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Abstract

This dissertation treats a set of six literary adaptations of the story of King David in the Hebrew Bible Books of Samuel. By attending to common modes of biblical reading and rewriting that straddle generic and disciplinary boundaries, the project explores why and how philological and historical questions and methods interact with imaginative, complex literary adaptation. These authors and scholars articulate and re-frame key twentieth-century concerns—such as the relations of modern cultures to history and religion, the nature of political power, authority, and legitimacy, and narrative poetics—in ways only made possible through new kinds of relationships with the biblical text founded on attentive close-reading, secular deconstructive gestures, or ambivalent returns to a traditional object.

The text of 1 and 2 Samuel is both remarkably unified by David himself and fraught with confusion: the juxtaposition of distinct historical sources, propagandistic elements, and multiple genres; a complex history of compilation and transmission and text-critical issues; and a supposedly central main character who is famously opaque and who is surrounded by competing interests and minor figures. The literary works this dissertation studies build from and with the ultimately messy biblical text and recursively return to it. Rather than simply taking the biblical text as inspiration, they stay with it in focused, attentive, even scholarly attitudes that produce narrative techniques. Read together, they evoke Samuel as a quintessential late twentieth-century source-text and crystallize versions of the text's tension between singularity and dispersion, authority and contingency. These authors probe the literary possibilities that emerge from grappling with David the legendary, enigmatic figure together with the particularities of the text which contains him.

Chapter 1 draws together Carlo Coccioli's *Mémoires du roi David* (1976) and Joseph Heller's *God Knows* (1984), two "autobiographical" texts in which David's doubled, often opaque characterization prompts reflection on problems of twentieth-century authorial identity. In these two novels, tensions between original and copy are also tensions between versions of selfhood performed and worked through by means of an unusual philologically-inflected style, in which both Davids attend closely to their lives as source-texts.

Chapter 2 reads Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Stefan Heym's *The King David Report* (1972) as novelistic reflections of seminal works by biblical scholars Martin Noth and Leonhard Rost, who critically represent the Book of Samuel as a compiled text. Faulkner and Heym produce novels as much about the actors who put together texts as about the central Davidic figures, and these compilers enact their own editorial epistemologies.

Chapter 3 treats Belgian playwright René Kalisky's experimental play *Dave au bord de mer* (1978), in which King Saul and David "play" modern versions of themselves on a beach in Israel. This chapter relates Kalisky's conflation of ancient and modern versions to David Ben-Gurion's reading of Samuel, exploring the exaggerated mediated mode by which the play deploys the biblical text and contemporary news in order to propagate a sense of destabilization in audiences, particularly around questions concerning Israel.

Chapter 4 turns to Grete Weil's *The Bride Price* (1988), a novel which juxtaposes alternating narratives recounted by ancient Michal, David's wife, and an aging German writer named Grete. The novel critiques certain modes of biblical and modern history as well as the patriarchal violence of nation-building and colonization and stages a tentative encounter between the two narrators, suggesting an alternative means of linking present and past history which re-centers women's "views."

Introduction: David Stories

> How fraught with background, in comparison, are characters like Saul and David! How entangled and stratified are such human relations as those between David and Absalom, between David and Joab! (Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," 12)

> In this elaborately wrought literary vehicle, David turns out to be one of the most unfathomable figures of ancient literature. He begins as the fair-haired boy of Israel. . . . Everyone seems to love him. He is beautiful, he is musical, and he is brave and brilliantly resourceful on the battlefield. He is also, from the start, quite calculating, and it can scarcely be an accident that until the midpoint of his story every one of his utterances, without exception, is made on a public occasion and arguably is contrived to serve his political interests. The narrative repeatedly reveals to us the churning fears and confusions within Saul while blocking access to David's inner world. Beset by mortal dangers, David is constantly prepared to do almost anything in order to survive. . . . He is in sum, the first full-length portrait of a Machiavellian prince in Western literature. . . . And yet, David is more than a probing representation of the ambiguities of political power. He is also an affecting and troubling image of human destiny as husband and father and as a man moving from youth to prime to the decrepitude of old age (Robert Alter, *The David Story* xviii)

> The narratives about Samuel, Saul, and David that make up our book have a heterogenous appearance even to the untrained eye. Numerous internal thematic tensions, duplications, and contradictions stand in the way of a straightforward reading of the story. The figure of Samuel dominates the first three chapters, then vanishes suddenly and completely in cc 4-6, only to return again in c 7. In c 8 kingship is depicted as wholly offensive to Yahweh, while in cc 9-10 the first king is anointed at Yahweh's command. Saul becomes king by lottery in 10:17-27 but, apparently, by popular proclamation in c 11. He seems to be rejected by Yahweh not once but twice (in cc 13 and 15), and he acquires the services of David not once but twice (in cc16 and 17). There are two accounts of David's betrothal to a daughter of Saul (c 18), two of his defection to the Philistine king of Gath (cc 21 and 27), and two of his refusal to take Saul's life (cc 24 and 26)." (P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* 12)

David's is a very famous story, retold by many authors, but the point of reference for those remembering him is not the same. To some (those who read Malcolm Gladwell's *David and Goliath,* for example) David is just the scrappy underdog, the little guy who beats the big guy in the story of David and the giant, Goliath. To others, he is the king who fell in love with

Bathsheba, as in the 1951 epic film, *David and Bathsheba,* or in the many famous paintings of a wistful king looking down at a bathing beauty. To others, he is the king who erred by committing adultery with Bathsheba, but who repented for it. To others still, he might belong in the pairing "David and Saul," the young harpist and the king, or with his usurping son, "David and Absalom," both doublings depicted by Rembrandt. Or, he might be seen as the model for Michelangelo's sculpture. For Christians, he might be remembered as a great king, a forefather of Jesus, particularly remembered at Christmas, as in Luke 1:30-33.[1] For some, he might be remembered as the namesake of the popular Jewish children's song, "David King of Israel Lives Today [David melech yisrael], itself a Talmudic reference to the future messiah, said to descend from David's line (Rosh HaShanah 25a 22). He might be remembered as a poet, the author of the psalms, the "sweet singer of Israel," or as King over a unified biblical Israel (2 Sam. 23.1).

As even these contemporary versions of David imply, the Book of Samuel[2] which contains most of David's story in the bible is full of good material—good stories, complex politics, prefiguration—and has been remembered for political and religious uses as well as for

[1] Verse number needed "The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. [32] He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. [33] He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (*NRSV* Luke 1:30-33).

[2] According to the Hebrew tradition, Samuel is one book (rather than in the Greek and Latin tradition, in which it was first divided, too long for one scroll). See McCarter, *I Samuel* 1-4 for a comprehensive discussion of this history. We might see the story as extending into 1 Kings 1-2, which describe David's death (Robert Alter's *David Story* includes these chapters; so does Rost in his description of "The Succession Narrative" 65-70). Some of this story is of course retold in Chronicles, and in the history of interpretation David is also linked to the psalms.
Eva Mroczek has recently explored the much more fluid, open textual world of Jewish antiquity which contrasts with the confining, familiar metaphor of "book" scholars use (3-13). "The Book of Samuel" is a construct in many senses, as is "The David Story," and the authors I examine open up these constructs in ways that parallel the "cultural receptivity to incompleteness, fragmentation, and possibility" Mroczek describes, though these authors also live in a world with fixed canons, editions, and biblical books (13). For clarity, I will write generally of "Samuel," or "The Book of Samuel."

its sometimes moving, sometimes shocking stories. For the medieval rabbis, David was a scholar-king and messianic precursor, a humble penitent (Diamond); to early Christians, he was the ideal king, a prefiguration of Christ and a summation of flawed humanity, and also famous for his penitence following the Bathsheba episode (Reemts, Kosuch). To interpreters in later Judaism, he represented an ideal Hasidic *tsaddiq*; to others in the 19th and 20th centuries, he was an ideal king and triumphant military leader who ruled over a united kingdom; and in Zionist memory, not only was he linked to the idea of an independent state, but also to Jerusalem itself, which David claimed; to some 20th century interpreters, he was a model for abuses of power (Davis). To post-reformation Christians, David was a vital component in political arguments over the reach of royal power; in the Enlightenment, David was criticized for moral flaws; in 19th and 20th century scholarly biblical interpretation, David was an important figure in the history of the Ancient Near East (Deming and Pioske).

In this dissertation, I read six late twentieth-century literary works (five novels and one play) from Europe and the United States. These works respond to David as he has been remembered, canonized, and codified, but are also particularly attuned to the biblical narrative text that contains David's story in the Hebrew Bible Book of Samuel. As my analysis of these works shows, new kinds of relationships with the biblical text—founded on attentive close-reading, secular deconstructive gestures, or confused returns to a traditional object—help articulate and re-frame key twentieth-century concerns, including the relations of modern cultures to history and religion, the nature of political power, authority, and legitimacy, and narrative poetics. These authors build also on the biblical text for unusual or experimental narrative modes.

Critics sometimes cast the upsurge of literary rewriting and adaptation culture more broadly along two poles: on the one hand, the impulse becomes part of the repetitious excess associated with postmodernism and reflects nothing more than endless recursion, in which the new text serves mostly as a critical or philosophical gesture.[3] On the other hand, adaptation performs critical subversion: by recasting old narratives, authors undo the authority of the from within and reasserting a new worldview drawn from but alien to the previous text.[4] A body of critical work on reception and rewriting, including that of scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders, has provocatively nuanced notions of temporal precedence and the model of postmodern rewriting as 'empty recursion.' Scholars such as Christian Moraru exemplify sophisticated analysis of rewriting's function in contemporary fiction and culture. Moraru argues for sustained, critical rewriting as a postmodern mode, but undermines the idea of postmodernity's empty repetition by showing how American rewriting critiques and restructures foundational myths propagated through American 19th century fiction.

This project is subtended by recent critical understandings of adaptation and rewriting, particularly those reflected in the work of Hutcheon and Sanders. Hutcheon, in her 2006 *A Theory of Adaptation* **(**revised in 2013), effectively destabilized the "fidelity criticism" which sought to evaluate works based on how they compared to the older, privileged model, and

[3] See Jameson, for whom postmodern pastiche functions as "blank parody," "without any of parody's ulterior motives," and the (postmodern) historical novel, "can no longer set out to represent the historical past: it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past" (17, 23); and Baudrillard's "Xerox degree of culture," in which "only copies, photos and duplicates are placed in circulation," and in which history is but pale versioning, "not even a nostalgic vision, but one recycled in the terms of post-modern intellectual comfort" (Jameson 17, 23; Baudrillard 74, 23-24). See also Moraru's discussion (7-9, 167-173).

[4] See Rushdie's *Times* article "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance;" the seminal volume that refers to it, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*; Moraru's discussion of postmodern rewriting as "counterwriting" and "revisionary;" and for example, a recent monograph entitled *Subverting Scripture: Critical Reflections on the Use of the Bible* (Moraru 9, 172).

instead substituted a theory in which the primacy of the "original," (what narratologist Gerard Genette terms the "hypotext [hypotexte]" in his 1982 treatment of "literature in the second degree [littérature au second degré]") is upended (Genette 16; Hutcheon xv, 6-7). For Hutcheon, adaptation is at once a "formal product," "process of creation" and "process of reception;" furthermore, for Hutcheon adaptations both stand on their own and in inevitable connection to the object they adapt: "An adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (7, 8, 9).[5] Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* similarly works against models of influence which might suggest the inferiority of the belated text, and instead celebrate the creative affordances of adaptation: "We need to find a way of discussing adaptation and appropriation that will register influence but not assume it is a stranglehold, that will see possibility, not prescription authored by what comes before . . ." (158).

In addition, Ziva-Ben Porat's description of a "prototypical rewrite" shares much with these theories and is also helpful in framing the kinds of works treated in this project—rewritings in particular. Ben-Porat distinguishes between allusive, intertextual works and the sustained, announced engagement which characterizes the works I examine:

> A prototypical rewrite is a literary product, perceived as new and independent, that, as an intertextual relation, explicitly calls attention to its being one; its major building blocks are those of the original text; its comprehension requires some familiarity with the original that is constantly activated during the reading of the rewrite and mental representation of it undergoes changes as a result of the interaction of the two texts; at no point does a prototypical rewrite allow the original to be discarded as irrelevant after it has been evoked; the mapping onto the original text is difficult but always possible; the mixture of faithfully or divergently transposed elements with those newly invented is

[5] Hutcheon gives a valuable disclaimer for her decision not to concentrate on "typologies:" "My decision not to concentrate on this particular aspect [faithfulness] of the relationship between adapted text and adaptation means that there appears to be little need to engage directly in the constant debate over degrees of proximity to the "original" that has generated those many typologies of adaptation processes" (*Theory* 7).

> open in terms of form, and particular configurations cannot be predicted on the basis of those that have already appeared; finally, a prototypical rewrite cannot be classified on the basis of specified formal criteria as belonging to another intertextual category. (6)

Ben-Porat emphasizes helpfully the way in which *both* texts—hypotext and hypertext—are inevitably changed for readers by the encounter the second text stages between them.

My work also stands against the backdrop of the rich and rapidly-developing field of biblical reception studies. In the past ten years, numerous new scholarly projects have taken up the Bible's post-biblical life through work on reception-history, the history of interpretation, and the Bible in culture[6]. Often, however, studies of biblical novels either concentrate on broad historical trends in interpretive tradition or develop categories and types of rewriting according to terminology (structuralist narratological models or those drawn from other disciplines), sometimes without room for sustained analysis. Furthermore, these surveys frequently seek to categorize literary reception in the broadest sense and often must elide the very different kinds of engagement inspired by different parts of the Hebrew Bible (or by the Hebrew Bible in contrast to New Testament writings).[7] The works of Brian Britt, Yvonne Sherwood, Samuel Tongue, and Magdalena Mączyńska and (on Moses, Jonah, Jacob, and Gospel novels respectively) represent exceptions to these trends in their attention to the particularities of each text and the way these contribute to rewriting/interpretative strategies. Similarly, Brennan Breed's *Nomadic Text*

[6] For example: de Gruyter's monumental *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, Seow's Illuminations commentary series; Blackwell's "Through The Centuries" commentaries, the Sheffield series Biblical Reception, and SBL program units including "The Bible in Film," "Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible, "Recovering Female Interpreters of the Bible," "Bible and Popular Culture," and "Use, Influence, and Impact of the Bible."

[7] These works include those such as Anthony Swindell, *Reforging the Bibl*e and other titles; Fisch, *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel*; and Leslie Stahlberg, *Sustaining Fictions: Intertextuality, Midrash, Translation, and the Literary Afterlife of the Bible*.

proposes important new topics for the field, including the of nature 'originality' and 'authority' with relation to the Bible.

