gunn and Fewell,\textsuperscript{858} McKenzie,\textsuperscript{859} and Van Seters.\textsuperscript{860}

It is worth noting that the findings of my own research rely on the presence of authorial intent. Without doing so, it would be impossible to apply Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony, nor would it be possible to argue for the genre of satire. I realise that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{855} Sharp, \textit{Irrony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible}, 96.
\item \textsuperscript{856} Gunn, \textit{The Story of King David}, 45, 91, 93, 95, 97, 98 & 100.
\item \textsuperscript{857} Brueggemann, \textit{David’s Truth in Israel’s Imagination & Memory}, 50, 58, 60, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{858} Gunn and Fewell, \textit{Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible}, 61 & 74.
\item \textsuperscript{859} McKenzie, \textit{King David. A Biography}, 158, 159, 160, 164 & 183.
\item \textsuperscript{860} Van Seters, \textit{The Biblical Saga of King David}, 308, 312, 322, & 358.
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this position is a scholarly minefield but this essentially theoretical debate lies outside
the parameters of this thesis. Thus I have not entered this debate. Instead I have pointed
the reader to one of the many contemporary discussions supporting the existence of
authorial intention.\textsuperscript{861} For what it is worth my own position is that of moderate
centrism. I hold that there is authorial intention but also that there are unintended
textual meanings and that readers bring perspectives which influence textual meaning.
I do maintain that an acknowledgement of the author’s intention expands the
understanding of biblical texts.

7.1.2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VERBAL IRONY IN THE SUCCESSION
NARRATIVE

If a literary work contains verbal irony then there must be an ironist; a character, a
narrator or an author who is being ironical. If a literary work has a pervasive sense of
verbal irony then - assuming also the presence of some other elements of satire – the
literary work is a satire. Since 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a and by extension the SN meets these
conditions it is a satire. Moreover, the primary ironist is also a satirist and, of course,
there is an object of ironic attack, be that a person(s) or an idea of whatever.

In reference to Higet’s argument that satirists are either optimists or
pessimists,\textsuperscript{862} it must be argued that the author of the SN is an optimist. For the
criticism of David and others in the SN indicates that the author was alarmed by the
corruption in the monarchy, yet, had faith that God was a higher authority than the king
and could put things right. To be more particular the satirist was critical of David,
Amnon, Absalom, and to a lesser extent, Joab and other members of the royal court.

\textsuperscript{862} Higet, \textit{The Anatomy of Satire}, 19.
The pejorative criticisms of these characters are detailed in chapter six of this dissertation.

If the satirist is an optimist, then it can be inferred that the satirist hoped for the correction of the vices satirised. We might then imagine that the satirist in the SN hoped for the correction of the vices; indeed, a correction in line with the moral order, and in particular, God’s laws. Importantly, the SN indicates that there are consequences for moral transgressions – consequences which go beyond personal suffering; in the case of David’s transgressions, all of Israel had to suffer a war. Furthermore, the satirist emphasizes that it is the action of the king to administer the laws in a just manner, and to preserve the moral order. If the king fails to do this, everybody suffers. Indeed, the security of Israel may be at risk. Most importantly, the satirist emphasizes that God is the author of the moral laws, and that the king’s job is merely to impartially administer these laws.

Therefore, according to the satirist author of the SN, the model king was a king who complied with the God-given laws of Israel, ensured that others complied with these laws, and exercised good and impartial judgement in the administration of these laws. Moreover, this model king was a paragon of faith. Indeed, faith in God and conscientious upholding of God’s laws worked hand in glove. Interestingly, David is generally accepted to be a paragon of faith. However, the satirist of the SN strongly implies that this view is mistaken; David is presented as a foolish transgressor of God’s laws and lacking in faith. Given that the primary purpose of satire is reform, it may then be argued that the author of the SN sought reform in the monarchy of Israel and did so in the context of an overall theological framework. Thus the satirist implies that the ideal King of Israel would be recognized by his faith in God, and good and
impartial judgement in respect of the laws of Israel, and conversely that a poor king can be recognised by his lack of faith in God and disregard for the laws of Israel.

