



University
of Glasgow

Pyper, Hugh Scott (1993) *'David as reader' 2 Samuel 12: 1-15 and the poetics of fatherhood*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/1743/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

'DAVID AS READER'

2 Samuel 12: 1-15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood

HUGH SCOTT PYPER

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Department of Biblical Studies
Faculty of Divinity
The University
Glasgow**

Date of Submission: March 1993

© Hugh Scott Pyper 1993

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has tried the patience of many whose forbearance and encouragement I now gratefully acknowledge. The Faculty of Divinity of the University of Glasgow provided physical, intellectual and personal support with great generosity. In particular, I am grateful for the grant of a Postgraduate Scholarship from the University for the years 1987-1990, and for subsequent employment as a Research and Tutorial Assistant during the years 1990-1992. For this I am especially indebted to the Very Reverend Professor Robert Davidson, whose combination of gentle wisdom and shrewd scholarship has been an inspiration, and to Professor John Riches, who has borne with good humour my attempts to combine this thesis with the production of course material for the Certificate in Christian Studies. The other members of the Department and Faculty have been a pleasure to learn from and to work with over many years.

There is, of course, a special and incalculable debt to my supervisor, Professor Robert Carroll, whose faith in my abilities, vast erudition and friendly concern have been an all-important support. I hope that with the submission of this thesis, he will be able to expunge the image of Munch's 'Scream' from his thoughts.

I should also like to record my appreciation of Professor Adrian Hastings and my current colleagues in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in the University of Leeds who have given me every assistance and encouragement as I completed this thesis, and have gone out of their way to relieve me of routine duties.

Many others in Glasgow and elsewhere have given support through their friendship and by their insights which

have helped to shape my thinking; too many, indeed, to list in full. My postgraduate colleagues in Glasgow, Leslie Milton, Robert Setio and Father Thomas MacGill have been more than congenial sparring partners. The members of Glasgow Preparative Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, collectively and severally, gave me a home, literally and metaphorically, which was a vital base for my studies.

It would be unthinkable not to mention three people in particular in connection with this thesis: Stephen Barton, whose own work on the cognitive psychology of reading has suggested many questions, and whose gift for friendship has been a blessing; Adam Fleck, whose mercurial intellect and charm kept me up to the mark; and, by no means least, Ronald Weitzman, my most trenchant critic and staunchest champion, who has left his mark on this thesis in ways which he will understand.

Finally, it is my joy to acknowledge my debt to my parents, Jock and Jean Pyper, who gave me, among so much, the love of reading which made this thesis both possible and necessary.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	4
Summary	13
Epigraph	16
Preface	17
Chapter One Reading 2 Samuel	23
1.1 Introduction: A Question of Text	23
1.1.1 What Text Do We Read?	23
1.1.1.1 Sternberg	24
1.1.1.2 Other critiques of text-critical approaches	25
1.1.2 The Text of 2 Samuel	27
1.1.3 The Risk of Reading	29
1.2 David as Reader	31
1.2.1 The Texts in Question	32
1.2.2 2 Samuel 1: 1-16	32
1.2.2.1 The Amalekite's Tale	32
1.2.2.2 The Reader as Detective	37
1.2.2.3 David as Detective	39
1.2.2.4 Reader as Writer	45
1.3 Mise en abyme	51
1.3.1 Dällenbach	51
1.3.2 Critiques of Dällenbach	57
1.3.2.1 Bal	57
1.3.2.2 Chambers	59
1.3.3 Characters as Interpretants	60
1.3.3.1 Schor	60

1.3.3.2 Wimmers	62
1.3.3.3 Sternberg	63
1.4 Reading the Reader: Problems of Circularity	64
1.4.1 Implicit Poetics	65
1.4.1.1 De Man	65
1.4.1.2 Peterson	66
1.4.2 Characters as Readers	68
 Chapter Two Character as Reader	 69
2.1 The Act of Reading	69
2.1.1 Noticing Reading	69
2.1.2 Convention and Defamiliarization	72
2.1.2.1 Formalism	72
2.1.2.2 Fowler	73
2.2 Reading as Inference	74
2.2.1 Inference and Schema	74
2.2.2 Polysemy	77
2.2.2.1 Ricoeur	77
2.2.2.2 Critique of Ricoeur	80
2.2.3 Reader Response	81
2.2.3.1 Iser	81
2.2.3.2 Sternberg	84
2.2.3.4 Fish	86
2.2.4 Schema and Reader	88
2.3 Theories of Character	90
2.3.1 Aristotle	90
2.3.2 Character, Actant and Action	92
2.3.3 The Proper Name	94
2.3.4 The Implicit Schema in the Name	96
2.4 Character and Language	102
2.4.1 Speech Characterisation	102
2.4.2 Language and Biblical Character	103
2.4.2.1 Bar Efrat	103
2.4.2.2 Alter	105
2.4.3 Whose Speech is is Anyway?	107

Chapter Three	Character and Reader: A Dialogic Approach	108
3.1	Bakhtin: Utterance as Answer	108
3.1.1	The Dialogic Principle	108
3.1.2	Meaning in Dialogue	110
3.1.2.1	Bakhtin	110
3.1.2.2	Benveniste	112
3.2	Language and the Speaking Subject	113
3.2.1.	Learning to Answer	113
3.2.1.1	Vygotsky	113
3.2.1.2	Benveniste	114
3.2.2	Child as Spectator	114
3.2.3	Reader as Spectator: Reader as Child	117
3.3	Author's Voice, Character's Voice	118
3.3.1	Heteroglossia	118
3.3.2	Single and Double Voices	120
3.3.3	Voice and Author	122
3.3.3.1	Mukarovsky	125
3.3.3.2	Foucault	125
3.3.4	Biblical Voices	127
3.3.4.1	Prickett	127
3.3.4.2	Lodge	128
3.4	The Reader in Dialogue	128
3.4.1	Kristeva	128
3.4.2	Character as Reader	131
3.5	Reading as Speech Act	131
3.5.1	Austin and Bakhtin	131
3.5.2	'How to Do Things With Words'	136
3.5.2.1	Constative and Performative	136
3.5.2.2	Illocution and Perlocution	138
3.5.3	Intention and Reception	141
3.6	Character as Judge; Reader as Judge	144
3.6.1	Character, Utterance and Signature	144
3.6.2	David as Reader, David as Judge	146

Chapter Four	Reading Nathan's Parable	148
4.1	Nathan's Parable	148
4.1.1	Structuralist Readings	151
4.1.1.1	Roth	151
4.1.1.2	Altpeter	154
4.1.2	David and Distanciation	158
4.1.2.1	Vorster and Lategan	158
4.1.2.2	First and Second Order Characters	159
4.1.3	Kierkegaard's Reading	160
4.1.3.1	David as Critic	160
4.1.3.2	God as Critic	162
4.1.4	<i>You are the Man</i>	163
4.1.5	Text Critical Approaches	167
4.1.5.1	Schwally	167
4.1.5.2	Gunkel	168
4.1.5.3	Daube	170
4.1.6	Decoding the Allegory	173
4.1.6.1	Delekat	174
4.1.6.2	Seebass	175
4.2	The Juridical Parable	177
4.2.1	The Juridial Parable as Genre	177
4.2.1.1	Simon	177
4.2.1.2	Critique of Simon	179
4.2.2	The Force of the Parable	182
4.2.2.1	Simon	182
4.2.2.1	Critique of Juridical Concept	184
4.3	The Place of the Oath	186
4.3.1	The Binding Oath	187
4.3.2	1 Kings 20: 35-43	188
4.3.3	2 Sam 12 and 2 Sam 14	191
Chapter Five	2 Samuel 14: Reading as Parody	193
5.1	Reading 2 Sam 14	193
5.1.1	The Tequite Woman's Tale	193
5.1.2	Alonso Schökel and the Hermeneutic Model	197

5.1.2.1	Alonso Schökel's Reading	197
5.1.2.2	Alonso Schökel's Conclusions	198
5.1.2.3	Critique of Alonso Schökel	200
5.2.	2 Sam 14 and Conversational Implicature	201
5.2.1	Grice and Implicature	201
5.2.2.1	Grice's Maxims	201
5.2.2.2	Leech's Maxims	202
5.2.2.3	Implicature	203
5.2.2	David's Responses and Implicature	204
5.2.3	David as Reader in 2 Sam 14	209
5.3	2 Sam 14 and 2 Sam 12	209
5.3.1	Similarities	209
5.3.2	Definitions of Parody	212
5.3.3	2 Sam 14 as Parody: the Evidence	214
5.4	The Consequences of Parodic Reading	220
5.4.1	Rereading 2 Sam 12	220
5.4.2	David and the Oath	223
5a	Appendix: Textual Criticism of 2 Sam 14	226
5a.1	2 Sam 14:1	226
5a.2	2 Sam 13:39	227
5a.3	2 Sam 14:15-17	229
5a.4	2 Sam 14:13-14	230
Chapter Six	Yahweh and the Oath in Biblical Narrative	235
6.1	Oath Formulae	235
6.1.1	'Thus do the Lord and thus add...'	238
6.1.1.1	Scarry: Oath and Wounding	239
6.1.1.2	Oath and Conditionality	241
6.2	Divine Names and the Oath	244
6.2.1	The Invocation of the Divine Name	244

6.2.2 Yahweh and the Fulfillment of the Oath	245
6.3 The Narratological Functions of the Oath	249
6.3.1 Standard Functions	249
6.3.1.1 Prolepsis	249
6.3.1.2 Analepsis	249
6.3.1.3 Allodiegesis	252
6.3.2 Exceptional Oaths as Narrative Device	254
6.3.2.1 1 Sam 29	254
6.3.2.2 1 Sam 14	255
6.3.3 The Exception that Proves the Rule	257
6.3.4 Oaths and Equivocation	259
6.3.4.1 2 Kings 5	260
6.3.4.2 Oath as Trap	260
6.3.4.3 Oath Evasion	262
6.4 David's Oath and the Reader	264
6.4.1 2 Sam 14 and 2 Sam 12	264
6.4.2 Rash oaths	265
6.5 David as reader, David as Swearer	267
Chapter Seven David as Son	270
7.1 David's Response to Nathan	270
7.1.1 Text	270
7.1.2 Son of Death	273
7.1.2.1 'One who deserves to die'	273
7.1.2.2 Other Translations	274
7.1.3 David as Son of Death	278
7.1.3.1 1 Sam 20: (30-)31	278
7.1.3.2 1 Sam 26:16	279
7.2 David as Son	280
7.2.1 'Whose Son is the Young Man?'	280
7.2.1.1 1 Sam 17	280
7.2.1.2 Foregrounding the Question	287
7.2.2 'Who is Their Father?'	289
7.3 Son of Jesse	293
7.3.1 David's Genealogy	293

7.3.2	Jesse and David	294
7.3.2.1	Jesse as Father	294
7.3.2.2	Jesse' Disappearance	296
7.3.3	'Son of Jesse' as Insult	298
7.3.3.1	1 Sam 20: 26-34	298
7.3.3.2	1 Sam 22	301
7.3.3.3	1 Sam 25: 10	302
7.4	Son of Nabal	302
7.4.1	1 Sam 25:8	302
7.4.1.1	Filiation and Liminality	302
7.4.1.2	Narrative Analogy in 2 Sam 24 and 26	304
7.4.1.3	Nabal and Saul	306
7.5	Son of Saul	307
7.5.1	Sons of Saul	307
7.5.2	Son of the King	308
7.6	The Search for the Father	311
7.6.1	Multiple Fathers	311
7.6.1.1	Schroeter	311
7.6.1.2	Paul	312
7.6.2	Reading and the Search for the Father	315
Chapter Eight	Fathers, Sons and the Anxiety of Utterance	317
8.1	Tension between Father and Son	317
8.1.1	Son and Heir	317
8.1.1.1	Sternberg	317
8.1.1.2	White	318
8.1.1.3	Rank	320
8.1.1.4	Girard	321
8.2	Relations between Generations in the Old Testament	323
8.2.1	Age and Youth	323
8.2.2	Plato and Parricide	324
8.2.3	Biblical Theories of Generation	327

8.2.3.1	Biblical References	327
8.2.3.2	Theories of Generation	328
8.3	The Uncertainty of Utterance	330
8.3.1	Coitus as Utterance	330
8.3.2	Lacan and the Name of the Father	331
8.3.3	The Mirror Stage	333
8.3.4	Name and Continuity	335
8.4	Reader as Father, Reader as Son	338
Chapter Nine	Father's Authority and Textual Power	341
9.1	God and Authority	341
9.1.1	Yahweh as Pledge of Continuity	341
9.1.1.1	Derrida	341
9.1.1.2	Divine Promise	341
9.1.2	Moses, Samuel and Divine Repentance	342
9.1.3	The Divine Word as Bond	344
9.2	Divine Speech Acts	346
9.2.1	'Let There Be Light'	346
9.2.1.1	Searle	346
9.2.1.2	Sternberg	347
9.2.2	Divine Speech	349
9.3	Reader as Creator. Reader as Creation	351
9.3.2	Creature or Creator	353
9.3.3	Fathering the Father	354
9.3.4	Textual Power	357
9.4	Freud as Reader of <i>Oedipus Rex</i>	358
9.4.1	Freud and the Effect of Art	358
9.4.2	The impact of <i>Oedipus</i>	359
9.4.2.1	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	360
9.4.2.2	The Response of the Audience	361
9.4.2.3	<i>Oedipus</i> and Oath	363
9.5	Oath, Ambiguity and the Anxiety of the Reader	365
9.5.1	Polysemy and Tragedy	366

9.5.2 The Place of the Reader	368
9.6 Conclusion: David as Reader	369
Chapter Ten	
Epilogue: David's Child	372
10.1 David's reaction	372
10.2 The Reaction of Readers	372
10.3 David and the Death of Sons	374
10.4 David and Readers	375
Abbreviations	377
References	378

SUMMARY

In this thesis, the concept of the character as reader is explored as a means of revealing the poetics of the text of 2 Samuel. A preliminary examination of David's interpretation of the story of the Amalekite messenger in 2 Sam 1 leads to the conclusion that the polysemy of the Amalekite's utterances is turned against him. David as reader re-writes the Amalekite's utterances.

This leads to a theoretical investigation of what it might mean to refer to a character as reader. The concept of *mise en abyme* suggests that the character's reading may be both a model and an antimodel of the reading strategy revealed by the character.

The concept of the 'character as reader' is then investigated using theories of the literary character from Aristotle to Greimas coupled with theories of reading as inference and the linguistic theories of Bakhtin and Austin. These all combine to reinforce the contention that meaning is a dialogic process, dependent on the response of the interlocutor, but in inviting response, provokes the hearer or reader to utter. The character as reader is defined as a signed site of translation, a particular interpretative transformation of perlocutionary force into illocution which is given coherence by a proper name. Character as reader is character as utterer.

This definition is then used to look at two stories where David 'interprets' a text, 2 Samuel 12: 1-15 and 2 Sam 14. Here the parodic relationship between these two texts is explored, and the difference in reading stances which are labelled by the name David is pointed out. This parodic relationship foregrounds the fact that both stories share the device of provoking an oath.

The narratological function of the oath is shown to depend on a convention that oaths in the name of Yahweh are always fulfilled, though often by the unlooked-for resolution of the polysemy of the oath. The paradox is that the attempt to resolve the polysemy of utterance by invoking the divine name frees the utterance to be reinscribed in an unexpected interpretative context.

In the particular case of 2 Sam 12, David's oath involves the expression 'son of death'. It is argued that this utterance acts as both a prolepsis of the death of David's child, and a self-description of David. It puts in question the 'authorship' of David himself, which has a particular significance for his position as Saul's heir who is not his biological son.

In the final part of the thesis, it is argued that the impact of the text on the reader is due to its activation of an 'anxiety of utterance'. The inevitable gap between utterance and reception in speech is analogous to the gap between the act of coition and the birth of a son. The work of Lacan on the Name-of-the-father and the investigations of the tension between fathers and heirs in the work of Rank and others is used to elucidate the place of the divine name as guarantee of continuity.

This continuity, however, is shown to be predicated on the vulnerability of the human body, and divine speech is shown to be subject to the same uncertainties as other speech. The response of the reader to the text, it is argued, is the product of its inducing the reader to follow David in his utterance of judgments which expose him to judgment. The parallels with the methodological premises of Freud's interpretation of the Oedipus legend are explored.

Ultimately, the reader is confronted with the formally unresolvable conflict between God and reader as 'father' of the world of the text. The reader is invited to 'give birth to his own father' in Kierkegaard's words, a process which gains its power through its engagement with the reader's anxieties as father and child. The character as reader, then, may activate the reader's awareness of herself as 'character', as inferred construct.

EPIGRAPH

Rabbi Levi Isaac de Berditschew: 'Here is the way it is: the blanks, the white spaces in the Torah's role also arise from the letters; but we cannot read them as we do the blackness of the letters. When the Messianic era comes, God will unveil the white in the Torah in which the letters are now invisible to us, and this is what the term "new Torah" implies.' (Derrida 1981: 345)

PREFACE

The question which this thesis addresses is captured in the conjunction of two striking remarks from the writings of two scholars who have devoted their efforts to elucidating what it might be to 'read' the Old Testament.

The first is a quotation from the noted Spanish scholar Luis Alonso Schökel, who in 1976 published a paper entitled 'David y la mujer de Tecua: 2 Sm 14 como modelo hermenéutico' ['David and the woman of Teqoa; 2 Samuel 14 as a hermeneutical model']¹. It ends with this stirring summons to his readers:

What we must seek, what the bible requires of us, is readers like David: willing to enter into dialogue with the text, participants in the drama of human existence, willing to take decisions in order to accept their consequences properly. [my emphasis] (1976: 205)

Secondly, John Barton in his discussion of Roland Barthes' analysis of Gen 32:22-33 (Barthes 1977: 125-141), the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel, offers this intriguing insight into his own reaction to this biblical text:

I suspect many readers of Genesis will share the experience that, however often they read this passage and however much they may try to ask only historical-critical questions about it, it never fails

¹ Subsequent quotations from this paper are my own translations of the Spanish original.

to give them a certain *frisson*, a blend of fascination and repulsion... (1984: 117)

These two sentences encapsulate the issues with which this thesis hopes to engage. Fundamentally, it arises out of a personal question: what is it that grips me as a reader of the books of Samuel to the extent that I am prepared to devote considerable time and effort to the writing of this thesis? What is the nature of the text, of the reading process, and of the reader, that leads to this powerful interaction and the production of this present derived text?

This is, moreover, not a purely personal reaction. The amount of secondary literature on all aspects of Samuel is overwhelming, ranging from scholarly monographs to novels by major literary figures². What is it in a text that provokes this plethora of secondary writing in reaction to it, of which this thesis in turn takes its part?

So we begin from the circular position of a thesis which is written in order to answer the question of why it came to be written. How is this circularity to be addressed? The approach adopted below is to focus on the self-referential aspect of the text of 2 Samuel itself. The quotation from Alonso Schökel's sentence itself is intriguing because it indicates that it is in reading the text that the model for the interpretation of the text is to be found. Specifically, he suggests that a

² So, for instance, the bibliography of McCarter's 1984 commentary on 2 Samuel runs to some thirty pages. Among recent novelistic treatments of the stretch of narrative including 2 Samuel 12 are Stefan Heym's *The King David Report* (1984), Joseph Heller's *God Knows* (1985) and Torgny Lindgren's *Bathsheba* (1989).

useful model might be provided by one of the characters in the text who acts as a reader, in this case, David. Indeed he goes further and argues for that the text itself *requires* such a reading.

But in Alonso Schökel's formulation, this conception seems to raise more questions than it solves. We might ask:

1. In what sense does, or can, the bible require anything of us? What is the source of the authority that determines what we *must* seek? Who, indeed are 'we' whom Alonso Schökel addresses and in whose number he counts himself?
2. What does it mean to describe David, a character within the text, as a 'reader'? This raises wider questions of what the process of reading entails, and the relationship between author, character and reader.
3. In the light of this, how far does Alonso Schökel's summary a) reflect David as reader in this particular instance b) David as reader generally? How might one arrive at this description?
4. In what sense does 2 Sam 14, or any other passage, provide a 'hermeneutical model'? How is the reader to detect, assess and implement this model?

In attempting to come to grips with these questions, I propose to concentrate on a passage that has exercised a fascination on succeeding generations, and that seems to be for many readers the source of the kind of *frisson* to which Barton refers: the so-called parable of Nathan and its reception in 2 Sam 12:1-15.

This restricted focus concentrates attention on a text which raises many general points of interpretation and issues surrounding the impact of a text on its readers, because it represents *in nuce* an event of interpretation by a character. After taking the wife of his faithful retainer Uriah and having him murdered, David in these verses is confronted with Nathan's story of the rich man who steals his poor neighbour's beloved lamb. The reader is made privy to David's reaction in which he uncompromisingly condemns the rich man's injustice. This provokes Nathan's unforgettable reprimand to David, 'You are the man.'

The relationship between this text and Alonso Schökel's chosen passage in 2 Samuel 14 will form part of our investigation, and the justification for choosing 2 Samuel 12 rather than the text Alonso Schökel opts for will emerge as a result of this discussion. Immediately, however, the very fact that Nathan's retort has such an impact makes this passage particularly interesting.

Leaving aside the issue of their relationship, the argument of this thesis will be that such passages as 2 Samuel 14 and 2 Samuel 12 do offer a model to the reader of the text, but that it is a model that subverts the notions of 'reader', 'text' and indeed 'model' as they appear in Alonso Schökel's text.

Furthermore, it is in just such a process of subversion that the kind of *frisson* which intrigues Barton is generated, or so he himself argues. Drawing on Barthes' analysis, Barton traces the effect of Genesis 32 to the way in which this story offers itself to the reader as a folktale and then turns the tables on the reader by an illicit twist of the conventions. Jacob's opponent, the man who wrestles with him, turns out to be the same God who sent him on his way and is expected to protect him. By playing on the conventions of folktales, the text un-

settles the reader: 'confusions of role undermine our confidence that we know what we are reading' (Barton 1984:119).

This leads him to the following wider conclusion that:

If Barthes is right, much of the distinctiveness of the Old Testament may well lie in the way that it exploits conventions. We have become accustomed to seeing the prophets as parodists, taking up secular or orthodoxly religious forms of speech (the lawsuit, the popular song, the priestly oracle) and filling them with new and surprising meanings; but perhaps a great deal more of the Old Testament is 'prophetic' in this sense than we have hitherto suspected - including much of the narrative material. (1984: 119)

The consequences of this speculation will also be part of our investigation. In what sense is the Old Testament distinctive? Is the concept of parody a useful strategy to be borne in mind in the attempt to understand the transaction between the biblical text and its readership? What indeed defines a parody? Is it a textual quality or does it describe a mode of reading? If so, what conventions are operating within the biblical text, and why should their subversion have such an effect on its readers?

This in turn involves us in a consideration of the relationship between language and the speaking subject, and the analogies between a literary character and the reader him- or herself as the site of production of language. We will seek to draw an analogy between the relationship of the subject to its speech and the relationship of a father to a son. This particular relationship is at the heart of the narrative of 2 Samuel in its account of the institution of a hereditary monarchy

and the complex interactions between Saul, David and David's sons, and is again brought to a particular focus in the text we have selected, the story of Nathan's parable. The parable arises from David fathering of a child on Bathsheba, and his response to the parable, we shall argue, entails the death of the child. How these events in the text impinge on the reader may lead us to revise our notions of what it is to read a text such as 2 Samuel 12: 1-15.

CHAPTER ONE

READING 2 SAMUEL

The David of [2 Sam] 12:1 sqq is himself a reader ... who may serve us as an example. Indeed we can see the entire situation of David-Nathan as a parable directed towards us. Just as David takes the story seriously and consequently extracts everything which might be useful to himself, so, too, can we assume a serious attitude with respect to the stories and poems of the Old Testament. (Fokkelmann 1981: 82 n.6)

The David/Nathan story is a key text for understanding the nature of allegorizing in the Bible for it allows us to see one character allegorizing for another. It is thus a kind of allegory of allegory, for the whole transaction ultimately serves another oblique purpose whose target is the reader. This is true however much we might debate the 'oral' or the 'written' character of the Bible. The semantic operations that we witness between one character and another are transacted again between the text and us. (Rosenberg 1986: 43)

1.1 INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION OF TEXT

1.1.1 WHAT TEXT DO WE READ?

The books of Samuel and in particular the character of David have been the object of study and the subject of

innumerable readings over the centuries since their first appearance¹. The present study arises out of an interest in the process of reading itself, and asks the question: what does it mean to 'read' the books of Samuel?

1.1.1.1 Sternberg

In the sense that Sternberg uses the terms (1985: 15), this study then is 'discourse oriented' rather than 'source oriented'; that is to say, its object of inquiry is not 'the realities behind the text,' but 'the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect'. One of the central questions of this sort of inquiry which Sternberg identifies is 'What are the rules governing the transaction between story teller or poet and reader?'

This division also leads him to make clear, if with some caveats, the inescapable fact that the reading of the text is the starting point for all inquiry into the biblical narrative whatever its orientation. The text is the one 'given' in the transaction. Sternberg also concedes that a historicist might disagree and argue that the first priority is the establishment of a valid text. Yet how else is this to be done without first reading the text as offered, albeit in the light of its variants?

¹ It is not proposed to offer an exhaustive bibliography of such study. Its bulk alone would preclude this. During the course of this study we will have recourse to many works whose titles can be found in the References at the back of this thesis. Particular works and the varieties of reading stances adopted will be referred to during the course of our investigation.

Sternberg refers to the enterprise of research into the genesis of the texts as both an indispensable tool and one which has been abused.

Rarely has there been such a futile expense of spirit in a noble cause; rarely have such grandiose theories of origination been built and revised and pitted against one another on the evidential equivalent of the head of a pin; rarely have so many worked so long and so hard with so little to show for their trouble. Not even the widely adopted constructions of geneticism, like the Deuteronomist, lead an existence other than speculative (1985: 13).

In discussing the 'arrogance' of the antihistorical view which argues the irrelevance of the conventions and expectations of the author and intended audience of the text, Sternberg rightly says: 'It is condescending, not to say arrogant, because it still remains to demonstrate that in matters of art (as distinct from their abstract articulation) the child is always wiser than its parent, that wit correlates with modernity, that a culture which produced the Bible (or the *Iliad*) was incapable of going below the surface of its own product or referring it to the worthwhile coordinates of meaning.' (1985: 10). Such a statement seems hard to disagree with, but it can be taken further than its context suggests.

1.1.1.2 Other critiques of text-critical approaches

In his reading of 1 Samuel, Robert Polzin bemoans the fact that a critic like Kyle McCarter, author of exhaustive commentaries on both books of Samuel (McCarter 1980, 1984), devotes great ingenuity to establishing an 'original' text only in the interest of using it 'excavatively', in order to dig out the history. Polzin argues that 'A competent literary

analysis of biblical material is necessary for even a preliminary scholarly understanding of what this ancient text means' (1980: 5).

Robert Alter (1987: 24-28) discusses the issue of the relationship between literary and historical criticism and argues as Polzin does for a priority of the literary: 'Before you can decide whether a text is defective, composite or redundant, you have to determine to the best of your ability the formal principles on which the text is organised.' (1987: 26) He argues that these are by no means uniform across time, and so that the imposition of conventions across texts and across time can involve unwise presuppositions.

An underlying maxim of the approach adopted in the present study will be that it remains to be proved that the composers and compilers of the biblical text were less astutely attuned to the possibilities of language and less resourceful in its use in narrative than the modern reader. In this regard, the historicist attempt to reconstruct the original context and conventions of the production of the text may not be the most appropriate question.

Todorov (1977:53-65) makes much the same point in opposition to the whole concept of 'primitive narrative' in relation to study of the *Odyssey*. He regards the tacit laws of stylistic unity, non-contradiction, non-digression and non-repetition which are proposed as the characteristics of primitive narrative as the product of the naïve aesthetics of the critics who propound them, rather than any reflection of the nature of the texts. To disentangle various strands of narrative on the basis that any breach of these laws argues for redactional interference is a complete misapprehension of the complexity of such a work.

From an ideological standpoint, Mieke Bal rests her critique of the ideological stances of various readings of the book of Judges on the MT, because she sees it as 'a starting point that allows us to measure what has been done to this text and why' (1988:267 n.20). Her concern is to elucidate the effects of presuppositions about gender and coherence on the reading of Judges. Commentaries and translations are the results of reading, and carry with them the assumptions and strategies of the reader and of the interpretive community to which he (generally!) belongs. Bal does not deny that the text itself is the product of a long series of readings and re-readings of traditions and conflicting systems of interpretation, but the attempt to disentangle these instantly becomes compounded with the interpretive conventions applied by the analytic reader.

1.1.2 THE TEXT OF 2 SAMUEL

This is all very well, but what is to be done in the face of the fact that there are variant textual traditions of the books of Samuel? Peter Miscall in his reading of 1 Sam (Miscall 1986) reads the Masoretic text, while acknowledging the problems of its critical history. He defends this decision by saying:

I do not automatically consider the Masoretic text to be the best: I leave it as it is, because text-critical study should be preceded by extended readings, wherever possible, of each version. Is it obvious that the Septuagint represents a better, or more correct, text? Perhaps the two, and others, can be read and compared and contrasted,

but not necessarily used,² [sic] to produce the correct and original text (1986: viii).

Conroy (1978: 12-13) takes an admirably pragmatic view on this matter. While holding out the ideal of a preliminary text-critical investigation on the largest scale, Conroy acknowledges that this is not achievable and so opts to follow one text-type, the Masoretic text, rather than attempt to establish some eclectic text. Where the text is disputed, he follows Masoretic readings, especially consonantal readings, even where these may seem less satisfactory than the readings of other witnesses. He specifically states: 'It should be clear, then, that this preference for the MT readings is a pragmatic and provisional option; it is not meant as an expression of Masoretic fundamentalism, and still less as a camouflaged form of theological fundamentalism' (1978:13).

A particular example of this approach is represented by Lyle Eslinger (Eslinger 1985). In discussing the problem of competing versions of the text of Samuel, he takes as an example 1 Sam 10:1, where the Septuagint has an addition, although the MT is not noticeably corrupt (1986:467-68). In opting to follow the MT, he argues that in such cases there is no justification for

² Interestingly enough, Miscall's text here seems to demonstrate a text-critical problem. As it stands, it argues that comparison and contrast of alternatives to produce a correct text is allowable but not their use, which seems a strange exclusion. If however, the comma after 'used' is deleted, then the point becomes the possibility of comparison or contrast as against the use of this comparison to produce a corrected text. This seems to give a more coherent reading when juxtaposed to his assertion that he prefers to leave the text as it is.

composing a new text from a 'little LXX here or a mite of MT there'. In any event, in view of the fact that text criticism is dependent on literary interpretation, 'a preference for one version over another is partially a product of a preference of one interpretation over another.' He quotes Mowatt's opinion (1971:26)

The author's version of his own work is a desirable starting point of the literary historian and critic. Where this is not available, however, it is doubtful whether we are justified in trying to reconstruct it. If we do try, we are obscuring our own function, which is the interpretation of the facts as found.

1.1.3 THE RISK OF READING

The attitude of David Jobling (1986) is refreshing and justifies the spirit of this thesis. Discussing the relationship of Jotham's fable (Jud 9: 7-21) to its context, Jobling sees the usefulness of reading the fable in isolation in order to determine its range of 'tolerable meanings', but also stresses the importance of the interaction between the story and its context, which may even produce new readings. The fable in turn suggests a reading of the context. It is his underlying methodological point, however, which I wish to stress:

The reading needs to be done without prejudice, and the danger of 'overinterpretation' has to be courted, since one cannot determine what overinterpretation is until one has done it! Bits of meaning float around in both text and context like charged particles. Some of them attract each other and undergo chemical change (others seem to remain inert!). (1986: 71)

Though one might take issue with the idea that autonomous 'bits of meaning' can be found in a text, let alone float freely through it, Jobling's justification of the risk of overinterpretation is one we will offer in our own defence. The task of the interpreter then consists of an interplay of imagination and discernment - imagination which is able to activate possibilities of reading, and discernment, which is able to note patterns of allusion, coherences and limitations on significance, to judge which possibilities work, have heuristic value, and which do not. The warnings of historical critics, though important in stressing the need for responsibility to the text, run the danger of fettering the imagination of the reader too soon.

This means that we will also feel free to draw on a wide range of allusions throughout the biblical text. Again, this is not an argument for or against a particular view of the development of particular books or the nature of the process of canonisation. We will also feel free to draw on comparison with works of literature which bear no relation to the biblical text. Our concern is to elucidate some basic principles of textual construction, and again Jobling provides us with an excuse for this approach, if one be needed.

We need to risk over-reading, pointing out some analogies and echoes which may prove to be nothing but coincidence, in order to be sure that we have been open to the range of possibilities that the text offers. A key part of the argument of this thesis is that reading is a matter of compromise between imagination and discernment. Unless the imagination is given rein, the processes of discernment and evaluation which are necessary will be applied to too narrow a field.

Yet unfettered imagination is also a peril. At its worst, it too can dispense with the text as it stands. So how then are we to temper our imagination without importing to the text a set of conventions alien to it?

1.2. DAVID AS READER

1.2.1 THE TEXTS IN QUESTION

The line of inquiry we shall follow in this study is to seek to elucidate something about the reading of the text from the observation of acts of reading within it. Hence the quotations at the head of this chapter. David will be our guide. By observing David in the act of reading, we may learn something of the interpretive conventions that the authors of the text used, whether consciously or unconsciously.

The immediate objection occurs that David is never represented as 'reading' within the text. The whole question of what it might mean to speak of a character as reader is one that will demand some thorough exploration. Yet even what might appear the most minimal requirement is not met in the text. 'David' never appears as the subject of the verb קרא 'to read.'

There are three particular episodes in the text of 2 Samuel, however, where David is confronted with the task of interpreting a story that is told to him, and where the text itself devotes a considerable space to this scene of interpretation of language. These are

- 1: 2 Sam 1:1-15; The story of the Amalekite messenger
2. 2 Sam 12:1-15; The story of Nathan's parable
3. 2 Sam 14:1-21; The story of the wise woman of Teqoa

Each of these will be considered in some detail below, but we shall be equally interested in considering the interaction between these stories, and between them and the wider text in which they are embedded. Why should 2 Sam contain such stories, and how together do they illuminate the character David?

1.2.2 2 SAMUEL 1:1-16

1.2.2.1 The Amalekite's Tale

As a preliminary plunge into the issues we are addressing, however, let us put the hypothesis of David as model reader to a practical test, being aware constantly that there are yet more questions we are begging. How does 'David as Reader' deal with just this issue of textual variants and competing versions of events?

Fittingly for our purpose, 2 Samuel begins with an account which sheds a surprising light on just this question. 2 Sam 1:1-16 recounts the story of David's reaction to the news of Saul's death, which he hears through the report of an Amalekite messenger. This man claims to have delivered the *coup de grâce* to the injured Saul and brings the king's regalia to David. David responds with an act of public mourning, and by arranging for the summary dispatch of the messenger for daring to lay hands on the Lord's anointed.

The problem for the biblical reader is that in 1 Sam 31, there is another account of Saul's death, and this is different from that given by the Amalekite. According to 1 Sam 31:4, Saul's death occurs when he falls on his sword after his armour bearer has refused to kill him. No Amalekite is mentioned here. There are other differences in detail; in particular 1 Sam 31 mentions that Saul was wounded by archers, whereas 2 Sam 1:6

mentions only chariots and horsemen. 1 Sam 31 also includes the information that the armour bearer also killed himself. This figure does not appear at all in 2 Sam 1. Now, if the account in 1 Sam 31 is true, then, strictly speaking, David has executed someone for a deed which he has not committed. In the circumstances, this may be understandable, but it must cast some doubt on David's judgment.

But this conclusion has already begged several questions which are the crucial ones we need to consider. Must we decide between the two accounts? If so, how do we go about it? If not, how do we avoid it?

One way of accounting for this clash is to claim, as many literary critics have done, that the discrepancies are evidence of two separate documentary sources each of which preserves a different version of Saul's death. These have then been brought together by later redactors.

This claim has been extended to find two traditions represented within 2 Sam 1:1-17 itself³. An earlier

³ A classic statement of this position is in Budde, who sees the combination of J and E sources in this pericope (1902: 193-5). Verses 1-4 and 11-12 represent an older story of David's grief-stricken reaction to the report of Saul's death brought by an unidentified messenger, an account in harmony with 1 Sam 31. Verses 5-10, 13-16 represent an alternative version of this position, including a reference David's peremptory death sentence against the messenger. This was softened at some stage of the tradition by making the messenger an Amalekite rather than an Israelite. Apart from the differences in detail between this later account and the one given in 1 Sam 31, the use of the word וַיָּבֵא in vv 5 and 6 as opposed to וַיָּבֵא in verse 2 is seen as evidence

source, represented by verses 1-4 and 11-12, so the argument goes, gives an account of David's grief-stricken reaction to the news of Saul's death brought by an unnamed messenger. This does not involve any report of the circumstances of Saul's death, and so no clash with 1 Sam 31. At some later date, this bare account has been combined with a separate source which records David's summary execution of an Amalekite messenger and includes a divergent account of Saul's death.

John Van Seters takes this approach to its logical conclusion: 'A long-standing difficulty has existed in the discrepancies between the details of Saul's death given in 1 Sam 31 and 2 Sam 1. This difficulty, however, lies entirely in the Amalekite's story in 2 Sam. 1:5-10, 13-16, which can easily be removed as secondary, leaving a harmonious continuity.' (Van Seters 1983: 285).

So why was this harmony ever disrupted? This approach ducks out of accounting for these discrepancies. Rather than reading the text as it stands, it opts to alter

of the combination of sources, as is the discrepancy that the messenger is said to be coming from the camp of Saul in verse two, but claims in v 6 to have been on Mount Gilboa. An earlier source, represented by verses 1-4 and 11-12, so it is argued, gives an account of David's grief-stricken reaction to the news of Saul's death brought by an unnamed messenger. This does not involve any report of the circumstances of Saul's death, and so no clash with 1 Sam 31. At some later date, this bare account has been combined with a separate source which records David's summary execution of the messenger. This story in turn has been softened by a yet later hand which identifies the messenger as an Amalekite, and therefore fair game for execution.

it.⁴ Adèle Berlin (1983:79-82) takes this pair of accounts as a paradigm case of the failure of source-centered critics to spot the significances of the differences in point of view between the two chapters. She cites Smith's opinion that 'It seems impossible to reconcile the two accounts. The easiest hypothesis is that the Amalekite fabricated his story. But the whole narrative seem against this. David has no inkling that the man is not truthful, nor does the author suggest it. The natural conclusion is that we have here a document different from the one just preceding it' (Smith 1899: 254). She contrasts this with the reaction of Caird in the Interpreter's Bible: 'The obvious explanation of this discrepancy is that we have to do with material from two different sources. But any solution based on the two source theory is invalidated by a further reference to the event in 2 Sam 4:9-10, which is beyond doubt from the early source... The only alternative is to say that in the one case the Amalekite and in the other case David was not adhering strictly to the truth' (Caird 1953: 1041). Berlin points out that both are wedded to the idea that discrepancies imply different sources. Once the sources have been established, this seems to allow the interpreter to 'abdicate his responsibility as critic by assigning passages to different sources when he fails to perceive the relationship between them' (1983: 81). She goes on to

⁴ As Arnold puts it: 'If the Biblical text has a contradiction of this nature, either an original author was willing to live with that contradiction or a later redactor was willing to leave it in the text. Early literary criticism has not helped with our understanding of this passage but has merely moved the problems into a different time frame and credited the difficulties to later scribes (1989: 293).'

stress that 'It is his job, often difficult, to make sense of the present arrangement of the text' (1983: 82).

If we choose not to follow this disjunctive approach, can we then find a way of harmonising the stories; in other words, can we show that the discrepancies are not really discrepancies after all? This is what Josephus did in the first century in his *Antiquities*⁵. He conflates the story of Saul's suicide in 1 Sam 31 and the Amalekite's deed in 2 Sam 1. According to Josephus, Saul first tells his armour bearer to kill him. When he refuses, Saul tries to kill himself and fails. At that point he catches sight of the Amalekite and orders him to finish him off.⁶

Of course, looked at with an unsympathetic eye, all Josephus has done is to add yet another account of the events surrounding Saul's death to those represented in the two biblical stories. We now have three stories to choose from rather than two. Both biblical accounts are shown to be partial reflections of this third story: 1 Sam 31 knows nothing of an Amalekite, and the Amalekite's report omits any mention of the armour bearer. Though it may solve the problems of deriving a unitary event from the narrative, it gives us no help in actually reading the text in front of us. We might well wonder why we are not told the whole story in either of the accounts in Samuel.

There is a fundamental point here that should not be missed. Both the source-critics and the harmonisers are

⁵ *Antiquities* 6.14.7

⁶ See also McKane (1963:175) for a modern proponent of this solution.

on a quest for the unitary narrative that represents 'what really happened'. This procedure can of course occur without any specific claim that the events postulated ever happened in the real world. Plausibility and actuality have no necessary connection. The reader attempts to create a plausible narrative that would account for the disparate details of the narrative.

1.2.2.2 The Reader as Detective

It is just this form of reading that is enacted in the classic detective story. We need not suppose for instance that there ever was a hound of the Baskervilles in order to appreciate Sherlock Holmes' sifting of conflicting stories in order to provide us with an overriding master-narrative that accommodates most plausibly every detail. Indeed, on the face of it, this stretch of Samuel could well be read as a detective story. We are given two accounts of Saul's death. Which, if either, should we believe?

The model of the detective story is one which has been used extensively by Stuart Lasine in his examination of the ideological function of such stories in the biblical text⁷. He sees this genre as basically an affirmation of the social values that it invokes. By presenting a situation of crisis, where the conventions of society have been broken, whether in a murder or a theft, it both speaks to the anxieties of an audience which is suffering under the sense of the possible breakdown of

⁷ See in particular his paper 'Solomon, Daniel and the Detective Story: The Social Functions of a Literary Genre' (1987), and his subsequent examination of the story of Solomon's judgment in 1 Kings 3, (1989b, 1991) and the stories of David's judgment of the dispute between Ziba and Mephibosheth (1989a).

its society and thus is becoming painfully aware that its conventions are conventions, and also serves as a source of reassurance.

The incursion of crime indicates that not everyone values property or human life as convention demands, but the superhuman intelligence of the detective figure in solving the crime and capturing the criminal serves as an assurance that the powers that be can restore order and that the conventions triumph.

So, for instance, according to Lasine the story of David's judgement of the rich man in 2 Sam 12 displays the injustice of the rich man's action, and the injustice that the king is capable of. Both king and rich man flout societal conventions. Yet the story in the end serves to reassure the audience that though this kind of breach of convention may occur, it may also be repaired. The success of the Lord and of Nathan in bringing David to book indeed strengthens the audience's sense of security in that their moral conventions are reinforced.

If we are to adopt this forensic model, the obvious first question is: How reliable are the witnesses? Many commentators have noted the neat solution that is provided to the apparent clash by assuming that the Amalekite was lying in the hope of getting into the good books of the likely successor to Saul. For example, W.G. Blaikie opines that 'no doubt it was to ingratiate himself the more with [David], and to establish the stronger claim to a splendid recompense, that he invented the story of Saul asking him to kill him, and of his complying with the king's order, and thus putting an end to a life which was already obviously doomed' (1892: 2-3). This is a fourth plausible story - but plausibility is not proof, as Blaikie's own 'no doubt'

betrays. Does the case against the Amalekite stand up? What is needed is a good detective.

1.2.2.3 David as Detective

In 2 Sam 1, David is the one who is cast in this role. He has to react appropriately to this situation, not out of a detached sense of justice, but because vital issues to do with the transfer of power and the loyalty of his own followers are at stake. How he reacts may have crucial consequences for the way in which his own story will unfold.

David is thus faced with his own problem of reading. Confronted with the report of Saul's death, will he believe the Amalekite? In this chapter, as in any detective story, we are encouraged to match our wits against a character who has to establish the truth of a case from the same clues that we as readers are given, a character who mimics our reading of the evidence. In this case it turns out that the reading strategy which David adopts is very different from that applied by most of the commentators.

In this situation, we need to proceed with caution, to examine the clues with care. We have one great advantage over David; we can read 1 Sam 31. And it is very important to notice the source of our information: a direct report by the narrator of the story. No character is involved. Within the world of the text, the narrator knows everything. He may not choose to tell us everything, but in principle, he could. He has an authority that cannot be gainsaid, especially by one of the characters within his narrative. If we wish to dispute with him, we have to go outside the text and ask the questions about historical plausibility which we mentioned earlier. In his own world, he is master. And this is the world we are dealing in with this reading.

So, unlike some of its critics, the text itself does not set up the accounts in 1 Sam 31 and 2 Sam 1 as competing stories on an equal level. The first comes to us straight from the horse's mouth, from the omniscient and all-seeing narrator. The other is mediated through the perspectives and desires of a character, and an Amalekite at that.⁸

David, however, only has the Amalekite's report to go on and we get to read that report just as he receives it, as direct discourse addressed to him on which we eavesdrop. The matter at issue for us readers then becomes one of observing the process by which David arrives at his conclusion on the basis of the partial evidence to which he has access. We know that Saul is dead, and how he died, but we ask ourselves 'Given the minimal information David has, would we be able to match his ability to come up with a solution?' Our interest becomes focussed on the way that David reads the evidence.

The parallel has been drawn between this story and the story of the arrival of another ragged, earth-smearred messenger: the Benjaminite who brings Eli the news of

⁸ Fokkelmann makes this point as follows: 'If the man [sic] who has first and last responsibility for everything in and about the story tells us personally how Saul has died, then there is no one who can refute him, and certainly not a character which he himself has created. The Amalekite is merely a figure within a story and cannot possibly compete for authority with his creator, the narrator. The contradiction on both sides of the border between 1 and 2 Samuel is therefore not a contradiction at all because the voice of the character sounds on an entirely different level of communication than the voice of the writer [sic; 'narrator' might have been a better-advised term]' (1984: 46).

the capture of the ark in 1 Samuel 4:12-18⁹. Both David and Eli are confronted with a messenger in this state which can be interpreted as a sign of mourning and of travail. David however, has the advantage over Eli in that we are specifically told that Eli is unable to see, and thus to 'read', the condition of the messenger.

Both ask the respective messengers 'How did it go?' (1 Sam 4:16, 2 Sam 1:4), after it has been established that they have been in a position to bring news of a vital battle. Both messengers reply with the bad news in an ascending order of personal involvement for the hearer, leaving the most emotionally charged news till last. In 2 Sam 1, David is told first that many have fled; then that many have been killed; then specifically that Saul is dead, and lastly, and most personally significant, that Jonathan has been killed. In 1 Sam 4, Eli hears first of the defeat, then the death of his sons and then the loss of the ark.

But the crucial difference between these stories comes with the reaction of the respective hearers. Eli hears the news and is so shocked that he falls backwards to his death. David asks the messenger 'How do you know?'

This is an interesting question, made all the more striking by the comparison. The contrast here between Eli's instant response and David's concern to establish the appropriateness of his own reaction is of course one reason why verses 5-10 have been seen as an insertion. If they are omitted, we can pass straight from David's receiving the message to his reaction. But what if that contrast is in fact the point?.

⁹ See Gunn (1974: 286-92) for a detailed analysis of the parallels which he regards as pointing to a common basis in oral tradition.

So far, of course, we as readers have no reason to doubt the messenger's reliability. He has said nothing which contradicts 1 Sam 31. So why does David ask his question? What prompts his suspicion?

He begins with a question that gets to the heart of the problem of the reliability of the evidence that we have been discussing: 'How do you know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?' As we read the answer over David's shoulder, so to speak, we readers note the discrepancies with the narrator's account in 1 Sam 31. David cannot do this. What is available to him are the rhetorical devices that the Amalekite uses, and these are clues available to us as well.

For a start, the Amalekite's blithe 'By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa' rings a little hollow. Who happens on a major battlefield 'by chance'¹⁰? In addition Adèle Berlin in her discussion of this speech sees something suspicious in the use of *hinneh* clauses in verse six. She characterises this word as an attention getter, but also a word that expresses wonder and surprise at a turn of events (1981:92-93).

Perhaps a more vivid translation of it might be: "Would you believe..." In the Amalekite's speech, there are two *hinneh*'s in verse 6. 'By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa and *hinneh* - would you believe? - Saul leaning on his spear and *hinneh* - would you believe? - the chariots and the cavalry officers had closed on him.' Berlin notes that this repeated use of *hinneh* is a feature of dream reports and that this convention

¹⁰ Fokkelman comments: '... we understand the narrator to be giving us a knowing wink, for no one just happens to be on a battlefield coincidentally' (1984: 48).

might alert the reader to the unreliability of the Amalekite's account (1983: 91).

This may be, but it also just as likely that both the Amalekite and those reporting their dreams are doing their best to involve their listeners in what might seem an implausible tale. This is a dangerous tactic. Someone who continually prefaces his remarks with 'You're not going to believe this..' may well increase rather than allay the scepticism of the audience. By striving too hard for vivid effect, the language of the Amalekite's report lays bare its own artifice, which makes it less rather than more believable. So both style and content raise questions about the soundness of the Amalekite's evidence.

But we may now be struck by the fact that this report does contain striking *similarities* to 1 Sam 31, especially in the key event of Saul requesting someone to put him out of his misery. If it is simply regarded as a tall tale concocted by the Amalekite, then it is amazingly coincident with the facts as the wider narrative presents them. Fokkelman (1986:640) explains this as implying that the Amalekite was an eyewitness of the attack.

Now of course this can only be of relevance to the reader; David has no way of comparing the two accounts. This highlights an important point. Two levels of communication are represented by this single speech: the communication between the Amalekite and David, and the communication between the narrator and the reader. Indeed, there is a third level in the reported conversation between the Amalekite and Saul. Fokkelmann writes 'The narrator had to pull the following stunt in the middle: he had to let the Amalekite speak in such a manner that he was credible for David and Saul, yet simultaneously write the war report in such a way that

the more knowledgeable reader is able to deconstruct it as deceit' (1984:52).

The narrator gives us clues that David cannot pick up. But what is the effect of this? Put succinctly, the fact that the two versions of Saul's death correspond so closely makes more demands on the reader. We are led to see the Amalekite as a clever liar, a twister of the truth, rather than as a barefaced romancer. Whether or not we are to make the inference that the Amalekite was an eyewitness as Fokkelmann contends, is another question and is formally unanswerable in terms of the text. All the information we receive is of course given by the narrator who does not need the Amalekite as an eyewitness in order to pick up this allusion.

This speech also contains the messenger's self-identification as an Amalekite. He remains unnamed except for this gentilic designation. For Hertzberg, this fact in itself is enough to condemn the man in David's eyes: 'Amalekites remain Amalekites, even if they are sojourning in Israel; these born robbers do not even shrink from the Lord's anointed!' (1964:237). After all, these are the very people David has just been raiding (1 Sam 30:17-18), and the people against whom Saul was fighting when he committed the fatal error of sparing their king that led to the withdrawal of God's favour (1 Sam 15:9).¹¹ Is Hertzberg right, however; is

¹¹ It is hard not to see the irony in the fact that an Amalekite claims to have given the *coup de grâce* to Saul whose failure to kill the Amalekite king Agag in 1 Sam 15 was the beginning of his downfall. Hertzberg's attack is supported by the fact that the messenger himself gives a rather different response to David's later direct question about his origins in v 13. Suddenly he revises his answer and describes himself as 'the son of a

this admission going to influence David's assessment of his evidence? Would he believe an Amalekite, let alone one who brings him a tale full of *'would-you-believe-it's?*

1.2.2.4 The Reader as Writer

The odd fact is, all this turns out to be tangential to the answer to David's original question 'How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?' This question is not asked in order to confirm the death of the two men. The evidence of this is not given in the Amalekite's speech. It is provided by the irrefutable physical evidence of Saul's death, in the form of his diadem and bracelet in the hands of an Amalekite.

These signs of kingship are marks of identification. How they arrived in Ziklag is not the point. The very fact that they are there signifies the loss of Saul's power and that it lies within David's grasp. Saul without these signs of power, and manifestly without the power to keep them in his possession is dead as a king, whatever his physical state. That being so, whatever

sojourner, i.e. a resident alien, an Amalekite'. Instead of being identified as the antithesis of Israel, he becomes an ambiguous figure, neither truly alien nor truly part of Israel. That ambiguity stretches to the point that it becomes difficult to know whether he is acknowledging that he is an Amalekite, or is trying to offload this potential stigma onto his father.

Whatever the case, he represents himself as a figure who is marginal, claiming a share in both the privileges and responsibilities of Israel, and yet only a partial share - enough privilege perhaps to incline the king to extend mercy, but not enough responsibility to be taxed with the full consequences of laying hands on Israel's king.

the messenger's trustworthiness, it is much more reasonable to believe that Saul is dead than to believe that the living Saul would have parted with these symbols of his power¹².

So David and his men put on the signs of mourning. Yet we more knowledgeable readers are left with a quandary. If we are to believe the narrator, Saul died by his own hand. So how *did* the Amalekite come by the king's regalia? We know no more about this than David does and the narrator has no interest in enlightening us. All we know is that the Amalekite's own account lies under a cloud - and that is all we need to know. The important aspect of the story is not what happened, but how it is interpreted.

David's own assessment is swift. He condemns the Amalekite to death. But is this just? Granted that the Amalekite is a suspicious character, what has he done that deserves death from the reader's perspective? Has David condemned a man for a crime that he did not commit just on his own confession without corroborating evidence?¹³

¹² A similar implication is drawn by Edelman (1991: 304): 'Presented with Saul's personal items of jewellery, David is convinced that Israel's first king has died.' See also Arnold (1989: 296) who brings out the significance of these accoutrements for the kingship.

¹³ On this point, see Anderson's comment: 'Irrespective of whether the Amalekite told the truth or not, David acted correctly from the legal point of view; the man had "confessed" his crime and therefore no further evidence was required' (1989:10). This is a rather condensed view of the process as we have seen. What in any

This might be very understandable, but there is a question mark here. This is David's first act as *de facto* king. Is it a foreshadowing of things to come?¹⁴ The point is that it is the narrator who has led us to experience this slight unease by offering us the two accounts. He is under no obligation to tell the story in the way it now appears. There are many examples of stories in the books of Samuel where all we read is 'It was told to David that ..' If the point is just to inform us that David learnt of Saul's death, why all this elaborate palaver including messengers and duplication of the stories? We need only contrast the treatment of these events in 1 Chronicles 10, where the narrator reports Saul's death but there is no scene corresponding to 2 Sam 1 at all.

If we look again more closely, however, we may find that something more subtle is going on. Exactly what leads David to condemn the man? His indictment, addressed, be it noted, to the corpse of the messenger, is: 'Your own mouth has testified against you, saying "I have slain the Lord's anointed."' The messenger, being dead, cannot be the audience for this remark; nor indeed can the messenger reply.

case is the basis for this assessment of what is correct legal procedure?

¹⁴ Edelman also sees this incident as David's first cognizant act as *de facto* king. However, her view is that 'the audience almost certainly would have felt that justice have been served, even though they knew for certain, unlike David, that the Amalekite's death was not a strict case of poetic justice' (1991:306). The point is that it is only 'almost certain' even by Edelman's own account.

Now the fascinating thing about this, of course, is that the messenger never actually said any such thing, nor does he imply it. His version of events was that he carried out an act of mercy in ending the sufferings of Saul, and, what is more, at the express command of the dying king himself. In no way did he set out to assassinate anyone. In explaining this, however, he did utter the fatal syllables 'we'amothe~~the~~hu [and I slew him]'.¹⁵

This act of utterance makes it irrelevant whether the facts of the case are best represented in 1 Sam 31 or in 2 Sam 1. It is not what he did, but what he said, that becomes his condemnation. And indeed, not what he himself said, but the implication read into it by David from within the perspective of an Israelite society which made an identification between the man Saul and the anointed of the Lord. David activates a semantic implication of the name Saul that the Amalekite has not brought to light and rewrites the Amalekite's statement of his actions. It is not the Amalekite's statement that kills him, but David's. By the quick dispatch of the messenger, David eliminates the dialogic element that the messenger might represent. This raises the question of what the messenger might have said in his own defence. Indeed, the swift execution of the messenger could lead a suspicious reader to see the whole transaction as David's shrewd dispatch of his own hired assassin who has carried out the necessary murder of Saul¹⁵.

¹⁵ On this point see VanderKam (1980:529 n.27) who raises the possibility that the Amalekite is a prisoner of war primed to tell this story-only to dismiss it as 'simply speculation'. There is a widespread view that there is an underlying thrust in this and the preceding chapters to provide David with an alibi. The

David has no need to get embroiled in the tangled business of establishing the underlying events. In Fokkelman's phrase, 'With his final judgment he cleaves in twain the Gordian knot he has been presented [with]' (1984: 53). Instead of untying the knot of the correspondence to events which the Amalekite claims for his speech, his verdict turns on a linguistic feature, on a set of words which he puts in the dead Amalekite's mouth and then uses to condemn him.

For confirmation of this we can turn to an explicit recollection of this incident in 2 Sam 4:9-12. In a grim reprise of the events reported in 2 Sam 1, Saul's son Ishbosheth meets an ignominious death at the hands of two of David's henchmen, who bring back even less equivocal proof of their victim's demise: his severed head. David has them executed and mutilated, commenting, 'When one told me, "Behold, Saul is dead," and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and slew him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news.' Here it is spelt out that the justification for the punishment is not the implicit deed of murder, but the assumed effect of the communication of Saul's death. It was not even what the Amalekite said but the way that he said it that sealed his fate.

So David here offers a model of reading which does not buy into the need to unearth the events which underlie this report¹⁶. The whole business that we have just

allegation, valid or not, would be that he was involved in Saul's death, from which he undeniably benefited. See for instance Anderson (1989: 10), McCarter (1984: 64) and particularly Mabee (1980; esp 98).

¹⁶ Anderson provides a concise statement of one possible reading of the wider purpose of this story: 'Since most, if not all,

become involved with crumbs¹⁷. David as reader is David as writer, as we have said, the one who writes the Amalekite's own speech of self-condemnation and puts in the mouth of a dead 'author'.

Far from supporting the 'forensic' model of reading which Lasine represents, and which is at the root of the the critical approach of the scholars who tease out the historical facts or plausibilities behind the text, David is revealed as a skilled practitioner of the art of *anacrisis*, of the eliciting of a response which can

readers would be aware of the partially fictitious nature of the Amalekite's story, it seems that its primary function was to counter any possible rumors or accusations leveled against David. Had not Saul been David's bitter enemy? Had not David and his men been in the Philistine ranks shortly before the battle of Gilboa? Was not David in possession of the royal insignia? It would not require much imagination for some to argue that David had helped to bring about Saul's death and was duly rewarded by the Philistines. If such a situation existed then the present story as well as the account of David's defeat of the Amalekites (1 Sam 30), would be the best defense of David: he simply could not be in two places at the same time' (1989:10).

¹⁷ Arnold (1989) links the deceptive strategy of the Amalekite to Hagan's argument (Hagan 1979) that the role of deception is central to the so-called succession narrative, the cycle of stories in 2 Samuel 9-20, 1 Kings 1-2. Arnold finds 13 examples in 1 Samuel. His conclusion is 'It would seem, then, that taking this important transitional chapter as an example of deception does no injustice to an analysis of the books of Samuel as a whole' (1989: 289).

be turned against the speaker. If this text is to offer a model of reading, it calls into question the appropriateness of a methodology that seeks to recover the irrecoverable events or sources behind the text, and to assess their reliability and accuracy. Instead it offers a model where the responsibility for utterance can be turned against a speaker with no regard for his intentions or deeds. The words themselves are enough.

1.3 MISE EN ABYME

In considering the implications of such an episode, a fruitful line of inquiry is to look at the work of various literary critics who had taken up André Gide's concept of *mise en abyme*. The term '*mise en abyme*' derives from heraldry, where it describes a device whereby a shield is emblazoned with a smaller replica of itself. Gide uses the term to describe the reflection of the theme or more importantly, the processes of a work, by an internal reduplication of an incident at the level of the characters. He introduced the concept in his *Journals* as follows: 'In a work of art, I rather like to find thus transposed, at the level of the characters, the subject of the work itself. Nothing sheds more light on the work or displays the proportions of the whole work more accurately' (Gide 1948:41 as translated in Dällenbach 1989:7). Each of the stories cited above is an example of *mise en abyme*. By taking a preliminary look at some of the theoretical issues involved in this concept, we may end up in a better position to analyse the working of these stories.

1.3.1 DÄLLENBACH

A major study of the concept is that of Lucien Dällenbach in his *The Mirror in the Text* (1989). He summarises Gide's concern as a fascination with incidents where a character mimics the activity of the

narrator of the story in which the character appears. In Dällenbach's view, critics have tended to subsume several different phenomena under this heading, and he offers a complex typology of the possible combinations.

For our purposes, it is the category that Dällenbach describes as the '*mise en abyme* at the level of enunciation' where the mimicry of the reading of the text occurs. A given character in the text can act the part of the producer or receiver of a discourse within the text, imitating the production or reception of the wider text by its author or reader. Such a discourse is often termed an 'embedded text' and it can stand in a variety of relationships to the wider or 'primary' text¹⁸.

Dällenbach interestingly observes that the protagonist, the principal character, is usually cast in the role of the receiver of the communication. 'One cannot enact one's own story and be a witness to it,' he comments (1989:81). The whole function of the *mise en abyme* is to afford a pause where the protagonist can be brought to a moment of recognition. The main character is confronted by another, often an 'extra', a relatively extraneous character, who represents to the character his/her own past actions: '... s/he must be confronted with a resemblance whose decipherment - which concerns him/her, not just the reader - will have a decisive influence on the rest of the plot. The *mise en abyme* of

¹⁸ Of course, this phenomenon can be repeated and stories within stories within stories can be generated. A standard example of this is *The Arabian Nights*, where within the overarching narrative of Scheherazade's communication with the Sultan, she tells tales where the characters tell tales about characters telling tales, sometimes to the fifth remove.

the narrated story must therefore be made to appear as an *exemplum* to its diegetic addressee' (1989:82). Dällenbach explains that an *exemplum* is in ancient rhetoric an argument by analogy used as to persuade the hearer to alter his/her self-consciousness and therefore way of acting¹⁹.

Dällenbach himself raises the question of authority in regard to the character who is responsible for the *mise en abyme*. If it represents a moment of revelation for the character, the reader as well as the character needs to be led to lend credence to it. If the *mise en abyme* represents the wider narrative, then the character is effectively speaking in the name of the narrator. How can the author ensure that this inspires confidence in the reader?

Most obviously, the narrator may briefly appear as a 'sponsor' for the character, giving confirmation of the character's view from outside the story. Dällenbach offers three further criteria which may reinforce the authority of these characters:

1. They tend to be agents who are not integral to the plot, and so are free to perform this particular task without narrative complications.
2. They tend to be 'qualified personnel who specialize in, or make their living from, the

¹⁹ The relevance of these remarks to 2 Sam 12 is clear. The receiver of the communication in that case is David, the principal character. He is confronted by Nathan, a character who appears in only three incidents in the biblical text with a story which indeed purports to alter David's self-consciousness and therefore way of acting in the matter of Bathsheba.

truth' (1989: 53): he cites as examples the artist, the critic or the clergyman.

3. In the absence of any such, the author may use the services of a 'work of art' which might need no such validation.

In the case of Nathan and the woman of Teqoa, these criteria are well exemplified. In both cases, the 'author' appears to validate them. In Nathan's case, we have the very rare case of direct intervention by God into the text of 2 Samuel when he sends Nathan to David (2 Sam 12: 1). In the Teqoite's case, we are explicitly told that Joab has sent her (2 Sam 14: 1-3). Both Nathan and the Teqoite woman are also marginal characters. The Teqoite woman appears nowhere else in the book. The case of Nathan is a little more complex as he appears in three scenes, but in the two scenes in 2 Samuel, he appears only in order to convey a divine message to David. His later appearance in 1 Kings 1 may in fact honour this convention in the breach²⁰.

