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## Saul's Prophetic Representations and Its Parody in 1 Samuel

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper engages the intrigue of Saul's description as a "prophetic figure" in the beginning of 1 Samuel and his description as the "patron" of witchcraft at Endor. In these conflicting representations of Saul, one of the hidden agenda of the narrator of Samuel is clearly achieved because he has successfully transformed a prophetic tradition which appears originally to attribute prophetic feats to the first Israelite king, and creatively turned the same tradition against itself by amusingly portraying the same character as the practitioner of witchcraft. Consequently, through the technique of parody, the original prophetic figure Saul is humorously no longer among the prophets, but now in consultation of a witch. In the continuum of ancient guidance, Saul's parody has come full circle because he is tragically moved from prophecy to divination/witchcraft.*

### A INTRODUCTION

The last recorded words of Saul to his bodyguard show that Saul preferred to take his own life rather than to face the "mockery" of his Philistine enemies.<sup>1</sup> Wounded, in the heat of the battle at Gilboa, Saul pleaded with his servant, "[d]raw your sword and pierce me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and pierce me through and make mockery of me" (1 Sam 31:4).<sup>2</sup> Ironi-

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<sup>1</sup> For the treatment of heroic deaths in biblical narratives particularly the comparison between Saul and Samson see Pnina Galpaz-Feller, "'Let my Soul Die with the Philistines' (Judges 16:30)," *JSOT* 30/3 (2006): 315-325. On the centrality of this motif in biblical thought see Jacob L. Wright, "Making a Name for Oneself: Martial Valor, Heroic Death, and Procreation in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 36 (2011): 131-162.

<sup>2</sup> The word translated as "mockery" is the word עָלַל which according to S. R. Driver "is applied in a bad sense," to "divert oneself at another's expense, to *make a toy of*, or by a slight paraphrase, to *mock*." See Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 78. Following Driver, William Whedbee also observed that עָלַל could also be translated as to "make sport of," or "amuse oneself" or "make a fool of"; see William Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 164. The word appears in the angry speech of Balaam to his donkey, when he said, "[y]ou have made a fool of me! If I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now" (Num 22:29). The word also appears in the Exodus narratives especially in Yahweh's playing or making fool of Pharaoh (10:1-2). In this particular understanding of עָלַל, Whedbee has described

cally, while his faithful bodyguard refused to acquiesce to his request at death, the narrator of 1 Samuel actually makes a "mockery" of Saul's entire life by his consistent and joking characterisation of Saul as a prophet.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, the narrator made this mockery evident by attributing to Saul a kind of prophetic status, while at the same time undercutting the full significance of this status.<sup>4</sup> He accomplishes this subversive polemic by noting side-by-side Saul's raving insanity, paranoid, and ecstatic prophesying.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in ancient

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Yahweh playing with Pharaoh "as a cat plays with a mouse." In addition, the word occurred in the speeches of the Philistine priests and diviners which recall Yahweh's making fools of the Egyptians in Exodus (1 Sam 6:6). Consequently, the presence of לָעוּל in the last recorded speech of Saul underscores the possible importance the narrator attaches to this particular word especially in its mocking character in the preceding narratives.

<sup>3</sup> Accounting for the development of the Saul material and its final incorporation into the "succession narratives," W. Lee Humphreys has observed that the reason for this narrative portrayal of Saul as a "tragic hero" comes from the earlier existence of the "stratum" of Saul material in the prophetic circles in the northern kingdom, and then it was "fundamentally recasts" in the "southern royalist context" through the "appealing" character of David, hence turning Saul from even more "a tragic hero into an out-and-out villain as he is overshadowed"; see W. Lee Humphreys, "From Tragic Hero to Villain: A Study of the Figure of Saul and the Development of 1 Samuel," *JOT* 22 (1982), 96. For Humphreys, 1 Sam 1-15 is governed by prophetic values as seen in the "archtypical prophet Samuel" and chs. 16-31 "extending into 2 Samuel 5" is particularly founded by "royalist and Davidic values"; see Humphreys, "From Tragic Hero to Villain," 103. Consequently, even though implied but not stated by Humphreys, it is suggestive that the prophetic description of the character of Saul fundamentally comes from the prophetic redactors who shaped the earlier parts of 1 Samuel to fit with the assumption of this circle that a king needs prophetic endowment in order to function, thus implying that this circle anticipates a prophet-king and find this individual in the Saul traditions. On the other hand, in a different direction, the later hands of the royalist redactors now reshaped the work of this prophetic circle and subsumed the same under the royal ideology of the court of David.

<sup>4</sup> The rejection of Saul is a defining theme in 1 Samuel. See V. Philips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 87-93.

<sup>5</sup> In talking about the subtlety of a biblical narrative one must acknowledge the presence of redactors who shaped the present form of the text. However, in more recent scholarship, the role of the redactor during the biblical period has largely been minimised. For example, against the dominance of a redactor in the book of Samuel, Moshe Garsiel observes, "[o]ne may also doubt if the figure of the 'Redactor' or 'Editor,' as depicted in biblical scholarship, is not unrealistic and anachronistic for the periods in which the Hebrew Bible came into being"; see Moshe Garsiel, "The Book of Samuel: Its Composition, Structure and Significance as a Historiographical Source," *JJScr* 10/5 (2010): 6. Similarly, John van Seters has also critique the overarching role assigned to redactor especially during the biblical period; see John van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism*

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Israel, as a results of their ecstatic, prophets are popularly known as "mad men" (2 Kgs 9:11).<sup>6</sup> This attitude appears to lie behind the narrator's descriptions of Saul consistently as both a "mad man" in the real psychopathic understanding of the term, and also a "prophet" by the use of נָבֵא to describe his prophetic activity (10: 1-27; 18:10; 19:18-24).<sup>7</sup> Consequently, it seems throughout his narrative on Saul, the narrator plays on the double meanings of נָבֵא in its usage to describe the act of "prophesying" or the raving ecstasy of madness.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, Saul is deliberately caricatured here by the narrator who seeks largely to undermine his kingship, and even where this ideological agenda is left unexpressed, this polemic commitment is no doubt entertained.<sup>9</sup>

Extending this parody to the discourse level, the narrator of 1 Samuel continued his parody of Saul by juxtaposing this image of a "prophesying figure" at the beginning of the Saul narratives with a "profaned character" at the end, who went after the forbidden practice of witchcraft/divination.<sup>10</sup> The

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(Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006). Taking these critiques seriously, it is then possible to understand the Saul material not from the tampering hands of the redactor but from the powerful skill of the narrator who uses his sources discretely with the sole intention to make a subtle mockery of Saul.

<sup>6</sup> Gesenius observes that the verb נָבֵא has the idea of acting "in an excited manner like a prophet," that is, "to rave." See GKC: 150. Similarly, Koehler & Baumgartner describes the verb as "to exhibit the behaviour of" a prophet and "to rage." See *HALOT* 1: 659.

<sup>7</sup> There is a need for further reflection on Saul's prophetic representations. For example, the character of Saul's prophetic involvement is particularly in term of ecstatic "musical prophets" rather than the classical prophets (1 Chron 25:2-3). This kind of prophecy appeared distinct to the prophetic ministry of Samuel (3:20; 9:9). In ancient Israel, it seems this group of ecstatic driven musical prophets evolved into the classical prophets. However, it is needful to also point out that these ecstatic and musical prophets seemed to have continued and flourished at the fringe of the Israelite societies even during the times of Israel's classical prophets (Jer 23:25-38; 29:8; Zech 10:2). Consequently, the use of Saul's prophetic tradition in this paper is generally from the point of view of the "musical" and ecstatic character of prophecy rather than its later classical form. On prophetic activity in the representations of Saul and David in the DtrH see Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 183-186.