Despite its popularity, surprisingly little scholarship is devoted to the afterlife of Samuel.[8] Rather than attempt a typology of Samuel rewritings, however, my project instead reads this set of texts closely. Particularly as many of these works are less well-known, and certainly have rarely been placed together, I feel it is important to allow space to move beyond simply understanding how the biblical text is transformed to observing how it is brought into conversation with contemporary contexts and the particular, very different situations and literary aims of each of these writers. Following Ben-Porat and Hutcheon, I read these as "multilaminated" "palimpsestuous" texts, asking what kind of encounter these novels and play set up between their new writing and the biblical precursor, but also attending closely to the new works *as* new works—the Bible received—with their own logics, styles, and literary, political, historical contexts (Hutcheon "Theory" 6).

In this introduction, I will first introduce the foundational text that animates the project: The Book of Samuel. I will briefly discuss the imbrication of literary-scholarly perceptions of the text, before turning to a discussion of Samuel's unique, "re-writerly" qualities as a simultaneously unified and unstable narrative. I then describe two other kinds of exemplary reuse

[8] Few works concentrate on the afterlife of 1 and 2 Samuel in particular: Nicholson's *The Three Faces of Saul* cogently analyses Saul's fall in 1 Samuel in relation to Lamartine and Hardy's reinterpretations, adapted to the tragic visions of their circumstances; and the essays in the edited volumes *The Fate of King David* and *The David Myth in Western Literature* treat a range of historical interpretations of David. From a purely literary perspective, Pia Eckstein's published dissertation compares the original narrative, taken as a structural unit, to a broad corpus of 20th century David retellings. Other notable treatments include Brauner, "Will the Real King David Please Stand Up: Unauthorized Versions of the David Story in Three Post-War Jewish Novels" and Alice Bach and Cheryl Exum on Bathsheba's afterlife in film and visual art. Given the range of fascinating literary versions of the story, however, the dearth of sustained scholarly engagements stands out.

of Samuel (the interpretations of the Book of Chronicles in the fourth century and of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime-minister, in the twentieth) both in order to give a sense of the stakes of Samuel rewritings and as models of some of the dynamics of literary re-use implicit elsewhere in my account. I will then give a sketch of King David's literary life in Europe and America before turning to the specificity of the novels and play at hand.

Bible and Literature?

One of this dissertation's wagers is that literary criticism, literary production and biblical studies (literary scholars and biblical scholars, but also biblical scholarship and literary fiction) are linked in ways that have not been fully explored. This project draws its interdisciplinarity directly from its objects, both from the text of Samuel itself, which has lent itself to intensive literary as well as historical-critical analysis, and from these works of fiction, which draw upon or evoke critical scholarship, build on its stances, and harness a spectrum of types of observations about the text for experimental fictional modes.

These works share with traditional critical biblical scholarship an attention to the unsettled qualities of biblical prose. We might predict the Bible would be recalled as a stabile edifice, (even if one to be overturned, undermined, or otherwise undone). For these authors, however, the text functions as a powerful, originary, destabilizing force.[9] At least since the rise of nineteenth-century historical-critical scholarship, biblical scholars have read the biblical text with an eye for the problems in the narrative, albeit in the service of various relatively empirical

[9] Mączyńska notes something similar in the Gospel novels she studies, which she terms "scriptural metafictions" with reference to Linda Hutcheon's term ("historiographical metafiction)." "What brings them together is that they emphasize the constructed, contingent nature of canonical religious writings" (12).

goals (to outline the possible history of composition, to imagine the *Sitz im Leben* for separate sections, to trace the ancient history behind the account). The authors treated in this dissertation, too, do not read the text as a unified historical or literary account, but as a document bristling with contradictions. Their works trace the contours of and re-animate the instability offered up by the biblical narrative. What is more, they crystallize in their fictional modes possible conceptions of the Book of Samuel in particular, a text in which tensions between unity and disunity, authority and contingency, are markedly prominent.

Samuel as Literary-Critical Monument

The Book of Samuel, which contains the lengthy narrative of David's life, has an established reputation both for its literary power and for the complex historical-critical interpretation to which it has been subjected. Though literary and historical-critical scholarship of the Bible are often perceived as highly separate endeavors, readings of Samuel consistently belie such separation, even when they would perhaps most like to enforce it. In some sense, the literary fictions studied here reflect the historical imbrication of these ways of seeing Samuel.

Samuel is a rich literary text. Indeed, much of the burgeoning literary school of biblical interpretation in America, Europe and Israel in the late 1970s and 1980s dedicated itself to studying the narratives within it. Menakhem Perry and Meir Sternberg's "The King Through Ironic Eyes," (an analysis of the David and Bathsheba narrative in 2 Samuel 11) in large part initiated renewed interest in the literary study of the Bible;[10] Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical*

[10] The literary study of the Bible of course has a long history that predates the resurge of interest in the 1970s (see Weitzman 191-196 for a brief description of this history and the development of the field).

Narrative (1981) relies heavily on narrative portions of Samuel.[11] Though many remember Erich Auerbach's analysis of Abraham and Isaac's story in the first chapter of *Mimesis,* "Odysseus' scar," Auerbach employs his now-classic formulation of biblical narrative's terse depth ("fraught with background") to describe characters from Samuel: "How fraught with background, in comparison, are characters like Saul and David! How entangled and stratified are such human relations as those between David and Absalom, between David and Joab!" (12).

To these critics, Samuel ought to be read as a literary text, and a marvelous one at that. Alter describes Samuel's "fictional shaping," and called it an "elaborately wrought literary vehicle" on an analogy with Shakespeare's History plays (*Art of Biblical Narrative* 47). Adele Berlin, in her *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983) calls the David stories "among the best examples of biblical narrative" (24). And David himself is of course the unifying focal point of the text, the stable term in the doublings Auerbach describes (Saul and David; David and Absalom; David and Joab). Auerbach also highlights the consistency of a character whose entire life is framed: "fraught with their development, sometimes even aged to the verge of dissolution, they show a distinct stamp of individuality" (18). Robert Alter, similarly, praises David's characterization as "one of the most unfathomable figures of ancient literature" and emphasizes the literary development of his complete life: "The story of David is probably the greatest single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life evolving by slow stages through time, shaped and altered by the pressures of political life, public institutions,

[11] Adele Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* relies on Samuel as well, and David Gunn, another foundational literary Bible scholar initiated his work with *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (1978) and *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (1980). J.P. Fokkelman's multi-volume *Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel* also appeared in 1981.

family, the impulses of body and spirit, the eventual sad decay of the flesh" (Alter, *David Story* xviii; ix).

For biblical scholars concerned with text-critical, or historical-critical issues, the David Story was an important key to understanding ancient Israelite history. As Marc Zvi Brettler summarizes in *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*, scholars initially conceived of Samuel as Israelite *history*—a helpful recounting of the past—but transitioned in the twentieth century to conceiving of it as *historiography*, necessitating more careful attention to kinds of rhetoric, ideology, and shaping within the text (Brettler 207). Yet whether or not scholars always linked their study of Samuel's "literary history" (the critical analysis of its possible composition history) to different ideological or theological bents, Samuel has long been understood as composed of distinct, sometimes conflicting elements. In the early 19th century, scholars identified distinct "strands" within the text (Eichorn, Thenius), a theory later taken up by others, (including Julius Wellhausen) who distinguished two "stratum": an early, pro-monarchic strand and a later, post-exilic, Deuteronomistic one wary of monarchy (McCarter, *I Samuel* 12-13).[12] Later, these strands were conceived as extensions of the J and E Pentateuchal sources (Cornill, Budde) edited later by a Deuteronomistic hand (McCarter 13). Hugo Gressmann, however, influentially reconceived the work as a combination of fragments, rather than strands, in a break from the model of Pentateuchal criticism (McCarter 13). Leonhard Rost (*The Succession to the Throne of David,* 1926) also imagined Samuel as comprised of a variety of sources of varying ages, edited together; in particular, Rost drew attention to a large edited narrative which he called

[12] As McCarter puts it, "Deuteronomism was a style of theology that drew its major tenets from the teachings of the Book of Deutreronomy. It stressed centralization of worship in Jerusalem, obedience to Deuteronomic law, and the avoidance of any kind of apostasy, all according to a rigid system of reward and punishment" (1964 14-15).

"The Succession Narrative". In 1943, Martin Noth posited a Deuteronomistic history stretching from Joshua through 2 Kings, edited by an exilic editor who brought all the sources together and added his own anti-monarchic additions (McCarter 14-15).[13] McCarter has argued for a "prophetic history" put together sometime before the Deuteronomistic editing took place, and for the "history of David's rise" as a Solomonic apology ("Apology").

Mountains of scholarship have been devoted to isolating proposed units and sources, themselves variously deemed edited together, within the text (most canonically the History of David's Rise, the Ark Narrative, The Succession History, as well as looser units like "The Saul Cycle," (McCarter, *I Samuel* 26) and the concluding "miscellany") and where they may be deemed to begin or end, what time period they might have been composed or edited, and what stance they or pieces of them take. Particularly following readings of the Book of Chronicles which understood Chronicles as revision of the history described in Samuel, the text has been understood as a combination of ideologically inflected components (McCarter; McKenzie; Halpern; Brettler). Marc Zvi Brettler, for example, describes the intermingling of pro-Saulide and pro-Davidic accounts in the first half of Samuel and isolates a section he calls "David as Proper King":

> 1 Sam. 14:52 through 2 Sam. 8:15, "David as Proper King," starts by legitimating Saul and ends by legitimating David. At its beginning, Saul is embattled (1 Sam. 14:52) and sinful (1 Sam. 15); at its conclusion, David is strong (2 Samuel 8) and righteous (2 Sam. 8:15). This unit is distinct from the surrounding material; as noted, the material preceding it is favorable to Saul while that which follows points to David's sins and (the resulting) military weakness. (100)[14]

[13] This imagined "Deuteronomistic History" has its own complex history of interpretation: Frank Moore Cross proposed a Josianic and later Exilic version (two layers), and Veijola and others have posited multiple layers of redaction. See Römer as well as the essays in Knoppers and McConville's volume for expansive discussions of Noth's work, its legacy, and its revision in more recent research.

[14] For more on "royal Davidic ideology," see Brettler 101-102. Brettler also refers to the "anti-Davidic" elements in the narrative, for example 2 Sam. 11-12 (the Bathsheba/Uriah episode) (98).

A dizzying array of scholarship debates the dating of the text, its various component parts, their genres, and even the possible historicity of David himself.

Yet though the old chestnuts of "synchronic" and "diachronic" readings[15], or "the pre-texts" rather than the "real text," as one literary critic put it, (Polzin 6) imply that literary and historical-critical readings of the biblical text remain fundamentally separate and irreconcilable, scholars from both sides of the aisle cannot help but acknowledge both aspects of Samuel: for this text, it seems, the literary is also the historical-critical, and the historical-critical acknowledges and builds on literary interpretation (or sometimes leans towards a naïve imaginative and artistic recreation of its own). So, Robert Alter acknowledges the work of philological scholarship and imagines that the "author of the David story thought of himself as a historian. . . . It is conceivable that he had some written reports of these events at his disposal or at any rate drew on oral accounts of the events," ("David Story" xxi) and even Auerbach himself, whose work has been read as a tacit defense of Jewish literature against the anti-Semitic Christian guild of traditional biblical scholarship,[16] sees and responds to a sense of compiled sources and styles within the text, even acknowledging the work of biblical "scientific criticism":

> . . . in the stories of David the historical report predominates. Here too, much that is legendary still remains, as for example the story of David and Goliath; now the difference between legend and history is in most cases easily perceived by a reasonably experienced reader. It is a difficult mater, requiring careful historical and philological training, to distinguish the true from the synthetic or the biased in a historical presentation; but it is easy to separate the historical from the legendary in general. Their structure is different;" "In the stories of David, the legendary, *which only later scientific criticism makes recognizable as such*, imperceptibly passes into the historical." (19, 20, emphasis mine)

[15] Sherwood and Moore describe "the dichotomy of the literary and the historical, or in much-loved terms that smacked reassuringly of scientific specialization, the "synchronic" and the "diachronic" (41).
[16] See, for example, James I. Porter: "In taking the particular stance that he does towards the Old Testament, Auerbach is also taking on contemporary German biblical criticism, both academic and popular (or rather völkisch)" (Porter 120).

In biblical scholarship, Wellhausen himself, father of source criticism, acknowledged the narrative manipulation of the events, albeit in a somewhat nasty backhanded compliment (actions are "faithfully reported, and the palace intrigue which placed Solomon upon the throne is narrated with a naïveté which is almost malicious" (qtd. in Joel Rosenberg 100).[17] Herman Gunkel, too, describes "the character sketches of a somewhat mature art" in Samuel (54); Martin Noth notes the Deuteronomistic History's "intrinsic value as a monument to a particular kind of theological interpretation of history and as a literary achievement," (78); and, perhaps most strikingly, Leonhard Rost, whose work has thoroughly historical-critical aspirations, examines the style of different perceived authors, including the author of the Succession History, which he deems "a quite outstanding piece of Hebrew narrative art . . . perhaps, indeed, in the complexity of its plot, in the wealth of personalities taking part and in the fine organization of its structure, the most outstanding of all" (102).

Indeed, a series of scholarly-popular biographies of David in the past twenty years attest to the ease with which biblical scholars apparently cannot help but read this story while imagining some kind of novelistic reading of it.[18] Many of these biographies, perhaps especially McKenzie's *King David: A Biography* and Baruch Halpern's *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* link their work to artistic reinterpretation. Halpern's description of his activity, along with his punchy title, sounds like an assignment for a novelization: "To escape the

[17]"*Prolegomena to the History of [Ancient] Israel,* "Preliminaries" n. 3" (Rosenberg 238 n. 1). Rosenberg also highlights the "marriage" of "historical verisimilitude and literary artfulness" in "modern characterizations of the story, in investigations of a historical or source-historical type" (100).
[18]*Power, Lust and Betrayal in Biblical Times* (Landay 1998); *King David: A Biography* (McKenzie 2000); *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Halpern, 2001). *King David: The Real Life of the Man Who Ruled Israel* (Kirsch 2001); *The Sins of King David: A New History* (Greenberg 2002); *King David and His Reign Revisited* (Wright 2013); *The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero* (Baden 2014).

framework of the historical narrative, we need only imagine the events from a political and ideological position opposite that of the text. The present book is . . . a glimpse of David as his enemies saw him. . . . In the absence of a competing narrative from antiquity, it falls to us to construct one. . . . we permit the people unable to express their own view in the text to do so in our imagination" (Halpern xv).[19] For McKenzie, too, "the Deuteronomistic history "provides the paints and canvas for our biographical portrait of David," and the text of Samuel "reads like a modern soap opera, with plenty of sex, violence, and struggles for power" (154). We could also include the less scholarly, more pious *Life of David* (Pinsky 2005) and *David: The Divided Heart* (Wolpe 2014), both of which more explicitly meld interpretation drawn from both scholarly resources and the history of David's reception and interpretation into composite fictional reimaginings of David's life.

The mixture of separation and complementarity between literary and biblical-critical interpretations of Samuel is related to the unity and discontinuity of the text itself. The authors I discuss are drawn to this text in part because it holds in unresolved tension a particularly present balance between centrality and diffusion, unity and discontinuity, on a wide range of levels. Samuel represents an authoritative document and an ideal figure which are simultaneously multiple, fragmented, and full of provocative inconsistencies. It is in the area between these two poles that the works studied here probe, experiment, feel-out, scintillate.