Certainly, both of them are representatives of professions whose business is the 'truth', prophets and wise women²¹. Again, the dubious status of the wise woman's intervention may honour this convention in the

²⁰ See the discussion of this episode in Chapter 6 below, where the argument could be made that the reader's response to Nathan's intervention is coloured by his claim of authority as God's messenger in a context where he at least stands under suspicion of political machination on behalf of the Solomonic party.

²¹ On the argument that 'wise woman' designated a recognised 'professional' status within Israelite society see Camp 1981.

breach. The claim to truth-telling is certainly part of the claim to wisdom, but claims may not be borne out.

Dällenbach goes on to discuss the particular matter of the reception of the embedded text by the character who is addressed. He distinguishes three phases of reception:

1.a deciphering of signs

2. a realization

3. a subsequent action

and explains that as they form a hermeneutic sequence, they can be used to expose the hermeneutic competence of the character. Will s/he perceive the analogy between his or her own situation and the embedded text, or not?

But as part of the narrative suspense, the narrator must manipulate the situation so that the interpreting character does not have access to the whole truth until the dénouement, just as David fails to grasp the deeper significance of Nathan's remarks. This condition also means that in a narrative, no character can ever entirely elucidate any *mise en abyme* unless it terminates the story, otherwise the character would already have anticipated the moment of recognition and transformation that the primary narrative itself hangs upon. There would be no need to tell the primary narrative in this case.

This may give us pause in considering the interpretation of a text such as 2 Sam 12. What aspect of the situation, what recognition, is withheld from David so that the narrative continues into the following chapters?

Dällenbach argues that the reader may be put in a different position from any of the characters. Usually, but not always, the reader is privy to knowledge that the character does not have. In 2 Sam 12 the reader knows that Nathan is sent by a disapproving God. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Dällenbach cites Kafka as an instance of a writer whose readers are often as bewildered as his characters by the stories and incidents that they are offered to interpret.

In a later paper, Dällenbach relates his investigation of *mise en abyme* more directly to the question of text reception. He introduces the idea of an '*organe de lisibilité*', an 'organ of readability', to describe the functioning of the device (1980-1:23). Drawing on the phenomenological reception theories of Jauss and Iser, where the activity of reading is seen as a reckoning with the indeterminacies, the 'gaps', of the text, which the reader consciously or unconsciously is stimulated to fill, Dällenbach sees the *mise en abyme* as providing an exemplar to the reader of this process of gap-filling in action. He cites Hamon who argues that this process demands that the text itself contains its own metalanguage, its own system of paraphrase, in order to ensure at least a minimum of readability (Hamon 1977:274-5) and argues that this is supplied by the *mise en abyme*.

But Dällenbach is far from asserting that the function of the *mise en abyme* is to provide an uncomplicated model of the reading process. One of its effects is to remind the reader that she is engaged in the act of reading and in that sense to break some of the illusions

of reading.²² Dällenbach concludes that the *mise en abyme* often functions by opening up the possibility of a *counter-reading* of the text.

If the primary text calls for a pragmatic, direct reading, any *mise en abyme* offers an example of self-reflexivity, of text reinscribing text; if on the other hand, the text is already self-reflexive, the *mise en abyme* offers the spectacle of communication between a narrator and a narratee, reminding the reader that the primary text is tied into such a transaction (1980-1:37).

1.3.2 CRITIQUES OF DÄLLENBACH

1.3.2.1 Bal

Dällenbach's work has been adopted, though not uncritically, by other students of narrative. Mieke Bal (1985:142-148) prefers to use the term 'mirror texts' for such embedded narratives, as she feels the term *mise en abyme* implies a more direct resemblance between the texts than is often the case. Too close a resemblance between the primary text and the embedded one tends to give things away too quickly. Often the resemblance is thematic or structural and may only be partial. It may be only comprehensible to the reader in retrospect.

²² Dällenbach refers to the painting by Magritte where a canvas with a sky scene stands in front of a window, where the pattern of clouds continues over the canvas. Not only does this problematise the relation between this painting and the scene 'behind' it, but it serves to remind the viewer that the very differentiation between 'window' and 'painting' is encoded in a painting. How is the Viewer to regard Magritte's painting itself?

Alternatively, it may serve to alter the reader's perspective, giving him/her an advantage over the character in that the question becomes not how the story will end, but whether the character will discover in time. Yet this is always a precarious advantage, as the reader can never be sure that she has not been misled by the narrator, or by her own (mis)interpretation of the embedded narrative. Bal sees such embedded texts as 'directions for use' of the primary text. They contain suggestions as to how the story should be read. But more than this, they can imply a poetics; 'a declaration of principle with regard to the ideas about literature that have been embodied in the events in this text' (1985:148).

Bal cites the example of the protagonist of Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'. It is this actor's realisation that the text he reads aloud in the story which talks of the 'fall of the house' is playing on the double meanings of these terms that enables him to save himself. The 'fall of the house' means both 'the end of the dynasty' and 'the collapse of the castle'. By realising this, he is able to anticipate the destruction of the ancestral building on the death of the last of the line of Usher, and so survive the ruin to recount the tale. Bal comments that this indicates that the wider narrative itself needs to be read with this device of duplicity of meaning in mind. 'Just as for the actor-witness the right interpretation of the doubleness of the meaning was a matter of life and death, so the double interpretation of the relationship between primary and embedded text is a matter of life and death, to be or not to be, for literature' (1985:148)²³

²³ In actual fact, Bal's account of the function of *mise en abyme* in this story is oddly at variance with what happens in the story

1.3.2.2 Chambers

But there is a further twist, brought out by Ross Chambers (1984). He prefers the term 'narrative embedding', within which he distinguishes two sub-classes 'narrational embedding' and 'figural embedding' (1984:33). Narrational embedding involves the representation in the text of a communicative act involving narrator, narration and narratee, whereas figural embedding involves a 'figure', either character or image, which represents art or the narrative act. He makes the point that the implicit poetics such representations convey limit the reader in approaching the text by defining a range of reading options.

But all models can be antimodels. In so far as a portion of a text models the whole of which it is a part, it necessarily must be different from as well as similar to the whole. Otherwise, it would be the whole. This must mean that every model is ambiguous. Where it reflects the whole, it is a model: where it differs from the whole, it functions as an antimodel. Such

itself (see Poe 1978). The text the narrator reads aloud is an old romance, but the connection between it and the primary narrative is a coincidence of sounds: as he reads a passage dealing with the scream of a dragon, a scream is heard in the castle, for instance. There are many complex and fascinating uses of *mise en abyme* in this story, the songs sung and the pictures painted by Roderick Usher amongst others, and the ambiguity of the phrase 'house of Usher' is indeed insisted on, but not in the embedded text. However, Bal's points stand as theoretical observations, even if they do not relate directly to the text she cites. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' could have contained the devices she expounds.

antimodels may be cautionary examples of how not to interpret the text²⁴.

1.3.3 CHARACTER AS INTERPRETANT

1.3.3.1 Schor

Another aspect of this situation is explored by Naomi Schor (1980) who introduces the term 'interpretant' to denote a character within the text who is cast in the role of interpreter, the one who is set the problem of coming to understand the story. Schor's essay was a reaction to Susan Sontag's book *Against Interpretation* which portrayed the activity of interpretation as essentially an aggressive, reductive operation on the text. Schor, by contrast, presents interpretation as an activity inscribed within any work of fiction. 'Novels are not only about speaking and writing (*encoding*) but also about reading, and by reading I mean the *decoding* of all manners of signs and signals' (1980: 168).

Interpretation is intrinsic to the work, not an illegitimate intrusion upon it. Characters interpret, and in doing so mirror the activity of interpretation

²⁴ Chambers cites Saki's short story 'The Open Window' where the protagonist, ironically named Vera, makes a speciality of 'romance at short notice', spinning yarns which alarm and confuse the other characters. The narratorial voice, however, is coolly lucid in recounting her exploits and the reader is amused rather than alarmed. Vera is an antimodel of this narratorial voice, but also a model, in that the story of her attempts to make a boring afternoon visit interesting does indeed mirror the narrator's intent to amuse the reader (1984:35-39).

for the reader²⁵. Schor seems to identify this activity with the protagonist of the text, a claim which she then drastically modifies in a footnote when she acknowledges the role of minor characters. Indeed, the interaction of various interpretations within the text may well figure large in the interpretative puzzle the reader is set.

Interpretants do not simply provide the definitive reading of a text. On the contrary, they mirror the reader's lack of comprehension and confusion. The narrator may be omniscient, but characters always have a limited perspective. Schor sees this as a necessary virtue: '... what could comfort and delight the interpreter more than to find the interpretant, his specular image, mirroring his confusions as well as his triumphs?' (1980: 169). She refers to Henry James, who in his preface to the New York Edition of *The Princess Casamassima* remarks that it is the 'wary' reader who 'warns the novelist against making his characters too

²⁵ See here Todorov's rather bold statement: 'Construction appears as a theme in fiction because it is impossible to refer to human life without mentioning such an essential activity. Based on the information he receives, every character must construct the facts and the characters around him; thus he parallels exactly the reader who is constructing the imaginary universe from his own information (the text, and his sense of what is probable): thus reading becomes (inevitably) one of the themes of the book' (1980:77). Though making the important point that this process is certainly not confined to the main character, and indeed may be part of the definition of a character, the 'exactness' of the parallel is where Todorov may be being a little bold, not to mention the question which we must consider below of what it can imply to say 'Every character must construct ...' In what sense can a 'character' 'do' anything, let alone be under an obligation to do anything?

interpretive of the muddle of fate, or in other words, too divinely, too priggishly, clever' (1984:1090). Schor does not discuss the relationship between the interpretant and the 'interpreter' or reader of the text in detail, but declares that 'via the interpretant the author is trying to tell the interpreter something about interpretation, and the interpreter would do well to listen and take note' (1980:170). The reference to the author's intention may be misleading: the point is surely that the author, or rather the text, is revealing willy-nilly quite unconscious assumptions about the way that interpretation operates, of which the interpreter should indeed take note.

1.3.3.2 Wimmers

The concept of the character as interpretant is explored further in Inge Crosman Wimmers' *Poetics of Reading* (Wimmers 1988) though she does not use Schor's actual term. She looks at the way in which a reader can gain information about characters, but also be led to judgments about various possible strategies of reading, from the display of characters in the act of reading.

So, for instance, in *Madame Bovary* Flaubert satirises the light romances which are Emma's diet as a teenager, but also by implication her judgment as a reader. It is not just her powers of discrimination and interpretation in relation to texts which are called into question, however, but her ability to come to proper assessments of the world around her, and the discourse directed at her by others. But, as Wimmers points out:

It is quite evident by the time that we finish the novel that the repeated emphasis on Emma's way of reading serves as a negative model for the reader - a model not only for judging Emma and those around her, but also a model by which to evaluate our own

reading of the very novel we are immersed in, and, by implication, of the world we live in. (1988:67)

This is not an explicitly stated model, but one which relies on the reader's inferential skills to be brought to light. To take one example, Flaubert follows his ironic description of the 'mere romances' which make up Emma's reading with a passage of free indirect discourse in which she indulges in a reverie about her honeymoon. The juxtaposition prompts the reader to connect Emma's ideals of love with her uncritical and hedonistic reaction to cheap fiction, rather than to any sober assessment of her situation.

Wimmers goes on, however, to complicate this model by indicating alternative strategies of reading which could be taken from the text, and, indeed, the ever-present possibility of deconstruction which would turn the text's problematisation of reading against the narrator himself. Her point is not that we have to choose between these varied models but that 'a poetics of reading built on the concept of multiple frames of reference ... enables us to see which readings are possible within certain frames of reference. We are then confined neither to one-sided emphasis nor to endless proliferation of meaning' (1988: 88)²⁶.

1.3.3.3 Sternberg

²⁶ Wimmers then goes on to look at similar phenomena in the work of Proust and Robbe-Grillet. She sees reading as the central frame of reference in *A la Recherche*, but here it is offered as a series of 'timely interpretive models' (1988:158) to the reader. Robbe-Grillet, by contrast, offers in his *Projet pour une révolution à New York* a novel which is in its own disjunctive structure 'a lesson in reading actively' (1988:125).

Within the field of Old Testament studies, Meir Sternberg examines the interrelationship between the reading perspectives of the character and the reader in his *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, particularly in the chapter entitled 'The Play of Perspectives'. He distinguishes three basic strategies: reader-elevating, character-elevating and evenhanded (1985: 163). The two 'elevating' strategies depend on a difference in information between the reader and the character, which allows ironic display of the reading strategies employed by the other. So in the reader-elevating strategy, we who are privileged to know of Jacob's deception watch the blind Isaac's attempts at determining which of his sons is speaking to him, for instance. Alternatively, when the character is given more knowledge than the reader, we emerge from initial mystification or misjudgment to surprise, for instance in the realisation of the mixed motives in Laban's offer of hospitality to Jacob.

The evenhanded strategy, however, provides the reader with the same information as the character, and so gives her the opportunity to test her skills on the same terms as the character. Sternberg's example of this is the story of Solomon's judgment (1 Kings 3). In this instance, he argues, the text's perspective of 'fair play' with the reader operates with conventions which millennia later were codified as the basic groundrules of the detective story (1985: 167). Sternberg summarises the effects on the reader of the narrator's range of options: 'From one position, we enjoy a grandstand view of history in the making; from another, we form hypotheses and impressions only to be proved wrong and inferior to our natural peers; from still another, we can puzzle out the truth given to humanity' (1985: 171).

1.4 READING THE READER: PROBLEMS OF CIRCULARITY

1.4.1 IMPLICIT POETICS

1.4.1.1 De Man

Of course, in order to find what the implicit poetics of the Old Testament texts may be, we have to read them. This leads us right into an abyss of circularity which has been relentlessly exposed by Paul de Man in his *Allegories of Reading* (De Man 1979). One of the best known analyses in that book is his examination of a passage in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* where the narrator gives a graphic description of the solitary pleasures of reading:

What does *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* tell us about reading? I approach the question in the most literal and in fact naïve way possible by reading a passage that shows Marcel engaged in an act of reading a novel. This procedure in fact begs the question, for we cannot a priori be certain to gain access to whatever Proust may have to say about reading by way of such a reading of a scene of reading. The question is precisely whether a literary text is about that which it describes, represents and states. (1979: 57)

De Man says rightly that 'if reading is truly problematic, if a nonconvergence between the stated meaning and its understanding may be suspected, then the sections in the novel that literally represent reading are not to be privileged' (1979: 58).

An illuminating case in point is offered by Shoshana Felman in her essay on Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* (Felman 1985). This narrative is well known for its elusiveness. It is the story of a governess who tries to save her charges from the malign influence of two ghosts. The question has been long discussed as to whether the

ghosts the governess sees are real or, as psychoanalytic critics have suggested, the product of the governess's own perverted imagination. James himself called the story 'an *amulette* to catch those not easily caught (the "fun" of the capture of the merely witless being ever small)' (1984: 1185). Felman talks of the suspicious, sophisticated reader here being led into a trap. That is because both the suspicious and naïve reader are inscribed in the text, the first as the governess and the second as the housekeeper Mrs Grose:

The reader of *The Turn of the Screw* can choose either to *believe* the governess, and thus to behave like Mrs Grose, or not to believe the governess and thus behave *exactly like the governess*. Since it is the governess who, within the text, plays the role of the suspicious reader, occupies the place of the interpreter, to *suspect* that place and that position is thereby to take it... James's trap is then the simplest and the most sophisticated in the world: the trap is but a text, that is, an invitation to the reader, a simple invitation to undertake its reading. But in the case of the *Turn of the Screw*, the invitation to undertake a reading of the text is perforce an invitation to *repeat* the text, to enter into its labyrinth of mirrors, from which it is henceforth impossible to escape. (1985: 231-32)

1.4.1.2 Peterson

Carla Peterson, discussing the representation of characters as readers in Victorian novels, which she sees as, among other things, a way by which the novelist can create and comment on the literary values that inform his or her society, draws our attention to the role of the narrator, and the double communication between narrator and reader whereby the character's

reading becomes a mode of communication between narrator and reader:

Above and beyond the reader-protagonists, finally, stand the narrators, who are both readers and writers. It is these narrators who take upon themselves the responsibility of composing written accounts of their characters and their reading processes. If the protagonists' reading is so often hesitant, confused, and distorted, resulting in misinterpretations and misapplications to life, the function of the narrators is to elucidate these problems of reading for us, the readers. Consequently, the very narrative structure of their texts is designed to provide, explicitly or implicitly, a critical assessment of their characters' readings and interpretations. Beyond that, however, the narratives also reflect the narrator's own attitudes to reading and writing, the complexities of which are revealed in their frequent and persistent questioning, even subversion, of traditional and inherited narrative forms and of the cultural themes they embody. (1986: 36)

So such embedded texts bear a complex relationship to the conventions of reading operating in a text. When Alonso Schökel (1967) subtitles his examination of David's reaction to the woman of Teqoa '2 Sam 14 como modelo hermenéutico' and goes on to draw a picture of David as model reader, he raises more questions than he deals with. The reaction of David to the story told to him by the woman of Teqoa may provide a 'hermeneutic model,' but the relationship of his reading to the reader of the text is likely to be much more complex than Alonso Schökel seems to claim. The text may be warning us against readers like David rather than

seeking them, and may be unsettling our notions of what it is to read by displaying David's reading.

1.4.2 CHARACTERS AS READERS

But there is a preliminary set of problems that must be considered. Throughout the previous discussion, the concept of a 'character as reader' has been taken as read. Yet what exactly is assumed by this? 'David' is just three Hebrew consonants on a page, What sense does it make to speak of 'him' 'interpreting' or 'reading something'?

In order to elucidate this, it will be necessary to consider the status of David as a character, and in what sense 'reading' or interpretation could be predicated of a character in a text.

In order to do this, we shall go on to examine some recent studies of the literary character with particular attention to those aspects which are relevant to the concept of the character as reader, drawing on the contribution of recent studies on the poetics of characterisation and in particular, characterisation in biblical narrative.

CHAPTER TWO

CHARACTER AS READER

2.1 THE ACT OF READING

We have already begun with a potential circularity. In order to investigate the character as reader, we have to be able to read the text to begin with. But even for you as reader to have this anomaly pointed out to you, you must be able to read this sentence. This means that inevitably we have to begin *in medias res*, begging the very questions that we are seeking to answer. As Tzvetan Todorov put it:

What is omnipresent is imperceptible. Nothing is more commonplace than the reading experience, and yet nothing is more unknown. Reading is such a matter of course that, at first glance, it seems, there is nothing to say about it. (Todorov 1980:67)

2.1.1 NOTICING READING

Given the prevalence of illiteracy in the modern world, let alone the ancient one, Todorov's statement quoted above may seem rather sweeping. In the context of the readership of a particular text, however, it makes an important point. On the whole, we are no more conscious of carrying out the act of reading as we read than we are of breathing or walking. Indeed, an important part of our education is to make reading just such an automatic process so that we can go on to use it for gathering information or enjoyment without being caught

up in the mechanics. It becomes 'tacit knowledge', to use Polanyi's phrase¹, knowledge put at the service of other ends, just as the skill of riding a bicycle is learned in order to be able to travel from A to B.

But consider a text such as the following extract from Dooling and Lachman (1971: cited in Sanford 1985:141):

With hocked gems financing him, our hero bravely defied all scornful laughter that tried to prevent his scheme. 'Your eyes deceive,' he had said. 'An egg, not a table, correctly typifies this unexplored planet.' Now three sturdy sisters sought proof. Forcing along, sometimes through calm vastness, yet more often over turbulent peaks and valleys, days became weeks as many doubters spread fearful rumours about the edge. At last, from nowhere, welcome winged creatures appeared signifying momentous success.

Without a title, this passage is very difficult to recall, or to read. It seems difficult to impose a semantic coherence on it. The reader struggles to resolve the ambiguities of the text. What are the winged creatures? Who are the sturdy sisters and how do they relate to the 'hero' of the tale? What are the 'winged creatures'? Are they birds? The mention of an 'unexplored planet' may lead the reader to make a guess that this is an extract from a science fiction novel. This generic hypothesis allows for a degree of fantasy and imagination on the part of the writer. In that case, the 'winged creatures' could be almost anything.

¹ See Polanyi 1962: 55-57; 95-100 for the distinction between tacit and active knowledge, which is allied to his concept of two forms of awareness, subsidiary and focal.

If they were birds, why would the writer not say so directly?

The very difficulty of this passage is of course its point. By the fact that it frustrates what is normally an unconscious, 'tacit' process, it forces the reader to become aware of the interpretative procedure that he or she is engaged in. Both the effects of such textual disruption, but also the importance of the reader's own interpretative presuppositions for the detection of such anomalies are summed up by Chabot:

As the reader strives for understanding, certain passages of aspects of the text can take on the quality of recalcitrance; they stand as stubborn witnesses to the partiality, and hence falsity, of our present efforts. If we can relegate the impasse to some lesser status, think it local, we lessen its force, (but not its irresistible effect upon the adequacy of our understanding). But in any event the relative force of a recalcitrant passage depends on our awareness of its resistance; that is, although any unassimilated residue always falsifies our interpretation, it only has force in any interpretative situation in so far as we are aware of it. Thus while we might say that reading, or interpretation generally is inherently a self-correcting activity, one in which remainders repeatedly necessitate that we revise our projections of the totality the text forms as we read, it is such only insofar as we recognize its necessarily tantalizing character. To put it another way, ignorance of the interpretive process has consequences also: it cannot only lead us into inadequacy, but insure that we remain there as well (1985: 29)

What our response to this passage reveals is that the process of reading is a constant tension between the activation of possibilities of meaning and the choice between those possibilities. The reader who is unaware of the range of possibilities will misread, just as much as the reader who activates an inappropriate because incoherent set of possibilities, or indeed the reader who imposes a coherence on the text which is not sustained by the text itself.

Expectations, however, are produced because there are conventions which lead to predictable outcomes which may or may not be fulfilled. Such conventions are a product of repetition. The expectation of the reader is aroused when it seems that there is a repetition of a theme or a formal structure. The familiar phenomenon of the three-fold repetition in folk-tales bears this out. A theme or narrative element is stated, and then repeated. This is enough to set up an expectation which the third appearance of the theme either confirms, or can disconfirm.

2.1.2 CONVENTION AND DEFAMILIARIZATION

2.1.2.1 Formalism

This battle between convention and the unconventional, the familiar and the unfamiliar, is classically stated by the Russian critic Vladimir Shklovsky², who explains this in terms of the contrasting terms 'habitualization' and 'defamiliarization'. The code of convention can become so 'habitualized' that the users do not even regard it as a code.

² See his article 'Art as Technique' (Lemon & Reis 1965: 3-24).

According to Shklovsky and his followers in the Russian Formalist school, the business of art is to force us to look again by making the familiar strange. In the words of one such follower, Tomashevsky, 'The old and habitual must be spoken of as if it were new and unusual. One must speak of the ordinary as if it were unfamiliar' (Lemon & Reis 1965: 85).

The Russian term 'ostranennie', 'making strange' is used for this process. The literary artist has a whole range of techniques for doing this to the elucidating of which the formalists devoted their energies. These techniques depend on ways of impeding or prolonging the process of perception by adding or subtracting from the information available to the reader so that she is either left to create one or more meanings from an elliptical text, or to decide what redundant information should be discarded to disambiguate her reading.

2.1.2.2 Fowler

In a series of recent books on what he calls 'linguistic criticism' Roger Fowler develops this idea (Fowler 1981, 1986) by arguing that these techniques are not something grafted on to language or the preserve of the artist, but are part and parcel of the function of language and communication³. While adopting the notion of defamiliarization, Fowler takes issue with the formalist critics for their attempt to describe a special type of 'literary language' as opposed to the rest of language

³ See also his *Literature as Social Discourse* (Fowler 1981) for more extended discussions of the blurring of the distinctions between literature and 'ordinary' language use. In particular, the chapter 'Linguistics and, and versus, poetics' (162-179)

which demands special 'literary' interpretative techniques:

...to claim that the imaginative writer creates through language a new world distinct from the real world referred to by history-books, newspapers, etc., is not to justify separating imaginative writing absolutely from 'referential' discourse. A series of propositions about non-existent people or events has, for the reader, the same status as a series of propositions about real historical circumstances of which the reader was not aware. In both cases, the reader has to make sense of the content by reconstructing it as a world which is plausible in terms of the world he knows. (Or in the case of the fantastic, related to 'our' world by systematic transformations). In both cases, the writer's arrangements of words and sentences impose an artificial order upon the events real or non-real referred to, so that historical narrative is ordered, edited, by language, in the way that 'pure fiction' is.

This means that the task of the reader is always one of choice and distinction amongst possibilities of meaning, of the activation and assessment of the possibilities of the text. It becomes a process of inference.

2.2 READING AS INFERENCE

2.2.1 INFERENCE AND SCHEMA

The study of inference in the process of reading has received much attention from cognitive psychologists⁴. Many of these studies have been conducted on the basis of the differential recall of texts. Having read a text, readers are asked to answer questions on it. The answers to the questions reveal the kind of processing that the readers had engaged in.

The results are intriguing. In recall, the 'surface text', the actual words, are often not reproduced, but a general 'gist' can be recalled. Indeed subjects may produce what can be called 'elaboration errors' where plausible parts of a story which were not actually presented are 'recalled' (Sanford 1985:143-146).

Such phenomena indicate that there is some matching of the information presented in a text against a more general background of knowledge. Since the pioneering work of F.C. Bartlett⁵, the division of this knowledge into various *schemata* has been posited. An individual schema could be thought of as a packet of knowledge, often a depiction of some situation, in memory. So, for instance, an incident placed in a restaurant summons up a whole range of expectations of vocabulary and transactions that may take place. Aspects of a discourse which cannot easily be fitted into a schema will be difficult or impossible to recall, or to interpret at the time of reading. Conversely, the schema may be used to fill in details not explicitly given in the discourse at the point of recall.

⁴ For a thorough review of recent approaches, see Singer (1988) and the chapter on 'Discourse' in Sanford (1985:249-283).

⁵ See in particular Bartlett (1932).

In the case of Dooling and Lachman's text, readers were unsurprisingly unable to recall its details. If, however, they were supplied with the title 'Christopher Columbus discovers America', the text became much more easy to recall and interpret. The title activates a schema, a packet of knowledge shared among most educated readers of English, about the voyage of discovery to the New World and the problems attendant upon it⁶. It gives a framework in which the polysemy of the individual words and phrases can be restrained. For instance, the 'three sturdy sisters' are resolved as the three ships *Pinta*, *Nina* and *Santa Maria*; the schema creates the expectations that three ships will be mentioned. The word 'sister' connotes femaleness and relatedness; a ship can be referred to as 'she' and the similarity of form and of purpose between the three ships are an acceptable manner of relatedness.

The schema then works in two ways for the reader. It allows a preliminary discrimination amongst the whole range of potential meanings of a particular word or group of words so that the particular semantic field which is being actualised in the passage before the reader can be identified. Comprehending the passage then becomes a matter of identifying that amongst the vast range of potential referents of the word 'sister', that designated by 'sister ships' is the most likely resolution of the problem in this case.

⁶ The fact that this some aspects of this schema have been challenged from the perspective of Native Americans during the recent controversies over the celebration of the quincentenary of Columbus' voyage merely serves to reinforce the point that these schemata are learnt and are culturally conditioned, an aspect to which we shall return.

In this sense there is a 'proper' reading of the text. It could be interpreted in many other ways, but the very fact that most readers experience a sense of relief, of 'rightness' about this interpretation is significant. It has the sense of being the answer to a riddle. The title provided seems to offer a way of resolving the text that allows a coherence between the various semantic elements that the reader is striving for. It is only when this attempt at coherence is thwarted that the reader becomes aware of how powerful a drive this is.

But the schema may work in another way. It may not only cause a restriction of meaning, but may in fact suggest a resolution which had not otherwise occurred to the reader. The reader may not have entertained the possibility that the word 'sister' might refer to a ship until the schema of Columbus's voyage is brought to his or her attention. By suggesting a potential actualisation of the the word, the schema may in fact add to the range of possible meanings that the reader had considered.

2.2.2 POLYSEMY

2.2.2.1 Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur gives an account of this interplay between possibility and actuality in the functioning of language in his article 'Word, Polysemy, Metaphor: Creativity in Language' (Ricoeur 1991: 65-85). Polysemy, he argues, performs a vital function in the constitution of natural language in that it permits economy and contextual dependence. The alternative to polysemy, namely univocity, would demand an infinite lexicon in order to convey the richness of concrete and qualitative experience. This impossible range can, however, be covered by the limited lexicon of any natural language

by the activation of each word in innumerable contexts. By context, Ricoeur is here referring not only to the linguistic environment of the words, but to the behaviour of speaker and hearer, their common situation and the 'horizon of reality' surrounding the speech situation.

The process of determining which of the limitless range of meanings of the words are to be activated in the given context of exchange is interpretation, in Ricoeur's definition. In normal speech, it depends on a convention of 'semantic pertinence' whereby only part of the semantic field of a word is used. The remainder, according to Ricoeur, is 'excluded, or rather, repressed, by the process of mutual selection exerted by the sentence as a whole and by the context on its parts' (1991:73).

So, we might instance, even short phrases like 'a spirit level', 'a bottle of spirit' or 'the holy Spirit' tend to repress different semantic fields associated with the one word 'spirit'. Economy and the ability to generalise depend then on repression, on the ability to forget some of the specific qualities of an object in order to manipulate concepts at a higher level of generalisation.⁷ In this sense, it is only as part of a

⁷ In this regard, J.L. Borges' story 'Funes the Memorios' (1970: 87) is instructive. It tells of a man who has an infinite memory, and the handicap that it proves. The narrator recalls, 'He was, let us not forget, almost incapable of ideas of a general Platonic sort, not only was it difficult for him to comprehend that the generic symbol dog embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form; it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front)' (1970:93-94). The narrator

sentence that it becomes appropriate to talk of a word having a meaning. Even so, it may be more appropriate to think in terms of the contribution a word makes to the meaning of an utterance. Meaning resides in utterances.

But this process is inevitably open to the risks of ambiguity and of misunderstanding. Ricoeur distinguishes ambiguity from polysemy as follows: 'polysemy is a normal phenomenon, ambiguity may be a pathological phenomenon' (1991: 72). Polysemy is an inevitable characteristic of the word, whereas ambiguity refers to the level of the sentence, of the communicative unit. Ambiguity represents the failure of the mechanisms of the reduction of polysemy mentioned above, and thus has a pathological aspect.

In the phrase quoted above, Ricoeur uses the subjunctive ('... ambiguity *may be* a pathological phenomenon ...'), because he also allows for the possibility of a 'functional ambiguity', particularly in what he designates as 'poetic language'. However, he also goes on to make it clear that ambiguity is ineradicable. The attempt to eradicate it in 'scientific language' is only

concludes, 'I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of abstract thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence' (1970:94).

Nietzsche (1969:57-58) speaks of 'active forgetfulness' which acts as 'a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness.' For Nietzsche, this is the other side of memory, which in turn is necessary for the capacity to promise, with all that that entails'.

possible insofar as the business of such language is not communication, but argumentation. Even so, misunderstandings occur.

2.2.2.2 Critique of Ricoeur

We may then take issue with the pejorative colouring of the word 'pathological'. What is universal and inevitable can hardly be pathological, unless it is being compared to an unrealisable ideal. To operate on the basis of such a fantastic notion could be termed pathological in its own right.

This analysis of interpretation applies to any linguistic interaction. Interaction, indeed, is central to Ricoeur's understanding. Ricoeur sees the process of question and answer, of dialogue, as fundamental to the process of the reduction of polysemy, allowing speaker and hearer to check what selection is being made between the inevitably plural meanings of any utterance.

In written texts, on the other hand, this element is impossible. Ricoeur states in the essay 'What is a Text?' that there is no dialogic exchange between writer and reader. 'The writer does not respond to the reader. Rather, the book divides the act of writing and the act of reading into two sides, between which there is no communication. The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading' (Ricoeur 1991: 45).

The competent reader, then, is one who is able to carry out a complex activity not simply of mapping a sign onto a reality, but of activating the possibilities evoked by a given sign in a particular context and making a decision between these. So to understand a particular sign, it is necessary to be able to activate and choose between a range of possible meanings. For that very

reason, it becomes difficult to say that the sign 'stands for' any particular object or concept. It makes more sense to say that any sign can stand for a particular range of objects, and that it is constraints of grammar and context, not something intrinsic to the sign, that narrow the possibilities down to the meaning that the reader opts for. The question then becomes, what are the constraints on the activity of interpretation?

2.2.3 READER RESPONSE: ISER, STERNBERG AND FISH

Two poles of this debate are represented by Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. In the next section, I propose to discuss their differing approaches to this question in order to elucidate further the interaction of the reader and the system of conventions that he or she brings to the text.

2.2.3.1 Iser

In a series of books and articles, Iser has explored the phenomenology of reading. Meaning, for him, is not something *in* the text, or brought by the reader. In fact, he distinguishes the physical text, the system of black marks on white paper, from the *work*, which he regards as a virtual reality, something that grows out of the *interaction* of the reader and the text. It is 'an effect to be experienced' not an 'object to be defined' (1978:10).

This effect depends on the occurrence of indeterminacies in the text, which he divides into two categories, *blanks* and *negations*. Because the text is unable to

respond as any other interlocutor could to correct or realign the process of the dialogue between itself and its reader, it has to resort to other means to control the reader's response. 'Blanks' in the text operate by forcing the reader to shift perspective, or to seek for connections, spurring the reader into communicative action. Iser uses an astronomical metaphor: 'The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable' (1974:282). But this also means that they can be realised in a multiplicity of ways : 'Two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper.'

For Iser, the time dimension of the experience is also all-important. Rather than having the stars spread out as a map, he favours metaphors based on a journey, where the passenger has to put together a picture of the country he passes through, with a recollection of its beginning and an anticipation of its end, from the glimpses that he can catch from the window of his stage coach (Iser is here talking in terms of the 18th century novel). Like the passenger, the reader has only limited freedom to choose which elements he will focus on in the text.

Just as astronomers over the centuries have found it irresistible to identify and name patterns in the heavens, so the reader will attempt to identify patterns in the text, to make connections and to establish some kind of coherence, stability and predictability. These patterns will be established on a whole series of conventions that the reader consciously or unconsciously brings to the text.

But by holding up such processes to the reader, Iser believes that the text supplies a critique of the social norms of the reader. In addition to 'blanks' the text

contains 'negations' which negate the texts and the reader's norms, and thus lead to the suspension of the reader's belief system. Behind the text is an unwritten, undefined 'negativity' which offers a deformed picture of the world, not in order to present the world as depraved, but to rouse the reader to a healing resolution of that deformity. Negativity is the 'nonformulation of the not-yet-comprehended' (229) which provokes the reader into an attempt at comprehension.

'If the reader is made to formulate the cause underlying the questioning of the world it implies that he must transcend that world, in order to be able to observe it from outside. And herein lies the true communicatory function of literature.'

The reader is sent behind the deformations of the text to find the 'virtual cause' of these deformations.

So he writes:

As we have seen, the success of a linguistic action depends on the resolution of indeterminacies by means of conventions, procedures and guarantees of sincerity. These form the frame of reference within which that speech act can be resolved into a context of action. Literary texts also require a resolution of indeterminacies but, by definition, for fiction there can be no such given frames of reference. On the contrary, the reader must first discover for himself the code underlying the text, and this is tantamount to bringing out the meaning. (1978:60)

As Holub summarises his argument here (1984:86), Iser claims that literature is distinctive in that it organises its conventions 'horizontally' rather than 'vertically'. 'Normal' speech is organised vertically

on an axis from past to present, by which Iser means that it depends on conventions which are grounded in a long history of prior use. In literature, however, 'these conventions are taken out of their social contexts, deprived of their regulating function, and so become objects of scrutiny in themselves' (Iser 1978:60) This system of conventions, what Iser refers to as the 'repertoire' of the text, is what the literary text seeks to expand, question or overthrow.⁹

2.2.3.2 Sternberg

With particular reference to the biblical text, Meir Sternberg (Sternberg 1987) adds another dimension to Iser's discussion of gaps. He draws attention to the need to distinguish between 'gaps' and 'blanks' in the biblical text. As he defines the terms, a 'gap' is a lacuna in the text which demands closure, where a 'blank' represents the case where information has been omitted because of its irrelevance. If, for instance, we are not told the colour of any biblical character's eyes, it is because such information is narratologically irrelevant. It represents a 'blank'. Given the infinite amount of information that could be given about any character, object, or event, it is inevitable that omissions occur. Indeed, it is necessary if any coherent, assimilable narrative is to emerge. A 'gap' however, is a piece of information whose omission affects the reader's assessment of the narrative in such a way as to problematise its interpretation. It is part

⁹ To revert to our rather frivolous example, Pooh's encounter with Piglet's letter, though it is not a literary text in the sense Iser defines this, serves as the occasion for the revision of his assumptions about the nature of signs. Whether he can or will revise these is another matter.

of the persuasive strategy of the text in involving the reader in the reconstruction and elaboration of the circumstances and events which the text encodes.

As Sternberg says, the art of reading consists in distinguishing between these two categories, so that the gaps can be filled and the blanks disregarded. Yet there is no formal difference between the two. 'The gap and the blank show identical characteristics in all that regards temporal structure. So any informational lacuna may in principle give rise to either, and one reader's gap may prove another's blank.' (1987: 236)

Sternberg then goes on to outline criteria by which the two can be distinguished within the poetics of biblical narrative. Yet there is an aspect of this which could bear further exploration. What is it that makes a 'gap' for one reader a 'blank' for another?

The answer lies in the set of assumptions that the reader brings to the text. The corollary of this is that if the text is designed to shake the reader's assumptions, its purpose must be to alter the reader's assessment of what is a gap, and what is a blank, and perhaps to bring out the very fact that the edge between the two is blurred. It is in this oscillation that the kind of challenge to the reader's assumptions posited by Iser occurs.

As Sternberg points out, the most obvious way in which a text can signal the difference between the two situations is by subsequently filling a gap. If the gap is later filled and the missing information supplied, the reader is made aware that in fact there was a gap to be filled. It may be that the reader had not even been aware of the lacuna, so automatic does the process of glossing over blanks become.

2.2.3.3 Fish

Stanley Fish in his critique of Iser entitled 'Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser' (1981:7) picks up on his reference to astronomy: '... the stars in a literary text are not fixed; they are just as variable as the lines around them.' For Fish, the line between what a reader brings to the text and what the text 'objectively' supplies is itself drawn by the reader, and the set of interpretative practices which s/he adopts. An analogy might be the fact that the constellations seen from earth disappear if the observer is sited in another star system. But Fish goes further than this: what one opts to take as a fixed point, as a 'star' in the literary text, is itself the product of a system of learned codes. What appears as a 'gap' or a 'negativity' depends on the underlying system of assumptions which Fish sees as the product, and the constitution, of a particular 'interpretive community'¹⁰. This might appear

¹⁰ As an example, we might take the well worn problem contained in the following anecdote. 'A father and his son are out for a drive when they are involved in an accident. The father is killed, and the son is critically injured. When the boy is brought into the operating theatre of the hospital where has been taken the surgeon exclaims, 'But that's my son!'

The problem, if it is one, and many people in experimental trials have difficulty in resolving it, depends, of course, on the unfounded assumption that the surgeon is male. She is in fact the boy's mother. The point about gaps in this case is that, just like Pooh, a large number of readers automatically resolve the word 'surgeon' as male on the basis of societal conventions, and miss the other possibility. The fact that the gender of the surgeon is not specified in the text is not a 'gap' for such readers. In other contexts, they would perhaps not even be aware

to lock readers into a set of mutually uncomprehending sects. But Fish does allow for the instability of these groups. All the strategies are learned, and thus can be revised. The fundamental characteristic that constitutes the human, according to Fish, is the fact that we have an innate capacity and desire to interpret, but our ways of doing this are learnt and can be forgotten.

This means that for Fish utterers are not handing over 'prefabricated meanings'. All they can do is to 'give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies.' (1980:183) In this formulation, the assumption of shared strategies is what gives meaning to the utterance. 'An author hazards his projection, not because of something "in" the marks, but because of something he assumes to be in his reader' (1980:130). So to take an example at the most basic level, when in France, I will attract a waiter's attention by calling 'Garçon!' rather than 'Herr Ober!'. My utterance is determined by the interpretive, here linguistic, community into which I presume the waiter falls, though I may be in error. Or, indeed, to revert to the case of Piglet, he launches his letter in the hope that it will fall into the hands of someone who knows that 'P's can be Piglets and will come to his rescue.

Obviously, the first example assumes that I have at least a minimal competence in a language other than my own. But this multilingualism differs more in degree than kind from the sort of choices the speaker of any

that they were making this assumption. A woman surgeon, on the other hand, might be more accustomed to holding these two possibilities in mind until other evidence in the text enabled the question of gender to be resolved.

language has to make even within his own community. The way in which one speaker may address the waiter in the expensive restaurant where he is seeking to impress his dinner guest, and the utterances of the same speaker in the familiar context of his works canteen are also dictated by assumptions about the kind of linguistic community and the relations of power within it.

2.2.4 SCHEMA AND READER

What are the consequences of this for our attempt to elucidate the process of reading? Ricoeur draws attention to the fact that writing preserves any given utterance and therefore allows it to move out of its immediate context. But this movement from the immediate context means that the deictic functions of language which in the situation of face-to-face speech are resolvable by pointing at or otherwise indicating the objects and persons referred to become irreducibly ambiguous. Removed from an immediate context, these very features of deixis are the ones that become hardest to interpret. Words such as 'this', 'he' or 'now' are peculiarly polysemous to the extent of not allowing even the generalised contextualisations of a dictionary. These words, however, invite the reader to supply a context consonant with the patterns of reference they offer.

In terms of the texts we have been examining, the cues as to the interpretative schema become inadequate. The reader is forced to infer a schema. This is not a matter of recapturing an original authorial intention or of reduplicating the reception of the text by the original audience. The establishment of just what contextual constraints either of these procedures involve is itself a circular task. All that can be done, or need be done, is for the reader to come to a coherent redescription of a possible world, a

possibility which may involve changes in the reader as well.

But this way of putting it seems to argue that the art of reading is to find the appropriate schema in order to assimilate the new information that the text provides in order to find its meaning. This may not be the only purpose of reading, or of writing for that matter. Suppose that instead of communicating information by activating the shared knowledge and schemata of the sender and receiver of the message, it is the schema that is to be changed.

Schemata are learned and culturally determined. What is learned can be relearned, and what is learned is not necessarily adequate to any or all situations. Columbus himself is an example of the consequences of a commitment to a new schema, one that saw the world as 'an egg, not a table.'

If the point is to alter the reader's schema, then the very ambiguities and misdirections which seem to disrupt the reader's expectations become what is important. The reader is left with the possibility that it is the range of schemata by which he or she is attempting to find coherence in the text that may need to be changed rather than the text which needs correction.

The other corollary is that it may be possible to deduce something about the schema which someone else is operating from their interpretation of a particular utterance. This is especially the case in the approach to a text which comes from a culture alien to the reader, and is even more important in the approach to a text such as Samuel where the gap is one of time rather than space, and where the text itself is the only source of information about the society whose practices it assumes.

It is here, then, that the character as reader comes into his or her own. The interpreting character reveals the interpretative conventions by which she operates, which may either confirm or overturn the conventions under which the reader operates.

Yet we are not yet in a position to determine how this is displayed in the text. In order to do so, we shall now turn to address directly the question as to what it means to speak of the character as reader. In order to do so, we shall begin by considering the character as a textual phenomenon.

2.3 THEORIES OF CHARACTER

2.3.1 ARISTOTLE

The critical study of the literary character begins with Aristotle. He discusses the concept of character in his *Poetics* as one of the six constituent parts of tragedy:

A tragedy is a *mimesis* of an action; action implies people engaged in it; these people must have some definite moral and intellectual qualities since it is through a man's qualities that we characterize his actions and it is of course with reference to their actions that men are said to succeed or fail. (Russell & Winterbottom 1989:58)

In Aristotle's scheme, it is these moral and intellectual qualities ascribed to those engaged in the action of the tragedy that are defined as character. Character in this sense is definitely secondary to action, or plot:

Though we consider people's characters in deciding what sort of persons they are, we call them successful or unsuccessful only with reference to

their actions. So far therefore from the persons in a play acting as they do in order to represent their characters, the mimesis of their characters is only included along with and because of their actions. (1989:59)

He uses a metaphor drawn from painting to express the relationship between plot and character. Character is the colour secondarily applied to the drawn outline, the plot, which gives the form to what is depicted.

Aristotle's subordination of character to action has been followed by later authors, but it should be remembered that Aristotle's definition of character is solely concerned with the moral disposition ascribed to the actors in the text.

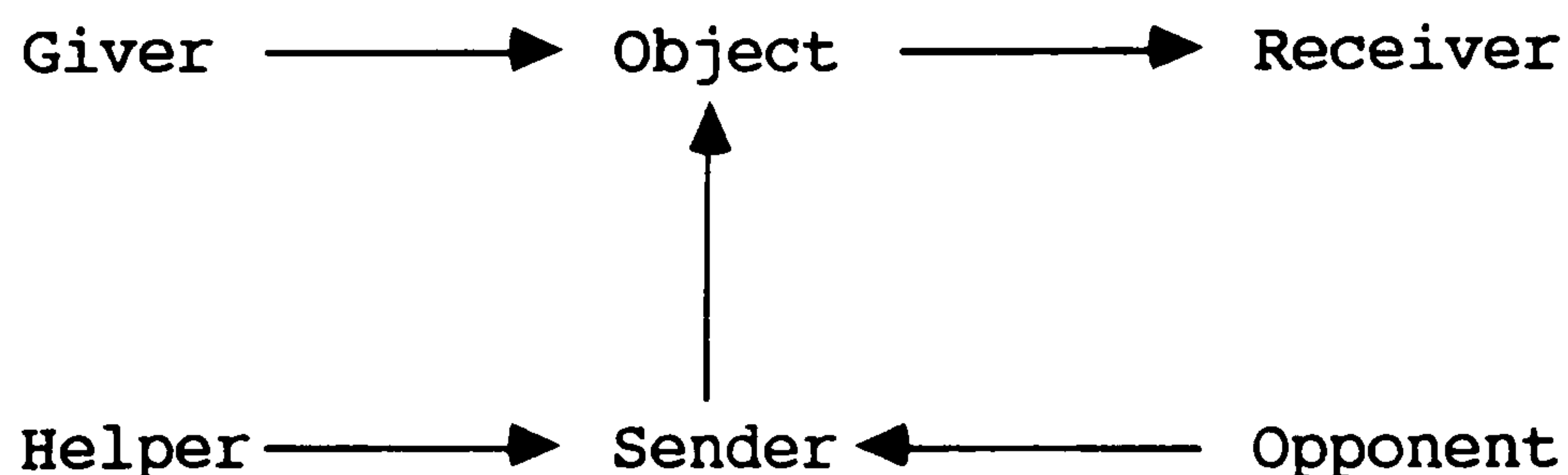
So when it comes to the relationship between a character and its speeches, Aristotle can say that 'the *mimesis* of character is what which makes plain the nature of the moral choices the personages made, so that those speeches in which there is absolutely nothing that the speaker chooses and avoids involve no *mimesis* of character' (1989: 60). Other sorts of speeches, however, can display *mimesis* of intellect, 'their ability to say what the situation admits and requires' (1989: 60).

This observation of Aristotle's on the importance of choice as the index of character is a key point to which we will return in our discussion. If, as we have seen, reading is a process of inference, and inference is a matter of the choice of some possibilities amongst others offered by the polysemy of the text, then it is in this aspect of choice that the character as reader is displayed. The consistency of a character depends on the consistency of the choices which she or he is represented as making. This begs a further question, which we will explore below, as to what it might mean to speak of a character 'choosing'.

2.3.2 CHARACTER, ACTANT AND ACTION

An important point which Aristotle goes on to make is that unity in a tragedy, one of its cardinal virtues in his account, is not to be achieved simply by making it revolve round one personage. 'One man's actions are numerous and do not make up one single action' (1989:61). So Aristotle makes a distinction between character, action and person in approaching this textual phenomenon. This enables him to make it clear that a particular character can represent several divergent actions.

This insight has been developed in this century by formalist critics and their structuralist successors. For Propp (1968), named characters represent a small number of typical formal positions or 'roles' in the structure of the story. Propp's studies of Russian folk-tales led him to postulate an underlying structure which they all manifested in whole or in part, and to the identification of a limited number of 'roles' which the individual characters of any particular story represent. Greimas (1973) took this process of abstraction further and produced what he called his 'actantial model' of narrative. In this theory, every narrative can be reduced to the interaction of six 'actants' related in the way that the diagram below indicates:



The Giver conveys an Object to a Receiver. The Object is affected by the Subject who is assisted by a Helper and opposed by an Opponent. A particular character, what Greimas would term an 'acteur', may occupy more than one of these positions. It should be remembered that Propp and the structuralist critics who follow him, notably Greimas, are interested in the general 'grammar' of stories, not in explicating the nature of any particular character. This sort of analysis perhaps has less to say about what makes for the uniqueness of a particular character and how the textual phenomenon of the interaction of actants is to be resolved in a given text. Its main use is as an analytic tool that can run counter to the intuitive inference of character from texts, that can defamiliarize the process of reading.

It does, however, depend on a fundamental division between the actant as the 'peg' on which the particular action of the text is 'hung'. This division between the character as the actor and actions he or she carries out is counterbalanced by the much-quoted remark by Henry James: 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' (James 1963:80) James sees no distinction between character and action. The traits of a character are revealed in and in turn delimit the character's action, among which can be included the action of speech.

Yet characters no more 'act' than they 'have qualities'; their actions and their qualities are inferred from verbs, nouns or adjectives. A character is textually a series of verbs, nouns, pronouns and adjectives bound together by the rules of anaphora. So Aristotle's distinction between moral qualities and actions is a kind of division which the verbal substance of the text does not immediately offer. Characters are inferred from a text, they do not exist within it.

2.3.3 THE PROPER NAME

What, then, constitutes the unity of a character? What ensures the coherence of the set of inferences that the reader activates and ascribes to this 'paper person'¹¹? One obvious answer, given by Roland Barthes, is the *proper name*:

The proper name enables the person to exist outside the semes, whose sum nonetheless constitutes it entirely. As soon as a Name exists (even a pronoun) to flow toward and fasten onto, the semes become predicates, inductors of truth [the truth of fiction, of course], and the Name becomes a subject; we can say that what is proper to narrative is not action but the character as Proper Name; the semic raw material ... *completes* what is proper to being, *fills* the name with adjectives. (Barthes 1974:190-191)

Barthes here makes the seemingly paradoxical observation that the Proper Name in this context need not be a name; a pronoun will do¹². As a pure deictic sign, in fact, the pronoun is pre-eminently empty of semantic content,

¹¹ The term is Bal's (1985:80).

¹² Chatman (1978:131) expands this point: 'Names are deictic, that is pointing, marked out as definite, "(de-)finitized" or cut out of infinity, hypostatized, and catalogued (be it ever so minimally). Thus, narratives do not need proper names in the strict sense. Any deictic mark will do; a personal pronoun, an epithet ("the man with a beard," "the lady in blue") or even a demonstrative pronoun or definite article. (The character is referred to as "a man" only once - in the first sentence. Thereafter, he will be called "the man")'.

and therefore available to be 'filled'. The character, of course, has to be tied together across a system of pronouns and nouns. But the question then becomes: what are the criteria by which this unity is identified and constructed by the reader?

In answer to this, Rimmon-Kenan (1983:39) details four principles that lead to this cohesion of a character around a proper name: repetition, similarity, contrast and implication. Repetition of various actions, highlighted by similarity and contrast in analogous scenes, lead to the inference of stable configurations of behaviour and attitudes, stable enough at least to be the source of expectation and of surprise to the reader if they are changed or broken. These predictive structures of behaviour can be referred to as 'traits'. In linguistic terms, what this means is that out of the field of the limitless possibilities of combinations of semes, a certain set becomes predictably associated with a particular Proper Name.

Bal, however, in a review of recent critiques of the notion of 'character' in a text (1987: 104-109), begins with a discussion of the role of proper names which to an extent subverts this view. 'As the fixed point to which the illusion of wholeness can attach itself, the proper name is the shortest and most definite sign of a character. It is its textual marker, embodying its stability and continuity' (1987: 106). Note her use of the word 'illusion'. She sees the proper name as part of the narrative deception that would indicate that the characters have an existence, a wholeness from the first time they are mentioned. The progress of the story, so the deception runs, is a matter of gradual revelation of knowledge, of the reader's coming to know what was always implicit within the name. So, in the books of Samuel, the reader has the impression of coming to know

David, of learning more about this complex personality as the story progresses.

This is an illusion, as Bal says. In actual fact, the information accrues to the proper name of the character as the narrative progresses. It is not revealed from within, say, the three letters *dwd*. A character such as David is constructed by the reader, not revealed by the text.

What the repeated use of this sign *dwd* does allow, Bal would argue, is the activation of the tension between analogy and chronology. As the reading progresses, the same sign is attached to increasing numbers of descriptions and actions and accumulates meaning. This can lead readers, and indeed may be designed to do so, into what she describes as the 'retrospective fallacy'. This she defines as 'the projection of an accomplished and singular named character onto previous textual elements that lead to the construction of that character' (1977: 108).

This is an useful point that underlines the importance, but also the conventionality, of the chronological aspect of narrative. The proper name 'David' in 1 Samuel 16 and the same name in 2 Sam 24, for instance, carry different weights of resonance for the reader who approaches these texts for the first time. In the process of reading these chapters a whole complex of adjectives, nouns and verbs comes to be associated with that name in an elaborate web of allusions. The retrospective fallacy then may lead the reader to read back signs of David's future development in the earlier narrative.

2.3.4 THE IMPLICIT SCHEMA IN THE NAME

There is however a further aspect which needs to be borne in mind as we examine the role of the proper name. The name 'David' carries a weight of association outside the text. The present-day reader may not come 'clean' to the text, especially a text with the wide cultural dissemination of 2 Samuel. Scraps of information are already tied to the name which will colour the set of expectations brought even to the first encounter with the name in the text. If indeed the text records the exploits of a historical figure, however embellished by legend or distorted by propaganda, or even a mythical leader, it is not unreasonable to assume that even its original readers and hearers would come to the text with associations with the sign *dwd* as well, even though we need to be cautious in reconstructing these. The use of the name 'David' conjures up a more or less complex schema for the reader, just as the name 'Christopher Columbus' brings with it a whole set of associations and narrative fragments.

In this respect, Bal contrasts the role of the proper name 'Emma' in Jane Austin's *Emma* and the name 'Eve' in Genesis 2. Emma is named at the beginning of the novel, whereas Eve's name comes only at the end of the chapter. Initially she is spoken of as 'the woman'. Emma on the other hand is introduced as a fully fledged character, and the novel represents the changing of a full being, whereas, as Bal puts it, Eve 'displays a slow construction out of the continuous restriction of possibilities'. It is only when she is given a name that she finally achieves the full stature of humanity¹³.

¹³ Sternberg argues that anonymity is a sign of supernumeraries in the Biblical text: 'To remain nameless is to remain faceless, with hardly a life of one's own. Accordingly, a character's emergence from anonymity may correlate with a rise in

But surely we might argue that this is a difference in degree rather than kind. 'Emma' also is constructed out of the restriction of possibilities. Where the difference lies is that these possibilities begin a way circumscribed by her name. Names themselves encode all sorts of social conventions. 'Emma Woodhouse' as the name of a character in an eighteenth century novel is resolved as female, for instance, and the very form of her name ties her into a family, raising the question of the status of her father, Mr Woodhouse. To the well-attuned ear of the time, the name 'Emma' itself might reveal a great deal about the social class or literary tastes of those who named her, just as in modern British society to name a child 'Kylie', 'Melanie' or indeed 'Emma' begins the process of activating certain assumptions.

In the names of Biblical characters the presence of theophoric elements, or the other semantic resonances of a name, may signal a restriction of their possibilities as well in identifying them as within the purview of the God whose name they bear¹⁴. The concern of the text for

importance.' (1985: 330) David, we might recall, is not named at his first appearance in 1 Samuel 16. It is only at the moment of anointing in 1 Sam 16:13 that his name is first mentioned.

¹⁴ But see here Sternberg (1985: 330) who argues that the Bible has a marked tendency to assign unique names to characters, and that these names are often opaque to etymological resonance. The etymology of 'David' is a case in point. Even where etymologies are offered, as in the case of Abraham or Moses, they tend not to be coherent or exhaustive. Such meaning as they do have tends to reveal more about the giver of the name than its bearer. Leah's frustration over Jacob is reflected in the names she gives her

etymological asides on the names of characters bears out the importance of this. Of course, it may be that the way the story progresses overturns the assumptions built into the name, but it will be overturning assumptions, not writing into a vacuum.

The point is, however, that the proper name of a character acts like any other descriptive attribution in restricting, but not dictating, the possibilities to be activated in the development of the character. Indeed, Bal seems to miss the point that it is not only Eve who changes her designation during the course of the narrative. Characters are not simply addressed by one name or designation. It is the rule rather than the exception that at different points of the story the name of a character may change or that the character may be designated by different names and titles by other characters. In the biblical context, the narrative significance of the change of Abram's name to Abraham, or of Jacob to Israel is immense.

'The' proper name of a character is in itself an abstraction, something that Barthes' and Bal's concentration on this subject may obscure. Most characters revolve and oscillate between several names or designations, and that very mutability may be a clear signal of the development of the narrative. So even in Bal's example from Jane Austen given above, the story of

sons (Gen 29:31-30:19). If these points can be conceded, it is also true that Sternberg does not note the more general points about theophoric elements and the like, and does not cite other clear examples where character and name are fitted. For instance, Gaal son of Ebed ('Wretch son of slave') the feckless rebel against Abimelech in Judges 9:26-41 is as good an example of his name as could be wished, as is Nabal, Abigail's husband, in 1 Sam 25.

Emma, at least in one aspect, is the story of a change of names just as much as the story of Eve. The plot itself might be said to turn upon the question of what Emma's name will become. Will she end up as Emma Churchill or as Mrs Knightley, or will she remain Emma Woodhouse?¹⁵ The social strata of society and the social interactions of marriage, kinship and degrees of intimacy are all encoded on the interplay of names and titles.

So too, to return to the story of David, the titles and epithets bestowed on David, ranging from 'son of Jesse' to 'my Lord the king' register differences in David's status and the attitude, sincere or feigned, that his interlocutors address him with. The proper name itself is a polymorphous category, demanding and encoding a knowledge of the social conventions of a society, as the introduction to any classic Russian novel is at pains to explicate¹⁶. This aspect of the character of David is

¹⁵ Critics have read a good deal into the brief notice that occurs at the end of the book that Emma will never call her husband anything other than Mr Knightley; a comment bound to lead to inference.

¹⁶ This point is made in the context of the biblical text by Berlin (1983:59-61), where she quotes the following extract from Uspensky (1973:25-26):

In a literary work, one character may be called by different names or designated by a variety of titles. Frequently, different names are attributed to one and the same person in a single sentence or in closely connected passages ...

It seems clear that several points of view are used in each text - that is the author designates the same character from

dealt with at length in the chapter below on 'David as Son'.

Part of the 'development' of a character, then, is the accretion of a complex of 'proper names', each of which becomes associated with a set of perceptions of the character setting him or her within a social milieu. Bal rightly differentiates this 'development' of a character from the normal development which is part of human life, the progress from childhood to maturity. We need only reflect that a character can be introduced as an adult, and then developed through an analeptic recursion to its childhood. The accumulation of resonance at the level of discourse proceeds linearly, whereas in such a case at the level of the story, the chronology is reversed. A case in point is provided by the interruption of chronological sequence in 2 Sam 21-24. As we read chapters 21-24, we revert to earlier events in David's life, and are given a new perspective on them.

We can add a further dimension to this consideration of what we mean by a character by turning to Roger Fowler (1977: 32) who remarks 'Character-individuality in fiction is an illusion, a projection onto texts of the cultured expectations of the community of modern novel-

several different positions. Specifically, he may be using the points of view of various characters in the work, each of whom stands in a different relationship to the character who is named...

If we know how different people habitually refer to one particular character (that is easy enough to establish by an analysis of corresponding dialogue), then it may be possible formally to define whose view point that author has assumed at any one moment in the narrative.

readers. Anything which is mediated through a social communication system is conventional; the "people" of fiction are transmitted through the conventions of fiction-language.' But it is pertinent to extend this dictum to non-fictional texts, and to readers of any kind of texts. Indeed, Fowler extends the same insight to the biological person. Our perception of the individuality of others is dependent on the same conventional activation of expectations.

The 'character' then is something constructed by the reader from the text, something 'fathered' on the text by the reader. David is a field of possibilities, activated and filled out by the reader, in a complex interplay of the polysemous hints offered by the text and the structures of expectation evoked both by the text and by the interpretative schemas that the reader brings to the text.

2.4 CHARACTER AND LANGUAGE

2.4.1 SPEECH AND CHARACTERISATION

How then does all this bear on the question with which we began this investigation: the meaning of the character as reader? Here Fowler's further definition of the character from the point of view of linguist proves helpful. He sees the character as combining the following four elements (1987: 36):

- a) an 'actant'
- b) an assemblage of semes
- c) a proper name
- d) the structure and semantic content of the language and thoughts that are assigned to him/her.

Much of this summarises our discussion above though Fowler could be taken to task for restricting the character to representing one actant. What he adds is an important insight in tying the distinctiveness of a character to the speech assigned to him or her, as well as the narrator's speech describing him or her. In a dramatic text, indeed, characters are almost entirely depicted in the speech that they utter.

The use of language by the character can be distinctive at a trivial level: dialect differences or the use of catch phrases can distinguish a character's language from other language in the text. On the other hand, the relations between the language of narrator and characters can be highly complex.

2.4.2 LANGUAGE AND BIBLICAL CHARACTER

2.4.2.1 Bar Efrat

Having raised the issue of language as an aspect of characterization, it becomes pertinent to ask how this relates to a biblical character such as David. Are the same criteria applicable? In asking this general question, we shall bear in mind that the goal of this enquiry is to elucidate the concept of 'character as reader' and so our discussion of the wider issues will must focus on the interaction between characters and their acts of speech and interpretation.

The techniques of characterization in the Bible are explored at some length by Bar Efrat (1989: 27-92). In particular, he discusses the importance of the character's speech as part of the indirect shaping of the character, as opposed to the direct shaping in the use of description of details of the character's appearance or his characteristics. He argues that:

Biblical narratives do not contain personal speech distinguishing one character from another. The characters' speech is more or less identical with the narrator's style, and, apart from a few exceptions, is marked by its matter-of-fact, restrained and unembellished tone. It reaches us through the author's mediation and is subject to the same stylistic principles which govern the work as a whole giving it unity. (1989 :65)

What is important in a character's speech, however, is not simply the style, but the content and the assumptions that are peculiar to it. The stylistic exceptions, however, are of interest. Bar Efrat sees the speech of Abigail (1 Sam 25:24-31), the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:4-20) and Hushai the Archite (1 Sam 17:7-13) as distinctive in the use of metaphor, which he sees as characterizing their wisdom. More extensively, he discusses the variation in speech between characters as a reflection of their social status, and the way in which this can be played upon in order to establish or reform as well as to reflect the social order. He contrasts the deferential form of address used by Joab to David in 2 Samuel 14:22 with his forthright speech in 2 Sam 19:7.