<sup>8</sup> The narrator often employs this kind of double entendre in his characterisations. For this kind of double entendre in the elegy of David to Saul and Jonathan see Tod Linafelt, "Private Poetry and Public Eloquence in 2 Samuel 1:17-27: Hearing and Overhearing David's Lament for Jonathan and Saul," *JR* 22/3 (2008): 497-526.

<sup>9</sup> Ideologically speaking, the book of Samuel seeks to undermine the rule of Saul and assert the place of "David as the proper king." For the treatment of Saul in the matrix of this ideological web see Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995), 91-111.

<sup>10</sup> The description of Saul material in terms of its tragic vision has become popular. On the various discussions and debates on the tragic vision of the Saul material see

juxtaposition of these two literary portraits is quite significant especially in the light of deuteronomistic polarity between the cultic institutions of prophecy and witchcraft/divination. To show their striking contrast, the deuteronomist placed these poles of ancient guidance in clear opposition by describing them side-by-side (18:9-13 and 18:14-22).

Therefore, it appears in 1 Samuel that Saul has crossed these defined cultic boundaries, and from the deuteronomistic point of view, he is "detestable to the Lord" (18: 12). Incidentally, one of the chief punishments of breaking the deuteronomistic code is becoming an "object of scorn and ridicule" (28: 37). In terms of these narrative portraits, it appears a deuteronomistic template lies subtly behind the mocking description of Saul as "prophetic figure" who moves from the desired cultic space of prophecy to the compromising pole of witchcraft/divination.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this present work seeks to engage 1 Samuel by noting the subtle parody in the representations of Saul as a "prophesying figure" and the inversion of this same characterisation at Endor. Even though the issue of historicity is immediately left out of the present interest, the engagement of the narrator in this subtle parody and its polemics may point us to the playful spirit of the narrator and his time, who despite the seriousness of his immediate task, nonetheless crafted his narratives in a playful parody of his opponents.<sup>12</sup>

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David M. Gunn, "The Anatomy of Divine Comedy: On Reading the Bible as Comedy and Tragedy," *Semeia* 32 (1984): 115-29; J. Cheryl Exum and J William Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson and Saul: Reflections on the Tragic and Comic Visions," *Semeia* 32 (1984): 5-40; J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. Cheryl Exum, ed., *Tragedy and Comedy in the Bible*. SemeiaSt 32 (Decatur, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> The demonisation of Saul and the "critical attitude" of the court historians of 1 Samuel have been duly noted by recent studies on the book. In fact, it is not uncommon to find scholars challenging the characterisation and the stereotyped of Saul in the writing and reading of the book of Samuel. For example, in the rewriting of the Samuel materials in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, Louis Fieldman has noted the depiction of Saul as a just judge by Josephus. In this perspective, Fieldman observed, "[n]ot only does Josephus emphasize Saul's qualities of wisdom, courage, and temperance; he also cites his sense of justice"; see Louis. H. Feldman, *Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1998), 535. Even though Michael Avioz has largely challenged this depiction of Saul in Josephus, he nonetheless conceded that there is an "encomium on Saul" in Josephus which described in passing the unique courage and justice of Saul; see Michael Avioz, "Saul as the Just King in Josephus," *JHScr* 8/18 (2008): 8. These different portrayals of Saul as illustrated in Josephus show the enigmatic character and ambiguity surrounding the character of Saul in post-biblical traditions.

<sup>12</sup> Yairah Amit has noted the intense polemic of the Saul material and its covert and overt character especially when placed in the context of Judg 19-21. For this "anti-

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**B THE REPRESENTATION OF SAUL AS A PROPHET IN 1 SAMUEL 10:1-27**

The beginning of Saul material in 1 Samuel opens with the rejection of the prophetic traditions as represented by Samuel.<sup>13</sup> Remarkably, the prophetic office and administration of Samuel over all Israel were terminated and "all the elders of Israel" demanded a transition to "kingship" "like all other nations" (8: 1-6). In addition, the narrator quickly dismissed the descendants of Samuel as unfit to carry on the prophetic legacy of their father. For the narrator, Joel and Abijah, sons of Samuel, like the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, abused the integrity of their offices, hence proving to be unworthy successors to the prophetic office of their father, and thereby sabotaging even further the prophetic hegemony of Samuel over Israel. Consequently, like the termination of Eli's children from the priestly lineage, a similar dismissal of Samuel's children from the prophetic heritage is hereby assumed.

According to Meir Sternberg, there is a particular "antiprophetic satire" in the immediate context which introduced Saul in 1 Samuel. This "antiprophetic satire" is principally seen in the pejorative etymology and wordplay between a prophet [נָבִיא] and "the one who takes gifts" [מְבִיא] in 9:7.<sup>14</sup> On the

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Saul polemic" see Yairah Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative* (trans. J. Chipman; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 169-188.

<sup>13</sup> See the indictment of the priests as represented by Eli in 3:1-21 and the indictment of Samuel and his sons in 8:1-22.

<sup>14</sup> Meir Sternberg has rightly recognised the "antiprophetic satire" of ch. 9, which primarily seeks to "shatter" the "image" of the prophet in "popular imagination." In his particular comments on vv. 6-10, Sternberg notes the quest of the narrator "[t]o cut the prophet down to size" and he succeeded in doing this by drawing attention to his undermining use of three appellations of the prophet, namely man of God, *nābi'* and the seer. Concerning the first title, Sternberg observes "once delivered from stereotypical freezing and cheapening, it gives credit for omniscience where credit is due," thereby turning the attention of the reader from the prophet to Yahweh. On *nābi'*, Sternberg underscores the caricature by the narrator in the use of this title for a prophet especially as evidenced in the wordplay between *nābi'* [נָבִיא] and the verb "to bring" [מְבִיא] in the speech of Saul of v. 7. This wordplay, according to Sternberg, points to "a pejorative etymology" which describes a prophet as "a man whom gifts are brought." Consequently, "the twist given to 'prophet' debunks prophetic malpractice itself." Similarly, in this same pejorative sense, according to Sternberg, the title of "seer" is also used because rather than the visual medium to communicate Saul's candidacy to Samuel the narrator employed an "aural idiom" (see v. 15, "Yahweh opened Samuel's ears"). For Sternberg, this "interplay" or use of aural idiom in place of a visual one "connotes that Samuel is less a "seer" (in his own right) than a "hearer" (by God's grace)." This antiprophetic satire, as duly observed by Sternberg, extends to ch. 16 whereby "[t]he great Samuel, whose arrival" to Bethlehem "throws the place into a flutter, helplessly stands oil-horn in hand before the procession of candidates, seeing without seeing whom God has seen for himself." See Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of*

other hand, this wordplay perhaps may be in itself an indirect mockery of the children of prophet Samuel who in the preceding chapter were described as taking gifts (8:3). Interestingly, it is within this defining antiprophetic rhetoric and its underlying polemic that the attribution of prophetic activity to Saul takes place. In three important places in 1 Samuel, the narrator describes Saul as a prophet-king (10: 1-27; 18:10; 19:18-24). What is puzzling is the consistent attribution to Saul this prophetic status and the refusal to identify David with the same prophetic status in 1 Samuel. In particular, Saul is often described as prophesying, involved in prophetic activity, in the company of the prophets, or moved by the spirit of prophecy.<sup>15</sup> Robert Polzin rightly observed, "When we inquire how the two royal rivals are said to conduct themselves *vis-à-vis* prophets and prophecy, the contrast in the books of Samuel is striking: Saul has an active, David a passive relationship to prophecy."<sup>16</sup> By themselves, these attributions of prophetic activity to Saul on the surface appear to be a kind of honour accorded to the first Israelite king, however, on a closer look, this prophetic association turns out largely to be a mockery of him. For example in 1 Sam 10:10-13 the text reads:

When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place.

