David and Uriah
(With an Occasional Appearance by Uriah's Wife) –
Reading and Re-Reading 2 Samuel 11

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ABSTRACT

The interpretation of 2 Samuel 11 has been built around three points: 1. The primacy of the relationship between David and Bathsheba; 2. Uriah dies in a cover-up; 3. The narrative is full of ambiguity. This paper explores the narrative from the perspective of the ambiguities employed, showing that the third point undermines the first two. This is achieved by drawing on Genette's theory of anachrony which emerges as an important historiographical feature in Samuel. The text is meant to be read and then re-read as each anachrony is encountered, thus coming to a clearer understanding of what is meant by the narrator's closing comment.

A   INTRODUCTION

Although it is always dangerous to speak of a consensus in biblical interpretation, since there will almost inevitably turn out to be some notable exceptions, it is possible to note the presence of a broad consensus in the interpretation of 2 Samuel 11. Indeed, it is possible for the purposes of this paper to note three broad but interlocking points of consensus, each of which contributes in some way to overall interpretation of the chapter, though without insisting that they constitute the whole of the consensus. These three points are:

1. The primary concern of the narrative is with the relationship between David and Bathsheba;
2. Uriah's death is part of a botched cover-up attempted by David because of Bathsheba's unexpected pregnancy;
3. The narrative is full of points of ambiguity that are left unresolved.

The aim of this paper is briefly to explore each of these in order to argue that the third point of consensus undermines the certainty of the first two, which is

why there are already some who break with the consensus. In addition, key points of ambiguity are resolved through other narratives within Samuel, all of which point to another reading of the chapter. The possibility of this alternative will initially be noted by reference to the work of Bailey (1990) who has resisted these points of consensus to offer a rather different reading of it. This does not mean that a first reading of 2 Samuel 11 will not conform to the main lines of the consensus, but rather that as the points of ambiguity are resolved in other narratives these force us to a re-reading which suggests that the primary concern of the narrative is David's relationship with Uriah, and therefore hints at the possibility that Uriah's death was always the goal. However, because the dominant modes of reading Samuel have been driven by source critical concerns rather than with the narrative art of the whole, the function of the ambiguity with 2 Samuel 11 has not been explored through the surrounding narratives but been treated as something complete within the chapter. But deliberate ambiguity within biblical narratives is always functional, and seeks to achieve something within the rhetoric of the whole. Simply identifying the presence of ambiguity is not enough: we must also seek its function within the text.

B   THREE POINTS OF CONSENSUS

1   The Relationship between David and Bathsheba

The priority given to the relationship between David and Bathsheba is evident from the title scholars use as a shorthand mechanism for referring to this chapter. Easily the most common is that commentators label the chapter as the story of 'David and Bathsheba' (e.g. Campbell, 2005:111, Gordon, 1986:252, cf. Stoebe, 1986, Fischer, 1989, Garsiel, 1993, Cushman, 2003) though variations on this such as 'The Bathsheba Affair' (McCarter, 1984:277) or 'David's Adultery with Bathsheba' (Birch, 1998:1281) also occur. Curiously, Hertzberg (1964:305) entitles the whole of 2 Samuel 11:2-12:25 as 'Uriah's Wife and the Birth of Solomon', but then immediately launches his discussion by referring to it as 'the story of David and Bathsheba' (1964:309). A title does not tell us everything a scholar thinks about a narrative, but would generally indicate where they believe the narrative's primary focus lies.

But titles do not tell us everything. So we should note some of the more explicit comments that are made, because not all titles focus only on the relationship between David and Bathsheba. Anderson (1989:150), for example, refers to the chapter as 'David, Bathsheba and Uriah', a title which more fairly represents the amount of text devoted to Uriah as one of the main characters. However, he concludes that Uriah's death 'appears nearly pointless' (1989:156) because, he believes, no court in Israel would convict the king on a charge of adultery. Rather, the only gain David would have made would have been to protect his and Bathsheba's honour (1989:156). Anderson's reading grants Uriah the status of a principal character within the narrative, but it is a

standing he is unable to explain, so that in effect Bathsheba's status is greater and Uriah's murder makes no sense.

A slightly more subtle reading of this relationship is presented by Bergen who notes that the 'story is not so much about Bathsheba's actions but David's' (1996:365). Bergen's title for the chapter is also suggestively open ended, simply calling it 'David does Evil in the Lord's Sight' (1996:362). Such a title leaves open the possibility that the evil might cover more than just the adultery with Bathsheba, though his acceptance of the cover-up reading of Uriah's death indicates that he still regards the relationship with Bathsheba as primary and driving the story.