7.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In terms of recommendations for future research, the most obvious recommendation is that the entire SN be considered in terms of verbal or satirical irony so as to make a decisive claim that the entire SN is a satire. I have only analysed 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. In order to fully achieve an understanding of the SN as a satire, the remaining chapters 2 Sam 19:8b-20 – 1 Kgs 2 would need to be regarded in view of verbal irony. In doing this a better understanding would emerge of the satirist’s view of Solomon’s succession to the throne. In line with scholars who do not accept the SN it would also be profitable to examine how a view of 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a as a satire rests with the broader narrative of 1 & 2 Sam and 1 Kings.

In addition to the aforementioned recommendation for future research it is suggested that there are three other possible areas for future research. The three major themes which emerged in this research are blood guilt, hospitality, and irresolvable legal cases. All of these ideas have been discussed by scholars, however, an ironic interpretation, and an appreciation of the narrative of Nabal as informing the SN, has brought these themes to the fore, and provided new insights. As these themes were not my focus I have not worked them through as I might have. However, I will discuss all of these themes below with the findings that this dissertation has netted, with the recommendation that these themes be explored further in future research.

7.2.1. BLOOD GUILT
It became apparent to me that the topic of bloodguilt is more important in an understanding of the SN than has previously been thought. However, scholars have not paid much attention to the topic of bloodguilt in the SN. Moreover, as I have demonstrated in the case of the story of the woman of Tekoa, the woman of Tekoa’s and David’s interpretations of the rules of bloodguilt are not reliable. Even if this passage were not to be considered to be ironic, the knowledge that the king only makes a decision when he is tricked by an actor who was enlisted by the king’s general is not encouraging.

The first indication that bloodguilt is a major theme in the narrative from 11:1-19:8a arises in 11:16-17 where Uriah is killed, as per David’s instruction, along with a number of valiant soldiers. This incident puts Israel at risk of bloodguilt since innocent blood has been shed. David’s cynicism regarding this event (2 Sam 11:25) indicates that David is not overly concerned by the convention of blood guilt. In Nathan’s Parable, which provides the lead-up to the episode in which God punishes David, the story of Nabal and Abigail is alluded to. In this latter narrative Abigail saves David from the bloodguilt of killing Nabal (1 Sam 25:23-26). Nabal dies because the Lord strikes him on account of Nabal’s wickedness (1 Sam 25:38). The case with David is not so cut and dried, and David’s evil reflects back on him in God’s punishment which transfers the punishment of death onto the illegitimate child (2 Sam 12:13-14), and determined that the evil will be expressed within David’s own family (2 Sam 12:10-12). This is a unique punishment for a king in the Hebrew Bible. Thereby, the motif of bloodguilt and retribution is established early on in the SN. The complexities of this situation arise as traditionally bloodguilt was reserved for warring families, as the idea behind bloodguilt was to preserve the strength of the family. An example of the outworking of bloodguilt within the family is otherwise not spoken of in the Bible.
The next episode which contains bloodguilt begins after the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon (2 Sam 13:14). It can be suspected that Absalom orders Amnon’s death in accordance with the premise of blood vengeance. However, it was expected that the monarchy would administer justice in accordance with the laws. Adding complexity to the story, Amnon’s death is not sanctioned by the law. The difficulties with Amnon’s punishment will be spoken of later in the section on irresolvable legal cases. After Amnon’s murder Absalom flees to Geshur (2 Sam 13:38) which may suggest that Absalom was acting in accordance with conventions where a murderer would flee to an ancestral village and seek refuge until a court case is heard. Yet, it appears that David responded to Absalom’s case in the same manner that he responded to Amnon’s case; with silence.