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*Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 95-99.

<sup>15</sup> Contrary to this position, Mark K. George has reasoned that Saul is primarily introduced in 1 Samuel as a priest particularly in the light of the priestly sacrifice in 9:23-24 and the cultic practices associated with Saul in these narratives. In particular, George observed, "[w]hen Saul is introduced into the narrative, part of his identification is in priestly terms." For George, Saul is depicted as "both king and priest"; see Mark K. George, "YHWH's Own Heart," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 450-453. Cf. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 35-56. Despite the insightful observations by George, however, George totally left out the prophetic character of Saul in his study. Consequently, he fails to take the prophetic credentials of Saul seriously especially the narrative significance of intermingling these two images by the narrator. In spite of the few instances of the priestly characterisation of Saul, yet this present study shows that prophetic characterisation dominates over the priestly. In addition, it also possibly, though not conclusive, that the narrator's few reference to priestly matters in relationship to Saul is to further make a mockery of Saul, a prophetic figure, who dabbles into priestly matters. However, this part of the study needs further attention by way of separate study.

<sup>16</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 183.

At the beginning of this text, Samuel gave three important signs that will ultimately confirm the certainty of Yahweh's choice of Saul as the king. According to Samuel, these prophetic signs will include his meeting of three men with one of them carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and the last a skin of wine. Prophetically, Samuel assured Saul that these men will greet him and present him with two loaves of bread, and then finally he will meet a prophetic procession in the course of his journey back home. In the company of these prophets, Samuel foretold that the Spirit of the Lord will come upon Saul in power and he will begin to prophesy like them, and then be "changed into a different person." Categorically, Samuel observed in v. 7, "[o]nce these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you." In v. 9, the narrator observes that "[a]s Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day."<sup>17</sup> Like the judges before him, this particular sign will indeed confirm that Saul is now a legitimate leader over God's people. Consequently, it appears that through the association of Saul with a prophetic activity by the narrator, Saul is here cast in a favourable light.

However, on closer analysis, this positive characterisation of Saul as a "prophetic figure" by the narrator hides a subtle mockery of this same character. Beyond its friendly disposition, underlying the present text is a masked polemic against Saul. Noting this parody, Klaus-Peter Adams observes, "Saul's encounter with the ecstatic prophets in 1 Sam 10:2-13 refers critically and almost ironically to the ecstatic of someone who pretends to be driven by a prophetic spirit."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Graeme Auld also suggests that Saul is here "acting the prophet."<sup>19</sup> In particular, the parody of Saul as a prophet is indirectly reflected in several mocking rhetorical questions by the narrator which largely underscore the narrator's caricatures of Saul's prophetic activity. As reflected in the text highlighted above, there are three rhetorical questions which mocked indirectly the description of Saul as a prophet. The first rhetorical question in v. 11b says, *מַה־זֶּה הָיָה לְבָנֵי־קִישׁ*. Here it appears that the people who knew Saul could not hide their surprise that Saul is among the company of the prophets. The question by itself reflects their laughter that Saul is now a prophet.

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the narrator did not concern himself with the other two signs but concentrated only on the confirmation of the prophetic sign which, according to Samuel, will serve as the last confirmation of Yahweh's choice of Saul as the future king. Apparently, the attention given to this last sign by the narrator, shows that from his point of view, the most important sign among the signs given to Saul was this last sign. In this perspective, the events of that day climaxed in God's Spirit coming over Saul and he will be involved in prophesy.

<sup>18</sup> Klaus-Peter Adams, "Nocturnal Intrusions and Divine Interventions on Behalf of Judah: David's Wisdom and Saul's Tragedy in 1 Samuel 26," *VT* 59 (2009), 25.

<sup>19</sup> A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 112.

Remarkably, they did not call Saul by name, they scornfully called him, "son of Kish." The patronymic construction "son of X" is often used in heightened emotion or confrontation, and within this context, it makes a rhetoric impact on the hearers. E. J. Revell notes the use of the designation by patronymic to scorn biblical characters. Revell observes "[a] patronymic is occasionally used in address, apparently to show scorn..." Obviously, there is the mocking intent on the use of "son of Kish" and not Saul here. For example, the narrator underscores the rhetoric impact of the patronymic "son of Jesse" in the angry speeches of Saul in 20:27, 30-31; 22:7-9, 13-14.<sup>20</sup> Thus the use of the patronymic "son of Kish" here appears to carry some scornful nuances. Similarly, noting the significance of enclitic הַן in the context of the הַן interrogative of the rhetorical question here, Bruce L. Waltke and M. O'Connor observe that enclitic הַן appears "to emphasize the question and is best rendered by an emphatic adverb or phrase," hence they translated this rhetorical question, "[w]hat *in the world* happened to the son of Kish?" (emphasis theirs).<sup>21</sup> In the shocking world of the narrative, this question is emotionally loaded and hides largely the ridicule of this same narrative world to Saul's claims and involvement with the prophetic activity.

The second rhetorical question is reflected in v. 11c, and it reads, "Is Saul among the prophets?" As rightly observed by Polzin, this sarcastic question certainly implies that Saul "is not a prophet."<sup>22</sup> In this regard, the rhetorical question further reveals the foreignness of Saul to the prophetic community. By this provocative question, these people directly observe that Saul is out of place or is a misfit by identifying with this group. The shock expressed by these people may be due to the fact that Saul's family is not a part of prophetic class and hence he does not belong here. Thus, the question, like the preceding one, describes Saul as a misfit in the gathering of prophets. The shock of this question becomes actually a lasting "proverb" that continually describes the laughter of the puzzling crowds to the claims and involvement of Saul with prophetic

<sup>20</sup> Concerning the patronymic, "son of Jesse," Revell observes, "[d]esignation by patronymic alone treats the person designated as a member of a group, not as an individual. This use thus distances the speaker from the addressee; it shows "non-intimacy," as would the use of a title. Since it is clear that David usually was referred to by name (as in 1 Sam 18:25, 19: 4-5, 22, 20: 28, 22:14), there can be little doubt that the use of the patronym reflects Saul's attitude to David, and that disparagement is intended..." See E. John Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1996), 174.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 312.

<sup>22</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 102.



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activity, hence the repetition of this same proverb in the different context of 19:23-24.<sup>23</sup>

The third question is found in v. 12a and was asked by a man who the text said lives close to the vicinity of this prophetic procession.<sup>24</sup> The anonymous character jokingly asked, "Who is their father?" According to Robert Gordon, this rhetorical question appears to describe the bewilderment of an onlooker who is "puzzled by Saul's fraternizing with nonentities."<sup>25</sup> This rendering is especially plausible, according to Gordon, because of the "honorific" association of the title "father" with prophets (2 Kgs 2:12). Consequently, Gordon opined that Saul is merely associated here with "insignificant" individuals of the prophetic circles who "lack a reputable leader" and hence the question about the "father" of this group is not a negative evaluation of Saul's character, but actually dignifies him. Similarly, according to Hans W. Hertzberg, "[t]he proverb means, 'How does a reasonable man, well placed in civil life, come to be in this eccentric company?' Among people who, as a contemptuous aside puts it, 'have no father,' i.e. come from anywhere!"<sup>26</sup> For Hertzberg, the narrator "gives as positive a judgment on the seizing of Saul by the spirit of Yahweh."<sup>27</sup> Despite the quest to ignore the laughter inherent in these rhetorical questions, there is no doubt that a reference to the "father" of the group is a taunt or mocking observation that the "father" or leadership of the prophetic group should not have allowed Saul into the midst of these prophets. In this perspective, Auld has described this question as "a slighting one."<sup>28</sup> From the point of view of Deuteronomist, Polzin describes this prophetic activity here as "disastrous," "evil" and "one of Saul's most abominable practices" in the books of Samuel.<sup>29</sup>

From the preceding remarks, the problem of the present text is how to understand the positive description of Yahweh's Spirit on Saul and the apparent taunting of these questions. Ignoring the sublime taunting of Saul in this passage, Gordon and Hertzberg have generally read this passage as a positive

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<sup>23</sup> Even though Robert P. Gordon notes that the rhetorical questions here are not totally "a negative evaluation" of either Saul or ecstatic prophets, nonetheless he conceded that this particular question is "detrimental" to Saul. See Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Regency, 1988), 118.