Although he offers an interpretation of 2 Samuel 11 that is otherwise quite distinct, Bailey (1990:85-90) also interprets the relationship between David and Bathsheba as primary. Building on some other syntactic observations, not all of which are equally persuasive,[1] Bailey notes that Bathsheba is among a select group of women within the Deuteronomistic History for whom the verb שלח is used, all of whom are shown to be women of power (1990:86). The other examples are Rahab sending the spies (Josh 2:21), Deborah summoning Barak (Judg 4:6), Delilah sending for the Philistines (Judg 16:18) and Jezebel plotting against Elijah (1 Kgs 19:2) and Naboth (1 Kgs 21:8). Since the information David receives about Bathsheba offers considerable patronmymic detail about her (11:3), Bailey argues that this also indicates a woman of considerable social status. We know that David has a history of marrying powerful women (Michal in 1 Sam 19:27, Abigail in 1 Sam 25:39-42 and Ahinoam in 1 Sam 25:43) who bring him important social connections. Bailey then argues that Bathsheba is a willing participant in the process, since the verb תבוא is Qal rather than Hiphil which would suggest causation, and that therefore what is presented is a carefully staged act in which the participants both know the probable outcomes of their actions because sex in this instance has become a tool of politics preparing for a political marriage (1990:88).[2] The ensuing assault on Uriah is thus secondary to the primary issue, which is David's relationship with Bathsheba.

It is probable that, to some extent, this consensus is one that is not particularly thought through, and that a shorthand convention for naming the story

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[1]   In particular, his suggestion that David is the subject of אמר in 11:3 (1990:85, similarly Birch, 1998:1284) rather than the verb being impersonal is not persuasive. David has made inquiry, so it makes more sense within the narrative that another unnamed bystander offers the information.

[2]   For a similar view of Bathsheba as one possibly complicit in events, cf. Nicol (1988:360-361) who suggests that Bathsheba may have placed herself so as to be seen by David, as opposed to Whybray (1968:40) who regards Bathsheba as 'rather stupid'. One might suggest that both have resolved aspects of the narrative's ambiguity in different ways in coming to these conclusions.

has had more effect than it should. Nevertheless, it is one that needs to be questioned purely in terms of the distribution of the narrative (similarly, Keys, 1996:128-129). As is generally noted, the events of 2 Samuel 11 are placed within the Ammonite War, the beginnings of which are recounted in 2 Samuel 10, while its conclusion is only recounted after Solomon's birth in 12:24-25. Within 2 Samuel 11 itself it is notable that David's involvement with Bathsheba is restricted to 11:2-5 and then 11:26-27. By contrast, Uriah is a principal character in 11:6-17, whilst 11:18-25 is concerned with how David and Joab communicate the issues concerning his death without actually expressing matters directly. Moreover, David only explicitly encounters Bathsheba twice (though of course 11:26-27 presumes continuing contact), and very little detail is provided for these encounters beyond noting that they were of a sexual nature. By contrast, 11:6-13 describes three encounters (11:7-8, 10, 13) with Uriah after his return from the front, with dialogue in each instance between them as David tried to encourage Uriah to have sex with his wife. David's own desperation in the matter is evident through the dialogue as he moves from using a euphemism to encourage sexual activity with Bathsheba (11:7), to a more direct question (11:10) and then finally attempting to make Uriah too drunk to know what he is doing (11:13). Within the consensus approach, unless one opts for a view like that of Bailey where the whole of the story is actually working out a plot between David and Bathsheba towards a political marriage, then Anderson's question about the reasons for putting Uriah to death cannot be answered. But even then, if the primary relationship is between David and Bathsheba it is difficult to explain why the narrator devotes so much space to Uriah's death and the subsequent recount of that death.

In addition, we should also note the extent to which Bathsheba and Uriah are characterised within the narrative (cf. van den Bergh, 2008:187-189). Bathsheba is a flat character, with her only defining feature being that she was very beautiful (טובת מראה מאד). Beyond that, she is typically a passive figure (similarly Seiler, 1998:256), one who is seen, discussed and lay with. Her primary actions are to send and tell David she is pregnant (11:5) and then bear him a son (11:27). She is also characterised through names, and it is noteworthy that she is only actually called Bathsheba in 11:3. She is otherwise 'the woman' (11:2, 5) or Uriah's wife (11:11, 26). By contrast, Uriah is a much more rounded character. His nature as one who is morally upright, a dedicated Yahwist in spite of his association with the Hittites and loyal to a fault comes through clearly in his encounters with David and then as he faithfully carries the order for his own murder to Joab. It is through Uriah that the narrator characterises David, because Uriah is the mirror through which we come to see the grasping David who takes and destroys because he can, and so becomes the king of whom Samuel had warned (1 Sam 8:10-18). In short, the form of the narrative may suggest that the relationship between David and Uriah is primary, and that the encounters with Bathsheba that bookend the narrative are a

sub-plot that generates the main plot action, which is concerned with how David destroys Uriah.

2   Uriah's Death as a Cover-Up

With the exception of Bailey, whose view we note below, the consensus is that Uriah's death is best explained as a cover-up gone wrong. David has made the mistake of having a sexual relationship with another man's wife and the resulting pregnancy means this relationship cannot be hidden. On this reading, David has to protect his honour (and perhaps that of Bathsheba as well), and so is ultimately forced to destroy Uriah when he refuses to have sex with his wife and so would know he was not the child's father.