On the one hand, the sheer prominence of David himself makes it difficult to see the text as anything other than deeply unified by David's presence, David's rise to power, David's

[19] The recent trend for "take-downs" of David, responding to the perceived apology of the biblical text, was anticipated by Voltaire's virulent play, *Saul et Davide: Tragédie* (1767), itself based on an earlier English pamphlet, as well as by Pierre Bayle's *Philosophical Dictionary* (Deming and Pioske 212).

decline and death. Similarly, the turn to centralization and the monarchy read as a guiding principle for the entire narrative, inaugurated by Samuel's speech in 1 Samuel 7, continued in the reign of Saul, then David, and shored up by David's conquests and the promise of the temple under Solomon. It is hard to stress enough the strangeness of David's centrality in the biblical account. The story stretches across huge swathes of biblical material. The Joseph "novella", a similarly developed narrative focusing on a single character, represents a large fragment, but only a fragment, of Genesis (37-47). Though Moses' story is extended, David's character is highly developed, if ambiguous, and readers see him engage in a large variety of complicated relationships.

But David's centrality is counterweighted by his story's inclusion in a particularly messy text. Regina M. Schwartz and Brian Britt have both productively explored the way the text maintains both unity and disjuncture. In "The Histories of David: Biblical Scholarship and Biblical Stories," Schwartz argues that, under the influence of German historicism, biblical scholars have been too quick to separate strands of the text by privileging narrative development, ignoring the deeper discontinuities she sees structuring the text. As she puts it, "It is possible that conflicts and ruptures like these are frequent because this text is not simply about the people, the nation, or its king *amassing* power, but is instead everywhere ambivalent about power. Even as the story of Israel depicts its efforts to become "like the nations," it depicts that very project as pernicious, for Israel depends for its identity on its distinctiveness, on being drawn "from the nations" (200).[20] She highlights the instability in the text's depiction of the monarchy ("rather than presupposing settled answers, these stories are intently interested in exploring such questions of definition") (200). Perhaps even more provocative for the purposes of my project,

[20] See 1 Samuel 8.20.

Brian Britt's article reads the character of David himself as a meta-tragic "commensurating machine" who must be contorted in impossible ways to fulfill at once the competing functions of the text's component ideologies, including "the demands of the distant past, which recall David and Saul; the more recent past, which includes subsequent kings in the Davidic dynasty and eventual exile; and those of the Deuteronomistic ideology that takes form during the exile" (214, 215). In Britt's reading, the hybrid David is forced to attempt to holds these competing versions in balance—the "heroic, anti-heroic, and post-Exilic" (214).

Whether within the text, as in Britt's reading, or as a figure remembered outside it, David holds together an unusually fragmented and disjointed part of the Bible, even for an ancient narrative.[21] Britt and Schwartz discuss the competing ideological demands of the text by making reference to the different layers of redaction scholars perceive within the text (the anti and pro-monarchic, for example), but these kinds of discrepancies proliferate in this text. As Robert Alter notes, the narrative he sees as unified by its central figures has been treated as complex: "to specialists who have exercised painstaking analysis in order to expose an intricate patchwork of sources and historical layers in the book as a whole and in most of its episodes, it may seem a provocation or an expression of ignorance to speak at all of the story of Samuel, Saul and David," and yet even Alter acknowledges that disjunctures occasionally appear even to a reader who is not a specialist in historical-critical methods ("Even a reader looking for unity must

[21] Of course, any ancient text is impossible to define textually and comes with a host of editorial material which may try to isolate a version but of course will never give access to any phantom 'original' Ur-text. Nevertheless, this narrative in particular is strikingly difficult to pin down and is structured by a combination of centrality/unity and discontinuity. Julie Sanders writes on the particular potentiality for transformation in Ovid (64-70) and Genette shows something similar for the ways in which the Odyssey *is* a a hypotext itself (its "secondary character is inscribed in its subject [Son caractère *second* est inscrit dans son sujet même]" and the reasons for which it inspires hypertextual retellings (246-247).

concede that certain passages are not of a piece with the rest") (Alter *David Story* ix).[22] The text-critical scholar Kyle P. McCarter, author of the celebrated Anchor Bible Commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel, reflects more forcefully on the disjunctures in 1 Samuel he feels would be obvious to even an "untrained" reader: "The narratives about Samuel, Saul, and David that make up our book have a heterogenous appearance even to the untrained eye. Numerous internal thematic tensions, duplications, and contradictions stand in the way of a straightforward reading of the story."[23] McCarter's list of these discrepancies, cited above, usefully surveys the different kinds of difficulties the text supplies, only in its first half. We could name others, most famously, perhaps, the conflicting accounts of Goliath's death: Did David kill Goliath, or did Elhanan? (1 Sam. 17 vs. 2 Sam. 21.19), or did Elhanan kill Goliath's *brother* (1 Chron. 20.5)? These doublings and disjunctures are clues to possible distinct sources and differing redactional layers of the text, in dizzying possibilities.

At a slightly larger remove from the text, the narrative is perhaps even more untidy and generically indeterminate. We could cite the apparently different genres or sources housed within the whole (Robert Alter speaks of a "collage of sources"), including pieces that look like battle reports and chronicles, personnel lists, old folktales, interpolated poetry, Deuteronomistic didacticism and propagandist writings, as well as more familiar narrative portions (Alter, *David Story* ix). Scholars and readers have long debated the degree to which the narrative, or pieces of it, should be regarded as history or fiction, or historicized fiction, or something else entirely. Though David himself recurs again and again, his character is famously opaque, is surrounded

[22] Alter sees in the narrative, however, an "architectonic cohesion," though he does (x) acknowledge light Deuteronomistic editing (particularly in David's death-bed speech to Solomon in 1 Kings 2) (see Alter xi-xiii). See Britt, "Davidmachine" 212-214 for an illuminating discussion of Alter's view of the literary as opposed to its religious redaction.

[23] But see Schwartz for a critique of this idea of a "straightforward reading" (192-197).

by layers of minor characters, and is often subsumed by political and military events, and competing pro-Saulide sources that sometimes render even him secondary. This text may contain a David Story which readers piece together as they go, but it is not *only* a David Story, and even if David's centrality manages to just hold it together—like Britt's Davidmachine—its edges remain ragged, its seams apparent.

These difficulties, visible even to an "untrained eye," are complicated further by Samuel's famously fraught textual history, not to mention the text's inevitable shaping in translations, editions, and commentary. The Septuagint versions of the text are markedly different in length from the Masoretic text, which prompted scholars to try to determine which might be more original. Text-critical study dominated work on Samuel in biblical scholarship of the 19th and early 20th century, as difficulties establishing the text often delayed many attempts at other kinds of analysis (McCarter, *I Samuel* 12). The Masoretic text is "in poor repair," and comparison to Septuagint translations and other versions was aided—and complicated—further by discoveries at Qumran in 1952. McCarter summarizes the impossibility of locating a satisfactory version in any of the exemplars we have: ". . . there are several ancient witnesses that compete for the attention of the modern text critic, each with a claim to originality at any given point in Samuel. It is no longer possible to defend a textual reconstruction that relies exclusively on the MT or turns to the versions only when the MT is unintelligible" (McCarter, *I Samuel* 8).[24] And beyond even the indeterminacy at the level of the Hebrew text (which manuscript version, or which critical edition) for modern literary readers the text is multiplied and mediated further

[24] See McCarter, *I Samuel* 5-14 for a history and survey of text-critical issues in Samuel. See Tov 1-22 for an introduction to the difficult subjectivity required by textual criticism and the fine line requiring outlining how a textual critic should proceed—and the impossibility of any Ur-text existing outside the mind of scholars.

by the variety of translations, editions, and paratextual materials through which the narrative is filtered.[25]

From a literary perspective, moreover, even when read through the disjunctures as a literary 'whole' of some kind—a bit like a realist novel—, the tension between unity and fragmentation in David and his text manifests in the character network that surrounds him (Woloch). In *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel,* Alex Woloch's book treats the idea of character as an implied person and as an element in a narrative structure, and finds a generative tension between these two poles (referent/structure) (12-15). Interacting individuals are also intersecting character spaces, and "the space of a particular character emerges only vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially revolve around him" (18). David's story might be compared to Elizabeth Bennett's story in *Pride and Prejudice* as Woloch describes it: Lizzy's centrality in particular emerges in interaction with other minor characters, and our access to her interiority is in some sense contingent on the gradual distortion of these others (the "strong protagonist, the intensity and vigor of whose personality seems to almost compel minorness all around her") (35).

In 1 and 2 Samuel, David himself is often an opaque figure, as Alter and Auerbach stress, but we also see him, inevitably, in contrast to and in light of a panoply of more or less minor characters that move through his narrative. We perceive David as he moves through this stream that engulfs him, through impassioned admirers, critics, supporters, and enemies. And though the figures may not be equipped with Dickensian descriptors, we appreciate their perspective

[25] Textual difficulties have consequences, of course. For example, the King James Version describes Elhanan as killing Goliath's *brother* in 2 Sam. 21.19, whereas many MT manuscripts (and translations) leave out this probably interpretive variant, leaving the version which might undermine David's legendary act.

nonetheless, often most clearly through their speech (Jonathan's open affection, Michal's pained sarcasm, Ahimelech's bumbling piety, Tamar's forthright pragmatism, Joab's violent communication, Absalom's bravura, etc.) These are more than mere agents—although many inevitably either contribute to David's progress or indirectly to our picture of him—for we often get a glimpse of interiority, a shade of depth or perspective. Alice Bach describes something similar in the minor female biblical characters she treats: "the female literary figure experiences a moment of focalization, a moment in which she refuses to blink" (*Women* 130). We might think of Tamar's fervent speech or Michal's bitter one, Jonathan's oath, in which he begs for his line's remembrance even as he predicts its downfall, Shimei's crazed outcry, Joab's shocked reproach.[26]

As Woloch writes, a minor character "comes to command a peculiar kind of attention in the partial occlusion of his fullness," (40). Our remembrance of his or her *character* as implied person is always caught up in our memory of their evanescent role in the discourse: "The minor character is always drowned out within the totality of the narrative, and what we remember about the character is never detached from how the text, for the most part, makes us forget him. . . . it is the disappearance of the minor character (for *every* minor character does—by strict definition—disappear) that, finally, is integrated into his or her interesting speech or memorable gesture" (40, 38). In the David narrative, the minor characters are circumscribed by their very status in the text. We know we will not know them fully (exactly how does Paltiel's relationship with Michal inspire such poignant weeping, for example?) and are shocked or touched or intrigued by the detail for a moment before it—and the character—are swept off the scene (2 Sam. 3.16). David's daughter Tamar appears properly, if strikingly, in only a few biblical verses; Tamar' brief protest

[26] 2 Sam. 13, 2 Sam. 6, 1 Sam. 20, 2 Sam. 16, 2 Sam. 19.

and rape makes way for the drama of her brothers and the king and the political stakes to come (2 Sam. 13). Even Saul's son Jonathan and his loyal army commander Joab, faithful companions in one way or another who accompany David through his life, are cut off firmly, the story cauterized around the wound of their absence. The scene of Joab's death is a particularly striking allegory for a minor character's demise: Joab is cut down at the altar, defined as merely a perpetrator of two evil deeds, cursed, and finally buried at a distance from the court—in the wilderness (1 Kings 2:29-34). The picture we see of David is negotiated through his character-space's intersection with those of these figures (55 or so in total, according to Alter's "Cast of Characters") and the process of David's space closing over that of the others. David's political and historical authority as King is figured in the text's character system (385-389).

Ironically, then, a narrative which on the one hand foregrounds David's centrality and which narrates attempts to consolidate political power (as well the personal and political fall-out that results) also expresses a similar interplay between diffusion and multiplicity and unified centrality in its very form. Tensions between the text's authority and its composite structure, mix of ideologies and genres are figured in the tensions between David's power and the occasionally polarizing events and characters which surround him, but ultimately cede to him. As narrative theorist Sophie Rabau writes of possible intertextual forms in the context of adaptation, "A text carries its past, which it determines more than it is determined by it; inversely, a text carries its future, which it contains in potential if not in deed [Un texte est porteur de son passé qu'il determine plus qu'il n'est determiné par lui: inversement un texte est porteur de son future qu'il contient en puissance sinon en acte]" (*Intertextualité* 37). Samuel seems to carry its future in this way. The works studied in this dissertation respond to Samuel's contradiction: it supplies readers

with the authority of sacred scripture and a famous, perfect king who resides in a text which was never perfect, never whole, and never comprised a unitary, authoritative story at all.

A First Rewriting: Chronicles as Model

Any new version recasts a story or text according to new or different—contemporaneous—aesthetic traditions and generic standards. Remarkably, the text of 1 and 2 Samuel (and its various translations) reworked by more recent authors coexists in the canonized Hebrew Bible alongside its first adaptation in 1 and 2 Chronicles. Examining the work of the Chronicler underscores the strange way David's story calls out for reuse, for the Chronicler both establishes David's story as always-already rewritten, perhaps already inextricable from its first interpretation, and as a text that contains within it conflicting and juxtaposed emphases, ideologies, and versions of retold events. Even in its 'canonical state', the text both presents the King's authority and his indeterminacy: he has always lived within multiple versions.

As we have seen, scholars consider the texts of 1 and 2 Samuel we have as part of a larger Deuteronomistic History tracing Israel's growth and relation to leadership and stretching from the book of Deuteronomy through the book of Kings. Debates rage on concerning the identit[ies] of the author[s] or editor[s] responsible for putting together the larger work, the degree of authority these individuals had over the content, and the ultimate slant or theological conclusion of the text. Many agree, however, that 1 and 2 Samuel and David's story fits in some sense into this larger narrative complex.

Following the groundbreaking work of Sara Japhet, scholars also now consider the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles as revised history undertaken by a single historian, possibly in the late 4th

century BCE.[27] The Chronicler recasts Israel's history—from Exodus through the end of Kings, with particular emphasis on David and Solomon's reign—for a contemporary audience. Among his biblical and extra-biblical sources, it seems he had access to a Vorlage very close to our Samuel and Kings (probably not precisely the Masoretic Text, but a slightly different version) and revised the story, drastically at times, to reflect his understanding of causation, reward and punishment and to establish the Davidic (and Solomonic) reign as a kind of Israelite golden age.