David’s silence is met with the parable of the woman of Tekoa. In this parable the woman of Tekoa, at Joab’s insistence, presents a case which concerns bloodguilt. In this parable the woman of Tekoa has two sons who fight in a field and one kills the other. This case seems to reflect upon the case of Cain and Abel. However, the complexity in the story of the woman of Tekoa is that the woman’s son is the last remaining heir of her husband, and that the family who have risen up against her are doing so for inheritance purposes and not for good judgement (2 Sam 14:7). This is not the position of David and this thesis has argued that the best course of action for David to have taken was to leave Absalom in exile.

Yet, this story is more complex, and the woman of Tekoa tricks David into taking the bloodguilt of Absalom (2 Sam 14:8-11). What exactly this means is uncertain. Certainly, David does not die in accordance with bloodguilt. Interestingly, David is exiled by Absalom, which I argued would have been the appropriate punishment for Absalom. However, in 2 Sam 14:28 Absalom mentions that if there is
bloodguilt in him he should be killed, otherwise the inference is that Absalom should be absolved entirely for his crime. Absalom is returned to Israel, yet, this turn of events comes through trickery and not through good judgement (2 Sam 14:22-23), highlighting the complexity of this issue.

The poor handling of Absalom, and before him Amnon, leads into the narrative where Absalom leads a revolt against David. This ends in Absalom’s death, which some scholars have argued is the appropriate punishment for killing Amnon. This may be so, however, this is also a complex area; it is certainly the appropriate punishment for treason. Also of note in this narrative is David’s mention of the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam 16:10). This verse highlights the knowledge that David, ordinarily, keeps himself free from bloodguilt as he gets others to take it on for him.

7.2.2. MENTIONS OF HOSPITALITY

Another major theme which emerged in this study into the SN was the theme of hospitality, or more importantly, hospitality without hesed, or hospitality which is taken advantage of. The first instance of hospitality without hesed is in the case of Uriah. David’s acts of hospitality in this case might be seen to be above and beyond expectations. For instance, David leaves a gift for Uriah, and provides him with a feast and alcohol. David even allows Uriah to eat at his table (2 Sam 11:8-13). However, David did not show the proper motivation for hospitality, as David only provided hospitality for Uriah in order to manipulate him to sleep with his wife, and thus cover-up David’s transgression. Moreover, at the end of the period of ‘hospitality’ David sends Uriah with his own death note to take to Joab (2 Sam 11:14). This is the antithesis of hospitality.
The theme of hospitality is further explored in the narrative of Nathan’s Parable (2 Sam 12:1-6). This thesis argues that Nathan’s Parable alludes to the story of David and Nabal. Nabal’s case is quite different to David’s, however, as Nabal does not offer hospitality at all. It is similar though in the fact that there is no hesed from Nabal. This thesis has also followed the existing proposition that Amnon’s encounter with Tamar is a violation of her hospitality. This case is a third example which shows hospitality which is tainted. Amnon has no interest in the labour that he has requested that Tamar undertake for him. Instead, Amnon has created an environment where he can be close to Tamar so that he can rape her.

Absalom’s violation of hospitality is like David’s instance with Uriah. Absalom arranges to have Amnon sent to his sheep-shearing festival. When there, Absalom offers Amnon hospitality without hesed. Also like David, Absalom commands that others kill Amnon for him (2 Sam 13:28). It may also be argued that David does not show proper hospitality when he allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem as he does not allow him to be in full communion with David (2 Sam 14:24). However, as has been discussed in the body of this dissertation, this premise is fraught with difficulties.

Another case is the story of Ziba who provides David with hospitality but only for his own advantage and not from hesed (2 Sam 16:4). Indeed, David gives Mephibosheth’s estate to Ziba. David had previously given Saul’s estate to Mephibosheth to pay hesed to Jonathan. Also in 2 Sam 16:17 Absalom mentions that Hushai is not showing hesed to David by joining with Absalom.