Within this consensus there are variations. The most common form can be described as the lust hypothesis. According to this approach, David's sexual relationship with Bathsheba was largely unpremeditated. Bergen (1996:365) exemplifies this approach well, arguing that David had acted in a way he knew was inappropriate, and that bringing Uriah back was therefore intended to lead Uriah to one night of intimacy with his wife, so he would assume that he was the child's father. Bergen also believes that this would resolve the question of the servants who had accompanied David and who might otherwise indicate that all was not as it might have seemed. Unfortunately, Bergen does not address the question of the fact that the servant who brought Bathsheba would still know of his adulterous relationship with her. In addition, we are told that Bathsheba sent to tell David of her pregnancy, which could indicate that there were others who were aware of what had happened. For Bergen, this ultimately meant that someone had to die, and that someone had to be Uriah (1996:366). David was not about to volunteer for this outcome, but the cover-up was by this point beginning to spin out of control. What had seemed like a neat and simple solution in which no one was really hurt would result in the death of not only Uriah, but also the soldiers who died with him when Joab had the sense to realise that David's plan was so obvious that it could not be applied.[3]

In a somewhat racier set of comments, Brueggemann (1990:273) even attempts to describe something of David's passion, concluding 'There is no hint of caring, of affection, of love – only lust'. For Brueggemann, the pressing issue once David knows of Bathsheba's pregnancy is not so much one of protecting his honour but rather regaining control. Bathsheba's message had shattered David's carefully cultivated image of royal power and control, and so the cover-up that follows must re-establish this. Nevertheless, Brueggemann is clear that when David somewhat euphemistically encourages Uriah to go down and wash his feet (11:8) there is no doubt that he wants Uriah to believe that

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[3]   Bodner (2005:98-111) can thus entertainingly treat Joab as a reader-response critic in his treatment of David's instructions, though Joab's messenger (11:23-25) is in turn a reader-response critic towards Joab.

the pregnancy was the result of his night home from the front (1990:274). But what David discovers through all this is how little he really controls because both human fertility and the loyalty of soldiers are beyond him. As such, having had one cover-up fail, David was forced into a second plan, this time involving Joab who acted as David's hatchet man.

Bergen and Brueggemann (and numerous others – e.g. Hertzberg, 1964:309-312, Fokkelman, 1981:70, Gordon, 1986:252-256) differ on minor points, but the approach is consistent in that the cover-up needed to proceed through two different stages. The first was a botched attempt to convince Uriah that he was the father and when this failed David had to adopt a second approach, which was the elimination of Uriah. Again, Anderson's question about what David could gain by Uriah's elimination is not addressed (1989:156), though attempts to psycho-analyse David and determine what he thought would be gained are unlikely to succeed simply because no motivation is ever expressly given for any of his actions in this chapter. They can be inferred, and some inferences are doubtless more likely than others, but motivation is never provided. In spite of this difficulty, some have at least toyed with the possibility that the goal of the cover-up was always Uriah's death, so that the stages of the cover-up are not a move from a failed attempt at covering the child's paternity, but rather from a tacit attempt to have Uriah executed. McKane (1963:229-230) opens up the possibility that Israelite soldiers on duty were meant to practise sexual abstinence, and suggests also that the reference to booths (סכות, 11:11) might refer to the feast of Tabernacles when he supposes that civilians were also prohibited from having sex, but does not develop this further. His suggestions about Tabernacles are less persuasive since the situation of the army in the Ammonite campaign would permit soldiers to stay in whatever temporary shelter they could find, but the need for soldiers to practise sexual abstinence, especially in a war involving the Ark raises interesting possibilities. Anderson (1989:154) points to Deut 23:11 [ET 23:10] which requires soldiers who had a nocturnal emission leave the camp until ritually clean again. To engage in sexual activity would be consciously to become unclean. Certainly, when David was fleeing Saul and needed to convince Ahimelech to make provision for him (1 Sam 21:6 [ET 21:5]) one of his important claims was that his men routinely practised sexual abstinence while on duty, and it is only because of this that Ahimelech gave him the bread of the Presence. We do not know the legal implications of such a breach, but the association of the Ark with the battle and the standards of holiness required for it (cf. 1 Sam 4:1b-7:1, 2 Sam 6) might suggest that the death penalty was normal, or at least possible. Uriah's horror at David's apparent suggestion that he engage in sexual activity with his wife would be consistent with this. Anderson thus leaves open the possibility that the cover-up always had the goal of eliminating Uriah, though he still adheres to the cover-up consensus.

A somewhat different approach is suggested by Bailey (1990:91-99) who argues that Uriah's death was always the goal of David's actions with him because the attack on Uriah was integral to the earlier sexual encounter with Bathsheba. Bailey thus stands outside of the consensus on this point. Bailey's approach assumes that Bathsheba's pregnancy was something that was planned, the narrator's brief aside that she was cleansing herself from her impurity thus indicating that she was at her most fertile (Bailey, 1990:88 – on the timing of fertility relative to this see Krause, 1983) so that both David and Bathsheba knew that a pregnancy was highly probable. Bailey interprets Bathsheba's lack of distress when she reports her pregnancy to David as a further sign of this (1990:88-90). If Bathsheba's pregnancy was intended then there could be no cover-up for David, especially if he wanted to claim both the child and Bathsheba for himself. Uriah's death was thus always intended.