Bar Efrat does discuss the 'valuable contribution to the shaping of the characters ... made by their [verbal] reactions to things that are said to them' (1989:73). For instance, he looks at the situation where the recipient of an order either accepts or questions it, and the situation where a hearer replies to a request. In such cases, the character reveals information about his attitude to the speaker.

However, Bar Efrat seldom attempts to look at the basis of his interpretations of these transactions. When, for instance, he declares that Abraham's response to Isaac's

question as to the whereabouts of the lamb for the sacrifice (Gen 22: 7) shows Abraham's 'fineness of soul' in its revelation of his delicacy, honesty and deep religious feeling (1989: 76) he fails to note that there are other explanations for this. Abraham may be simply fobbing Isaac off in an attempt to keep him in the dark, revealing thereby either cowardice or a cynical disregard for Isaac's desire for truth. Bar Efrat's approach does not seem to take seriously enough the problem of the gap between the textual evidence and the deduction of the character's motives or to consider the processes that may be involved in the bridging of that gap.

2.4.2.2 Alter

For Alter, however, that very gap is the essence of the biblical art of characterization. Alter's major discussion of the topic is in a chapter of his *The Art of Biblical Narrative* entitled 'Characterization and the Art of Reticence' (1980: 114-131). He argues for a concept of the character in biblical narrative that sees it as containing an abiding mystery. The character is a centre of surprise. So he contrasts the portrayal of Saul, Michal and David in 1 Samuel 18:1-30 in terms of a hierarchy of specificity in the text's presentation of characters. In ascending order of specificity:

Character can be revealed through the report of actions; through appearances, gestures, posture, costume; through one character's comments on another; through direct speech by the character; through inward speech either summarized or quoted as interior monologue; or through statements by the narrator about the attitudes and intentions of the personages, which may come either as flat assertions or motivated explanations. (1980: 117)

In 1 Samuel 18, Alter contrasts the use of direct comments and interior monologue in the characterization of Saul. David however is characterized by lower and middle range devices. There is no ascription of feeling or inner monologue to David; in such cases, he writes:

We are compelled to get at character and motive, as in Impressionist writers like Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, through a process of inference from fragmentary data, often with crucial pieces of narrative exposition strategically withheld, and this leads to multiple or sometimes even wavering perspectives on the characters. (1980: 126)

Such a lack of specificity in the portrayal of David serves to mystify but also intrigue the reader in the analysis of his character.

This insight appears also in Auerbach, who in his *Mimesis* talks of the 'multilayeredness' of the individual character in the biblical text: '... in Homer, the complexity of the psychological life is shown only in the succession and alternation of emotions; whereas the Jewish writers are able to express the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them' (1968: 13).

The implication appears to be that we are left to infer the motives of a character such as David from his speech and actions, the situation of course in which we find ourselves in our ordinary intercourse with the 'flesh and blood' people with whom we meet. To interpret David, then, calls on inferential skills. It is from the utterances that David makes that we must infer his motives. Yet David as a character makes no utterances. All the text offers us is language. Our ascription of some of that language to David as a centre of utterance

is a matter of convention. We separate out a set of utterances from the general utterance of the text.

2.4.3 WHOSE SPEECH IS IT ANYWAY?

We are left then with a baffling complexity of interaction between the language a character utters and the language from which the reader constructs the character. In order to elucidate this complexity, we shall turn in our next chapter to the work of an author who investigates the relation of the subject to language and makes a special study of the interactions between the different forms of language in a literary text: Mikhail Bakhtin. In examining his view of language and of the subject, we may find some light shed on the interaction between the author, the text, the character and the reader at the linguistic level.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTER AND READER: A DIALOGIC APPROACH

3.1 BAKHTIN: UTTERANCE AS ANSWER

3.1.1 THE DIALOGIC PRINCIPLE

Bakhtin¹ conceives of language as 'dialogic'. This is in conscious opposition to the model of language as code

¹ There is a continuing debate over the extent of Bakhtin's authorship. From the 1920's to the 60's, Bakhtin was subject to internal exile and his writings were suppressed. During the 20's some of his former associates, most notably V.I. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev, published books which developed arguments very similar to those of Bakhtin, though with a particular Marxist slant. The controversy arises over whether these works were written by Bakhtin and published under the names of his friends, perhaps with some editorial involvement, or whether they represent their development of his ideas. The Marxist slant has been interpreted differently. Does it represent an attempt by Bakhtin to make his works more acceptable, does it reflect a real shift in his thought, or does it reflect the different ideological slant of his colleagues? It is obviously beyond the scope and competence of the present discussion to resolve this issue. Its importance is that the major interpreters of Bakhtin's work in English differ on this point. Clark and Holquist accept the so-called 'ventriloquised' works as part of the Bakhtin canon and cite them under his name. Morson and Emerson regard them as important restatements of Bakhtinian ideas which lead Bakhtin himself to respond by revising his stance on various topics, and cite them under the names of their ostensible authors. For detailed defences

which underlies the work of the Russian formalists. He bases his theory on the 'utterance' (*vyskazyvanie*), rather than the sentence. This is not to be confused with the Saussurian concept of the individual instance of speech (*parole*) which instantiates the abstract semiotic system of language (*langue*).

The utterance is not a formal unit to be defined grammatically, but a unit of communication, which might range from a grunt to *War and Peace*. It is 'dialogic' in that every aspect of it is conditioned by the particular need of a speaker to communicate in a particular context, as well as the general requirements of the linguistic system.

This specificity is reflected in the fact that a crucial difference between the utterance and the sentence is in *repeatability*. A sentence is repeatable. It can be quoted and cited and reprinted. An utterance is *not* repeatable. The context can never be exactly the same on the next occasion that a sentence is uttered, if only because the repetition comes after the audience has reacted the first time to the sentence. The essential aspect of any utterance is whatever makes it unique, not what it has in common with other utterances. As Voloshinov puts it:

of their different points of view, see Clark and Holquist 1984:146-170 (reaffirmed in Holquist 1990:8) and Morson and Emerson 1990:101-119. In the present text, individual works are cited under the name that appears on the title page, but the adjective 'Bakhtinian' is used to cover a complex of ideas, aspects of which may be most fully explored in works not directly attributed to Bakhtin. In view of Bakhtin's own concepts of dialogue and authorship, the whole debate takes on a curious and intriguing self-referential air.

What is important for the speaker about a linguistic form is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign. That is the speaker's point of view.

But doesn't the speaker also have to take into account the point of view of the listener and understander? Isn't it possible that here, exactly, is where the normative identity of a linguistic form comes into force?

This too is not quite so. The basic task of understanding does not at all amount to recognizing the linguistic form of the speaker as the familiar 'that very same' form, the way we recognize a signal that we have not become quite used to or a form in a language that we do not know very well. No, the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used but rather to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e. it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity.
(1973:68)

3.1.2 MEANING IN DIALOGUE

3.1.2.1 This leads Bakhtin to distinguish two kinds of meaning: *znachenie* or 'abstract meaning', the 'meaning(s)' of a word as found in a dictionary, and *smysl*, the 'contextual meaning' of a particular utterance in a particular situation. 'Abstract meaning' is 'potential to mean' which must be actualized in an event of utterance, and which is subject to a whole complex of constraints. There is no simple mapping between word and reference in Bakhtin's account:

No living word interacts with its object in a singular way. Between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. (Bakhtin 1981:276)

The business of the hearer, of course, is to attempt such an act of penetration. Counterposing the two forms of meaning are two forms of understanding or interpretation. 'Passive understanding', or recognition, merely demands the grasping of the linguistic meaning of a sentence. 'Active understanding' is a much more complex process which Morson and Emerson sum up as follows:

The listener must not only decode the utterance, but also grasp why it is being said, relate it to his own complex of interests and assumptions, imagine how the utterance responds to future utterances and what sort of response it invites, evaluate it and interpret how potential third parties would understand it. Above all, the listener must go through a complex process of *preparing a response* to the utterance. These various elements are in fact separable only for purposes of analysis, but in essence are inseparable elements of any act of real understanding. That is, we do not first passively decode and then decide how to respond; rather, we engage in an act of active understanding, for which passive understanding is necessary. (1990:128)

Crucially, for Bakhtin, every utterance is already an answer. It is always conditioned by an utterance that has preceded it, and indeed by the knowledge of a potential response. It is thus a social phenomenon,

conditioned by shared assumptions of what need and need not be spoken.

Voloshinov explains:

In point of fact, *the word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose word it is and for whom it is meant*. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee; ... I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view*. (1973:86)

This statement in itself reveals the further point that the notion of the 'subject', the 'I', is in the thought of Voloshinov and Bakhtin, as much a product of speech as its source.

3.1.2.2 In this regard, the Bakhtinian approach bears a strong resemblance to the approach of the French linguist Émile Benveniste. He too made a distinction between the 'sentence' and the 'utterance', though he termed these the '*énoncé*' and the '*énonciation*'. His contention is that it is in the act of utterance that subjectivity arises. His particular interest, expressed in his paper 'Subjectivity in Language', is the function of pronouns in language. He argues that the word *I* does not refer to any concept or individual: '*I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker' (1971:226). It is a linguistic construct. But further, Benveniste argues that every *I* presupposes a *you*, an interlocutor who could in turn designate herself as *I*. The sense of 'self' is a product of the act of utterance.

Where Benveniste and Bakhtin part company is over Benveniste's view that there is an irreducible polarity

in this relationship: "'ego" always has a position of transcendence with regard to you' (1971:225). This ties in with Benveniste's notions of intrinsic authority in speech, which we will discuss below. On the contrary, Bakhtin's contention is that the utterance is the answer; the *I* is the response to the question of the other. Indeed, for Bakhtin, it is the dawning awareness that what otherwise is a chaos of impression contains a question to which one can make a responsible answer that is the coming into being of the consciousness and the self.

3.2 LANGUAGE AND THE SPEAKING SUBJECT

3.2.1. LEARNING TO ANSWER

3.2.1.1 Vygotsky

This ties in with the theories of child development developed by the Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky² who contends that it is as children learn to talk that they learn to think. Vygotsky deplores the fact that too many theories of language development seem to have a myth at their root that at some point the child conceives a desire to communicate and then goes about acquiring a competence in language to enable him to do so, moving from an initial solipsism to an increasing capacity for social interaction. On the contrary, Vygotsky insists that the child is born into a sea of communication, and it is its gradual acquisition of responsibility for its utterances in the light of the utterances of others that is the task of development.

² See on this especially his *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky 1986) and the discussion of his work in the chapter with that title in Kozulin 1990: 151-195.

3.2.1.2 Benveniste

The same sentiment is expressed by Benveniste:

Language is in the nature of man, and he did not fabricate it. We are always inclined to that naïve concept of a primordial period in which a complete man discovered another one, equally complete, and between the two of them language was worked out little by little. This is pure fiction. We can never get back to man separated from language and we shall never see him inventing it. We shall never get back to man reduced to himself and exercising his wits to conceive of another. It is a speaking man whom we find in the world, a man speaking to another man, and language provides the very definition of man. (1971:223-4)

3.2.2 CHILD AS SPECTATOR

The French psychoanalyst and critic André Green draws a direct parallel between the experience of the spectator in the theatre and that of the acquisition of language in terms of overhearing and inference (Green 1979: 2):

Does not the theatre owe its peculiar power to the fact that it is an exchange of language, a succession of bare statements without benefit of commentary? Between the exchanges, between the monologues, nothing is vouchsafed about the character's state of mind (unless he says it himself); nothing is added to these statements that refers to the physical setting, the historical situation, the social context, or the inner thoughts of the characters. There is nothing but the unglossed text of the statements.

In much the same way, the child is the witness of the daily domestic drama. For the *infans* that he remains long after his acquisition of language, there is nothing but the gesture, actions and statements of his parents. If there is anything else, it is up to him to find and interpret it, the father and mother say this or that, and act in this or that way. What they really think, what the truth really is, he must discover on his own. Every theatrical work, like every work of art, is an enigma, but an enigma expressed in speech; articulated, spoken and heard, without any alien medium filling in its gaps. That is why the art of the theatre is the art of the *malentendu*, the misheard and the misunderstood.

In this quotation, Green brings together a series of themes which we will hope to explore further. He draws a crucial parallel between the role of the spectator, and the development of the human subject as an autonomous being. On the face of it, Green here is seriously overstating his case. Surely costume, setting and action all contribute in large measure to the power of the theatre. Even if he is taken as referring to the text of a play, stage directions add to the information available to the audience. If, on the other hand, we consider the original text of a play such as *Oedipus Rex* which forms the substance of his subsequent discussion, we are perhaps nearer to the condition that he posits. Green's description thus fits far more closely to the situation of the reader of a text than to the spectator of a play³.

³ One author who discusses the position of the reader as onlooker is D.W. Harding (1937). He discusses the role of the spectator of an event, someone who is both interested, or else s/he would not

register the event, and detached, or else s/he would be a participant.

Harding identifies several elements which may secure the onlooker's interest. First among these he puts *possibility* : '... a scene may secure the onlooker's interest because it discloses or makes more vivid to him certain of the possibilities of his surroundings, possibilities which, although not directly involving him at the moment, must yet affect his expectations' (1937: 251). It is on the basis of this expansion of possibilities that hope and anxieties for ourselves and others depend.

A second factor is *sentiment*, the degree of concern that the onlooker feels for the participant, the factor that makes the difference in observing an incident where a stranger or a close friend is involved.

Most importantly, however, the spectator provides an *evaluation* of the event. By his or her mere presence, s/he signals its interest. By his or her reactions, s/he signals his or her evaluation of its place within his or her scale of values, thereby also revealing something about what those values are.

We might take the example of a crowd of spectators gathered round a man and woman fighting in the street. By being there, they signal the interest of the event. By remaining spectators rather than intervening they sanction it in some respect, even if they express disapproval in other ways. The event reveals the value systems of those who treat it as a spectacle.

An important point that Harding does not make is that the boundary between onlooker and participant is a fluid one. In the scene we have discussed it is possible for a member of the crowd to wade in on the one side or the other, or to try to separate the two

3.2.3 READER AS SPECTATOR: READER AS CHILD

By interpreting Green's insights in terms of the reader, the fundamental point about the centrality of the inferential process both to the spectator of the play and the infant in its struggle to enter the community of language remains unaltered. It is through overhearing, listening to the transactions of those round about us and imitating them without understanding that language

fighters. This is an evaluative response, either a commitment to or refusal of the sanctioning of the event.

Harding does discuss the reciprocal process of sanctioning and evaluation that occurs as soon as the participant becomes aware of the onlooker. Harding uses as examples of this in representation the two phenomena of 'cooperative play' and 'gossip'. In both of these possibilities of experience are explored and offered for evaluation, by the participants who, in gossip particularly, become the vicarious onlookers on events, real and imagined in their communities. In most situations the effect is one of reinforcing commonplace assumptions. A more developed form challenges these very assumptions at the risk of bringing down social opprobrium on the story teller.

What Harding does not discuss is the key difference between the spectator of an event and the hearer of its retelling, whether orally or through the medium of a text. The physical or temporal distance from the event that the latter experiences means that the line between spectator and participant cannot be crossed. Even if the hearer is worked upon to such an extent that he wishes to spring to the rescue of an endangered heroine, there is an impenetrable barrier between them. The spectator of a real event may be physically constrained from participating in it - the onlooker at a fictional event is always so constrained.

is acquired. The child is not a silent spectator in this process, however, but a constant utterer.

It is as particular utterances are 'taken as' meaningful by the parents and those around and repeated and rewarded that the child comes gradually to be able to take responsibility for its utterances. This, however, leaves a legacy in that it is the responsible utterance which is the derivative form, not the other way round. We begin in babble, and it is from this babble that language emerges by a process of social reinforcement. Yet babble always reemerges, and as Green indicates, the possibilities of misprision and misunderstanding remain at the heart of language.

The child's language has infinite possibility: any linguistically competent human infant can learn to speak as its native tongue any human language. Yet it has no grasp on actuality, and cannot be used for purposeful communication precisely because it is all possibility. This is not to say that it has no communicative function, but this function is limited to what Jakobson defined as the 'phatic' aspect of speech, the tying of the child into the human community. By its babble, the child evokes speech from others to which one day it will be able to make answer, to be 'responsible' in the root sense.

What the passages cited from Green make clear is that the processes of inference that we have seen at work in the task of reading, and evoked by the dialogue of literary and dramatic texts are foundational for the acquisition of language, and therefore constitutive of the subject in Bakhtin's terms.

3.3 AUTHOR'S VOICE, CHARACTER'S VOICE.

3.3.1 HETEROGLOSSIA

The danger of this approach may be that the individual speaking subject is dissolved into a sea of language. The importance of Bakhtin's contribution is that he rescues the uniqueness of the individual within its social matrix by seeing each subject as placed in a particular unrepeatable site of the interaction of ideologies, each of which speaks its own language. Each subject is addressed by a unique set of questions. By ideology here, Bakhtin means a more or less coherent system of values and interests which stakes a claim in providing an interpretive key to the world.

This profusion of different languages Bakhtin calls *heteroglossia*. Each of us is thus addressed by a unique instantiation of *heteroglossia* and is answerable to this. Each subject is a distinct 'speech centre'. Only we can speak from the place we occupy and cannot evade that responsibility. 'What the self is answerable to is the environment; what it is answerable for is authorship of its responses; "it is not the content of a commitment that obliges me, but my signature beneath it"' (Holquist 1990:167).

It is with the re-emergence of the theme of the signature, the name, that we can relate Bakhtin's theory to the literary character. In essence, the lesson I wish to draw from Bakhtin is that the character is a site in a text for a *distinctive instantiation of heteroglossia*, a locus of a particular form of response. The author of a text, as with all other authors of utterance, is a nexus of interaction between discourses, and has a whole repertoire of discourse on which s/he can draw. Within a text, different characters represent different combinations of discourses. Each character represents a different 'signature' of commitment to a particular set of utterances.

At a trivial level, this can be manifested in a particular linguistic tic or a use of dialect which distinguishes a character's speech from the narrator's. At a more profound level, it can be an intricate social and intellectual position within a society that can be represented.

3.3.2 SINGLE AND DOUBLE VOICES

It is not the case, however that we can neatly disentangle a particular set of utterances from a text and feel that we have thereby defined the character as an entity independent of the narrator. The speech of a character within a text always represents the overlay of (at least) two different dialogic situations in the one form of words - the dialogue between characters and the dialogue between author and reader. In Bakhtin's terminology, these words are 'double-voiced'. The nature of the relationship a character's words can express is complex and variable. Bakhtin's discussion of this diversity is systematised by Morson and Emerson into the following table (1990:147):

I. Single Voiced Words

- A. 'Words of the first type': Direct, unmediated discourse
- B. 'Words of the second type': Objectified discourse (of a represented person)

II. Double Voiced Words: 'Words of the third type'

- A. Passive double voiced words
 - 1. unidirectional passive double voiced words
 - 2. Varidirectional passive double voiced words (such as parody)
- B. Active double voiced words

The first category denotes the situations where a speaker is employing language without any consciousness that the language he uses is anything other than adequate to express his meaning. The concept that another form of language might be possible or more adequate is not in question. This might be the represented situation of a literary character, but cannot be the position of the utterance of any work that contains characters as we saw above. The very fact that discourses are distributed between characters means that a diversity of languages is acknowledged.

Just this situation of representation is what Bakhtin alludes to in his category I B. There a character is represented as using speech in the 'unmediated' way that it would be used by the speaker in category I A. Formally, Bakhtin's description of this category as 'single-voiced' is misleading. His defence of this is that there is no interaction between the narrator's language and the character's, as the character is 'unaware' of a second speech centre. This means that there is no dialogue between the two forms of speech. An argument based on the character's 'awareness' seems open to question: what could this mean? All it can imply is that the author has chosen not to intrude upon the character's speech. This might be possible if the character is drawn from life, so that her speech is recorded and can be reproduced verbatim. But as we have seen, even this minimal necessity of reproduction rules out the possibility that we are confronted with the character's utterances. The case is compounded for any fictional character, or one whose speech is provided by the author. The illusion that the character's language is unaffected by the author who has chosen and edited it is a double illusion of the sort that seeks to deny that any illusion is being perpetrated.

Indeed, this category seems closer to that of the passive double voiced words, where there is an

authorial control of the character's language, and where the forms of the language are in dialogue. The distinction between 'unidirectional' and 'varidirectional' speech depends on whether the speech of the author and the character pursues the same or different purposes.

3.3.3 VOICE AND AUTHORITY

This recalls the important point that, for Bakhtin, agreement as much as disagreement is a dialogic encounter. Agreement expresses a negotiation of authority. It is not appropriate, for instance, for a private to agree to the orders of a general. He should simply obey them. Agreement opens up the possibility of disagreement. The word of the other is not simply accepted but is assessed. In unidirectional double voicedness, the discourse of the other is affirmed by being adopted. It is implicitly tested and approved,

Where the voice of the other is tested but this time found wanting, we have the case of 'varidirectional passive double-voicedness.' Bakhtin takes parody as the exemplar here. By exaggeration of the points at which the narratorial voice and the voice of the character differ the narrator can hold the character's voice up to judgment or ridicule. We should not forget that the term 'voice' here covers the whole gamut of linguistic and ideological particularities that distinguish the various forms of discourse.

But it may be that the parodied voice is capable of resistance, and that in fact the battle between the two becomes a battle of equals. In active double voiced words, the character's discourse 'resists' the author's intentions. This may seem strange. Surely an author is in control of his character's speech? Such a response ignores the extent to which any speaker is in fact at the service of the discourse s/he employs. Once

more, for Bakhtin, language is not a neutral tool manipulated by the speaker, but a complex intersection of evolving discourses with competing claims to power of which the speaker is a manifestation. Just as the inexperienced rider of a powerful horse may find that the animal bolts with him, so an utterance may turn on its speaker, or a character's speech may turn on its author.⁴

It may be that an author elects to have a character represent a particular set of discourses in order to undercut the claims to power and coherence of that discourse. Those claims to power, however, are founded in discourses that run beyond the text, that antedate it. The same holds true of the author's own preferred form of discourse. It may prove to be the case that the character's discourse is ultimately better founded than the author's. So, for instance, a nineteenth century skit on the absurdity of evolutionary ideas might give a character who propounds a thinly-veiled doctrine in accordance with Darwin's views. The last laugh is now on the author rather than the character, as the character's views are more firmly grounded in the wider social discourse than the author's at this date. This is, of course, the counterpart of Leo Strauss's position on the writer who conceals his sympathies for a view which he expounds while seeming to attack it⁵. It may

⁴ To anticipate our later argument this is exactly what we will find in the case of the oath on the divine name, where the power of the discourse 'bolts' with the speaker.

⁵ Leo Strauss (1952) explores the concept of writing between the lines in his *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. The avowed purpose of his study is to alert historians to the possibility that the ostensible ideology of a text may not reflect the

well be that an author, convinced in his or her own mind of the correctness of a particular view quite unwittingly serves only to demonstrate the strength of the opposing discourse by the feebleness of her attack upon it.

author's views. This is especially so if the text is produced under conditions of persecution where the direct statement of unpopular views might lead to the censorship of the text and endanger the author's life.

Strauss argues that it is possible to imagine a situation where an author in such a situation might comply with the enforced ideology, but leave sufficient clues for the wise and the curious to catch on to the subversive message of the text. So Strauss uses the example of a historian in a totalitarian atheistic society who comes to doubt the government's interpretation of the role of religion:

Nobody would prevent him from publishing a passionate attack on what he would call the liberal view. He would of course have to state the liberal view before attacking it; he would make that statement in the quiet, unspectacular and somewhat boring manner which would seem to be but natural; he would use many technical terms and attach undue importance to insignificant details; he would seem to forget the holy war of mankind in the petty squabbles of the pedants. Only when he reached the core of the argument would he write three or four sentences in that terse and lively style which is apt to arrest the attention of young men who love to think.

(1952: 24)

So Strauss envisages such a curious, intelligent reader being struck by this incongruous passage, and then being lead to re-read the book two or three times, a process which would confirm the dawning insight that the position which ostensibly was being attacked was in fact being promoted with passion.

An author is therefore no more in final control of his characters' utterances than he is of his own.

Authorship and authority become complex issues in Bakhtin's thought. He is at pains to distinguish the 'real author' from the 'image of the author' in the text. The two are intimately connected, but their connections do not form part of the being of the text. On the other hand, the decision to treat the text as utterance inevitably leads to the projection of an author.

3.3.4 VOICE AND AUTHOR

3.3.4.1 Mukarovsky

The same understanding of the author is well expressed by Mukarovsky:

The creator's personality is ... always felt to be behind the work even if we do not have the slightest information about the concrete creator and his actual mental life. It is a mere projection of the perceiver's mental act ... behind each work of art the perceiving subject intensely feels the subject providing the sign (the artist) to be responsible for the mental state which the work has aroused in him. From here it is only a step to the involuntary hypostasis of the concrete creative subject, constructed only on the basis of premises given by the work. It is clear that this hypostasised personality, which we shall call the author's personality, need not coincide with the artist's actual psychophysical personality.

(Mukarovsky 1977:163)

3.3.4.2 Foucault

The implications of this are seen at their most extreme in the account of the author given by Foucault, who sees

the author not as the inexhaustible source of meaning, but rather as a functional principle by which readers limit the profusion of meaning. The very positing of the author as source is a mechanism of confining meaning; it is 'the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.'

(1991:119)

Confronted with a text, the reader has to constrain the possibilities of meaning, and the author embodies the postulate of a unity of intention behind the text. The author then is not the source of meaning, but the receptacle for it. Foucault acknowledges that such a system of constraints is inevitable, but argues for a change of strategy, one that would shift the focus from the idea of an originating subject.

Instead of asking how a free subject activates the rules of language in order to convey its 'own' meaning, Foucault sees the relevant question as 'How, under what conditions and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it assume and by obeying what rules? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.'

(1991:118)

Such a view of the author, however, holds equally true for the characters in the work seen as the 'authors' of their own discourse. They too become caught up in this process of 'involuntary hypostasisation'. Bakhtin himself found this revealed in the novels of Dostoyevsky in which he sees the emergence of a form of 'polyphonic' writing, where the authorial voice is on equal terms with his characters. This is opposed to the 'monophonic' or 'monologic' nature of most texts, where only the author's voice is accorded ultimate authority.

3.3.5 BIBLICAL VOICES

3.3.5.1 Prickett

We need to pause here for a moment because Bakhtin himself saw the Bible as an archetypally monologic text, making an absolutist claim for its own authority. In this regard, then, is it legitimate to introduce his insights on heteroglossia and polyphony to the texts that we are discussing?

Stephen Prickett points out (1986:210-211) that Bakhtin's attitude to the biblical text may reflect more about his presuppositions as a biblical reader brought up in the atmosphere of the authoritative Orthodox church in the period of Soviet control than it does about the text. The Bible in these circumstances may speak with a 'single voice' but that does not belong to the text, but to the institution that claims to speak in the authoritative voice of the text.

The polyvalence and dialogism of a work that can juxtapose Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs is subsumed in the interests of a powerful discourse of authority from an institutional guardian. The power of the competing discourses within the text is shown in the energy of the Reformation return to the text, a power that has all too often proven capable of 'bolting' with those who attempt to manage it.

In any case, our discussion indicates that the ideal of monophony may be impossible to achieve in any text. That authors attempt to achieve it is one thing; whether they succeed is another. Dostoyevsky's importance may not be in the 'invention' of polyphony. It may rather be his willingness to take on board and make a virtue of the inherent polyphony of text instead of resorting to the subterfuge of monologism.

3.3.5.2 LODGE

Furthermore, David Lodge (1990:97-98) argues that Bakhtin himself came to collapse this distinction between the monologic and polyphonic. He cites a passage where Bakhtin asks:

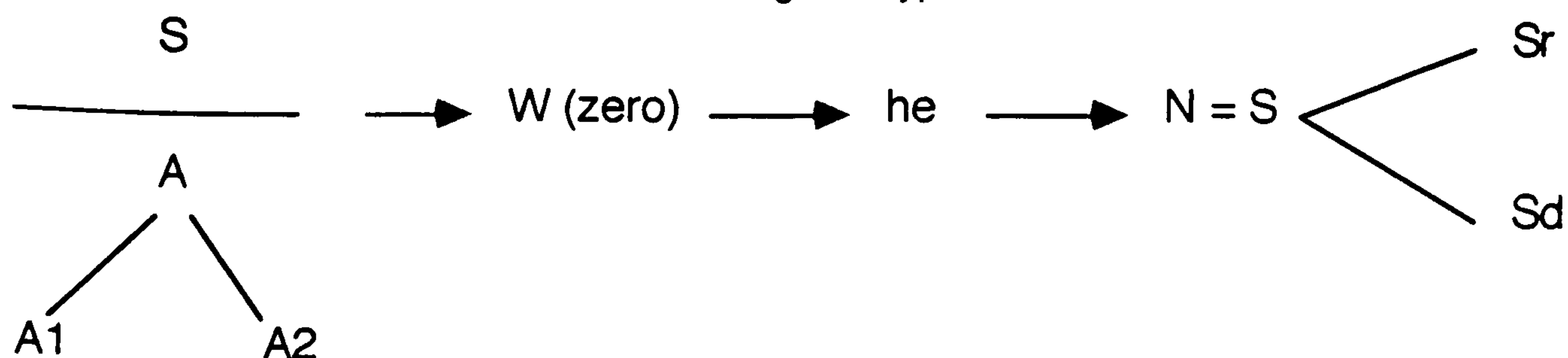
'Doesn't the author always find himself outside of language in its capacity as the material of the literary work? Isn't every writer (even the purest lyrical poet) always a 'playwright' insofar as he distributes all the discourses among alien voices, including that of the 'image of the author' (as well as the author's other *personae*)? (Lodge 1990:97)

3.4 THE READER IN DIALOGUE

3.4.1 KRISTEVA

Having established the legitimacy of using Bakhtin's insights into the nature of the discourses in the text, and discussed at length their bearing on the character as author of discourse, the question then becomes: how are we to use them to shed light on what it might mean to speak of the 'character as reader'?

Bakhtin himself engages remarkably little with the figure of the reader as such. His work, however, was taken up by Julia Kristeva, who in her article 'Word, Dialogue and the Novel' (1986:34-61) does offer a model of the relationship between author, character and reader based on her knowledge of his work. Her conclusions are codified in the following rather forbidding but ultimately illuminating diagram (Kristeva 1986:46):



Beginning from the right hand side, Kristeva explains this as expressing the fact that narration is a dialogue between the subject of narration (S) and the addressee (A) who is 'quite simply the reading subject'. The form of the formula recalls the separation between signified and signifier in Saussure's analysis. The Addressee, however, has a dual aspect: he is 'signifier in relation to the text and signified in the relation between the narration and himself'. This is a markedly cryptic way of expressing the Bakhtinian insight that the addressee is integral to the constitution of the the text. The text is addressed to the reader, and so the reader becomes a presupposition for and part of the production of the text. The reader's language becomes part of the language of the text which forms the 'signifier' which expresses and constitutes a relationship between the subject of the text and the addressee. That relationship itself is the 'signified' of the text.

The writer (W) of the text is drawn into this relationship and is reduced to zero; 'he is neither nothingness nor anybody, but the possibility of permutation from S to A, from story to discourse, and from discourse to story.' Again, this expresses the way in which the text takes on an existence which can be independent of the writer, but an existence which depends on this dialogue between Subject and Addressee. The writer as 'speech centre', as source of utterance

becomes replaced by a character, as a system of pronouns (e.g. 'he' as in the diagram) or of proper names (N)⁶.

But all this is equivalent to the fundamental division in the writer between *énonciation* and *énoncé* in Benveniste's terms or between sentence and utterance as Bakhtin would have it. This is expressed in the diagram by the splitting of S into Sr (subject of enunciation) and Sd (subject of utterance). This presents a parallel split to that in the Addressee (A). The diagram expresses the way in which this split in the addressee transforms into a split in the subject, The two disjunctions complement and provoke each other. In the act of writing, of narration, the writer's language is released from its immediate context of utterance and becomes open to being taken as *énoncé*, contextless 'authorless' speech, rather than *énonciation* or utterance. It also divides itself under the signature of different proper names, and so becomes able to be used in the construction of hypostasised 'authors', the characters.

As John Lechte summarises these points:

In the diagram, 'S' and 'A' are transformations of each other: the writer is included in what the reader reads, but the reader is presupposed in what the writer writes. Not that either the position of the writer or the reader can easily be represented for they are irrevocably double ... we note that writing is also a reading, and vice versa. (Lechte 1990:108)

⁶ This holds true even for an autobiographical confession, where the name of the author functions as the name of a character.

3.4.2 CHARACTER AS READER

We are now in a position to express the position of character as reader succinctly: *the character is a signed site of translation*. That is to say, the language of the text is subject to rewriting by its translation onto that particular system with the polyphony of the text that the name of the character labels or 'signs'. 'David' in the biblical text is a point at which a response is enacted where the author's language, directed at the reader, is shown to undergo a transformation of a particular sort, as one character's language is responded to and translated by another. The reader is offered an utterance labelled with that name.

So the 'character as reader' is the character as utterer, as responder. Character as reader is character as writer. There is no character without utterance. This is entailed in Benveniste's statement about any speaking subject: 'If one really thinks about it, one will see that there is no other objective testimony to the identity of the subject except that which he himself thus gives about himself' (1971: 226).

Yet what exactly is the nature of this transformation, this translation that the character signs? What happens to the utterances in the text which are 'read' through the mechanism of a character? What particular mode of selection is enacted when a character responds to a text? In order to investigate this question further, we will turn for aid to the theory of speech acts.

3.5 READING AS SPEECH ACT

3.5.1 AUSTIN AND BAKHTIN

The theory of Speech Acts has its roots in J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin 1980). In this fascinating text, Austin attempts to move beyond the positivist assumption that the business of a statement is to describe a state of affairs, and that unless it can be seen to be either true or false, it has no meaning. Austin investigates those cases where language is used to carry out an act, what he calls a speech act, to change a state of affairs rather than describe them. This leads him to a very different conclusion about the function of language.

Austin's work has been taken forward in different directions by different readers, a fact which has led to some confusion. The main advocate of Austin's approach in Anglo-Saxon circles has been J.R. Searle⁷.

⁷ Searle appropriates Austin by undertaking a systematisation of his categories on the analogy of natural sciences. So for instance, in his introduction to his discussion of the promise, Searle states:

I am going to deal only with a simple and idealized case. This method, one of constructing idealized models, is analogous to the sort of theory construction that goes in most sciences, e.g., the construction of economic models, or accounts of the solar system which treat planets as points. Without abstraction and idealization there is no systematization. (1969: 56)

The irony, not lost on Searle himself, is that he then entitles his discussion 'How to Promise: A Complicated Way' (1969: 57). Searle rules out anything but 'full-blown' promises, and ignores sentences with irrelevant components and hypothetical promises. This still leaves him with a list of nine conditions that must be met before a promise can be said to have been sincerely made.

He develops Austin's work into a theory of the rules which govern the performance of speech acts. In doing so, he quite explicitly distances himself from Austin on several counts; for instance, he does not accept the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts (Searle 1969: 23 n.1), which Austin puts forward as a key plank of his argument, and which will be the main focus of our concern.

Austin's own approach is very different, and akin to the method we have been using. Instead of seeking to propound a set of prescriptive rules based on an ideal model, Austin's interest is in seeking to elucidate conventions by the study of exceptional and marginal cases.

In this regard, he comes closer to Bakhtin than might appear. Morson and Emerson (1990: 58) speculate that Bakhtin's attitude to speech act theory would have been highly critical, in that he argued strongly against any view of communication that saw it as a matter of obeying a set of codified rules. They quote his opinion that

... in live speech, strictly speaking communication is first created in the process of transmission, and there is, in essence, no code ... a context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context. (1986: 147)

Yet to represent speech act theory as a theory of codes may not be an adequate description of Austin's approach,

however valid it is as a critique of Searle. A similar criticism of Austin's view of context is to be found in Culler, who declares:

A theory of speech acts must in principle be able to specify every feature of context that might affect the success or failure of a given speech act or that might affect what particular speech act an utterance effectively performed. This would require, as Austin recognizes, a mastery of the total context; "the total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating ([Austin 1980] p.148)" But total context is unmasterable, both in principle and practice.(1983: 123)

What Culler seems to overlook is that it is he who introduces the idea of 'mastering' the context. Austin only claims to 'elucidate' the act within its context, which is surely rather different. To adopt a scientific analogy, Austin is concerned to watch a particular feather fall to the ground rather than to work out a grand theory that will predict infallibly where any feather will fall. His interest, as ours, is in the creative potential of a communicative system where a particular utterance does not infallibly lead to a single predictable response⁸.

⁸ The passage that Culler quotes comes from the final chapter of *How to Do Things with Words* where Austin engages in the last of the teasing summaries that punctuate that work where typically he rehearses his own earlier arguments only to show their inadequacy. In the immediate context, he is engaged in revealing once again that the constative/performative distinction must be considered as a special theory within the general theory of locutionary and

Indeed, one could well argue that Austin is actually making the same point as Culler in the very passage that Culler criticises. By restricting themselves to the investigation of simplified 'ideal' acts, theorists such as Searle narrow their attention to something less than the 'total speech act in the total speech situation'. But this is precisely not to deal with the '*only actual phenomenon*', which is the way people do things with words in the hugely complex system of interchanges that constitute any human society. They deal with an abstracted or idealized phenomenon.

What an adequate speech act theory, on the contrary, 'must' demonstrate is how it comes about that it is unnecessary to specify a whole context before communication can occur. That is the mystery to be addressed. To put it in terms that Austin himself might have used, how is it that human beings can get away with having such an inadequate grasp of the total context and still communicate effectively?

Austin's focus is on the pragmatic observation that communication does occur in spite of all the obstacles that a model of language based on a notion of a universal code comes up against. The constant possibility of failure, of slippage, in the use of language means that any theory that would aim at the 'mastery' of its totality shows a profound

illocutionary acts. Such a general theory becomes necessary because the traditional unit of linguistic investigation, the 'statement', is itself an abstraction, a special case. Austin's remark about the need to have regard to the total situation is thus a criticism of the narrowness of the conventional wisdom that restricts its argument to the true/false statement, not a claim that the solution to this is an exhaustive knowledge of context as a necessary or even desirable goal.

misunderstanding of the nature of the pragmatic phenomenon of speech. The fact of communication thus demonstrates the irrelevance of such an attempt at total mastery as Culler suggests. Any aim of elucidating a speech act has to take on board the impossibility of mastering it.

It is in this sense that Bakhtin and Austin may be closer than Morson and Emerson suppose. Far from seeking to deduce and enshrine a dead code; Austin attempts to explain the workings of an uncodifiable system. It is his methods of doing this that we will now turn to.

3.5.2 'HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS'

3.5.2.1 Constative and Performative

Austin begins by distinguishing two classes of statement. Those which can be characterised as 'true' or 'false' he calls 'constatives'. The second class which he identifies he calls 'performatives'. As he first introduces them, these are the class of statement in the utterance of which the speaker performs an act. Rather than describing the state of affairs, such statements alter it⁹. So, to use Austin's favourite

⁹ In this connection it is irresistible to recall the words of the woman of Teqoa when David asks her if Joab had put her up to tricking him into an act of reconciliation with Absalom: 'It was your servant Joab who bade me; it was he who put all these words [dbrm] in the mouth of your handmaid. In order to change the course of affairs [lit. to turn the face of the deed/word; sbb ʔt-pny hdb] your servant did this' (2 Sam 14:19b-20a). Here we have a demonstration of the range of meaning of the Hebrew word *dbr* which no single English equivalent can match. It is both the word

example, when a man says 'I do' in the context of a valid wedding ceremony, then he alters his own state and that of his bride, rather than describing it.

There is a distinction to be made, however, between 'explicit' and 'implicit' (or 'primary') performatives. The first class involves a set of verbs which when used by the speaker in the first person present indicative active not only describe an action but bring it about; for instance: 'I name this ship'; 'I bet five pounds'. One of the features which distinguishes verbs which can be used in such ways is an essential asymmetry between its use in the first person as opposed to the second or third. This is because the utterer implicates him or herself in the action specified, taking responsibility for him or herself in a way that cannot be done for others.

But then, what are we to do with a verb such as 'I state'? In saying 'I state that...' I perform the action to which I refer. It would seem to be a prime candidate for the category of the performative verbs. Having begun with this performative verb, I then go on to make a statement of which it is perfectly legitimate to ask whether it is true or false. By reversing this argument, it would seem that implicit in every such statement of fact is an unexpressed 'I state'. Every constative statement is also performative.

Notoriously, then, Austin's argument proceeds in such a way as to collapse his own distinction. The attempt to demonstrate the existence of a 'pure' performative or a pure constative meets with no success, as the constative

and the deed, speech and act. The purpose of Joab's words delivered by his proxy is to alter the state of affairs, not to describe them.

turns out to have a performative aspect; it always involves the act of stating, of committing oneself to a statement.¹⁰ Performatives therefore prove not to be a distinct category of utterances. On the contrary, every utterance has a performative aspect.

Austin then proceeds to refine the concept of performativity. He identifies three actions common to any utterance; the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. The distinction between these is crucial to our argument, but not always easy to grasp. Perhaps the most useful approach is to turn to an illustration.

3.5.2.1 Illocution and Perlocution:

Let us then consider the story of the boy who cried 'Wolf!' The act of uttering these sounds and the conventional agreement that they may - but need not - refer to a large predatory canine are aspects subsumed under the locutionary category. But what is the effect of uttering these words? This depends on context and the hearer's expectations deriving from convention. In a small village which depends on sheep for its livelihood, it constitutes a warning¹¹. This is its illocutionary function.

¹⁰ A very similar conclusion is expressed by Michael Polanyi (1962) who sees any statement as entailing a degree of commitment on the part of the person uttering it, the seemingly impersonal pronouncements of science being his particular area of concern.

¹¹ So Austin might argue that there is a concealed performative verb. The boy's cry is an abbreviated form of the sentence: 'I warn you that a wolf is approaching.' In different contexts it might have different connotations. We might amuse ourselves by

However, there is also, and all-importantly, the perlocutionary aspect, how the utterance is taken by its hearers. The story depends on that. Every time the boy rushes into the town, the cry 'Wolf!' has the same *illocutionary* force. It is still a warning. However, the villagers soon realise that the conventions are being abused. There is no wolf, and so no valid warning. When finally the wolf really does appear, the boy can scream and cry all he likes. The warning he gives is not taken as a warning. Both what Austin calls the perlocutionary *effect* of the statement and the perlocutionary *aim* alter in the story. The effect changes from alarm to irritation; the aim changes from provoking a futile rallying of the villagers to a cry for rescue.

This is not to deny that there is a constative aspect to this utterance. One might perfectly legitimately ask whether it is true that there is a wolf or not. The appearance or non-appearance of the wolf to corroborate the boy's cry is crucial to the story. Yet there is no point in having a boy to cry 'Wolf' if everyone can see the wolf for himself. It is the absence of the referent that makes language necessary.

thinking of situations where it was: a) the exclamation of an indignant woman to an importunate male; b) the cry of recognition when a long-lost German friend of that name turned up; c) a jocular invitation to a bunch of ravenous schoolboys to start eating. In each of these, the *illocutionary* effect is different, but deducible from the context. We cannot, however, deduce what the perlocutionary effect would be in any of them. Perhaps the man would be covered with shame, or perhaps he would be roused to renewed endeavour; perhaps the friend has been misidentified, leading to general confusion; perhaps the schoolboys all have a loathing for raspberry jelly or whatever is provided.

What this story does is to illustrate a very important and imponderable element in any reading process. The perlocutionary effect is not ultimately in the control of the utterer. It depends on the audience. Equally, the audience cannot be sure of the perlocutionary aim of the utterance. It may or may not accord with their conventional appraisal of the illocutionary force of the utterance.

So Austin here cuts the link between intention and utterance. In the end, the boy's language does not do what he intends, which is either to frighten the villagers, or to warn them. Nor can the villagers accurately deduce his intention from his language. They rely on the existence of conventions, themselves linguistically constituted, to decide on a course of action. The audience is forced to choose between the risk of being made a fool of by the boy or the risk of having their sheep stolen by the wolf. They cannot know which effect their response will have.

Austin offers a definition of his distinction between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary which carries the discussion into the realm of law and the conventional construction of society:

Illocutionary acts are conventional acts:
 perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional... Acts of *both* kinds can be performed - or, more accurately, acts called by the same name (for example, acts equivalent to the illocutionary act of warning or the perlocutionary act of convincing) - can be brought off non-verbally; but even then, to deserve the name of an illocutionary act, for example a warning, it must be a *conventional* non-verbal act: but perlocutionary acts are not conventional, though conventional acts may be made

use of in order to bring off the perlocutionary act.(1980: 121-22)

Indeed, Austin concedes that '... any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever...' (1980: 110) This means that there is an infinite polysemy in any utterance which is only to be contained by contextual factors.

Having established this definition, Austin sums up the position in this telling statement: 'A judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved' (1980: 122)

Austin's description, however, may seem a little bizarre. Surely the perlocutionary effects of the speech are the judge's concern? After all, to be at issue the speech act must at least have had the effect of inducing the plaintiff to bring the case to court or else there would be no case to answer.

Yet this also establishes Austin's point. Whether or not the case has been brought is one thing at least that the judge does not have to determine. The highly conventionalised communicative interaction of a courtroom is the setting for his judgement. The judge does not have to *decide* that an action has been brought. He may have to decide whether it was brought properly, but that is another matter, a matter of whether the conventions enshrined within the law have been *appropriately* applied, rather than whether they were applied at all.

3.5.3 INTENTION AND RECEPTION

So Austin here ruthlessly cuts the intuitive link between the effect of an utterance and the intention of the speaker. The most stark example of this occurs in his treatment of the oath. Austin's example is taken from Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Hippolytus himself attempts to evade the consequences of an oath to secrecy. In Austin's translation, Hippolytus says, 'my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not'. (1980: 9-10)

In a much misunderstood comment, Austin sums up the implication of Hippolytus' speech as: 'thus "I promise to ..." obliges me - puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle.' (1980: 10). Hippolytus is claiming that though he uttered the words of an oath, he had not assumed this spiritual shackle, and therefore had not really promised.

A surprising number of readers take this as Austin's own view rather than the view which he is ironically displaying. This becomes clear from the subsequent, and highly characteristic, paragraph:

It is gratifying to observe in this very example how excess of profundity, or rather solemnity, at once paves the way to immorality. For one who says 'promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!' is apt to appear as a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers: we see him as we see himself, surveying the infinite depths of ethical space, with all the distinction of a specialist in the *sui generis*. Yet he provides Hippolytus with a let-out, the bigamist with an excuse for his 'I do' and the welsher with a defence for his 'I bet'. Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*. (1980: 10)

So Austin concludes that to say 'I promise' is to promise. It cannot be possible to evade this by appealing to 'fictitious inward acts'.¹² So too, in the story we have been examining, the boy cannot excuse his conduct by saying 'I cried "Wolf!" but I did not intend to warn anyone that there was a wolf around.'

Even in the middle of this scenario, the cry 'Wolf!' has not ceased to be a warning, but it has ceased to alarm people. As we have already indicated this depends on, but also reveals the decision made by the villagers on the otherwise undecideable issue of the perlocutionary aim of the boy's cry. Undecidable by the villagers, that is. For the reader, the narrator indicates the context in which the boy is speaking, and reveals the presence of the wolf.

Here the villagers act as readers in the text, but readers who are less informed than the reader outside the text. The effect of this in the story is to reveal the existence of the conventionality of interpretation. It is told as a warning to children not to lie, by exposing the fact that it is easy to lie, simply because the nature of language is such that it is only trust and convention that can maintain the system.

¹² This is a significant shift from Austin's position in his paper 'Other Minds' (1961:44-84), first published in 1946, where he concedes that a broken promise is not quite a promise. In the case of a broken promise, '... it may well transpire that you never fully intended to do it, or that you had concrete reason to suppose that you wouldn't be able to do it (it might even be manifestly impossible), and in another "sense" of promise you can't then have promised to do it, so that you didn't promise' (Austin 1961:69). This is the very position that Austin later challenges.

In this sense, unreadability is the order of the day. It is an unreadable world. And yet action and decision must be made, though their consequences are formally undecidable. It is just this tying down of the undecidable into an account of action taken, decisions made, readings selected, that occurs as a character "reads". It is a locus for the representation of the perlocutionary effect of language. Of course, perlocution can only be represented textually as locution and illocution, and the reader is free to respond to these or not.

3.6 CHARACTER AS JUDGE; READER AS JUDGE

3.6.1 CHARACTER, UTTERANCE AND SIGNATURE

So the final element in the description of a 'character as reader' is that in such transactions in the text, the reader becomes made aware of the way that the character has taken a particular utterance. The formula which we adduced above from the work of Bakhtin and Kristeva can thus be amplified.

The character is a signed site of heteroglossia. What, however, is distinctive in the character's utterance, what makes it a cue on which the reader can make decisions about the range of possible actions which this character could be expected to engage in or utterances which could be attached to his or her name is the fact that every utterance instantiates a particular perlocutionary force of the previous statement addressed to the character in the text or of the text that the character is 'reading'. What is thus displayed to us as readers of this transaction is the actualization of the perlocutionary possibilities of the utterance in one way or another. That actualization can only occur because the perlocutionary aspects are in some sense translated into locutionary and illocutionary expressions.

The reader is in the position of the judge. Without these explicit clues we are left in the dark about the perlocutionary aim and effect of the character's language. It is in having these made explicit to us that we have the particular interpretative assumptions linked to the name of that character made manifest to us.

Yet, as we have seen, the utterance ascribed to a character is always double-voiced, because the transaction between characters is always also a transaction between author and reader¹³.

The existence of these dual polarities is the condition of discourse but each is itself a dynamic polarity. As utterance depends on the hearer and the speaker, its form emerges between these poles. The hearer is author in that her language and expectations form the parameters for the text; the speaker is hearer in that by being induced to utter, the nexus of discourse that constitutes consciousness is enriched by the discourse of the hearer.

In the language system of the text, however, the role of 'third person' is open to the reader in relation to the discourse of the characters. Another way of expressing the dynamic interaction that constitutes the experience of the reading is the split that occurs in the reader as addressant in Kristeva's scheme between 'second' and 'third' person. The addressant or reader is second

¹³ Yet Bakhtin himself complicates this picture when he speaks of a 'character zone', by which he means the way in which a character's speech may invade the authorial language around his utterances (1981:316) The use of a word in the narrator's speech may be coloured by its use in a character's discourse.

person to the narrator's discourse and third person to the characters.

In addition, as 'co-author' of the text, the addressant may also occupy the place of first person. This constant shift in perspective is the work of reading. The shift from receiver to author of the discourse, the shift between responses to different voices within the text, the shift from first to second to third person is what consumes the energy of the reader.

3.6.2 DAVID AS READER: DAVID AS JUDGE

The character as reader is exposed to judgement by his or her option for one of many perlocutionary possibilities of the language the reader has read along with her. The reader, too, is exposed to the judgement in that he or she assents or dissents from the character's judgment.

It is this line that David is induced to attempt to cross in the 'leap on the stage' which, in their different ways, both the woman of Teqoa and Nathan engineer. David moves from 'spectator' of the fictional events to participant in his act of judgment; an act which exposes him to the the judgement of the spectator of his act; the reader of the biblical text.

In the next section of the thesis, we will move to a detailed discussion of the mechanisms by which this is effected. The two incidents where David is confronted with the 'reading' of an anecdote presented to him by Nathan and the woman of Teqoa will form the substance of our discussion in the next two chapters. As a result of this, we will be led to a discussion of the role of the oath in the biblical text, and to the concept of David's sonship. This will provide the data for the final section of the thesis, where the implications of this

theoretical discussion of the nature of character as reader will be discussed in the particular case of the reader of 2 Samuel, and for the discussion of biblical poetics in general.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING NATHAN'S PARABLE

4.1 NATHAN'S PARABLE

In 2 Sam 12, the prophet Nathan is sent to convey to David the Lord's displeasure at his recent actions in committing adultery with Bathsheba and arranging for her husband Uriah to be killed on the battlefield. The text of the passage where he accomplishes his task is as follows:

2 Sam 12:1-15

(1) And the Lord sent Nathan¹ to David. He came to him and said to him²: 'There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. (2) The³ rich man had very many flocks and herds: (3) but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb which he had bought. And he brought it up and it

¹ The LXX specifies Nathan 'the prophet'.

² The LXX has Nathan preface his remarks with the words 'Judge this case for me.' It is probably easier to assume that this is an interpretive clarification by the LXX rather than an original specification which has been dropped by the MT. There seems little justification for such an omission, as McCarter hypothesizes, a haplography (1984:294).

³ English usage requires the definite article, which does not appear in the Hebrew. Some commentators wish to restore it to the Hebrew text, but the extant text will allow this reading.

grew up with him and with his sons. It used to eat his bread and drink from his cup and and lie in his bosom and it was like a daughter to him. (4) Now there came a traveller to the rich man and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd to prepare for the guest that had come to him and he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man that had come to him.'

(5) And David became very angry at the man and he said to Nathan, 'This man is a son of death; and the ewe lamb he shall repay fourfold because he has done this thing, and because he did not spare.'⁴

(6) And Nathan said, 'You are the man. So says the Lord the God of Israel, "I anointed you as king over Israel and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. (8) And I gave your master's house [or daughter]⁵ and your master's wives into your bosom and if that were too little, then I would have added unto you like them and like them. (9) Why have you despised the word of the Lord to do what is evil in his eyes? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword and you have taken his wife for yourself as a wife, and you have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. (10) And now,

⁴ The discussion of the variants of this verse will be held over until chapter 6.

⁵ The reading 'daughter' is supported by the Peshitta. If accepted, the allusion is to David's marriage to Michal (1 Sam 18:27). The allusion to Saul's wives is obscure, unless we follow the suggestion that the Ahinoam whom David marries (1 Sam 25:43) is to be identified with Saul's wife of the same name (1 Sam 14:50).

the sword shall never depart from your household for ever for you have despised me and you have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. (11) So says the Lord, 'Behold I will raise up against you evil out of your own house and I will take your wives before your eyes and I will give them to your friend and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. (12) For you have acted secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'

(13) And David said to Nathan: 'I have sinned against the Lord' and Nathan said to David, 'The Lord has also caused your sin to pass on; you shall not die. (14) Nevertheless, because you have greatly blasphemed the enemies of the Lord⁶ by this thing, the son that is born to you shall surely die.'

(15) And Nathan departed to his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became mortally ill.

The problem of understanding what we mean by describing David as 'reader' of Nathan's parable as we have seen

⁶ This strange locution has met with different resolutions. The commonest approach is to see this as a euphemism introduced to soften even the suggestion of blaspheming the Lord (so McCarter 1984:296, Anderson 1989:163). The alternative is to argue for a causative *pi'el* form of the verb, so that the verse would read 'because you have caused the enemies of God to blaspheme' (see e.g. Hertzberg 1964:315), though this depends on whether the interpreter is prepared to allow for a unique use of the *pi'el*.

reduces to the question of the relationship between the parable and David's response. This is complicated by the fact that his response is two-fold. His immediate response is of anger against the rich man in the parable. Subsequently he acquiesces with Nathan's application to his own case. So how does David read this parable?

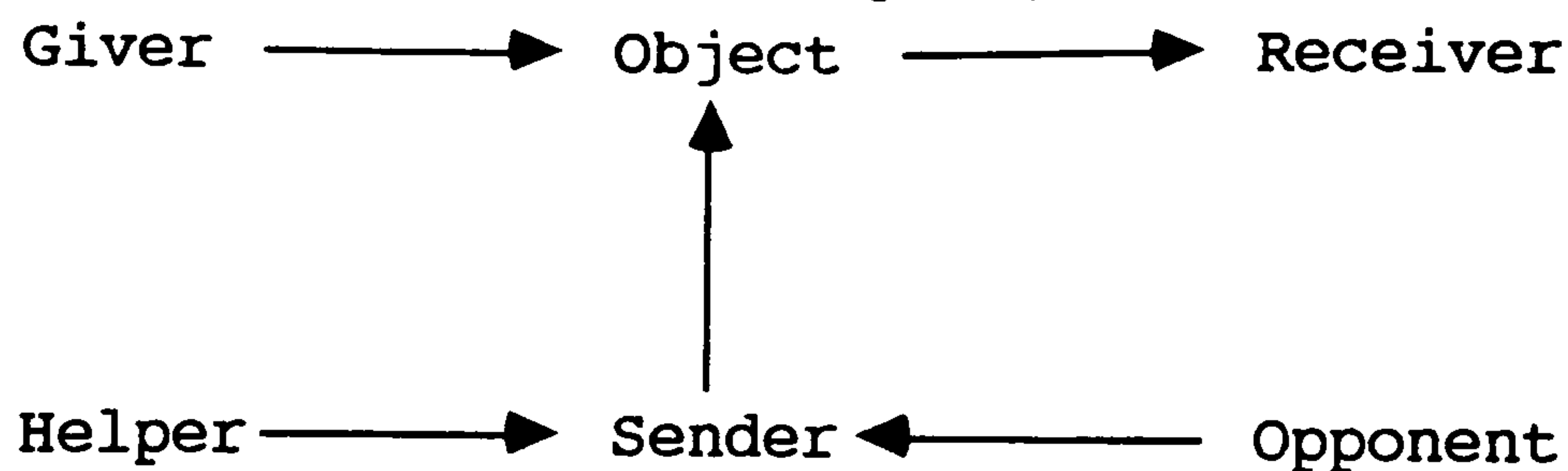
To begin with, we shall look more closely at the workings of the parable that Nathan tells the king. What in it provokes his anger and his oath, and yet also leads to his acceptance of Nathan's application of this anger to himself?

4.1.1 STRUCTURALIST READINGS

4.1.1.1 Roth

Wolfgang Roth (1977) offers an explanation of the initial impact of the parable in terms of the phenomenological-structural analysis developed by J.D. Crossan⁷. This approach draws on the work of Propp and Greimas which we alluded to earlier in the discussion of the concept of the character. As we saw at that point, this analysis allows the reduction of every narrative to the interaction of six 'actants' related in the way that the diagram below indicates:

⁷ See in particular his *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (1975) esp. ch 3 'The Tradition of Parable'.



The Giver conveys an Object to a Receiver. The Object is affected by the Subject who is assisted by a Helper and opposed by an Opponent. This scheme was further refined by Barthes (1977) who identifies three axes to the structure:

1. The axis of communication:

Giver - Object - Receiver

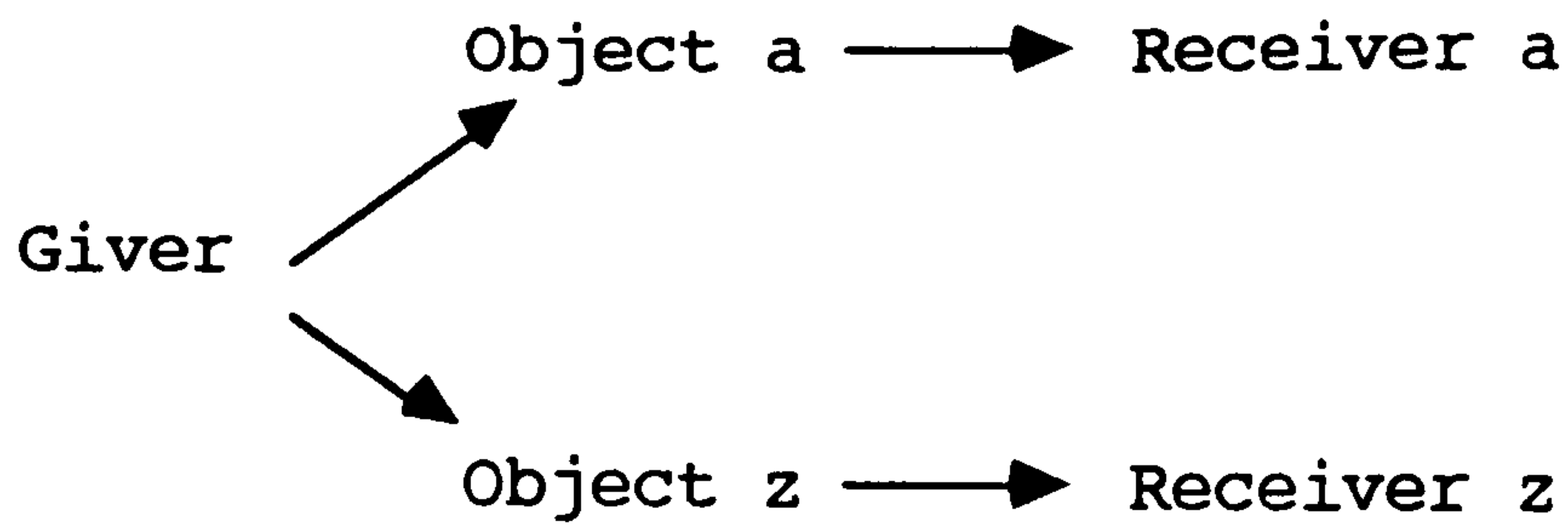
2. The axis of volition or quest:

Subject - Object

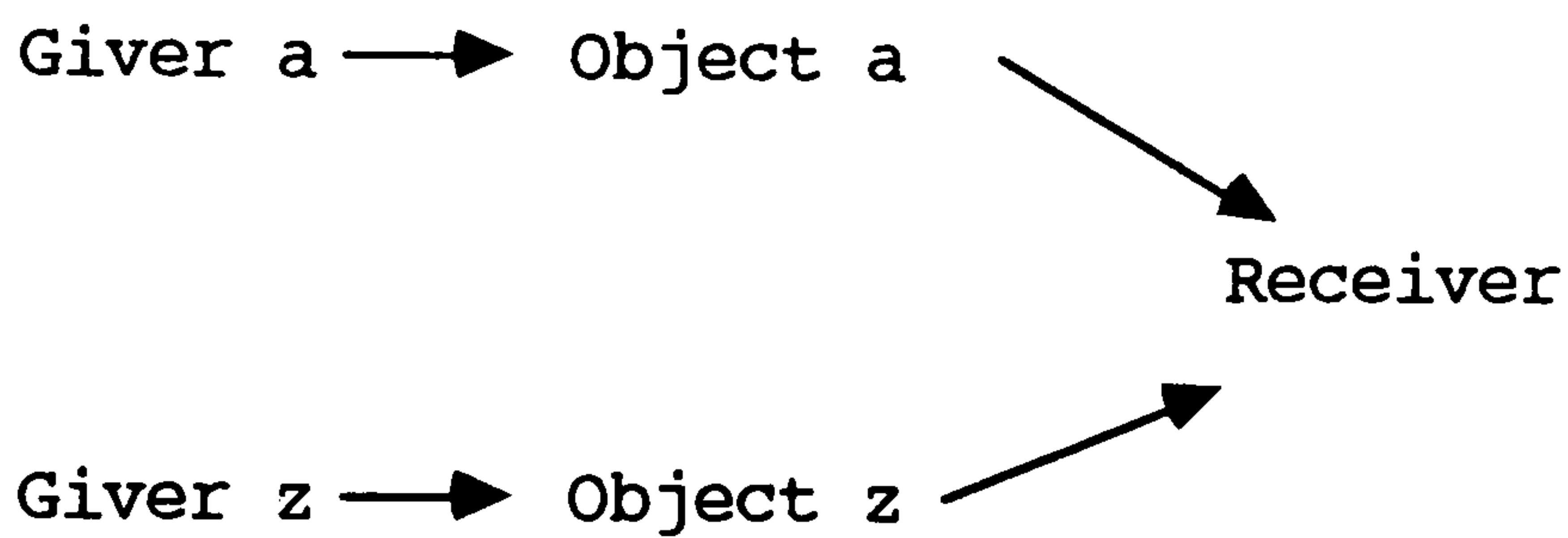
3. The axis of test or ordeal:

Helper - Sender - Opponent

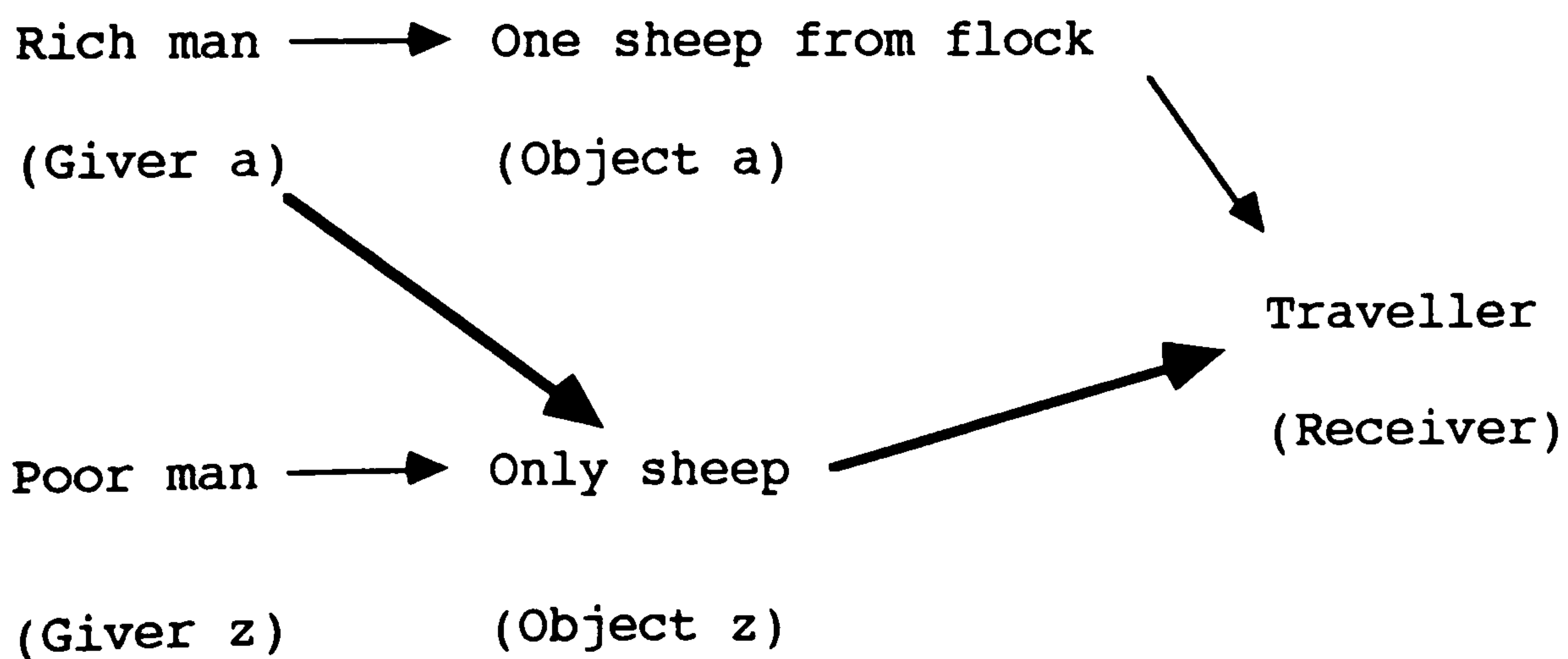
Barthes also observes that two characters may invest the same position, and that positions within the scheme may not be occupied in a particular narrative. We might be permitted to ask how far this basic universal scheme can be modified before it ceases to have any explanatory value. Be that as it may, Crossan combines these two observations to produce a structure for parables which depends on the presence of two senders or two receivers along the axis of communication. He thus produces schemes of the following form (Crossan 1975: 66)



or



These reflect the structures of expectation that the reader generates from the text. For Crossan, the impact of a parable comes about by its disruption of the reader's expectations. The narrator sets up a structure of expectation on the part of the reader which is then subverted. Roth applies this scheme to Nathan's parable as in the diagram below (see Roth 1977:6):



In this diagram, the heavy arrows represent the story as Nathan retails it, while the light arrows represent David and the reader's expectations. We expect, so Roth would have it, that the wealthy rich man will give up one sheep of his many flocks, whereas he actually delivers the single sheep of his poor neighbour⁸.