7.2.3. IRRESOLVEABLE CASES

Another theme which seems to be central to the SN is the theme of complex crimes. The major transgressions in the SN do not have biblical precedents, and cannot be
adequately adjudicated with reference to the laws. Commonly, these cases all involve the complexity of family relations, however, they do not all involve family. For instance, the first example could be spoken of as Uriah’s death (2 Sam 11.17). Although it would seem blatantly obvious that Uriah’s death was unjust there is no law prohibiting third person killings where a person is responsible for giving the command to kill another person. In the case of Uriah it becomes apparent that this is not acceptable behaviour as God punishes David severely (2 Sam 12:7-14). In this instance, David’s case becomes a case precedent.

The first truly irresolvable case, however, is the sibling rape of Tamar. As with the occasion of third person killings, there is no case precedent for incestuous rape in the Hebrew Bible. The proper recompense in rape is that the rapist marry the victim and pay compensation to the victim’s father (Deut 22:28-29). However, incest was forbidden (Lev 18:6, 18:9, 20:17 and Deut 27:22) so it was not possible for Amnon to marry Tamar. The punishment for incest was exile (Lev 18:29). David’s response to do nothing was unwise. As Tamar’s guardian, Absalom missed out on receiving compensation, and was angry for the injustice (2 Sam 13:22). This is credited with being the reason for the revolt that Absalom leads against David. It is argued that this dilemma could have been resolved satisfactorily by ordering Amnon into exile, however, as stated there is no precedent for this.

The next difficult case to adjudicate is Amnon’s execution. It would appear that Absalom harks back to the rules of blood vengeance to kill Amnon, however, the crimes of rape and incest do not command such a severe punishment. Moreover, the rules of bloodguilt when a family member is concerned is murky territory, as is the idea that blood vengeance may be used if the king does not administer a judgement as he should. At no point do we really appreciate whether or not there is guilt in Absalom, as
Chapter 8 - Conclusion

Determining the genre of the Succession Narrative has proved to be far from straightforward. In chapter six I have provided a comparative discussion of the various competing genres: satire; national epic; propaganda; wisdom literature; theological history; literary art.

The findings of this thesis support the proposition that the broad genre to which the SN belongs is that of literary art, given the aesthetic quality of the narrative. This research supports Gunn’s proposition that the SN is a serious work of art. However, my own interpretation involves the common-sense acceptance of an author and, therefore, of authorial intention. Moreover, this author intends to be highly critical of David’s moral transgressions. So my interpretation of the SN differs from that of Gunn. Gunn argues that the SN is not a moral tale. The findings of my research have the most in
common with Van Seters’ argument that the material in the SN is satirical. However, whereas Van Seters suggests that this material is akin to a *njals saga*, according to my own interpretation 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a satire. I argue that the designation of satire is more precise than that of *njals sagas* since the latter are not always satirical in nature.

The essential feature of satire is a pervasive sense of irony which is intentional and critical. To satisfy the claim that a work is satire one must demonstrate that it has a pervasive and critical sense of irony, provide evidence of a few of the other features of satire, and display an object of attack. This work is focused on irony, as it is the essential element of a satire. Moreover, since verbal irony is the type of irony found in satire, the focus of this work is on verbal irony. Specifically, Douglas Muecke’s taxonomy of verbal irony has been applied to 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a. In a lesser way this work has applied David Marcus’ taxonomy of elements of satire to the Succession Narrative, to discern the other features of satire including, fantastic events, grotesqueries, distortions, ridicule, parody, and rhetorical features. It is argued that there is a pervasive sense of critical irony in 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a, along with examples of the other lesser features of satire, and an object of attack. These findings are sufficient to demonstrate that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire.