Bailey seeks to substantiate this by noting that there are close structural parallels between 11:6-13 and 11:14-25, so both the attempt at convincing Uriah to have sex with Bathsheba and the more overt (at least for the reader) assault through Joab are ordered through the same stages which occur in the same sequence. Bailey knows that there are points where his parallels become somewhat unbalanced, especially his fifth item where David is informed of the outcome of his plans in 11:10a and 11:18-24 respectively. However, the status of verses 19-24 has been much disputed due to text critical issues, and Bailey argues that these are a secondary expansion of the text. Bailey's arguments have been examined by Seiler (1998:241-243) and critiqued by him, more probably concluding only that 11:21a is a gloss.[4] However, Bailey's argument as a whole does not fall at this point. In any case, the broad similarities remain, and the substance of Bailey's case that 11:6-13 is a plan to murder Uriah is built on the observation of the taboo expressed at 1 Sam 21:6 [ET 21:5] and the evidence of Achan's treatment for breaking the laws of holiness under Yahweh war conditions in Josh 7:6-26. In addition, Bailey observes that nothing in the account indicates that David was willing to give up his claim of paternity even if Uriah did sleep with his wife (1990:97), arguing in addition that the otherwise obscure reference to a gift from the king when Uriah went home (משׂאת המלך, 11:8b) actually refers to someone who followed to report to David that Uriah had breached the soldiers code so that he could duly be executed.[5] Not all of Bailey's suggestions are equally compelling, but that they are at least plausible raises questions about why the general consensus holds as it does.

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[4]   Fischer (1989:59) offers a more probable structure for the whole narrative in terms of its divisions, though staying within the consensus view of the text.

[5]   The probability that this last point is correct is doubtful. Although משׂאת can refer to a signal, it does not refer to the one who gives the signal which would be required by Bailey's proposal. A good meal, which is the more traditional interpretation, could be intended to improve convivial relationships between Uriah and Bathsheba as a stimulus to sex.

3   A Narrative full of Ambiguity

The possibility that the other points of consensus may not be as secure as most think is perhaps related to the third point, which is that the chapter contains numerous points of ambiguity. It is, as Yee (1988:240) puts it (though adapting Eric Auerbach), 'fraught with background'. Most scholars considering this aspect of the narrative have built on the pioneering work of Sternberg (1985:190-222), though his more accessible work in English builds on an earlier essay he had written in Hebrew with Menakhem Perry. Sternberg is particularly concerned to explore the ambiguity within the narrative that is developed through what the narrator does not tell us. It is certainly the case that a great deal is not said, and readers have therefore felt free to fill these gaps in a variety of ways, though in general within the framework of the two points noted above. But, staying only with the points Sternberg develops (1985:190-193), the narrator leaves many things unsaid. We are not told why David remained at the palace and then decided to enter into a sexual relationship with Bathsheba, what Bathsheba felt about the whole process, what any of the messengers thought, what Uriah thought of David and his inducements to go to his wife, how Joab reacted when he received David's orders, why Joab changed David's plan for eliminating Uriah or why the messenger Joab sent back to report Uriah's death changed Joab's instructions as he did. Perhaps most importantly, we are never told if Uriah knew of the sexual relationship between David and Bathsheba (cf. Yee, 1988:243). The narrative leaves much unsaid, meaning that readers fill these gaps in different ways. We can make informed guesses about what happens and why, but so long as we remain with the evidence provided by 2 Samuel 11 alone, we are left without any specific directions that tell us how we should fill those gaps. Indeed, the only seemingly unambiguous note in the whole chapter is the closing observation that 'The thing that David had done was evil in Yahweh's eyes'. And yet, even here, much is left unsaid that could clarify what has taken place. Why, for example, is הדבר singular? Was it only one thing that David had done that was evil in Yahweh's eyes, or is the singular used to cover the whole of what has taken place? But if the whole of it can be covered with a singular noun, does this mean we should look for an integrated interpretation such as that offered by Bailey?

The narrative's ambiguity is not restricted to issues of motivation, though this is perhaps the most important (so Polzin, 1993:112-114). Related to this is the use of words and expressions which can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In addition to the nature of הדבר in 11:27b, there is the question of what David means when he suggests that Uriah wash his 'feet' when he first returns from the front (11:8). The phrase could simply mean to go home and relax, but given the established use of 'feet' as a euphemism for male genitals (Is. 6:2, Ezek 16:25), it is quite possible that David is suggesting that Uriah go home and have sex with his wife. David could be intentionally ambiguous, so that the phrase could mean both of these things, though Uriah's comments in 11:11

would suggest that he thought it was a reference to sex. Staying with euphemisms for sex, we can note that the root שׁכב occurs six times in the chapter, and refers variously to a couch (11:2, 13), the act of lying down (11:9, 13) or as a euphemism for sex (11:4, 11). In both 11:9 and 11:13, the verb is foregrounded so as initially to raise the possibility that Uriah was about to have sex with his wife, but each time he simply lies down. This however points to an important distinction between the semantic ambiguity employed and the motivational, and that is that although semantic ambiguity is employed, this is typically resolved within the narrative whereas the motivational is not. The notable exception to this is the reference of הדבר in 11:27b.