Though Roth does not make this explicit, what has happened is that the implied contrast between the two main characters, the rich man and the poor man, has increased rather than decreased. There has been no mediation of the contrast, rather its exaggeration. The poor man begins the story with one lamb in contrast to the rich man's many. He ends it with no lamb, while the rich man not only maintains his flock intact, but has gained a guest and feasted him at no expense to himself. An imbalance has been exaggerated, and the listener is left dissatisfied because there is no restitution. There is a gap in the narrative which needs to be filled.

4.1.1.2 Altpeter

⁸ Stuart Lasine (1984: 111), however, makes the point that the reader of 2 Sam 11 may well not expect the 'conventional' answer. Such a reader knows that Nathan has been sent to confront David with the events of 2 Sam 11 and so expects the unexpected story of greed and theft. This may not prevent the reader from having a sense that some convention is not complied with in the story. His wider point that the telling of a story presupposes that in some way the incident related will be unusual, however, applies equally to David as reader. If Nathan had come and told David a story where the rich man did take one of his own lambs, there would have been little point in the transaction.

This aspect of the situation is brought out in another structural analysis of the story, that by Altpeter (1982), who confines her study to the parable itself. As she describes it, there is a disjunction between the poor man and the rich man which can be expressed as the opposition between the Personal and the Economic spheres, between 'eating with' (companionship) and 'eating up' (consumption). But the situation is a little more complex than the brief summary above indicated.

There is a reciprocity of 'riches' and 'poverty' here, which is brought out by Fokkelman who points out that verse 3 gives an account of the 'wealth of the poor man' (1981: 75). The verse begins by stating that the poor man had nothing; the contrast between rich and poor is stark. But then this opposition is undermined by the little conjunction *ky-'ym*: 'except'. We learn that in fact the poor man has a lamb; we learn that he has bought it, and so therefore he must have some money. Then we learn that he has sons, and further that he has bread, drink and a companion to lie with. He may only have one lamb, but the contrast between one and many is shown to have two sides. It may denote economic poverty, but it denotes emotional wealth.

But as yet there has been no story. We only have the description of the two protagonists in their polarised but stable configurations. For the story to proceed, this stability must be disrupted, as indeed it is with the appearance of a third character, a traveller who comes to stay with the rich man.

Altpeter contrasts the poor man's conviviality with the situation of the rich man. Given a guest as an opportunity of sharing and finding the companionship that the poor man has, and he lacks, he opts to steal. The poor man's sheep is translated from one sphere to the other: from eating and drinking with her poor

master, she becomes the food of the rich man and his guest.

The action of theft represents the impingement of the two characters upon one another which the story promises. For a story to occur they must either interact with each other or act together in an encounter with a third party⁹. We are told that they live in one city, which defines a geographical parameter within which the possibility of encounter takes place. In other forms of story, one of the characters might undertake a journey in order that they may encounter. We then hear of the imbalance between them, on an economic level.

What is interesting is that this is presented as a tolerable imbalance. One might conceive a situation in which a story began; 'There were once two men in the same city. One had many flocks and the other nothing but a single lamb', and that in itself would be enough to enrage the listeners, and to prompt them to wish that things were distributed fairly. But then we are told that the poor man has bought the lamb with his own money. The structure that allows the divergence between the two also allows the possession of the one lamb that the poor man loves.

But again the point is made that the story lacks any resolution. The gap between the rich man and the poor man which was set up so starkly and then subtly infilled by the information that the poor man had possessions and had companionship is now gaping wide. At the end of Nathan's recitation, the poor man indeed has nothing, while the rich man has the lamb, the food and the

⁹ On this point, see Funk 1988: 15ff.

traveller. The story has not fulfilled the promise of resolution.

David's response is to leap into the gap¹⁰, to seek to provide the means of recompense, the restoration of the lamb and the discomfiture of the rich man. David casts himself in the role of the judge who will restore order to the society, the figure that the story lacks.

¹⁰ The notion of 'a leap on the stage' finds its classic exemplar in the incident in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* where Quixote springs to the defence of the gallant Don Gaiferos who is being pursued by Moors (Cervantes 1964: 712-720; esp p.716). However, this incident is being enacted in a puppet show. Don Quixote leaps on the stage to defend his hero and merely succeeds in wrecking the puppets. It is, as Haley (1986: 104) says, 'an attempt to invade the impenetrable world of fiction'.

The point is discussed by Alter (1975: 11-15) who observes that the incident is actually very complex narratologically. The play is being narrated by a boy whom both Don Quixote and the puppetmaster keep correcting. The 'leap on the stage' occurs at a point where the Don has been criticising the production of the play as the boy who is narrating it ascribes church bells to the mosques in the scene.

Alter sees the Don as representing that fact that there are two contradictory responses to fiction which may not be so easy to hold in tension as we like to think: the response to it as 'only' a fiction and the imaginative consent to its reality. This for Alter is a paradigm of Cervantes' technique whereby 'the fictional world is repeatedly converted into a multiple regression of imitations that call attention in various ways to their own status as imitations.' (1975: 14)

Nathan's reply to him: 'You are the man' identifies him not with the restorer of order but its disrupter.

4.1.2 DAVID AND DISTANCIATION

So David begins by reacting as someone outside the story. Yet why does he not realise that he is being obliquely addressed? What leads to his distancing of himself from the case?

4.1.2.1 Vorster and Lategan

The exact nature of David's perception of the parable is the subject of a fierce debate between Lategan and Vorster (1985). Does he take it as a real case which Nathan is bringing to him, or as a fictional test case which he is being offered? Lategan argues that David treats the case as fictional while Vorster interprets his reaction as only appropriate for a 'real case'.

Vorster quotes Lategan as saying that 'the story character of the parable puts David at ease' (1985; 102, quoting 1985:81). Lategan, however, does not simply assert this. He takes the indefinite and anonymous character of the opening verse of the story as a cue to the hearer, in this case David, to take it as a fictional story, removed from the immediate context in which David finds himself. This distancing is the condition for the subsequent recognition by David of his own responsibility. Lategan then comments on David's reaction, using an intriguing typographical device:

'David was very angry with the rich man' (12:5)
(David speaks of this fictive character as if he is
a man of flesh and blood!). (1985:81)

Lategan seeks to reinforce his view of David's reading by marginalising this contradictory reference to the

'reality' of the rich man in parenthesis and drawing an alienating attention to it by his use of the exclamation mark. It is also ambiguous: does the pronoun 'he' refer to David or to the rich man?

This 'as if' is the central point at issue between Lategan and Vorster. Vorster contends that 'according to our narrator, David did not hear the parable as a parable at all' (1985:103). He does not offer to confirm this statement, and indeed, we might well ask how this could be done. The whole debate between Lategan and Vorster is engendered by the ambiguity of the narrator's stance. The only evidence that exists is David's reaction, which contains the paradox Lategan tries to marginalise.

4.1.2.2 First and second order characters

Of course, neither David nor the rich man is 'flesh and blood'. Both are characters. What is at issue between the disputants is whether David reacts to the rich man as a first order or second order character. In other words, are we as readers offered a scenario where David imagines that he and the rich man could meet outside Nathan's story, or does he view the rich man a 'second order' character, only available through the narrative which is embedded in the speech of the first order character Nathan?

Once again, we have no clear indication in the text. This indicates that the question that is being discussed here comes under Vorster's own criticism as one that is not specifically raised by the text itself. The narrator can make this embedded incident convincing without giving definite clues about the narratological status of the characters, so that what Vorster terms the 'macrotext', the larger narrative in which the parable is embedded, has its impact without the reader having to

determine whether the story has a historical referent or not.

What is true is that the story can work only because an effect of distanciation is introduced. David can be led to identify himself as 'the man' only because he has initially not identified himself as the man, either because he regards the man as some concrete other involved in the case Nathan brings, or because he regards him as merely a fictional character.

4.1.3 KIERKEGAARD'S READING

4.1.3.1 David as Critic

The impact of this on the biblical reader is given an intriguing gloss in Kierkegaard's version of the parable. In his discourse entitled 'What Is Required in Order to Look at Oneself with True Blessing in the Mirror of the Word?' (Kierkegaard 1990: 7-51), Kierkegaard presents the meeting between David and Nathan as a literary *conversazione*. The well-known belle-lettrist Nathan has composed a short story which he brings for the renowned psalmist to criticise. Kierkegaard writes:

I imagine that David listened to this attentively and thereupon declared his judgment, did not, of course, intrude upon his personality (subjectivity) but impersonally (objectively) evaluated this charming little work. Perhaps there had been a detail he thought could be different: he perhaps suggested a more felicitously chosen phrase, perhaps also pointed out a little fault in the structure, praised the prophet's masterly presentation of the story, his voice, gestures - in short, expressed his opinion the way we cultured people today tend to judge a sermon for the

cultured - that is, a sermon that is itself also objective.

Then the prophet says to him, 'Thou art the man'

Behold, the tale which the prophet told was a story, but this 'Thou art the man' - this was another story - it was the transition to the subjective. (1990: 38)

This clearly sets David's inappropriate objective aesthetic attitude in opposition to the subjective religious appropriation of the text. The interesting thing is that this version of David's response is quite different from what is actually recorded in the biblical text. In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan arrives at God's behest and, without any preliminaries, presents the story baldly to the king. David's response is a blaze of anger.

This is a far cry from the urbane reaction of Kierkegaard's David. In the biblical account, David leaps into the unresolved gap between the rich man and the poor man in the story, appointing himself to the role of the just judge who will redress this imbalance, only to be told that the role he really plays is that of the unscrupulous oppressor. In Kierkegaard's retelling, on the other hand, David stands back from the story as an aesthetic critic without realising that he is being given a description of his own lived experience, something from which he cannot properly distance himself.

Kierkegaard prefaces his recast version with the admission that he is 'modernizing' it to 'make it more vivid to us.' What his version does, in fact, is to align David's perception of the story much more closely with that of the modern biblical reader. As readers of

the biblical text, we are warned at the end of chapter 11 of 2 Samuel that Nathan has been sent by God because 'the thing David did was not pleasing in God's sight'. We are thus privileged spectators who can appreciate the irony of David's ignorant self-judgment. We can experience the aesthetic thrill of the ironic reversal. Kierkegaard's David is not the naïve, impulsive and inadvertent author of his own judgment represented in Samuel, but a detached critic who mimics the modern bible reader in his expectation of deriving just this aesthetic pleasure from the text, perhaps with an indulgent smile at its primitive awkwardness of expression.

4.1.3.2 God as Critic

In a striking passage in his *Purity of Heart is to win one thing*, Kierkegaard addresses the issue of the hearer as critic:

Alas, in regard to things spiritual, the foolishness of many is this, that they in the secular sense look upon the speaker as an actor and the listeners as theatergoers who are to pass the judgment on the artist. But the speaker is not the actor - not in the remotest sense. No, the speaker is the prompter ... (1956: 180)

In the most earnest sense, God is the critical theatergoer, who looks on to see how the lines are spoken and how they are listened to: hence here the customary audience is wanting. The speaker is then the prompter, and the listener stands openly before God. The listener, if I may say so, is the actor, who in all truth acts before God (1956: 181).

In the biblical account, David takes on the role of the judge and thus opens himself to judgement in his 'leap

on the stage'. Someone called on to the stage to enact the role appointed for him is, however, just as much under judgment if all he does is to stand in the wings and pass remarks on the performances of his fellow actors. The latter is precisely David's situation in Kierkegaard's version of the scenario. David sees Nathan's story as a performance on which he is called to give a critical judgment, whereas in fact Nathan is setting the stage and providing the script in which David opts to act out the role of the insufferably complacent critic under the properly critical gaze of God.

Kierkegaard's formulation here irresistibly recalls Green's account of the role of the theatrical spectator. What Kierkegaard makes clear in his inimitable way is that, as in Austin's description, the division between spectator and actor is no more absolute than any other.

With his 'thou art the man', Nathan, as it were, causes David to turn round and see the hidden audience which has already watched and judged what he thought was a cleverly concealed private transaction between Bathsheba and himself. As the phrase which ends 2 Samuel 11 has it, 'these things were evil in the eyes of God'. In the biblical version, David's ethical judgment of the actions of the character within the story reveals his own ethical blindness. In Kierkegaard's alternative, it is David's stance as a reader which is laid open to judgment.

4.1.4 YOU ARE THE MAN

Nathan's 'You are the man' is a sentence which has a particularly haunting effect on the reader. One commentator who offers an account of this is Joel Rosenberg, who argues as follows:

Nathan's startling and resonant announcement ... is ultimately capable of being turned against the reader, who has thus far been habituated to imagine villainy primarily in the third person, just as has the king himself. The sting of this parable gathers force precisely from the satisfaction we derive as readers at the springing of this trap upon a character in the story. Only as an afterthought (or perhaps not until the impending civil war is recounted in II Sam 15-19) does the multivalence of the prophet's stratagem occur to us. The 'you're the man' of allegorical discourse is distressingly contagious, but it likewise can appear to quarantine and reassure ('Yes, he's the one all right!'). It much depends on the type of reader facing the material. (1986: 41)

We have here, however, a point of major significance in the relationship between the reader and the text. If the reader is in a sense 'eavesdropping' on the dialogue between David and Nathan as we have suggested in our earlier discussion of reader as 'overhearer', he or she is here offered a place in the text. Just as the pronoun 'I' instantiates the speaking subject in Benveniste's descripton, so the pronoun 'you' indicates the one addressed. The important point is this: without further specification, anyone within hearing of the speaker could identify him or herself with the one addressed.

The classic situation of the teacher addressing the class with 'You, boy!' and evoking the response 'Who, me, sir?' illustrates the point. Linguistic communication always has the potential for such leakage. The pronoun 'you' is what Benveniste calls an 'empty form' which the hearer may choose to fill. It may, however, not be a matter simply of choice. The hearer

may well be in doubt over whether he or she is called upon to fill it.¹¹

But as such, these forms have a particular kind of 'potential' claim to our attention. It is always possible that I am being addressed. Although all the other cues which exist in most situations of communication - eye contact, proximity, use of names and so on - may lead me almost unconsciously and rapidly to decide that this time I am not being called upon, initially the possibility is there. It may be my answer which is being required. There is here an 'anxiety of possibility'. Am I being summoned to utter?

This is the lesson that Kierkegaard in the end draws from David and his response to Nathan's parable. The reader must not treat the biblical text objectively but must constantly remind him- or herself, 'It is I to whom it is speaking, it is I about whom it is speaking.' (1990: 40) He applies this insight to the reading of the story of the Good Samaritan, enjoining the reader constantly to be aware that he or she is being addressed.

Then when the parable ends, and Christ says to the Pharisee, 'Go and do likewise', you shall say to yourself, 'It is I to whom this is addressed - away at once!' You must not resort to quibbling, even less try to be witty (divinely understood, a witticism does not compensate for anything but merely sharpens the verdict). You must not say,

¹¹ If I may be allowed an autobiographical note, any child named 'Hugh' is only too aware of the problems of identifying oneself as the targetted hearer of discourse. Was it 'You come here' or 'Hugh come here?'

'On my honor I can assure you that never in my life did I come along a road where there lay a half-dead man who had been assaulted by robbers; generally speaking, robbers are a rarity among us.' No, you must not talk that way; you must say, 'The words "Go and do likewise" are addressed to me.'

Therefore you do understand the words very well.

(1990:41)

Kierkegaard thus lays on the reader a positive duty to resolve the referential ambiguity of the second person pronoun, but one which does seem to rest on an assumption that such ambiguity exists. Yet the call to judgement is reciprocal. The reader opens him- or herself to judgment by the judgment which he or she makes, just as David lays himself open to judgment by his act of judgment.

The other word in Nathan's response is also of interest. 'The man' is a word that could be applied at any time to a large number of individuals, and one that also has several connotations. Peter Berger (1961: 225-7) offers a sociologist's view when he speculates that here David is being reminded that he is 'a man' rather than, or as well as, a king. The abuse of power described in 2 Sam 11 is supported by the illusion that different rules apply to kings. But it also carries connotations that David is being described as the archetypal human being 'the man'.

Of course, the whole transaction works on the transference between grammatical persons. David speaks of the man as 'he'. In terms of Benveniste's theory, 'he' as the third person is the one for whom I am not directly responsible, and whom I am not addressing. 'He' designates an autonomous centre of language. Nathan turns this round to the second person 'You are the man', implicating not the man safely ensconced in the world of

the embedded text but one of his own hearers. In David's confession 'I have sinned against the Lord', we have the appearance of the first person.

Yet a further question remains. What is it that Nathan engineers in turning David's reading against himself? What is it that leads David to accept this revised reading of the parable as applicable to himself? How are we to account for David's double reading?

To answer this question, we will begin by reviewing the critical literature which has been devoted to the place of the parable within the text as it stands. This double reaction, and indeed David's subsequent reaction to the death of his child have posed problems for textual critics.

4.1.5 TEXT-CRITICAL APPROACHES AND READING STANCES

4.1.5.1 Schwally

The modern critical discussion of the origin of Nathan's parable is usually traced back to F. Schwally (1892). As part of his source-critical investigations into the historical books, he looked at the three pericopes in which Nathan makes an appearance: 2 Sam 7, 2 Sam 12, and 1 Kings 1. On the basis of the 'absurdity' (1892: 155) that David later mourns for his child without any reference to the explicit warning he has been given by Nathan that his son will die, Schwally concludes that 2 Sam 12:1-15a has been inserted into an older text in which the sickness and death of the child followed on as an immediate and unexplained consequence of the divine displeasure expressed in 2 Sam 11:27. With regard to the parable itself, Schwally notes:

The highly artistic rounding off of this parable shows that there must already have been a long

development of this form of literature. But what is to be taken from this? Our canonic collection has been compiled so selectively. (1892:153 n.1)

The interest of this rather cryptic comment is that Schwally here acknowledges the limitations of the critical method he is employing. Faced with the literary finish of the parable, the source critic can do no more than acknowledge it.

4.1.5.2 Gunkel

Schwally's view was taken up by Budde (1902:254) who is cited by Gunkel (1987:54-55) as support for his contention that 2 Sam 12:1-13a is a later addition to the chapter. Unlike his predecessors, however, Gunkel turns his attention to the parable itself as part of his investigation of the influence of folk literature in the Old Testament. In particular, he argues that the lack of reference to a death in this pericope and the lack of evidence for a close bond of affection between Uriah and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11 allow us to conclude 'with the greatest certainty' (1987:55) that the story originates from another context¹².

¹² Bernard Jackson (1972: 144-49) on the other hand goes so far as to rewrite the whole story on the basis of the judgment, rather than simply see the parable as an intrusion. He hypothesises that there was an original version of the story where Uriah was not murdered (1972: 147 n.6). This later became modified by the addition of the story of his death, but, at that stage, principles of jurisprudence did not extend to interpreting the remote link between David and the death of Uriah at the hands of the Ammonites as a charge of murder. All this arises from his contention that 'the parable in no way alludes to the murder of Uriah' (1972: 147).

He points out the folkloric elements in the story:

1. The anonymity of the characters;
2. The contrast between rich and poor;¹³
3. the sentimental exaggeration of the poor man's affection for the lamb.

He notes that its metrical form is unusual. More intriguingly, he comments rather diffidently that 'it does not provide a complete story but rather lets a single aspect suffice' (1987: 55). The question of the story's completeness is one that we have already addressed. It is its incompleteness that opens the gap for David to write himself into it.

At this point, it is appropriate, however, to wonder what situation Gunkel imagines such an incomplete story could have arisen from. Either it circulated independently in this unfinished form, which *prima facie* seems highly unlikely, or else it was truncated in the process of its incorporation into the material that makes up 2 Sam 12. If this second hypothesis is true, it calls for an explanation. The third alternative, that its incompleteness is a necessary part of its function in this chapter, might rather undermine the basis for Gunkel's investigation as it would suggest active composition of the story for this setting.

¹³ Gunkel cites here Grimms' tale no 87 as an example of this motif.

His concern, of course, is to unearth earlier folk narratives from within the text. Ours is with the later form of the narrative. In this connection it is useful to have it pointed out that folk elements can be found in the parable. Such elements, however, could well be available to a later author. Whether an author drew on a pre-existing folk story or whether he drew on common folk elements in order to construct a plausible parable seems hard to determine.¹⁴

We may therefore happily acknowledge the notion that this parable has resonances with folk narrative without feeling obliged to draw Gunkel's conclusion that it has been interpolated into this chapter and applied to a new purpose. It is just as likely that the author has seen the appropriateness of this style of story-telling to his immediate needs.

What this draws to our attention is the implicit model of reading that Gunkel is working with. In order to provoke the reaction it does, he argues, the story should contain certain explicit elements, notably reference to death.

4.1.5.3 Daube

For a highly developed modern version of Gunkel's argument, we can turn to David Daube (1982). In Daube's

¹⁴ On this point, see Kirkpatrick (1988) who cites a wide range of evidence from folklore studies which indicates that there are no clear stylistic features which prove an oral basis for a particular story. Any linguistic feature thought to be diagnostic of an orally transmitted or folk narrative can be reproduced in a written text. See her conclusions (1988: 115-117).

opinion the incongruities between the parable and the situation it is supposedly referring to are glaring.

Firstly, and in his view most significantly, Daube follows Gunkel in drawing attention to the lack of reference to the murder of Uriah in the parable. He reviews some possible explanations of this, all of which he regards as inadequate in the face of the other inconsistencies he identifies¹⁵. There is, for instance, the question of the relevance of the traveller to the story. Daube does not find any analogy to the situation of adultery in this account of theft in order to satisfy the demands of hospitality. The parable also evokes sympathy for the stolen lamb, whereas, in Daube's opinion, the main story shows no reluctance on Bathsheba's part which might lead the reader to feel for her as a helpless victim.

Daube concludes that the parable would have more pertinently fitted a situation where a tyrant stole the wife or daughter of one of his dependants to furnish a bedfellow for a visitor or a favourite. Daube finds this pattern in Saul's allocation of David's wife Michal to Palti (1 Sam 25:44). He conjectures that a parable which originated in David's circle as a condemnation of Saul's arbitrary action over this matter is here being

¹⁵ The first line of argument which he discusses depends on the indirectness of Nathan's stratagem. It may be that if this was to succeed, it was necessary to keep David in the dark about the thrust of the apologue (see the argument of Simon [1967:223-224]). Alternatively, the indirectness of David's own methods of arranging Uriah's death may have made his culpability under law unclear, as argued by Jackson (1972: 146). Alternatively, the parable may have existed in a version where the rich man did in fact kill the poor man.

turned against David himself. He further speculates that Nathan may have been picking up on the gossip of Bathsheba or Uriah's supporters. Perhaps it was this group who hit on the idea of reapplying this attack on Saul's perfidy to David. Or did this reapplication occur even earlier, at the time when David himself took Michal away from her husband Paltiel (2 Sam 3:13-16)?¹⁶

Daube's boldness in reconstructing these hypothetical transactions is impressive but not thereby convincing. His assumptions about the relation of Nathan's story to the events it condemns are, as we have seen, by no means inevitable. He also clearly assumes that the text gives a more or less verbatim account of a historical encounter between the king and the prophet. The final paragraph of his paper reads:

One missing item of the jig-saw would be of enormous assistance: how did it become known what

¹⁶ As Simon (1967:226 n.1) points out, this last parallel was already noted by Leben (1903:153). For the sake of David ('the wayfarer'), Abner ('the rich man') takes Michal ('the ewe-lamb') from Paltiel ('the poor man'). This also explains why the parable has no mention of Uriah's death; Paltiel does not die in the 2 Sam 3 story. Leben argues that Nathan used an already familiar story. Ehrlich (1910: 296) saw the parallel with 1 Sam 25, but he employed it to argue for the implausibility of the story in 2 Sam 11. If Saul and David could take away other men's wives with impunity, why all the fuss about Bathsheba and the need for the murder of Uriah? The parallels are, of course, rather dubious. Saul takes back his daughter from an exiled rebel, and David is recovering his lawful wife. By contrast, David has no claim whatsoever to Bathsheba, and, as far as we can tell, no cause to show anything but loyalty to Uriah as one of his most trusty servants.

Nathan said to David, in private no doubt? Did he divulge it in his memoirs? If the paradigm was current since the rape of Michal, and certainly if it was already turned against David prior to Nathan's visit, chroniclers might infer his use of it without being directly instructed. I would give all Watergate tapes for a tape of that interview - without an 18-minute gap. (1982: 288)

It will not be our concern to elucidate whatever historical transaction did or did not take place between David and Nathan. Such a reconstruction can only be made on the basis of the text before us. The critic is then engaged in correcting the text against the putative constraints of the actual event. This presupposes that any such incongruities must arise through oversight or incompetence on the part of the author or a flaw in the transmission of the text.

It might be possible, however, that such discrepancies are an oblique comment on the irreducible problem of encoding any event in language. By looking at this episode as a literary construct we may be able to appreciate the subtlety of its appeal to the reader, not just as a record of fact, but as itself eliciting the judgment of the reader.

4.1.6 DECODING THE ALLEGORY

In any event, this judgment of Daube and Gunkel's depends on a simple identification whereby

Poor man = Uriah

Rich man = David

Lamb = Bathsheba

Traveller = ?

4.1.6.1 Delekat

This may not be the only possible reading. Delekat (1967) proposes a rather different scheme in order to surmount some of the problems with Gunkel's reading, especially the lack of concern with the murder. Delekat argues:

Uriah was killed. If he was meant by the sheep, then David would be the guest, and Yahweh the rich man. In this way, the parable fits the story much better. The chief motif, the murder of Uriah, is taken into consideration and the noteworthy fact that David did not steal for himself, but for the guest in the parable, is done away with. In the tale there is no equivalent for the guest. If Yahweh is the rich man, then he appears to be the real sinner, Could he not in fact easily have thwarted David's murder plot? (1967:33)

So here the cast list reads:

Poor man = Bathsheba

Rich man = Yahweh

Lamb = Uriah

Traveller = David

The details of this scheme seem a bit forced, especially the idea that the point of the parable is to show Yahweh as the principal bearer of blame. Nothing else in the story or its development seems to indicate that. Indeed, Nathan and David seem to agree that David in some sense is to be identified with the rich man. Where

Delekat does have a point in his identification of the mutual deprivation of Uriah and Bathsheba, and the association of murder with this element of the narrative. If the lamb was eaten, then it was killed; an elementary knowledge of cookery could have alerted Gunkel and Daube to this fact. So Chibaudel (1989:79) describes the lamb as 'the life of Uriah' and Bathsheba as the poor man deprived of it. Wesselius (1990:346-7 n.13) argues for the identification of the lamb with Uriah who, as a resident foreigner married into a leading Israelite family, would be the weaker partner in the marriage.¹⁷

4.1.6.2 Seebass

Seebass (1974: 205-6) takes another line in arguing that the real point of the king's involvement is the abuse of power by the rich man. A fourfold fine is not going to

¹⁷ Wesselius argues this on the basis that Bathsheba is described as Eliam's daughter as well as Uriah's wife. Her marital tie has not effaced her connection with her father's family. This argument is strengthened by his acceptance of the identification of Bathsheba's father Eliam with the son of Ahithophel mentioned in 2 Sam 23:34. He rather disarmingly states that 'the usefulness of this assumption for understanding certain aspects of the story apparently confirms it' (1990:349). In particular, Ahithophel's part in Absalom's revolt, and especially his part in inciting Absalom to violate his father's concubines in a fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy of the punishment to be visited on David for his conduct over Bathsheba (2 Sam 16:21 cf 2 Sam 12:11), seems explicable in these terms. Bailey (1990) goes much further in hypothesising that David's alliance with Bathsheba was part of a political strategy to strengthen his ties with the north, Ahithophel's fiefdom, in the aftermath of Absalom's revolt, which he regards as having preceded the events in 2 Sam 10-12.

be much inconvenience to him, even if the poor man has the resources and the courage to seek redress at law. The law is not geared to this kind of manifest but minor injustice which if unchecked allows the powerful to abuse their power with impunity. This is exactly where the king needs to step in. Here too is the analogy to David's conduct which is a gross abuse of his power and ultimately a threat to the continued monarchy.

Perhaps what is borne out here is the inappropriateness of the attempt to tie the interpretation to a strict equivalence between the incidents and characters of Nathan's story and those of the wider narrative. The more general themes of murder, deprivation and the severance of a loving bond are what matter, rather than a mechanical transformation of one narrative into another. Uriah and Bathsheba equally exhibit characteristics of both the poor man and the lamb. Both are deprived of the one they love; both are sacrificed to satisfy the appetites of the king.

The link between Uriah and the lamb is also made in a way that reminds us that the communication between narrator and reader is here intersecting with the communication between characters. Part of the problem of the connection between the parable and the wider context arises from the interaction of these two channels of communication.

The most striking instance of this in this text is the coincidence between the verbs used to describe the relationship of the lamb and the poor man, and Uriah's refusal to comply with David's plans for him. In 2 Sam 11: 11, Uriah indignantly points out that the whole of the nation is on the battlefield: 'Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?' Exactly these verbs reappear in the parable with reference to the lamb: 'it used to eat of his morsel,

and *drink* of his cup, and *lie* in his bosom' (2 Sam 12: 3)¹⁸. Nathan's utterance then, is evoked by the reaction of the 'over-hearer' of this text, not as part of the ostensible communication between Nathan and David.

4.2 THE JURIDICAL PARABLE

4.2.1 THE JURIDICAL PARABLE AS GENRE

4.2.1.1 Simon

A major contribution to the debate, which seeks to defend the connection between Nathan's story and the text of 2 Sam 11, is made by Uriel Simon (1967). He introduces the concept of the 'juridical parable' to the discussion. He defines this as follows:

The juridical parable constitutes a realistic story about a violation of the law, related to someone who had committed a similar offence with the purpose of leading the unsuspecting hearer to pass judgment on himself. The offender will only be caught in the trap set for him if he truly believes that the story told him actually happened, and only if he does not detect prematurely the similarity between the offence in the story and the one he himself has committed. Tree and animal parables are intrinsically intended to arouse comparisons. The realistic dress of the juridical parable, on the other hand, is intended to conceal the very fact that it is a parable. The narrator has to strike a careful balance between getting too close

¹⁸ The same verbs also recur in the story of David's mourning for Bathsheba's child, where he refuses to eat and *lies* on the ground (2 Sam 12: 16).

to the parable's application and being too remote from it. In both cases, he is liable to undermine the force of the analogy. Once the narrator has succeeded in completely concealing his intentions, he drops the veil and usually points the moral by identifying the villain [sic] of the parable with the hearer: "Thou art the man". The juridical parable is a disguised parable designed to overcome man's own closeness to himself, enabling him to judge himself by the same yardstick he applies to others (1967: 221).

So Simon defends the apparent discrepancy between the parable and the situation to which it is applied as integral to the functioning of the parable. It is not the result of a pre-existing story being pressed into service, but arises from the need to disguise the point of the parable so as to prevent its hearer from realising its point until he has incriminated himself¹⁹. Yet it must have enough features with a bearing on the situation to force the hearer to admit to its applicability to his case when this is pointed out. 'Every parable, and in particular the juridical one where concealment is of the essence, is based on a delicate relationship of closeness and remoteness towards the object of its application' (1967: 223).

Simon identifies four examples of juridical parables in the Bible besides 2 Sam 11:1-14; 2 Sam 14:1-20; 1 Kings 20:35-43; Isa 5:1-7; Jer 3:1-5. The first three involve

¹⁹ In point of fact, Simon's claim is foreshadowed by the comment in *Mezudoth Zion* as summarised by Sosevsky (1986: 324) that 'much of the parable was impertinent to David but was included so that David take the story literally and fail to conclude its true nature until after he had passed judgment on it.'

a confrontation with a king who is induced to pass judgment on his own conduct. In the latter two, a prophet appeals for the people's judgment only to turn it against them. For the purposes of our discussion we will confine our attention to the three passages in the Former Prophets as the others are even by Simon's reckoning derived 'rhetorical-literary' transformations of the situation of appeal to the king²⁰ (1967:222).

Simon's definition of this genre raises several questions which have been dealt with in divergent ways by those who have followed up his suggestions.

4.2.1.2 Critique of Simon

Firstly, we might ask what the generic definition of the juridical parable might be.²¹ It is interesting that

²⁰ The appropriateness of stretching the definition of the genre to these two cases has been questioned in his detailed review of the various generic labels that have been applied to Isaiah 5:1-7.

²¹ For an extended discussion of this problem see Coats 1986. He rightly questions the confusion of genre and function in the use of the term 'juridical parable'. His own suggestion is that the story be regarded as a fable. He defines this genre as follows: 'A fable paints a picture of relationships in the human world by casting these relationships in exaggerated form with characters from the subhuman world' (1986: 373). The other examples he cites are Jotham's fable (Jud 9:7-15), Jehoash's fable (2 Kings 14:9) and the story of Balaam and his ass (Num 22:21-35). In applying this definition to Nathan's story, Coats acknowledges the objections that may be raised on the grounds that the animal is passive and does not speak. He counters this by arguing that the action turns on the animal. 'To deny that this story is a fable because the animal does not speak or because humans carry the

Simon himself defines it in relation to the situation of its telling. Nathan's story has no intrinsic quality by which it could be identified as a juridical parable without the wider narrative which describes the underlying situation to which it refers and the reaction of its hearer. It would make no sense to describe an isolated story of the theft of a poor man's lamb as a juridical parable. The most we might be able to say is that we could envisage circumstances in which it might function to elicit a judgment.

It is significant that Simon himself in citing these stories gives a reference which includes the reaction of the target of the story. What Simon has identified is a group of stories which involve a self-reflexive judgment by one of the characters. There is a confusion which runs through the literature in the use of the word 'parable'. If it is applicable at all, then it applies, in Nathan's case, to 2 Sam 12:1b-4. Any more than that and we are not dealing with a parable, but a story about the reception of a parable.

active roles is to define the genre by reference to particular features in the story's content' (1986:372). To this we may well reply that it is hard to see what else Coats is doing if he is not defining the story as a fable precisely on the basis of particular features of its content: the presence of an animal in the text. In order to defend himself from this charge, Coats offers a new functional definition of a fable as 'a critique of the power wielded by the famous to the pain of those subject to the power' (1986: 272). He is of course entitled to revise his definition, but this does seem to evacuate the fable of any distinctive features as against satire or polemic. It is hard to see how assigning this story to this revised and revisable category does any more to elucidate it than calling it a parable. Coats himself does go on to argue that parable is best seen as a functional definition.

There is something then to be said for the position of De Vries (1978). He makes use of the category of 'Regal Self-judgment Stories' to describe 2 Sam 12: 1-7, a category that he defines as: 'A story in which a king's word or act determines his own judgement. Purpose: enhance the belief that Yahweh's supreme authority comes to paradoxical expression in the responsible deeds of the institutional holders of power' (1978: 55). This is a sub-category of his wider interest in what he calls 'the prophetic legend'. He himself admits that this description defines the circle of tradents and/or the subject-matter rather than addressing a particular literary device. The stories must involve a prophet and a king. So he does not include 2 Sam 14 in his purview simply on the grounds that no prophetic figure is involved.

In any case, the comments of D.M. Gunn (1982:41) are relevant here. He argues that 'if Simon is really suggesting, as would appear, that we have here a "literary genre" with a primary connection with a "legal" setting of kings and "judges at the gate", then one must observe that as such it can hardly have enjoyed much of a vogue.' He points out that situations in which a litigant against the king would practice a deliberate deception against him must have been 'rare and risky events'.²²

²² In his novelistic treatment of the confrontation between David and Nathan in 2 Sam 12, Stefan Heym has David remark to Nathan: 'Either the Lord is truly speaking through you, Nathan, or you are the most insolent man this side of the Jordan...' (1984:166). The possible consequences for Nathan if the latter proves to be the case do not need to be spelt out.

Such considerations lead K. Whitelam (1979: 135-6) to suppose that both the story of Nathan's encounter with David and the story of the woman of Teqoa are literary constructions from the outset, designed to exonerate David from blame. The legal authority and probity of the kings that these stories rely on and depict is, he claims, more a product of the wishful thinking of later writers than descriptions of actual circumstances. They reveal the gap between the theory and the practice of royal judicial authority.

4.2.2 THE FORCE OF THE PARABLE

4.2.2.1 Simon

But for the purposes of our investigation, the question that needs to be addressed is: what leads David to accept the judgment in both cases as applying to him? Or, to put it another way, what is the textual feature that makes acceptable to the reader the transformation of the character David brought about by these two stories?

Simon appears to argue that this depends on the law. David as king is the final arbiter in Israel's legal system, but is also not above his own law. 'The legal issue, which is the hallmark of this literary genre, is realistic in character when addressed to the king-judge' (1967:221) Having been induced to give a ruling, David is obliged to stick by it when the case is shown to parallel his own conduct. The constraint thus becomes the overarching rule of law.²³

²³ The legal implications of these stories are discussed by Whitelam (1979:123-256). He cites commentators who have used these cases as evidence for Israelite judicial procedure. Macholz

If this is the case, then Simon is obliged to argue that 2 Sam 14 is the exception proves the rule. He claims that the extenuating facts that the woman adduces for the case of her son (that he was the only son, that the killing was the result of a quarrel that could have gone either way) mean that the intention of Joab and the woman could not have been to lead David to a verdict which would implicitly bind him. Neither of these provisions apply to Absalom, who had carried out a cold-blooded act of revenge and who was one of several brothers (cf Anderson 1989: 186).

The implication is that these discrepancies in this case reveal the underlying dependency on the binding force of the law. By introducing these inappropriate details, the woman subverts the genre of the juridical parable. She and Joab were not seeking to gain a verdict on the basis of a parallel case. Rather, they sought to prevail upon David gradually by awakening his mercy for a son who had committed fratricide (Simon 1967: 225).

Hoftijzer takes issue with Simon over this, arguing that these extenuating circumstances serve to deflect David from noticing the parallel, but do not alter the legal position. He sees the ruling of the king as binding in that the underlying nature of the cases is the same. The extenuating circumstances are not relevant to the judgment. 'The conclusion must be that for juridical cases being parallels, they "only" needed to be so in the basic facts: one brother killing another, a rich man stealing from a poor one, a prisoner of war let go' (1970: 423 n.1).

(1972) argues that Nathan's device suggests that court officials could act as judicial mediators. There is no other biblical evidence for this.

4.2.2.2 Critique of Juridical Concept

So to defend the concept of the juridical parable, Simon has to argue that 2 Sam 14 is a derived form which subverts the genre, a strange way of justifying his concept, or else Hoftijzer has to claim that the most general similarity can give rise to a binding precedent. This claim on the face of it seems unlikely. Such similarities might have a moral force, but not a legal one. The whole thrust of the halakhic revision of legal material in the Old Testament and its elaboration of basic principles illustrates the fact that a workable system of law demands that vague parallels be systematised into strict case law.

Without this strict definition, it must be possible to demonstrate that the general parallel established between the two cases is unassailable if it is to be regarded as legally binding. This is doubtful in the case of Uriah, as we have seen, but even more so in the case of Absalom. As Whitelam puts it: 'The terms of reference in the case presented by Nathan were so vague that it is unlikely that the king would be bound by any such precedent' (1979: 128). In any case, as Phillips points out, 'While the king was subject to the criminal law and therefore could suffer divine punishment for breach of it, it is possible that as head of the judiciary he was outside the jurisdiction of the courts, and therefore could not be indicted and tried on a criminal charge' (1970:135 n.33). Whether or not we grant the assumptions, acknowledged and unacknowledged, that Phillips makes²⁴, he brings out the point that there is

²⁴ Is it really the case that God punishes those who breach the criminal law? Is it not rather the case that the criminal law is based on divine sanctions in the jurisprudence of the Old

an irremediable gap between our knowledge of the text and our knowledge of its context. The circularity of the argument is plain: Why does the king accept the sentence? Because he is bound by the law. What evidence do we have that he is bound by the law? He accepts his sentence²⁵.

In the case of the Tequite woman, Whitelam casts even more doubt on the appropriateness of the legal interpretation. Again, this case has been used to argue that the king had a function as supreme court of appeal. Whitelam, as we have remarked, sees such stories as reflecting, indeed promoting, an idealised view of the monarchy, and not necessarily representing any actual situation. Whitelam concludes that 'there is no

Testament? In any case, any such statement has to rely on assumptions, justifiable or not, about the relation between these texts and any actual social or legal events in Ancient Israel.

²⁵ In the absence of other evidence, however, those interested in the judicial procedures of ancient Israel have used these stories to argue for particular views of the nature of Israelite society. So, for instance, Bellefontaine defends her use of 2 Sam 14:4-20 in promoting her thesis that judicial authority of the chief was being expanded at the expense of autonomous local groups by saying: 'The account presents a story plausible enough for the king to believe and which is realistic enough to allow us to glimpse through it the dynamics of a politically sensitive judicial situation' (1987: 48). She sees no reason to suppose that there is a legal system in place which traps David. On the contrary, Joab's purpose is to make David realise the potential of the burgeoning monarchy to override local traditional law. David's hesitancy reflects the boldness of this move with its far-reaching implications for the legal system of Israel. Bellefontaine is quite explicitly not concerned with the functioning of the parable within its present setting.

evidence to show that the "juridical parable" ever functioned in ancient Israel. The discrepancies between basic facts indicates that not too much importance can be attached to the decisions that were given in each case. The indications are that these were literary constructions whose purpose was an attempt to exonerate David of any blame in the Bathsheba affair or the case of Absalom' (1979: 135).

Gunn in fact dismisses the legal element as 'merely an accident of these particular cases where the one to whom the parable is addressed happens to be a king with (implicit) judicial powers' (1982: 41). He claims that all that is necessary is that the parable is sufficiently apt to induce the addressee to make the decision that the teller deems apt, and that when the key is provided 'he cannot escape the force of its application to his own case' (1982: 41). But this begs the question of what provides that force, what prevents that escape.

Claudia Camp, citing Gunn with approval, regards the wise women of 2 Samuel as early practitioners of 'literatherapy' in all but name, using stories to create the conditions of distancing and re-involvement that can help a person see a situation in which they are involved from a new perspective (1981: 21-22). The trouble is that it seems rather ineffective in the long term. In actual fact, in neither of these situations does David seem to regard himself as bound to follow out any more than the letter of the provision. His recall of Absalom is half-hearted to say the least, and there is, as we have seen, little evidence of major repentance on his part once the price of his son's life has been paid in 2 Sam 12.

4.3 THE PLACE OF THE OATH

4.3.1 THE BINDING OATH

Much more to the point is an observation that Hoftijzer makes, but does not follow up: 'The woman takes much pains to let David confirm his ruling on oath' (424). Later he remarks in passing that this means that God is 'guarantor for the king's ruling (He is that because of the oath sworn by the king)' (438). Strangely, he sees this imposition of the oath as a difference between this story and the parable of Nathan: 'It is also told of her that she went to much trouble to let the king confirm his ruling in the fictitious case by an oath (see especially 2 Sam. xiv 12), *both the prophets do not do this [my emphasis]*' (443). This is odd as David's response to Nathan is a blatant oath: '*As the Lord lives, the man who did this is a son of death.*' If Nathan does not go out of his way to induce David to swear an oath, it is because he did not need to.

Just because of this, my contention is that the oath is the key to these stories²⁶. As Hoftijzer puts it, God is

²⁶ This point is made forcibly by Bovati (1986: 329 n.4) who notes that an oath often accompanies a royal verdict, perhaps, he speculates, to prevent the possibility of the king going back on his decision. Fokkelman also acknowledges the importance of the oath, if rather obliquely. In the context of his contention that the standard translation of 2 Sam 14:1 that David was 'longing' for Absalom is misleading, he adduces as evidence the 'way he carries out to the letter the oath elicited from him but violates its spirit' (1981: 26). He sees the oath by David as the climax of the story, in that 'Joab and the woman have achieved the utmost' in gaining this irrevocable commitment from David (1981: 135), which he himself acknowledges without demur in v. 21. 'The king acknowledges that he is bound by the oath. ... David does not complain, however, asks no questions, and does not reproach Joab

the guarantor of these verdicts. It is the invocation of the divine name in both contexts that is the crux of the device²⁷. The implications of this we shall go on to explore in our next chapter. Our immediate concern will be to strengthen this claim in the case of 2 Sam 12 by looking at the structure of analogous passages.

4.3.2 1 KINGS 20: 35-43

In this context, it is instructive to turn to the other story often bracketed together with Nathan's parable and the story of the wise woman of Teqoa as a juridical parable, the story of the encounter between Ahab and a nameless man of God in 1 Kings 20: 35-43. In this pericope, there is no oath. Does this then invalidate our argument?

On closer inspection, this story turns out to be the exception that proves the rule. In it, we find what amounts to an inversion of the device in 2 Sam 12 and 14

about the fiction. He immediately faces up to the consequences of his oath, and by realizing them at once he seems to accept them chivalrously' (1981: 145). 'Seems', however, because as Fokkelman points out, when it comes to the point David only goes as far as recalling Absalom. He will not meet him. Fokkelman here, however, is reading more into the oath than is there. All that David swears to is the fact that not one hair of the fratricide's head will fall to the ground. The issue of the recall from exile and reconciliation is not specifically addressed in the oath.

²⁷ McCarter sees the royal oath as placing the fictional fratricide and by implication Absalom under royal protection. He regards the oath itself as a factor in the danger that the woman predicts for the people of Judah; '... now that the oath is in the air, she is probably correct. At this point Israel is in trouble either way' (1984: 352).

which lays bare the inadequacy of the juridical model of these stories.

1 Kings 20: 35-43 concerns one of the sons of the prophets who appears on the scene to confront King Ahab with the dire consequences of his leniency to Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, whom the Lord had instructed him to dispose of. The prophet presents himself in the guise of a soldier who has been charged on his life, or the payment of a talent of silver²⁸, to guard a captive whom he has allowed to escape. He makes no explicit plea for a ruling, but by telling his story to the king implicitly invites a judgment in his favour.

The king's answer is to pick up on the implicit verdict in the prophet's own account. The prophet himself in the guise of the soldier has told the king that he had made an agreement to forfeit either money or his life if he failed in his duty. The king turns his own words back on him: 'So shall your judgment²⁹ be; you yourself have decided it' (1 Kings 20:40). The judgment which the man has recited is to be applied to him.

²⁸ The absurdly high value of the ransom, about one hundred times the price of an ordinary slave, coupled with the anonymity of the characters, has been used by Whitelam (1979:168-70) to argue that the whole incident is a literary construction. As such it is designed to show that the king is subject to divine law despite his *de facto* status of operating outside the jurisdiction of the courts. Whitelam sees this as the function of Nathan's parable as well.

²⁹ 'Judgment' here bears a double sense in Hebrew as well as English: it refers both to the judgment that the prophet/soldier has pronounced, or more accurately, reported, and also to the judgment or sentence which will be passed on him.

The king thereby explicitly establishes the principle that the prophet is condemned out of his own mouth. Here the prophet has provoked the king into articulating the necessary convention that the judgment a man utters applies to him. Here, of course, there is the further refinement that it is not the prophet's own judgment of his own case which applies to him, but the penalty attached to the contract he entered into with the man who assigned him to guard the prisoner. By accepting the contract, the king implies, he has accepted the judgment.

It is this principle that the prophet then turns against the king. If a soldier is to be held to the contract he made, how much more should the king of Israel be held to the consequences of breaching a divine command? He uses the king's own avowed principle to drive home the consequences for the king of his own remissness in making a treaty with Ben-hadad, whom the Lord had devoted to destruction. Note here that the juridical model again proves inadequate. There is no appeal by either party to any code of law or legal practice. It is the logical and linguistic consistency and coherence of both characters' positions that is the binding force.

This exception proves the rule, because here the prophet first ensures that the king himself establishes the principle of self-condemnation³⁰. Ahab is caught, not by

³⁰ This point is made manifest by the fact that the NEB translates v.40 as follows: "As I was busy with one thing or another, sir, he disappeared." The king of Israel said to him, "You deserve to die." And he said to the king of Israel, "You have passed sentence on yourself." The words italicised here are the translators' addition. Robinson (1972:233-4) comments, "... these words have been added by the N.E.B. to clarify the sense. The

an oath, it is true, but by the articulation of a principle of applicability. The important conclusion that this entails is this: such applicability is shown to be not an automatic process but one that must be assented to. There is no obligation on the king to be consistent in applying his own judgment to himself except in so far as he has explicitly articulated and assented to the principle. In the other two cases, this principle of self-condemnation is not articulated. What is binding in these cases appears to be David's oath.

4.3.3 2 SAM 12 AND 2 SAM 14

So these two stories, 2 Sam 12:1-5 and 2 Sam 14: 6-7, rather than juridical parables, should perhaps best be described as *Oath-provoking stories*. The function of both is to induce the king into swearing an oath.

Throughout this argument, however, the nature of the parallel between the two incidents has been taken almost as read. On closer inquiry, however, we may find that some of the cautions that have been given in our earlier review of the phenomenon of *mise en abyme* have been missed. In order to explore the possibility of such a complication of the process, we will turn to a fuller

translators think that they were at some time accidentally omitted from the text. The words 'You have passed sentence on yourself' are then understood as the response of the prophet to the king. In the Hebrew they are the king's reply and do read strangely.' On the contrary, the argument given above shows that the implicit juridical model that the NEB translators are drawing upon creates the problem which they then have to solve by introducing a modification unsupported by any textual evidence. If the juridical model works, then why is the king induced to state the principle? Rather than the text, it is the model that needs to be changed.

examination of 2 Sam 14 and the nature of the
relationship between this text and 2 Sam 12.

CHAPTER FIVE

2 SAMUEL 14: READING AS PARODY

5.1 READING 2 SAM 14

5.1.1 THE TEQOITE WOMAN'S TALE

The story of David's encounter with the woman of Teqoa begins by recording Joab's recruitment of a 'wise woman' from the village of Teqoa whom he instructs to pretend to be a mourner¹. He tells her to disguise herself as a widow and waylay the king. The narrator adopts a rather teasing device by informing the reader that the woman is disguised, and by telling us that Joab instructs her in what to say to the king, but omitting to record the conversation between the woman and Joab. The reader knows that a plot is hatched, but is left in suspense as to how it will play itself out.

As Fokkelman points out, the reader is left knowing more than David, but less than Joab and the woman. He argues, 'This provides two advantages: we listen with interest to the woman whose message is as new for us as it is for David, and so we can easily empathize with David's position. Simultaneously, we are kept in suspense from step to step about her succeeding/failing, and along with Joab, looking on from behind the

¹ The position of 'wise woman' is thought to represent a recognised status in Israelite society, designating a woman who has particular skills in negotiation. For a discussion of the existence of such a recognised role, see Camp 1981.

scenes², we follow the way in which she gives form to the script with which she has been prompted' (1981: 129)³.

² Fokkelman here goes beyond the text. Joab disappears from the text between vv.3 and 21. His prompt appearance in verse 21 might suggest that he is nearby, but Fokkelman has no other evidence to support his contention; even less so the confident assertion by Smith (1899:137) that 'Joab, as a high officer of the court was standing by the king during the woman's plea.'

³ We then read that 'Joab put the words in her mouth.' This raises the whole question of whose words we are reading in the subsequent speeches of the woman. Are they hers, Joab's, or do they have an odd ambivalent status? This becomes particularly complex in verse 19, where the woman admits to David that she is speaking at Joab's behest. The woman answers that Joab put the *dbrym* (words) in her mouth 'in order to change the course of affairs (*pny hdbbr*)'. The oddity of the relation between their speech comes to a head here. Did Joab put these words in her mouth, the words that expose his own part in her language? Did he instruct her to 'drop the mask'? Or is she here speaking her own words? What meaning does the distinction have in the text? The point becomes more complex in view of the fact that the same word *dbr* is repeated in the text.

For a discussion that comes down strongly on the side of Joab, see Nicol (1982), continuing a line of argument deriving from Whybray (1968:59) who declares that this is 'really a story of Joab's wisdom rather than that of the woman.' Nicol argues that in a literary situation the claim that Joab might have anticipated the king's every objection is 'entirely possible' (1992:98-99). If this is so, then we are really talking about the wisdom of the narrator (see the comments of Spangenberg 1986:275). How are we to extract a quantity such as 'Joab's wisdom' from the speech of the woman displayed in the story, unless we follow Nicol's

questionable assertion that v. 3 implies Joab has authorial control over every word uttered? Nicol's warning that using such a story to derive confident reconstructions of Israelite society is however well taken.

Hoftijzer (1970:419 n3) lists the parallel uses of the phrase 'to put words in the mouth of' in Ex 4:15, Num 22:38, and Ezra 8:17. In each of these cases, he contends that the subordinate (Aaron, Bileam and the Judean high officials respectively) has to carry out the instructions of their superior (Moses, God and Ezra) to the letter. Camp (1981:17 n.8) argues that the woman needs great skill to carry out her assignment in the face of the unpredictable responses of David. She comments that Aaron is appointed as Moses' mouthpiece because of his eloquence, not merely to relay Moses' words, but to put them in the best form. This is also seen in the other case where we see Joab in the role of 'script-writer'. In 2 Sam 11:19-21, Joab instructs the messenger who is to take the news of Uriah's death to David in what to say. What the messenger actually says is rather different (2 Sam 11:22-24). The difficulties and wider consequences of these passages will be discussed later. Fokkelman declares 'The Tekoite woman has delivered a masterpiece' (1981:141). Of course, all the words that are presented to us in the text are those of the narrator.

Hermisson (1971:142) turns the argument round by regarding the woman as a fictional necessity created by the story which she tells. The story of a widow pleading for her son requires a widow to tell it. The fact that she is a wise woman pretending to be a widow is a further narrative refinement which Hermisson's account does not seem to require. This begs the question as to how we are to decide that the the narrator is using his invention and when he is constrained by historical exigencies. Again, this problem will recur. Suffice it to say for the moment that what we are confronted with is a literary artefact, which may or may not be under constraint from considerations of historical accuracy.

In essence, the story the woman relates is simple. She tells David that she is a widow. One of her sons has killed the other and the family is demanding the murderer's life in return, which would leave her husband without an heir⁴. However, it involves the counterposition of two opposing versions of justice. One involves the death of a son, and the need for that death to be avenged. Opposed to this is the need for an heir to carry on the name of the father. If the son is executed to fulfil the demands of justice, this will spell not only his own death, but the death of his father's line. The king tells her that he will deal with her case later. The woman then announces that she will take any guilt on herself, and again presses the king. He declares that no-one will harm her. The woman then urges him to invoke the Lord, which he does, swearing that 'As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son's head shall fall to the ground.'

She then exposes the parallel between the king's banishment of his own son Absalom and the peril her son was exposed to. David's own conduct is at odds with his judgment. She begins an explanation of why she made this point to the king, but he asks her whether Joab was

Whatever else we can say, it is at least subject to the conventions of literary production.

⁴ The parallels between the plot of this story and the story of Cain and Abel are commented on by Blenkinsopp and by Brueggemann in his elaborate association of the story of Adam and Eve with this part of 2 Samuel.

with her in this. She concedes that it is so. The king then tells Joab that he will recall Absalom.⁵

5.1.2 ALONSO SCHÖKEL'S HERMENEUTIC MODEL

5.1.2.1 Alonso Schökel's Reading

This story is the basis for the paper by Luis Alonso Schökel in which he introduces the idea of 'David as reader' which we have been exploring (Alonso Schökel 1967). In his characteristically sensitive account, Alonso Schökel begins by discussing the role of each of the named characters with an eye on the eventual model of reading that he will erect. Joab represents the author, but it is imperative for the success of the story that his identity becomes apparent only at the end of the transaction. He is not a disinterested participant as his own future depends on the result of this transaction, but for that very reason he has to be absent, and entrust the enactment of the dramatic scenario he has devised to the woman of Teqoa. Joab has already appeared in this role of dramatic coach, when he instructs the messenger who is bringing the news of Uriah's death to David in 2 Sam 11:19.

David as 'spectator' or reader is not left to the role of critical observer. He is induced to become so involved in the drama that he takes a 'leap on the stage and "enters the play"' (1976: 195). Alonso Schökel draws the parallel with Elihu in the book of Job, who is so frustrated by the dialogue between Job and his friends that he cannot contain himself and intervenes (Job 32).

⁵ This simplicity, however, is masked by a whole catalogue of textual problems. These are dealt with in some detail in the appendix to this chapter.

He also draws the parallel to the playlet in *Hamlet*, where the spectators find to their increasing discomfort that they are by no means outside the play they observe.

Alonso Schökel analyses three aspects of the woman's intervention. Her speeches have three functions: to convey *information*, to indicate her *emotional* involvement in the case, and place a *plea* before the king to act. He sums up David's reaction as follows: 'To the information he responds by understanding, to the expression by interest, and to the plea by involving himself/pledging himself' (1976: 197)

He goes on to break down this reaction further. To begin with, 'To understand, David must be ignorant' (1976: 197). In order to be affected by the juridical issue, David must be unaware of the fictional nature of the text. The woman must breach the barrier which his anger against Absalom has imposed to his full understanding of the situation. In order to do this, the woman has to intervene with judicious admixtures of reactions. Contrary to some other critics, Alonso Schökel, far from finding the woman verbose, admires her expertise in maieutics which allows her to 'checkmate the king in eight moves'.

5.1.2.2 Alonso Schökel's Conclusions

Alonso Schökel draws several conclusions from this encounter which have hermeneutic consequences. Firstly, he notes that the identity of the author is not the key to the interpretation of the story, *pace* the researches of many historical critics. Neither is the identity of the referent. Both of these have an effect but only by their revelation at the end of the story. In both cases, it is David, the 'reader', who names the referent. He it is who introduces Joab's name when he asks the woman if Joab's hand is behind this, and he it

is who finally identifies the banished one as Absalom when he speaks his name in his instruction to Joab to go and fetch the young man Absalom.

Secondly, he argues that it is in dialogue with the woman that David comes to identify the nature of his own attitude, and thus to be able to change it. Alonso Schökel sees this coming about in the final description of David as 'wise' as a result of his forensic skill. The epithet 'wise' is transferred from the woman to David. His wisdom is shown in the fact that he chooses rightly between good and evil in recalling his son. As we shall see, this may be the point at which we have to begin to take issue with Alonso Schökel. How wise David has been, and the connotations of that epithet in 2 Samuel are matters we shall discuss below.

However, Alonso Schökel goes on to derive some interesting general lessons from this text. The point of hermeneutics is not dispassionate understanding, but transformation. The quest for the author can be a great excuse to misunderstand the content, and can relieve the the reader of moral responsibility for his reaction to the text. So David as reader is revealed by the alteration of his attitude from hostility to acceptance of his son.

Neither is it necessary to identify the referent. To enquire what the name of the woman's dead husband was is not germane to the task of interpretation. Alonso Schökel uses the image of tying the text down by details of reference like Gulliver immobilised by the Lilliputians. By doing so, the text can be safely confined to the past, to the historic.

But the point is to respond to what he calls its *symbolic* meaning, the way in which any narrative, whether fictional or historical, embodies human values in the mode of its telling rather than in its content.

This timeless quality enables the text to 'cut the hawsers' (1976:204) of its historical setting and enter into dialogue with a contemporary reading.

Alonso Schökel ends by summarising the significance of David as reader in the following ratio:

$$\frac{\text{David}}{\text{Tequite}} = \frac{\text{Reader}}{\text{Text}}$$

This final scheme leaves out the role of Joab, the present yet absent figure of the author in the text. Alonso Schökel is here pointing out the necessary intervention and commitment of the reader in the construction of the meaning of the text. Yet here again we may have questions to ask about the nature and effectiveness of David's interventions.