Scholars who have written on irony in the SN have not hitherto utilised Muecke’s definitions, or done a thoroughgoing analysis of the SN in terms of verbal irony. Therefore, irony in the SN has not been considered from a strictly satirical position. Muecke claims that there are three essential elements in all types of irony which are as follows: two different levels in the narrative, an opposition between the levels, and the presence of ‘innocence.’ Moreover, as Muecke points out, verbal irony always involves an ironist and, therefore, the irony is intentional; in short, verbal irony and, indeed, satire presupposes authorial intention.
I have diverged somewhat from Muecke’s account. Firstly, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the feigned ignorance of the ironist and the actual ignorance of the victim. Second, there is a need to distinguish, as Muecke does not always do, between the victim of irony – in the sense of the person who is confidently unaware of the irony – and the object of ironic attack. In verbal irony there is always an object of ironic attack. The object of ironic attack is always someone or something that is the object of pejorative criticism. Notice that the victim of irony is not necessarily the object of ironic attack.

If a literary work contains verbal irony then there must be an ironist; a character, a narrator or an author who is being ironical. If a literary work has a pervasive sense of verbal irony then - assuming also the presence of some other elements of satire – the literary work is a satire. Since the SN meets these conditions it is a satire. Moreover, the primary ironist is also a satirist and, of course, there is an object of ironic attack, be that a person(s) or an idea or whatever.

2 Samuel 11:1-19:8a is very critical of David, Amnon, Absalom, and Joab and other members of the royal court. The evidence for this finding has been provided in detail in chapter six, in particular. Chapter six provides systematic characterisations of the main characters in the narrative. The pejorative criticism of David, who is the primary target of attack in his role as king, is both explicit and implicit. More generally, the SN portrays King David, Absalom and Amnon as corrupt. This much is certain.

In addition to this general finding of a pervasive sense of irony in the SN, there are also a number of important miscellaneous findings.

5.3.1.2: 2 Sam 12:1-6: The conclusion that the story of Nathan’s Parable is analogous not only to the story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, but also to the story of Nabal (1
is a new and important finding. This finding provides a new lens through which to interpret the SN as a whole. Specifically, the themes of *hesed*, hospitality, and bloodguilt become far more prominent.

5.3.2.2: 2 Sam 13:22: Not only have I suggested that Absalom’s hatred of his brother is against the law, but also that it causes a disproportionate punishment for Amnon’s crime; a punishment which is carried out at Absalom’s instruction.

5.3.3.1: 2 Sam 14:12-14: The research in this thesis identifies the Joab/woman of Tekoa deception of David as not unlike the Amnon/Jonadab deception of David and Absalom’s deception of David. Importantly, in all of these cases David made the wrong decision and disaster followed. Previous scholars have incorrectly assumed that the story of Joab and the woman of Tekoa is akin to Nathan’s Parable and that, therefore, David did the right thing in allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem unpunished.

5.3.3.6: 2 Sam 17:1-4: A new perspective has emerged in relation to Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom. Hitherto, scholars have universally agreed that the advice that Ahithophel gives to Absalom is simply better than the advice that Hushai gives to Absalom. However, I have argued that Ahithophel’s advice that Absalom not lead his army in battle is contrary to the expectations that the Israelites had for their king (1 Sam 8:20, 5:2-3) and is, to this extent at least, deficient as advice.

I have concluded that 2 Sam 11:1-19:8a is a work of satire. Given that this is a large portion of the SN, it is reasonable to draw the further conclusion that the SN as a whole is a satire. Being a satire, there is a satirist/ironist who is seeking to make the audience (presumably, including the Israelites) aware of the vices of the characters, notably David and other leaders of the Israelites. In so far as the audience is made aware by the ironist of these vices of the leaders and other characters, they are in a
position, at least potentially, to correct these vices, especially if in some cases they recognize the vices in themselves. Of course, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is part of the point of verbal irony, and satire, to bring about the correction of vices. This being so, the SN has a moral purpose albeit, in the case of the SN, within a theological framework.

The SN indicates that there are consequences for moral transgressions – consequences which go beyond personal suffering; in the case of David’s transgressions, all of Israel had to suffer a war. Importantly, the satirist emphasizes that God is the author of the moral laws, and that the king’s job is merely to impartially administer these laws.

Given that the primary purpose of satire is reform, it may then be argued that the author of the SN sought reform in the monarchy of Israel and did so in the context of an overall theological framework.
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