In exploring the function of ambiguity in 2 Samuel 11 it is therefore important to distinguish between different types of ambiguity and then consider their rhetorical function within the narrative world it creates. Semantic ambiguity is, for the most part, resolved within the narrative and therefore functions primarily to raise or sustain the reader's interest in events in a first reading. We anticipate certain things might happen when Uriah lies down, especially when in spite of his earlier claim that he could not eat, drink or have sex while his colleagues are out in the field (11:11) but he then eats and drinks with David until he is drunk and then goes and lies down, but not with his wife (11:13).[6] The reader anticipates one outcome, but is offered another instead. But this type of ambiguity is somewhat different to that which is employed by ensuring that the motivation of the characters remains opaque. This ambiguity is not resolved within the narrative, because even by its end we do not know what motivated any of the characters to act as they did. Similarly, as Rosenberg has stressed (1999:108), many of the actions that are described in 11:2-4 are capable of more than one interpretation, but the narrator gives no guidance on them. For example, when David sent to inquire about who the beautiful woman he can see bathing is, we do not know if that meant despatching someone to the house to find out or if it meant summoning someone to come to the roof and look with him to provide the necessary details. If he had indeed sent someone to the house to find out who Bathsheba was, then it might lead to a rather different reading of her actions when she finally comes to David. Similarly, we do not know if someone bathing would be naked, and that David could see that she was very beautiful does not answer this one way or the other, but it is quite possible that someone bathing on a roof would keep some light clothing on and only use a bowl. In spite of this, plenty of interpreters have built at least part of their interpretation on the assumption that she was naked (e.g. Garsiel, 1993:255). We might describe these as partially resolved actions – we know that something happened, but we still lack the detail to know exactly what. As a mode of ambiguity, these actions lie between the absence of motivation for the various actions for which no resolution is given and the semantic ones which

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[6]   The polyvalence of the verb שׁכב is similarly employed in Josh 2:8 when the spies have entered the house of the prostitute Rahab.

are resolved. Their function as a partially resolved ambiguity ought also to be noted because it means that they function both to pique the readers' interest in a first reading, while still leaving space for gaps to be filled on second and subsequent readings.

Ambiguity within the narrative can thus function in three ways. Some aspects are resolved within the chapter, leaving no space for reconsideration in a subsequent reading. After all, once we know in 11:13 that Uriah has not had sex with Bathsheba it does not matter how aware we are of the multiple possibilities for the verb שׁכב, it is no longer ambiguous for us in this instance. Other aspects are partially resolved within the chapter and so give the appearance of resolution when in fact they are left unresolved. We might think we know what David has seen when Bathsheba was bathing, but we only know some of what he saw, not all of it. Our chance to fill in that gap can only come when we begin to resolve the question of the gaps for which no level of resolution is provided within the chapter. In particular, we never know anyone's motivation. It is important that we distinguish between these different types of ambiguity rather than treating ambiguity as a single category, because ambiguity is a hyponym that covers a range of rhetorical effects.

In spite of the consensus that the narrative is full of ambiguity, it is remarkable that even scholars who have emphasised this aspect have seldom grasped its full implications, usually because of the assumption that the closing comment in 11:27b (irrespective of whether it is a Deuteronomistic addition) has resolved the question for us. For example, Garsiel (1993:249) notes that there is a fundamental ambiguity in 11:1 on the question of exactly who goes out and when, not least because the consonantal text has מלאכים but the vocalisation seems to imply מלכים. He is then critical of Perry and Sternberg[7] for regarding this as a criticism of David for remaining at home when he should have gone out to battle, though curiously his reasons for doing so have more to do with sound military practice than the details of the text (1993:249-252). Indeed, the previous chapter has already established that Israel's armies can win without David and that he only participates when needed. Staying within the confines of 2 Samuel 11 alone, one can see why both the readings of Perry and Sternberg and Garsiel are plausible, but in fact neither is necessary because in spite of their insistence on the narrative's ambiguity, neither is prepared to leave the motivational gaps unresolved. Conversely, both Rosenberg (1989:105-106) and Polzin (1993:109-112) believe that the ambiguity may be intentional, especially given the prominence of messengers who are sent through the chapter. Similarly, both Yee (1988:246) and Rosenberg (1989:109) assume that David's goal in bringing Uriah back to Jerusalem was to cover his paternity of Bathsheba's baby, though in fact there is nothing within the text to

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[7]   In Sternberg's revision of the article (1985:193-196) he continues to offer the reading Garsiel critiques.

indicate that this was his goal. Even those who recognise the presence of ambiguity within the text cannot resist the temptation to resolve that ambiguity, usually within the framework of 2 Samuel 11 alone.