5.1.2.3 Critique of Alonso Schökel

Alonso Schökel's account of David's response seems at least questionable. His David is 'understanding', 'interested' and 'involved' in the story. Yet compared to David's response in 2 Sam 14, the whole transaction is much more drawn out. As opposed to his two short interventions in 2 Sam 12 1-15, David is given nine speeches in 2 Sam 14: 1-24. Why should David's utterances be so different in quantity, when, as we have seen, all we can mean by speaking of David as reader is the analysis of his utterances and their relation to the texts that precede them? On this basis alone, the parallel between the two cases is less clear than it might seem at first sight. So what is the nature of their relationship?

Our earlier theoretical discussions led us to the conclusion that David as reader means David as utterer. It is in the entextualisation of the perlocutionary aspect of his reaction to the woman's speeches that we will find the answer to what it means to explore 'David as reader' in this text. In this case, we will make use of the insights of H.P. Grice into 'conversational implicature' (Grice 1975).

5.2 2 SAM 14 AND CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

5.2.1 GRICE AND IMPLICATURE

Grice suggests that conversation takes place under the guidance of a *co-operative principle* which places speakers under the obligation to express themselves in a way that will facilitate interpretation, and requires hearers to assume that the remarks they hear are designed to make sense, so that they will make an effort to interpret what they hear, even if at first its relevance seems unclear.

5.2.2.1 Grice's Maxims

Grice summarised the speaker's obligations under four maxims:

1. *Quantity*

a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

b) do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. *Quality*

Try to make your contribution one that is true

- a) Do not say what you believe to be false
- b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. *Relation*

Be relevant

4. *Manner*

Be perspicuous

- a) avoid obscurity of expression
- b) avoid ambiguity
- c) be brief
- d) be orderly

5.2.2.2 Leech's Maxims

Grice's principles were expanded upon by Leech (1983: 132) to include what he called the *Politeness* principle, which falls under the following six maxims:

1. Tact maxim: Minimise cost to other/maximise benefit to other
2. Generosity maxim: Minimize benefit to self/ maximize cost to self.
3. Approbation maxim: minimise dispraise of others/ maximize praise of others.

4. Modesty maxim: Minimize praise of self/maximize praise of self.
5. Agreement maxim: Minimize disagreement between self and others
6. Sympathy: Minimize antipathy between self and others

These principles and maxims are proposed by Grice and Leech as the conventional conditions to be met if the communicative transaction is to be maintained. Like all conventions, they are revealed more readily in the breach than in the observance, and as we shall see, obedience to them may not be in the speaker's control - judgments as to what is 'true', 'relevant' or 'ambiguous' are just that: judgments. We shall also go on to question whether ambiguity is ultimately avoidable.

5.2.2.3 Implicature

It is when these maxims seem to the hearer to be broken that we may have examples of *conversational implicature*. The hearer has to come to a decision whether:

- a) they are being broken in an attempt to disrupt the communicative transaction
- b) the breakdown has occurred through a failure in the system, for instance a mishearing or misunderstanding,
- c) the speaker is challenging the hearer to the imaginative creation of a context in which the utterance would be relevant.

The speaker may then either:

- 1) break off communication as a result of being contradicted, teased or snubbed,
- 2) attempt to repair communication, perhaps by asking for a word to be repeated, or rephrasing her own remarks
- 3) opt to interpret the remark in the light of shared unexpressed knowledge of the wider context.

Implicature also encodes social and political assumptions about the relationship between the speakers, as Leech seeks to point out. In particular, the kinds of assumptions about information and values shared between the speakers and which therefore can be assumed as context and brought into play in the resolution of implicatures both reveal and establish the social standing of each.

Conversation may be designed to reinforce or to change these patterns of relationship, and this may be effected by the use of more or less formal modes of speech and address, for instance. Of course, this whole analysis bears more than a passing similarity to the analysis of schemata which we used in our earlier chapter.

As we have also discussed, the problem is compounded in the case of conversations recorded in a text, or overheard: the two cases are formally not very different. In both cases, the two interlocutors may be able to assume a commonality of knowledge or experience denied to the reader or the overhearer. With these points in mind, let us see what we can deduce about the interaction between David and the Teqoite woman by analysing David's responses to the woman. We will analyse each of the nine transactions between David and the woman in the light of these maxims,

5.2.2 DAVID'S RESPONSES AND IMPLICATURE

1. v.5: In response to the woman's cry 'Save O king', David's response is literally 'What with you?' This short phrase is found in parallel contexts as a response to a request⁶. However, what the words do not convey is the tone in which it is said. It could express a willingness to help, or else an irritation at being importuned. The woman's use of the title, and the king's possibly rather peremptory use of this short pronominal phrase already establish a distance between them.

2. David's first response to the woman's story of her son is to reply, 'Go to your house and I will give orders concerning you.' This speech seeks to bring the encounter to an end, by specifically sending the woman away, and is also notably non-committal. The king only promises to 'give orders'; we are not even at this stage told whether these will be in the woman's favour or not. Conceivably, they could be orders to silence her.

In any event, David evades giving any decision on the case. He could be said to breach the maxim of quantity, in not giving a full answer, and in some sense also breaches the politeness principle: the woman is ordered to go, at some cost of effort to herself, whereas the king only takes on the vague obligation of 'giving orders'. The use of the simple imperative indicates the

⁶ Jos 15:18, where Achsah requests Caleb for land; 1 Kings 1:16, where Bathsheba requests David's confirmation of Solomon's succession; 2 Kings 6:28, where the king is requested to judge between two cannibal mothers. Interestingly, all these occasions involve a woman requesting something from a ruler. Moore (1990:100) points out the assonance between *mh lk* and *mlk* in 2 Kings 6:28, commenting that 'the king is the problem!' The masculine form of the question does not occur in the Former Prophets.

king's assumption that he has no need to negotiate with the woman. In several ways, he breaches the cooperative principle. This all adds up to a signal that he is not interested in continuing the communicative transaction.

3. The woman attempts to repair the communicative transaction by an exaggerated use of the Tact and Generosity maxims, taking the cost of the transaction upon her or else, by implicitly accusing the king of breaching these maxims, depending on the reading we take of this verse. In response to the woman's acceptance of, or fear of, the guilt arising from her quest, David promises that anyone who says anything to her will not touch her again. This still does not impinge on the case in point. What David promises is her own protection, and that by means of a rather sinisterly understated threat. The fate of her son is not alluded to at all. Here David seems to breach the principle of co-operation, again signalling that the transaction is at an end.

4. v.11 In response to a direct plea from the woman that he invoke his God, David swears that not one hair of her son's head shall touch the ground. David utters an oath which, as we shall explore further, has far-reaching consequences, consequences of which he is unaware. In the immediate context, however, we are left in the dark as to what prompts him to this. Is it a considered judgement, or is this the rash exclamation of a king who is driven to distraction by the reiterated questioning of the woman?

After David's reluctance and equivocation in his previous speeches, this second hypothesis seems equally plausible, especially as the woman's speech adds no new information. She simply repeats her plea that her son be not destroyed by the avenger, this time without the metaphorical flourishes. What induces David to give

such a different response, which could have been his immediate reply to her speech in verse 7? In terms of Grice's analysis, it may be that here David is breaching the maxim of quantity; the assurance David gives is at once hyperbolic, too strong for the situation, and, as we shall see, ambiguous, involving a breach of 4c.

5. v. 18 In response to the woman's long speech justifying her actions, the king commands the woman not to hide anything from him. The request implies that there is a possibility that she is doing exactly that, a possibility the reader is well aware of. It may be that ~~the~~ woman's breach of the maxims of quantity, in that she gives the king much superfluous information, and of manner, in that her speech is long, repetitive and larded with obscurities and exaggerated expressions of respect for the king, lead to a suspicion that she may also be breaching the maxims in other ways. Specifically, she is concealing the source of her request, and thus not telling the whole truth.

David's reply is thus not a response to any aspect of the content of the woman's speech. Instead it is directed to the parameters of the communicative transaction, setting out the requirement for honesty. David makes explicit the need to assume the maxim of quality for the transaction to continue.

6. v, 19 After the woman acquiesces in the king's insistence on the compliance with his imposed conventions, David requests to know if Joab has been at the bottom of this. The reader may interpret this as *indicating* ~~that~~ David has detected the doubleness of the woman's speech, and has deduced the identity of the other voice in it. What leads him to this conclusion? Surely it is the fact that the woman's concern for and knowledge of the relationships between the king and his son imply a degree of shared knowledge, values and ends between

herself and the king that David knows does not accord with the reality of their respective situations. This gap between social reality and the world of her language opens up to be filled by the figure of Joab.

David's final two speeches are not directed to the woman. His speech in v.21 to Joab, 'Behold, I grant this', indicates that he expects Joab to assent to the fact that there has been a request made, and that Joab knows what it was. Neither need be specified. However, the king goes on actually to speak the words that will bring about the desired effect, to bring back the young man Absalom. However, his final speech throws a question mark over this. For the first time in this transaction, we are given a speech without being told specifically who the hearer of the speech is. Is it directed to Joab, or to some other unnamed servants? Who is its audience, apart from the readers who overhear it?

It also puts a limit on the king's response. The king puts his own interpretation on the recalling of the banished one which the woman has lured him to. To recall is to recall, but not necessarily to restore to former privileges. It is only after a subsequent transaction which involves the burning of Joab's field that the king and his son are restored to one another, but, as the following chapters will reveal, the problem remains unresolved.

So, by this analysis, does David actually meet Alonso Schökel's description of him as a reader? Surely, in fact, David is revealed as a very reluctant participant in the transaction, who is induced, perhaps through exasperation, into making a rash oath and acquiesces to the trick of his general with a bad grace, only fulfilling as much of the requirement of his oath as he need. As we have seen, his initial responses can be

interpreted as attempts to break off the communication, rather than as expressions of interest, enthusiasm and commitment.

5.2.3 DAVID AS READER IN 2 SAM 14

The David of 2 Sam 12 seems to fit Alonso Schökel's description more closely. In that first encounter, David is interested, enthusiastic and commits himself to an unequivocal condemnation and judgment on the rich man. How different his response to the wise woman proves to be.

Once bitten, twice shy, it seems. Is the reader meant to take David's sense of *déjà vu* as a prompt to a sense of *déjà lu*? In his discussion of the nature of Nathan's parable David Gunn asks, 'What would have happened if the king had said to Nathan, "Well, I'm sorry for the poor man but there may be more to this than meets the eye - take the case to the examining magistrate"?' (Gunn 1982: 41). This is virtually what happens in this second encounter, bringing a slightly farcical aspect to it, reminiscent of the black humour of David's own repeated attempts to persuade Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:7-13).

So what, then, is the relationship between these two stories, and these two pictures of David as reader?

5.3 2 SAMUEL 14 AND 2 SAMUEL 12

5.3.1 SIMILARITIES

Jan Fokkelman (1981) lists the similarities between David's encounter with the woman of Teqoa and the encounter with Nathan as follows:

Again, David is approached as a judge with a fictitious case which will lead to a *tua res agitur*. Again he binds himself with an oath ... when he passes sentence. Whereas Nathan was the voice of God in Ch[apter] 12, here the wise woman is the voice of Joab and simultaneously an envoy. Again, an impasse of David's must be broken through. (Fokkelman 1981: 129)⁷

He draws particular attention to the equivalences between the actors in each story:

The parallelism in the series of scenes shows that the duo Joab/woman is the successor to the twosome Yahweh/Nathan. The voice of David's conscience is Nathan's voice is God's voice [sic], and the voice of the woman is Joab's voice - they too make an appeal to David's conscience. Just as Nathan is literally and essentially sent by God, so too is the woman sent by Joab. (1981: 142)

Fokkelmann sums up the effect of these similarities as follows: 'The entire parallel ... already points to the particular significance of the figure of Joab.' (1981: 158) For Fokkelman, the structural equivalence of the roles of God and Joab in these two stories serves to reveal to the reader the God-like qualities of Joab the reconciler.

One could equally well argue that it reveals the Joab-like qualities of God. Rather than revealing Joab as a God-like reconciler, God's own efforts at reconciliation have the same overtones of ruthlessness and fallibility

⁷ These parallels are also noted by Waldman (1986) who points out the close similarities between the two transactions.

as Joab's. In 2 Samuel 12 God is responsible for the death of one of David's sons, as Joab will be in 2 Samuel 18. Throughout the books of Samuel, Joab's ruthless interventions on David's behalf, yet often against David's own wishes, have a quality recognisable in God's relationship to his chosen ones. To take one instance, Joab's remarkable reproach to David in 2 Samuel 19:5-7 has strong emotional resonances with the message God conveys to David through Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:7-12.

There is no *a priori* reason to suppose that the analogy between the two protagonists is to be read in one direction alone. In any case, how far a reconciliation is effected in 2 Samuel 14 is a moot point. Just because David finds himself entrapped by his oath into recalling Absalom does not mean he has to like it. The grudging way in which he adheres to the letter rather than the spirit of this agreement fuels Absalom's frustration and contributes the eventual outbreak of hostilities between them. The results of Joab's intervention seem to me better expressed by David Gunn when he writes that it is 'to prove disastrous for the state and, in the aftermath of the war, for Joab's personal status.' (1982:158) So much for the wisdom and benignity of the protagonists of this incident. Again, is Joab here shown to be God-like, or does this perhaps cast a shadow over God's actions in 2 Sam 12?

In effect, what Fokkelman seems to me to miss is the mutually destabilising effect of a *parodic* relationship between the two accounts. In putting forward this thesis it must be acknowledged that parody, like irony, is difficult to demonstrate conclusively. This is especially so as its effect is achieved by playing on the competence of the reader. This is well illustrated by the reception of Jonathan Swift's 'Meditation on a Broomstick', a parody of a pious reflection which he

composed out of exasperation at being obliged to read to his patroness from Boyle's *Meditations* evening after evening. On one occasion, he substituted this parodic invention of his own. The good lady, all unawares, pronounced it the most inspiring of the lot.⁸

5.3.2 DEFINITIONS OF PARODY

Despite the difficulties, one offer of a definition of parody is to be found in John R. Miles's article 'Laughing at the bible: Jonah as parody' (Miles 1990). For Miles, parody assumes the audience's prior knowledge of a familiar text or a familiar style, what Gérard Genette in his turn calls the 'hypotext', on which the parodist then composes his 'hypertext' (1982: 11-12). This textual or stylistic starting point differentiates parody from other ostensibly similar genres such as satire or burlesque. But Miles goes on to assert that the target of the parody is not so much the text itself, but the audience that takes it seriously. So, to refer to our earlier example, Swift's parodic meditation was not really directed at Boyle's texts *per se* - black marks on white paper are not troubled by such things - but at his patroness's uncritical appreciation of the assumptions and conventions they embodied. Even Boyle as author only comes under attack in so far as he took these conventions seriously himself. Parody calls the audience's attention to the conventions operating in a text or a style by seeming to obey them but applying them to incongruous purpose⁹.

⁸ This anecdote is recounted in Murray (1954: 112-113)

⁹ Templeton (1992) discusses the role of parody as a mode of interpretation, but also as an internal process within the Old Testament. So, citing Davidson (1983:181) who sees Job's outburst

Gary Saul Morson, expounding Mikhail Bakhtin's account of parody, reinforces this view when he claims that by removing an utterance from its original occasion, or perhaps displaying its conventions in a new context, the parodist can expose 'the otherwise covert aspects of that occasion, including the unstated motives and assumptions of both the speaker and the assumed and presumably sympathetic audience' (Morson 1989: 71). He also usefully lists three techniques which may alert the reader to the possibility that a particular text may be a parody, even in the absence of any original. These diagnostic signs are:

1. exaggeration - particularly the heightening of contrasts
2. incongruity - countergeneric elements
3. punning - perverse reading of polysemic elements.¹⁰

in 7.17-18 as a 'bitter parody' of Psalm 8:4, he sees parody as a mode of appropriation of texts which transposes them to a new context (1992: 285). He asks 'And if Scripture parodies Scripture, does that not give Writing a licence (or license) to do the same? There are songs, of course that give rise antiphonally to the "song alongside the song" (the *Beigesang*), but also songs that evoke "the song against the song" (the *Gegensang*). And man being plural, with a legionary soul, both functions, singing alongside, and singing against, can be fulfilled simultaneously and ambiguously. To which a third may be added: a song sung against itself, a text written against itself (and every other), a literary critical text that is also critical of the criticism; in a word, *self-parody*' (1992:284).

¹⁰ Adapted from Morson (1989: 67).

Although these can only be indications, we are in the fortunate position of having both hypotext and hypertext if we wish to postulate that 2 Samuel 14 represents a parody of 2 Samuel 12. Is there then any evidence of the presence of these elements which might support such a reading?

5.3.3 2 SAM 14 AS PARODY: THE EVIDENCE

In fact, it is there in abundance. First of all, there is clearly a bathetic contrast between the figures David has to deal with in 2 Samuel 14 and 2 Samuel 12. We have already pointed out that God seems to be substituted with Joab, whose press elsewhere in Samuel is none too favourable. Similarly, whereas in 2 Samuel 12 we have David confronted with the forbidding figure of an accredited prophet sent at the bidding of God, in 2 Samuel 14 we have the slightly ludicrous figure of a wise woman who has swathed herself in dust and weeds at the bidding of Joab¹¹. Within the conventions which 2 Samuel at least purports to embody, women are not of high status, and to be described as wise is no compliment. We need only think of the depiction of the 'very wise' character who appears in the intervening chapter, Amnon's treacherous friend and adviser Jonadab.

¹¹ Hoftijzer (1970:443 n.1) remarks: 'The different status of the prophets in these cases is already clear from the fact that they represent God and speak in His Name, as both Nathan and the unknown prophet do (2 Sam. xii 7, 1 Reg. xx 42). This is quite a difference from the Tekoite woman who speaks for one of the king's servants and does not reveal the fact until forced to do so (2 Sam. xiv 19). She acts - as the prophets do - under directions, but she on the other hand does not derive any authority from it.'

This leads us to consider the way in which David himself differs between the two encounters. We could encapsulate this by saying that his faults in chapters 13 and 14 are those of impotence, while in chapters 11 and 12 the problem is a sight too much potency. The grand sins of adultery and murder in chapter 11 merit divine intervention and penalties which jeopardise the whole future destiny of the Davidic dynasty. By contrast, the ugly mess of chapter 13 which is compounded by David's failure to act decisively merits only the intervention of Joab, and the issue is over the banishment of one of David's sons, not necessarily a matter of life and death.

As we have seen, his impetuous but decisive response to Nathan is replaced with a cautious, even anxious, reaction to the woman's request. David is reduced to a banal parody of himself.

There are also several intriguing features in the language of the woman of Teqoa's speeches which are interlarded with somewhat forced similes and proverbs to the extent that they pose some knotty problems of translation. The surviving son is compared to a coal about to be quenched (2 Samuel 14:7). The transience of human life is captured in the image of water poured on the ground which cannot be gathered up again (2 Samuel 14:14). It is at least noteworthy that the books of Samuel are otherwise very sparing of figurative language. There are exceptional passages which all turn out to represent the language of persuasive negotiators put to the test: Abigail's speech to David where she seeks to avert his threat of massacre against Nabal's household (1 Samuel 25:24-31), Hushai's deceptive advice to Absalom as he seeks to persuade him not to attack David (2 Samuel 17:7-13), and the wise woman of Abel who is negotiating with Joab for the safety of the city caught up in Sheba's revolt (2 Samuel 20:18). With no direct evidence available, it is tempting to wonder if

the woman of Tekoa's distinctive style might represent a recognisable heightening of a wise woman's typically flowery speech to an audience familiar with such characters.¹²

The wise woman also assures David twice that he is 'like an angel of the Lord', both in his ability to discern good from evil (v.17) and in his knowledge of what is going on (v. 20). It is hard to avoid the conclusion

¹² On this point, see B.P. Church (1947: 30): 'Two of the most striking examples of real literary skill [in 2 Samuel] are the speeches of the woman of Tekoa and of Hushai the Archite. Both speeches are meant to deceive, and the author has shown their speciousness in their unnecessary length and flowery language. Figures of speech are comparatively rare in Hebrew prose, and especially simile which is more complex than the metaphor which comes naturally to the Oriental... As a result of this literary device a smooth persuasiveness is given to the arguments suggesting the insincerity of the speakers.'

Contrast this with the verdict of Claudia Camp who sees the apt use of proverbs by the wise women of 2 Samuel as part of their professional status and their success in diplomacy: 'In the wise women's use of proverbs to lend incisiveness and authority to their arguments, we have seen the kind of persuasive counsel, presented in a compelling manner, that a royal advisor maybe employed' (1981:21). See also Bar-Efrat's comments on Hushai's speech to Absalom: 'The speech, which is coloured throughout by a plethora of images and figurative language, reaches its apogee in this respect at its close. In order to conceal the weakness of his plan, Hushai appeals to his audience's emotions, using fantastic descriptions in order to inflame its imagination. Excitement suppresses rational consideration' (1989:236).

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. Indeed, it is never clear that he identifies her accurately as a wise woman acting the part of a mourner. It is easier to interpret this story on the basis that he imagines the woman to be a genuine plaintiff whom Joab has coached in making the application of her own case to David. As for his ability to discern good and evil, it is precisely his woeful failings in this which have created the situation that Joab is trying to rectify, to say nothing of his conduct in chapters 11 and 12,

If we go on to look at the other occasions on which this same expression 'like an angel of the Lord' is applied to David in the books of Samuel, they merely serve to reinforce this impression. In 1 Samuel 29:9, Achish, king of Gath, proclaims that David is 'as blameless in his sight as an angel of the Lord', when the reader knows from 1 Samuel 27:8-12 that David has been busily slaughtering Achish's allies behind his back. The other person who uses the expression of David is Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 19:27) in a context where David is making the third in the series of contradictory judgments as to the proper distribution of Saul's property between Ziba and Mephibosheth. David's wisdom and discernment are certainly not put in a good light by this case, especially as Mephibosheth's final word is to propose his own solution in contradiction to David's! We might finally note that the only other use of the expression 'angel of the Lord' comes in 2 Samuel 24, where God sends an angel to bring a plague on the people of Israel as a result of David's decision to institute a census. Here the judgment of this king who is 'like an angel of the Lord' is the cause of God's angel of destruction being unleashed on the people. Can we really after all

this take the wise woman's words as any kind of compliment?

In any case, just how 'wise' is the intervention of Joab and the wise woman? Cazelles (1955:26-27) is uncompromising: 'The wisdom in question is the same as the insidious wisdom of Jonadab in the preceding chapter (13:3) whose advice does end up delivering Tamar to Amnon but with the consequences which one knows.'

Indeed, Jonadab is described as a 'very wise' man. His advice to Amnon, which precipitates the whole crisis that leads to Absalom's banishment, involves disguise. In order to sleep with his half-sister Tamar, Amnon is to pretend to be ill, just as the wise woman is to pretend to be a mourner. It involves deception not only of Tamar, but more particularly of David, whose permission is necessary before Tamar can visit Amnon in his quarters. It is also a wisdom which is about subverting reason and decency, which paradoxically leads to what Tamar calls 'wanton folly'. Jonadab's other contribution is the devious trick of consoling the king for the death of his eldest son by reassuring him that only one of his sons is dead, not all of them. Jonadab then takes credit for giving him this good news, without revealing any compunction for over the death of the man who was his friend. Jonadab comes out of the story as the wise one who understood what was happening. Who, however, was better placed to know that Amnon was the target of Absalom's wrath? This wisdom is manipulation in pursuit of self-interest, which leads to the death of the one who imagines he is the beneficiary.¹³

¹³ Bar-Efrat in his detailed study of 2 Sam 13 offers a possible interpretation that might exonerate Jonadab on the grounds that his intervention was well-meant, but disastrous, leading him to

So in the case of 2 Samuel 14, do we see a parallel? The ultimate result of the intervention is civil war and the death of the possible benefactor Absalom in the pursuit of the throne, a death which ultimately leads to the circumstances of Joab's own execution.

Gunn judges that in his intervention in 2 Samuel 14 Joab for once has the interests of the state at heart in his intervention but it proves disastrous both for the state and for Joab's personal status (1982:100). McCarter concludes that it is the Machiavellian disregard for larger moral issues in the interests of attaining an immediate goal typical of the sons of Zeruah. Anderson (1989:191) argues that the concern of the narrative is actually to exonerate David to an extent from the 'ill-advised recall of Absalom'. He ends up trapped by his own oath through his merciful response to the woman. The effort to exonerate David shows just how ill advised the action is thought to be.

Yet it might be argued that the problem is not so much the recall of Absalom, but the disregard that David shows him by refusing to admit him to his presence. If this is so, what price David's wisdom and obedience?

turn against Amnon in disappointment (1989: 249-50). Even if we grant that his motives towards Amnon were not duplicitous, his attitude to David and above all to Tamar was far from commendable on the most charitable interpretation. This reading attempts to save Jonadab's morals at the expense of his ability to foresee the result of his intervention; either way, his 'wisdom' seems of dubious value.

On a more general point that the proleptic epithet 'wise' often serves 'to drive home in retrospect the ironic difference between the character's auspicious potential under God and his miserable performance in opposition to God' see Sternberg (1985:345).

His reluctant and half-hearted response is hardly consonant with the picture of the interested, eager pillar of moral virtue that Alonso Schökel depicts. Either way, the wisdom of the episode is severely thrown into question.

5.4 THE CONSEQUENCES OF PARODIC READING

5.4.1 REREADING 2 SAM 12

If this accumulated evidence does point to a parodic relationship between the stories, what does this imply? Perhaps it is necessary to state explicitly that to say that the story in 2 Samuel 14 is a parody of that in 2 Samuel 12 is not to imply that 2 Samuel 12 at some time existed as an independent text, 2 Samuel 14 being composed as a satirical commentary upon it. In itself this description of their relations carries no such implications. 2 Samuel 12 has a priority conferred by the sequence of reading. In its present position in the book of 2 Samuel, 2 Samuel 12 establishes the pattern which we recognise in 2 Samuel 14. It is only as we recognise that pattern, however, that it makes sense to speak of 2 Samuel 12 as the 'original' story. It becomes the original by virtue of its repetition. What is implied, however, is that at the level of composition there is an awareness of both texts. If, as, for example, P. Kyle McCarter would claim, 2 Samuel 12 and 14 are from different documents (McCarter 1984: 305-6), at the very least the close correspondence between the stories shows a very heavy redactorial hand.

Important as such questions may be, I am more concerned at this juncture to explore the consequences of this reading for our understanding of what is going on in the text of 2 Samuel 12. The thought that there may be a parodic relationship between chapters 12 and 14 entices us to reread chapter 12. As Joan Hartwig expresses it:

The parody emphasizes similarities between the original and the imitation; yet the difference is so great that it activates the potentialities of meaning in the original. Because of the almost automatic reviewing process it promotes, the parody heightens and expands, even as it qualifies, the meaning of that which it imitates. (Hartwig 1983: 5)

This puts a question mark over the traditional reading of the story in 2 Samuel 12 as a tale of repentance, a reading enshrined in the ascription of Psalm 51 to the penitent David. In his reading of the story, Stuart Lasine argues strongly that David's behaviour shows no real change after his encounter with Nathan, and certainly not the radical improvement that a full-blooded repentance would provoke. 'His repentance,' says Lasine, 'does not teach him what he needed to learn in order to rule more justly when similar situations arose.' (1984: 85) Certainly David's subsequent actions in 2 Samuel do not show any sign of increased insight or moral stature, a point well borne out by 2 Samuel 14.

Lasine also suggests another line of thought when he points out the rather mawkish sentimentality of Nathan's parable, even more marked in some of its readers. He latches on to Fokkelman's rhapsody on the love of the pauper and the sheep:

The twosome of pauper and sheep grows into a unity in an atmosphere of warmth and care. This unity is practical and emotional and therefore existential. It emanates the mystical lustre of everyday life, as we often suspect and even come to know in our most open moments. (Lasine 1984:103, quoting Fokkelmann 1981: 74)

In contrast to this, we might want to ask 'What kind of a man is it that goes to bed with a sheep?' This quotation from Fokkelman, which it would be hard to better in any parody, prompts the thought that within the framework of 2 Samuel 11 and 12, Nathan's story is itself functioning as a parody of David's acts. For the reader of 2 Samuel, that is. In terms of our strict definition of parody as a genre dependent on a prior text, David does not experience it as a parody. We as readers do, as we compare it to the text of chapter 11.

By its exaggerated and slightly ludicrous insistence on the emotional implications of a minor incident of sheep-rustling, it calls attention to the disproportion of David's own actions and his disregard for the emotional lives of others. David is forced to re-read his own depiction of the events in 2 Samuel 11. What he had perhaps represented to himself as 'the tale of the crafty king merely getting what was his due', is re-presented to him as the tale of a powerful man revealing his callous selfishness.¹⁴ The question then becomes, to what extent does David recognise the truth of this description?

The answer would appear to be that he does recognise it, but not to the extent that this causes any fundamental shift in his attitudes. Just as he recognises the hand

¹⁴ See Brown (1984: 56): "... the story about an innocent ewe lamb was not really a story about an innocent ewe lamb, but a story about a guilty king ... David suddenly saw, in what must have been a sickening moment of insight, that he had been reading not only "The Ewe Lamb Story" incorrectly, but "The David Story" as well, which up to that point had gone: "Kings are entitled to whatever they want and are entitled to get it by whatever means they choose."

of Joab in his encounter with the Tegoite, but does not fully grasp the implications and depth of this involvement, David both acknowledges and fails to acknowledge the hand of God in Nathan's intervention. 'I have sinned against the Lord,' he says (2 Samuel 12: 13), but such recognition is not necessarily repentance. This ambivalence may be reflected in God's double-edged forgiveness. David is to survive, but at the expense of his son.

5.4.2 DAVID AND THE OATH.

After this rather circuitous comparison of David as reader in the two accounts, there is one particular aspect of this parodic relationship which I wish to explore. The widow's insistence on the oath, and the complexity of the transaction by which she secures it emphasise starkly the importance of David's oath in both stories. David as reader is David as swearer. In both cases, David's oath serves parallel functions. It ties David to the words rather than the meaning of his utterance.

In both cases, too, the oath is the handle by which David's reading is turned back on him. The oath as ambiguous utterance means that David as utterer is committed to a reading that another can re-read or counter-read.

Both stories then turn on a rather grim play on words. In chapter 14 David swears that not one of the banished son's hairs will fall to the ground. Peter Ackroyd has noted that this is a possible link with the unusual insistence on the beauty and quality of Absalom's hair in 2 Samuel 13, making specific the implicit

identification of Absalom with this son¹⁵. (Ackroyd 1977:135; see also Anderson 1989:190).

What has not often been noted is that this oath is fulfilled to the letter, but not in spirit. Absalom is killed, despite the implication of David's oath that he will not be harmed. But as he is hanging in a tree, not one of his hairs does touch the ground¹⁶. Could this be a parodic heightening of the notorious equivocation of oaths and oracles? Both the reference and the the outcome of the oath are unlooked for and not part of David's immediate intention, by which we must mean the immediate resolution of their polysemy.

It leads us to wonder if there is a similar phenomenon in 2 Samuel 12:5. David's expletive describing the rich man as a 'son of death' finds a telling echo in Nathan's warning that his 'son' will 'die'. Such reinscription of the figurative as the literal has been identified as one of the common features of parody.

¹⁵ The connection, however, between the mention of Absalom's hair in 2 Sam 14:26 and his death - though generally on the assumption that Absalom was entangled by his hair - has a long history; see the Mishna Sota 1,8 which reads 'Absalom gloried in his hair - therefore he was hung by his hair' [cited by Fokkelman 148 n.148]. There is no textual evidence that Absalom was entangled by his hair, which would make it an indirect cause of his death, but this does not alter the fact that he dies suspended in mid air with the consequences noted in the text above.

¹⁶ Blenkinsopp (1966:51 n.6) is the only commentator who makes this connection, and then only allusively: 'We should note the finesse in putting into David's mouth the assertion: "Not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground" (cf. 1 Sam xiv 45) in view of the tragic but ludicrous nature of his own son's death.'

The implications of this suggestion will be explored further in our next chapter where we explore the nature of the biblical oath. David as reader, as we have already established, means David as utterer. If David as reader in both of these cases becomes David as swearer, then the function of the oath in the text and its implication for the character of David become key questions.

It also brings to the fore the relation between the oath and polysemy. As we have seen, the question of polysemy and its resolution is central to the process of reading. In exploring the nature of the oath, we can investigate in depth a particular instance of this process.

APPENDIX: TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF 2 SAMUEL 14

5a.1 2 SAM 14:1

The text of 2 Sam 14 has created many points of controversy, which in themselves reveal interesting points about the reading stances of its commentators.

The chapter begins by intimating that Joab, David's general, has noted that the king's 'heart' was 'toward' or 'against' [לע] his son Absalom, who is in self-imposed exile after killing his brother Amnon. Immediately we hit on an interpretive crux which is not resolvable by textual criticism. The problem of interpretation here is due to the fact that the preposition לע is intrinsically ambiguous in a way that is not reproducible in English. Was David 'for' or 'against' his son?

Most commentators have read this as expressing David's desire to be reconciled to his son (e.g. Hertzberg 1964: 328, Gordon 1986: 266), a desire which Joab furthers by his scheme. Fokkelman's contrary judgment (1981: 126) that 2 Samuel 13:39 and 14:1 express David's continuing hostility to his son is a minority view, but one for which he adduces several lines of defence. In particular, he argues that the length of time that has elapsed before David expresses any desire for reconciliation, and the very fact that Joab has to embark on an elaborate ploy to trap David into recalling his banished son both support his contention¹.

¹ Fokkelman's arguments have borne subsequent fruit. Anderson (1989:187) has 'the king's heart was still set against Absalom.'

5a.2 2 SAM 13:39

The decision between the two positions depends on how 2 Sam 13:39 is interpreted, but it too is ambiguous. At this key juncture of the story the phrase expressing David's attitude to his son is capable of radically different interpretations. In 2 Sam 13:39, this is partly due to a problem in the syntax of the MT, but this merely emphasizes the point that the interpretative decisions by commentators as to whether the king is hostile to his son or not have to depend on judgments not reached on linguistic grounds.

The MT of 13:39 reads:

וַתֵּכֵל דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ לֵצֵאת אֶל-אַבְשָׁלוֹם כִּי-נָתַם עַל-אַמְנוֹן כִּי-מָת:

The masculine subject 'David the king' follows a feminine verb which causes a problem of interpretation. LXX and Q both indicate *rwḥ hmlk* 'the spirit of the king' as the subject, which would indeed accord better with the feminine verb. The meaning of the verb itself is a source of dispute. Its root meaning is taken as 'to cease' or 'finish'. In this context, however, does it simply mean 'to cease', or does it carry the extended meaning of being 'spent', or 'exhausted', by longing? The alternative interpretations of the subject of the verb have rather different connotations in relation to the infinitive which comes next in the sentence, translated 'going out' or 'going forth'. If we take the MT as it stand, David the king's 'going forth' suggests a literal movement. In the suggested emendation, the verb has to take a more metaphorical colouring when expresses the 'going forth' of the king's spirit. There is also

McCarter opts for the more neutral 'the king's mind was on Absalom' (1984:344).

disagreement whether the king (or king's spirit) goes out to (ל) Absalom or against (על) him, though, as we have seen, the preposition על itself carries a range of connotations. As a result of these various possibilities, translations of this verse cover the following range:

'And the spirit of the king longed to go forth to Absalom; for he was comforted about Amnon, seeing he was dead' (RSV)

'And David gradually began to lose his abhorrence of Absalom, for he was comforted about Amnon seeing he was dead' (Hertzberg);

'King [David's] enthusiasm for marching out against [him] was spent, for he was consoled over Amnon's death' (McCarter);

'The king's anger ceased to be actively directed against Absalom for he had become reconciled to the fact that Amnon was dead' (Anderson)

'David longed intensely to march out against Absalom, for he was grieved about Amnon that he was dead.' (Jongeling, cited in Fokkelman)

Each translator has had to come to a decision on the question of the nature of David's relationship to his son on very fluid textual evidence. Is 'going out' to one's son an expression of loving longing, or of military aggression? The fact that such different conclusions are possible indicates graphically that such decisions reveal more about the assumptions about the dynamics of such relationships than the various commentators bring to the text than they do about the text itself.

5a.3 2 SAM 14:15-17

One particular point of debate has been over the place of verses 15-17. McCarter (1984: 345-46) supports the suggestion of Budde (1902: 267) that they should be moved up to follow verse 7. His argument is that the woman drops her disguise in vv 13-14, when she makes the direct application to David's case. When, then, she seems to revert to speaking about the case of her son in v.16, the incongruity is glaring. It is this passage which leads to Budde's notorious accusation that she is guilty of 'blosse Schwatzhaftigkeit' [mere chatter] (Budde 1902:267). Budde is not the only critic to excuse the incoherence and long-windedness of the woman's speech on the grounds of her sex. This judgment is questionable in itself, but may also serve as a short cut in the attempt to delve into the implications of her speech. Perhaps there is more to the matter than this suggests.

In McCarter's view, these problems are solved by moving the verses, when they become part of the initial articulation of her request rather than a redundant amplification of it. Hoftijzer (1970: 438) opts to circumvent the problem by interpreting the woman's words as citing rather than reverting to her case. He agrees with McCarter in regarding the latter as impossible now that the mask has been dropped, but does not thereby conclude that the text has to be reordered. Fokkelman, on the other hand, takes another line. He attempts to demonstrate that the problem only exists because of McCarter's assumption: '...the fiction has not yet been given up, however; on the contrary, even in v.16 the woman still plays the role of waylaid widow who is counting on the king's redeeming word'; and he notes: 'Her bringing up the Absalom case doesn't necessarily mean that she drops her mask'. (1981: 131 and n.6).

Though Fokkelman does not spell this out, the problem seems to be that there are three positions, not two, that the woman adopts:

1. widow pleading her case
2. widow pleading her case with consciousness of its application to the state of the nation and the king's family circumstances.
3. wise woman acting the part of 2.

Dropping the veil of role 1 does not mean that she is exposed as really occupying role 3 rather than 2. Indeed, it is not clear that David ever identifies her with role 3. It is possible that Joab could have found a widow with just such a grievance and persuaded her to make the application of her (genuine) case to David's actions. David's question 'Is the hand of Joab with you in this?' would not enable him to discriminate between the two possibilities. This may have a bearing on the assessment of the acuity shown by David in seeing through the ruse. Hertzberg, indeed, sees these verses as 'particularly fine' (1964: 332), and sees the woman's strategy as an example of a kind of subtlety of negotiation still to be found in the East.

5a.4 2 SAM 14: 13-14

Further problems are found in verses 13-14. The extent of these can be seen by comparing the translations offered by McCarter (1984: 336) and Fokkelman (1981: 135)

'Why have you devised such a thing against the people of Yahweh?' she said. 'For by reason of the king's having said this thing they become guilty, in that the king does not permit his exile to

return. For your son is dead, and as water spilled on the ground cannot be gathered up, so he cannot take up his life again. Yet it seems reasonable to the king to keep his exile away from him.' (McCarter 1984: 336).

Why hast thou then undertaken such against God's people?!

Yes, because the king has uttered this, he is guilty for not taking back his cast-out one.

Verily, we must certainly die,

Yes, as water oozing into the soil which can no more be gathered up!

But would God make no effort or take no initiative to let the cast-out one not remain cast out from him? (Fokkelman 1981: 135)

The MT of these verses reads:

13 וַתֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁיב הָאִשָּׁה וְלִמָּה חֲשַׁבְתָּה כֹּזֵאת

עַל־עַם אֱלֹהִים וּמִדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה כְּאִשִּׁים לְבִלְתִּי

הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־נִדְחוֹ: 14 כִּי־מוֹת נְמוֹת וְכַמִּים הַנִּגְרִים אֶרְצָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא

יֵאָסְפוּ וְלֹא־יֵשָׂא אֱלֹהִים נֶפֶשׁ וְחָשַׁב מִחֲשָׁבוֹת לְבִלְתִּי יָדַח מִמֶּנּוּ

נִדְחָ:

Both Fokkelman and McCarter agree that *מדבר* is best taken as the proposition *mn* + *pi'el* infinitive construct of *dbr* rather than as the *hithpa'el* participle (see here BDB 181). This verse is the only occasion where the participle would appear in this construction. Otherwise it is only found in Num 7:89 and Ezek 2:2; 43:6 (the Numbers citation is dubious). The question becomes one

of what the king has done *in* or *by* uttering this phrase. What has the king perpetrated against the people?

Hoftijzer discusses the history of interpretation of this verse thoroughly (1970:430 and notes). One interpretation sees a parallel between David's banishing of Absalom and the threat to the widow's son with Israel here cast as the widow and Absalom as the favoured son of the people. David has thus taken the widow's remaining son. Hoftijzer, however, prefers to see the reproach as directed at the king for implicating the people in the consequences of his unfulfilled oath. Fokkelman sees the guilt as the king's, but McCarter, following the same line of thought, takes it to a further, but unnecessary, stage in making the king's guilt the fact that he has made the people guilty and so regarding the people as the subject of the verb.

A greater difference is to be found in the translation of verse 14. Fokkelman here follows the MT which seems to record a proverbial saying about the irreversibility of death. Again Hoftijzer gives an extensive review of interpretations (1970:431-34 and notes). The proverb has been read by various commentators either as a warning to David that if he does not act immediately, it may be too late, or else as an encouragement to put the death of Amnon in perspective. Hoftijzer's own suggestion is that the emphatic nature of the infinitive construct is commonly used when the death sentence is passed, not for natural death. The woman is implicitly accusing the king of having passed a death sentence on the people by his conduct. That being said, however, might we not ask how else the woman could make a powerful statement of the brute facts of mortality? Just because a death sentence lends itself to such vehemence does not imply that every such statement carries that force. McCarter dismisses all these explanations in favour of the LXX^L reading 'your son is

dead'. The MT reading is a 'trite generalisation' (1984:341). McCarter's own reading is hardly a startling revelation. The phrase is followed by a metaphorical proverb as both agree. As we shall see, the very triteness of the statement could explain its presence.

The final sentence reveals major differences. McCarter again follows LXX^L. He reads the MT 'lhym as 'lyw, taking the subject not as 'God' but as the dead son who cannot take up his life 'for himself'. Fokkelman, on the other hand, again follows Hoftijzer who attempts to make sense of the MT as it stands. He takes the expression ns' nps literally 'to take up [one's] life' as an idiom for 'to aim one's activities at' or, in Fokkelman's interpretation, 'to make an effort'.

In the second phrase, the interpretation differs widely. McCarter translates the MT literally as 'and he [God] devises a plan not to keep an exile away from him.' Having opted not to follow the reading 'lhym above, he here again follows LXX^L, and translates a text which supposes a rather different Hebrew basis וַחֲשַׁב הַמֶּלֶךְ מַחְשָׁב לַנֶּדָּח מִמֶּנּוּ נִדְּחָה . This he translates literally as 'And the king thinks a thought to exile from him an exile' which he paraphrases as the phrase in his translation. Unusually, he gives no detailed reconstruction of the process by which the LXX may have arrived at this version. We might then suspect that this is a case where it has resorted to paraphrase, and may not be reflecting its Hebrew *Vorlage* with any accuracy. Fokkelman is influenced by Hoftijzer who follows the MT, but here not completely. Hoftijzer again argues for an idiomatic usage whereby, rather than 'plans', the word מַחְשָׁבוֹת should be taken as 'deeds'. Fokkelman opts for the lesser extension of meaning to 'initiative', which combines elements of deed and plan. Both see the two phrases as 'syndetic paratactic sentences'. Neither McCarter or

Fokkelman adopts the very common resource of reading וְהִשָּׁב 'take away' for וְהִשָּׁב 'plan', a suggestion of Ewald's, which gives a sense along the lines of 'And God will not take away the life of one who devises plans not to keep an exile away from him'.

The NIV offers a version which does not demand any emendation of the MT or Hoftijzer's appeal to idiom: 'But God does not take away life: instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.' It does, however, impose a rather elaborate, though not impossible, syntax on the Hebrew sentence, and also a rather dubiously defensible piece of theology. God quite obviously does take away life on many occasions in the Old Testament, though the woman of Teqoa would not be the first or last person who was prepared to assert as a general theological principle the view of God's actions that suited her immediate purpose.

CHAPTER SIX

YAHWEH AND THE OATH IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

There has been remarkably little discussion of the oath forms of the Old Testament and what there has been concentrates, not unexpectedly, on philology and comparative linguistics rather than on the narratological functions of the oath¹. Rather than seeking to elucidate the origins of the characteristic form of the biblical oath, I want to ask what conventions are at work, and what is the reader led to take from the manipulation of these conventions. Narratologists have not investigated this phenomenon in any great depth, presumably because it is not a standard device in modern literature or, for that matter, speech².

6.1 OATH FORMULAE

¹ The most comprehensive treatment is still to be found in J. Pedersen's *Der Eid bei den Semiten* (Pedersen 1914) which forms the basis of the more recent papers by Blank (1950-51), Lehmann (1969) and Gehman (1975).

² The most useful discussions are to be found in investigations of the poetics of ancient Greek drama, though it is well to be wary as to whether like is being compared to like. The plot of a play like *Oedipus* turns on the consequences of oaths taken. It is Oedipus' pledge to find and banish Laius' murderer that sets in train the tragedy. In particular, Barbara Goff's discussion of the poetics of Euripides' *Hippolytus* (Goff 1989) has proved very useful.

There are several ways to swear in the Old Testament. The root which underlies the vocabulary of swearing in OT Hebrew is שָׁבַע *shaba'*, which is also the root for 'seven'. Quite what the connection between the two is remains unclear: one common explanation is that the sacrifice or exchange of seven animals was an ancient practice accompanying or confirming an oath³. Something of the sort seems to be behind the rather obscure story in Gen 21:22-31 where Abraham sets apart seven ewe-lambs as a witness to the fact that he dug the well at Beersheba, a name that can equally well mean the well of the oath, or the well of seven. We will come back to the elements of gift, sacrifice and witness accompanying the concept of the oath.

Another verb which seems to share this semantic field is נָדַב, which is commonly translated as 'to vow'. The narratological significance of the difference in use between the two verbs is not easy to determine. Both involve an act of commitment to the future, or an anchoring of uncertainty, though *ndr* most often involves the idea of a gift pledged to God either in return for divine favour, or as an earnest of the speaker's sincerity⁴.

³ So, for instance Lehmann (1969), citing Abraham's sacrifice, with similar sacrifices of seven animals in Num 23:1, 14, 23, 29 and in texts from Canaanite sources. Pedersen (1914) disputes this position.

⁴ For a study of this particular verb and the whole phenomenon of the vow in Israel and cognate cultures, see Cartledge (1992). Cartledge devotes his final chapter to a consideration of the literary function of vows in Hebrew Narrative. Although it is necessary to acknowledge the point that he makes at the very beginning of the book (1992: 11) that scholars, and especially

literary scholars, have been all too cavalier in their use of the terms 'oath', 'vow' and 'curse' which are clearly differentiated in the biblical text, in terms of their narratological function there are marked similarities. Cartledge acknowledges that the 'building block' of both vow and oath is the promise.

In the case of the oath, the promise is tied to a curse. Cartledge points out that in such cases, though there is a conditionality to the oath, it is the curse, not the oath, that is conditional (1992:18). Though formally this is true, the introduction of conditionality into the formula brings a shadow of possibility that the oath may not be confirmed. He contrasts the vow with the oath in that whereas the oath moves from human action to God's potential response, the vow moves in the opposite direction. It typically consists of a plea for divine action, followed by a conditional promise of the worshipper's response.

Cartledge concludes his study with an examination of the literary function of the five vows which he classes as 'narrative vows' in the Old Testament:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Num 21: 1-3; | Israel's vow to put cities under the ban. |
| Gen 28: 10-22; | Jacob's vow to set up pillar and serve God. |
| Jud 11:30-40: | Jephthah's vow to sacrifice the first who meets him on his return. |
| 1 Sam 1:1-11 | Hannah vows to dedicate her son to Yhwh. |
| 2 Sam 15:1-8 | Absalom's reported vow to worship in Hebron. |

For the purposes of this discussion, based as it is on the oath that David swears in his response to Nathan, I propose to concentrate on those oaths and vows which invoke the name of God.

6.1.1 'THUS DO THE LORD AND THUS ADD ...'

There are two basic formulae to be investigated here, each with minor variants. The fullest formula is an oath invoking a curse: 'God do so to X and more also if ...' a certain state of affairs comes about, or is not found to be true. So, for example, as part of his mourning for Abner, David swears 'May God do so to me and more if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets' (2 Sam 3:35).

There are several intriguing elements to this formulation. First of all, it ties the oath firmly to the *body*. The physicality and vulnerability of the body becomes the ground in which the possibility is anchored. The uncertainty of the pledge is bound to the

Cartledge explains that in all these cases, the narrator has deliberately used the device of the vow as a crucial turning point in the narrative: 'These examples,' he concludes, 'give convincing testimony that the biblical authors and editors not only understood the high significance of the vow as a popular cultic practice, but also consciously exploited its emotive and structural potential in their work' (1992: 199). But beyond this, he does not engage in a detailed analysis of the nature of this use. He does, however, make the point that in the last case, Absalom is prepared to lie in a context where he takes the name of the Lord in vain, a point that relates to the consideration of the use of the divine name in oath formulae.

continuity of the flesh. This bodily aspect of the oath is of great importance. When push comes to shove, it is the body which will bear the mark; this is what is behind a pledge such as the pound of flesh exacted in *The Merchant of Venice*. Nietzsche made the point that the pledge of continued responsibility is often exacted in the form of pain, pain being the great mnemonic. The promisor gives over his body to the mercy of the creditor.

6.1.1.1 Scarry: Oath and Wounding

Elaine Scarry has carried this idea further in her book *The Body in Pain*, where she elaborates the thesis that the very inarticulacy of pain is what makes it possible to anchor the vagaries of speech into the body (Scarry 1985).⁵ The concrete reality and vulnerability of the body are enlisted as the earnest of the elusive faculty of speech when there is a 'crisis of substantiation' (1985:127). It also is made plain in the association of promise and sacrifice, and of promise and bodily mutilation, most powerfully seen in the practice of circumcision. What the mind may forget, the body will remember. And, as we shall see later, the faithfulness

⁵ Scarry (1985:127) refers specifically to the biblical account of Abraham's servant placing his hand under his master's thigh as he swears to find a wife for Isaac among Abraham's kin (Gen 24:2-9). 'An unsubstantiated statement (unsubstantiated because its realization belongs to the future) is given substantiation by being placed immediately beside the material reality of the body. The place touched by the servant is so intimate that it is almost interior to the body, and it is in oaths often the interior of the body that is exposed, usually through some form of wounding, in attempts to bestow the force of the material world on the immaterial.'

of divine promises are manifested in the alteration, the wounding, of human beings, of human flesh. This is the only evidence human beings can have of the constancy of the divine, in the constancy of the body.

Man can only be created once, but once created, he can be endlessly modified; wounding re-enacts the creation because it reenacts the power of alteration that has its first profound occurrence in creation (Scarry 1985: 183).

The use of wounding the body as a way of evoking or witnessing to the presence of God is attested in several passages in the Hebrew Bible. Pre-eminent, of course, is the sign of circumcision. In addition, there is the phenomenon by which the name of God is written on people's bodies: 'and another will write on his hand "The Lord's"' (Isa 44:5). The priests of Baal cut themselves with knives to invoke their god (1 Kings 18:28). The fact that this is forbidden to the people of Israel as a sign of mourning (Deut 14:1; Jer 16:6) indicates that it was a temptation.

But there are more particular scenes of wounding: the laming of Jacob at the ford Jabbok (Gen 32:25); the assault on Moses which leads to his circumcision (Ex 4:24-26); or the disease that smites Job (Job 2: 4-8). In these cases, the Lord's special interest is made public by the alteration of the body of the one singled out.

The case of Job demonstrates the point. Job's problem is that he is singled out by his righteousness, and so comes to the attention of God and Satan. Even after the loss of his wealth, his home and his children, Job blesses the Lord. Satan is then permitted to assail Job himself, when he puts forward the argument, 'Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But

put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh and he will curse thee to thy face' (Job 2:4-5).

Job's body becomes the final site of the battle for blessing. His other losses are either of property, or may have been caused by factors outside Job's immediate responsibility. Even the death of his children may have not been directed at Job. Job 1:5 records Job's punctilious sacrifices which atone for the possibility that his sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. When they are killed, it could be that this possibility has come to pass; perhaps it was Job's sons' own misdemeanours which brought about their deaths as a tragic but just act of vengeance by God, an interpretation suggested by Bildad in Job 8:4. When Job's own body is smitten with sores, however, no other can share the imposition. It is Job's dilemma that he knows that his body is knit together and sustained by God, and yet it is maintained only as the arena for his pain. It is the witness of God's sustaining power devoted however to his destruction.

6.1.1.2 Oath and Conditionality

Secondly, this formulation brings out the *conditionality* of the oath. Such an oath hold out the possibility of failure in its very structure. By this formula, the desired result is introduced by excluding, but thereby admitting, the possibility of its failure. But without the possibility of failure there would be no need for, and no virtue in, the swearing of the oath at all. If human beings always said what they meant, oaths would be superfluous; if human beings could only tell falsehoods, there would be no point in instituting such a custom either. It is because human communication is fallible

that there is a place for the oath or the promise in speech⁶.

⁶ It is instructive to turn to the discussion of the promise in Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He uses it as an example to illustrate the application of the moral principle of universalisability in deciding whether it can ever be right to promise deceitfully:

The shortest but most infallible way to find the answer to the question as to whether a deceitful promise is consistent with duty is to ask myself: Would I be content that my maxim (of extracting myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold as a universal law for myself as well as others? And could I say to myself that everyone may make a false promise when he is in difficulty from which he cannot otherwise escape? I immediately see that I could will the lie but not a universal law to lie. For with such a law there would be no promises at all. Inasmuch as it would be futile to make a pretense of my intention in regard to future actions to those who would not believe this pretense - or if they overhastily did so - who would pay me back in my own coin. Thus my maxim would necessarily destroy itself as soon as it was made into a universal law. (1978: 22-23)

By the same token, however, if we make it a universal principle that everyone must only speak the truth, then we also destroy the concept of the promise, which would become supererogatory. Even given the inescapable slippage of language, if truth telling is a universal law, and if I act on that assumption, it becomes unnecessary for me to preface any statement about my future intentions with the words 'I promise'. My bare word is security enough. So it seems that either way the act of promising is abolished.

Such conditionality is carried over into the other form of the oath which we will examine. This second form is introduced by the formula, 'As X lives, ...'. X may be either divine, Yhwh or God, or else another human being, most often the king⁷. Conventionally, the verb itself marks the difference between a oath dependent on the divine, and one predicated of a human being; before the name Yahweh or other divine equivalents the form *hê* appears whereas in other contexts, most often invoking the king, the verb is pointed *hay*.

Following this introductory formula, we find the substantive clause of the oath intriguingly retains in Hebrew the syntax of conditionality and negativity in a way that is hard to reproduce in English. So, for instance, when Saul swears to the witch of Endor that she will not come to any harm (1 Sam 28:10), he says literally, 'As the Lord lives, if you are met by evil for this deed'; i.e. 'you will not be punished for this'. What in English is a negative statement is in Hebrew given the form of a conditional. Here, the oath is tied to the continuity of the existence of God, or of

This demonstrates the point that the possibility of failure, of misfire and abuse, is constitutive of the act of promising. Indeed, it arises because these are inescapable conditions of communication.

If this is so, what does this indicate about the status of the subject if it is predicated on the promise?

⁷ See here Greenberg (1957) who argues that the particle ׀ should be regarded as the construct of a noun, the singular of the otherwise attested plural ׀׀׀ 'life', and so translates the formula, 'by the life of ...'. This makes little material difference to the development of our argument.

the human being addressed. The guarantee of coherence and stability is the unchangeableness of God.

6.2 DIVINE NAMES AND THE OATH

6.2.1 THE INVOCATION OF THE DIVINE NAME

The invocation of the name of God in an oath is a serious business. The third of the ten commandments makes this clear: 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain' (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). Lev 19:12 enjoins 'And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane your God; I am the Lord.'

The prophets also emphasize the heinousness of swearing by another name than Yahweh's. Jeremiah rails against the people for swearing 'by those who are no gods' (Jer 5:2). Amos proclaims, 'Those who swear by Ashimah of Samaria, and say "As thy god lives, O Dan," and "As the way of Beersheba lives," they shall fall and never rise again' (Amos 8:14). Zephaniah decries hypocritical swearing by 'those who bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom' (Zeph 1:5). The same point is made positively in Jer 12:16 where the Lord promises to Israel's neighbours: 'And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name "as the Lord lives", even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people.'

This particular example leads to the suggestion that within the text, a refinement of the convention holds true. I would argue that every oath sworn in Yahweh's name is fulfilled, and so the reader begins to operate with this convention. Oaths sworn without using the name of God, even oaths sworn by *Elohim* 'God', may be

thwarted. The key seems to be the mention of Yahweh's name.

This functional differentiation between 'Yahweh' and 'Elohim' in Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges, where, of course, they have long been seen as markers of different documentary sources, is reassessed by Polzin. He sums up his position on the use of these terms in the book of Judges as follows:

It appears likely that in the Book of Judges the use of now 'Yahweh', now 'Elohim', has compositional implications, whatever might be previous assertions about the diachronic aspects of such an alteration. In those passages where there is a shift between 'Yahweh' and 'Elohim', the use of 'Elohim' appears to signal a deity whose identity from the point of view of the speaker uttering his name or in the view of the speaker's audience, is either not Yahweh himself or a deity unable clearly to be identified with Yahweh in a particular instance of communication. (1981:175-6)

6.2.2 YAHWEH AND THE FULFILMENT OF THE OATH

My contention is that there is a similar functional differentiation at work in the narrative convention of oath formulae. Whether it arose from a scribal reluctance to record an oath sworn in Yahweh's name that was not fulfilled or whether it was a deliberately exploited convention is hard to elucidate. Regardless of its origin, it now serves as a cue to the reader as to whether or not the oath will be fulfilled. An oath sworn in Yahweh's name will inevitably be fulfilled, whereas an oath sworn in any other name, may not be. We will investigate the exceptions below. The same however is not true of an oath sworn either on the life

of a human being, or an oath sworn on the name 'Elohim'. These may be fulfilled, but they may not.

The same uncertainty holds true of any reported oath. So, for instance, in 2 Sam 19: 23, David is reported to have sworn to Shimei 'You shall not die'. This oath is rescinded on David's death bed in 1 Kings 2:8-9 where David quotes himself as having sworn in Yahweh's name that he will not put Shimei to death by the sword. This is an interestingly more specific oath. David recalls it while instructing Solomon to make sure that the oath is subverted after his death. Solomon then imposes another oath on Shimei by swearing that he *will* die if he crosses the Kidron valley. Shimei does so and is then executed by Benaiah (1 Kings 2:46).

Here we have a prime example of an oath being evaded by being interpreted literally: David does not kill Shimei by the sword, Benaiah does. But this story is imposed on another one where David seems to break a direct promise that Shimei will not die. Of course, interpreted literally, no man, not even a king, can make such a promise to another. Everyone dies. The implication is clear, though, that Shimei is being promised a protection which is later cynically withdrawn. Here David's initial oath is reported rather than stated, so that the text itself does not contain a false oath in Yahweh's name. The later oath, as we have seen is fulfilled, but fulfilled through an act of equivocation, and even here is not directly quoted. David merely reports that he swore the words by the Lord. At no point in the text is there a full direct quote of the oath.

Another suggestive example, this time involving reporting a vow in the name of Yahweh which may never have occurred, is to be found in 2 Sam 15: 7-8. Absalom makes the excuse that he swore a vow to Yahweh to

worship him in Hebron if he was restored to Jerusalem in order to conceal the military strategy behind his departure from his father's court. There is no indication in the text that Absalom fulfils this vow, and the suspicion remains that this may have been nothing but a stratagem, similar to that adopted by both David and Samuel in earlier stories. David explains his absence from Saul's table as due to an obligation to meet for a family sacrifice (1 Sam 20:6). Samuel himself at Yahweh's instigation had used the excuse of a sacrifice with David's family to account for his own trip to Bethlehem to anoint David (1 Sam 16:1-3). The difference is that only Absalom baldly recounts a vow to the Lord which may be part of a ploy. Absalom at least rests under the suspicion of having taken the Lord's name in vain, something that certainly would not bode well for his future chances.

An example which tends to confirm the hypothesis that oaths in the name of Yahweh have a different status from those in the name 'Elohim' appears in the series of oaths in 1 Sam 25⁸, the story of Nabal's dealings with David. Having refused to help David and insulted him, Nabal becomes the object of David's revenge. David swears in the name Elohim: 'Elohim do so to the enemies of David and more also if by morning I leave so much as one wall-pisser of all who belong to him' (1 Sam 25:22). Abigail, Nabal's wife saves the situation by pleading

⁸ Peter Miscall (1978) distinguishes the divine and human word as follows: 'In the case of the divine word, e.g., prophecy, oracle, etc., it is a question not of whether it will be fulfilled but of how it will be fulfilled. However, with a human word, e.g., blessing, prediction, etc., it is a question of whether it will be fulfilled and not just of how. For example, In (sic) I Sam. 25, David's vow is not fulfilled because of Abigail's plea.' (1978: 33)

the stupidity of her husband. She swears in her turn by Yahweh, and by the king's own life: 'Now then, my lord, as Yahweh lives and as your soul lives, seeing the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt, now then let all your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal' (1 Sam 25:26).

This is a subtle counter to David's oath, in that it presumes that his action is already restrained - assuming what she wants to prove, in a sense. David in turn replies with an oath which confirms his assent to Abigail's pleas, thus effectively rescinding his earlier oath: 'For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male' (1 Sam 25:34).

There has been a certain amount of controversy over the place of the phrase 'enemies of David' in the first oath, which has been seen as a euphemism⁹. In the

⁹ So, among others, McCarter (1980: 394) who writes 'this expansion is surely a deliberate attempt to distort the original meaning. The threat is never carried out, and a scribe has changed David's words to protect him (or his descendants!) from the consequences of his oath.' This seems to presuppose that the scribe's business is to record the historical, or historically plausible words of David. It is possible, I submit, that the very narrative exigencies that McCarter alludes to may actually have taken priority. In which case, it is the reversion to a putative original that distorts the 'meaning', or at least the narrative function, of the text. Whatever the historical David may or may not have said, the character David gives a speech which, if we are right in constructing the conventions, could act proleptically in indicating that David's oath may not be fulfilled.

context that we are exploring, the introduction of the phrase deflects the unfulfilled oath from David himself, and is echoed in Abigail's use of the phrase, which can hardly be a euphemism. But the important point for our purposes is that David's first oath which remains unfulfilled is sworn by 'Elohim' rather than 'Yahweh'; in fact, his 'Yahweh' oath trumps his 'Elohistic' card

6.3 THE NARRATOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF THE OATH

6.3.1 STANDARD FUNCTIONS

6.3.1.1 Prolepsis

What then are the narratological functions that the oath can perform? Most obviously, the oath is a form of *prolepsis*, an indication of the future state of the characters that carries us forward in the temporal sequence of the narrative. As readers, the proleptic swearing of an oath by a character acts as a promise to us. We are induced to ask: will what is sworn come to pass? We read on to see whether or not such a fulfilment will occur. Our judgment of a character whose oath is not fulfilled may be harsh.

6.3.1.2 Analepsis

Secondly, oaths may have an *analeptic* function - the oath may be sworn to verify a past state of affairs. Or else it may be at the moment of fulfilment that the oath is recalled. This may serve to confirm the convention that the oath is accompanied by its fulfilment, but, in at least one case, whether the oath was ever sworn is open to question: the oath recalled by Nathan and Bathsheba to David in 1 Kings 1:17.

Adonijah the son of Haggith has made it clear that he has ambitions for the throne. Nathan the prophet, who

has been conspicuously absent from Adonijah's plans, points out the dangers to Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. Nathan claims that Adonijah has proclaimed himself king. The narrative evidence is rather that he intends to; Nathan is perhaps here putting pressure on Bathsheba. He advises her to save her life and Solomon's by going to David and asking him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your maidservant, saying, "Solomon your son shall reign after me?"', after which Nathan will come in. The point is, of course, that we have no account of David swearing such an oath¹⁰.