The Chronicler's re-presentation of Israelite history (particularly material from 1 and 2 Samuel) functions like a literary re-working that both attends to and moves beyond its hypotext. As Marc Zvi Brettler notes, Samuel was likely known to the Chronicler's readers, and the new work sometimes expects familiarity with the old: "Thus, the Chronicler was most likely not writing a history to replace Samuel and Kings, but desired to reshape the way in which these books would be read and remembered" (21-22). Japhet stresses both the Chronicler's literary skill and complex relationship to sources, a combination of close attention and "a skillful blend of omissions, additions and changes along the way, which transforms the final composition into a story which is not only divergent, but sometimes contrasting" (Japhet 15). With regard to our part of the larger story, the Chronicler bowdlerizes many episodes which present David in a less-than-glorious light (the ambiguity of his rise to kingship, the Bathsheba affair, the civil war) and reduces the entirety of Saul's narrative arc to a brief and didactic account of his death. Often, too, adaptation requires complex narrative changes to recast the story for a new audience and

[27] McKenzie summarizes research and dates the text to between between 400 and 250 BCE (McKenzie 2004).
McKenzie describes the emphases of the Chronicler as "Davidic-Solomonic Kingship, the temple, "all Israel," [united under Davidic kingship, and the ideal for future restoration] and divine retribution and reward" (2004 32). See also Brettler for an extended discussion of the Chronicler's "reshaping the known" (20).

according to new aesthetic aims. For example, as Japhet shows, Chronicles 21 reframes and expands the brief story of David's census and the resulting plagues and makes what was a rather uncategorized episode a crucial example of divine providence that renders David human and fallible while still affirming his kingdom's preeminence. David here becomes the poignantly consummate leader, himself emphasizing his particular sin and the desired result of his repentance (Japhet 375-6). Both through large-scale omissions and reframing and smaller, subtle episodic adaptations, Chronicles is a different David story. Even in the 4th century BCE, David was already shifting.

Furthermore, reading Chronicles as historical revision has been hugely productive for biblical scholarship: with regard to the David story, the example of Chronicles provides a model of altered perspective making it possible to imagine conflicting ideologies and emphases at work within 1 and 2 Samuel. The story might contain propagandistic narrative along with other possible generic categories and probably underwent a process of textual development that involved artistic use of old stories, reworking at one or many stages, as well as the insertion of new material. In many cases, the way Chronicles 'solves' certain problems in the text (David's and God's often mysterious motivations, unclear causality and narrative juxtapositions, the lack of an overarching purpose) and highlights the discontinuities and confusion in the original.

In these ways, Chronicles exemplifies some aspects of rewriting as it has been theorized more recently, such as in Ziva Ben-Porat's idea of prototypical rewriting, implemented through transgression and fidelity and the activation of a reading pact (comprehension of this rewriting "requires some familiarity with the original that is constantly activated during the reading of the rewrite and mental representation of it undergoes changes as a result of the interaction of the two texts") and Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, which disrupts the relation between "priority

and authority" (Ben-Porat 6, Hutcheon 9). This first early rewriting points to internal reworking and confusion in the original that seems to allow, or even encourage the rewriting itself; it exemplifies the way an author's new interpretation negotiates adherence to a model with adaptation to contemporary thematic and aesthetic needs; and it provides a strangely literal example of hypertext and hypotext working in tandem—stitched together.

Ben-Gurion's David

In the long history of David's re-use, a particular strain of Zionist re-imagining might be read as a more recent counterpart to the work of the Chronicler; just as the Chronicler's version adapted David's story for a new political environment, some Israeli state-builders, including the first prime minister David Ben-Gurion, drew the Bible forward as part of a new national history. Whether or not the authors treated in this dissertation acknowledge it explicitly in their works, Ben-Gurion's re-use of the Bible (and Samuel in particular) was a prominent public 'version,' against whose backdrop many of their retellings must inevitably be seen. If Chronicles represents a canonic *ancient* reimagining, Ben-Gurion's interpretation, though not explicitly a re-writing, is perhaps the most influential contemporary 'version' of David's story.

As Anita Shapira has shown in an article tracing David Ben-Gurion's changing relationship towards the Bible, Israel's first prime minister relied on the Bible in writings and speeches after the establishment of the state and the Arab-Israeli war that followed as part of a new way of seeing Jewish history, a new version of events which would support and ground the nascent nation. Ben-Gurion de-emphasized much of Jewish history—including the Shoah, the shtetl, and diasporic life, the history of rabbinic exegesis and Talmud—in order to link instead the ancient *biblical* world with Israel's present and its future. Shapira writes that immediately

following independence in 1948, the "course of the conquest of the land awakened mythological associations," in Ben-Gurion, who saw in Israel's triumph the Book of Joshua re-played. For Ben-Gurion, furthermore, only those living in Israel could truly interpret the Bible:

> Only a people living in the country and in its sovereign control can read the Book of Books with an open eye and intuitive understanding, a book created in that land by that same people. Only a generation that renewed its independent existence in the ancient land will comprehend the spirit and soul of his ancestors, who acted, fought, conquered, created, worked, suffered, contemplated, sang, loved and prophesied in that same homeland. (qtd. in Shapira 658)[28]

As Shapira shows, for Ben-Gurion, the link between ancient biblical and contemporary Israel was of paramount importance: though he attended closely to the words and values expressed in the prophets, he also emphasized the specific actions and location in the land of the Bible:

> On the other hand, his true interest in the Bible lay in the concrete exploits narrated there, flesh-and-blood events like Jewish settlement in Palestine, the exodus from Egypt, the great conquests by Joshua, David and Uzziah, the Return to Zion in the period of Cyrus and Darius. At the very heart of his interests, over against the philosophical-ethical aspects, stood the Bible's historical dimensions – they served as overwhelming evidence for the antiquity of Jews in the land. As early as 1949 he had stressed the importance of Jewish archeological excavations: "All their exploits actualize our past and testify to our historical continuity in the land." (659)[29]

In contrast to later traditions of Israeli national commemoration, which celebrate more recent historical events such as the battle of Tel Hai in combination with classical and ancient

[28] "'The Spiritual Revolution'" speech at a gathering of professionals, 15 Jan. 1949, *Vision and Path,* Vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1951)" (Shapira 673 n. 46). This new way of interpreting the Bible, from the context of life in the land, corresponds with the use of the Bible as an exploratory guide for those of the Second Aliyah. As Shapira describes, the Bible "imbued the relation between the People and the Land with a sense of reality and was used as a *vade mecum* to the geography, for a and fauna of Palestine. Members of the Second Aliyah, Bible in hand, wandered on foot through Palestine and would identify its antiquities" (647).

[29] "From the Sixth Conference on the Knowledge of Eretz Uisrael, Sukkot 1951, Yediot ha-hevrah ha-ivrit le-yediat Eretz Yisrael ve-atikotehah (Magazine of the Hebrew Society of Knowledge of the Land of Israel and its Antiquities, 15 (1950)" (Shapira 673, n. 48).

history,[30] Ben-Gurion concentrated distinctly on the most distant stories of ancient heroes, and in particular those of the Bible. In a speech in 1956 later published as the essay "Concepts and Values" Ben-Gurion reinforces the link between the Bible and current life, with an emphasis on kingship and war exploits. Shapira writes, "Yet the ancient tales of the forefathers, Joshua's wars, Saul, David and Solomon, Uzziah and Jeroboam have greater *relevance,* are closer; they infuse the generation that was born and raised and is living in the land with an essential vigour – far more so than all the speeches and disputes in the congresses at Basel'" (660).

For Ben-Gurion, the national project of the Jewish State was itself nearly a physical, political rewriting of the Bible: as he remarked in 1951, "Not a single biblical commentator, Jewish or Gentile, medieval or contemporary, would have been able to interpret the Book of Joshua in the way the Israel Defense Forces did this past year" (Shapira 658).[31] Indeed, just as theorists of adaptation describe the ways in which a new text can shed light on the old, for Ben-Gurion the new version taking place in the land helped him better interpret the past text: of his analysis of Joshua, he remarked, "I arrived at this supposition after the establishment of the state and the War of Independence which cast a new light on our distant past, at least for me" (Shapira 673 n. 44).[32]

The Bible was apparently so important to Ben-Gurion in "shaping the bond between the People and its Land" that he gathered a group of Bible scholars for a study group called the

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[30] Yael Zerubavel has written of the mythologizing historiography by which certain non-biblical even contemporary, narratives have become ingrained in the national cultural memory of Israel. Zerubavel analyzes The Battle of Tel Hai (modern) the Bar Kokhba Revolt (classical) and the Fall of Masada (classical).

[31] "Magazine of the Hebrew Society for Knowledge of the Land of Israel and its Antiquities, 15 (1950), p. 123" (Shapira 673, n. 43). See Havrelock for an extended discussion of Ben-Gurion's use of Joshua in particular.

[32] Ancientness of Israel in its Land. Comments in the Bible Study Group, 4 April 1959, *Studies on the Bible* (Tel Aviv, 1976), pp.5lff (Shapira 673 n. 44).

"Prime Minister's Bible Study Circle" (Shapira 665). A collected volume of essays presented to this group by Ben-Gurion attests to his deep interest in questions of nationalism and statehood as they are made manifest in the biblical text. For one, the Bible should be read historically, rather than theologically: "The author of the Bible saw David's life and deeds through a theological conduit. . . . But the lives of Saul and David, as they are told in the Bible, are more naturally understood if we look thoroughly at the particular circumstances of the times in which they lived" (Ben-Gurion 263). The contextual reading that follows seems highly related to a contemporary lens: "Fate charged [Saul] with a difficult task; the transition from a tribal anarchy to national government at a time when Samuel, the most repsected spiritual personality in the nation was still alive, and his influence over the people was still substantial. . . . Saul, too, was a great and brave military man, but he lacked the inner stability and the deep political wisdom of David" (263). Indeed, the opening of Ben-Gurion's essay "Saul and David," might well describe a vision for the current state, linking the time of Saul and David to the beginning of a (re)new nation: "In the days of Saul and David, a new era began in the life of the Jewish people- a period of national solidarity, independence and political strength. Until the days of Saul, the Israelites lived in their land as separate tribes, recognizing that they shared a common origin and a common belief in one God" (252). Like the retelling of the Chronicler, Ben-Gurion's style of Bible 'retelling,' reframed the history of his people for a new place and a new time and recalled the glory of the Davidic Kingdom in the service of a projected future (in Ben-Gurion's case, present) restoration.

Shapira notes that Ben-Gurion's vision for a nationalism founded in the Bible was not entirely effective, but that it did apparently influence some of the Palmach generation. Indeed, Israeli General Moshe Dayan's 1978 *Living with the Bible* links landscape and events from

current battles and ancient ones in neat juxtaposition: a collection of photographs of Israel and archaeological objects is coupled with Dayan's reflections, which consistently link biblical stories with Dayan's own recent war-time experiences. The list of maps juxtaposes "The Kingdom of Israel in David's time" with "The frontiers of the State of Israel**"** (5). Not surprisingly, perhaps, sections on David and Saul occupy the final two of the five sections of the book ("The Kingdom of Israel" and "The House of David") which conclude with a chapter entitled "A United Nation." From Dayan's perspective in 1978, the birth of the united nation is apparently the final relevant point of contact between the Bible and his own life. Dayan writes of his affinity to the old conquests, "I felt drawn more to the earlier periods, to the times of the patriarches, the Joshua conquest, the kingdom of David," and begins to collect archaeological objects from these periods (111); and he dedicates an entire chapter to Saul and David, entitled "The Kingdom of Israel." His writing includes constant leaps from past to present, equating places and events ("The Philistines who vanquished Saul in Jezreel were campaigning north of their region of settlement, the southern coastal plains, with its five cities of 'the lords of the Philistines'. One of these Philistine cities was Gaza, which gave trouble to Israel even in our own day) (160).[33]

Just as the Chronicler brought David in line with his particular circumstances and theology, then, Ben-Gurion, and Dayan after him, highlight certain secular qualities of the biblical David appropriate for their own time and community—David's military might, war and

[33] Other indicative examples: "The State of Israel, in its thirty years' existence and its victory over the Arabs in four wars, is a perfect expression of the symbolism in the David-Goliath duel. . . . Ever since it was established, Israel has had to wage a dual struggle against Arab hatred" (184-5). "David's kingdom solved this problem by subduing the surrounding hostile neighbours: Edom, Moab, Ammon and Assyria. These lands served as a security belt that encircled the territories of the tribes of Israel. In our time, too, since the Six Day War, Israel has maintained an advanced security belt far from her population centres. The people within this belt are not vassals; the lands are 'occupied territories" (227).

conquest, David's United Kingdom, and the continuity of the land and landscape in which he is remembered—in a highly influential twentieth-century reading of the biblical text.[34] Chapters three and four most explicitly treat the influence of this interpretation, exploring the ways in which Grete Weil's novel and René Kalisky's works tacitly respond to Ben-Gurion's juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary times and his notion of biblical and national history.

David in Modern Literature

Not surprisingly, David's story is ripe for literary renewal: from Théodore de Bèze's (1519-1605) "poetic Preface to David's Penitential Psalms" (a voluptuous return to the story of Samuel)[35] to NBC's acclaimed 2009 drama *Kings*, David has been retold and reworked, his story manipulated in very many of the forms Gérard Genette describes hypotexts undergoing in *Palimpsests,* or the kinds of reformulations Linda Hutcheon or Julie Sanders describe in their work on adaptation. Many of the retellings, moreover, unsurprisingly, adapt the books of Samuel in ways appropriate to interests and concerns and generic conventions of their age, drawing out and focusing on elements that appeal. In order to give a sense of the sheer breadth and depth of these retellings, as well as the David Story's multivalent availability to such disparate literary environments, it seems appropriate to sketch a by no means exhaustive picture of David's

[34] This kind of re-use of David and Saul is of course one of many instances in which the biblical text has been harnessed powerfully to support migration after persecution. As Joseph David writes of modern Jewish reception of Exodus, "The Holocaust involved a literal recurrence of some aspects of the biblical exodus story, such as slave labor. The liberation from Nazi oppression was often analogized to the exodus" (482). The Exodus from Egypt was widely recalled in Zionist discourses, as well as with regard to Jewish emigrants to the United States following the war and Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union; (Davis 482-3). The Exodus has also been a powerful story for Protestant Reformers, Puritans, liberation theologians, and prominently for African Americans, particularly during the Civil Rights era (Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X "both likened segregationists to the Egyptian pharaoh" (Langston 487) (Langston 484-488).

[35] See Yvonne Sherwood "Scenes of Textual Repentance and Critique/Confession."

literary adventures in Europe and America.[36] Here, I discuss works which simply leap off from a biblical theme as well as those which build sustained engagement with their hypotext.