B   AMBIGUITY AND METHOD

Although there are therefore exceptions to the three points of consensus noted above, there is something generally consistent across them all. This is that apart from the fact that 1 Sam 21:6 establishes the pattern that soldiers on active service were meant to refrain from sexual activity, especially if the Ark was involved in some way, and occasional references to Uriah's position as one of David's mighty men (2 Sam 23:39), resolution of the narrative's ambiguities has been achieved from within. Perhaps in part because of the effect of source criticism, which attributes this chapter to the so-called Succession Narrative (Rost, 1982),[8] information from other parts of Samuel has not generally been called upon to indicate ways in which the ambiguity can be resolved, and as such the other two points of consensus have continued to dominate readings of the text. But as agreement on the concept of the Succession Narrative breaks down, it enables a fresh approach to these matters. In addition, sufficient attention has not been given to the different modes of ambiguity and their different narrative and rhetorical functions, because it is also the case that those who have explored the chapter from the perspective of its ambiguities have treated all ambiguity as essentially equal. As such, it is appropriate to look for new modes of reading, and then re-reading, this chapter. In particular, we will focus on determining exactly what הדבר that David had done was evil in Yahweh's eyes.

In attempting this, it will be useful to draw on the work of Genette (1980:33-85) in considering the ways in which a narrative may employ order as a mechanism both for creating gaps and also filling them. Although Genette is primarily concerned with modern narrative fiction, and especially that of Proust, his frequent references to Homer indicate that his analysis also applies to ancient texts. The narrative of 2 Samuel 11 is generally held to be a work of historical intent, albeit one with a strongly theological bent, but even those like Fischer (1989:59) who question its historical reliability do not therefore regard it as a work of conscious fiction. Nevertheless, if one of the goals of these narratives is to entertain as well as to inform there is no reason why the narrator might not draw on a range of narrative techniques which make the story more exciting and involving for those who read or hear it. Indeed, attention to Genette's work on order in narrative provides fresh insights into how this narrative works.

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[8]   That the Ammonite War materials are largely separable within this proposed source is well-known and constitutes a core component in Bailey's case (1990:33-50). Lawlor (1982) has also demonstrated the artistic integrity of this section.

Genette develops two key themes which are relevant to this task, exploring anachrony and its related concepts of analepsis and prolepsis since it is by means of these that any anachrony's reach is able to be effected. Anachrony occurs when a narrative, or information relative to a narrative, is given in a non-chronological order. Not all narratives, nor the information necessary to fill in their gaps, are provided in a straight chronological sequence from beginning to end. Because of the possibility of doing this, Genette developed the concept of anachrony as a means of analysing the effect of this within a narrative (1980:35-36). A given anachrony can take the form of either an analepsis or a proplepsis. In the case of an analepsis (Genette, 1980:48-50), the narrator provides the necessary information after the event has been narrated, whereas a prolepsis occurs before the event (Genette, 1980:67-68). The prolepsis thus provides information which prepares for a later narrative, whereas an analepsis provides information subsequent to it which therefore requires the reader to re-evaluate a narrative and thus consider whether or not the narrative's gaps have been filled appropriately, or indeed whether new gaps are opened up by the subsequent information. Genette also makes an important distinction between analpeses that are internal or external to a particular narrative (1980:49-50) because the status of an analepsis as internal or external leads to a different function for it. In particular, whereas an internal analepsis provides direct interference within a given narrative, one which is external does not and is therefore of more importance because of the role it plays in filling a gap.

Bearing in mind the possibilities created by prolepsis and analepsis, Genette argues that two other factors impact upon an anachrony. These are its reach and its extent. Basically, the reach of the anachrony is how far into time, either forward or back, it goes through the narrative, whereas its extent is a measure of how much of the narrative can be said to be effected by it (1980:48). It is these factors that have been particularly constrained by the source critical divide that has been dominant since Rost's (1982, but German 1926) work. Once it is decided that 2 Samuel 11 is part of a Succession Narrative which is then narratively separate from other parts of Samuel then the extent of an anachrony is limited and its reach cannot therefore be considered. Yet as agreement on the source critical divisions breaks down, new possibilities are opened up which enable the issues of reach and extent to be reconsidered. Particularly important in this respect is the work of Koorevaar (1997) and Klement (2000:153-159). In spite of small differences, they have both shown that the macrostructure of the books of Samuel indicates that our canonical division is actually important at a literary level, and that we should treat them as literary wholes. This also chimes with Keys (1996:54-70) who has shown that there are good reasons for believing that 1 Kings 1-2 are a later text written in full awareness of the contents of 2 Samuel 10-20. Whatever source materials might lie behind the current text, and it is highly possible that the older sources were edited earlier to form part of a ninth century prophetic record (Campbell,

1986), they are now part of an integrated text that can be read both diachronically and synchronically. But where diachronic analysis tends to look for the ruptures pointing to different hands and redaction, a synchronic reading can attend to the narrative texture of the final text. Both are valid, but Genette's insights are more appropriate to a synchronic reading. Once it is appreciated that the whole of Samuel constitutes the extent of the anachronies, then it is possible to note the ways in which their reach causes us either to read or re-read 2 Samuel 11.