¹⁰ Fokkelman, for instance, finds it 'fascinating that we can construe all sorts of evidence either proving or disproving the "historicity" of the king's oath, yet there is no single proof to be found in the OT, that is, not in the sole plane in which we, methodologically speaking, may seek - that of literary art in which 1 Kings 1-2 is contained. We simply do not know if Nathan's words, repeated by Bathsheba, recall an actual event' (1981: 353-4). Fokkelman goes on in a footnote to provide some 'marginal notes' (354 n.12). He comments on the oddity that the oath is not mentioned earlier, especially if the whole story is taken as a succession narrative. However, he considers the hypothesis that it is invented by Nathan as hard to reconcile with the portrait of an upright man of God in 2 Samuel. It is surely not so hard to reconcile with the Nathan of 2 Sam 7, the prophet who blithely assures David that his plan to build a temple has the Lord's blessing, only to be forced to correct this verdict when the word of the Lord comes to him. Ahlström (1961: 123) indeed tries to make a case that Nathan's naming of Solomon as Jedídhah constitutes the oath in question, but apart from the fact that there is no evidence of any oath form, Nathan was certainly not ignorant of this, and there seems little to stop him recalling his own words to David.

Bathsheba goes further in the terms of the investigation we have been conducting, and specifically states to David that he swore 'by the Lord your God'; note the pronoun¹¹. Nathan then comes in as she is explaining the peril she and Solomon will face if Adonijah is allowed to succeed and asks whether David has ever said that Adonijah should be his successor. This certainly renders it unlikely that we are to take the oath concerning Solomon as public knowledge. Nathan seems to envisage that the king may well have appointed Adonijah as his successor without the knowledge of his closest councillors. Commentators have suggested that we have here an instance where the ageing king, out of touch with reality as is witnessed by his reported ignorance of Adonijah's move, is being manipulated into a course of action on the basis of an oath which he never made¹².

¹¹ This point is noted by Alter (1981: 98) who sees a subtlety of narrative presentation in this story indicated by the small but significant shifts of vocabulary and emphasis between Bathsheba's and Nathan's presentation of their case. He ends his account of the use of incremental repetition in their speeches by commenting, '...here, as elsewhere in the Bible, language manifestly makes things happen' (1981: 100). Contrast Alter's praise of Bathsheba's 'persuasiveness' (1981: 98) with Whybray's characterisation of her in this scene and others as 'a good-natured, rather stupid woman' (1968: 40) who failed to see the danger of Adonijah's bid for the throne until Nathan spelt it out.

¹² See the discussion of this issue by Jones (1990: 50-53) where he argues that the oath is a fabrication principally on the grounds that Adonijah appears to have no knowledge of such an oath when he claims the throne, and Nathan's pretence that he has no knowledge of it when he asks David if he had sworn an oath in favour of Adonijah. Against this, see the comment of De Vries who

What this approach does achieve is a unique case of an oath confirming an oath; David swears to do as he had sworn (1 Kings 1:29). Whatever, then, the validity of the first oath, it is now irrelevant. Nathan and Bathsheba have induced the king to swear to what they want. Solomon's position is assured by a royal oath in the name of Yahweh. This story thus represents the device of the oath-inducing ploy not by evoking a fictional character against whom the king measures himself, or by appealing to his juridical role as opposed to his role within his family, but by exploiting the differentiation between the present David, old, impotent and with failing powers against the former David of which the David addressed seems to have little knowledge¹³.

6.3.1.3 Allodiegesis

opines that 'such subtle psychologizing has to be beyond the naïve art of the narrator, however much it may possibly have motivated the historical Nathan and Bathsheba' (1985:15); a comment so much at odds with the thrust of our reading as almost to suggest its own refutation. Where does this element of 'has to' creep in? Who says? In any event, the narrator is assumed not only to be naïve, but more naïve than the putative characters. I am at a loss to see the grounds for De Vries's assumption, even given his premises. If Nathan could think of it, why not the narrator? Who other than the narrator offers evidence of what Nathan might think?

¹³ In actual fact, this sense is rather contradicted by David's vigorous response, and the rather chilling precision of his memory of the wrongs done to him as he lists them to Solomon in the next scene. Is David in fact duped - or does he play the part of a willing dupe?

A third case might be called the *allodiegetic* oath. By having a character swear on the name of Yahweh that a change in circumstances would have brought about a different outcome, the narrator is able to display an additional dimension to the character by providing us with a glimpse of an actualisable possibility. The author is not simply confined to the story-line which allows for only one alternative to be actualised, but can display another line backed up by the name of God.

David's oath to Abigail in 1 Sam 25: 34 discussed above is a prime example of this. David swears: 'For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male' (1 Sam 25:34). The oath leaves us in no doubt that things might have turned out very badly for the whole of Nabal's household. Such a massacre is revealed as the kind of action David might engage in¹⁴. A side of David's character not previously revealed is exposed to the reader's view, not merely as a vague possibility but in terms of possible actions which are backed by divine authority. This is as real a possibility for David as his actual conduct.

¹⁴ See here the contention of Levenson who sees the episode with Nabal as 'the very first revelation of evil in David's character' (1978: 10). This is revealed through the allodiegetic oath. We might mention, however, the possible earlier indication that David has a less savoury side in Eliab's attack on his motivation for turning up at Saul's camp: 'I know your presumption and the evil of your heart' (1 Sam 16: 28). Eliab, of course, is not necessarily a reliable witness, as the supplanted elder brother, but his words have long resonances. See also the caveat of Gordon (1980: 53) who doubts whether the narrator would have seen the story in terms of David's moral character.

6.3.2 EXCEPTIONAL OATHS AS NARRATIVE DEVICES

There are two occasions where the convention that an oath sworn in Yahweh's name, if such a convention exists, does not seem to hold: in 1 Sam 14:39, where Saul takes an oath to kill Jonathan, and in 1 Sam 29:6, where Achish swears to David's uprightness. In examining these cases, we will pick up on many of the points that have already been made in discussing the function of the oath.

6.3.2.1 1 Sam 29

To take the latter case first, as it is in some ways the easier, Achish, the king of Gath, swears to David's uprightness when he is faced with the understandable doubts of his Philistine allies over David's reliability as part of their attack on Israel. 'As the Lord lives, you have been upright and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with the campaign.' (1 Sam 29:6) As readers, we know that David has been slaughtering Achish's allies behind his back, and lying to Achish about his activities. He even goes so far as to save no-one alive in case it is spoken of (1 Sam 28:8-12). Achish swears to the truth of something that the reader knows to be false. Or so at least it would appear.

We should note, however, that there are a few anomalies here. First of all, what is the king of Gath doing swearing by Yahweh? Whose words are these - his or the narrator's? Secondly, there is a typical example of the equivocation in the word *yashar* 'upright'. Such words have a very different meaning depending on who is uttering them. For Achish, and the Philistines, upright means 'loyal to the Philistine cause'. Put in the sphere of Yahwistic discourse, however, upright means 'loyal to Yahweh'. That, of course, is exactly what David has been, despite appearances. While pretending to side

with Achish, he has actually been promoting the welfare of Yahweh's people by surreptitiously killing their enemies. In the juxtaposition of the words 'yhwh' and 'yashar' in the mouth of the Gittite king, the oath points up the blindness of the king. It certainly seems to provide for the possibility that the oath is indeed in accordance with its narrative context.

6.3.2.2 1 Sam 14

Much more problematic for this theory is the case of Saul's oath in 1 Sam 14:39. Yet I think we can argue that this is the exception which proves the rule that directly quoted oaths in the name of Yahweh are fulfilled.

1 Sam 14 contains a complex story of interlocking oaths, beginning in v 24 with Saul's curse pronounced on any man who eats food until the evening of the battle. Jonathan has gone off with his armour bearer to carry out a daring raid on the enemy camp and so does not hear the curse. He breaches it by tasting some honey as he and the people are journeying through the forest. Only then is he told of Saul's prohibition, to which he reacts with scorn. Having eaten, he is revived while the people are faint.

There is something a little strange here, though. Why has Jonathan not been told? Two odd remarks earlier in the chapter may have some bearing on this. Firstly in verse 3, we are told that the people did not know that Jonathan had gone off on his raid, so they might presume that he had heard the order. On the other hand, verse 17 records the fact that Saul, noticing the turmoil the raid caused among the Philistines, had a count made of his entourage, and found Jonathan and his armour bearer missing. Did Saul then know that Jonathan would not hear the curse made in verse 24?

Ironically, the upshot of Saul's curse which seems to have some motivation in the regulations hedging about holy war is that the people fall on the plundered animals once the battle is over. They are so famished that they omit to observe the proper rituals of slaughter and eat the meat with blood in it. Saul seeks to prolong the fight, but his priest advises that they consult the Lord, who will give no answer. Saul then determines to hunt out the bringer of sin on the people. 'As the Lord lives who saves Israel,' he swears, 'though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die' (1 Sam 14:39). Is this the nobility of the king willing to sacrifice his own son for the common good, or is there a more sinister undertone?

We may be excused our suspicions when Saul calls for lots to be drawn with Jonathan and himself on the one side, and everyone else on the other. The lot falls on Saul and Jonathan, and a second lot falls on Jonathan alone, who proclaims his readiness to die. Saul again swears, this time, be it noted, in the name Elohim: 'God do the same to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan' (1 Sam 14:44).

It is at this point that the people intervene, taking an oath themselves: 'As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he has wrought with God this day' (1 Sam 14:45) Here we have two anomalies; we have two oaths sworn in the name of Yahweh directly opposed, and we have a collective oath taken by the people. Two oaths in the name of the Lord confront each other, as Saul confronts his people, one against many. It is the people's version that prevails. They ransom Jonathan, but the chapter ends with Saul's abandonment of his chief business, the pursuit of the Philistines echoing the standard response in Israel when things get beyond a joke, the retreat of every man to his own tent and the abandonment of community.

6.3.3 THE EXCEPTION THAT PROVES THE RULE

I would submit that this unparalleled opposition of two oaths is a device whereby the flouting of narrative convention points up the breakdown of the authority structures in the society. The whole issue of Saul's authority over the people is a fraught one. The matter of the double coronation of Saul has been a topic of scholarly debate for a long time. Without being drawn into the intricacies of the debate, the moment when Saul's kingship is really established is not in his anointing by Samuel (1 Sam 10:1), or in his selection by lot in Mizpah (10:20-21), or even his acclamation by the people (10:24). In the words of Wellhausen, 'Saul at this point is only king *de jure*: he does not become king *de facto* until after he has proved himself.' (1961: 250).

What establishes Saul's authority is the fact that the people follow him as one man when he sends out the summons to aid the besieged city of Jabesh-gilead. His authority is conferred in that moment by their acceptance of it¹⁵. Kingship is a matter of negotiated assent.

His speech act of summons has great power, of course. He sends with it the pieces of a yoke of oxen which he has hacked to bits under the inspiration of the spirit, but

¹⁵ The paradigm example of this is in 2 Sam 20 the story of the revolt of Sheba, who is called a 'worthless fellow' and has no status. Yet he blows his trumpet and calls out his slogan, 'We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!' The result is that 'all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri' (2 Sam 20:1-2).

even here there is a note which demands caution. The power of destruction is not vented against the enemy, but against his own people. 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, the same be done to his oxen!' he proclaims (1 Sam 11: 7), an utterance which formally is rather similar to an oath in its conditionality and the physicality of both sign and sanction, but where, tellingly, no divine confirmation is sought or offered. The implication seems to be that it will be Saul himself who will dismember the oxen of the people.

Whatever its power, in the last resort this summons need not be heeded. The people do come and thereby constitute the authority that they recognise. By the same token, nothing can ever be the same once they have revoked Saul's oath. Saul is marked out in the Old Testament as the one character whose oath spoken in the name of Yahweh does not find fulfilment.

The further consequences of this exception will be discussed below. For our present purposes, here indeed we have the exception that seems to prove the rule. Oaths sworn in the name of Yahweh are fulfilled. The corollary of this observation is that we may hypothesise that this is a narrative convention that the narrator may manipulate. The readership when it comes across such an oath sworn by a character is left in no doubt that it will be fulfilled. At first sight this seems to undercut the narrative stratagem. The seventh veil has been dropped. Where is the suspense? But of course, we now become intrigued by the indeterminate possibilities of the mode of fulfillment.

Sternberg (1985) discusses the effect of the anticipation of the future through prediction and prophecy in terms of a clash between suspense and curiosity. 'Real suspense, as the clash of hopeful and fearful expectation about the future, gives way to the

retardatory play of how-when-why hypotheses, which leaves our mind free for the manipulation of curiosity about the past. Attention shifts from terminus to route, from long-range effect to intermediate causes, from plot as such to its motivation through the tangle of God's providence and human character that makes biblical history.' (1985:285-286)

The oath will be fulfilled but not necessarily in the way that the character or indeed the reader envisages¹⁶. The seductive stratagem of the text then becomes to evoke curiosity as to how this will happen, and how the character may act under the misplaced security of the meaning he thinks the oath will ensure. Alternatively, we may be offered a situation where the character seeks himself to circumvent the effects of an oath.

6.3.4 OATHS AND EQUIVOCATION

¹⁶ See on this point L.A. Turner's discussion of what he calls 'announcements of plot' in Genesis (1990). These consist of prophecies, commands, oaths and promises whereby a prediction of the future course of events is made, often as a revelation of the divine intention. Turner points out that 'human attempts to frustrate the Announcements tend to fulfill them; human attempts to fulfill the Announcements tend to frustrate them' (1990: 179). Turner attributes this partly to 'Yahweh's habit of not clarifying the exact nature of the Announcement at the outset' (1990: 179). He goes further in seeing an ironic gap between Yahweh's intentions and the subsequent course of events which reveals Yahweh's dependency on human obedience and initiative. See also G.C. Nicol who sees the impetus of the Genesis narratives as the result of 'the conjunction in these narratives of divine promise with a wide variety of events which bring the fulfilment of the promise into question' (1992: 222)

6.3.4.1 2 Kings 5

In 2 Kings 5 we find a series of oaths which turn out to have different resolutions from the ones which the reader or indeed the character anticipates. Having been cured of leprosy by Elisha, Naaman offers him a gift. Elisha swears 'As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will receive none' (2 Kings 5:16). However, his servant Gehazi decides to take advantage of this situation: 'As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him' (2 Kings 5:20). He follows Naaman and requests a talent of silver and two festal garments on Elisha's behalf for two recently arrived young prophets. Naaman presses two talents on him. Gehazi hides his loot in the house. Elisha, sure enough, receives none of it. However, Elisha wants to know where Gehazi has been. When Gehazi tells him 'Nowhere,' Elisha reveals that he knows the whole story. Indeed Gehazi will get something from Naaman: 'Therefore,' pronounces Elisha, 'the leprosy of Naaman will cleave to you and to your descendants for ever' (2 Kings 5:27). Not what Gehazi was after, but the letter of his oath is fulfilled admirably.

In this case, the equivocation is possible because Gehazi only specifies that he will get 'something'. The immediate and obvious resolution of this general word is the 'gift' but the story reveals that it can, of course, equally well refer to the leprosy.

6.3.4.2 Oath as trap

The other side of this coin are the stories where men use the inviolability of an oath to trap others into a course of action. In Joshua 9, we have a story which revolves around the efforts of the inhabitants of Gibeon to entrap the Israelites into making a treaty with them. Knowing that Israel can make a treaty only with a

distant people with no claim to the land, the Gibeonites send a delegation who disguise themselves as weary travellers from a distant country, putting on worn out garments and packing only mouldy old provisions. When they meet, the men of Israel point out that Israel cannot make a covenant with their neighbours. At this the Gibeonites protest, showing them the mouldy old bread which they claim was baked the day they set out, the burst wineskins and the holes in their shoes and claiming to have travelled for many days from their distant homeland. The men of Israel fall for it, and swear a covenant with the Gibeonites, without taking the precaution of consulting the Lord.

When the ruse is discovered, the people of Israel voice their discontent at their leaders' stupidity, but the leaders insist that the covenant must stand. So the Gibeonites are saved from slaughter and put to work. Indeed, it is on behalf of the Gibeonites that the sun stands still, as Joshua ensures the slaughter of their neighbours who have resolved to punish them for treating with Israel.¹⁷

¹⁷ This oath has longer narrative consequences, as it becomes the motivation for 2 Samuel 21. The Gibeonites demand the death of 7 of Saul's sons as recompense for the breaking of this oath of protection by Saul, who has been carried away by his zeal for the Lord and has tried to slay them. This has resulted in a three year famine, which David is trying to have lifted. So David hands over Saul's two sons by Rizpah, and the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, sparing only Jonathan's son Mephibosheth for the sake of the oath between himself and Jonathan. This whole episode is rather strange, as there is no record of this act on Saul's part in 1 Samuel, where this kind of overzealous disobedience on Saul's part is one of the narrative stock-in-trades.

6.3.4.3 Oath evasion

A final refinement of this formula is a narrative that depicts people evading the force of their own oath by playing on its equivocation. In Judges 21, we have a story where Israel has to do just this.

As a result of the incident at Gibeah where a man sacrifices his concubine to save himself from the attentions of a lustful crowd of Benjaminites (Jud 19), the rest of Israel met at Mizpah to pronounce judgment on them (Jud 20). In Jud 21:1 we are told analeptically that they had sworn at that meeting that no one should give his daughter to a Benjaminite as a wife. But this of course means that Benjamin will die out as a tribe, as by this stage it has been reduced to a fugitive band of six hundred men.

Then in Jud 21:5, we hear that they had sworn that any tribe that did not come to Mizpah should be put to death. We are not clear at this stage what the relevance of this oath is. The most obvious resolution is to take it as a further sanction against Benjamin, which was of course itself missing from this gathering. In fact, it turns out that no-one from Jabesh-gilead had appeared. So Israel hits upon the neat solution of killing all the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead except four hundred virgins, and giving these to the Benjaminites.

This story therefore hinges around two analeptic oaths. There is no mention of either of these oaths in the account of the rally at Mizpah in Jud 20:1-11. The problem in the story arises through one oath and the solution is provided by the second, though at first the

reader is left with an uncertainty over the distinction between the two oaths, not knowing who did not come to the assembly at Mizpah.

The first oath here poses itself as a riddle: Benjamin must marry Israelite women; the Israelites have sworn not to give them their daughters; who then can Benjamin marry? The answer is to circumvent the need for the fathers of some Israelite women to give them away. Israel never swore that Benjamin could not marry any Israelite women, only that no Israelite father could give away his daughter. Slaughtering the fathers on a legitimate pretext such as that provided by the second oath is one answer. Dead fathers cannot give or withhold their consent. In a second twist, the four hundred virgins turn out not to be enough for six hundred Benjaminites, so the people sanction the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh. Again, no-one gives their daughters; they have been stolen. Indeed, in Jud 21:22, the people suggest that they will make this very point to the men of Shiloh if they find they have to explain themselves to aggrieved relatives: 'And when their fathers and brothers come to complain to us, we will say to them, 'Grant them graciously to us; because we did not take for each man of them his wife in battle, neither did you give them to them, else you would now be guilty' [my emphasis].

Here too, then, the irrevocability of the oath is tempered by the looseness of its language. The key becomes the concept of *giving* in marriage. An added frisson of narrative interest is given by the lack of specificity in the second oath, by ambiguous anaphora. Who is "he" in the sentence 'he shall be put to death' (v.6)? We are also given clear indications that the people's desires and intentions are at odds with the deeds their language obliges them to perform, as they weep and feel compassionate towards Benjamin. (Jud 21:3)

The narrative problem then becomes the resolution of this impasse where language has proved to bind the people to unexpected and unwanted obligations. The existence of this convention, then, causes both characters and readers to look for the fulfilment of the oath.

6.4 DAVID'S OATHS AND THE READER

6.4.1 2 SAM 14 AND 2 SAM 12

So what bearing does this have on the oaths that David swears to Nathan and to the woman of Teqoa? Both of these are oaths sworn in the name of the Lord 'As Yahweh lives ...' The narrative convention we have identified thus raises the reader's expectation that both of them be fulfilled, though not necessarily as David expects. The paradox of the oath form is that in seeking to disambiguate his own language, to make the tie between word and act secure, David becomes tied not to any single meaning but to the possibilities of unexpected meanings, indeed to the whole range of meanings which can be taken out of his utterance.

In chapter 14, David swears that not one of the banished son's hairs will fall to the ground. His son Absalom is killed, of course, but as he is hanging in a tree, not one of his hairs does touch the ground¹⁸. In the grim humour of the pun, this could be taken a parodic heightening of the equivocation of oaths and

¹⁸ See the discussion of this point on page 224 above.

oracles. David's words are fulfilled, but none of the characters, nor the reader can anticipate the form of their fulfilment. The reader who already knows the outcome of the story, however, may be led by the existence of this convention to look with close attention at the words he uttered.

This then may lead us to notice the similar phenomenon in 2 Samuel 12:5. David's expletive describing the rich man as a 'son of death' finds a fatal echo in Nathan's warning that his 'son' will 'die'. The reader is alerted by the oath form to read this utterance with great attention. Although the precise way in which these words will come to be applicable is not clear, the reader may well anticipate that David's utterance will be taken up in an unexpected way. Nathan's echo of the key words of the oath then is highlighted or foregrounded.

6.4.2 RASH OATHS

If this link in fact exists, then David's oath could be regarded as the unintentional cause of his son's death. His son dies because he becomes the referent of the oath. In this regard, the resonances of the story are with the other two incidents where an oath or vow implicates the death of a child.

One of these we have already examined in some detail, Saul's oath to kill whoever had violated his prohibition against eating in 1 Sam 14: 24. As we have seen, there are reasons to question just how unaware Saul is of the consequences of his words. As we will explore further below, there is at least a suspicion that this is a device which provides a convenient occasion for Saul's hostility against his own son.

The other narrative that springs to mind as a parallel is the story of Jephthah's vow in Judges 11: 30-31. In exchange for victory over the Ammonites, he vows to offer the first creature he meets on his return home to the Lord as a burnt offering . It is his daughter whom he meets. 'Alas, my daughter', he cries, 'you have brought me very low and you have become the cause of great trouble to me; for I opened my mouth to the Lord and I can not take back my vow' (Jud 11:35).

Cartledge (1992: 179) puts forward the idea that Jephthah's vow was not rash in the sense of being uncalculated. It is hard to translate the vow as having any reference other than a person¹⁹. Cartledge wonders if Jephthah is not making a a calculated bid to put Yahweh on the spot. He makes a vow which he is well aware can be taken as pledging his daughter to Yahweh, and signals his willingness to sacrifice her. In effect he leaves the final choice to Yahweh as to whom he will meet, and whether the sacrifice will be required.

However we interpret this, as an unwitting blunder or a calculated gamble, Jephthah's reaction to his daughter reveals the nature of the language of his vow. Leaving aside the well-worn observation that it is a bit rich of Jephthah to blame his daughter in these circumstances, we have here a classic statement of the irrevocability of the vow. In seeking to bind the subject, the oath liberates language, in a way analogous to writing. The words take on a life of their own. Unreferred pronouns turn out to implicate unexpected people. The polysemy

¹⁹ This is in contrast to the rabbinic censure of Jephthah on the grounds that he might have left himself in the impossible position of having to sacrifice an unclean animal such as a dog or a pig to the Lord.

of words allows phrases to take on unexpected contours and implications²⁰.

But it is also a rash vow whose dire implication is the death of a child. Jephthah dies with no heir. Just as he himself is in origin a bastard, thrust out from his father's house by his legitimate brothers with the words 'You shall not inherit in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman' (Jud 11: 2), his line dies with him.

6.5 DAVID AS READER; DAVID AS SWEARER

In 2 Sam 12, David here is provoked by Nathan into making an irrevocable utterance which has consequences that he did not foresee. Yet this is in response to an irrevocable utterance of another kind, which again had consequences he did not foresee - the sexual 'utterance' of his seed which engenders the child in Bathsheba's womb, an aspect of the situation which we will explore more fully in our concluding chapter.

²⁰ In this connection, it is interesting that several scholars, beginning with the mediaeval Jewish commentator Kimhi, have sought to argue that in fact Jephthah does not sacrifice his daughter. This line of argument is extensively documented by David Marcus (Marcus 1986 esp. 7-12). Marcus himself supports the contention that the notice that Jephthah's daughter 'never knew a man' (Jud 11: 39) is consistent with the possibility that, rather than being killed, she was dedicated to perpetual virginity in the service of the temple. This is indeed a possibility, but the text remains ambivalent, an ambivalence that could as well be explained as a reticence over the direct admission that a human sacrifice could be sanctioned in Israel.

If we then compare this transaction with David's own dealings with the Amalekite in 2 Sam 1, we can see that it is a case of the biter bit. David executes the man on the basis of his reading of a statement that he extracted from him under interrogation. The link between the man's words and his intentions, and between his account and the events behind it, turns out to be irrelevant. The man is bound to the implications of his words.

Both Nathan and the woman of Teqoa employ complex strategies to provoke David to utter, and therefore to reveal his own stance as a reader of their texts. The conventions of the oath then bind him irrevocably to his speech, but not in any sense to a determinate meaning. For the reader, the frisson comes when David's words find their interpretation, when their possibilities are actualized in the death of two of David's sons.

Nor need we suppose that the meaning of David's oath is exhausted by this paronomastic resolution. Just as David's oath that not one of the hairs of the woman of Teqoa's fictional son ^{will fall to earth} redounds on Absalom, the hidden referent of her story, so David's own words come to haunt him. David has sworn by Yahweh that the one who has done this is a 'son of death'. By his own oath, David has described himself. David is the 'son of death'. In purely narrative terms, the character David is bound to this self-description.

In the next chapter, we will explore the implications of the identification of David as 'son of death'. In doing so, the form of this thesis will reflect the form of the linguistic phenomenon that we are investigating. In his oath, David seeks to assure Nathan that he is bound to the execution of justice in the restoration of the imbalance opened up by Nathan's narrative. As it turns out, however, he is indeed bound to his words, but they

are interpreted under a different schema from the one he imagines is in operation. The oath, designed to narrow the range of possibilities of interpretation, to marry intention, utterance and act, turns out to be an utterance which activates a whole series of unexpected possibilities.

In the same way, our study will now concentrate on this single phrase of David's, the implications of which will open up a new range of resonances in the study of the uses of language by characters, and its effect on the reader.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DAVID AS SON

7.1 DAVID'S RESPONSE TO NATHAN

7.1.1 TEXT

At the end of the previous chapter, we made the suggestion that David's oath in his response to Nathan acts as a self-description. David names himself as 'son of death'. In the light of our previous discussion of the oath, let us move on to a closer examination of the implications of his response to Nathan's parable.

The MT gives his response as:

וַיַּחַר-אַף דָּוִד בְּאִישׁ מְאֹד וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-נָתָן חַי-יְהוָה כִּי בֶן-
 מוֹת הָאִישׁ הָעֲשָׂה זֹאת: וְאֶת-הַכֶּבֶשֶׂה יְשַׁלֵּם אַרְבַּעַתַּיִם עֵקֶב
 אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְעַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא-חָמַל:

'And David was greatly angered against the man and said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who did this is a son of death; and he will restore the lamb fourfold¹ because he did this thing and did not spare²."

¹ The only major textual disagreement between the MT and the LXX is over the number of times that the lamb should be repaid. The LXX has 'sevenfold'. Commentators are divided over which should be preferred. In favour of 'fourfold' is the legislation in Exod 21:37 which prescribes such a penalty for theft. The Talmud (Yoma

22b) makes the restitution have a direct bearing on David. He pays for the death of Uriah with the lives of four children: the first child of Bathsheba, Tamar, Amnon and Absalom. We will take up this point below.

The argument for 'sevenfold' is that it carries the implications of perfection. Those who see this passage as a record or reproduction of a spontaneous outburst argue that he would be more likely to use this symbolic number rather than make the considered judgement of the legal prescription. This was later emended by legalistic editors concerned to have David make a judgment in line with the law. This, of course, begs the question precisely of the status of this text. Carlson (1964:152-157) makes a great deal of this alternative reading in the course of his attempt to demonstrate that a series of sevenfold cycles underlies the structure of the Succession Narrative. He finds a legal justification in Prov 6:31 which prescribes a sevenfold restitution for theft. He notes further the fact that David's son dies 'on the seventh day'. There is also the point taken up by Coxon (1981:250) that the root **שבע** appears in Bathsheba's name and so makes a subtle connection between the answer and the story, especially in the light of the reference to the other element of her name in the word **בת** 'daughter' in v 3, when the lamb is compared to a daughter. Again, we might extend this link to the alternative reading of v 8 in the Syriac which reads 'daughters' (*bnt*) where MT has 'house' (*bt*). We might also note the connection between this root, Bathsheba's name, and the oath which we are examining and which has such important effects. Bathsheba is also implicated in the oath that ensures Solomon's succession in 1 Kings 1:29.

Both alternatives are attractive; in such cases I opt to stick to the MT.

² Many commentators follow Schill (1891:318) in making the simple change of *l'* to *lw*, changing the final phrase from 'he did not

The verse begins with an idiomatic expression, literally 'David's nostril smoked greatly', registering David's anger against 'the man'³. The perlocutionary effect of Nathan's parable is thus inscribed in the text as a

have pity/spare' to 'he had pity on/spared what was his.' The argument is that this means that the verb *hml*, which also appears v.4 where the rich man 'spares' to take one of his own flock, has the same meaning on its two occurrences. However, there is abundant evidence that precisely this kind of play on the ambivalence of the meaning of a root is a common device in biblical style, as Simon (1967:231) makes clear. It also avoids the juxtaposition of two different expressions translated as 'because': 'qb 'sr and 'l 'sr (see McCarter 1984:294-5). Again, this does not seem a particularly unusual piece of syntax. There being no textual evidence to support this change, I opt to follow the MT.

³ This is the only occasion on which this expression is applied to David. Elsewhere in the books of Samuel it is used as follows :

1 Sam 11:6 Saul's anger is kindled by the news that the men of Jabesh have been blinded

17:28 David's brother Eliab is angered by David's appearance on the battlefield.

20:30 Saul is angered by Jonathan's predilection for David.

20:34 Jonathan is angered by Saul's determination to kill David.

2 Sam 6:7 The Lord's anger is kindled against Uzzah for touching the ark.

We might note that a high proportion of these occurrences involve David.

bodily function, used metaphorically to describe an emotional reaction.

7.1.2 SON OF DEATH

7.1.2.1 'One who deserves to die'

The particular focus of our attention is, as we have said, to examine the implications of the phrase בֶּן-מָוֶת 'a son of death'. What does this juxtaposition of the idea of procreation and the idea of death imply?

The standard modern translation is to take this phrase as a death sentence: 'this man deserves to die.' In this particular circumstance, it is argued, the very fact that David is later assured by Nathan that he will not die (v.13) implies that he is under a sentence of death⁴. The only formal candidate for such a sentence is this self-reflective condemnation. As against that, we might argue that once David's involvement in murder and adultery has been made clear, there is no requirement for a formal death-sentence. Death hangs over him in any case.

There also seems to be a contradiction on the face of it between such a sentence of death and the supplementary requirement for restitution. The second penalty seems rather banal after the first, and indeed would be rather hard for a dead man to fulfil.

24:1 The Lord's anger against Israel makes him incite David to conduct a census.

⁴ So Hertzberg (1964:313).

We can of course circumvent this by speculating that it is the dead man's estate that would be charged. An alternative adopted by Phillips (1966: 243) is to see this phrase as David's expression of frustration at a legal system that does not prescribe the penalty of death for this crime. In law, the man is only guilty of stealing a sheep, and his callous disregard of the poor man's situation, while deplorable, is not punishable. David is thus saying 'This man deserves to die; but as the law only allows a penalty of restitution, all I can do is to set his punishment at the maximum fine of four (seven?) sheep.'⁵

7.1.2.2 Other translations

What evidence is there, however, that this expression bears this nuance of judicial condemnation to death? Kimchi suggests that it is an emotional outburst rather

⁵ This verse has indeed been used to make the contrary argument that here we have clear evidence that the death penalty could be imposed for stealing a sheep, either as part of Israel's legal tradition or ^{as} decreed by the king who as the final court of appeal was able to promulgate case law in the absence of precedent. This argument, for which see Macholz (1972a:165), presumes that as David reacts to the case as if it were authentic, his reaction can be used to derive information about historical juridical procedure in Israel. See on this point Jackson (1972:144-48) who casts doubt on the evidence that such a provision ever existed. Whitelam (1979:135) and Niehr (1987:118) make the more fundamental point of the untenable assumptions that Macholz's argument makes about the nature of the texts. Even if David takes the story as genuine, the narrator may be presenting us with a wholly artificial situation, in which we are hardly entitled to suppose that the first interest is the accurate exposition of Israelite legal procedure.

than a death sentence (Sosevsky 1986: 324). This interpretation is followed by many modern commentators (see inter alia Gerleman 1977: 133, Ackroyd 1977: 109, Anderson 1989: 162). An alternative suggestion is offered by McCarter who opts to translate the phrase as 'a fiend of hell' (1984:299). He argues for this on the grounds that there is no good parallel for the extension of the meaning of *ben* to include this idiomatic sense of 'deserving of ...'. Instead, he takes as parallels phrases such as *ben-beliya'al* 'son of hell'⁶, which are general expressions of disgust and contempt.

Indeed, such parallels as there are for the use of *ben* in expressions where it forms a construct chain with an inanimate or abstract noun can all be translated satisfactorily in an extension of the general sense of 'having a loyalty or connection to...', 'coming within the sphere of' or even 'tainted with....' death or whatever the absolute noun might be⁷.

The two close parallels that might be adduced in order to defend the translation 'deserves to die' are the expressions *ben-gorni* 'son of my threshing floor' (Isa

⁶ For a review of the various suggestions as to the derivation of this phrase see Emerton 1987 and the bibliography there appended. All the various suggestions agree that the term, however construed, expresses a strong despidal of the one so labelled.

⁷ The phrases that might be considered include expressions such as *bene hayil* (1 Sam 14:52, 18:17, 2 Sam 2:7) 'sons of valour', where the implication is that the men are valorous, not that they 'deserve valour'. Compare the phrase *ben hameratstseah* 'son of murdering' by which Elisha describes the king of Israel in 2 Kings 6:32, translated in e.g. the RSV as 'murderer' not 'one who deserves to be murdered'.

21:10) and *bin hakkoth* 'son of scourging' (Deut 25:2). These might be translated 'one who deserves to be threshed' and 'one who deserves to be scourged'. The first, however, occurs in the context of the destruction of Babylon where it might equally well be translated 'one who has been threshed', as indeed many modern translations attest⁸.

The most convincing case can be made for Deut 25:2, where the judge has to decide which of two disputants is guilty and, if the guilty man is '*bin hakkoth*', arrange to have him beaten. This certainly lends itself to the possibility that the judge could sentence the man by saying: 'This man is *bin hakkoth*' in strict parallel to what David does in this passage. In this case the phrase would be translated 'worthy of a beating', the reading found in the LXX (ἀξίος...πληγῶν). There is, on the other hand, also the possibility that the phrase could mean that he is the one who has struck the blow in the dispute, just as the 'sons of uproar' (*bene sha'on*) in Jer 48:45 and the 'sons of rebellion' (*bene meri*) in Num 17:25 are not deserving of, but the cause of, the violence that is attributed to them. The punishment then fits the crime. So, too, the phrase *ben mawet* may allude to the death-dealing rather than death-deserving qualities of those to whom it is applied.

David's phrase, then, rather than condemning the rich man to death as one 'deserving to die' may be a description of the man as a murdering, death-dealing scoundrel, one who brings death in his train.

⁸ The RSV translates the phrase 'O my threshed and winnowed ones'; the REB opts for 'My people, once trodden out on the threshing floor.'

McCarter's translation then seems nearer the mark than the more usual interpretation.

It is not necessary to our argument to show more than that this is a possible translation of the phrase. If, as we claim, the polysemy of the oath is one of its characteristics, it would be quite possible for the phrase to carry the meaning of a death sentence, and yet also have the function of an epithet.

As such, if it describes David as a 'death dealer', then there is evidence that bears out such a description. Directly or indirectly, the books of Samuel are filled with violent deaths which are either carried out by David, or at his behest. Other deaths, such as Nabal's, seem to occur providentially to David's benefit. There are also several deaths which David vehemently disclaims any involvement with, but which bring him great gains in power and influence. In particular, the deaths of Saul, Abner and Ishbosheth fall into this category. Most of those who have any dealings with David have met their deaths by the time that he exceptionally dies in bed of old age. If David is here implicitly described as a 'son of death' in the sense of one who brings death on others, the description seems to be valid, without implying that he deliberately engineered all these deaths.

What brings a particular importance to this phrase 'son of death' is that in the Hebrew Scriptures it is used only in association with David. It is used solely by David or to refer to David⁹ in the two instances of its

⁹ The related phrase *ben temuthah* occurs in Psalms 79:11 and 102:21. In both psalms it stands in parallel to the word 'syr' 'prisoner'. The implication in the call for mercy is surely that

use other than in 2 Sam 12. These occasions are as follows:

7.1.3 DAVID AS 'SON OF DEATH'

7.1.3.1 1 Sam 20:(30-)31.

In these verses, Saul rails against Jonathan when he comes to explain David's absence from the royal table. His speech is prefaced by the same idiom expressing anger as David's speech in 2 Sam 12:5, and contains three instances of expressions translatable as 'son of ...', here italicised:

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan and he said to him, 'You *son of a perverse, rebellious woman*, do I not know that you have chosen the *son of Jesse* to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the *son of Jesse* lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore send and fetch him to me, for he is a *son of death*.'

This speech raises important issues about the function of sonship in this text which we will explore further below. Suffice it to note here that the phrase 'son of death' comes as the culmination of a series of such phrases, all of which have a negative connotation. Furthermore, it is David's threat to *Jonathan's* security which is stressed. The phrase could be interpreted as pointing to David as the bearer of death for Jonathan.

they do not 'deserve to die'. They may have been sentenced to death, but it is also possible to interpret this passage as those who are in the sphere of death, about to die of neglect or else simply those separated from the living by imprisonment. See Emerton 1987 for a discussion of these verses.

If so it takes on an added irony in verse 33 where it is Saul who threatens his son's life when he takes up his spear to cast it at Jonathan¹⁰. Yet if Saul had succeeded in killing his son in his wrath over Jonathan's relationship with David, then David would indirectly have been the cause of Jonathan's death.

Here, too, the phrase 'son of death' might be taken to imply that Saul is pronouncing a death sentence on David. Perhaps we might interpret the incident as implying that David is to be brought to Saul because he 'deserves to die'. But against this we could argue that the phrase is not so much a death sentence as a general execration of David as a potential bringer of death.

Jonathan's reply 'Why should he die? What has he done?' might be taken to indicate that here *ben mawet* does carry the implications of a death sentence, but equally, the structure of verses 30-31 may argue that it is a culminating insult, whose implications Jonathan can read without it being necessary to assume that these reflect any inescapable connotation of Saul's words.

7.1.3.2 1 Sam 26:16.

In this verse David, who has stolen into Saul's camp and removed the king's spear, himself describes Saul's general Abner and his men as '*bene mawet*' for their neglect of the king's safety. This time the description

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, the MT only states that 'Saul took up his spear to cast it at him'. The reference of the pronoun could conceivably be David, who has been at the receiving end of Saul's spear before this (1 Sam 18:11). The alternative and predominant view that Jonathan is the target is strengthened by Saul's hostile conduct toward him in 1 Sam 16, which is discussed below.

is not applied to him; he is the one who utters it. Again, it is not necessary to assume that this implies any kind of death sentence or even a judgement that death was merited. It could equally be the case that the death referred to is rather the peril into which they placed Saul by their negligence, if indeed any specific reference is required. Once again, a general implication of worthlessness is all that the context would require.

In the light of these two examples, David's use of the phrase in 2 Sam 12:5 can be seen as combining features of both of the former uses in that he is both the one uttering and the one referred to by the phrase.

If then we take David's exclamation as a self-description which is not necessarily a sentence of death, a position which these episodes do nothing to contradict, we are now made aware that it is a phrase which has had associations with David earlier in the text. This has a bearing on what it might mean for David to be described as 'son of death.'

To explore this concept further we shall look at the series of incidents where David is referred to as a son. In doing so, we discover that David's status as 'son' is highly problematised within the text of the books of Samuel. In order to uncover the nature of this problem, we will examine the relevant incidents in turn.

7.2 DAVID AS SON

7.2.1 'WHOSE SON IS THIS YOUNG MAN?'

7.2.1.1 1 Sam 17

David's status as a son is the subject of one of the most problematic utterances in the books of Samuel:

Saul's question in 1 Sam 17, three times repeated, as to whose son the young man who has just killed Goliath may be¹¹. The oddity stems from the fact that Saul himself refers to David by name in 1 Samuel 16:19, when he instructs Jesse to send him his son. How are we to explain the fact that Saul knows that David is Jesse's son at the end of ch. 16, and yet seemingly has to ask whose son he is only a chapter later?¹²

There are 3 basic approaches to this problem:

¹¹ The question is addressed directly to Abner (17:55), and then repeated in Saul's injunction to Abner to inquire into the young man's ancestry (17:56). Saul finally confronts David directly with the question (17:58).

¹² For a recent discussion of these issues, see Campbell (1991: 10-15). Campbell comes to the conclusion that the attempt at harmonization has failed, but that this is only a problem for the critical reader. For many purposes, he argues, a 'panoramic reading' (1991: 15) is perfectly adequate, one which elides the difficulties, helped along by the decision to read the story as beginning at 1 Sam 17:1 instead of 16:14, and ending at 17:54. It would be hard to surpass this as an example of a solution to a problem arrived at by a quite deliberate refusal to read the text. Campbell also sees these chapters as the product of a sophisticated intention to preserve two stories rather than to compress and eliminate their differences. This is in order to offer two different visions of David's coming to power (1991: 13-14). But here Campbell himself seems to be offering two incompatible accounts of the interpretation of this hiatus. A panoramic view of his own paper is perhaps necessary to preserve its coherence.

1. Some commentators attempt to harmonise the stories. This must depend on finding a plausible narrative to explain Saul's repetition of the question. Either he has forgotten that he already knows the answer¹³, or is asking for supplementary information¹⁴. It may be, of course, that he has simply failed to recognise David¹⁵. Or perhaps he is not really requesting information but is making some oblique rhetorical point by this question, for instance registering his disbelief that such a stripling could accomplish so daring a feat¹⁶.

¹³ Saul's subsequent attacks of madness have been offered as a possible explanation for such a lapse of memory.

¹⁴ So Ginzberg (1913: 88) conflates aggadic sources which indicate that Saul wants to discover whether David, who he knew was of the tribe of Judah, belonged to the clan of Perez or the clan of Zerah. If the former, then Saul would be confirmed in his suspicion that David was destined for kingship. This of course depends on the variable reference of the concept 'son'. It can refer to the membership of a tribe or clan rather than to a family. Beyond that, there is no textual basis for the conjecture that Saul had any way of knowing that the future king would be descended from Perez. Keil and Delitzsch (1975:178) interpret the question as reflecting Saul's desire to find out who the father of such a fine young man might be in order to bring the father into his entourage.

¹⁵ So Gunn (1980: 79) speculates on 'David's appearance, as he matures, being greatly altered so as not to be recognisable on his reappearance before Saul and his general.'

¹⁶ Polzin (1989: 174-5) offers a complex reading along these lines. He suggests that the reader can account for the first two mentions of the question by supposing that Saul is too far away

2. By contrast, many commentators have seen this discrepancy as evidence that two traditions about the introduction of David to Saul's court have been conflated. This explanation is bolstered by the fact that one manuscript tradition of the Septuagint (LXX^B and allied manuscripts) preserves a shorter text than the MT¹⁷. The implications of this are a matter of debate¹⁸. Does the LXX represent an abbreviation of the MT¹⁹ or is the MT an expansion of the LXX?²⁰ The latter is now the majority opinion. Yet if this is so, we have

from David to recognise him, and that he was not aware that David was actually going to attack Goliath, given that he had discarded Saul's armour. This explanation will not account for Saul addressing the question to David face to face. Here Polzin sees a multi-layered implication in the question; a self-ironic recollection of Saul's earlier dismissal of David; a genuine amazement that the son of an ordinary fellow like Jesse could bring this adventure off; and a veiled directive that David should henceforth regard Saul as his father. Campbell (1991:13 n.31) calls this reading a 'valiant attempt' that 'fails to carry conviction', but see below.

¹⁷ In chapters 17 and 18, the shorter version common to both Hebrew and Greek traditions is 17:1-11, 32-40, 42-48a, 49, 51-54; 18:6aβ-9; 12a, 13-16, 20-21a, 22-29a. In addition the Hebrew has: 17:12-31, 41, 48b, 50; 17:55-18:6aα; 18:10-11, 12b, 17-19, 21b, 29b-30.

¹⁸ This is reflected in the detailed but ultimately unresolved examination of the debate in Barthélemy et al. (1986).

¹⁹ Wellhausen (1871: 104-112) argues that LXX is an early attempt at a harmonisation of the MT text. If so, it is not a very successful one as it still contains discrepancies. The boy who cannot manage Saul's armour in 17:33 and 17:38-40 does not accord very well with the description of the 'man of war' in 16:18.

still to explain why the seams show so much. Is this the result of clumsy editing, or is it a sophisticated technique? Are the redactors of the MT simply constrained by the effort to preserve two equally revered accounts with minimal editing, or is there more to it?

3. This leads us to the third approach, which seeks to account for the preservation of the tensions in the text. Most of the commentators who adopt this approach are perfectly happy to concede that the text may well have a history of editing, but are more concerned to explain why the seams would be left showing. Gros Louis comments '... surely whoever put the narrative into this final form was aware of the inconsistency too; such inconsistency in close proximity in a narrative is more than an author's nodding; it is the equivalent of deep sleep' (1977: 20).

Gros Louis accounts for this inconsistency in terms of his wider reading of the David stories. He sees a consistent pattern whereby David's private life is set against his public role. In this instance, David is first introduced into the private world of Saul's tent as his intimate, the one who can soothe his melancholy with music. In ch. 17, however, David acts in the glare

²⁰ This is now the majority position. See e.g. McCarter (1980: 306-309) who sees the extra material in the MT as deriving from an independent, coherent, alternative account. Klein (1983:174) is more cautious in claiming the existence of an independent account, especially as McCarter has to reject 17:14b-15, 16, 23b, 31 and 18:10-11, 17b, and 29b as harmonizing additions. For an entertaining account, fictional as all such accounts must be, of the way which such a harmonization might occur and the reasons behind it, see Heym 1984:43-50.

of publicity as a warrior and hero. The two introductions reflect the duality that persists throughout David's story between the man and the king.

Robert Alter adopts a similar line in his discussion of 1 Samuel 16-17 (1981: 147-153). He speaks of the 'binocular vision' (1981: 148) of David which the author provides by the technique of 'composite artistry.' The discussion forms part of a chapter where Alter is arguing that the biblical authors sought to record the complexity of their subjects and their characterisations using a technique of 'montage', juxtaposing blocks of material which gave very different perspectives, rather than attempting to assimilate them into a unified account.²¹ In another metaphor, he compares the technique to that of Cubist painting which imposes incompatible perspectives for expressive effect (1981: 146). He draws an analogy with the two creation stories in Genesis, where a human-centred 'horizontal' view

²¹ Alter (1981: 148) regards these chapters as particularly significant for his theory as he dates their composition to only a few decades after the events. He argues that the author was thus much less constrained by the need to work with traditions which already had status and fixity than, say, the authors of Genesis. This means that the discrepancies in the text of 1 Samuel are more likely to be the result of the author's deliberate choice: '...if he chose to combine two versions of David's debut, one theological in cast, and the other folkloric, it was because both were necessary to his conception of David's character and historic role' (1981: 148). Apart from the assumption about the date of the composition of this text that Alter makes, one could equally well argue that proximity to the event would put tighter restrictions on the author, if we imagine that he is trying to tell the story of David's debut to an audience which presumably includes other witnesses to the events.

follows a more stylized, theocentric version. The two maintain a tension over the vexed theological question of the relation between divine initiative and human response. David is depicted both as the object of divine choice, and as the young hero whose rise to the kingship depends on his own sharp wits and bravery.

Alter's account is endorsed by Fokkelman who finds it 'quite unacceptable that the author was not aware of the friction between 16:14-23 and cap. 17' (1986: 202). He goes on to conclude that the author 'found it quite unnecessary or quite incorrect to deny that he was using two sources or traditions concerning the first meeting. On the contrary, he simply saw the chance of making positive use of the fact that more than one tradition was available' (1986: 202). He also draws attention to the fact that the author devotes 3 verses to this transaction which could have been summarised in a few words.

Another commentator who takes this line is Miscall (1983: 71-73; 1986: 120-210). He warns that the tensions in the text should not be resolved too easily. Though he opens up the questions, he does not answer them. He reproaches other critics for choosing one topic or theme from the text as the core meaning and then honing the other details to fit this. He is content to conclude with the verdict that the final section of ch. 17 is 'opaque, its significance is indeterminable' (1983: 71).

An explanation for the growth of this technique is ventured by Damrosch (1987). He sees a dynamic interaction between the sense of the complexity of historical affairs and the technical demands of editing together pre-existing accounts. 'On the one hand, a metaphoric view of character and history inspired the seeking out of such analogies and bred a tolerance for

narrative doublings; on the other hand, the compositional pressures inherent in combining disparate sources and traditions would in turn have reinforced a metaphoric and ironic view of history as a series of repetitive transformations of earlier events' (1987: 234).

7.2.1.2 Foregrounding the question

Interesting though these readings are, they do not account for the stark inconsistency of the repeated question in this particular instance. This subtle point about the conflict of the private and the personal is made elsewhere without requiring such a blatant narrative inconsistency which the text does nothing to resolve.

One commentator whose interest is in the narrative coherence of the final form of the text is Polzin (1989: 171-176)²². He begins by pointing out the contrast between these verses and v. 15. 'Why would some guiding intelligence take care in verse 15 to make David's situation there consistent with the events of the

²² Polzin (1989: 259 n.20) provides a substantial review of the reasons why he opts to read the MT without becoming embroiled in the text-critical arguments over 1 Sam 17 and 18. He does this in the form of a critique of Tov's detailed analysis (Tov 1985) which seeks to demonstrate that the LXX text is a coherent and plausible version, rather than the product of an abridgement of the MT. Polzin concludes, 'What is clear from Tov's exercise, it seems to me, is that no amount of internal text-critical evidence of the type Tov employs can render either alternative more likely than its opposite' (1989: 260 n.21). Polzin calls his own integrated reading of the MT a 'calculated response' (1989: 261 n.21) to the notion that the Hebrew text is incoherent and conflated.

previous chapter, but then allow to stand, or worse still incorporate, a conclusion that is inconsistent not only with chapter 16 but also with Saul's and David's meeting in the middle of chapter 17?' (1989: 172).

Polzin answers this by pointing out the *rhetorical* effect of these questions on the reader: 'The narrator certainly succeeds in getting the reader's attention at the end of the chapter: Saul's question to Abner in verse 55 falls upon one's ears like a thunderclap' (1989: 171).

This is an aspect that most other commentators do not touch on, and which seems to me of prime importance. The very inappropriateness of this question, especially in its three-fold repetition, serves to bring it to the reader's notice²³. Polzin enjoins us to take responsibility for reading this story, rather than dismissing it as incoherent with what he calls a 'redactional shrug' (1989: 172). Polzin's subsequent discussion of the significance of this question has been mentioned above. What is important for our purposes is to acknowledge his detection of the function of this incoherence and repetition.

In a more impressionistic way, Segal urges the reader to imagine that 'the two stories are not erroneously, or innocently, but insistently inconsistent and meant to blow the mind fruitfully' (1987: 113). She explains that 'The mind must imagine the impossible, and can't, and can't let it alone, and keeps trying to argue itself out of its distress' (1987: 112).

²³ As Polzin remarks, 'That Saul's question about David is expressed not just once but three times in these four verses should at least alert the reader that Saul's questioning is being emphasized here with a vengeance' (1989: 172).

The narrative effect of this disruption is undeniable; it brings the question to the fore. Here we have a prime example of a case of 'defamiliarization', of making strange. As Herbert Schneidau points out in his discussion of the use of this device in biblical poetics, this word also encapsulates the nature of what is going on in the text. 'Familiarization, as the word itself reveals, implies familial interdependence: breaking free of dependence on our families is necessarily estrangement' (1976: 34). David himself here is 'defamiliarized'; the narratological oddity of this question at this place coincides with David's movement into liminality, his removal from Jesse's family and his as yet uncertain incorporation into Saul's household, and his eventual appearance as Saul's heir. It is this aspect of the text which our enquiry has already encouraged us to take seriously. Just whose son is David?

7.2.2 'WHO IS THEIR FATHER?'

At the beginning of David's career, then, the question is posed 'Whose son is this young man?' in a way that the reader can neither ignore nor assimilate. It is therefore all the more striking that a similarly enigmatic question over fatherhood appears toward the beginning of Saul's career²⁴.

²⁴ Edelman (1991:135) notes the link between the two questions, which she sees as both seeking the answer 'Yahweh'. In her interpretation, Saul is asking whether this test of the killing of Goliath confirms the rumours of David's anointing which he has heard. She also draws attention to the link between this question and Nabal's twofold denunciation of David as 'son of no-one' and 'son of Jesse' (see also Polzin 1989: 211). This is also

On his return from his anointing by Samuel, Saul, as Samuel had prophesied, encounters a band of prophets and is himself seized by the prophetic spirit. This provokes the people to ask the question, 'What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?' (1 Sam 10: 11-12) which the text informs us attains the status of a proverb. It also provokes 'a man of the place' to answer 'And who is their father?'²⁵ This question, like the one which we have been discussing, gains prominence by its very oddity. What can it mean? In what sense is it an answer provoked by the previous question, which has given rise to its own crop of speculations as to its meaning?

The wider context, is suggestive. The word 'father' appears on one other occasion in this chapter, when Samuel predicts that the two men who will meet Saul will say to him, 'The asses which you went to seek are found,

connected with Saul's outburst in 1 Sam 22:7-8 (see Gunn 1980: 97) and forward to Sheba's cry in 2 Sam 20:1.

²⁵ In the alternative etiology given for this proverb in 1 Sam 19: 24, there is no equivalent to the man's question. Of course, the whole point of a proverb is that it is applicable to a variety of situations, that it has become detached from the particular occasion of its first utterance. So McCarter speculates that 'this saying may have been applied to situations involving participation in a particular group or activity by an individual who for one reason or another would not have been expected to participate ... When someone would find an unlikely individual involved in some group, therefore, he would say, "Is Saul, too, among the prophets?"' (1980: 183-4). Note however, that in a way not totally dissimilar to the episode we have just been examining, the striking repetition of the proverb serves to draw attention to it, and the very fact that the repetition is inexact may serve to highlight and problematise the question.

and now your father has ceased to care about the asses and is anxious about you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?"' (10:2) A father expresses his bewilderment over a son²⁶.

The people also preface their question in 10:11 by asking 'What has come over the son of Kish?' This reminds us that the father most obviously in question is Kish. The issue of Saul's relationship to his father is thus highlighted in the text. In this perspective, the precise implication of this question for the sociology of Israel's prophetic movement is not the point, interesting though it may be to speculate on such matters²⁷. Whatever the meaning of the phrase 'sons of the prophets', it does show that the word provides a

²⁶ This is of course Samuel's anticipation of what the two men may present as a quotation from Kish, an anticipation which is not explicitly confirmed in the text of Samuel, and which is at a third remove from its imputed speaker. We might note the parallel that both David and Saul are sent off on an errand by their father that involves a donkey. In David's case, in 1 Sam 16: 20 records his father's sending him to Saul's court with a donkey laden with gifts. Both David and Saul find more than they bargain for in the shape of an encounter that will lead eventually to their gaining the throne.

²⁷ So, for example, Ackroyd (1971: 85) relates the question to the concept of the 'sons of the prophets' who, by implication must have a 'father', perhaps the leader of a band or school of prophets. He takes the word אב here to indicate an interpreter, citing the parallels of Joseph who describes himself as Pharaoh's 'father' (Gen 45: 8) and Micah's request to the Levite to be a 'father' to him (Jud 17: 10)

bridge between the biological family and the affiliative bond. The possibility that Saul is now breaking out of the role as 'son of Kish' is raised. He is in fact referred to by this epithet only once more in 1 Samuel, very much the exception that proves the rule. In 1 Sam 10:20-21, Saul is chosen by lot from among the tribe of the Matrites. However, Saul is missing. He has quite literally separated himself from his family in order to evade a selection process which is rooted in the genealogical structures of Israel.

Yet on both occasions the reference to Saul as a son of the prophets is in the form of a question. Saul is not clearly drawn into the orbit of the prophets, but rather left in a limbo. This is of course the position he must be in as the first king. There is a basic dilemma in the text over the transition to the hereditary monarchy. The king's son gains his position because he is the son of the king. The dynasty looks back to its founder for its legitimacy. But how is that founder himself legitimised? Who is the father of the first king?

This question resurfaces again in the case of David. David becomes the founding father of the monarchy. The same dilemma reappears only here with an added complication. Not only must David's legitimacy be established, but there is now a legitimate rival, Jonathan, Saul's son.

The question 'Whose son is David?' thus becomes the animating question of the text. It is also a question that receives multiple answers in the books of Samuel. David is referred to as the son of four characters; Jesse, Saul, Nabal and Death. In the next section, I will discuss David's relationship to each of these figures, before going on to discuss the implication of Saul's question for the reader.

7.3 SON OF JESSE

7.3.1 DAVID'S GENEALOGY

The first mention of David in 1 Sam is as the youngest among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Jesse is given no genealogy in Samuel, which is suggestive in itself²⁸. The books of Samuel are on the whole reticent when it comes to genealogies anyway, but Elkanah, and hence Samuel, is given four generations of ancestors in addition to his tribal designation:

There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah the son of Jehoram, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite (1 Sam 1:1).

The same pattern is repeated in the case of Kish, Saul's father; four generations of ancestors and a tribal designation:

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becotath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite (1 Sam 9:1).

Ruth, of course, preserves a tradition that carries David's ancestry back through Jesse to Boaz to Perez (Ruth 4:18-22) and the genealogy of the sons of Judah in 1 Chron 2 contains a parallel account. That said, the fact remains that even by the reticent standards of Samuel, Jesse, and thus David, have no genealogy in this

²⁸ In 1 Sam 16:1 he is introduced simply as 'Jesse the Bethlehemite'; on his reintroduction in 1 Sam 17:12, he appears as 'an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse.'

text. When David replies to Saul that he is the son of his servant Jesse, what information is the reader given?

7.3.2 JESSE AND DAVID

7.3.2.1 Jesse as father

The most penetrating recent account of Jesse is to be found in Rosenberg, who cautions us: 'The story of Jesse, like all else in biblical narrative, is the sum total of the words spoken about him. There are dangers to reading too much into a text that speaks so sparingly, but when sparse words are the only story we have, we must make what we can from what we are given. The words are, after all, what the makers of the text chose for us to know about Jesse, so the burden of interpretation is not to be skirted²⁹' (1986: 176).

He comments on the disjunction between Jesse's house and the house that David himself founds. This first appears in the disjunction between Jesse and his seven sons, who

²⁹ We need to bear in mind that the makers of the text may have been writing for an audience which had a stock of common knowledge about Jesse which is not available to us. Strictly speaking, then, what they 'chose for us to know' would have to include their expectations of our previous knowledge. In the event, however, this makes no practical difference to the fact that, as Rosenberg says, we modern readers have to make the best of what we have. Indeed, Rosenberg's restrictive formulation is to be preferred to the attitude which makes the probability that the first audience knew more of Jesse than we do a licence for speculation. The fact that neither Samuel (16:1) or Saul (16:18-19) has to ask for further identification may reflect the assumption that Jesse is well known, either in the world of the text or to the readership, or else it may simply reflect economy of narrative technique.

all appear at the sacrifice to which Samuel bids them, and the eighth son³⁰ who is out keeping the flocks. How are we to interpret this disjunction? Is it an instance of the youngest son being disregarded as too young to be of significance (Hertzberg 1964:138), or is the parallel to be drawn with Jacob and his devotion to Benjamin? Benjamin is also separated from his brothers when they go down to Egypt but here as an index of his father's protective love. Is this Jesse's motive? Is he keeping David back in order to spare him from whatever Samuel has in mind? The initial reaction of the elders of Bethlehem to Samuel's arrival, after all, had been one of fear over whether his intentions were peaceful (1 Sam 16: 4-5).

At all events, 16:20 records Jesse sending David to Saul along with gifts. Again, is Jesse sending his son as one more gift among the others, or is he taking care that his cherished boy is received in the most auspicious circumstances? David's status as Jesse's son is emphasized by the repetition of the word in vv. 19 and 20. What the emotional content of the relationship between the two may be is not disambiguated.

The same motif of David as messenger and go-between recurs in 17:17-18 when Jesse sends David to take provisions to his three brothers who are fighting with Saul's army and to their commander. We get some sense of

³⁰ 1 Chron 2:15 lists David as the seventh son. In view of the importance of the number seven in the biblical text, this may reflect an attempt by Chronicles to bring David into a position of prominence. Equally, the story in Samuel may be using the number symbolically to represent David as the extra, the supernumerary son, already in some sense displaced from the 'complete' number of his brothers.

a reciprocity in the relationship between Jesse and his sons from his request that David should bring back a token from them. Yet the very request that David should bring some proof of delivery could suggest that Jesse had reason to suspect that he might not carry out his commission. As it turns out, David leaves the provisions with the keeper of the baggage and that is the last we hear of them.

We are left uncertain as to the nature of the relationship between Jesse and his son. Does he represent the protecting father, or the father who seeks to reject or suppress his son?

7.3.2.2 Jesse's disappearance

Other than in such references, Jesse himself disappears from the story, as do the rest of David's family. There is one obscure reference in 1 Sam 22:3-4 when David asks the king of Moab to allow David's father and mother to stay with him until the outcome of his rebellion against Saul is known. Nothing is subsequently heard of them. In 2 Sam 8:2, Moab is mentioned as a conquered enemy of David's, its captives subjected to a draconian and arbitrary execution of two thirds of their manpower. Rabbinic sources suggest that this is retaliation on David's part for the murder of his parents by their supposed guardians³¹.

Rosenberg (1986: 174) describes David as 'indirectly responsible' for their deaths, which is certainly

³¹ See e.g. Rashi, on Numbers Rabbah 14:1 'because they had killed his father, mother and brothers. For it states: and he led them before the king of Moab (1 Sam 22:4) and we do not find mention of their departure from there.' See Rosenberg (1986: 304 n.2).

pushing the evidence, but his comment comes in his interesting discussion of the royal household as the repository *par excellence* of shame, 'the desire to cover up oneself, one's body, one's emotions and needs, one's presence to another.' The interaction of the political and familial in the royal household is the key to this transition³². 1 Samuel 17 is in his view a story which details the leaving of the father's house in a complex and subtle way. He sees this as an 'archetypal moment in the history of fathers and younger sons, the emergence of the historical actor' (1986: 176). As he puts it: 'The least significant son of Jesse has become the author of Jesse's significance'. Jesse is only remembered because of his famous son whom he tried to conceal.

In Rosenberg's reading, the concealment of Jesse by the text is a counterpoise to the concealment of David by his family. David's biological descent is not in question, but he refuses to accept the social consequences of that descent. To be identified as 'the son of Jesse' implies a whole set of social parameters which form a boundary to who David can be. Rosenberg reads David's reply to Saul as an assertion of independence: 'The son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite' is to be taken as 'I who am free am the son of one who serves, of one who has not understood his freedom' (1986: 180). There is a move from the filiative to the affiliative relationship.