Many early literary versions of the David story capitalize on and elaborate certain dramatic episodes and, like the Chronicler, often shift the story's emphasis in accordance with contemporary themes and aesthetic structures while managing to maintain doctrinal definitions—the text's ultimate import and genre. Early modern dramatic reworkings focused attention on the legendary exploits of grand, elevated, exemplary figures like Saul, David, and Absalom. In the 17th century, playwrights in Spain and France composed remarkable works perfectly attuned to the aesthetics of their age inspired by the tragic in the sacred text. Du Ryer is remembered for his in 1642 biblical play *Saül*, for example, and obeyed the strictures of neoclassical theatre and presented a timely, poignant portrait of the first king of Israel tragically divided between his dual roles as king and father. Tirso de Molina's *La venganza de Tamar* expands on Tamar's rape by her half-brother, Amnon to create a magnificent honor drama typical of the period, the political machinations the story also presents now trumped by the pattern of transgression and honor finally avenged. Both these plays take simple plot-points from the earlier narrative but also engage with the biblical source in subtle ways: marvelously, David drives du Ryer's play but never appears in it, haunting the stage instead through the outpouring of love and confused passions of Saul's family, a reflection of David's status as opaque, beloved and relatively passive recipient in the early Samuel narratives; *La Venganza de Tamar* capitalizes on the recurrence of food in 2 Samuel by adapting a murderous feast to serve as an honor drama's typical final bloody

[36] For different treatments of these adventures, see for example Swindell "Literature: General;" Ewbank; Frontain and Wojcik. I concentrate here on novelistic and dramatic reworkings of the David story, though there is of course also a vast literature of Davidic poetry, often in response to David's traditional role as psalmist.

tableau and highlights elements of 'seeming' *ser/parecer* in the biblical narrative. These works represent sophisticated interpretation and adaptation of the source to new environments.

These highly dramatic stories are reframed for the time in which they appear. We might also recall George Peele's Elizabethan *David and Bethsabe* (1593), or De la Taille's 1572 *Saül le furieux,"* built on the influence of Senecan tragedy, and which explored the danger of an ambitious tyrant who does not repent after disobeying his God. Billard's 1608 *Saül* also highlighted Saul's dangerous links to sorcery through his visit to the necromancer, his abuse of power, and his regrettable refusal to be penitent. In Italy, Vittorio Alfieri's *Saül* (1782) is an astounding tragedy in which the sublime looms large; Lamartine's 1817 *Saül*, makes of Saul a true Romantic tragic hero, a perspective recalled in Browning's 1845 poem, in which David appears as a deeply spiritual Romantic poet.[37]

In Spain, the second half of David's story received more focus, and David's struggles with his family were assimilated to theatrical conventions. Godinez's *Las lagrimas del rey David* both highlights David's sin and his subsequent repentance, a common refrain in Christian interpretations, and transforms the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah into a brilliant honor play: Bathsheba has lost her honor (torn between loyalty to the king and self-preservation, finally persuaded by David's tears; Uriah too is prisoner of the honor system, and his best friend Joab kills Uriah in order to save him from knowledge of lost honor impossible to avenge. Calderón de la Barca adapted Tirso's *La Venganza de Tamar,* in *Los cabellos de Absalón* (c. 1633-36) (Tirso's last two acts become Calderón's first two, one almost verbatim) and Tamar's triumph is rendered as a dangerous, nearly hysterically violent response; María Rosa de Gálvez adapted the

[37] Other 19th century treatments include Sauls include Lamartine's *Saül* (1818), Friedrich Rückert's *Saul und David* (1843) and Karl Beck's *Saul* (1841) ((Swindell "Literature: General" 219).

story again, in a remarkable neo-classical play, *Amnón* (1804), in which Tamar's rapist is a melancholic hero overcome by passion, but in which Tamar herself offers a momentarily trenchant critique of David's role as patriarchal father and king.

Du Ryer's play forms part of a series of Catholic biblical tragedies apparently designed to counteract immorality and shore up the Christian faith.[38] *Saül* ends with Saul's tragic death, but his death is that of a noble servant of God who sees the divine plan (his death and David's ascent) and takes his own life in agreement with it.[39] In Tirso de Molina's play, Tamar's vengeance never destabilizes David's role as pious and merciful father (and, it is implied, progenitor of the messiah and Christian mercy)—David's tearful monologue closes the play. These plays, and others like them, thus both relate to and move beyond their primary 'source text' in fascinating ways. Yet, as for the Chronicler, it is relatively easy to perceive both the new aesthetic guidelines to which the story is adapted and the author's relationship to the source—its primary and enduring value and relevance.

In later centuries, authors reimagined Saul's story less as an exemplary tragedy of an erring monarch than as a more properly psychological drama; similarly, later works, particularly those of the twentieth century, turned to Saul and David not as exemplary figure from the top of society, but as human figures closer to the rest of us. Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) pits a Saulide figure Michael Henchard against Davidic Donald Farfrae, and the novel's painfully poignant progression follows Henshaw's slow unravelling in the face of Farfrae's perfection, all set amidst the drama of 19th century grain sales. At the turn of the

[38] See Miller's introduction to Du Ryer's *Saül,* 13.
[39] "Il faut, puisque le Ciel ordonne que je tombe/ Que Saül soit le faix sous qui Saül succombe" (V iv 1729-30). In a moving earlier speech, Saül wishes an absent David a peaceful and happy reign as much unlike his own tenure as possible (IV iii 1218-1228).

century, André Gide's *Saül* (1896) explored the sensuous side of David. Written soon after Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, Gide's play similarly draws out currents of desire from a biblical story: *Saül* highlights David's erotic appeal, as well as the biblical intimations of David's close relationship with Saul's son Jonathan in a new version of the classical French tragedies centered around the tragic king. The play highlights the push and pull between Saul and David present in the biblical account, playing on the madness of a Saul who behaves at turns warmly towards his harpist and with murderous intent, arguably towards a possible future rival who might usurp his throne. Just as Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* highlights the interior struggles his Saul and David face novelistically, Gide highlights the tragedy of a Saul who both loves and hates his young rival in heartbreaking dialogue. Here the "bad spirit from God'—Saul's desire for and jealousy of David manifest in child-demons who torture the king and draw him towards his death (1 Sam 16:14).[40]

Four years after *Saül* was staged at the Vieux Colombier in 1922, D.H. Lawrence's *David* (1926) also approaches youthful David's uncanny appeal, as does J.M Barrie's *The Boy David* (1936). Both plays stage David as a preternaturally gifted and attractive young lad. D.H Lawrence's play in particular draws on the biblical David's impervious goodness—his "butter wouldn't melt" qualities (God was with him, in everything David did he succeeds, and escapes unscathed, in contrast to Saul's mental degradation and increasingly chaotic home life, and unsuccessful attempts to catch the lithe David, whether by lance or in the caves)—to represent a David who is all piety, all religion, all blazing splendor, in contrast to a dark and tortured Saül, and his struggling children.

[40] See Katherine Brown Downey's *Perverse Midrash* for a discussion of the relationship between Gide and Wilde. Jewish dramatists Richard Beer-Hofmann (*Der junge David* (1933) and Max Zweig *Saul* (1948) write of Saul's tragedy also; *Der junge David* "sees a Hitler-like Saul finally defeated by the rise of David, and *Saul* "has Saul as the victim of post-Holocaust despair, finally able to acknowledge the hope that David offers for the future" (Swindell "Literature: General" 217).

Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* (1936) perhaps stands as a fulcrum between the dramatic tradition and many later David novels; it is a high modernist masterpiece, and its use of David's later life and family drama as the framing myth around which to structure another empire is the stuff of epic tragedy.[41] *Absalom, Absalom* is a complex rewriting, but most basically it transposes the story of David and his children—a patriarch and king who faces tragedy and civil war which arises from his own house (as for David, who is told his God will "raise up evil against thee out of thine own house") (*KJV* 2 Sam. 12:11). *Absalom, Absalom's* attention to historiographical issues as well as its use of differing perspectives on Sutpen, the central Davidic figure, crystallizes various tendencies in David rewritings of the twentieth-century, particularly post-1945, including an emphasis on the characters that surround David and on the composition of the story itself.

Inevitably, rewritings of Samuel often exaggerate the indeterminacy of David's character as well as his centrality, responding to or reframing the character system of the biblical text. Novels respond to David's dominance as well as his contingency in various ways. Sometimes, David himself is the first-person narrator who would like to elucidate his ambiguity or reassert his dominance, as in the case of Allan Massie's *King David* (1995) he is an "Updikean figure" (Swindell "Literature: General" 220). In Heller's 1984 Jewish-American novel *God Knows,* a David who conveniently elucidates all doubts as to his state of mind and who takes on a witty, sarcastic defiant personality of his own and in the case of Carlo Coccioli's *Mémoires du roi David* (1976) he is a narrator whose constantly questioning mental state deftly shifts the text's ambiguity.

[41] In *The David Story,* Robert Alter writes that "David's sin and the consequent theme of the unfolding of the prophet's curse on the house of David . . . has a certain affinity with Greek tragedy, as Faulkner . . . keenly understood in *Absalom, Absalom!*) (xi).

A large group of twentieth century novels, instead, however, reacts to David's central position in the network by shifting the perspective to one or more minor character nevertheless reflecting on David himself. Each of the members of David's court which Stefan Heym's compiler-character Ethan interviews gives his or her perspective on the king (*The King David Report,*1972). Cassill's *After Goliath* (1985) perhaps most clearly reflects on the character system by juxtaposing a series of separated chapters which narrate the perspectives of multiple different minor characters. In Grete Weil's novel *The Bride Price,*(1988) David's wife Michal reflects on her relationship with David, tainted irrevocably by the sordid, violent bride price he supplied. The wily, unreliable, distasteful Jonadab, Amnon's cousin, narrates Jacobson's *The Rape of Tamar* (1970) from his own perspective as a minor participant in the story—the person who goads Amnon to violent action—and is embroiled in the political intrigue which follow's Tamar's rape. Torgny Lindgren's *Bathsheba* (1984) documents Bathsheba's manipulation of power. Spanish novelist Ignacio García Valiño's *Urías y el rey David* (1997) tells David's story through an external narration focalized through Uriah. Here García-Valiño shifts the arrangement of the character-system such that Uriah takes on the true space of a protagonist: he is an outsider, a foreigner, but he has a history, actions, ideas and perspectives that do not always simply reflect on David. The novel's tragedy is reflected in the shift in focalization: Bathsheba's perspective is exposed during the rape and the narration turns to David's perspective following it. The character network shifts to privilege the King and force out Uriah before readers' eyes.[42]

[42] More recently still, Australian-American novelist Geraldine Brooks' *The Secret Chord* (2015) is narrated by Nathan the prophet. In modern Hebrew literature, Moshe Shamir's *The Hittite Must Die* also tells the story of Bathsheba's husband, Uriah; in a more popular vein, Yochi Brandes's *The Secret Book of Kings* (2008, trans. 2016) *similarly* takes the perspective of the vanquished by narrating history from the Northern Kingdom, including through Michal's eyes.

In more properly American popular and genre fiction, too, the large cast of characters and the story's epic grandeur was and remains extremely attractive to adaptation. David is a perfect example of a conflicted leader and lover, ripe for psychological retellings and rich historical trimmings. Lengthy novels *Giant Killer* (Elmer Davis 1928), a historical satire bringing down David, and *David the King* (Gladys Schmitt**)** garnered some critical attention and were best-sellers of their time (Gladys Schmitt Collection). Though the movie option for *David the King* fell through, replaced instead by the film epic *David and Bathsheba,* one critic writes that the studio capitalized on the popularity of Schmitt's novel, which delved deeply into the psychology of David and his erotic relationships (Culley 33-34).[43] In 1943 and 1963, respectively, politicians Duff Cooper and Juan Bosch published popular David biographies. More recently, the market has produced slews of popular Christian works, semi-theological novels that stress David's humanity and his role as Christ's ancestor; in genre fiction, the Christian-military genre includes such works as the Lion of War series concerning David's mighty men, and Christian historical romances like Jill Eileen Smith's *The Wives of King David Series;* a wide selection of historical novels are narrated from the perspective of a minor character to fill in the gaps of the canonic story, often in the "modern midrash" tradition perhaps most clearly exemplified by Anita Diamant's popular 1997 novel, *The Red Tent*.[44] These range from works such as India Edghill's *Queenmaker* (1999) to Ann Chamberlin's *Tamar* (1994).

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[43] Other more epic historical fictions include Gilbert Parker "The Promised Land," (1928) Laurene Chinn's *The Unanointed*, and Malachi Martin's *King of Kings*.

[44] Often these works are amplifications of certain parts of the biblical narrative, particularly where these episodes are terse: *The Red Tent* amplifies Genesis 34 to a full novel and trans-focalizes the narrative to Dinah's perspective. Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg writes of the term, "In practice, modern midrash has not only emerged as a popular genre but, thanks in part to the wild successes of books like *The Red Tent,* comes to be almost synonymous with Jewish creative writing" (126). See Stahlberg 92-135 for a survey of the term "midrash" and its use in literary studies, including a discussion of Geoffrey Hartman's *Midrash and Literature.*

Beyond its readily renewable characters and their exploits, the story has also attracted many late-twentieth century rewritings which draw on the generic indeterminacy of the biblical narrative (its fictional-historical qualities) to elaborate on notions of storytelling and history-telling.[45] In many of these works, a tension between official and unofficial versions drives the plot. In Stefan Heym's magisterial *The King David Report*, a writer must write an "official" version of David's story sanctioned by Solomon's court; Ethan collects documents to write his history, and the novel explores boundaries between authorship and editorial work as well as issues of censorship and totalitarian control. In *Urías y el Rey David*, Uriah himself is the soldier charged with writing David's exploits, and David himself acts as censor by stealing two of the tablets Uriah writes. In a different tack, Casill's wry novel *After Goliath* reaffirms the importance of the written record as well as the possible perspectives of minor characters: possible publications are discussed (including *Intimate Palace Secrets,* Solomon's *pensées,* and *The Life of King David*) and Joab describes Jehoshaphat the scribe as an ambitious interpolator (200, 201, 94, 3). Nathan Abel's moving and contemplative play, *Absalom,* explores the power of the written word to manipulate circumstances, and the special book in which the scribes write takes on the magical function of determining the truth and the future: The difficulty of writing itself and unease over its relation to reality (is it a report? A fiction? An oracle?) becomes a defining theme of the play. René Kalisky's play *Dave au bord de mer* (1978) has David and Saul performing dual counternarratives—the Davidic and the Saulide—of the same story. Even NBC's acclaimed 2009 drama, *Kings,* which retells David and Saul's conflict in a futuristic Gilboa of arms deals and mass media, includes a scribe as spin-man, who follows Saul around

[45] Some of these share qualities with Linda Hutcheon's notion of "historiographic metafiction:" ". . . its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its thinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (*Poetics* 5).

and alters history as needed: “He governed patiently and well and ran home for a shower” (Stanley C1).

Among this wealth of retellings, this dissertation draws together a group of six literary works which combine trends visible in the later twentieth-century rewritings of this sketch, particularly those of the 70s and 80s: an emphasis on a critical interpretation of David and on his political activities, a reframing of the character system, heightened attention to the manner in which the biblical story is written down and transmitted. For these authors, it is not difficult to read the David story as pertinent for their time. These texts in particular, moreover, reimagine a version of the David story while retaining a close, even scholarly relationship with the text they draw from. For these works, contemporary issues are inextricably related to the text itself; these novels and play variously stage an encounter with the biblical text which also figures orientations toward tradition, to canonicity, and to authority that are hypostatized in Samuel. Rather than simply revamp sacred history for modern readers, these novels foreground Samuel as a certain kind of site, in which the consolidation of power and its concomitant instability are thematized in content and in form.