C   CONSENSUSES AND FILLING GAPS

Genette's analytical tools enable us to reconsider the nature of 2 Samuel 11, particularly the ways in which the world of ambiguity created by the text leads to gaps being filled and then re-filled through anachrony.

A first reading of 2 Samuel 11 in terms of David's relationship with Bathsheba and then the processes of Uriah's death might quite reasonably come to the consensus positions. That is, on a first reading it is entirely plausible that the relationship between David and Bathsheba is primary and that David's relationship with Uriah is subsequently an attempt at covering up what has happened so that Uriah assumes he is the child's father. The narrator even provides certain clues that lead to this reading. Thus, that David is walking about (ויתהלך) on the palace roof (11:2) after an afternoon rest would suggest that he is not acting out of any particular plan and that he therefore saw a beautiful woman bathing quite by chance. Having inquired as to the woman's identity he had her brought to him and they had sex. How consensual this was from the woman's perspective cannot be resolved, because one can interpret the fact that David took (לקח) her as indicating compulsion, though as has been pointed out that she comes might indicate some degree of complicity on her part unless one decides that the prior taking governs her subsequent actions. That David decided to send for Uriah only after he had received word that Bathsheba was pregnant and that he attempted to convince him to have sex with his wife can all conceivably point to the possibility that he is attempting to cover his paternity, so that Uriah's death is ultimately the tragic outcome of being too loyal to the king for one's own good.

Such a reading is plausible. But those who reflect on how they fill in gaps will notice certain points that remain awkward for this reading, even if one stays only within 2 Samuel 11. In particular, the function of 11:3 in such a reading is open to question. On seeing the woman bathing and apparently noting that she was very beautiful, David sent and inquired (דרש) about the woman. The subject of the verb ויאמר is not certain, and could mean that David has answered his own question (Birch, 1998:1284), but it seems more likely that the verb is impersonal, and one of those sent reports the information. Nevertheless, this is still a semantic ambiguity, a gap that has to be closed, though

it is not one that radically affects our concerns here. Whether it is a messenger who speaks or David, we note that the woman is now identified in three ways. First, we are told that she is called Bathsheba, though the name will not recur in the chapter. Second we are told that she is the daughter of Eliam, though since we have not heard of anyone by this name it does not help us unless provision of the patronymic is intended to indicate her status. Finally, and most importantly for this chapter, she is described as the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Like Eliam, Uriah has not been previously mentioned, though he will be an important character in what follows. Only once David knows this information about the woman does he send for her and bring her to himself. In particular, it means that only once David knows that she is another man's wife, and in particular the wife of Uriah, does he send for her and bring her to himself. This can still fit with the consensus reading as indicating that David knew he was about to commit adultery, but it foregrounds Bathsheba's relationships before telling us of the adultery.

It is at this point that we can draw on certain anachronies in Samuel whose reach and extent can impact this narrative. The taking (לקח) of women is something of which Samuel had warned (1 Sam 8:13), though his concern was that the king would take the people's daughters and make them servants, while David has also taken (לקח) Abigail to be his wife (1 Sam 25:40) as well as Ahinoam (1 Sam 25:43). David's actions up to this point may represent a typically male hold on power, but there is nothing that would have necessarily raised any suspicions. Nevertheless, both references acknowledge that David can take women. But there is a more intriguing note in 2 Sam 3:6-11. In the context of David growing stronger and Ish-bosheth weaker, Ish-bosheth had challenged his army commander Abner, accusing him of having sex with one of Saul's concubines, a woman named Rizpah.[9] Whether the accusation is true or not has continued to divide commentators (and it may be that it is left intentionally unresolved), but the more important point to note is that this narrative sets up the possibility that one might attack the power and prestige of another person through a sexual relationship with a woman associated with them.[10] Certainly, Abner's response that he should therefore hand the kingdom over to David suggests that he understands the accusation in this way. Taking someone's concubine seriously undermines their power (Linafelt, 1992:102). This narrative can then function as a prolepsis that addresses David's actions, and which at least raises questions about the interpretation of 11:3. The possibility exists that a sexual relationship with someone else's concubine is an attack on their

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[9] n an alternative set of anachronies, 2 Sam 21:1-14 casts doubt on the probability of the accusation because of Rizpah's loyalty to the slain members of Saul's family.
[10] Although not directly relevant to Samuel, Reuben's act of having sex with his father's concubine Bilhah in Genesis 35:22 is probably to be interepreted along similar lines, and would thus have intertextual allusions for Samuel. Cf. De Hoop (2007:621-622).

power. And if one can attack a powerful person through their concubine, then a sexual relationship with their wife can do so, only more directly.