<sup>24</sup> In the mentioning of the "Philistine post" in v. 5, Auld suggests "that Philistine have nothing to fear from the local young man, Saul—if any change has come over him, it is simply that he has become another mad prophet." See Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 119.

<sup>26</sup> Hans W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. S. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1964), 86.

<sup>27</sup> Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 179-186, especially 185.

depiction of Saul. However, these positive readings come from a failure to adequately recognise the crafty art of misdirection by the narrator of Samuel who, according to Steinberg, usually "avoids the line of least resistance in presenting character" immediately as full-fledged villain, but often depicted "repulsive villains pitted against all-round paragons."<sup>30</sup> In addition, Sternberg also observes the intentions of the narrator are often "unannounced" and "artfully camouflaged."<sup>31</sup> In fact, in the rejection of Saul, he "misled the reader about his target and intentions," only at the end to prepare "the real line of attack" against him.<sup>32</sup> Significantly, the romancing tale of Saul prophesying here is part of this general quest by the narrator of Samuel to "mislead" his readers from his true aim, however, the questions by the characters in the present passage underscore the taunting polemic underlying his seemingly positive or innocent characterisation of Saul.<sup>33</sup> The concealment of this parodic intent is in this sense appropriate because "[p]arody usually does not announce itself to the reader with explicit warnings about parodic intent."<sup>34</sup> Margaret Rose also notes that "most parody worthy of the name" appears "ambivalent toward its target."<sup>35</sup> Consequently, with the preceding rhetorical questions, the narrator points to the

<sup>30</sup> See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 483.

<sup>31</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 485.

<sup>32</sup> Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 485.

<sup>33</sup> On the discourse level, we must ask the purposes of employing these faceless characters and their speeches by the narrator in his narratives. The speeches of biblical characters as other characters of non-biblical or fictional works serve some narrative functions. In this perspective, Ellen van Wolde describes the speeches attributed to the characters in biblical narrative as "embedded discourse." Speaking of the significance of this "embeddedness," van Wolde observed, "...the narrator does not tell merely *about* actions by characters or *about* situations but also looks *through* the eyes of the characters and speaks *through* their mouths. The narrator then surrenders the observations or narrative point of view to those characters in the narrative, so that character's texts (*discourses*) that are embedded in the narrative's text (*narrative*) emerge. Through this embedding of texts in texts, the reader is being guided in a certain direction, since the information that the reader obtains is always determined by the textual perspectives or subject-oriented views of the narrator..." For van Wolde, "embedded discourses of the narrator point ultimately to the perspective of the narrator and guide the reader towards a particular textual interpretation. Hence the narrator uses the character as his mouthpiece since through the character or characters, he speaks to the reader and most importantly his own world." On this discourse level, the taunting speeches of these faceless characters are intended ultimately to disparage Saul and his claims to prophetic deeds. See Ellen van Wolde, "Who Guides Whom? Embeddedness and Perspective in Biblical Hebrew and in 1 Kings 3:16-28," *JBL* 114/4 (1995): 623.

<sup>34</sup> Wifredo de Ràfols, "Lies, Irony, Satire, and the Parody of Ideology in Doña Perfecta," *HRev* 64/4 (1996): 473.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51.

laughable character Saul who is deemed a misfit in the company of the prophets. Interestingly, John A. Miles Jr. observes that the laughable character itself aims at creating a parody because "[i]t is crucial to the functioning of parody" that persons or objects in the narrative should "be laughed at..."<sup>36</sup> Taken together then, these positive and negative elements in the present passage fit very well with the "centrality of ridicule" and "homage" in the criteria for effective parody by Seymour Chatman.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Chatman observes that a true ridicule in parody must "accommodate the ambivalence of criticism and homage" at the same time.<sup>38</sup> He also notes, "[t]hink, then, of parody as a kind of twitting or rallying of" the person or thing "such that even the target, the *parodee*, can admire the accomplishment."<sup>39</sup> The narrator accomplishes this intention by paying "homage" to Saul as a "prophesying figure" while at the same "ridiculing" this involvement through the rhetorical questions within the narrative world. In this respect, George Savran also underscores "a powerful tension between acclamatory and derogatory tendencies" which "permeates the story" here despite the "overt praise of Saul."<sup>40</sup>

### C THE REPRESENTATION OF SAUL AS A PROPHET IN 1 SAM 18:10

The parody of Saul in this verse is obvious by the apt demonisation of Saul's ecstasy and prophetic behaviour. Remarkably, this verse bears similarity with the first passage (10:1-27), however, unlike the first passage, this verse recorded that an evil spirit was particularly responsible for the prophetic ecstasies by Saul. One would have expected that David's playing of the stringed-instrument imbued with the Spirit of Yahweh, powerful enough to ward off evil spirits and to bring about the needed therapeutic effects, would have been considered by the narrator to be in the dimensions of ecstasy or prophesy (v.10b cf. 16:14-23). On the contrary, the exorcist music of David is never considered ecstatic or a kind of prophesying, it is always Saul that is considered a prophesying figure because within this consistent image of Saul lies the parody of him.<sup>41</sup> The text here reads: "[t]he next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying [נָבֵא] in his house, while David was play-

<sup>36</sup> John A. Miles Jr., "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," *The JQR* 65/3 (1975): 170.

<sup>37</sup> Seymour Chatman, "Parody and Style," *PT* 22/1 (2001): 33.

<sup>38</sup> Chatman, "Parody and Style," 33.

<sup>39</sup> Chatman, "Parody and Style," 33.

<sup>40</sup> See George W. Savran, *Telling and Retelling: Quotation in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 73.