Though each of the works draw from different aspects of Samuel, reflecting distinct contexts and imaginative aims, they share some general qualities which I will gesture towards here. The works this dissertation treats neither re-sanctify the biblical account nor overturn it completely: as Julie Sanders writes with regard to re-imaginings of the literary canon, “The question raised by any act of imitation is whether the impersonation is carried out in a mode of celebration or critique. In many cases, however, the truth is a rather more complex hybrid of the two stances” (106). All six authors relate to the Bible in ways that diverge from purely religious

attachments, in a trend indicative of a post-war, perhaps postmodern stance towards the biblical text. Indeed, though all (with the exception of Faulkner) have at least some sense of a Jewish heritage, their understanding of Samuel is related to Jewish and Christian histories of interpretation as well as to the book's status as a literary monument of Western culture. Carlo Coccioli was first known as a Catholic novelist, but his interpretation of the David story also led him to expand on his Jewish heritage by exploring not only philological but Kabbalistic interpretation, as well as a sense of David as a kind of universal man. Joseph Heller writes of David's fame in both Christian and Jewish heritage; Grete Weil's narrator responds to Michelangelo's David—the platonic ideal of a Western hero—as well as to Rembrandt's more 'Jewish' version; René Kalisky writes of the conflict between David and Saul as fundamental to the history of Israel, and yet also describes the story as part of the substrate of a universal Western consciousness: "Beginning with David and Saul, myths were forged from which stem some of the categories of Judeo-Christian civilization" (Weil 6; Kalisky "Surtexte" 222).[46] Stefan Heym's Jewish heritage might have influenced his choice of texts in *The King David Report*, but his novel plays with the text of the King James Version and, in the German version of the text (translated by Heym himself) with the Luther Bible.[47] Faulkner, a Protestant steeped in Old Testament narrative, famously included it in lists of those literary works he returned to fondly again and again, and Scott T. Chancellor has argued for Faulkner's "ontologically Jewish" status (Gwynn and Blotner 50; Chancellor 4).

[46] "A partir de David et de Saül, des mythes se sont forges d'où sont issues quelques-unes des catégories de la civilization judéo-chrétienne" (Kalisky, "Surjeu" 222).
[47] On Heym's Jewishness, see Fox. Heym died while visiting Israel to present at a conference on Heinrich Heine (Tate).

Perhaps with the exception of Faulkner, for whom the King James Version was a familiar literary ground, these authors also come to the biblical text as highly mediated object. In contrast to the kinds of direct re-use and appropriation that characterize modern Hebrew literature, from Agnon to Amichai, for whom the "original" biblical text is linguistically available, these authors are already—sometimes consciously—reading at a translated distance. Heller reads the *KJV*, with all its waspy connotations so different from his Brooklyn upbringing; German-Jewish author Weil reads the Buber and Rosenzweig translation as "new material, previously unknown" and comments that she could not read a Hebrew commentary written by her ancestor: "the book . . . says nothing to me" (Weil 128, 127). Carlo Coccioli reads the biblical text in Hebrew as well as in multiple translations; Stefan Heym refers to a Kautzsch's German Bible, an edited edition with copious explanatory notes, and René Kalisky also used at least four different Jewish and Christian French translations, one of which included explanatory footnotes.

These authors do work through the biblical text with a kind of focused attention that in itself is a kind of reverence, a reverence often borne less from religious tradition than from personal reading experiences of the Bible, despite its distance. Faulkner spoke lovingly of returning to the biblical text for its characters and its style ("It's people all trying to get something for nothing or . . . to be braver than they are—just ordinary everyday folks, people, that's why I like to read that. That's apart from the fine poetry of the prose") (Gwynn and Blotner 167-68); Grete Weil's narrator describes the feeling of approaching the characters she reads about (128-9). In their autobiographical writings, Heym and Coccioli both narrate episodes in which they had a pivotal encounter with the text, Heym when he picked up a King James Version Bible, as if at random, on one of the nights following his mother's death; Coccioli when

he describes reading about Samuel in a magazine and picking up a hitherto unread Bible and opening it at random to The Tower of Babel and its "stupefying simplicity, whose grandeur moves me [Simplicité stupéfiante, dont la grandeur me bouleverse]" (Heym, *Nachruf* 847; Coccioli *Tourment*, 129). And Heym, Kalisky, and Coccioli all dedicated countless hours to studying the biblical text, as evidenced in Heym's detailed summaries and notes for the novel, Coccioli's descriptions of his meticulous study and note-taking, and Kalisky's highly researched history of Zionism from Abraham onward (Heym "Summary;" Coccioli, *Tourment* 222-226; Kalisky *Sionisme*).

This style of attention marks these works as distinct from many modern reinterpretations of biblical stories which leap off from the original text to fill in the gaps, explaining tensions and creating unity from confusion, amplifying small moments into lengthy narratives.[48] These novels, instead, explicitly treat their relationship to the past text in various ways—by narrating the experience of various kinds of readers who are also retellers, centering author-editor figures, or exposing the mediated nature of the received text.[49] These works recursively frame a kind of critical relationship to the text which depends on the biblical text's particular status, and which often draws on, mirrors, or otherwise recalls the reading strategies of certain kinds of traditional

[49] In this sense, they are akin to many postmodern works, such as those American texts Christian Moraru describes, which are often *about* writing and rewriting as much as they are rewritings themselves. Where *Foe* dramatizes the process of writing and not writing Robinson Crusoe's (and Susan Barton's, and Friday's) story, *Mémoires du roi David* shows the narrator (David) carefully parsing Hebrew phrases in the biblical "annals" even as he gives his own account. The *King David Report* riffs around a famous harmonization in the biblical text, describing the editorial discussion behind the interpolation and framing the "sources" for readers to see. (Whether or not these novels are *as* postmodern as some, they certainly share qualities of the literary era in which they appeared: of those Strategies and Devices in Postmodernist Writing catalogued in Fokkema and Wessel's 1997 *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*, for example, Rewriting, intertextuality, self-referentiality, the refutation of truth claims, and non-teleological narration are all characteristic of the texts to some degree or another).

biblical scholarship.[50] Here the empirical quest, the tedious, philological exercises—eye-blurring lists of chapter and verse numbers, the footnotes citing manuscript editions, or the dry explanations which solve the text's mysterious juxtapositions (Saulide/Davidic, pro/antimonarchic juxtaposition) provide their own springboard. These authors do not reject such methods of reading and writing the biblical text as other, or separate from their own creative modes, but rather harness them as part of the means through which they present their own, different versions of the biblical text—a productive literary field.

The six works studied here build from and with the ultimately messy biblical text, and recursively return to it. Rather than simply take the biblical text as inspiration, they stay with the text, in focused, attentive, even scholarly attitudes that produce narrative techniques. Read together, they evoke Samuel as a late-twentieth-century hypotext par excellence, and

[50] Other novels occasionally build on biblical scholarship, but mostly in order to flesh out historical detail. In *Giant Killer* and *David the King* there is evidence already of links to biblical scholarship's interpretation of the text. An otherwise complimentary review of *David the King* notes a "blemish," in the text, which attributes Goliath's murder to Elhanan rather than David and protests this "regrettable break from the traditional story," seeing "no valid hermeneutic ground for the change" and displaying some apparent ambivalence about how cutting an interpretation of David should be (Sullivan 116). Elmer Davis's satire, on the other hand, might be the ancestor of Heller's *God Knows*, and also seems to anticipate the critical turn towards David manifest in the scholarly biographies of the early 2000s, which sought to uncover the 'true' mafioso beneath the apologetic cant. A reviewer of a 1946 re-edition of *Giant Killer* placed it in the context of other American works of the 20's, as he describes it, "the heyday of the debunkers" and insists that Davis has "modern scholarship on his side when he insists that Goliath died at the hands of a common soldier named Elhanan" (Du Bois). Perhaps most strikingly, Elmer Davis himself ostentatiously notes the scholarship behind his version of the story in his author's note: "For the fault or merits of the fiction in this book I alone am responsible; but the history embodies the soundest conclusions of modern scholarship. . . The Scriptural account of the rise of the Hebrew monarchy is an interweaving of ancient records and late traditions, of varying value, often confused, and sometimes contradictory. The critical reconstruction here presented is my own amateur work, but it agrees with the consensus of expert opinion, in so far as the experts ever reach a consensus" (Davis vii).
He goes on to discuss the ancient civilizations of the "Hebrews" and the Philistines, describes Elhanan's killing of Goliath as "a commonplace of scholarship" and thanks professors from the Union Theological Seminary for their advice (viii). Later, unusual figure Malachi Martin (scholar, priest, exorcist)—wrote a rollicking historical fictional account of David's story highly influenced by scholarly understandings of ancient history (*King of Kings:A Novel*).

simultaneously draw from and crystallize various elements of the text's tension between singularity and dispersion, authority and contingency. These authors probe the literary possibilities that emerge from grappling with David the legendary, enigmatic figure together with the particularities of the text which contains him.

Chapter Summaries:

The first chapter introduces two novels, Carlo Coccioli's *Mémoires du roi David* (1976) and Joseph Heller's *God Knows* (1984), two "autobiographical" texts in which the problem of David's personal identity—or lack thereof—prompts reflection on problems of twentieth-century authorial identity. In these two novels, tensions between original and copy are also tensions between versions of a self performed and worked through by means of both novelist's unusual, philologically-inflected style.

Coccioli and Heller portray David, the universal ancient and modern man, the "doubled," confusing creature, as a Jewish writer dealing with textual sources, and, I argue, experiment with a mode of autobiography as self-rewriting. In Coccioli's case, this autobiography is an existential search that perhaps parallels Coccioli's own desire to found an identity based on texts and philological reading of them. David self-evaluates based on his close-reading of the biblical text itself as well as of his own new philologically-motivated rewriting. In Heller's case, this search for a sense of self is again enacted through close links to the very specific stylistic tics of the biblical text—a reverence for it and imitation of it, but also a desire to supersede it. The constant battle over sources yields a poignant pastiche.

The second chapter turns from the autobiographical and the self to the historical and the dynasty/nation. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*(1936) and Stefan Heym's *The King David Report*

(1973) respond to Samuel's intertwined narratives and David's fraught centrality by exploring the conflict between personal or political *investment* in authority and the unstable nature of the way institutions are portrayed; this conflict is formally reflected in an editorial process which both reflects the system in which the writer is invested and opens up the seams within it. These novels are concerned with balancing attachments to the power and authority of the biblical text and the powerful regimes they treat (the South and East Germany) with attending to historical narratives as open, fragmented, and composed in a process of edition. This chapter reads *Absalom* and *The King David Report* as novelistic reflections of the seminal works of Noth and Rost, two biblical scholars who read Samuel as a particularly compiled text, unearth the actors who do this compilation, and hint at a story about them while creating a text full of interpolations and disjunctures. Faulkner and Heym produce novels as much about the people who do the compiling as about the central Davidic figures, and these compilers enact a kind of editorial epistemology. In the Faulkner, this editing work produces a novel which might be read as a new kind of Bible with its own centripetal force; Heym's novel retains its vital connection to its source material, and turns readers back to a more open, less stable version.

The third chapter recalls the role-playing, performative aspects of Coccioli and Heller's narratives as well as the idea of juxtaposed versions narrated in Ch. 2 in a discussion of René Kalisky's 1978 play *Dave au bord de mer.* Kalisky's play is an experimental drama in which ancient King Saul and David play modern versions of themselves pitted against one another 'again' on the shores of contemporary Israel. Here "the nation" comes to the fore, and Kalisky builds on his own understanding of Samuel's fundamental ambiguity, apparent in the transition to Kingship and from King Saul to King David, to re-assert ambiguity in the present for the play's audience by means of an exaggerated mediated mode.

In this chapter, I link Kalisky's reading of Samuel to Ben-Gurion's: both see the text as reflecting a crucial moment of transition in Israel's history, and one which is related to its present. The resulting play develops a mediated mode in which a thick collection of sources—the biblical text, in multiple translations, along with contemporary news reports—are deployed and juxtaposed as part of Kalisky's attempt to propagate a sense of destabilization in audiences, particularly around questions concerning Israel.

The first half of the chapter connects Kalisky's reading of the biblical text to its update in the play. Ambiguous characterization is played-up and extended through character-actors who play with their roles and the power dynamics between David and Saul are re-enacted via relationship to the canonic text (Dave takes power as biblical David by declaiming the source text for himself). The second half of the chapter turns to the explicit ways Kalisky's play draws together the biblical transition to statehood and present-day Israel. The play's conclusion and its recollection of a contemporary attack in the city of Beit Shean dramatize a provocative conflation of contemporary news and biblical reports. All versions (here French translations and news articles) are included together, "played," and mixed up. Apparently opposing viewpoints are destabilized and intermingled, and readers try to sort out parallels but are blocked from any final consensus or solution.

The fourth chapter turns to a less programmatic text, one also in which the intense grappling that characterizes the earlier works gives way to a more exploratory fictional mode. Grete Weil's *The Bride Price* (1988) also responds to Samuel's ambiguity and to the power struggles within it, but also turns to treat the perspective of a minor, female character, a move which allows the text to sidestep the dominance and drive of the original narrative and refuse to

be governed by fidelity to the text or new versions of it, instead proposing an alternate view and a probing, reflective style.

The novel's experimental structure juxtaposes two first-person narrative recollections in alternating chapters: one set of chapters is narrated by a Holocaust survivor and writer, a German-Jewish author who has returned to the text of Samuel, and the other is narrated by the ancient Michal, daughter of Saul and wife of David. Like Ben-Gurion, Grete Weil seems concerned with reading the Bible as it relates to the present. Rather than imagining biblical events repeated in Israel, however, the novel links biblical time and the contemporary land through two women's voices who critique nationalism and male military force. The alternating chapters of Grete and Michal's monologues further frame Michal through Grete's contemporary readerly interpretation and propose an experimental relationship between the voices: the women's narratives of suffering are linked across time and suggest an alternative means of linking present and past history through their drifting language and tentative encounter. As I argue, the text both responds to and critiques certain Zionist models of biblical history as well as the patriarchal violence of nation-building and colonization, and provides an alternative, feminist version of the text which, recalling the techniques of feminist biblical scholarship, re-centers women's 'views.'

1. Coccioli, Heller, and Philological Style

The Hebrew Bible story of King David, in all its ancient literary context, offers something strangely familiar, for novelist and literary readers alike. In his highly influential critical biography of the Golden-Age king,[1] biblical historian Baruch Halpern compares David to a modern-day Mafioso and writes of the great political cover-up as if it were President Nixon's Watergate affair. Similarly, Stephen McKenzie's David biography juxtaposes vignettes from contemporary David narratives with his historical retelling, as if to highlight David's contemporary currency. He is distant, but he's also one of us.