³² Rosenberg here is drawing on Cavell's essay on *King Lear* (Cavell 1969:267-293), where he argues that the whole conspectus of tragedy that ensues in the play, which leaves none of the characters unscarred, and none immune from the charge of wrongdoing, depends on the attempt to evade the threat of self-revelation (1967: 286).

This is of course unsupported by any textual evidence, but draws attention to the fact that David's natural parents disappear from the text from this point. The name of his father, however, does not disappear from the text as we shall go on to discuss. At key points in the text, David is spoken of as the 'son of Jesse'. It becomes part of David's 'proper name' in terms of our discussion in Chapter 2 above. We will examine each of these incidents to see if there is a common strand to them.

7.3.3. 'SON OF JESSE' AS INSULT

7.3.3.1 1 Sam 20:26-34

In these verses, Saul uses the epithet three times in a context where the reader is well aware that Saul is harbouring murderous thoughts about David. In 1 Sam 20:27, Saul, missing David from the table, asks, 'Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?' Jonathan replies that David is attending a sacrifice with his family in Bethlehem. Note that Jonathan uses David's name, rather than echoing Saul's phrase, but it is Jonathan who is the one who brings up the matter of the family sacrifice.

There is an echo here of the last sacrifice which the text has referred to as taking place at Bethlehem, the one which Samuel conducted when he came to anoint David king (1 Sam 16: 1-3). That sacrifice is also a ruse, one which Samuel uses at the Lord's instigation in order to give himself an excuse for being in Bethlehem. We might also note the similarity to the excuse that David's own son Absalom uses in 2 Sam 15: 7-8 where he engineers his escape to Hebron by pleading that he has to pay a vow in Hebron.

Note, too, how Jonathan embellishes David's story. In 20:6, David suggests to Jonathan that he tells his father that there is a yearly sacrifice in Bethlehem for all David's family. It is Jonathan who introduces in vv 28-29 the idea that it is David's brother who has bidden him to attend. In view of Eliab's reaction to David in 1 Sam 17:28, this seems odd to the reader, as is the further insistence that David wishes to be with his brothers. None of his brothers otherwise figures in the narrative. Why is there no mention of Jesse or David's mother? This is particularly intriguing in that there is in this episode a reversal David's transition from Jesse's household to Saul's in 1 Sam 17.

Saul's response to this excuse is an outburst against Jonathan for his foolish loyalty to David at the expense of his own inheritance. Saul speaks twice of the 'son of Jesse', but uses another 'son' epithet, calling Jonathan the 'son of a perverse and rebellious woman'. At the very least, this suggests that the use of the word 'son' to indicate condemnation by association is circulating in this text. This culminates in Saul's use of the epithet 'son of death' in 20:31, the implications of which we explored earlier.

The sexual connotations of this speech of Saul's are powerful. Jonathan's choice of David 'shames his mother's nakedness', a strong term if we relate it to the context of Lev 18:6-18 and similar passages which prescribe drastic penalties for exposing a mother or father's nakedness. Levenson and Halpern (1980: 515-6) relate this language to the possibility that David has stolen Ahinoam, Saul's wife and Jonathan's mother (1 Sam 14:49-50), on the basis that she is identical to the

Ahinoam who David 'takes' apparently in lieu of Michal (1 Sam 25:43)³³.

Be that as it may, here we have a father uniquely in the Old Testament referring in what seem to be crude and blatant terms to his wife's genitals in the course of an argument with that woman's son. That son was engendered when Saul uncovered Ahinoam's nakedness, and is accused of bringing shame on that nakedness. The shame of the act of copulation resonates with the shame of the fickle, uncontrollable product of that copulation. The son who opts for the affiliative relationship with David rather than the filiative relationship with Saul undercuts the whole economy of the hereditary system, and activates all the resentments of the father. The resentment over the act of procreation which will lead Saul to cast his spear at Jonathan in v. 33 is uncomfortably near the surface.

So in this extract, the name used of David represents a clash between the two discourses of father and son, a clash where Saul uses the language of sonship to distance and denigrate both of his 'sons', natural and

³³ Levenson (1978: 9-10) makes the case for the identification of the two royal wives. He draws attention to Nathan's remark in 2 Sam 12:8 where he refers to the Lord having given David his master's wives. In addition, he interprets Saul's action in conveying David's wife Michal to Paltiel, which is mentioned in the next verse in 1 Sam 25 (v.44), as a *quid pro quo* for David's appropriation of Saul's wife. Jonathan's mother, then, is 'perverse and rebellious' in having abandoned Saul for David. There is, of course, no direct evidence for any of this, but the coincidence of names, otherwise infrequent in the Hebrew Bible, is intriguing.

adoptive. David is 'son of Jesse' and so alien, and out of line for the throne.

7.3.3.2 1 Sam 22.

Saul also uses this epithet when he is berating the Benjamites for their failure to keep him informed about Jonathan's rebellion. He ironically questions the *son of Jesse's* ability to provide his followers with land and vineyards. We might especially note the contrasts in v. 8:

'No one discloses to me when *my son* makes a league with the *son of Jesse*, none of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that *my son* has stirred up *my servant* against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.'

Again, the language of sonship is at once used to distinguish Jonathan and David, and yet brings both of them together. Jonathan is 'my son' yet he acts like the 'son of Jesse', who is not here Saul's son, but his servant.

The epithet is also used in 1 Sam 22:9 by Saul's ruthless henchman Doeg the Edomite, reporting the action of Abimelech in giving David Goliath's sword. There is a certain irony in Saul's scornful dismissal of David's obscure ancestry when he himself is descended by his own admission from 'the humblest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin' (1 Sam 9:21)³⁴.

³⁴ We read even less about Kish than we do about Jesse. He is given only one speech in the biblical text, when he sends Saul off with a servant to search for his lost asses (1 Sam 9: 3). The ultimate fate of Kish is even more obscure than that of Jesse.

7.3.3.3 1 Sam 25: 10

The contrast between son and servant reappears in the use of this epithet by Nabal in 1 Sam 25:10. He dismisses David's claims contemptuously:

Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who are breaking away from their masters.

In the context of Nabal's further refusal to give provisions to 'men who come from I know not where', the obscurity of David's origins is emphasized. To claim descent from Jesse is tantamount to coming from nowhere. We shall presently go on to examine this particular pericope more closely.

The epithet also appears in 2 Sam 20:1 in the slogan which Sheba son of Bichri uses to promote his rebellion emphasizing the lack of connection between Israel and the son of Jesse.³⁵

7.4 SON OF NABAL

7.4.1 1 SAM 25: 8

7.4.1.1 Filiation and liminality

David himself describes his relationship to Nabal as that of a son in 1 Samuel 25: 8. This rather startling self-identification comes at the end of the speech that David instructs his young men to make to Nabal. They

³⁵ The same slogan reappears in 1 Kings 12:16 when Israel rebels against David's grandson Rehoboam. Contrast the slogan attributed to Amasai, chief of the Thirty, in 1 Chron 12:18.

are to point out to Nabal that David and his men have defended the flock and so deserve some recompense: 'Pray give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'

Nabal rejects this designation of himself as David's father. As we have seen, he asks the rhetorical question 'Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse?' Quite specifically he counters the claim by a disparaging reference to David's biological paternity. He also implies that David falls under the category of a slave breaking away from his master. Again, this contradicts the language of sonship that is at work between David and Saul. David, Nabal implies, is Saul's servant. It is interesting to note that it is in this very verse, 1 Sam 25:10, that David's young men are first referred to by the narrator as his servants, a designation which thereafter becomes more and more frequent in the text. Heretofore they have been his 'young men'.

Why, then, does this suggestion of a filiative relationship between Nabal and David arise in the text at all? At a superficial level, David is making a polite and ingratiating approach which is repudiated by the churlish Nabal. But we may suspect that there is more to the matter than this.

Regina Schwartz (1992) examines the wider ramifications of the theme. The name Nabal, as is well known, is the word for 'fool', but also for an outcast, and has a resonance with the word *nebalah*, a corpse. Besides its resonances in this chapter, the word reappears later in the narratives about David.

David's daughter Tamar uses the word 'folly' to describe her half-brother Amnon's conduct in raping her (2 Sam 13:12). This Schwartz uses to point out the way in

which David himself becomes a fool in the Bathsheba episode. In this episode, he shows himself to be a true son of Nabal, of whom Abigail says 'Nabal is his name and *nabal* is his nature' (1 Sam 25: 25).

Indeed, the connection is closer than Schwartz indicates. It is Abigail's intervention that keeps David from what he himself admits would have been an action of folly, the massacre of Nabal's household. In the Bathsheba episode, however, David does just what Abigail prevents him from doing in 1 Sam 25. He brings about the death of Uriah, who has done nothing to harm him, an even more heinous action than his hot-headed desire to kill Nabal who had insulted him and his men. In both tales, David becomes the husband of another man's wife, and in both cases, the man dies. Both stories thus turn on the question as to whether David will prove himself to be a 'son of Nabal' or not.

7.4.1.2 Narrative Analogy in 1 Sam 24-26

Levenson (1978) brings out the narrative analogy between these two episodes. He sees this story, sandwiched as it is between the two similar stories in 1 Sam 24 and 26 of David's merciful action towards Saul, as a proleptic glimpse of the downfall of David. David here is shown for the first time as capable of the ruthless violence that sets the whole sorry train of events after Uriah's death into motion:

... the David of chaps. 24 and 26 is the character whom we have seen since his introduction in chap. 16 and whom we shall continue to see until 2 Samuel 11, the appealing young man of immaculate motivation and heroic courage. But the David of chap. 25 is a man who kills for a grudge. The episode of Nabal is the very first revelation of evil in David's character. He can kill. This time

he stops short. But the cloud that chap. 25 raises continues to darken our perception of David's character. (1978: 27)

Levenson seems to have overlooked the strange but telling episode of Eliab's speech to David in 1 Sam 17: 28-30, where his brother says that he knows David's presumption and the evil of his heart. At the very moment when David's first moves into Saul's world are occurring, we have the suggestion that his motives are less than pure. Though this can be dismissed as the reaction of an elder brother on the same lines as the reaction of Joseph's brothers to him, it also 'raises a cloud' that with hindsight foreshadows David's later peccadilloes. This observation of course strengthens rather than weakens Levenson's case.

However, as Robert Gordon has suggested (Gordon 1980), the links between these three chapters are even closer. Gordon hypothesises that Nabal stands as a narrative surrogate for Saul. He points out that the place names associated with Nabal in 1 Sam 25: 2 are ones also associated with Saul³⁶. Nabal also acts as if he were a king. Indeed, the word 'king' itself appears in the text to describe the lavishness of the feast Nabal holds to celebrate the shearing, 'like the feast of a king' (1 Kings 25: 36).

Gordon regards the function of 1 Sam 25 as the reinforcement of the sense that bloodguilt would be fatal to David's move towards the kingship. He sees an

³⁶ Maon is named three times in 1 Sam 23: 24f as the area where David hid and where Saul nearly captures him. Carmel also has a Saulide association as the place where Saul erected his stele to celebrate his victory over the Amalekites (1 Sam 15: 12)

incremental repetition in the three chapters which shows an increasing resistance of David to the idea of the inappropriateness of revenge for bloodguilt. Chapter 26 is not just a redundant repetition of chapter 24.

Whereas in chapter 24 David does desecrate the royal person by the symbolic action of cutting the edge off Saul's robe, in chapter 26 he refrains from touching Saul's person. Saul is also more vulnerable in chapter 26 despite the fact that he is surrounded by his men. In that chapter, the whole camp is sunk in a deep sleep.

Chapter 25, Gordon agrees, is proleptic. In it 'the whole issue of grievance, revenge and blood-guilt is played through to its conclusion. Thus David is given a preview of what will happen if he commits his case to God and leaves Saul unharmed' (Gordon 1980: 57). Just as Nabal is smitten by God without David having to incur the guilt of killing him, so Saul will die without any intervention by David.

This is in direct contrast to Levenson's reading of the same chapter. Where they agree is in the claim that chapter 25 is proleptic. Their judgment of its implications is very different, however.

7.4.1.3 Nabal and Saul

Here, then, the relationship between the three chapters is seen in much the same way by the two commentators, but very different conclusions are drawn. This can only confirm an ambivalence at work in the text itself in that it supports such different conclusions. That ambivalence is carried over into the whole matter of the father-son relationship with which the text is dealing.

In chapter 25 we have a story where David makes the overture of declaring himself a son. Nabal rebuffs it, and in what could be read as a classically Freudian

move, David reacts with murderous hostility to this unresponsive father figure. This violence becomes deflected when it is diverted into the vengeance of taking the father's wife. Abigail's pleas can thus be reinterpreted as a case of seduction by the mother. As rejected 'son of Nabal', David takes revenge, not by overt violence, but by marrying Abigail.

Yet if Nabal is a surrogate for Saul, the connections become even more suggestive. At the end of this chapter (1 Sam 25: 43), we are told of another marriage that David contracts, that with Ahinoam of Jezreel. As we have already seen, it is striking that Saul's own wife, the mother of Jonathan, a woman who implicitly he described as 'perverse and rebellious' in his outburst against David in 1 Sam 20: 30, is also named Ahinoam (1 Sam 14: 50). Is there a parallel here too between David's taking of Abigail from Nabal and his taking of Ahinoam from Saul?

Be that as it may, there is a close parallel in the use of the language of sonship between these chapters. If Nabal is referred to by David as his father, on three occasions, Saul describes David as his son. These three occasions occur in the very chapters 24 and 26 that we have been discussing.

7.5 SON OF SAUL

7.5.1 SONS OF SAUL

In 1 Sam 24: 16, Saul responds to David's speech chiding him for his suspicion by asking 'Is this your voice, my son David?' In 1 Sam 26: 17, the same question is echoed. Saul repeats the designation of David as his son in 1 Sam 26: 21. Here it comes in the context of Saul's own identification of himself as one who has 'played the fool'. Finally in 1 Sam 26: 25 Saul and

David part finally on a word of blessing from Saul:
 'Blessed be you, my son David! You will do many things
 and succeed in them.'

Here we need to take account of the paradox that this text constantly circles round, the fact that David, the founder of the royal house, is himself the son of Jesse, and the second king, not the first. Saul's son Jonathan, his rightful heir, does not succeed him.

7.5.2 SON OF THE KING

David Jobling (1978: 4-25) devotes a study to the role of Jonathan in 1 Sam 13-31. In essence, he concludes that Jonathan as a character, whatever the historical basis of this narrative may be, serves as a necessary intermediary device between Saul and David. He becomes the agency of transfer of power from Saul to David. Saul cannot transfer power to David because part of the sign of his rejection is his lack of knowledge that he is rejected. Jonathan provides the missing link: 'Jonathan's identification with, his heirdom to, Saul, provide him with the royal authority to abdicate; his identification with David enables the emptying of his own heirdom into David' (1978: 18). In Jobling's account, Jonathan serves to mediate a fundamental paradox in Israel's story:

1. Monarchy is intrinsically dynastic, but
2. Israel's monarchy is not traced from her first king (1978: 17)

This formulation of Jobling's, however, masks an even deeper problem in the consideration of the monarchy. If the monarchy is dynastic, how can there legitimately be a first king? Jobling's formulation is predicated on an accident of history: what must be explained is the

empirical fact that Israel's monarchy does not follow an uninterrupted dynastic line. The further question makes it clear that this is not simply a historical anomaly. There is an intrinsic difficulty in 'beginning' a monarchy. Just as there is an inherent problem with the first human being, so there is a like problem with the first king.

Jobling hypothesises that Jonathan serves to mediate the dichotomy that has been set up. He is the heir who renounces his filiative claim to Saul's throne in favour of the affiliative claim of comradeship with David. Another of Saul's children might at first sight be thought to be better placed to accomplish this feat. Saul weds his daughter Michal to David. He is thus tied into the royal household, although as the story is recounted in 1 Sam 18: 17-29 this is a calculated act of hostility.

Jonathan, however, performs a function that Michal cannot because of her sex. Though David can possess her affiliatively in a way that the culture forbids with her brother, she cannot as a woman stand in the direct line of succession. She cannot directly confer the throne on him. In addition, Saul is able to give Michal to another man, Paltiel (1 Sam 25: 44). Precisely because there is no formal, legal, culturally sanctioned relationship between David and Jonathan, Saul cannot do the same with the relationship with Jonathan.

Saul is also bound to Jonathan in a more intimate way than to his daughter, in that Jonathan is his heir. We will explore at length below the ambivalence of the relation between father and son that the concept of the heir involves. At this juncture, let us note that Saul's designation of David as his son also can be taken as a tacit acknowledgement that David will be his successor rather than Jonathan. In 1 Sam 24:20, Saul

states: 'And now, behold, I know that you shall surely become king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.'

In some sense, then, David becomes the substitute for Jonathan. This is confirmed by the fact that they are both the subject of parallel incidents in the narrative. The nature of these common events, however, is at first sight surprising. They are both the objects of Saul's hatred, and both of them come under his threat of death.

Saul casts his spear at David in 1 Sam 18: 12, and makes to do the same to Jonathan in 1 Samuel 21: 30. In addition, as we have seen, Saul's conduct towards Jonathan in 1 Sam 14 is at least suspicious. His murderous intent towards David is made explicit in the text on several occasions³⁷, but Jonathan is no less threatened by him.

³⁷ Saul's hostility to David is first mentioned in 1 Sam 18: 9 in response to the song of the women who praise David for killing tens of thousands in comparison to Saul's thousands. In verse 10 and 11 he seeks David's death for the first time. In 1 Sam 18: 25, we are made privy to Saul's hope that David will be killed seeking the bridal price of one hundred Philistine foreskins for the hand of Michal, incidentally a plan for a proxy killing that has echoes in David's plan to dispose of Uriah. In 19: 1, Saul explicitly tells his servants, including Jonathan, that David is to be killed. Jonathan effects a reconciliation, but once again, in 19: 10, Saul casts his spear at David and in 19: 11ff attempts to arrest him at home. From then on, hostilities are open between them until the moments of reconciliation in chapters 24: 16-22 and 26: 21. Despite these, in 27: 1 David acknowledges the impossibility of any final reconciliation.

To be Saul's son, then, is to be at the mercy of a death-dealing father, to be a 'son of death'. Why this should be we shall explore in our next chapter. For the moment, we shall turn to consider the significance of the multiplicity of the figures to whom David relates as son.

7.6 THE SEARCH FOR THE FATHER

7.6.1 MULTIPLE FATHERS

7.6.1.1 Schroeter

The result of our enquiry seems to be the anomalous position that David is the son of more than one father. Strange though it seems, this is not unprecedented. Just such a concept of the multiplicity of fathers is explored in relation to *Oedipus Rex* by James Schroeter (1961).

Schroeter argues that the play is divided into sections where different characters occupy a position in relation to Oedipus which represents an aspect of the complex paternal function. The four characters - Teiresias, Creon, the Messenger, and the herdsman - are all older than Oedipus, and, so Schroeter claims, each also has a nurturing role. Teiresias fosters Oedipus' psychic good (his happiness), Creon his political good (his rule), the Messenger his social good (his nurture) and the herdsman his biological good (his physical existence) (1961: 189).

Schroeter argues that this multiplicity of fathers gives Oedipus his universal significance. In defence of this thesis, he draws attention to the widespread trope by which founding figures are brought up by foster parents. The examples he cites are King Arthur, raised by humble foster parents; Moses, brought up in the Egyptian court;

Mohammed who is raised by his grandfather and an uncle; Jesus who, though son of God, is raised as the son of a carpenter. Schroeter's contention is that this dual origin means that each both shares and transcends the ordinary lot of the people to whom he becomes a national leader.

In Sophocles' play, this device of mediation is carried to a further level. Oedipus's four fathers represent a whole spectrum of human types and of social relationships, which Oedipus comes to embody in a unique synthesis.

7.6.1.2 Paul

Yet there are another two obvious candidates for inclusion in this spectrum whom Schroeter omits to mention, presumably because neither of them appears in the play in person. They are Laius and Polybus, Oedipus' natural and adopted fathers. The role of these two is discussed in R.A. Paul's paper on 'Symbolic Interpretation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology' (Paul 1980: 286-294) where he sees them as representing the decomposition of the figure of the father as destroyer and rescuer: 'the complicated and ambivalent father is broken into two; Laios, who wants to kill his son, and Polybos, who saves him. Nothing supernatural has been added, but rather the character of the father has been decomposed into two characters, each representing a different aspect' (1980: 294).

Paul carries his analysis further in an examination of the paternal roles in the gospels (1980: 292-3). He there finds a structure which provides four places for the father in the four possible logical combinations of the two aspects of father as destroyer and preserver. In Jesus's case, the four fathers are:

God	destroyer	preserver
Joseph	not-destroyer	preserver
Herod	destroyer	not-preserver
Pilate	not-destroyer	not-preserver

While this may be a little neat, both these are suggestive for our purposes. The three human fathers to whom David relates all exhibit this ambivalence. Jesse gives David biological life, but his name attached to David is an obstacle to his attainment of his status as king. Does he seek to protect or to repress his son? Saul, on the other hand, gives David his status but also acts as an obstacle by his very existence. He is represented both as loving David (1 Sam 16: 21) and as seeking to kill him. Yet as father, he is inviolable. David refuses to take the obvious course of killing Saul to protect his own life³⁸. It is Nabal who represents the possibility of the death of the father, necessary for the son's life.

The relationship between these figures is alluded to by Bach (1989: 53). She sees David's allegiance to Saul and Nabal as surrogate fathers as an expression of his liminal situation. 'No longer the child shepherd guarding his father's flocks in the hills of Bethlehem,

³⁸ There are of course other aspects to the stories of David's sparing of Saul. If he did kill Saul, David in his turn would be vulnerable both to the vengeance of Saul's kinsfolk and also to any ambitious assassin who opted to follow his example in usurping the throne. In the context of the present discussion, however, the interaction between David as son and Saul as father is the point at issue.

not yet ready to discard the time of sonship.' She contrasts David's fate with that of Jonathan, who is never able to discard the role of son. Of course in this regard, David has a peculiar advantage over Jonathan. Just because he is not Saul's biological heir, the two facets of the father as progenitor and as predecessor in power are separable for him. Jonathan, by contrast, has no option of playing one 'father' off against another.

Indeed this is true, but in the end, the designation that David takes to himself unwittingly is as 'son of death'. This too is, as we shall see, an ambiguous designation. Whatever David's intentions, the textual fact is that all these paternal figures are dead by the end of 1 Samuel. Jesse, whether alive or dead, disappears from the narrative through David's agency. Nabal dies, by divine intervention we are told, but the intention of 'parricide' is explicit in the text. The transition between the two books of Samuel is the story we have investigated of the Amalekite messenger. Saul too is dead, and David's concern to exculpate himself makes it clear that he stands under suspicion of a third form of parricide. David appears as the 'son of death' indeed; the death-dealing son of deadly fathers.

The whole subject of the relations between fathers and sons and the connection between fatherhood and death in the context of the transition to a hereditary monarchy is thus shown to be a complex one. It is to a further consideration of these relationships that we will turn in our next chapter. In it we will attempt to show that the designation of David as 'son of death' reflects a profound unease in the text of Samuel with the business of procreation and succession. Every son is a 'son of death'; the outcome of the father's anxiety over his own survival, and so engendered out of the inevitability of

death, and yet also a permanent sign to the father of his own death.

7.6.2 READING AND THE SEARCH FOR THE FATHER

Yet in this whole problematic, the problem of reading has reappeared in a new guise. Saul's question can be seen as an attempt to place David into a setting in order to restrict and therefore predict the range of possibilities that can be predicated of him. Saul's question 'Whose son is this young man?' is a question about authorship. Who has authored David? Who is responsible for the 'utterance' of this young man into the discourse of the society of the text?

The problem of reading reappears. How is Saul to read David? Through this question, the reader is also alerted to the fact that this matter of reading David and his relations to his origins may be problematic. Once again, the text of 2 Samuel refuses an answer by providing a range of answers. It offers us several readings of David, by offering us several candidates for his father.

Yet, as in the case of Schroeter's analysis of Oedipus, there are three obvious candidates for David's father who are not mentioned in that role within the text: God, the authorial voice and the reader. Insofar as God is the creative force behind the world of the text, he could be described ultimately as David's father. Yet there is also the authorial voice in the text to be considered. What is the relation between these two?

Yet both also depend on the intervention of the reader. The text offers only black marks on white paper. David as character, as a signed site of heteroglossia, is inferred from the text by the reader, who thus also ends

up in the place of the father of the character, the one who 'brings David to life'.

By investigating further the problematic of the relations between fathers and sons in the text, we will also be led to a new apprehension of some of the anxieties and ambivalences inherent in the relation of the reader to the text as modelled by the figure of David. Such an investigation will form the substance of our concluding chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT**FATHERS, SONS AND THE ANXIETY OF UTTERANCE****8.1 TENSIONS BETWEEN FATHER AND SON****8.1.1 SON AND HEIR****8.1.1.1 Steinmetz**

In her study of the relationships between fathers and sons in the book of Genesis, Devorah Steinmetz summarises the ambivalence of such relationships as follows:

Fathers live on through their sons, passing down, together with physical substance, possessions, ideals, and customs. Whatever the father has accomplished will die with him if he has no son to take over. It is here that the ambivalence lies. As an extension of the father, the son ensures his immortality, yet as successor, the son usurps his place - he can continue for the father only on the father's death.

To the father, then, the son represents both the ultimate promise and the ultimate threat, immortality and death, and the father responds both by claiming his son and by rejecting him, in being torn between nurturing and killing him. The more closely the son resembles the father, the more he seems able to continue for the father, the more likely violence will erupt. (1991: 29)

This tension, of course, operates in the other direction as well, between son and father. The son owes his being

and his status to the father, but the father is the obstacle to the very position that the son aspires to. This tension is particularly acute when the father is, like Abraham, the bearer of a promise, or indeed the king, in which case the son occupies the position of heir. Without the father, the son has no claim, but while the father is alive, he has no power. Equally, without a son, the father has no means of continuing his power or his name. Once the son is born, however, the father has a physical reminder of his own mortality, and of his own expendability, constantly before his eyes. The heir becomes the rival.

Steinmetz examines this tension specifically in the stories in Genesis which involve the transmission of the divine promise between the generations of Abraham's descendants. The moment of transmission involves conflicts between father and son, and between rival brothers. She sees a central dilemma in the need to ensure the continuity of the family as a unit while containing the tensions between the generations. As Steinmetz formulates this: '... either the family members remain together and threaten to destroy one another, or they separate and are in danger of being lost to the family's special mission' (1991: 11).

This means that a problem arises in the transmission of the promise between successive generations, especially when the founding promise made to Abraham in Gen 12, like that made to David in 2 Sam 7, is a promise of a dynasty, of succession and transmission.

8.1.1.2 White

White (1991: 187-203) discusses exactly this dilemma in the context of the Akedah in Gen 22 which he interprets as the one mechanism which could mediate the paradoxes

of transmission of the promise. As he defines them, the potential obstacles are as follows.

In one scenario, the promise is transmitted biologically, so that the promise passes directly to the son. But the whole point of the promise is that the existence of the father is founded upon the promise. Abraham is who he is not because of his descent from Terah, but because he becomes the bearer of the promise. The son's existence, however, reverts to the exigencies of biology. As White summarises it, '... what the first generation experiences as divine promise, the second generation will experience as familial ambition' (1991: 195).

But the other alternative, that the promise be given anew to the son, breaks the hereditary flow and in a sense renders the earlier promise ineffective. If the promise states that the family will bear a blessing for future generations, why should the promise need to be repeated?

The dilemma can also be stated in terms of desire. If the desire is for a successor, then the promise is fulfilled in the birth of a son, which becomes the material embodiment of the fulfilment of the desire. Once fulfilled, is the promise not redundant? Does this not also jeopardise the relationship between promisor and promisee, in this case that between God and Abraham?

Both dilemmas are brought to a head in the promisor's (God's) demand for the sacrifice of the promisee's son. Will Abraham abandon his loyalty to the voice which promised him a succession in opting to cling to the material fulfilment of his desire? On the other hand, if he does sacrifice his son, then this will destroy the continuity of the family.

There is another aspect of this that White does not bring out. The presence of the new bearer of the promise renders its old bearer dispensable. Until Isaac is born, Abraham leads a charmed life. He knows he will survive through all the vicissitudes of his existence in order for the promise to be fulfilled. Once his son is born, however, Abraham can die. There is no need for him to survive longer, because the promise will live without him in the form of his son. Isaac is the possibility of Abraham's death. If indeed Isaac is sacrificed, then Abraham again becomes the sole bearer of the promise. His age is no barrier, as God was able to intervene to bring about the birth of Isaac. What has happened once can happen again. Whatever its merits, this interpretation at any rate explains the lack of protest on Abraham's part and the equivocation of his reply to Isaac at least as well as explanations predicated on his piety and obedience.

8.1.1.3 Rank

The importance of the concept of the heir is also central to Otto Rank's account of the tension between generations (Rank 1959: 293-315). In particular, he is concerned with the relationship between procreation and continuity. He sees three stages in the development of society, which in turn generate three different views of the ideological status of the child, of what the child represents: the collective, the patriarchal and the matriarchal.

In the collective stage, which is often also matriarchal in structure, the child is looked on as the bearer of the survival of the group. In patriarchal society, however, the child becomes identified as the heir of its father, the bearer of his personal immortality. In the final stage, the child becomes an individual, responsible only to himself. Conflict arises because

the son resents being his father's successor, but also because the father resents the fact that his survival depends on the son. Each wishes to be immortal in his own right, not through his relation to the other. This resentment may lead to a repudiation of fatherhood, exemplified for Rank in the Oedipus myth by Laius's abandonment of Oedipus.

8.1.1.4 Girard

A contrasting account of these tensions is provided by René Girard (Girard 1977). Girard for his part sees the origin of conflict in the tendency to imitation which all children display. The male child adopts the father as his model, and so imitates him in his desire for the mother. This results, however, in the model becoming the rival, who can only be imitated by being displaced. The child in Girard's account is innocent of this implication¹. It is the father who reacts by interpreting the child's desire as a potential threat and thereby introduces the child to the possibility of violence. As Girard puts it, 'the son is always the last to learn that what he desires is incest and

¹ The term 'double bind' derives from the work of Bateson on the origins of schizophrenia which he associates with the imposition of contradictory imperatives on the patient (see the article 'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia' [Bateson, Jackson, Haley, Weakland (1972: 201-27)]). The content of the mimetic double bind - "Be like me/Don't be like me" - Girard relates to Freud's discussion in *The Ego and the Id* where he explains that the relation between the ego and the superego 'is not exhausted by the precept: "You ought to be like this (like your father)." It also comprises the prohibition: "You may not be like this (like your father) - that is, you may not do all that he does; some things are his prerogative..." (Girard 1977:178)

patricide, and it is the hypocritical adults who undertake to enlighten him in this matter' (1977: 175).

In Girard's account such mimetic rivalry is at the origin of all violence. It evokes what he calls the 'mimetic double bind'. Society can only maintain itself by evolving mechanisms which deflect this violence, either by adopting hierarchies which mean that potential rivals are separated into different spheres of activity or by turning the violence on an innocent scapegoat whose death will lead to no further repercussions. The act of patricide breaches the distinction between father and son. They behave as equals in a form of fraternal rivalry (1977: 74). The breaching of that distinction in turn is likely to lead to patricide.

Girard accounts for the Oedipus conflict as a particular product of Western society as the power and status of the father declines. The decline of the father's authority brings him into direct confrontation with the son in the same sphere, where he functions not only as model but as obstacle (1977: 188). Of course, the reciprocal observation must also be true; this same diminution of the father's power leads to the perception of the son as usurper and rival. Girard sees a modern crisis brought about by the gradual undermining of the position of the father as the giver of the law, which ends up in a frantic search for a source of law which can no longer be found.

Yet again, we find that this tension is characteristic of the hereditary monarchy. There is only one throne, one position of kingship. The son as the father's heir must imitate him completely, must become king. He is destined to be king, indeed groomed for that role, but can only be king if his father is removed from the scene. As the father declines in power with age and the son grows stronger, the difference between them

diminishes until they may come to a point at which they, and only they, become equal claimants to the same object of desire. Especially if the father has gained the throne by conquest, the throne as the symbol of power and authority is manifestly the object of the father's desire, and is what spurred him in his youth to violence. This is exactly the situation that according to Girard will generate violent confrontations. Here again we are not forced to choose between Girard's account and Freud's. On either account, the mechanisms to generate violent rivalry between father and son are in place, and will reinforce each other.

8.2 RELATIONS BETWEEN GENERATIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

8.2.1 AGE AND YOUTH

Wolff (1974) specifically discusses the problems between generations in the Old Testament. He sees an implicit opposition along the following lines, which is not a simple evaluative dichotomy; both youth and age have their advantages and disadvantages:

age = wisdom/infirmary

youth = folly/vigour²

As an instance of the folly of youth, he offers as a paradigm the disregard of the advice of the elders by the young men who egg Rehoboam on to contempt for the people in 1 Kings 12. Isa 3:4-5 holds out a prospect of

² This is ironically confirmed by Eccl 4:13: 'Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who will no longer take advice.'

the insolence of youth, as does Mic 7:6, as a warning symptom of social decline. The extreme case is found in Deut 21:18-21 where the instructions for the public stoning of a disobedient son are given. As usual, such legal provisions indicate that this was not an unknown problem in ancient Israel, or else it would not have needed to be legislated against.

Equally, the oppression that the legacy of the past exerts on the young and the fatalism this may engender is captured in the proverb 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' quoted in Ezek 18:2 and Jer 31:29. In both cases this is quoted in order to refute it and place the penalty squarely on the shoulders of the generation who have gone astray. Indeed, the theme that the deeds of the fathers are to be regarded as a cautionary counter-example is also found in the text (Ezek 20:18, Ps 78:8). Disobedience to the father is necessary too, if Israel is to throw off the bad effects of the past.

So Israel's tradition contains both the provisions for the repression of the revolt of the younger generation against the older, and encouragement of just this revolt. Both repression and encouragement are evidence that the potential of such conflict exists.

8.2.2 PLATO AND PARRICIDE

A further aspect of this is illuminated in a comparison which can be drawn from the works of Plato where the repression of this conflict between generations is seen as a prerequisite for social stability. It becomes inextricably involved in the issues of the transmission of culture and education. In book 2 of the *Republic*, Socrates explicitly condemns the repetition of the story of Ouranos and Kronos, to the extent that the story is only alluded to in Plato's text even as it is being

condemned. Hesiod's account of Kronos castrating his father Ouranos and eating his own children³ is, so Socrates avers, based on '... the greatest falsehood, involving the greatest issues' (Russell & Winterbottom 1989:15).

It should not be told in public even if it were true, particularly because of its effect on the young: 'Nor is it to be said in a young man's hearing that if he committed the most outrageous crimes, or chastised an erring father by the direst means, he would be doing nothing remarkable, but only what the first and greatest of the gods had done' (Russell & Winterbottom 1989:15). Thus the possible political consequences of such a story are made plain. The consequences of such programmes of repression and censorship are not explored by Plato. This text could almost be designed to resist the equalisation of the powers of the father and the son which Girard sees as the bugbear of modernity.

West (1966: 16-31) discusses the extensive parallels to the Ouranos myth in Ancient Near Eastern literatures, including the *Enuma Elish*. In the light of its wide currency in neighbouring cultures, the absence of such a myth in the biblical corpus is intriguing. Despite all the tensions and difficulties between fathers and sons in the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures, there is no recorded case of parricide.

³ Hesiod's *Theogony* (l.154-82) gives the account of Kronos' castration of his father Ouranos who loathes his children and so has prevented their birth. In lines 454-500 is to be found the myth of Kronos himself devouring his own children save for Zeus who is rescued by his mother. Kronos' motive is an oracle which tells him that he will be destroyed by one of his sons. The similarity in this regard to the position of Laius is striking.

The strictures against any assault by a son on a parent are stringent and merciless. Ex 21: 15 prescribes the death penalty for anyone striking his father or mother, and in Ex 21: 17 this is extended to anyone who curses or mocks his parents. In Deuteronomy 21: 18-21, we have the provision that parents can bring a disobedient son before the elders at the city gate and have him publicly stoned. There is no specific mention of a penalty for parricide, but the harshness of the penalties for these lesser crimes leave little doubt of the utter horror it would inspire. Yet the forcefulness of the legislation, while it may reflect the severity of the crime, may also represent a suppressed anxiety as to its possibility.

For our purposes, it is interesting that the most overt statement of a parricidal ambition in the Hebrew Bible is directed against David by his son Absalom. Ahithophel in 2 Sam 17: 1-3 advises Absalom that in order to gain the kingdom it is David who must be killed, and proposes to lead a force to strike down the king alone. 'And the advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel' (2 Sam 18: 4). Even here, the plan directed at the father will be executed not by Absalom himself but by Ahithophel.

Yet, as we have seen, David himself as 'son of death' is implicated in the death of the three characters who fill the role of his father: Jesse, Nabal and Saul. This leads us to ask whether the absence of parricides in the Hebrew Scriptures really reflects the situation in Ancient Israel or whether it does not rather reflect the same socio-political concerns that Plato articulates in the *Republic*. Why has Israel no myth of parricide? The evidence of the relationships between Saul and his 'sons', David and Jonathan, which we have been exploring

makes it clear that it is not that the tensions do not exist.⁴

Indeed, given the understanding of the physiology of reproduction in Ancient Israel, the identification between the son and the father would appear to be closer than modern understanding would allow. The theory of generation makes the tension between the heir as the bearer of survival and the possible rival even clearer. We shall turn now to consider the aspect of the relationship.

8.2 3. BIBLICAL THEORIES OF GENERATION

8.2.3.1 Biblical References

There is very little direct discussion of theories of the physiology of generation in the Old Testament. There are however hints as to the underlying schema. The most sustained account of the process of generation comes in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:1-2:

1. I also am mortal, like everyone else,
a descendant of the first-formed child of earth;
and in the womb of a mother I was molded into
flesh
2. within the period of ten months, compacted with
blood,
from the seed of a man and the pleasure of

⁴ The absence of such a myth in the Hebrew Scriptures is commented on by Ostriker (1993: 35-37), who sees it as a symptom, not of the anxiety of inheritance, but as part of the repression of the murder of the Mother Goddess which is the basis for Israel's claims of uniqueness and its patriarchal culture.

marriage.

There are also brief allusions to the development of the embryo in the womb in Psalm 139:13:

'For you formed my inward parts,
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.'

and also in Job 10:9-11:

9. Remember that you made me of clay
and wilt you turn me to dust again?

10. Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle
me like cheese?

11. You clothed me with skin and flesh,
and knitted me together with bones and sinews.

8.2.3.2 Theories of generation

These passages, fragmentary as they are, accord with a theory of reproduction where the male seed interacts with the blood in the woman's womb in order to form a 'clot' which develops under divine guidance into the embryo. Indeed Aristotle in his *Generation of Animals* uses almost the same metaphor as that found in Job 10:10:

The action of the semen of the male in 'setting' the female's secretion in the uterus is similar to that of rennet upon milk. Rennet is milk which contains vital heat as sense does, and this integrates the homogeneous substance and makes it 'set'. (2:14; [1943:191])

The other passages are equally compatible with this sort of theory, though it must be acknowledged that the influence of Greek scientific thought on Wisdom of Solomon is not unlikely. This may therefore not reflect the theory of generation that underlies earlier writings in the Hebrew Scriptures.

That being said, Héritier Augé (1989) gives an account of theories of the relationship and genesis of blood and semen in a wide range of ancient and modern 'pre-scientific' cultures. He asserts that because there are inescapable physical facts to be accounted for - the facts of menstruation, male ejaculation and childbirth for instance, have to be part of the system - that the wide variety of hypotheses offered reflect a small number of coherent models. Basically, blood and semen are accounted for either by some physiological account of their production in the body, or else in terms of supernatural gifts. This restricted range of hypotheses makes it more permissible to look to models from other cultures.

Aristotle's argument is that the male provides form while the female provides substance. The semen is a 'tool', something that provokes a change, but its material substance evaporates and has no part in the physical body of the child. What the precise nature of the understanding of this process was when the text of Samuel was produced we cannot tell, but a theory that sees the male semen as the main channel of reproduction, while the woman provides the 'field' in which the male 'seed' is planted seems to have some explanatory value when we approach the questions of the rationale behind Israel's laws on sexual behaviour and the problematics of the stories which revolve around issues of sexuality.

Such a theory means that the male alone is the true bearer of inheritance. The 'vital force' passes through

him. The woman provides the indispensable matrix in which it can take on renewed human form. However, descent is through the male, and the conservation of seed becomes a priority. It is literally the stuff of life. Yet the male must hand over this essence of himself and the hope for the future of his line to the mysterious safe-keeping of the woman.⁵

8.3 THE UNCERTAINTY OF UTTERANCE

8.3.1 COITUS AS UTTERANCE

Coitus is an act of donation, fraught with risk. What if the woman is barren and the seed is unable to spring up? What if alien seed is planted in her womb and supplants the legitimate bearer of the line? The man 'utters' his seed, but has no guarantee of how it will be received, whether it will bear a boy, who in his turn can transmit the seed, or 'merely' a girl who will bear the children of other lines. In this gap of uncertainty, of hidden burgeoning, God is at work.

The consequences of this sense of the uncertainty inherent in fatherhood are profound. The importance of

⁵ The mystery is given voice in 2 Maccabees 7:22-23 where the mother exhorting her seven sons who are being put to death says: 'I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.' Note here too the implication that the mother supplies the 'elements' of the embryo, but not the 'ordering' power. The role of the father is here not adumbrated.

the father as against the mother in this reflects the age-old observation that 'it is a wise child that knows its father' - and a wise father that knows his son. Freud himself quotes the old legal tag '*pater semper incertus est, mater certissima*' [paternity is always uncertain, maternity is most certain] (Freud 1977: 223).

There is an uncertainty about the relationship between father and child that does not exist in the case of the mother, just because of the delay between copulation and child-birth, and the hiddenness of the process of development. This parallels the uncertainty inherent between a linguistic utterance and its reception by the audience. Yet that gap of uncertainty between father and child is often only bridged by a linguistic utterance, the recognition of the child by the father, the acceptance of responsibility as father. This is often symbolised by the inheritance of the father's name, a key concept in the Hebrew bible. The nearest that the Former Prophets approach to a concept of immortality is the perpetuation of the name⁶.

8.3.2 LACAN AND THE NAME OF THE FATHER

With the reintroduction of the theme of the name, we find a resonance with the work of the French

⁶ In 2 Samuel 14, the wise woman of Teqoa entices David into an ultimately unworkable reconciliation with Absalom by a story in which the crux of her problem is the fact that her husband will be left with no name. It is the survival of the name of the father which is at the heart of the genealogical anxiety, and the heart of the historiography of Israel.

psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. He insists that fatherhood is a linguistic phenomenon:

The question is that the sum of these facts - copulating with a woman, that she thereafter carries something for a certain time in her belly, that this product ends up being ejected - never ends up in constituting the notion of what it is to be a father. I'm not even talking about the cultural edifice implied in the term *être père*, I'm simply talking about what it is to be a father in the sense of procreating. ... So that procreation can have its full meaning, it is also necessary that there is an apprehension, or a relation to, the experience of death which gives its full meaning to the term procreate.

Rather, 'the attribution of procreation to the father can only be the effect of a pure signifier, of a recognition, not of a real father, but of what religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father' (1977: 198).

The concept of the Name-of-the-Father became a central reference point in Lacan's theory of symbolization, not something susceptible to easy summary. Lacan himself acknowledges its origins in the return of the dead father in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (Lacan 1977:199). In this essay (Freud 1985a: 43-224), Freud provides a theory of the origin of religion and of the prohibition of incest in the hypothesis of an originary murder of the father by a 'primal horde' of brothers who attack the father in order to gain access to the women whom he has in his sole control. Freud describes how the guilt of this murder produces guilt which leads both to the repression of the knowledge of the murder, but also to the elevation of a symbolic totem to fill the place of the father. The sons also internalise the very command

against which they were rebelling and forbid themselves access to the women of the horde. This command derives its unquestionable force from the dead father symbolised by the totem.

The conjunction of fatherhood and death in Lacan's thought gives rise to the insight that both of these states can only be known through the agency of the signifier. Though Lacan does not specifically indicate this, the common factor for both states is *absence*. Both the father and the dead are lost to the present, the father through the gap between copulation and the emergence of the faculty of recognition in the child. Just as the child can have no knowledge of those who die before its birth without the faculty of symbolisation and language, to acknowledge the father as progenitor demands the same faculty. This same faculty also enables the son to transmit that memory to the succeeding generations. The mechanism that evokes the dead also allows the recognition of the father. These two coalesce in the figure of the dead father which at once exists through and validates the symbolic order.

8.3.3 THE MIRROR STAGE

Lacan sees the father as the crucial factor in introducing the child to the world of language. Lacan's account of development begins with the child as an amorphous mass of impressions, what he punningly calls the *hommelette*. The first organising movement which begins the separation of the child as a subject in his own right is the 'mirror stage' where the child metaphorically or literally responds to its own image as

reflected, so it supposes, in the mother. But this is an illusion.⁷

The child supposes that the mother reacts to serve the child's needs, and that the child is the full satisfaction of the needs of the mother. But sooner or later the child must come to a point where its desires are no longer met by the mother, where it becomes aware of the world beyond the mother. A gap opens up between desire and its satisfaction, a gap which Lacan assimilates to the distinction between signifier and signified in Saussurian linguistics⁸.

Saussure himself had sought to tie the two together, but Lacan insists on the slippage which means that the signifier can never be tied to the signified. This he calls the *Nom du Père* or by another punning identification the *Non du Père*; the parental name is also the parental prohibition, the prohibition that blocks the fulfillment of the child's desire.

The position of the father in Lacan's theory is summed up by Forrester as follows:

In contrast to other recent psychoanalytical theories, which stress the pre-eminence of the mother-child relationship (pre-Oedipal, pre-genital), Lacan affirms the centrality for the subject's history of the triadic Oedipal complex, in which the function of the father is both

⁷ See on this Lacan (1977: 1-7), his most succinct account of the mirror stage.

⁸ For a succinct account of Saussure's distinction here, see Hawkes (1977: 1-7)

essential and mythical: essential, since the father is the representative of the law, in the last instance the (senseless) law of language, and supplies the third term or mediating function that allows the child to find his place in the symbolic order (language) and escape from the blind alley of fascination with the image (other) of the mirror stage, experienced in fantasy as fascination with the mother; mythical because the father's function is strictly metaphorical - he functions neither as a real father (flesh and blood) nor as an imaginary father (though the latter figures in fantasy as an ideal and punitive agency) but as the Name of the Father, with his name assigning the child a place in the social world and allowing the child to become a sexed being through the phallic function (i.e. sign of sexual difference) to which the Name of the Father refers. (1990:110)

Whether this is a disaster or a liberation is a matter of intense debate; both within the Lacanian subject and between Lacan and those critics who see him as entrenching the paternal, the male in the discourse of psychoanalysis⁹. It is not our purpose here to venture opinions in a field which is riven with internal dissensions, but there is a clear relationship between this debate and the debate in contemporary feminist theology over the possibility of living with the patriarchy of the Old Testament. Our concern here is not with Lacanian theory *per se*, but how it may serve to illumine the power and strangeness of the biblical texts.

8.3.4 NAME AND CONTINUITY

⁹ See on this the essays in Mitchell and Rose 1982.

In 2 Samuel 14, as we have seen, the wise woman of Teqoa entices David into an ultimately unworkable reconciliation with Absalom by a story in which the crux of her problem is the fact that her husband will be left with no name. It is the survival of the name of the father which is at the heart of the genealogical anxiety, and the heart of the poetics of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Lacan also specifically refers to the interaction of the divine, the symbolic with the processes of human procreation: '...the Lord with the unpronounceable name is precisely he who sends children to barren women and old men. The fundamentally transbiological character of paternity, introduced by the tradition of the destiny of the chosen people, has something that is originally repressed there, and which always re-emerges in the ambiguity of lameness, the impediment and the symptom, of non-encounter, *dustuchia*, with the meaning that remains hidden' (1979:248).

Lacan's citing of the Name-of-the-Father brings together themes that have occupied us throughout our discussion. In the link he draws between the identity of the subject, the uncertainty of Fatherhood, the name of God as the bridge between the father and the child, and the theme of wounding in the Hebrew Scriptures, we can find a condensation of the questions that we have been exploring.

The most recent explorations of these topics are astonishingly anticipated by St Augustine in his *Confessions*. As he wrestles with the need to believe in God without proof and on the word of others, he casts around for analogies. He writes: 'Most strongly of all it struck me how firmly and unshakeably I believed I was born of a particular father and mother, which I could not possibly know unless I believed it upon the word of

others.' (1942:104) This one sentence brings together the impossibility of knowing our own origin directly, the role of language and of community in the identification of our parents, and the way in which this belief can become the foundation for other beliefs, culminating in the belief in God¹⁰. Augustine grounds his belief in God in the unreasonable certainty of his belief in his paternity, guaranteed only by the word of others, of witnesses. Yet this whole edifice could crumble. If the certainty of God's existence is tied to the uncertainty of parenthood, then rather than being a founding belief, perhaps it is derived, and derived on no good basis.

In this light, the lack of a myth of parricide in the Hebrew Scriptures is a measure of the investment that the Hebrew Scriptures, along with Augustine, make in the name Yahweh, the unpronounceable name with, as we have seen, its narratological function of the guarantee of the fulfilment of the oath. This is an investment in

¹⁰ The picture is further complicated by the rather fraught relationship between Augustine and his own father, and the closeness of his identification with his mother. Paul Fleischman, for instance (1989:167), suggests that his conversion is a repudiation of his father's world of sexuality and violence, and the substitution of God as the ideal father in his place. This adds another layer to the story. It is Augustine's attempt to evade the consequences of the paternity that he has been led to believe in that drives his conversion. If he had not come to this certainty of belief in his relationship to his father, he would not have come to the point of rejecting him, but neither would he have had the categories into which he inscribes the figure of God, his mother's true love, who becomes his real father. His unshakeable belief is what leads him to doubt and to a new certainty.

repression. That name becomes the sign which will cover the gaps, that will ensure the continuity of the genetic line, of the individual subject and the coincidence between speech and act. Yahweh names the unspoken, yet omnipresent anxiety of utterance in these texts.

8.4 READER AS FATHER, READER AS SON

As a result, we can at last reach the climactic claim of this thesis, which is that the impact of the biblical text on the reader is predicated on the anxieties of fatherhood. The reader is both father and child of the text. The narratives of David as reader display this fact. In the process of reading these texts, the reader is led both to observe and to enact this double motion.

The reader of 2 Sam 12 infers a David who is brought to judgement as a result of two acts of utterance. The utterance of his seed results in the unforeseen and unconcealable sign of the birth of the nameless child. The utterance of his oath results in the unforeseen exposure of his false reading of that situation. The invocation of the name of God brings on him the judgment attached to that name. David's misreading is made to redound on the head of the son who dies.

The reader, however, not only observes but is obliged, as reader, to enact the same process of judgement and discrimination as David, and is forced to 'utter' a reading. The David whom the reader fathers on the text becomes the reader's version of the child in the text. the judgement turned on David is also, as we have seen, implicitly turned on the reader in the ambiguity of reference in the expression 'You are the man.' The reader is brought before the tribunal of the God who acts as the guarantee of the linguistic act of the

reader in the text, David's oath, yet that guarantee turns the oath against the utterer's intentions.

The reader is shown that illumination comes through misreading, by the very act of reading which he or she is undertaking. What we read is David's misreading. By the application of the device of parody, even that reading has later to be modified in the light of 2 Samuel 14.

Yet insofar as the text provokes the reader into the utterance of reading, the text fathers the reader. If, as we have discussed above, the reader as subject comes to a sense of coherence and identity through the acts of interpretation and utterance for which he or she takes responsibility, then the reader not only is exposed to the ambivalences of the father towards the son, of the reader to the reading, but also to those of the son towards the father. The text then gains its emotional power by buying into and provoking the reader's anxieties about his or her own status as father and child.

There would appear to be a glaring paradox in the idea of the female reader's anxiety of fatherhood. The structure of the anxiety between utterance and reception is nevertheless communicated in the text of Samuel through the medium of male anxieties about the continuity of the subject. The whole issue of gendered reading is too complex to be raised here, and arguably it is not for a male reader to do more than to raise the question. Suffice it to say here that the poetics of this text is a poetics of fatherhood, and that the understandable reaction that many feminist readers have to these texts is an acknowledgement of that fact. =

What we will claim, however, is that this apparent privileging of the male is not a simple assertion of

power, but a claim to power. As such, it reveals that, like all such claims to power, it can only be substantiated by the assent of those to whom it is made. In actual fact, the claim to power is a revelation of powerlessness, of vulnerability. As we have seen, the male domination of female sexuality in the text is not because the act of procreation is something in the power of the male, but precisely because the male is powerless to procreate himself without the female. Its rigour and violence are signs of impotence rather than of strength.

The need for the male to validate his claim to paternity through the invocation of the name finds ultimate expression in the overarching symbol of the Name-of-the-Father, in Hebrew Scripture, the name Yahweh. So too, the speaker, in order to validate his or her utterance invokes that name in the oath. The convention of the oath is an attempt to buy into the power of the name Yahweh, the authority which Yahweh commands as the first speaker, which validates the power of the discourse of the present speaker.

The implications of this claim to authority, however, will bear further examination. If it is claimed that Yahweh as sign bridges the gap between father and son, between speaker and utterance, between reader and reading, then it seems appropriate to question just what the basis of this claim and command may be. Is this claim of authority substantiated in the workings of the text? The implications of this claim to power by the text will form the last part of our investigation. How is the reader situated by this claim?

CHAPTER NINE

FATHER'S AUTHORITY AND TEXTUAL POWER

9.1 GOD AND AUTHORITY

9.1.1 YAHWEH AS PLEDGE OF CONTINUITY

9.1.1.1 Derrida

Just this question of authority is investigated by Jaques Derrida in his essay on the American Declaration of Independence. The declaration asserts that it derives its authority from the people of the United States; but no such entity exists until the Declaration is assented to. The document serves to constitute the authority of those who sign it, and draws on the authority of their signatures. In Austin's terms, is it a constative document, recording a preexisting statement of fact, or a performative one, that brings about a state of affairs?

The document also, however, appeals to authority of God. Derrida sees this as an illegitimate attempt to ground the 'graphemic identity', as he calls it, of the nation in some recourse to an ultimate signator. Petrey however, sees this differently. "The Declaration of Independence performed both God and the United States of America and the fact that the performance is explicit in one case and implicit in the other is trivial." How far then is Yahweh performed in the act of swearing? If Israel is to swear by no other name, then is 'Yahweh' replaceable with 'that which we swear by?'

9.1.1.2 Divine Promise

If so the name Yahweh becomes the sign of a narrative commitment to continuity and fulfilment. Yet there is a further aspect of this which we might with profit explore: the divine oath. Yahweh is not only the locus of swearing but swears by himself. At the crucial event of the Akedah, Yahweh's angel announces to Abraham, 'By myself have I sworn', says the Lord, 'because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore.' (Gen 22:16-17) The writer to the Hebrews comments on this: 'When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us (Heb 6:17-18)'.

This is a clear statement of the traditional position. God's promise confirms his unchangeability, and is confirmed by it. Yet as John Searle says, 'A happily married man who promises his wife that he will not desert her in the next week is likely to provide more anxiety than comfort (1969: 59)'. And note the explicit stress on the rhetorical function of this oath in Heb 6: 17; it is God's desire to increase his credibility with his audience that leads him to conjoin these two unchangeables. But if we turn to Ex 32 we have the weird story where the Lord tells Moses to leave him alone so that he can destroy the people. It is Moses that recalls his oath to him and tells him to repent, in case he gives the Egyptians the chance to accuse him of evil intentions in rescuing the people. And the Lord duly repents.

9.1.2 MOSES, SAMUEL AND DIVINE REPENTANCE

There is a similar incident in Numbers 14:11, where we have the odd portrayal of God turning to Moses in frustration at the people's obstinacy, threatening to annihilate them and promising to raise a greater people in their stead with Moses as their founder. Again it is Moses who calls to mind God's oath, when he argues that God will suffer a drastic public relations debacle when the nations conclude that he was unable to fulfil his oath to bring the people to the promised Land. So who actually is the source of faithfulness?

Moses himself is obviously flawed - a murderer and a stammerer, and as it turns out fatally disobedient to God in the seemingly minor matter of striking the rock at Meribah (Num 20:10-13) rather than speaking to it as the Lord commanded. Israel is continually portrayed as faithless and unstable. Yet these stories would indicate that God also is not a stable narrative point. Faithfulness here seems to be a cooperative venture, in which the partners to the promise have to recall each other to the obligations that they have entered into, something that has to be negotiated, argued over and fought for in a context of authority. There is a distinct sense in this passage that God has assented to some sort of moral authority that Moses has over him.

With more immediate reference to the texts with which we are dealing, Samuel specifically states to Saul that 'The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man that he should repent' in 1 Sam 15: 29. Yet exactly that verb has been used by the Lord himself in his statement to Samuel in verse 10 of the same chapter: 'I repent that I have made Saul king; for he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments.' Samuel here uses his claim that the Lord is unchanging in order to justify the change in the Lord's intentions towards Saul in the stripping away of his kingship.

This change is not simply a matter of Saul's failure to observe the commandments. Earlier in the book, the Lord is quoted by the man who brings the message of his rejection to Eli as follows: 'Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: "I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me for ever"; but now the Lord declares: "Far be it from me; for those who honour me I will honour and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed"' (1 Sam 2: 30). The implication here seems to be that the Lord is rescinding what reads like an unconditional promise of perpetual priesthood to Eli. Whatever the shortcomings of Eli's house, it seems that the conditionality of the promise is an afterthought, not part of God's original commitment.

God repents of what he does. And yet, when the world becomes corrupt, God does not simply take the step of rescinding his creative word by saying "Let there not be light" or people or whatever. He seems bound by his word. As we have seen, his promise to Abraham irks him, and throughout the prophets, there is a tension between God's will and his promise.

9.1.3 THE DIVINE WORD AS BOND

As Austin says, what binds is the promise - both God and Israel revolve around that. What we might call the 'crisis of continuity' seems to me to be a key to understanding the Old Testament, in both its contents and its function. The book exists in enacting its theme, which is to ensure the survival, the continuity, of the community that in turn preserves the book.

As Harold Fisch puts it: 'If Hebrew poetics looks to history and the survival of the people, it would also be true to say that it is the word that bears the people, enabling it to survive. According to Deuteronomy 31, it

is not because the people is undying that the word survives; it is rather the other way round" (Fisch 1988: 64).

The text itself may seem to set up Yahweh as the guarantor of language and of human continuity, and yet our reading of Yahweh depends on the assumption of the community of language and human continuity. That would be fairly trivial in itself: far more interesting is that fact that within the text, we see this odd oscillation of negotiated authority. At some level God has the authority that human beings accord him. By opting for the risk of language, God has become embedded in the possibilities and constraints of the text, on the need for assent from a reader¹. By opting to anchor

¹ On this point see the fascinating essay by Rowan Williams (1990) which touches on many of the points of this discussion. He likens any use of language to 'stepping into mid-air', taking the risk of both committing the freedom of thought to the constraint of a form of words, and also the risk of being misunderstood, or even worse, understood and rejected. He also says that 'being human is initially a matter of hearing others letting themselves be heard, the product of others venturing into the dangerous waters of constructive speech.' (1990: 12) He applies this insight to God as well: 'God cannot but "risk" if we are to hear God. God without human language is not the God who actively constructs meaning and hope. But the God who speaks our language is unimaginably vulnerable; in the sense that for God to give what is God into the hands of the world is to open up what is worse than misunderstanding and rejection. It is to risk idolatry - the assimilation of God to some portion of the perceived world, and thus an absence of God, which is a force of destructiveness and disintegration' (1990: 15). So he cites the insight of Ida Göres that in the book of Judges, God is used as a sign for human dominance and violence. And yet, the other side of the coin is

language to Yahweh, the Old Testament text has taken the risk of being absolutised and hijacked into communities which live from its power, but cease to read it.

In so far as God is 'that which we swear by', then the oath becomes inextricably the earnest of the continuity of God as much as the earnest of the continuity of the one who swears in God's name.

God then is not above the exigencies of language. Various speech act theorists have worried about the status of a divine speech act such as 'let there be light'. In the act of saying this, God brings light into being. Only the divine can be the subject of a speech act predicated on the verb to be. And yet God, the supreme creator, seems to be in a position where the gap between intention and occurrence affects him as well.

9.2 DIVINE SPEECH ACTS

9.2.1 'LET THERE BE LIGHT'

9.2.1.1 Searle

Searle himself refers to a special category of speech acts, the 'supernatural declaration' (1979:18), of which God's initial speech in Genesis 1:2 is the paradigm example: 'God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light'. This is surely the archetypal performative

that the very flexibility, the polysemy, of language means that the rumour of the possible can never quite be suppressed. That assimilation may be to the forms of language itself, so that God becomes the expression of this nature of language. In our discussion, the ambivalence of that position has been exposed. It can only be resolved by the reader.

speech. In and by saying these words, God brings about the state of affairs without any other action. However, it is also rather unusual. It is predicated on the verb 'to be', a verb which is not readily described as a performative verb. In addition, the statement is made with no context, and no audience. For Searle this serves to bolster his argument that conventions and institutions are not necessary for a performative to have validity.

Such a response earns him a sharp retort from Petrey (198 :63): 'To the contrary, divine beings are totally incapable of performative speech, which is accomplished solely by the protocols organizing *human* communities.' Petrey here defines this utterance out of consideration. He suspects Searle of an illegitimate move in his attempt to detach speech acts for a social or institutional context. Certainly, there is sufficient peculiarity in this divine sentence to give us pause when it is used as a central plank of a general theory of speech acts. However, on his part, Petrey offers no account of what is going on in this act of speech, except to say that such divine sentences have nothing in common with human speech acts.

Yet both Petrey and Searle seem to concur in the premise that such speech is divorced from any institutional or conventional background, merely drawing opposing conclusions. Is this in fact justified? Stark though it is, this speech is not without context. It follows after the description of the formless earth and is embedded in narrative speech.

9.2.1.2 Sternberg

Sternberg in his discussion of this verse states that the divine speech act is unique: 'In the biblical framework, . . . , the performatives of the human speakers

exhibit all the complications that have bedeviled speech-act theory; but this only throws into relief the transcendence of the divine performative' (1985:107). Sternberg argues that God's performatives never fail, and he need do nothing other than speak. 'A divine speech-act therefore cannot fail to take effect, unless God changes his mind' (1985:107). This is a significant caveat, however, and one rather hard to fathom. At what point would God change his mind? Once he has uttered the words 'Let there be light', what is there to prevent light appearing, especially if, as Sternberg argues, there is no other action but speech necessary? We return to Austin's fundamental point about the promise and intention. God's word is his bond: if the divine performative operates in the way Sternberg suggests, then God is less able than any other speaker to claim 'My tongue said it, but my heart did not'. In addition, our earlier discussions about the importance of failure to the whole notion of the speech act would surely need revising.

Sternberg does consider the context of the statement by pointing up the direct repeat which may seem redundant: '... and there was light.' In his view, this repetition represents the imposition of equivalence between two different forms of speech: the direct utterance of a character, and the narrator's report of an event. Because the words are repeated almost exactly, the two apparently disparate phenomena of divine speech and narratorial report are made to match. 'God first appears to voice the performative and the narrator then echoes him to vouch for the performance' (1985:109).

But what is the relation between the two in terms of authority? This passage reads very much as if we have the situation of a new convention being established on the concurrence of the only audience available, the narratorial voice. God proposes and the narrator

assents. It is on this assent, however, that the implementation of God's proposals depends. There is a gap between divine intention and speech which is filled and mediated by the narrator.