<sup>41</sup> Concerning stereotypes in parody, Miles notes, "if characters, scenes, and language were less stereotyped, parody would be impossible." See Miles, "Laughing at the Bible," 170.

ing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand" (1 Sam 18:10).<sup>42</sup> This is definitely an "antiprophetic satire" that appears to connect prophesying with madness. In this understanding, Saul is now a raving madman and not the original prophesying character in the preceding narratives. There is a strong comic undercurrent behind the present description of the character of Saul who has been associated earlier as a prophesying king but now depicted as a mad king in raving feats of prophesying under the power of an evil spirit. Importantly, the text comically takes the biblical association of prophesying and madness seriously (See 2 Kgs 9:11). In the present text, the narrator plays on the double understandings of "prophesying" (נבא) in order to make a parody of the character Saul. The narrator has earlier described Saul as a prophet as evidenced in the close association of Saul with the prophesying of the school of the prophets in 10: 1-27, however, here the narrator reverted comically to the other meaning of נבא as raving madness. Hertzberg notes the close relationship between the present text and ch. 10, when he observes,

It is remarkable and by no means by chance that the words used here correspond to those in 10.6 and more particularly in 10.10, where the "spirit" "comes mightily" upon Saul "in the midst of the prophets," so that he goes into "prophetic ecstasy." It is the same thing, except that in ch. 18 an "evil" spirit from God brings about this seizure. Saul is by nature extremely susceptible to such attacks in one way or another.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately, Hertzberg missed the parody in this purposeful connection between the two passages, and merely saw in them a quest by the narrator "to understand Saul's nature and to forgive him" hence the "passage," according to him, "is suffused with an understanding sympathy."<sup>44</sup> However, this particular reading fails to underscore the polemic and pro-Davidic tune of these successive narratives which seek politely to undermine Saul and to assert the importance of David as the "man after God's heart."<sup>45</sup> In this perspective, the narrator is making a subtle parody of Saul because he now clearly demonised and ridiculed Saul's prophetic activity by connecting this same ecstasy or

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<sup>42</sup> The confusion of this verse is occasioned by the differences in the translation of the verb נִתְנַבֵּא. Some translations translate this as "and he prophesied" and other translated this "and he raved." For example see the various renderings by KJV, NIV, NAS, and RSV.

<sup>43</sup> Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 157.

<sup>45</sup> In critical reading of the David material in Samuel, Baruch Halpern, went against this popular fascination with David's character as a "man after God's heart." For this treatment of David see Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 3-480.

prophesying with madness.<sup>46</sup> Polzin also observed, "The precise words of the narrator" here "serve as a formal condemnation of Saul's and Samuel's behavior back in ch. 10, even as they continue to condemn the pair in ch. 18. For the narrator here characterizes the spirit of God that rushes upon Saul causing him to prophesy *as an evil spirit*..."<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Polzin further observed, "...the spirit of God that causes the king to prophesy is invariably evil, and the king upon whom it rushes does not have God with him..." In this scene, "We see Samuel and Saul paired once more under the shadow of the narrator's condemning words."<sup>48</sup> The artful association of Saul earlier with prophesying and now with the madness shows the narrator's quest to provocatively alter the reader's perception of this character who is now no longer the charismatic and prophetic figure of the earlier narratives but a mad fellow. For the narrator, the former-prophesying Saul has lost his prophetic flair and he is now possessed by an evil spirit which moves him in raving ecstatic feats. This particular caricature of Saul perfectly fits the intent of parody. Describing this intent, Stuart Hannabuss observed, "[p]arodies often showed people in a bad light, making fun of them, pointing out their idiosyncrasies and flaws."<sup>49</sup> Specifically, this understanding of the attitude of the narrator towards Saul is also reflected in some references by the narrator on the departure of the Spirit of Yahweh from Saul and his torment by an evil spirit. For example, the narrator points out that an evil spirit from Yahweh comes to torment Saul in 16: 14.<sup>50</sup> The narrator also refers to the temporary relief from Saul's torment by the evil spirits whenever David plays his music in v. 23. The same madness of this former "prophesying king" was also noted in 18:10 with the corroding irony that the songs of the women instead of calming Saul and giving him the needed relief, on the contrary, instigated Saul further against David, hence turning away from him the music of David which normally helps to exorcise the evil spirit from torment-

<sup>46</sup> Twice the narrator referred to Saul as "fool" (כֵּל). First, the word כֵּל appeared in the speech of Samuel to Saul in 13:13 and once in the speech of Saul to David in 26:12. For the use of this word to undermine Saul see Adams, "Nocturnal Intrusions and Divine Interventions," 1-33.

<sup>47</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 179.

<sup>48</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Hannabuss, "Inspiration or Infringement: Parody and the Law," *LR* 51/2 (2002): 79.

<sup>50</sup> In spite of the quest often to explain away the connection or association of an evil spirit to Yahweh, this connection I believe must be linked to the problematic characterisation of Yahweh in the entire book of Samuel. For the problematic characterisation of Yahweh in 1 and 2 Samuel see Marti J. Steussy, "The Problematic God of Samuel," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw* (ed. David Penchansky and Paul L. Redditt; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 127-161.

ing him (v.7).<sup>51</sup> Similarly, 19:9-10 also describes almost the same scenario of Saul seeking to pin David to the wall of the palace in a possible feat of madness. In this characterisation of Saul as mad king, the narrator plays on his former description of him as a prophet. Since prophets are known as mad persons, the narrator explores literarily this popular description of the prophet to speak of Saul. In doing so, the narrator makes a parody of the once anointed prophetic figure who has now become a mad man that seeks to kill the same David who provides him relief from his demonic torments. By his description of the raving feats of Saul, the narrator comically shows the degenerating nature of Saul's condition which moves from the lofty sphere in his association with the prophetic community of the earlier days to the lowest point here at his house, whereby the king who refused to kill Agag, the Amalekite king, is now branding his spear against one of his loyal subjects.<sup>52</sup> Comically, this former prophet-king is now described as short-sighted, mad and myopic because he is unable to see or fully accept the divine verdict that David is now actually the "man after his heart." In addition, Polzin has also observed that this chapter describes "the disastrous commingling in Saul's person of king and prophet."<sup>53</sup>

#### **D THE REPRESENTATION OF SAUL AS PROPHET IN 1 SAMUEL 19:23-24**

In this passage, there is another description by the narrator that Saul was involved in prophesying. First, the narrator describes the ordeal of David and the quest of Saul to kill him in vv. 1-22. This plot by Saul to kill David led David to seek refuge in Naioth at Ramah. According to Hertzberg, Samuel appears in Naioth to be the "principal of a theological college" for the proph-

<sup>51</sup> Speaking on the exorcist power of David's court music, Steven L. McKenzie notes that "music was believed to have magical powers to keep evil spirits at bay." See Steven L. McKenzie, "Who was King David?" *WW* 23/4 (2003): 360.

<sup>52</sup> In respect to the consistent portrait of Saul's many attempts to kill David, Brettler notes "Saul is depicted as a murderer and an attempted murderer." Ironically, "[h]is victims and intended victims are always, according to the narrator, innocent. So, for example, he kills the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22: 16-19)...His massacre of them is complete – indeed, he acts as if they were under the *herem* [ban], killing men, women, children and animals (v.19). This deliberately contrasts with Saul's non-compliance with the *herem* [ban] against the Amalekites in ch. 15 – he spares those he should kill under the *herem* [ban], while he carries out the *herem* [ban] against the innocent. He tries to kill David several times (1 Sam 18:10-11; 19:1-2, 9-10, 11-24, throughout chapters 23-6)." In this narrative representation, added Brettler, Saul is shown to go against the Decalogue (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17) in its prohibition against murder which is often described as a terrible crime that is closely associated with the "archetypally evil king of Judah, Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:6)." See Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 179.

ets.<sup>54</sup> To capture David, Saul sends three groups of messengers, but these messengers were overwhelmed by the Spirit of Yahweh and hence they begin to prophesise. Finally, Saul decided to go and arrest David himself, however, he too went into a prophetic ecstasy.<sup>55</sup> Describing this incident, Gordon observed, "[w]hen all three of his [messengers] have collapsed in ecstasy, Saul himself sets out for Ramah, only to discover that he is even more susceptible to the mysterious influence than are his messengers; he begins to ecstasize even before he reaches Naioth (23)!"<sup>56</sup> The text partly reads:

So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

In this text, the Spirit of Yahweh is described as responsible for this ecstatic feat of Saul's prophesying. Unlike 18:10, it is not the working of an evil spirit from Yahweh, but the positive working of the Spirit of God. However, despite this positive association of Saul with the Spirit of Yahweh, the narrative portrait here is intensely negative. To this end, Hertzberg rightly observed, "[t]he description here, however, is not written in praise of the king. This is so both in the case of the account itself and of the position it occupies in the narrative sequence."<sup>57</sup> Significantly, the narrator refuses to describe the influence of the Spirit of Yahweh here on David, and refused to associate David with the ecstatic feat of prophesying as reflected in the present text. Noting this silence of the present text on the influence of ecstatic Spirit on David, Hertzberg observed, "[w]e do not hear whether David was similarly affected" because "[t]he narrative is much more concerned to bring Saul into contact with the prophetic ecstasy and thus to give the basis for the proverb" in v. 24.<sup>58</sup> Admittedly, the concern here is on Saul, however, it is also suspicious in spite of the narrative's consistent emphasis on the presence of Yahweh with David, yet he never associates David with the feat of prophesying. The closest the narrator came to associating David with ecstatic feats was the feigning of madness of David before Achish king of Gath.<sup>59</sup> However, even there it is not

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<sup>54</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 167. Gordon also describes Samuel "as the doyen of a college of prophets" at Ramah. See Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 165.