The two novels this chapter treats take David's strange belatedness as a point of departure. In Carlo Coccioli's 1976 *Mémoires du roi David*[2] and Joseph Heller's 1984 *God Knows*, David is his own *auto*biographer. Though the trappings of the ancient king's context remain, both novelists bring David forward by granting him a 20th-century consciousness, a process made explicit in the frequent anachronisms of *God Knows* and Coccioli's introductory designation of David as "modern, our contemporary [moderne, notre contemporain]" (8). For Coccioli, David's conflicted character provides an opportunity to explore a modern man's relationship to divine authority in the wake of French existentialist philosophy through a one-sided dialogue. David's famous doubled nature,[3] (his "unfathomable" qualities, as Alter has it) provides Coccioli with a legendary figure that becomes representative of a conflicted modern man, struggling with the same questions as his readers, only amplified by his special status as a

[1] In an allusion to the provocative modernizing metaphors contained within, Halpern's work is entitled *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King.*
[2] *Memoirs of King David.* Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
[3] David is famously both the man after God's own heart and a sinner; he feels deep emotions, writes lyric poetry and yet is a ruthless warrior who sanctions many violent acts to preserve his rule, etc.

chosen biblical figure (Alter, *David Story* xviii). For Heller, similarly, David is a kind of American Jewish everyman—one who provides the novelist with fuel for a biblical satire, following American satirical novels of the 60's and 70's, that compellingly treats David's crisis of masculinity and fraught relationship to the authority of God and the Jewish tradition he represents.

The novels respond to the vast gamut of possibilities the original narrative provides in different ways: Coccioli explores David's inner authenticity, while Heller emphasizes his comic near-banality. For both, the distance between the old and new versions is highly productive. Coccioli's novel probes questions drawn from his existentialist background, the divide between an old, static text and the vital experience it rose from, the authentic and inauthentic self), whereas Heller's creates a dialogue between periods by juxtaposing an apparently vapid reinvention with its sacred, foundational "original."

And yet by emphasizing David's role as a literary artist through his first-person perspective, a perspective so absent from the biblical text and scholarly writings in which David is described and circumscribed, both novels also implicitly reflect on their own status as rewritings: David is not only a fictional writer, like so many other novel narrators, but a reader—and a Bible reader at that.[4] To do so, by blending David's modernized first-person searching with his role as writer, both novels take on a unique and strange philological style, by which the novels return incessantly to fine particularities of the biblical text itself in order to present

[4] For a different take on David as an interpreter within the biblical text and as a figure for biblical readers, see Hugh Pyper's *David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1-15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood*. Pyper concentrates on David's "reading" in the scene with Nathan, with the Amelekite messenger, and the wise woman of Teqoa; he describes how "the implicit theory of language and textuality exemplified in Samuel is a particular male view of language as utterance which embodies male fears of contingency and the uncontrollability of the uttered word," a view which certainly holds for the David of Heller's novel in particular (14, 9).

David's own meticulous attempts at self-understanding. We might expect David the autobiographer to 'fill in the gaps' of the old story or to present additional commentary—a series of footnotes or marginal asides. But for each novelistic David, the process of slowly working through the source text in the manner of an attentive philological reader accompanies and sustains his process of self-understanding and allows for self-(re)writing. The result is a language that drifts intertextually between source and revision, but that marks its engagement with the older text as critical, and productive for David's development as a character. In Coccioli's case, the elaborate philological style relies on the canonical version of David's story, presenting a back-and-forth between the two intertwined versions. Heller's David goes further, and initiates a philological inquiry into the entire web of David stories that constitutes his a-temporal, figural self. Both novels stage David's own self-discovery ("solving") or lack thereof through his own pseudo-scholarly work: David the man analyzes David with and through his text.

Philology of the Self: *Mémoires du roi David*

Italian novelist and journalist Carlo Coccioli (1920-2003) is an unconventional figure, known in Italy for his early Catholic novels, in LGBTQ contexts for the novel *Fabrizio Lupo* (1952), in France for his trilingual writing identity, and in Mexico for his journalistic writing. He was born in Livorno, but spent much of his childhood in Libya, where his father was stationed, and where he describes an early fascination with Muslim spiritual life. He later attended the Royal Oriental Institute of Naples and received an extensive education in Semitic studies, interrupted by participation in the Italian resistance movement, for which he later received a medal. His first novel, *Il migliore e l'Ultimo* (1946) (an autobiographical chronicle of escape from German captivity in Italy) was extremely successful, and was followed by the much

beloved *Fabrizio Lupo* (1952), the story of a young devout Catholic man's gay love affair (Coccioli 1971; "The Life"). Later in life, he settled in Mexico City, where he wrote for Mexican and Italian periodicals (and edited *Siempre*) and began to write in Spanish as well as in Italian and French. He wrote prolifically, publishing dozens of novels in his lifetime, many self-translated among these three languages. Though Coccioli had a very close relationship to his French publishers[5] and received considerable acclaim for his early novels, recent reviews in the Italian press of newly republished works emphasize again and again the dearth of critical attention his work has received in Italy.[6] When it was published in 1976, *Davide* (Coccioli's self-translation of *Mémoires du roi David*) received the Seleccione Campiello prize, but has recently garnered renewed attention, in part due to republication by a new Italian editorial house dedicated to resuscitating Coccioli's works in Italian, Spanish and in French ("The Life").[7]

As a novel about a man and his God, *Mémoires du roi David* slots in easily among Coccioli's other works: one could trace the Italian artist's artistic and spiritual journey through his novels, and indeed Coccioli himself categorizes life-stages in terms of published writings in his journalistic books (*Le tourment de Dieu, Journal*). Coccioli underwent a thorough

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[5] Coccioli had a long-standing relationship with his French editor, Charles Orengo, at Plon and later Fayard. He received the Prix du rayonnement de la langue française from the Académie Française in 1982, and the French ministry of culture named him a Chevalier dans l'ordre d'arts et lettres in 1989 (Coccioli, *Tourment* 91-92, 116; *Académie Française*; "Carlo Chevalier.")

6 Articles describing Coccioli upon the republication of *Mémoires* (*Davide*) in 2009, for example, describe (and lament) Coccioli's past reception: he was "too eccentric [troppo eccentrico]" for Italy, and "ignored by the Italian intellectual establishment [ignorato dall'establishment intellettuale]" (Brullo 1; Doninelli 1).

[7] Piccolo Karma Edizione, Milano. The novel appears in seven editions/translations. In French and in Italian (by Coccioli): *Mémoires du roi David.* Paris: Table du Ronde, 1976; *Mémoires du roi David.* Paris: Livre de poche: 1979; *Davide.* Milano: Rusconi, 1976; *Davide.*Milano: Mondadori, 1989; *Davide.* Milano: Sironi, 2009; *Davide.* Milano: Piccolo Karma, 2012.
In Spanish, *David.* Trans. Javier Albinaña. Barcelona: Planeta, 1978.
In Polish, *Pamietniki Króla Dawida*. Trans. Adam Szymanowski.Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1980. vide

exploration of personal religion: in a 1990 interview for Italian television and elsewhere, he emphasizes that each of his writings treats his obsession with the question of God in some way or another (Coccioli, *Intervista*).[8] In one of his published 'journals,' Coccioli describes experiencing a relationship to the divine and a sense of vocation at a very young age (Coccioli, *Tourment* 13). He quickly moved away from the always alien Catholicism of his youth, however, and eventually towards his Jewish heritage and the Islam he experienced all around him during his childhood in Libya. After studying Islam extensively at the Oriental Institute of Naples and immersing himself in what he later categorized as almost "Talmudic" study style, he moved further away from Catholicism following a self-imposed exile from Italy and the publication in France of *Fabrizio Lupo* (1952) (Coccioli, *Tourment* 47). Coccioli chronicles his own long love-affair with Judaism, including interest in rabbinic and mystical texts, in *Le tourment de Dieu* (1971). Finally, towards the end of his life, after *Mémoires,* he reflected on Buddhist traditions (*Buddha e il suo glorioso mondo* 1989).

During a long period of renewed attention to his Jewish roots, Coccioli composed *Mémoires du roi David,* an ample novel in which an ailing King David gives an extended, circuitous monologue directed to God himself. The novel opens with David's call to attention: "Écoute," a strange inversion of the *shema* followed not by a description of God's power, but by David's roles: "me, David son of Jesse, messiah, king of Israel [moi, David fils d'Isaï, messie, roi d'Israël]" and a detailed account of his recent dream (9). In part to stave off his death, a kind of Scheherazade to his maker, David recounts the events of his life with the urgency and the

[8] In another journal text, *Pequeño Karma Segundo* (2002), he writes of his "religious itinerary," that "I have been everything: from Jewish to Jainist. From animist to Muslim, from Krishnaite to Mormon [lo he sido todo: desde judío hasta jainista. Desde animista hasta musulmán, desde krishnaita hasta mormón]" (63).

meticulous detail signaled by this opening. And though the novel is diffuse on the level of plot—David passes through and returns to episode after episode of his story in the dreamy, drifting monologue—it is unified by a style which is both consistent and disjointed. Though David's ostensibly fluid and seamless narrative voice moves the novel smoothly, the prose seems to break itself apart into words and phrases in the reading. Within the space of a few pages, for example, while describing his triumph over Goliath, David moves from the described scene to theological musings: "A confession to You: I only tasted deeply the bitter wine of a leader's solitude at the moment of shedding blood, blood which has always appalled me. And it is because of this spilled blood, isn't it, that You have condemned me not to build You a temple" (73).[9] These lyrical assessments lead back to a more casual description of events directly linked to the biblical version:

> Whose son is this young man, Abner? This was the question Saul asked his army commander at the time of my encounter with the Philistine. And the annals, where one reads that to say "young man" (or: youth), "na'ar" is used, seem the height of precision with regard to this phrase: must one then acknowledge that Saul had not recognized me? (74, 75)[10]

One critic noted the clipped short "bursts" of Coccioli's French prose[11]: this broken incantatory style, combined with slippages between high and low diction (soon after describing the recherché "bitter wine of a leader's solitude [vin amer de la solitude du chef]" David describes Saul's armor as "[snazzy kit [tapageur barda]") as well as multiple references to transliterated Hebrew

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[9] "Un aveu à Toi: je n'ai savouré à fond le vin amer de la solitude du chef qu'à l'heure de répandre le sang, le sang dont j'ai toujours eu horreur. Et c'est à cause du sang versé n'est-ce pas? Que Tu m'as condamné à ne pas Te bâtir un temple" (73).

[10] "De qui ce garçon est-il fils, Abner?" Voilà la question posée par Saül, tandis que j'allais à la rencontre du Philistin, au chef de son armée. Et les annales, où on lit que pour dire "garçon" (ou: jeune) on employa le mot "na'ar", paraissent le comble de la précision à l'égard de cette phrase: faut-il donc admettre que Saül ne m'avait pas reconnu?" (74, 75).

[11] François Caviglioli in *Combat*, cited in the 1976 Table Ronde book jacket : "la phrase française. . . est un peu brisée; elle se disperse en petits élans vifs et précis."

words ("na'ar") and Coccioli's own rather abrupt, line-by-line Bible translations ("De qui ce garçon est-il fils, Abner?"[12]) force the reader to attend to the very words of the text.

In many ways, the novel's unusual style reflects Coccioli's own unique blend of spiritual and philological engagement with the text of 1 and 2 Samuel that serves as a primary source-text for his novel. Coccioli describes the link between his fascination with David as a character and his training in close textual study: in a 1976 interview he recalled being drawn to David by "the psychology" as well as by his own experiences with the "philology, the semantics" of an education in Semitic studies (Coccioli, "*Davide*" 32).

In one of his myriad autobiographical works, Coccioli describes this imbrication as part of his long researches towards his David novel. He tells of his first experience reading the Bible with the Louis Segond version on the table before him ("a beautiful text, from the literary perspective, which I would willingly call Gide-like"[13]) and evocatively describes the darkened room as if it were a scene of prayer or ritual, lit by a bronze lamp with windows opening over "a sea of roofs [un mer de toits]" in which he recited, intoned, the list of biblical books (Coccioli 1971 223). Later, he tenderly describes pages of pink-papered notes which evidence more literary and philological attention (notes on word-choice, a list of David's successes, an entire page of notes on the etymology of David's name) (224). Elsewhere, he feels renewed religiosity while reading of Samuel's call in 1 Samuel 3, such that what began as literature for him became "something else," a religious experience felt throughout the process, in which even (and particularly) taking notes on the Bible became an act of prayer (Coccioli, *Tourment* 225, 230). In *Mémoires*, the writer of fiction concerned with man's relationship to his God draws on his

[12] See 1 Sam. 17.55 in *BHS*; Coccioli seems to follows the Hebrew word order when possible.
[13] "Un très beau texte, du point de vue littéraire, d'une clarté et d'une harmonie que je qualifierais volontiers de gidiennes" (*Tourment* 223).

philological and historical training as well as his own religious-textual activity in a provocative dual position.

As Coccioli's description of his process suggests, the novel's engagement with its "source" is remarkably meticulous: *Mémoires* moves in dialogue with the text of Samuel (and Chronicles) to a degree unparalleled in other reworkings, including Coccioli's own adaptation of other stories.[14] As Coccioli stresses in his author's note to the novel, the work's basis, "and it couldn't be otherwise," is in "the Hebrew original" (7).[15] Rewritings often emulate biblical style to some degree—to grant authority to a retelling or to recall the strangeness or the distance of a biblical text. Other retellings recall the original document merely for place names and specificities, small cues to add 'local color' to a novelistic *Sitz im Leben*. Coccioli's text, however, creates a new kind of biblically-inflected style unto itself, one that integrates Coccioli's own translations of biblical materials with David's 'own' novelistic voice. David's account of his attempt to wear Saul's armor before his fight with Goliath exemplifies this juxtaposition:

> It is told (and one reads in our annals) that I cried out I cannot walk with all this, because I have never tried." This is false. I said exactly: "Let my lord allow his servant to conduct the fight in his own way! " And I quickly got out of that luxurious, snazzy kit.
>
> In short, it's not true that the young David was unable to support the king's massive gear: on the contrary, the great sword fit him beautifully, which was surely noted by the assistants and foremost by the king.

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[14] *Manuel le Méxicain,* for example, recasts Christ's passion in a Mexican village (1956). In many ways, the novel also represents a mystical religious text, (a "text to meditate upon [à mediter]" according to the Table Ronde edition jacket cover) and reflects Coccioli's deep engagement with Judaism in the influences cited in his author's note (from midrash, the Talmud and the Zohar, to Scholem, Safran, Neher, Epstein, Heschel, Buber, Mandel and Chouraqui as well as many Bible translations ("Louis Segond, Rabbinat Française, la Pléiade, l'École Biblique de Jérusalem") (7). David exhibits an erudite religious scholar's facility: he cites from the Torah, Qohelet, Proverbs, Lamentations, and elsewhere, occasionally hints at mystical interpretation, employs Kabbalistic terminology, and recites the *shema* in times of trouble. The most sustained intertextual relationship, however, is between David's memoirs and the books of Samuel and Chronicles.

[15] "La base de mon travail a été, et ce ne pouvait être autrement, l'original hébreu" (7). It is not clear exactly what edition of the Hebrew texts Coccioli may have used, however, though he also consulted many French editions for his dedicated translation work (see above).