Nevertheless, this prolepsis on its own will not resolve the question of how to read 11:3. But there are two analepses which do lead to a re-reading of 11:3, and open the possibility that the first reading of it needs to be reassessed. The first occurs in Nathan's judgement speech when he confronted David over his sin in 2 Sam 12:1-15a. In 12:8 he quotes Yahweh as claiming to have given David his master's wives when he also gave him the throne of Israel and Judah. In context, the master of whom Nathan speaks can only be Saul, meaning that when David came to the throne he took over some of Saul's wives, effectively claiming them as his own so that the authority that was formerly Saul's was now his. Although we cannot be certain, it is quite plausible that this is also what David did in 2 Sam 5:13 when he took concubines and wives from Jerusalem (מירושלם). Much depends here on how we read the preposition מן, but in the context of the capture of Jerusalem is likely to indicate that he effectively took women from the former Jebusite court and claimed them for himself (Hill, 2006:130-131). If this reading is correct, then this too is a prolepsis that impacts our reading of 2 Sam 11:3 since it indicates that those already in power might continue to secure it by attacking those in socially weaker positions. However, 2 Sam 12:8 certainly indicates that when David claimed power he also took Saul's wives, so that his sexual relationship with them was a further demonstration of his triumph and Saul's failure. Later, when David fled Jerusalem he left behind ten concubines who may well have been the Jebusites from Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:16), perhaps because if he no longer reigned over Jerusalem he could no longer claim them. But Ahithopel knew that if Absalom entered into a sexual relationship with them then he would show that he had made himself odious to David and would therefore strengthen his support (2 Sam 16:20-22). In effect, the way in which Absalom was to attack his father, who was by now his adversary, was through a sexual relationship with those who would otherwise have been associated with his father. Both analepses have the reach and extent needed to force a re-reading of 2 Sam 11:3. If a sexual relationship with a woman associated with another man was actually an assault on that man, what is David doing when he chooses to have sex with Bathsheba only after he knows that she is Uriah's wife? The re-reading generated by the analepses bring the prolepses to bear on the text, and to raise new possibilities, and in particular the possibility that the decision to have sex with Bathsheba was a deliberate attack on Uriah.

But 2 Samuel 11 alone does not provide any reason why David would attack someone who appears in every way to be loyal to him. Nevertheless, another analepsis may shed some light on the question, and that is that Uriah the Hittite is listed as one of David's mighty men, one of the Thirty (2 Sam 23:39). An Eliam also appears in the list as the son of Ahithopel (2 Sam 23:34), which might indicate why Ahithopel opposed David (Bodner, 2005:124-139) but this

is never made explicit. But by placing Uriah last on this list, his name is given special prominence along with Asahel, the only other figure we can certainly identify (2 Sam 23:24) who appears first. What links both figures is that they died in apparently pointless circumstances (cf. 2 Sam 2:18-23), but the important point here is that this now provides a possible reason why David would seek to attack Uriah. As is well-known, the greatest danger to an ancient king generally came from those closest to him, and as a member of David's elite troops Uriah could be seen as a threat. The prolepsis of Ishbosheth's encounter with Abner certainly flags this possibility, as of course does Saul's attitude towards David. But by not showing him directly as a threat, the narrator can suggest that David's perspective was flawed, yet still provide a possible motivation for David's actions.

But if the re-reading suggested by these prolepses and analepses indicates that David was attacking Uriah from the beginning, then we are led to consider the possibility that the summons for Uriah to return might also constitute part of the attack, and that covering David's paternity was never the issue, something that would address Anderson's difficulty with the consensus reading. Now, the reference in 1 Sam 21:5-6 [ET 21:4-5] can function as a prolepsis, though it is only one that comes to the fore when the other analepses have brought about a re-reading. Here, David insists that abstinence from sexual relationships marks all his men when they are on active duty, something seemingly confirmed by Uriah himself in 2 Sam 11:11. If this was a requirement of David's men, and in particular if the demands of Yahweh war were understood to require it, then an attempt to convince Uriah to have sex with his wife would appear to represent an attempt to lead him to commit a major, and probably capital, offence. 2 Samuel 11 is thus a text to be read, but when approached through its anachronies, is also a text to be re-read, and whose ambiguities may therefore be filled in different ways.

D   CONCLUSION

There are strong reasons for the consensus reading of 2 Sam 11, but there are also grounds for the alternative view developed by Bailey. But Bailey's reading, apart from a certain amount of textual surgery, still attempts to achieve a different approach by working with a first reading rather than one which considers the ambiguities within the narrative as gaps needing to be filled in different ways. Bailey is as uncomfortable with the ambiguities as others even though he works against the consensus view. What is suggested here then is that both ways of filling the gaps in the narrative are possible and indeed plausible, but the ways in which we do so depends upon which reading we are doing. A reading focused on 2 Samuel 11 alone will probably tend towards the consensus, but once the anachronies of Samuel are taken into account, then the possibility that one should read the text in a different way becomes stronger. Each anachrony, as we become aware of it, either prepares us to read the text or

leads us back to re-read it, and a re-reading through an analepsis might also make us aware of a prolepsis we had not considered. In doing so, it therefore becomes possible to identify הדבר that was evil in Yahweh's sight. We do not need to choose between adultery or murder as the greater sin, nor interpret the singular noun as covering two separate things equally. Rather, there was one dominant sin, an attack on Uriah that had two parts, a sexual relationship with his wife and then his murder. But the two are one, and that one thing was evil.

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