<sup>55</sup> Auld notes that "this narrative has to be read in conjunction with the third of the signs promised by Samuel to Saul after anointing (10:5-6, 10-13)." In this text, Saul also "play[s] the prophet." It is also possibly the three messengers send to catch David mimicked the three signs in 1 Sam 10: 1-18. See Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 228.

<sup>56</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 228.

<sup>57</sup> Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 168.

<sup>58</sup> Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, 168.

<sup>59</sup> Regardless of one's initial misgivings on the parody of Saul, the book of 1 Samuel fits generally into a comic outlook in spite of its bloody tales of battles, civil conflicts,

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prophesying that is attributed to David but a temporary feigning of madness by David in possible imitation of Saul in order to deter Achish from killing him. This observation is plausible in light of the placement of the women's song in 18: 7 and then followed by the raving display of Saul's insanity in vv. 8-10. In

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political intrigues and its "serious claims" to recount history. Hebrew narratives often employ a comic template in order to narrate its stories. Describing the comic vision of the Hebrew Bible, Whedbee observes, Hebrew narrative "revels in a profoundly ambivalent laughter that by turns is both mocking and joyous, subversive, and celebrative, and finally a laughter that results in an exuberant and transformative comic vision" (See Whedbee, *The Bible and the Comic Vision*, 4). At the risk of oversimplification, one can readily feel the intense humour permeating the entire book. For example, there is humorous ridicule of idolatry in the Ark narratives (4:1b-7:1). In this story, there is the mocking representation of the Philistine god Dagon who falls down every morning before the Ark of the covenant breaking of his arms and head (5:1-5), the helplessness of the Philistine people before the "hand of Yahweh" (5:6-12) and the corroding mockery of the Philistine priests and diviners who made "models" of "rats" in order to curb the plague (6:1-6). In addition, humour lies at the core of the demands of King Nahash for the right eye of the inhabitants of Jabesh (11:2 cf. v.10). In particular, the disfiguring of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead is particularly intended to mock "all Israel" and bring them "shame" (On the connection between "mutilation," "mockery" and "shame" see Tracy M. Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 125/2 (2006): 225-241. See especially his discussion on this particular text in pages 229-232). Similarly, there are also other amusing stories for example in the humorous choice of the tallest man for a king (9:2, 10:23), the comic journey of Israelites' farmers and soldiers to Philistine territories in order to point and sharpen their farming implements and weapons for war (13:16-20), David's carrying of Goliath's sword on his visit to Goliath's hometown in Gath (21:8-10 cf. 17:4), the comic feigning of madness by David here (21:10-15), the embarrassing story of a seer who went about the choice of a new king by "trial and error" (16: 1-3), the comic bride price of one hundred foreskins (18:25), the comic taking of another wife by David (in ch. 25) in the middle of hot pursuits of chs. 24 and 26 by his father-in-law Saul, the comic flouting of David's loyalty (29:8-11) and the ironic burial of Saul under the tamarisk tree in possible imitation of his administrative space under the same tree while alive (31:13 cf. 22:6). In spite of these comic descriptions of 1 Samuel in terms of its humorous episodes, nevertheless there are tragic stories which are interlaced with this comic vision. These tragic stories, for example, include the gruesome massacre of the priests at Nob (22:6-19), the killing of Agag, the annihilation of the Amalekites (15:1-35), and the killing of Saul and his sons on mount Gilboa (31:1-13). While most of the studies have rightly underscored the tragic vision of the narratives of 1 Samuel, unfortunately its comic vision is yet to be fully explored. The modern reader often misses the presence of the comic elements of the biblical narrative because the comic vision of the bible is closely interlaced with its tragic stories and hence most biblical humour need an active participation by the reader in order to recover the humorous character [See Yehuda T. Radday, "On Missing the Humour in the Bible: An Introduction," in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Yehuda. T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; JSOTSup, 92; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1990), 21-38].



the same way, the Philistines in 21:11 quoted verbatim the women's song and it is immediately followed by the feigning of David's madness. In this placement of the same song followed by Saul's madness in 18:8-10, and the repetition of the same women's song in 21:11 and followed quickly by the feigning of madness by David shows a quest to show that through the feigning of madness, David is imitating his mad master, Saul.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Achish in 21:14-15 asked, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my palace?" In this text, the polemic is abundantly clear because it appears to say that the heathen Philistine king had rejected a madman from entering his palace, while Israelites, on the other hand, have entertained and accepted a mad man on its throne. Consequently, the story here is a carefully articulated polemic against Saul. This polemic reading of the text accords very well in finding the purpose of the text in its present location especially in the light of the subsequent acceptance of David by the same Achish of Gath in 27:1-12.<sup>61</sup> One realises that the conflict of David's meeting of Achish in 21:10-15 and 27:1-12 only make more sense when the former is understood as a direct polemic against Saul whose madness is now imitated by David. Remarkably, the former serves as a critique of Saul's kingship and to show that the uncircumcised Philistines could not admit a mad man to its court, yet Israel did just that by accepting the kingship of Saul.

For all its ideological worth, our present text is silent on the ecstatic Spirit of Yahweh on David especially in this particular context that is enriched with prophetic activity which is extended to the mere or ordinary messengers of Saul. Indeed, in the refusal to associate directly ecstatic behaviour to David and its consistent application of the same to Saul underscores the sentimental nature of the present narrative and its particular polemic against the prophesying of Saul.<sup>62</sup> On the long run, in the descriptions of the embarrassing nakedness of Saul, his madness and intoxicating ecstasy here, the narrator again makes a direct mockery of Saul. Describing the demeaning status of Saul in this particular text, Walter Brueggeman observed,

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<sup>60</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 113.

<sup>61</sup> In the third occurrence of the same song of the women in 29:5, it is immediately followed by the feigning and mocking flouting of David's faithfulness to the Philistines. See vv. 6-11.

<sup>62</sup> Noting this deliberate effort to disassociate David from the prophetic activity, Polzin observes, "In line with this prophetic rule in the books of Samuel is the absence of any reference to prophets, prophecy, or prophesying whenever David *does* take the initiative in inquiring of the LORD." He also added, "The contrast between David and Saul is clear: Saul is intimately associated with prophecy, David not; and when Saul inquires of the LORD..., he often receives no answer...when David does so, he usually receives one..." See Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 184.