It might be asked whether this is really what Sternberg wishes to imply. The answer must inevitably be that his intentions are beside the point. Whether he intends it or not, the way we have outlined for regarding the event may turn out to be fruitful.

9.2.2 DIVINE SPEECH

For an attempt to explore further the interaction of this 'unlocated' divine speech and the narrative speech that encapsulates it, we can turn once again to Hugh C. White. He makes the point that part of the sense of dislocation in this verse is due to the conjunction of two imponderables, the character 'God' and the strange jussive form of the verb 'to be'. Does the nature of the character account for the oddity of the speech, or does the oddity of the speech give access to the mystery of this undescribed character? This 'divine voice' does not speak from any recognizable spatio-temporal location within the narrative world, a feature it shares with the narratorial voice, yet it is presented as the voice of a personage by the narrator. White concludes that the divine voice has a unique status in the text. He speaks of it as 'that third voice which is at the basis of the author's own creative impulse' (1989:101). It is thus a Voice, a position, in relation to which the author's standing is analogous to that of the characters.

White follows Bakhtin in seeing subjectivity as derived from the response to the voice of another. The divine voice establishes a 'third ambiguous locus of subjectivity beyond the narrative work to which the author is as much subject as his characters are'.

In his later discussions of the similar unlocated address of God to Abraham, White concludes that the form of speech best suited to evoking this subjective response is the promise and its related forms, the oath and the pact: 'In the mutual recognition between promisor and promisee, the freedom of both takes on the form of the "mysterious elective contingency" which underlies the decision to speak and to listen, and in the implicit agreement to accept the conditions of the system of language conventions which mediate this relation.' (1989:104). This is an important point which White later seems to obscure. There is a *mutual* binding to the exigencies of speech and language recorded in the text. The divine is as bound as the human to the conventions of language.

Of course, there are problems in the present case in transferring that analysis. Where is the audience which God is addressing? In what sense is 'Let there be light' a promise? Again, there is only one other source of language on the scene at the beginning of Genesis; the narratorial voice. Is this then a case where it is the narratorial voice that evokes the speech from the character? In a sense, because the narrator requires that there be light, God is coerced by that fact into utterance. That utterance does become, if not a promise, then in a profound way constituent of the divine being, partly as the result of its power.

The paradox is that what we might call the 'high' view of the divine performative, the argument that it is uniquely inerrant, places restrictions on such an utterer. Once this utterance is made, it cannot be repeated by the utterer: precisely because it brings about the creation of light, to utter it again would repeat that creation, but now in a context radically altered by the existence of light. Yet what could it mean to create light when light already exists? An

utterer whose statements are of this kind is deprived of not only the necessity but also the possibility of repetition.

9.3 READER AS CREATOR, READER AS CREATURE

9.3.1 'LET THERE BE LANGUAGE'

But it is not only light that is brought into being by this act of speech. God as speaking subject and the conventional system of language both spring to life in this act of utterance. Yet although God cannot repeat the utterance simply because of its power, God's performative can be repeated by the narrator as description. There is an interaction between the language of God and the language of the narrator, which, be it noted, precedes the divine speech in the text.

There is another aspect of this which could be expressed in the following observation which may seem at first seem both banal and flippant. The fact that the reader can read the words 'Let there be light' depends on the fact that there is light. Without light, no-one can read. Yet there is no light in the text; sitting in the dark looking at this sentence will not yield much profit. It is part of the essential context in which the text and reader must be situated. Indeed, it is the reader, not the narrator or God who requires, both in the sense of needing and of demanding, the existence of light. Once again, there is a reversal at work. The pragmatic fact of reading demands that light exist and an act of creation of light. Which founds the other? Is the reader the proof that such an act took place, which she can no more doubt than her own existence, or is she the creator, who as reader posits the prior act of creation?

The same is true for the existence of language. Without some understanding of language, there can be no reading. And yet in some sense this text claims to be inaugurating language, particularly in the episodes of divine naming in Genesis 1. In Gen 1:3, there is no naming of light as such, but the creative speech act functions as an act of naming as well. But an act of naming is also a social act. To name something entails an expectation that others will assent to using that name for it.

There is an etiological element to this text and as with all etiologies there is a double thrust to it, illustrated in the so-called anthropic principle. This argument contends that the existence of humankind indicates that the improbably narrow conditions which have permitted and sustain this existence have some intentional basis. The universe must have been set up within these parameters deliberately in order to arrive at such an unlikely outcome. However, this can be turned round to argue that the fact that we can observe the universe means that it must be the kind of universe we can observe. There may well be millions of other universes which we do not observe because they could not sustain human life.

So the fact that we are reading this text can be taken as a demonstration that the creative act we are reading about must have occurred, allowing it to be claimed as a 'proof' of the existence of God. On the other hand, we could argue that the kind of people who could read would project exactly that quality on any divine figure that they might invent. There is always a double bind of the kind which bedevils psychoanalytic enquiry; if a patient ascribes their neurosis to a traumatic event, do we conclude that the severity of the neurosis proves that the event took place, or do we see it as proof that

the patient is likely to have invented the event to have objectified their desire or dread?

9.3.2 CREATURE OR CREATOR

The ambiguity of this position over the reality of the divine voice is expressed by Elaine Scarry:

Sometimes as one reads through the Hebrew scriptures, God's existence seems so absolute and human belief in that existence so assumed and widely shared that doubt within the story of any one individual's life or any one epoch seems like only a small tear in the page, a tiny fold in an almost invisible shred of tissue in the heart, the dropping of a single stitch in the endless rounds of a woven cloth. God's realness, his presence, seems so steady, so immediately available for apprehension, that the individual person or group that fails to apprehend Him seems only an idiosyncratic exception, perversely denying of what is obvious. Yet at other readings - perhaps even almost simultaneously - it seems as though what is on every page described in these writings is the incredible difficulty, the feat of the imagination and agony of labor required in generating an idea of God and holding it steadily in place (hour by hour, day by day) without any graphic image to assist the would-be believer. (1985:198)

Scarry regards the process inscribed in the text as the creation of what she calls 'the supreme artifact', precisely the sort of voice that White postulates, as an outcome of a supreme will to *believe*, to maintain an image in continuity.

Belief is the act of imagining. It is what the act of imagining is called when the object created is

credited with more reality (and all that is entailed in greater 'realness', more power, more authority) than oneself. It is when the object created is in fact described as though it instead created you. It ceases to be the 'offspring' of the human being and becomes the thing from which the human being himself sprung forth. It is in this act that Isaac yields against all phenomenal assessment to Abraham, that Abraham yields to God and that the reader yields to the narrative: it is not simply the willingness to give one's interior to something outside of oneself, but the willingness to become the created offspring of the thing in whose presence one now stands. (1985:205)

9.3.3 FATHERING THE FATHER

This willingness to become the offspring of one's own creation is the act which Kierkegaard memorably sums up as 'giving birth to one's father'. It is this act that also describes the anxiety of reading the Hebrew bible. The reader constantly gives birth to his father, or an entity that claims to stand in that relation to him or her. The reader projects an authorial voice which is tied to a character in the text which, if what is said in the text is true, inhabits not only the world of the text but the reader's world as well. Unlike any human character, who is bound by the confines of time and space, God can exist within the text and within the reader's world simultaneously. The imperious claim of this character to be the originator, the father, of the reader invokes the anxiety of the reader both as son, and as father of his own father.

This theme, of the child as its own father, is referred to by Schneidau in the course of his discussion of the relationship between Israel's historiography and its consciousness of paternity (Schneidau 1976). Schneidau

brings out many of the themes we have been exploring in the biblical stories we have investigated. He sees the Hebrew scriptures as representing a departure from the mythological sense of a continuity in the world in favour of an arbitrariness which he associates with paternity. 'Paternity makes us aware how vulnerable we are, how enmeshed in each other, no matter how masterfully we manipulate our lives' (1976: 242). He sees this as a rebuke to our desire to be self-engendered, in its insistence that we are the creatures of God. Schneidau ties this sense to the experience of the reader in arguing that that contingency is the legacy of the Bible to Western tradition. So he writes:

When Shakespeare promises us that 'the great Globe itself', the theatre, the audience and the world, will/fade away and leave not a rack behind, he voices the fundamental Yahwist insight into the constructedness of created things. Not only the fictions but we ourselves are made: and something made is real not in its own right but in that of its maker; so that the easy distinction between fact and fiction breaks down. (1976: 276)

Yet we are left with the dilemma that the distinction between creator and created itself becomes blurred. Insofar as Schneidau is arguing that the Hebrew stress on paternity faces human contingency squarely, we must also insist that it brings up the matter of divine contingency. He interprets the distinctiveness of the Hebrew Scriptures as their critique of any myth of self-engenderment in their refusal of mythical stories of self-creating gods and heroes. Yet from the reader's point of view, this heightens, rather than lessens the dilemma. A god or a character who appears in the text as self-generated has no need of a father. The reader is not necessarily implicated in that existence. A text, however, where every character is fathered, all

except the one figure of Yahweh, insists on the importance of that act of engenderment, and throws down a challenge to the reader. If only one source of existence is allowed, which is it, reader or Yahweh?

The reader's situation comes closer to that depicted in an episode in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. Tweedledum and Tweedledee confront Alice with the sleeping Red King:

'He's dreaming now,' said Tweedledee: 'and what do you think he's dreaming about?'

Alice said 'Nobody can guess that.'

'Why, about you!' Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you would be?'

'Where I am now, of course,' said Alice.

'Not you!' Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. 'You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!'

'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out - bang! - just like a candle!'
(Carroll 1962: 244)

Yet the book ends when Alice herself wakes and is left wondering whose dream it was, hers or the Red King's. "'He was part of my dream, of course - but then I was part of his dream, too!'" (1962: 346) The final sentence of the narrative is a question addressed to the reader: 'Which do you think it was?' (1962: 346)

The difference is, of course, that the claim that Carroll's text makes for the Red King is much more modest than the claims made for the character of Yahweh. Yahweh, unlike any other character in the Hebrew Scriptures, is both undying and omnipresent. If the claims of the text to have some relation to the world of the reader are true, then by definition, Yahweh is present and active in the reader's present situation.

The character of David, by contrast, may or may not have some historical counterpart. Even if he did exist, the reader has no expectation of encountering him. He is long dead, and far distant. Yahweh, if Yahweh has existence outside the text, can be neither dead nor distant. The world that he creates and sustains is the world which encompasses the reader. No such universal claim is made for the Red King within Carroll's text. The question becomes, 'Yahweh's dream, or reader's dream? Which do you think it is?'

9.3.4 TEXTUAL POWER

The power of the biblical text to grasp its readers is explored in Auerbach's now classic essay 'Odysseus' Scar' (1968:3-23) where he contrasts the style of two episodes in ancient literature: the scene in Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus' nurse recognizes him from the scar on his leg, and the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

Auerbach couples this with what he calls the bible's 'tyrannical' claim to truth (1968:14). It does not simply offer another possible reality for us to divert ourselves in contemplating it:

The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us - they seek to subject us,

and if we refuse to be subjected, we are rebels ... Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, [the text of the Biblical narrative] seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our own life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history. (1986:15)

It is no wonder, then, that the reader has a strong emotive reaction to the text. The twin claims of ambiguity, and of authority, make demands on the reader's ingenuity, on his or her obedience, and ultimately on his or her 'reality'. Auerbach represents the transaction in terms which seem to strike at the very identity of the reader.

What is of interest in this description is not whether Auerbach has fairly represented the relative narrative strategies of Homer and the Old Testament, or whether his account of the power of Gen 22 is either adequate to that text or generalisable beyond it. The question that arises for us from this text is what it could be in a series of black marks on white paper that could give rise to these claims. Can it make sense to represent a text as 'demanding' interpretation or 'seeking to subject' its readers? How could such an artefact 'overcome the reality' of its readers, or even present a claim so to do?

9.4 FREUD AS READER OF *OEDIPUS REX*

9.4.1 FREUD AND THE EFFECT OF ART

One towering figure who concerned himself deeply with the effect of works of art on the spectator or reader is Sigmund Freud. In his study 'The Moses of Michelangelo' (Freud 1985:248-282) Freud makes his interest in these effects clear when he writes:

... works of art do exercise a powerful influence upon me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often of painting. This has occasioned me, when I have been contemplating such things, to spend a long time before them trying to apprehend them in my own way, i.e. to explain to myself what their effect is due to². Whenever I cannot do this, as for instance with music, I am almost incapable of obtaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me.

This has brought me to recognize the apparently paradoxical fact that precisely some of the grandest and most overwhelming creations of art are still unsolved riddles to our understanding. We admire them, we feel overawed by them, but we are unable to say what they represent to us. (1985: 253-254)

As Peter Gay summarises Freud's attitude, 'What intrigued Freud most about Michelangelo's massive sculpture was that it should intrigue him so much' (Gay 1988: 315).

9.4.2 THE IMPACT OF OEDIPUS

² An introductory note to this paper in the *Pelican Freud Library* edition records Freud's reminiscence to Edoardo Weiss that he had spent every day of three weeks in September 1912 studying and drawing the statue. He also remarks that he only dared publish this essay anonymously: 'It was only much later that I legitimized this non-analytic child.' (1985:252)

9.4.2.1 *Oedipus Rex*

This fascination with the impact of artistic creations is at the heart of Freud's work. His most famous hypothesis, that of the Oedipus complex, derives from his engagement with the play *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. Freud's concern with *Oedipus* is prompted by the power of the play on its audience. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he introduces Sophocles' play as confirmatory evidence for his hypothesis that murderous hatred towards one parent and being in love with the other are not abnormal symptoms peculiar to psycho-neurotics but universal feelings which are merely magnified in certain pathological cases³. He writes:

This discovery is confirmed by a legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity: a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal validity. What I have in mind is the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles' drama that bears his name. (Freud 1976: 362)

The universal significance of the hypothesis is, he claims, a necessary inference suggested by the universal power of the play to move its audience. Citing this passage, Bernard Knox comments:

³ Freud first alludes to the Oedipus legend in this way in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess dated Oct 15th, 1897 (Freud 1984:272) but it is in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that he gives a sustained account of this phenomenon.

... it is fascinating to observe that this idea, which valid or not has had enormous influence, stems from an attempt to answer a literary problem - why does the play have this overpowering effect on modern audiences? - and that this problem is raised by an ancient Greek tragedy. (Sophocles 1984:132)

9.4.2.2 The Response of the Audience

This is an important and often neglected point. The datum that Freud works from is not the existence of the complex which then is used to explain the power of the play. Formally speaking, the argument proceeds in the other direction. The universal appeal of the play is the datum, of which the hypothesis offers an account, but a rather circular account:

- (i) The play has universal impact;
- (ii) its plot concerns the killing of the father and the marrying of the mother;
- (iii) therefore this plot has universal significance.

Freud sees this significance in the hypothesis that the plot speaks to repressed longings in every member of its audience. The power of the play fuels the speculation that that power depends on the anxiety of the open representation of repressed desires.

In this regard, it is important to note that the common criticism that Oedipus does these things unwittingly is rather beside the point. Freud argues that it is the failure of Oedipus' attempts to avoid carrying out the dreadful actions foretold by the oracle that registers with an audience. They see their own repressed desires

enacted in a context where the effort at repression has brought about the very thing that was dreaded. Oedipus' self-imposed exile from his presumed parents in order to avoid his fate is what leads to the murder of his natural father and his incestuous marriage to his mother.

The audience responds to this particular oracular doom, so Freud argues, because it is a doom laid on all of us. Not only does the audience share Oedipus' incestuous and murderous desires, but it is made aware of the sense of their inescapability. The play reveals that the effort to repress such desires in fact permits them to be enacted in unforeseen ways.

Freud then inverts this into an explanation of the power of the play, which, it should be remembered, is the datum, not the derived conclusion. The play, so Freud argues, has its power because it addresses the repressed longings of the Oedipal complex. Such processes of inversion will prove to be a recurrent motif in our forthcoming study.

Freud's work suggests that the impact of any text depends on the underlying anxiety that it activates. If the impact of *Oedipus* relates to the audience's repressed desires in relation to their parents what might be the implications of the impact of such passages as Gen 22 or 2 Sam 12? What anxiety do they activate in the reader?

Freud derives the power of Sophocles' play from its content rather than its structure. What grips the audience, he avers, is not the fact that Oedipus is caught in the trap of an oracle which he cannot escape. The failure of modern attempts to write plays which try to use the contrast between inexorable fate and human impotence confirms this analysis in Freud's view.

Sophocles' play grips its audience because of its theme of incest. This is made explicit in his remark, 'If *Oedipus Rex* moves a modern audience no less than it did the contemporary Greek one, the explanation can only be its effect does not lie in the contrast between destiny and human will, but is to be looked for in the particular nature of the material on which that contrast is based' (1976:364). However, Knox (1984:132) points out that Freud's insistence on the power of the contents can be challenged on the same grounds that he uses to dismiss the effect of the inexorable destiny. Voltaire's *Édipe*, for instance, is hardly a box office success though it deals with the same legend.

On this point, we may now take issue with Freud; the sense of inevitability that the play conveys, in particular through its use of the devices of the oath and the oracle is not to be separated from the theme. The link between the oath and the anxiety of fatherhood that the play attributes to Oedipus' father Laius is an intimate and intriguing one. Both reveal the anxiety of utterance, the anxiety of the realisation that the continuity of the subject depends on the reception of an utterance, the entrusting of speech or seed to the receptive other. Just as David utters his oath, which then turns out to have consequences unforeseen, so he 'utters' his seed in the womb of Bathsheba, again with a consequence for his own survival and the engendering of an heir.

9.4.3 OEDIPUS AND OATH

A reading of the Oedipus legend which takes seriously these linguistic and narrative features is James Hillman's 'Oedipus Revisited' (1991). He emphasizes that the whole series of tragedies that befall Oedipus, Jocasta and their children begins in Oedipus' father Laius' fear that he will be killed by his son, a fear

that is evinced in his reaction to the oracle to that effect pronounced by Apollo.⁴

Hillman goes on, however, to see the tragedy as dependent on Laius' *literal* reading of the oracle, and on his attempt to evade it, just as Oedipus in turn attempts to evade the prophecy of his own fate by fleeing from his supposed parents.

'Taking action to avoid the prophecy fulfills the prophecy. Hence the feeling that oracles are inescapable, foredooming. But the doom is not in the prophecy; it is in the action taken when one hears the oracle literally. Laius hears literally and so literally tries to kill his son; so that literally he is killed by his son ... Prophecy is a "forthtelling" ... stating in dark speech what is archetypally present as a dark potential and which may become enacted in the day world in time.' (1991: 118)

⁴ Jocasta reveals this to Oedipus as follows:

'An oracle came to Laius one fine day
(I won't say from Apollo himself
but his underlings, his priests) and it declared
that doom would strike him down at the hands of a son,
our son, to be born of our own flesh and blood.'

(Sophocles 1984:201)

Though this last sentence is itself rather 'dark speech', and seems to reduce the polysemy of the oracle to an ambiguity over fulfilment, Hillman is making a crucial point. The action of the play depends on the *character's reading* of this particular ambivalent oracle. It is ambivalent in that although it announces that Laius will die by his son's hand, it leaves unspecified the manner in which this end will be accomplished. Laius' failure as a reader is that he is unaware of the possibility of another reading, another reaction.

Hillman supplies just such another reading of the oracle:

'If we imagine a second sense of the oracle, then Laius might have heard: "Watch your son deeply, study his heart, grasp his ways, for he has the potential for your end. He is the one who can show how your life ends, the ends of your life." The son offers another way than the father's. The son is the ruling mind's potential for a second sense. He is the next generation, a generative understanding beyond the literalism of a king's kind of consciousness, which hardens into single meanings when the bounds of any kingdom are defined ...' (1991:123)

The ambiguity turns on the double meaning of 'end' as 'goal' or as 'termination'. Whether or not we deem Hillman's particular reading convincing, the significance of such multiple meaning in words and indeed utterances, and the role of the reader in resolving, or activating, this multiplicity of meaning is exactly what we have demonstrated in the poetics of the books of Samuel.

9.5 OATH, AMBIGUITY AND THE ANXIETY OF THE READER

9.5.1 POLYSEMY AND TRAGEDY

For an account which relates the oath to the reader's response we can turn to J.-P. Vernant (Vernant 1983)⁵ on the function of ambiguity in the workings of ancient Greek drama, in particular the *Oedipus Rex*. He writes:

The words exchanged in the theatrical space, instead of establishing communication and agreement between the characters, on the contrary underline the impermeability of minds, the freezing of character: they mark the barriers which separate the protagonists, and they trace the lines of conflict. Each hero, enclosed in the universe which is his own, gives a word a meaning, a single meaning. Against this unilaterality another clashes violently. Tragic irony may consist in showing how, in the course of the action, the hero finds himself literally 'taken at his word', a word which turns itself against him in bringing him the bitter experience of the meaning which he insisted on not recognizing. (Vernant 1983: 189-190)

For Vernant, then, tragedy represents ^a clash between two or more different resolutions of the polysemy of a word. In particular, he draws attention to the way in which a protagonist's own words may commit him to a course of action that he had not foreseen. Of course, the word that redounds on a protagonist's head may either be his

⁵ Vernant's paper is referred to in most complimentary terms by Derrida in his discussion of the word *pharmakos* (Derrida 1981: 131 n 56). He does distance himself from Vernant's professedly anti-Freudian stance in 'Oedipe sans complexe', while at the same time taking care to distinguish his own analysis from the psychoanalytic approach.

own interpretation of an oracle, or else his own statement, often couched in the form of an oath.

Vernant, however goes on to describe the role of the spectator or reader in this process:

It is only over the heads of the characters, between the author and the spectator that another dialogue is woven, where language recovers its property of communication and almost its transparency. But what transmits the tragic message, when it is understood, is precisely that in the words exchanged between men there exist zones of opacity and incommunicability. In the moment when, on stage, he sees the protagonists adhering exclusively to one meaning and, thus blinded, lose themselves or tear each other apart, the spectator is led to understand that there are in reality two possible meanings or more. The tragic message becomes intelligible to him to the extent that, wrested from his former certainties and limitations, he realizes the ambiguity of words, of values, of the human condition. Recognizing the universe as full of conflict, opening himself to a problematic vision of the world, he makes himself embody the tragic consciousness through the spectacle. (1983: 190)

It is the realisation not of the 'true' meaning of the fatal word that has its effect on the audience, but the realisation that there is no true meaning, that any utterance is liable to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The spectator is the point at which the language regains its transparency as a communication between author and spectator, the transparency which is lost as it fractures into the competing discourses between characters. But what it communicates is precisely the fact that there are always 'zones

d'opacité', areas of darkness, in the speech between people. It is when the spectator becomes aware that the character has blindly opted for one meaning that he realises that in fact there are two or even more senses possible.

9.5.3 THE PLACE OF THE READER

Goff (1990: 89) argues against Barthes and Vernant that:

'... if the play offers to put the audience or reader in the privileged position of *mantis*, it also immediately withdraws that offer; the claims for *manteia* are undermined by the insistence on the inevitability of misreading and misinterpretation in communication ... While the play functions as a demonstration of divinity, it denies to human speech and communication any security or stability. Human speech emerges as always imperfect and incomplete.'

Perhaps the two positions are very similar, except that Goff leaves open the possibility that there may be meanings that the spectator does not easily grasp either. So the reader or spectator may see enacted in the text his or her own misreading. The reader or spectator who is given the same information as the interpretant character may come to realise that she or he has also opted for only one possible meaning. The text may then offer a second meaning, offering an unexpected further interpretation to the reader as well as the interpretant.

As Agamben puts it:

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the division, always inherent in every human word, appears most clearly. As a *living being* who has language, man

is subjected to a double destiny. He cannot know all that he says and if he wills to know, he is subjected to the possibility of error and hubris. Now language becomes the site of a conflict between that which one can know in any utterance and that which one necessarily says without knowing.

(Agamben 1991: 89)

This gap is the gap which the oath is designed to bridge, but which it opens wide as language comes adrift from intention. It is also the fatal gap which allows Oedipus to interpret the oracle that he will kill his father in such a way as to make that outcome possible.

9.6 CONCLUSION : DAVID AS READER

Both 2 Samuel 12 and 2 Samuel 14 involve David as reader swearing an oath in the name of Yahweh. This invocation of the divine name carries its own *frisson*. Moreover, both oaths have a direct bearing on the relation between David the king and his sons and heirs. In 2 Samuel 12, David's admission of guilt leads to the death of the unnamed son that Bathsheba bears him, and to the birth of Solomon, the son who will succeed him.

It is this sense of ambiguity, of the 'dark potential' that may see the light of day that links language and fatherhood. As Bakhtin and Austin indicate, the inherently dialogical nature of language, and indeed the social basis of the human subject, means that the analogy can be drawn to the paradox that the only form of survival of the individual human subject depends on the transaction of procreation. The risk of utterance is required both for communication and for procreation. The risk is the absolute dependence of the utterer on the hearer, of the male as producer of seed on the woman as its bearer. In her womb, woman bears 'dark potentials that may become enacted in the day-world, in

time' in Hillman's phrase. Jocasta's womb bore Oedipus, Bathsheba's bore the nameless child.

Hence the power of the text, and the kind of claim that it makes on its readers, are aligned with the claims and anxieties of the relations between fathers and children. Just as in the case of Oedipus, where the ineradicable relationship of generation draws Laius and Oedipus to their fatal encounter despite their best efforts to evade it, so the relation between fathers and children and the tension between them informs the text of 2 Samuel.

Both text and child as utterances take on a physical and vulnerable existence beyond the intentions of those who engender them, a life that both offers the possibility of survival and the reminder of death to the one who engenders it. The reader is then implicated as both child and father of the text, and indeed fathers his or her own father on the text. It is the anxiety of fatherhood that underlies the reader's involvement in the text.

As subject, the reader is constituted by the acts of linguistic decision, of resolution of the perlocutionary effects of language that reading demands. The act of reading in itself modifies and constitutes the reader. The reader is child of the text in this sense.

Yet the reader is also father, in that the process of reading is a matter of making such decisions, of uttering a reading, a reading, which like any utterance, depends on its reception in order for its consequences to be clear.

In the figure of David, the reader see enacted his or her own transactions of reading through the reading judgments of David, whose utterances are resolved in

ways that are not anticipated. The very convention that seeks to guarantee that resolution in invoking the divine name only serves to emphasise rather than close the gap between speech and act, intention and realisation.

Yet this also implicates the divine in the exigencies of language. There is an ideological battle for precedence between the divine character and the character of the reader which is formally unresolvable. The text offers the reader a source of origin, thereby activating the anxieties of the heir, and the anxieties of being ungrounded, of having no origin.

The text 'needs' to recruit the reader as its 'child' in order to ensure its own survival. In every generation, it will only survive if it gathers round itself communities that will ensure its transmission to the next generation. Or rather, that anxiety has ensured, so far, that this unique body of literature has been transmitted and continues to live in the language and conventions of communities which make sure that their own children will carry it on.

It does so by making claims of power, of authority, which like any such claims, can only be sustained by the consent of the reader. Such consent can only be secured by promises, which the reader cannot ever be sure will be fulfilled. It holds out the promise of survival, but a survival only predicated on its own survival, in an inextricable circulation of textual power.

David as reader, then, serves to make the reader aware of her own status as an entity which only exists in acts of reading, of interpretation, of judgement, and of the unpredictability of these judgements. Whether that is a matter of liberation, of hope, of freedom from the constraints of a rigid system of correspondence between

sign and signified, intention and action, utterance and reception, or whether it threatens only failure, misunderstanding, and the collapse of meaning, can only itself lead to such an act of reading, and of judgement.

CHAPTER TEN

EPILOGUE: DAVID'S CHILD

10.1. DAVID'S REACTION

As a final word on the poetics of fatherhood in the books of Samuel, let us end with a consideration of a section of the text in which David's reading of the death of the child born to Bathsheba is recorded, 2 Sam 12: 16-23.

His reaction to the sickness and death of the unnamed child has provoked a wide range of interpretations. David fasts and lies on the ground without eating and drinking for seven days while the child is dying, but when he learns that the child has died, he gets up, washes and anoints himself, goes to the Lord's house and eats. His servants question him over this unaccountable behaviour. David replies, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."' (2 Sam 12: 23)

10.2 THE REACTION OF READERS

This scene where the puzzlement of David's hearers is inscribed in the text, has exercised the ingenuity of commentators. It is a prime example of an encoded 'defamiliarization'. Their verdicts range from Pedersen's encomium of David as disclosing a radical new attitude to the rite of mourning (1940: 455-57) or Brueggemann's heroic picture of a David who now knows that 'the issues of his life are not to be found in cringing fear before the powers of death' (1969: 491),

through Alter's reading of 'these numb and dispiriting words' as giving an inkling that David 'has a newly tangible sense of his own mortality' (1980: 128), to Würthwein's severe condemnation of a David who 'knows neither God nor commandment' (1974:26) in his cynical abandonment of human decency.

The ambiguity is heightened by readers such as Hertzberg (1962: 316) and Gerleman (1977) who point out that the death of the child can be construed as a positive benefit to David. It is an indication that the transference of David's sin to the child which Nathan predicted has occurred, and therefore by implication David is no longer himself in peril from God's punishment. Once the child has died, David is in the clear. So is David's mourning merely an act put on for public consumption? Gerleman (1977: 138), for instance, explains the servants' confusion as caused by the fact that David's servants have not been privy to God's judgment as meted out by Nathan. David's attendants can only suppose this is mourning, whereas he and the reader know that this is supplication.

Other readers themselves stress the ambiguity. So Perdue asks, 'Are these the words of a grief-stricken father, or of a callous ruler realizing he had failed to negate Nathan's prophecy predicting trouble from the king's own house, a prediction whose initial sign was the death of the child?' (1984: 77) Whybray asks, '... was this genuine piety, or was it a calculated attempt to impress his followers?' (1968: 36) Ackerman, who points out that the narrator leaves the reader no option but confusion, sets out the dilemma as follows: 'Is the story depicting a cool calculating relationship to God? Or does it show David's resilient faith that accepts the child's death as divine judgment after his pleas for divine mercy have had no effect?' (1990: 45)

No single commentator seems to cover the whole gamut of interpretations, but the range is startling. The wider context does not do much to help the reader in the effort to disambiguate David's statement. David has already been displayed in contradictory attitudes to situations where he is informed of a death.

10.3 DAVID AND THE DEATH OF SONS

His reaction to Nathan's parable shows a strong emotional response to the death of a sheep and to the deprivation of a poor man. Does this indicate that David's fasting and lying on the ground represents a similar emotional outburst at the news of the child's death? On the other hand, David's cynical dismissal of the death of his crack troops with the callous phrase 'the sword devours now one and now another' (2 Sam 11: 25) argues that there is a possibility that this episode represents the same disregard of death.

Similarly, we have the contrast between his outburst on the death of Absalom which argues his passionate devotion to this rebellious son. Yet he treats him with what could be interpreted as an alienating coolness when he returns from his exile in his mother's country, and even, if Jan Fokkelman is to be believed, plans to kill him until persuaded otherwise by Joab.

The key feature of this episode of David's reaction to the child's death, surely, is precisely its ambivalence. The servants' questioning of David's motives and actions is unusual in itself. The speculation on the motives of a character which the chorus in a Greek tragedy can provide is very seldom to be found in Hebrew narrative. Within the text there is an inscribed audience which represents the reader's bafflement at this procedure. There is a *mise en abyme* of incomprehension. This ambivalence is not dispelled by David's answer, but on

the contrary works to highlight the emotional ambiguity of the answer itself. We are not given the reaction of David's servants to his response to their question. Were they satisfied by his answer, scandalised, or were they left as much in the dark as they were before? David's answer is left ambiguous.

10.4 DAVID AND READERS

David himself appears as reader of the servants' mutterings. He overhears their conversation, a conversation in which they are debating the advisability of communicating the fact of his son's death to him, and interprets not the content of their speech, but the act of secretive speech itself. 'When David saw that his servants were whispering together David perceived that the child was dead; and David said, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead."' Notice the order of the narrated events here. David perceives the death of his son and then asks a question, which cannot then be a search for information. Its perlocutionary effect is to demonstrate to the servants that David has understood the death of the child merely from the fact that they were whispering. His subsequent actions are then to be interpreted in the light of that knowledge.

Neither readers in the text or outside have been able to disambiguate this reaction. The attempts to do so, more or less convincing as they are, can only reveal the attitudes and assumptions of the commentators on the text rather than anything to do with the construction of the character of David. The reader is brought to the point of facing his or her own response to the death of this child, to the character whose oath is implicated in that death and to the God who is represented as bringing that death about. As meta-readers, we then can use these responses to pass judgment on these readers from their utterances. Just as David himself reads the words

of the Amalekite after his death, so readers are induced to utter on the central issue of this text: the relations between fathers, sons, and death.

But what is left to the reader to infer is the relationship between the death of the child and the life of God. 'As the Lord lives ...'; 'a son of death'. It is God's faithfulness that has led to the death of the child; or is it the death of the child which becomes the earnest of God's life? The only concrete evidence the text can offer of the existence of the God invoked in David's oath is a tiny corpse. God lives, if he lives, through the death of the child.

The answer then, to the question with which this thesis began: 'What is it to read 2 Samuel?' is perhaps here. It is to confront the question of David's unresolvable words without evading the emotional consequences of the juxtaposition of a living God, and a dead child.

ABBREVIATIONS

BWANT	<i>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CJT	<i>Canadian Journal of Theology</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
OTWSA	<i>Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTS	<i>Supplement to Vetus Testamentum</i>
WMANT	<i>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft</i>

REFERENCES

[Note: Except where a translator is indicated, or a passage is cited as quoted in a work in English, English translations in the text of the thesis are my own.]

ACKERMAN J.S. (1990) 'Knowing Good and Evil: A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2.' *JBL* 109: 41-64

ACKROYD P.R. (1971) *The First Book of Samuel* [The Cambridge Biblical Commentary] (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

--- (1977) *The Second Book of Samuel* [The Cambridge Biblical Commentary] (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

AGAMBEN G. (1991) *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press)

AHLSTRÖM G.W. (1961) 'Der Prophet Nathan und die Tempelbau.' *VT* 11:113-27

ALONSO SCHÖKEL L. (1976) 'David y la mujer de Tecua: 2 Sm 14 como modelo hermenéutico.' *Biblica* 57:192-205

ALTER R. (1975) *Partial Magic* (Berkeley, University of California Press)

--- (1981) *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London, George Allen & Unwin)

--- (1983) 'How Conventions Help Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene' *Prooftexts* 3:115-130

ALTER R., KERMODE, F. eds (1987) *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London, Collins)

- ALTPETER G.(1982) 'II Sam 12,1-15a: Eine strukturalistische Analyse.' *Theologische Zeitschrift* 38:46-52
- ANDERSON A.A. (1989) *2 Samuel* [Word Biblical Commentary:11] (Dallas, Word Books)
- ARENDT H. (1958) *The Human Condition* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press)
- ARISTOTLE (1943) *Generation of Animals* trans PECK A.L. (London/Cambridge MA, Heinemann/Harvard University Press)
- (1982) *Aristotle's Poetics* trans HUTTON J. (New York, W.W. Norton)
- ARNOLD B.T. (1989) 'The Amalekite's Report of Saul's Death: Political Intrigue or Incompatible Sources?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32:289-298
- AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (1942) *Confessions* trans SHEED F.J. (New York, Sheed & Ward)
- AUSTIN J.L. (1961) *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- (1980) *How to Do Things with Words* [first published 1962; second revised edition ed J.O.Ormison, M.Sbisà 1975; reprinted with corrections 1980] (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- BACH A. (1989) 'The Pleasure of her Text.' *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43: 41-58
- BAILEY R.C. (1990) *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10-12* [JSOT Sup Ser 75] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- BAKHTIN M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* HOLQUIST M. ed, HOLQUIST M., EMERSON C. trans (Austin, University of Texas Press)

- BAL M. (1985) *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* trans VAN BOHEEMEN C. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press)
- (1987) *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)
- (1988) *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago, University of Chicago)
- BARTHES R. (1977) *Image - Music - Text* trans HEATH S. (New York, The Noonday Press)
- BARTON J. (1984) *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (London, Darton Longman & Todd)
- BAR-EFRAT S. (1989) *Narrative Art in the Bible* trans SHEFER-VANSON D. [JSOT Sup Ser] (Sheffield, Almond Press)
- BARTLETT F.C. (1932) *Remembering* (London, Cambridge University Press)
- BATESON G., JACKSON D.D., HALEY J., WEAKLAND J. (1972) *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (New York, Ballantine Books)
- BELLEFONTAINE E. (1987) 'Customary Law and Chieftainship: Judicial Aspects of 2 Sam 14.4-21.' *JSOT* 38:47-72
- BENVENISTE E. (1971) *Problems in General Linguistics* trans MEEK M.E. (Coral Gables, FL., University of Miami Press)
- BERGER P. (1961) *The Precarious Vision* (New York, Doubleday)
- BERLIN A. (1983) *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, Almond Press)
- BETTELHEIM B. (1955) *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (London, Thames & Hudson)

- BLAIKIE W.C.. (1892) *The Second Book of Samuel* [The Expositor's Bible] (London, Hodder & Stoughton)
- BLANK S.H. (1951) 'The Curse, Blasphemy, the Spell, and the Oath.' *HUCA* 23:73-95
- BLINKINSOPP J.(1964) 'Jonathan's Sacrilege: 1 Sm 14,1-16: A Study in Literary History.' *CBQ* 26:422-449
- BORGES J.L. (1970) *Labyrinths* ed YATES D.A., IRBY J.E. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- BOVATI P. (1986) *Ristabilare la Giustizia: Procedure, vocabolario, orientamenti* (Rome, Biblical Institute Press)
- BOWIE M. (1991) *Lacan* (London, Fontana)
- BROWN R.M. (1984) 'The Nathan Syndrome: Stories with a Moral Intention.' *Religion and Literature* 16:49-59
- BUDDE K. (1902) *Die Bücher Samuels* [Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum AT abt. 8] (Tubingen, J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck])
- BUSHNELL R.W. (1988) *Prophesying Tragedy; Sign and Voice in Sophocles' Theban Plays* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press)
- CAIRD G.B (1953) 'The First and Second Books of Samuel.' *The Interpreters' Bible* vol. 2 (New York, Abingdon): 853-1176
- (1980) *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London, Duckworth)
- CAMP C.V. (1981) 'The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel?' *CBQ* 43:14-29
- CARLSON R.A. (1964) *David, the Chosen King: A Traditio-Historical Approach to the Second Book of Samuel* (Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell)

CARTLEDGE (1992) *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield, JSOT Press)

CAZELLES H. (1955) 'A propos d'une phrase de H.H. Rowley.' *VTS* 3:26-32

CERVANTES SAAVEDRA M. de (1964) *Don Quixote of La Mancha* trans STARKIE W. (New York, New American Library)

CHAMBERS R. (1984) *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Manchester, Manchester University Press)

CHABOT C.B. (1985) 'Understanding Interpretive Solutions.' In: COOPER C. ed *Researching Response to Literature and the Teaching of Literature: Points of Departure* (Norwood NJ, Ablex Publishing Corporation)

CHIBAUDEL P. (1989) 'David et Bethsabée; une Tragédie de l'Abstention.' *La Vie Spirituelle* 143:75-85

CHATMAN S. (1978) *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press)

CHURCH B.P. (1947) *The Golden Years: The Old Testament Narrative as Literature* (New York, Rhinehart)

CLARK K., HOLQUIST M. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press)

COATS G.W. (1970) 'Self-Abasement And Insult Formulas.' *JBL* 89:14-26

--- (1986) 'II Samuel 12:1-7a.' *Interpretation* 40:170-175

COGAN M., TADMOR H. (1988) *II Kings* [The Anchor Bible] (New York, Doubleday & Co)

CONROY C. (1978) *Absalom Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13-20* (Rome, Biblical Institute Press)

COSERIU E. (1974) *Synchronie, Diachronie und Geschichte: Das Problem des Sprachwandels* (München, Wilhelm Finck Verlag)

COXON P. (1981) 'A Note on "Bathsheba" in 2 Samuel 12,1-6.' *Biblica* 62:247-250

CROSSAN J.D. (1975) *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Argus)

CULLER J. (1981) *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)

--- (1983) *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)

DÄLLENBACH L. (1976) 'Intertexte et autotexte.' *Poétique* 7:282-296

--- (1989) *The Mirror in the Text* trans WHITELEY J., HUGHES E. (Cambridge, Polity Press)

DAMROSCH D. (1987) *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of the Biblical Literature* (San Francisco, Harper and Row)

DAUBE D. (1982) 'Nathan's Parable.' *Novum Testamentum* 3:275-288

DAVIDSON R. (1983) *The Courage to Doubt* (London, SCM Press)

DELEKAT L. (1967) 'Tendenz und Theologie der David-Salomo-Erzählung.' In: MAASS F. (ed) 'Das ferne und nahe Wort': *Festschrift für Leonhard Rost zum 70. Geburtstag* [BZAW 105] (Berlin, Verlag Alfred Töpelmann):26-36

- DE MAN P. (1979) *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven, Yale University Press)
- DERRIDA J. (1981) *Dissemination* trans JOHNSON B. (London, Athlone Press)
- (1984) *Otobiographies: L'enseignement de Nietzsche et la politique du nom propre* (Paris, Editions Galilée)
- DEVEREUX G. (1983) 'Why Oedipus Killed Laius: A Note on the Complementary Oedipus Complex in Greek Drama.' In : EDMUNDS, L., DUNDES A. *Oedipus: A Folklore Casebook* (New York, Garland Publishing Inc.: 215-233)
- DE VRIES S.J. (1978) *Prophet against Prophet: The Role of the Micaiah Narrative (1 Kings 22) in the Development of Early Prophetic Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans)
- EDELMAN D.V. (1991) *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* [JSOT Sup Ser 121] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- EHRlich A.B. (1910) *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel vol 3* (Leipzig, Hinrichs)
- EMERTON J.A. (1987) 'Sheol and the sons of Belial.' VT 37:214-218
- ESLINGER L.M. (1985) *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* [Bible and Literature Ser 10] (Sheffield, Almond Press)
- (1989) *Into the Hands of the Living God* (Sheffield, Almond Press)
- FELMAN S. (1985) *Writing and Madness* trans EVANS M. (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press)

FISH S. (1980) *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press)

FISCH H. (1988) *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)

FLEISCHMANN P.R. (1989) *The Healing Spirit: Case Studies in Religion and Psychotherapy* (London, SPCK)

FOKKELMAN J.P. (1981) *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel Vol 1: King David* (Assen, Van Gorcum)

--- (1984) 'A Lie, Born of Truth, Too Weak to Contain it: A Structural Reading of 2 Sam.i 1-16.' *Outestamentische Studien* 23:39-55

--- (1986) *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel Vol 2: The Crossing Fates* (Assen, Van Gorcum)

--- (1990) *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel Vol 3: Throne and City* (Assen, Van Gorcum)

FOUCAULT M. (1991) 'What Is an Author?' In: RABINOW P. ed *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books):101-120

FOWLER R. (1977) *Linguistics and the Novel* (London, Methuen)

--- (1981) *Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism* (London, Batsford)

--- (1986) *Linguistic Criticism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

FREUD S. (1976) *The Interpretation of Dreams* [The Pelican Freud Library vol. 4] ed RICHARDS A., trans STRACHEY J. (London, Penguin)

- (1977) *On Sexuality* [The Pelican Freud Library vol. 7] ed RICHARDS A. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- (1984) *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904* ed, trans MASSON J.M. (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press)
- (1985a) *The Origins of Religion* [The Pelican Freud Library vol.13] ed DICKSON A. trans STACHEY J. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- (1985b) *Art and Literature* [The Pelican Freud Library vol. 14] ed DICKSON A., trans STRACHEY J. (London, Penguin)
- FUNK R.W. (1988) *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Sonoma CA, Polebridge Press)
- GARSIEL M. (1985) *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan, Revivim)
- (1991) 'Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1-2.' *Biblica* 72:379-86
- GAY P. (1988) *Freud: A Life for our Time* (London, Papermac)
- GEHMAN H.S. (1975) 'The Oath in the Old Testament: Its Vocabulary, Idiom and Syntax; Its Semantics and Theology in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint.' In: COOK J.I. ed *Grace upon Grace: Essays in honor of Lester J.Kuyper* (Grand Rapids, Wm B.Eerdmans):51-63
- GENETTE G. (1982) *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au second degré* (Paris, Editions du Seuil)
- GERLEMAN G. (1977) 'Schuld und Sühne: Erwägungen zu 2.Samuel 12.' In: DONNER H., HANHART R., SMEND R. eds *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walter Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht):132-139

- GIDE A. (1941) *Journal 1889-1939* (Paris, Gallimard)
- GINZBERG L. (1913) *The Legends of the Jews: Vol.IV Bible Times and Characters from Joshua to Esther* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America)
- GIRARD R. (1977) *Violence and the Sacred* trans GREGORY P. (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press)
- GOFF B.E. (1990) *The Noose of Words: Readings of Desire, Violence and Language in Euripides' Hippolytos* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- GORDON R.P. (1980) 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Samuel 24-26.' *Tyndale Bulletin* 31:37-64
- (1986) *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter, Paternoster Press)
- GRAY J. (1964) *I & II Kings: A Commentary* [The Old Testament Library] (London, SCM Press)
- GREEN A. (1979) *The Tragic Effect: The Oedipus Complex in Tragedy* trans SHERIDAN A. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- GREENBERG M. (1957) 'The Hebrew Oath Particle *Hay/He.*' *JBL* 7:34-39
- GREIMAS A.J. (1973) 'Les actants, les acteurs et les figures.' In CHABROL C. ed *Sémiotique narrative et textuelle* (Paris, Larousse)
- GRICE H.P. (1975) 'Logic and Conversation.' In: COLE P., MORGAN J.L. (eds) *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (New York, Academic Press):41-58
- GROS LOUIS K.R.R. (1977) 'The Difficulty of Ruling Well: King David of Israel.' *Semeia* 8:17-32

- GUNKEL H. (1987) *The Folktale in the Old Testament* trans RUTTER M.D. (Sheffield, Almond Press)
- GUNN D.M. (1974) 'Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel.' *VT* 24:286-317
- (1980) *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* [JSOT Sup Ser 14] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- (1982 [1978]) *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* [JSOT Sup Ser 6] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- HAGAN H. (1979) 'Deception as Motif and Theme in 2 Sm 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2.' *Biblica* 60:301-326
- HALEY G. (1986) 'The Narrator in *Don Quijote*: Maese Pedro's Puppet Show.' In: EL SAFFAR R. ed *Critical Essays on Cervantes* (Boston, G.K. Hall & Co):94-110
- HAMON P. (1977) 'Texte littéraire et métalanguage.' *Poétique* 31: 264-275
- HARDING D.W. (1937) 'The Role of the Onlooker.' *Scrutiny* 6: 247-248
- HARTWIG J. (1983) *Shakespeare's Analogical Scene; Parody as Structural Syntax* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press)
- HAWKES T. (1977) *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London, Methuen & Co)
- HELLER J. (1984) *God Knows* (London, Jonathan Cape)
- HÉRITIER AUGÉ F. (1989) 'Semen and Blood: Some Ancient Theories concerning their Genesis and Relationships.' In: FEHER M. with NADDAFF R., TAZI N. eds *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* vol 3 (New York, Zone):158-176

- HERMISSON H.-J. (1971) 'Weisheit und Geschichte.' In: WOLFF H.W. ed *Probleme biblischer Theologie* (München, Kaiser):136-154
- HERTZBERG H.W. (1964) *I & II Samuel* [Old Testament Library] (London, SCM Press)
- HEYM S. (1984) *The King David Report* (London, Abacus)
- HILLMAN J. (1991) 'Oedipus Revisited.' In: KERÉNYI K., HILLMAN J. *Oedipus Variations: Studies in Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Dallas, Spring Publications): 87-169
- HOFTIJZER J. (1970) 'David and the Tekoite Woman.' *VT* 20:419-444
- HOLQUIST M. (1990) *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (London, Routledge)
- HOLUB R.C. (1984) *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London, Methuen)
- ISER W. (1978) *The Art of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press)
- JACKSON B.S. (1972) *Theft in Early Jewish Law* (Oxford, Clarendon Press)
- JAKOBSON R. (1960) 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics.' In SEBEOK T. (ed) *Style in Language* (Cambridge MA)
- JAMES H. (1963) *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* ed SHAPIRA M. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
- (1984) *Henry James: Literary Criticism; European Writers and the Prefaces* ed. EDEL L., WILSON M. (New York, The Library of America)
- JEFFERSON A., ROBEY D. eds (1986) *Modern Literary Theory: A Comparative Introduction* (London, B.T. Batsford)

JOBLING D. (1978) *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: 3 Structural Analyses in the Old Testament* (Sheffield, JSOT Press)

--- (1986) *The Sense of Biblical Narrative vol.II* (Sheffield, Almond Press)

JONES G.H. (1990) *The Nathan Narratives* [JSOT Sup Ser 80] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)

JOSIPOVICI G. (1988) *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven, Yale University Press)

KANT I. (1978) *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* trans BECK L.W. (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing)

KIERKEGAARD S. (1990) *For Self-Examination/ Judge For Yourselves* trans HONG H.V., HONG E.H. (Princeton, Princeton University Press)

KIRKPATRICK P.G. (1988) *The Old Testament and Folklore Study* [JSOT Sup Ser 62] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)

KLEIN R.W. (1983) *1 Samuel* [Word Biblical Commentary vol 10] (Waco, Word books)

KOZULIN A. (1990) *Vygotsky's Psychology: A Biography of Ideas* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf)

KRISTEVA J. (1986) *The Kristeva Reader* ed MOI T. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell)

LACAN J. (1977) *Écrits: A Selection* trans SHERIDAN A. (London, Tavistock/Routledge [1990 reprint])

--- (1979) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* ed MILLER J.-A., trans SHERIDAN A. (Harmondsworth, Penguin)

- LASINE S. (1984) 'Melodrama as Parable; the Story of the Poor Man's Ewe Lamb and David's Topsy-turvy Emotions.' *Hebrew Annual Review* 8:101-125
- (1987) 'Solomon, Daniel and the Detective Story: The Social Functions of a Literary Genre.' *Hebrew Annual Review* 11: 247-267
- (1989a) 'The Riddle of Solomon's Judgment and the Riddle of Human Nature in the Hebrew Bible.' *JSOT* 45:61-86
- (1989b) 'Judicial Narratives and the Ethics of Reading: The Reader as Judge of the Dispute between Mephibosheth and Ziba.' *Hebrew Studies* 30:49-69
- (1991) 'Jehoram and the Cannibal Mothers (2 Kings 6:24-33): Solomon's Judgment in an Inverted World.' *JSOT* 50:27-53
- LATEGAN B.C., VORSTER W.S. (1985) *Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* [Semeia Studies](Philadelphia/Atlanta, Fortress Press/Scholars Press)
- LECHTE J. (1990) *Julia Kristeva* (London, Routledge)
- LEBEN H. (1903) 'Eine Vermutung zum "Schäfchen des armen Mannes" (2 Sam 12, 1-4).' *Orientalische Litteratur-zeitung* 6:152-155
- LEECH G.N. (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longman)
- LEHMANN M.R. (1969) 'Biblical Oaths.' *ZAW* 81:74-92
- LEMON L.T., REIS M.J. (1965) *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press)
- LEVENSON J.D.(1978) '1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History.' *CBQ* 40: 11-28
- LEVENSON J.D., HALPERN B. (1980) 'The Political Import of David's Marriages.' *JBL* 99: 507-18

- LINDGREN T. (1989) *Bathsheba* trans GEDDES T. (London, Collins Harvill)
- LODGE D. (1990) *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London, Routledge)
- MABEE C. (1980) 'David's Judicial Exoneraton.' ZAW 92: 89-107
- MACCANNELL J.F. (1986) *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious* (London, Croom Helm)
- MACHOLZ G.C. (1972a) 'Die Stellung des Königs in der israelitischen Gerichtverfassung.' ZAW 84:157-182
- (1972b) 'Zur Geschichte der Justizorganisation in Juda.' ZAW 84:314-340
- MARCUS D. (1986) *Jepthah and his Vow* (Lubbock TX, Texas Tech Press)
- MARTIN W. (1986) *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press)
- MCCARTER P.K. (1980) *I Samuel* [The Anchor Bible] (Garden City NY, Doubleday & Co Inc)
- (1984) *II Samuel* [The Anchor Bible] (Garden City NY, Doubleday & Co Inc)
- MEDINA A. (1979) *Reflection, Time and the Novel: Toward a Communicative Theory of Literature* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)
- MILES J.R. (1990) 'Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody.' In: RADDAY Y.T., BRENNER A. eds *On Humour and Comic in the Bible* (Sheffield, Almond Press)

- MISCALL P.D. (1978) 'The Jacob and Joseph Stories as Analogies.'
JSOT 6: 28-40
- (1983) *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative* (Philadelphia PA/Chico CA, Fortress Press/Scholars Press)
- (1986) *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)
- MITCHELL J., ROSE J. (1982) *Feminine Sexuality; Lacan and the 'Ecole freudienne'*. (New York, Macmillan)
- MORSON G.S. (1989) 'Parody, History and Metaparody.' In: MORSON G.S., EMERSON C. (eds) *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press): 63-86
- MORSON G.S., EMERSON C. (1990) *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press)
- MOWATT D.G. (1971) *Friedrich von Husen. Introduction Text Commentary and Glossary. Anglica Germanica II* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- MUKAROVSKY J. (1977) 'The Individual and Literary Development [1943-45].' In: BURBANK J., STEINER P. trans eds *The Word and Verbal Art: Selected Essays by Jan Mukarovsky* (New Haven, Yale University Press): 161-179
- MURRAY J.M. (1954) *Jonathan Swift: A Biography* (London, Jonathan Cape)
- NICOL G.G. (1982) 'The Wisdom of Joab and the Wise Woman of Tekoa.' *Studia Theologica* 36:97-104
- (1992) 'Story-patterning in Genesis.' In: CARROLL R.P. ed *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson* (Sheffield, JSOT Press): 215-233

- NIEHR H. (1987) *Rechtsprechung in Israel: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Gerichtsorganisation im alten Testament* (Stuttgart, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk)
- NIETZSCHE F. (1969) 'Second Essay: "Guilt", "Bad Conscience", and the Like.' In: KAUFMANN W. ed *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* trans KAUFMANN W., HOLLINGDALE R.J. (New York, Vintage Books):57-96
- ORTIGUES E. (1962) *Le Discours et le symbole* (Paris, Aubier; Editions Montaigne)
- OSTRIKER A.S. (1993) *Feminist Revision and the Bible* (Cambridge MA, Blackwell)
- PAOLUCCI A., PAOLUCCI H. (1968) *Hegel on Tragedy* (Westport, Greenwood Press)
- PAUL R.A. (1980) 'Symbolic Interpretation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology.' *Ethos* 8:286-94
- PEDERSEN J. (1914) *Der Eid bei den Semiten in seinem Verhältnis zur verwandten Erscheinung sowie die Stellung des Eides in Islam [Der Islam - Beihefte: Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients 3]* (Strassburg, Verlag Karl J. Trübner)
- PERDUE L.G. (1984) "'Is there anyone left of the house of Saul ...?'" Ambiguity and the Characterization of David in the Succession Narrative.' *JSOT* 30:67-84
- PETERSON C.L. (1986) *The Determined Reader: Gender and Culture in the Novel from Napoleon to Victoria* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press)
- PETREY S. (1990) *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York, Routledge)

PHILLIPS A. (1966) 'The Interpretation of 2 Samuel xii 5-6.' *VT* 16:242-44.

POE E.A. (1978) 'The Fall of the House of Usher.' In MABBOTT T.O. ed *The Collected Works of Edgar Allen Poe Vol II* (Cambridge MA, Belknap/Harvard):392-422

POLANYI M. (1962) *Personal Knowledge; Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London, Routledge Kegan & Paul)

POLZIN R. (1980) *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History Part One* (New York, Seabury Press)

--- (1989) *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History Part Two* (San Francisco, Harper & Row)

PRICKETT S. (1986) *Words and The Word; Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

PROPP V. (1968) *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, University of Texas Press)

RABINOWITZ P.J. (1977) 'Truth in Fiction: A Re-examination of Audiences.' *Critical Inquiry* 4:121-141

--- (1987) *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press)

RANK O. (1959) *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero and Other Writings* ed. FREUND P. (New York, Vintage Books)

RICOEUR P. (1991) *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination* ed VALDÉS M.J. (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester/Wheatsheaf)

RIFFATERRE M. (1990) *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press)

- RIMMON-KENAN S. (1983) *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London, Methuen)
- ROSENBERG J. (1986) *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)
- ROTH W. (1977) '“You are the Man!” Structural Interaction in 2 Samuel 10-12.' *Semeia* 8: 1-13
- RUSSELL D.A., WINTERBOTTOM M. eds (1989) *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- SANFORD A.J. (1985) *Cognition and Cognitive Psychology* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson)
- SCARRY E. (1985) *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, Oxford University Press)
- SCHILL S. (1891) 'Zu 2 Sam. 12,6.' *ZAW* 11:318
- SCHNEIDAU H.N. (1976) *The Bible and Western Tradition* (Baton Rouge LA, Louisiana State University Press)
- SCHROETER J. (1961) 'The Four Fathers: Symbolism in *Oedipus Rex*.' *Criticism* 3:186-200
- SCHWALLY F. (1892) 'Zur Quellenkritik der historischen Bücher.' *ZAW* 12:153-161
- SCHWARTZ R.M. (1990) 'Joseph's Bones and the Resurrection of the Text: Remembering in the Bible.' In: SCHWARTZ R.M. ed *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge MA, Basil Blackwell):40-59
- SEARLE J.R. (1969) *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

- ed. (1971) *The Philosophy of Language* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)
- (1977) 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida' *Glyph* 1: 198-208
- (1979) *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)
- (1983) Review of Jonathan Culler *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. *New York Review of Books* 27.10.83
- SEGAL L. (1987) 'II Samuel'. In: ROSENBERG D. ed *Congregation: Contemporary Jewish Writers Read the Hebrew Bible* (San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich):106-127
- SEVERINO CROATTO J. (1983) 'L'Herméneutique biblique en face des méthodes critiques: défi et perspectives.' *VTS* 36:67-80
- SHIRLEY F.A. (1979) *Swearing and Perjury in Shakespeare's Plays* (London, George Allen & Unwin)
- SIMON U. (1967) 'The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable.' *Biblica* 48:207-242
- SINGER M. (1988) 'Inferences in Reading Comprehension.' In DANEMAN M., MACKINNON G.E., WALKER T.G. eds *Reading Research: Advances in Theory and Practice* Vol 6 (San Diego, Academic Press): 177-219
- SMITH H.P. (1899) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* [International Critical Commentary] (Edinburgh, T.& T.Clark)
- SOPHOCLES (1984) *The Three Theban Plays* trans FAGLES R. (London, Penguin)

- SOSEVSKY M.C. (1986) *The Book of Samuel 2: A New English Translation of the Text and Rashi, with a Commentary Digest* ed ROSENBERG A.J. [2nd Edn] (New York, Judaica Press)
- SPANGENBERG I.J.J. (1986) 'Who is the Wise One in 2 Samuel 14:1-24?' In: WYK W.C.van ed *Studies in the Succession Narrative* (Pretoria, OTWSA)
- STEINER G. (1975) *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London, Oxford University Press)
- (1979) *Real Presences* (London, Faber & Faber)
- STEINMETZ D. (1991) *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Community in Genesis* [Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation] (Louisville, Ky, Westminster/John Knox)
- STERNBERG. M. (1985) *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)
- STRAUSS L. (1952) *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe IL, The Free Press)
- TAYLOR M.C. (1975) 'Language, Truth and Indirect Communication.' *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 37:74-88
- TEMPLETON D.A. (1992) 'A "Farced Epistol" to a Sinking Sun of David. Ecclesiastes and Finnegans Wake: The Sinoptic View.' In: CARROLL R.P. ed *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson* (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- TODOROV T. (1980) 'Reading as Construction.' In : SULEIMAN S.R., CROSMAN I. eds *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, Princeton University Press):67-82
- (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle* trans GODZICH W. (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press)

- TOMPKINS J.P. ed (1980) *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press)
- TOV E. (1985) 'The Composition of 1 Sam 16-18 in the light of the Septuagint Version.' In TIGAY J.H. *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press): 97-130
- TSEVAT M. (1975) 'Ishbosheth and Congeners: The Names and Their Study.' *HUCA* 46:71-81
- TURNER L.A. (1990) *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* [JSOT Sup Ser 96] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)
- USPENSKY B. (1973) *A Poetics of Composition* trans ZAVARIN V., WITTIG S. (Berkeley, University of California)
- VANDERKAM J.C. (1980) 'Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study.' *JBL* 99: 521-539
- VAN SETERS J. (1983) *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, Yale University Press)
- VERNANT J.-P. (1983) 'Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of *Oedipus Rex*.' In: SEGAL E. ed *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press):
- VOLOSHINOV V.N. (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* trans MATEJKA L, TITUNIK I.R. (New York, Seminar)
- VON RAD G. (1966) 'The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel.' In: his *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd)
- (1975) *Old Testament Theology Vol I* trans STALKER D.M.G. (London, SCM Press)

VORSTER W.S. (1986) 'Readings, Readers and the Succession Narrative: An Essay on Reception.' *ZAW* 98:351-362

VYGOTSKY L.S. (1986) *Thought and Language* trans KOZULIN A. (Cambridge MA, MIT Press)

WALDMAN N.N. (1986) 'Two Biblical Parables: Irony and Self-entrapment.' *Dor-le-dor* 15:11-18

WEBB B.G. (1987) *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading* [JSOT Sup Ser 46](Sheffield, JSOT Press)

WELLHAUSEN J. (1871) *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis untersucht* (Goettingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht)

--- (1961) *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* trans MUNZIES, BLACK (Cleveland, World)

WESSELIUS J.W. (1990) 'Joab's Death and the Central Theme of the Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 9 - 1 Kings 20).' *VT* 40:336-351

WEST M.L. (1966) *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford, Clarendon Press)

WILLIAMS R. (1990) 'God and Risk (2).' In HOLLOWAY R.(ed) *The Divine Risk* (London, Darton Longman & Todd)

WHEDBEE J.W. (1988) 'On Divine and Human Bonds; The Tragedy of the House of David.' In: TUCKER G.M., PETERSEN D.L., WILSON R.R. *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in honor of Brevard S.Childs* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press):147-165

WHITE H.C. (1988a) 'Introduction: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism.' *Semeia* 41:1-24

--- (1991) *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

WHITELAM K.W. (1979) *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* [JSOT Sup Ser 12] (Sheffield, JSOT Press)

WHYBRAY R.N. (1968) *The Succession Narrative: A study of II Samuel 9-20; I Kings 1 and 2* (London, SCM Press)

WIMMERS I.C. (1988) *Poetics of Reading: Approaches to the Novel* (Princeton, Princeton University Press)

WRIGHT E. (1984) *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice* (London, Methuen)

WOLFF H.W. (1974) 'Problems between the Generations in the Old Testament.' In: CRENSHAW J.L., WILLIS J.T. eds *Essays in Old Testament Ethics (J. Philip Hyatt In memoriam)* (New York, Ktav Publishing House):77-95

ZEITLIN F.I. (1985) 'The Power of Aphrodite: Eros and the Boundaries of the Self in the *Hippolytus*.' In: BURIAN P. ed *Directions in Euripidean Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Durham NC, Duke University Press)

ADDENDA:

DÄLLENBACH L. (1980-81) 'Réflexivité et lecture.' *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 9 (177):23-37

DOOLING D.J., LACHMAN R. (1971) 'Effects of Comprehension on Retention of Prose.' *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 88: 216-22