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The pitifully embarrassing scene is that of this once great man, still tall but no longer great, exhausted by demanding religious exercise (v. 24), clearly not in control, shamed, now rendered powerless in a posture of submissiveness. This episode is an act of dramatic delegitimation of Saul.<sup>63</sup>

Also noting the negative portrait of Saul here, Hertzberg observed, "Saul is evidently drawn more strongly into the workings of the spirit than are his messengers, as he tears the clothes from off his body and lies on the ground in this state like a paralytic."<sup>64</sup> On this same scene, Gordon observes, "[i]f Jonathan's disrobing in 18:4 had its symbolic aspect, the same is probably true of Saul's nakedness here. He no longer has the dignity or the authority of a king, and the divine spirit, which was supposed to be the cachet of a king, is actually operating in the interest of his rival."<sup>65</sup> For Polzin, "Woven into this account of Saul's murderous attempts and David's escapes is the thematic thread of Saul's evil prophesying."<sup>66</sup> On the use of the proverb that "Is Saul also among the prophets?" in v. 24, Gordon following W. McKane suggests that "the two occurrences of the proverb represent two different evaluations of Saul vis-à-vis the ecstasies: on the first occasion" in 10:12 the prophets "were not fit company for him, whereas now" in this present passage "he is not fit company for them."<sup>67</sup> This similar line of thought is also followed by Bill Arnold, however, he underscores the irony of this second question, and its attending sarcasm. In particular, he observed, "[t]he irony" of the second question is that it "challenges the genuineness of Saul's prophetic behavior and thus also his legitimacy as king of Israel."<sup>68</sup> Against these readings by McKane, Gordon and Arnold, the present work understood both occurrences of the proverbial question as a kind of polemic and a biting criticism of Saul. Even though the polemic inherent in the previous prophetic characterisation of Saul appeared hidden, the one of this pericope is clearly obvious. Like our discussion on the preceding texts had shown, the narrator is making a subtle but consistent mockery of Saul as a prophet also here. This consistent subtle mockery seems to possibly refute a prophetic tradition in ancient Israel which originally accords to the first Israelite king some degree of prophetic status.

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<sup>63</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1990), 292.

<sup>64</sup> Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 292.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 165.

<sup>66</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 183.

<sup>67</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 183. See William McKane, *I and II Samuel: The Way to the Throne* (TBC; London: SCM, 1963), 122.

<sup>68</sup> Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 291.

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## E THE PARODY OF SAUL'S PROPHETIC REPRESENTATIONS AT ENDOR

The present episode records the peak of Saul's characterisation as a prophet figure in DtrH. Here, the "former-prophesying figure" Saul, the dead prophet Samuel and the witch met in this final and very important caricature of Saul in 1 Samuel. The text begins with a flashback on Saul's expelling of mediums and spirits from the land in v. 3. It also recalls the death of Samuel in 25:1. There is an interesting irony in the picture of Saul seeking the help of a witch on the eve of his death.<sup>69</sup> This irony becomes obvious when a comparison is made between the first portraits of Saul in ch. 9 and the one here. In the first appearance, Saul through the help of his servant sought the Lord in finding the donkeys of his father. The narrative portrait of Saul there appeared largely positive. Even though the suggestion to seek the guidance of the prophet came from the servant and was not primarily an initiative of Saul (9:6-8), we could agree that the characterisation of Saul in this passage was largely positive. Overlooking this particular detail, however, one can readily say that at the first appearance of Saul in 1 Samuel, the character Saul was portrayed as seeking Yahweh through the help of his servant. In contrast to this first portrait, the last picture of Saul here reflects a man who now seeks the help of a witch by the assistance of his servants. Interestingly, the loss of his father's donkey led him to the prophet Samuel and the loss of his kingdom finally led him to the door of the witch. In this immediate context, the narrator describes also the loss of divine guidance which now sets in motion the nocturnal visit of Saul to the witch (v. 6).<sup>70</sup> In gender terms, the witch provides a completion to the story that begins with a man as the means of guidance for Saul. The importance of this woman is not often realised especially in a book that celebrates the deeds of men and yet despite the unacceptability of her craft by the Deuteronomist the woman was given twenty-three verses, and superficially, she is portrayed in a good light that one is tempted to call her, "a good witch." On this surface reading, she appears to provide the failing king with care and love and one wonders that if all the witches in ancient Israelites are this good, why expel them from the land? However, the seemingly positive portrait of the witch is part of the misdirection of the narrator and his deuteronomist agenda.<sup>71</sup> Like all his portraits in

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<sup>69</sup> On the geographical and chronological dislocations of the present story see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 422-23; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 269 and Gordon, *I & II Samuel*, 193.

<sup>70</sup> For a descriptive introduction to the magical traditions of the Jewish people see Gideon Bohak, "Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Magical Tradition," *CBR* 8/1 (2009): 107-150.

<sup>71</sup> McCarter opined that the present story is a "prophetic reworking" of an original ghost story where the main character Saul consulted an anonymous ghost, but this was

Saul's narratives, he allows his readers to put down their guards before launching out his subtle attack. Underscoring this subtle craft, Amit observed, the narrator of Samuel "relies upon indirect means in order to mitigate the starkness of the picture, not to show events in terms of black-and-white, but to present shades of gray, which are closer to reality."<sup>72</sup> Significantly, on the surface it appears the narrator is praising the witch, and it appears that there is nothing wrong in consulting this means of guidance. It also appears that Yahweh could use the medium to "speak" to his people. Interestingly, Samuel never condemned the witch. One would have expected Samuel to speak against the witch for thinking that she could conjure up a prophet of Yahweh. However, Samuel never condemned the witch and he appears calm and collected about the witch. In fact, the Samuel we see here is a kind of "witch-friendly" person. However, underneath the positive description of the witch and Saul lies a scathing criticism of both parties. For example, the narrator already alluded to Saul's disobedience in 15:23, when he observed that "disobedience" to Yahweh "is like the sin of witchcraft" or "divination" (מַדְבָּר). The word מַדְבָּר employed for witchcraft or divination in this verse appeared in Saul's speech in v. 8 when he said, "divine (מַדְבָּר) for me." From the point of view of the narrator, Saul by his disobedience to Yahweh is already a man that has thrown his sympathy with rebelliousness and witchcraft. The going down to consult a witch in this present passage is merely to show the reality of this rebellion that already began when he refuses to carry out the divine instructions against the Amalekites. In this perspective, the narrator has already associated witchcraft or divination with idolatry and rebellion, hence Saul's visit to the witch is the graphic illustration of the wisdom of Samuel's reasoning in 15:22-23.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, despite the absence of outright negative comments by the narrator, the narrator trusts his readers to make the connection between this present passage and the earlier rejection of Saul in ch. 15. In addition, the reference to prior removal of mediums and witches in the land, and the present quest of Saul to revive this practice already also condemned Saul, hence Arnold observed, "the narrator has already, by implication, condemned Saul's actions with this reference to the king's previous expulsion of mediums and spiritists."<sup>74</sup> In addition, Arnold

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reworked to involve Samuel in order to launch his criticisms against Saul. See McCarter, *I Samuel*, 421-23.

<sup>72</sup> Amit, *Hidden Polemics in Biblical Narrative*, 173.

<sup>73</sup> On the description of witchcraft and divination in Canaan and ancient Israel see Jean-Michel de Tarragon, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (vol. 3; ed. Jack M. Sasson; New York: Scribner, 1995), 2071-2081.

<sup>74</sup> Bill T. Arnold, "Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel," *CBQ* 66 (2004): 205. Similarly, Brettler also notes the irony of this act. He observes, "[t]his chapter opens with a wonderful irony—Saul, in his earlier righteous days, had banned necromancers from the land (28:3), but now must consult one himself, breaking both

made an important connection between the present passage with the prohibition of witchcraft and divination in Deut 18:10-11.<sup>75</sup> He notes, "the narrator goes even further in the critique of Saul, inasmuch as the text appears to have the pentateuchal proscriptions against such practices in view..."<sup>76</sup> In light of this intertextual framework, Arnold observed that the present text "has been intentionally redacted and placed in its canonical location in the Deuteronomistic History, with specific and precise terminology employed to characterize the ill-fated king further as part of a larger trajectory in the Books of Samuel."<sup>77</sup> Despite this intertextual connection between the text and Deuteronomy proposed by Arnold, he fails to note the presence of וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב in Deut 18: 11, the phrase means "the one who consults familiar spirits." Interestingly, the participle שֹׂאֵל comes from the same root שָׁאַל which the name Saul is derived from. Hence the narrator plays on the root of שֹׂאֵל to connect Saul to the familiar spirit or witchcraft (אוֹב) as prohibited in Deuteronomy.<sup>78</sup> This is particularly noticeable in the Chronicler's wordplay which summarises Saul's regime thus, "so Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also for asking *counsel of one that had a familiar spirit*, [לְשֹׂאֵל בְּאוֹב], to enquire of it [לְדַרְוֹשׁ]" (10: 13). The Deuteronomy text partly reads, "וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב וְיִדְעֵנִי וְדַרְשׁ אֶל-הַמֵּתִים." Consequently the Chronicler as well as the narrator of Samuel takes notice of the wordplay between the name of Saul and the main verb (שֹׂאֵל) in the Deuteronomist prohibitions against witchcraft, hence directly condemning the consultation of witchcraft by Saul. Ironically, the person whose name is derived from "ask" or "enquire" (שֹׂאֵל) went and consulted the spirits of the dead. There is a parody of Saul in this connection of his name with divination and the prohibition against witchcraft. Saul is the only character in biblical literature who is clearly depicted as consulting the dead in terms and wordings reminiscent of the prohibition of the Deuteronomist. The use of various forms of שֹׂאֵל is particularly important because of the dominant use of this same word in relationship to enquiring from Yahweh in 1 and 2 Samuel.<sup>79</sup> However, this in itself is not the

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the Deuteronomic law (Deut 18:10–11) and the royal edict." See Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, 103.

<sup>75</sup> Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, 103.

<sup>76</sup> Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, 103.

<sup>77</sup> Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, 206.

<sup>78</sup> Wim A. M. Beuken has noted the little attention given to the background materials in Deuteronomy and Leviticus which placed side-by-side normative forms of guidance and unacceptable forms of guidance in relationship to the present text. See Wim A. M. Beuken, "1 Samuel 28: the Prophet as 'Hammer of Witches,'" *JSOT* 6 (1978): 3-17.

<sup>79</sup> See 10:22; 14:37; 22:10, 13, 15; 23:2, 4; 28:6; 30:8; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:19, 23; 16:23. On the significance of שֹׂאֵל in first and second Samuel, Arnold rightly observed, "[i]n 1 and 2 Samuel, the phrase "inquire of YHWH/God"...[שֹׂאֵל] is used consistently as a technical expression for seeking an oracle of God whenever the expectation of

parody, but the parody lies in the caricature of Saul in contrast to his earlier depiction as a "prophetic figure" and now a practitioner of witchcraft. The reader is clearly dumbfounded of the awkward and incongruous nature of finding this same character in the house of a witch. At the end of Saul's life, Saul dined with a witch. Interestingly, this meal in the house of a witch (28:21-25) is directly placed in opposition with the prophetic meal which was served by the prophet Samuel at his first appearance in the book (10:22-27). In this portrait, the parody of Saul is complete. He is a prophet-like figure who ends up fellowshipping and dining with a witch.

Collaborating the preceding characterisation of Saul, for example, Pamela T. Reis has underscored the compromising nature of Saul's dining with the witch at Endor.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Brian Britt has shown the inversion of the prophetic typescene in the representation of Saul at Endor.<sup>81</sup> In particular, the inversion of the prophetic type scene here and the attribution of the same on Saul is noteworthy because it is largely to parody Saul as a former prophetic figure who is now in communion with witchcraft. In this sense, the passage is intentionally positioned to ridicule Saul as a prophet, and to disparage his claims and association with a prophetic tradition. For the narrator, Saul ends his last day in consultation with a witch rather than in communion with Yahweh and hence refuting and dismissing all the claims that seek possibly to associate Saul with a prophetic tradition.

## F CONCLUSION

At the beginning of his stories, the narrator presents the first image of Saul in 1 Samuel as a tall, energetic and charismatic figure.<sup>82</sup> This sensational picture of Saul was further enhanced with the clearly embossed prophetic glamour (10:1-11). Whatever its other surface importance, the sentimental portrait of Saul as a prophet figure by the narrator, seems on face value, to underscore the political and possible theological importance of the character of Saul in the book of 1 Samuel. At the end of the book, this initial depiction of Saul as a prophetic figure became a ploy to indict Saul especially when this text of a prophetic and charismatic Saul is placed in dialogue with a "profaned Saul" who on the last

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response is binary, that is, of a simple affirmative or negative answer." See Arnold, "Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel," 209. On the use of אִוֵּן in relationship to inquiring of Yahweh outside of Samuel see Cornelis van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 182-190.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Britt, "Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 37-58.

<sup>81</sup> See Pamela T. Reis, "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," *JSOT* 73 (1997): 3-23.

<sup>82</sup> On the handsomeness of Saul in 1 Samuel see Michael Avioz, "The Motif of Beauty in the Books of Samuel and Kings," *VT* 59 (2009): 341-359.

night of his death was found in the house of a witch at Endor. To maximise the force of his characterisation, the narrator indulges in subtle connection of Saul to the Deuteronomist prohibitions against witchcraft, thus consummating his anti-Saul agenda with the de-prophetisation of Saul. It is within this narrative protocol that the parody of Saul in 1 Samuel lies, and it is only at this point that the narrator's ideological agenda clearly emerges.

In retrospection, the narrator playfully moves the characterisation of Saul between the poles of real charismatic prophetic activity of the earlier passage to the full-fledged madness of the later Saul, and then ends this circle by placing Saul in the incongruous house of a witch. In this circle, the narrator deliberately placed Saul at the extreme end of the continuum of ancient guidance which moves clearly from prophecy to witchcraft/divination.<sup>83</sup> The movement between these extreme poles was gradually, but in the end the narrator mockingly moved Saul from the original prophesying character to a king who gives royal patronage to witchcraft, indeed making Saul in the process, "a patron of witchcraft." In the encounter with the witch, the caricature of Saul has now run its final course and it is totally complete because Saul's character is now inverted or placed opposite his earlier characterisation as a "prophetic figure." Unfortunately, it is this inverted image of Saul that had dominated and prevailed over his prophetic portraits. However, the modern reader must realise, that in the fiercest ideological battles of royal successions in ancient Israel, the submergence of the prophetic credentials of Saul by the court narrator of David, becomes a political necessity in order to sabotage the religious claims of the Saulide dynasty. Significantly, in the submergence of these prophetic portraits, one of the hidden aims of the narrator of Samuel is clearly achieved because he has successfully transformed a prophetic tradition that originally appears to attribute prophetic feats to the first Israelite king and creatively turned the same tradition against itself by amusingly portraying the same character as the practitioner of witchcraft, hence further de-legitimising Saul's dynasty in its prophetic claims to the throne of ancient Israel.

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<sup>83</sup> Anne Marie Kitz has questioned the validity of this polarity and has generally treated this continuum as one and the same. For this treatment of prophecy and divination as one and the same category see Anne Marie Kitz, "Prophecy as Divination," *CBQ* 65 (2003): 22-42.

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