> It's that I wanted to advance against the blaspheming monster, as the annals and country legends have told with a proud beatitude for over 50 years, with only my shepherd's stick and, in my pouch, the five flat stones I'd gathered with a furtive movement. (74-5)[16]

Here, and elsewhere, David reinterprets his old text with fastidious attention, making adjustments to it as necessary that lead into the more sustained spiritual reflections that he interpolates between and among such scenes. David moves between reanalysis of the biblical material and of his own former self, retelling both the old version and his new version and commenting on both. Translated Masoretic text and transliterated Hebrew words appear uncited in David's discourse, both as excerpts from historical books he calls the "annals" and as remembered dialogue. During the course of his monologue, he also speaks entire psalms, recalls and refers to passages and stories readers recognize from the Torah, Job, Lamentations, and other biblical books. By presenting David's encounters with his 'canonic' text in Samuel and Chronicles as part of his meticulously retelling of the story, the novel effects a peculiarly tight link between the two versions.[17]

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[16] "On raconte (et on lit dans nos annales) que je m'écriai: "Je ne puis marcher avec tout cela, car je n'ai jamais essayé!"; c'est faux. Je dis exactement: "Que mon seigneur consente à son serviteur de mener le combat à sa façon!; et je me libérai rapidement de ce luxueux, tapageur barda.

En somme: ce n'est pas vrai que le jeune David se montra incapable de soutenir le massif équipement du roi: la formidable épée, au contraire, lui allait à merveille, ce qui fut assurément remarqué par les assistants et en premier lieu par le roi.

C'est que contre le monstre blasphémateur je voulus avancer, comme les annales et les légendes du pays le rapportent avec une béatitude orgueilleuse depuis plus de cinquante ans, rien qu'avec mon bâton de berger et, dans ma panetière, les cinq pierres plates que j'avais ramassées d'un mouvement furtif" (74-5).

[17] Like many of Coccioli's works, *Mémoires* was composed in one language (in this case French) and self-translated to another (Italian) (See Mercuri on Coccioli as auto-translator). Coccioli prided himself on his ability to drift between languages, choosing a language to write in that seemed appropriate for the story he would write. According to Coccioli's author's note, he completed the "definitive" French edition on January 3rd, 1975 in Mexico City and the "definitive' Italian version in Florence in August, 1975 (*Mémoires* 7).

In David's treatment, the relationship between source and new version moves beyond simple recall: *Mémoires* also mirrors a reader's response to the Bible, transferring confusion about David's often opaque characterization onto David himself, deftly combining David's famously conflicted nature with existentialist meditations on the dual self.[18] In large part, the novel founds David's theological reflection and self-psychologizing on David's awareness of his "doubled" state, both fleshly and heavenly, beastly and human, violent and compassionate, elements of his narrative that have troubled Bible readers for centuries. Is he ruthless or sensitive? Ambitious and lusty sinner, or noble servant of God? These doublings manifest in the novel through two kinds of soul ("âme") motivating David, the "sensitive" and the "spiritual." As David describes himself, in the reflexive-third-person speech that often characterizes his musings: "One part of David can't stop—and it's a furor that takes on different shades—becoming impassioned by everything; but another part of David is definitively 'beyond.'"[19] The novel turns on this strange position of limbo between heaven and earth: at times the duality represents the David of "non-time an non-space [non-temps et non-espace]" ready for death, in contrast to the "lower [inférieur]" David full of appetite or who remains "attached to the fallacious dimensions of human history" (154)[20] This contrast reflects the distinction between

[18] Coccioli's close relationship to 20th century French existentialist thought is clear. He writes in *Pequeño Karma Segundo* (2002) for example, of being "seized by great religious- intellectual doubts [asaltado por grandes dudas intelectuales religiosas"] as a young man in Paris, caught between Jean-Paul Sartre, "he of atheist existentialism" and Gabriel Marcel, "he of Catholic existentialism," and speaks of Marcel's *Mors et Vita* with admiration (63). Later, Coccioli refers to the "squalid and cold existentialist world à la Jean-Paul Sartre (to whom I was very close in the Paris of my youth" ["escuálido y frío mundo existencialista a la Jean-Paul Sartre (a quien estuve muy cerca en el París de mi juventud"] (70). Marcel and Coccioli corresponded, and a letter from Marcel praising Coccioli's 1959 novel *El guijarro blanco* is included in 1959 and 1960 Italian, Spanish and Portuguese editions of the work. See also T.F Staley.

[19] "Une partie de David ne cesse, et c'est une fureur qui assume des couleurs différentes, de se passionner pour tout; mais une autre partie de David est définitivement au-delà. Divorce, sans doute, entre l'âme sensitive et l'âme spirituelle, cela me déchire" (12).

[20] "Un David qui demeurait attaché aux fallacieuses dimensions de l'histoire humaine" (154).

early and late portions of the biblical narrative (young, vital David who dances before the ark, who takes Bathsheba, who toys with the passions of Saul's family; and the failing King David who reveals himself stonily to the people in the gate after his second son's death in tacit, minimal participation and who lies, cold and frail, in an unwarmable deathbed).

Beyond the contrast between earthly and heavenly David, however, *Mémoires* represents the 'ultimately' doubled man, and therefore the perfect man to represent man's inner conflicts, between reason and feeling, 'sensitive' and 'spiritual' souls, the struggle of confronting the divine as a fleshy, desiring human. David recalls a conversation with Samuel (the spiritual guide to young David) in which Samuel stresses the universality of a dual self, that all humans have inside them "some angel [de l'ange]" and "some animal: whence the dialogue [de l'animal: d'où le dialogue]" (32).[21] David is representative of mankind's doubling and the difficulties it brings. But Samuel goes on to note David's particularly extreme manifestation of this duality. Samuel remembers, "I suddenly knew . . . that the duality was a deeper, more painful mark in you than in most humans . . . I believe I recognized in you the wound that split you: your double being, and the interminable dialogue between its two inhabitants" (32-34).[22] Samuel highlights the abrupt clarity with which he "recognizes" the future king and marks the difficulties such a role will bring, the more "painful [douleureuse]" "wound [blessure]" that "split [partageait]" David's self and prompts an unending dialogue.

David himself recognizes his doubling as constitutive and irreducible and hints at the task it is to live in such a state: "There was never just one David: always, there were two. We were

[21] David explicitly confronts the two sides of the self, Pascal's "ni ange ni bête," but some combination of the two (Pascale 115).

[22] J'ai su soudain . . . que la dualité était en toi une marque davantage profonde, et davantage douloureuse, que chez la plupart des créatures humaines . . . je crois que je te reconnus à la blessure qui te partageait: ton être double, et le dialogue interminable entre tes deux habitants" (34).

(we are) enclosed in a single body" (30).[23] Here, David as ultimate conflicted biblical character models the kind of inner dialogue Gabriel Marcel describes, in which "everything must be interpreted as though I were two persons—as though I were, for example, at once the older and younger brother of myself," by which the statement "I belong to myself," yields an absolute "convergence" between the statements "I belong to you/ You belong to me/ I belong to myself" (42). The third-person voice David uses to confront and name his two selves, in past and present ("There were two [Il y en a eu deux]") extends the "interminable dialogue" between the two inhabitants, as David speaks about his doubled-self from both a position somehow both outside the two parts and within it "nous sommes [we are]". Though the novel ostensibly describes David's one-sided dialogue with God, David's constant self-analysis renders the entire novel an extension of this internal dialogue contained within the pages of a retold story, a dialogue with a past text.

David refers to the model of doubled self again and again, such that all of his behaviors—from his bloody deeds to his pious prayers—are tacitly linked to his duality, representing manifestations of one or other side of their dialogue. Here, some version of the concerns that plague interpreters of David's story, scholars and religious readers alike (Is he simply an innocent and divinely sanctioned child, or is he an ambitious young pretender? How can he be a "man after God's own heart," and an apparently ruthless tyrant?) are transferred onto David himself as he attempts to self-interpret, to distinguish the Davids in dialogue. For David founds his self-exploration upon a never-ending attempt to distinguish between the two selves locked in his body: "Our concern consisted in knowing who was who: which of the two Davids was

[23] "Il n'y a jamais eu qu'un David: toujours, il y en a eu deux. Nous étions (sommes) enfermés dans un seul corps" (30).

David[24]" (30). These Davids, which David names "David intelligence, David instinct" relate to a mystical view of man as containing both "intelligence," linked to angels and to obeisance of the divine, and "instinct" linked to animal behavior, in parallel, it seems, to the "spiritual" and "sensitive" souls (32). Inevitably, these repeated Pascalian pairs recall the paired oppositions that make David such a legendary figure (he is the shepherd-poet and the warrior-king), contrasts made clear in his final commands to Solomon: walk with God, and act justly, but also make sure my enemies wallow in blood.[25] Often the parallels are quite explicit: David himself grows uncomfortably sure, for example, that he is linked to Joab and his bloody acts by a sense that Joab incarnates something of David's brutal side ("Wasn't Joab's true crime, in the end, that he resembled the "bad" David too closely?"), an idea that recurs at key moments of Joab's violence, which David is uneasily aware works to his benefit (225).[26] Elsewhere, he wonders whether his decision to join the Philistines (a classic example of David's possible Israelite betrayal) was a reasoned or emotional choice, from "impulsive David [impulsion]" or "reasoning David [raisonnement]" and "head over heels David [coup de foudre]" or "calculated David [calcul]" (177).

But just as his doubles are inseparable from one another, though David discusses himself at length—the novel is over three hundred pages long—he only extends the question of his identity through his own self-probing. Again, the questions of Bible readers are transferred onto David. David responds cagily to Michal's question, "Who are you, David? [Qui es-tu, David]," and picks up the question later, ("Who was I [Qui étais-je]") in analyzing his growing separation

[24] "Nos soucis consistaient à savoir qui était qui: lequel des deux David était David" (30).
[25] See 1 Kings 2:2-9.
[26] Le véritable crime de Joab n'était-ce pas, au bout du compte, de ressembler trop au "mauvais" David?" (225).

from those around him (88, 152). The question's imperfect tense apparently reflects his past self-interrogation, and past David responds in a litany of actions that read like a book jacket for a bildungsroman, or like Robert Alter's description of David's human change over time[27]:

> Little shepherd with my zither, his dreams, his pebbles; adolescent on whose head one day a few drops of oil were poured; musician whose songs calmed a sick king; national hero, son-in-law and rival to the king; someone before whom secret doors are cracked open; a man with nothing, wandering in the desert, and who feigns madness; the leader of a band of outlaws; now the liberator of a fragment of Judah. (152)[28]

But these superficial descriptions of action and role leave David himself, like the reader, at a loss, and he closes his response with a reiteration of the question: "Yes, but who was I? [Oui: mais qui étais-je?]" (152). This time, the repeated question seems to re-instigate David's monologue, which he continues as if in answer to the question: David self-constitutes through language, extending his response to "qui est David" through his own *mémoire*.

Furthermore, towards the novel's conclusion, David concentrates on the important *continuity* in his sense of self, even if he is inexplicable, a continuity similarly emphasized through David's own continuous speaking voice. Though he responds to words from Bathsheba concerning his kingship and his divine function, David emphasizes not his role but his being: "I have never stopped being David [Je n'ai jamais cessé d'être David]" (331)**.** He extends the timelessness of this decision into the past and the future, and simultaneously affirms his self-containment against God the interlocutor himself: "Until my death, and probably beyond, I will be David, forever. Not even you, I told myself then (I tell myself now) . . . would be able to take

[27] David's is "probably the greatest single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life evolving by slow stages through time" (1999 ix).

[28] "Petit berger avec ma cithare, ses rêves, ses cailloux; adolescent sur la tête duquel on verse un jour quelques gouttes d'huile; musicien dont les chansons apaisent les crises d'un roi malade; héros national, gendre et rival du roi; quelqu'un devant qui l'on entrouvre des portes secrètes; un homme sans plus rien, errant dans le désert et qui contrefait la folie; le chef d'une bande de hors-la-loi; maintenant, le libérateur d'un fragment de Juda . . ." (152, ellipsis in original).

from me the privilege of being David son of Jesse: "that" fragment of essence, not another fragment (331).[29] Though he may not understand exactly who "David" is, he has always been "David." Not only does David mark himself as eternal through his relationship to language, but describing his identity in words—telling God, and more importantly David, about being David—allows David to survive, now in his deathbed, and, he implies, even after. In a revealing pivot, David speaks both to God ("Toi") and himself, rejecting divine omnipotence through speaking to himself ("me dis-je"). His twice-repeated "me dis-je [I told myself]" in past and present tenses hints at his anxious need for identity: here, David constitutes himself by repeated *spoken* affirmations. He even describes his words as a speech act, remarking that "this sentence [phrase], the simple noting [constatation] of an irrefutable fact, radiated a sense of peace,"[30] as though the very expression of the words in a voice—and ultimately their repetition in his memoirs, their "constatation**,"** as text—effected their truth (331).[31]

In *Mémoires du roi David,* a living, thinking, dialoguing David questions his authentic self within the larger framework demarcated by the repeated questions "Who is David" or "Which of the two Davids was David?" But David also negotiates his relationship with himself through his *past text* explicitly, and not merely by referencing the static written account in order to move beyond it by supplying alternative vitality. His meditative self-assessment occurs through recourse to his previous speech treated as a stable object (as if transcribed in his

[29] "Jusqu'a ma mort, et très probablement au-delà, je serais David, pour toujours. Pas même Toi, me dis-je alors (me dis-je aujourd'hui) . . . ne pourrais m'enlever le privilège d'être David fils d'Isaï: "ce" fragment d'essence, pas un autre fragment" (331).
[30] "Cette phrase, la simple constatation d'un fait irréfutable, irradiait un sens de paix" (331).
[31] The connection between mémoire-praxis and this speech-act is reinforced by the doubled connotations of "constater," as both to record or note and to do so officially through written documentation.

memory) as well as to the text of the "annals" that tell his story officially.[32] The novel alternates between direct recounting of events and citation of dialogue combined with the analysis that one expects from an autobiographer. Yet again and again, this David's retrospective analysis is tightly bound to the texts that we know form it.

Often, David's analysis of the material found in the "annals" as well as of other pieces of dialogue he recalls trace an experience of an author revisiting the sacred text as if imbued with David's voice. We might expect an autobiographer to tell things his way—this is a new version—and yet David composes this new version through deep philological engagement with the old. The text is separate from him, and separate from his narrative, and yet he inserts cited references to it, like a scholar referring to a source and incorporating its insights. At one point, during Nathan/God's didactic accusatory speech following David's crimes with Bathsheba and Uriah, David cuts the prophet short, claiming "I know my story by heart [je connais mon histoire par coeur]," and indeed, he finds it easy to recall his own chronicle. At times he cites the "annals," as corroborating evidence, even of his own beauty ("'of handsome appearance, ruddy skin, with beautiful eyes'. . . (description of our annalists, very exact). . ." (174).[33] Elsewhere, he reacts to particular word-choices in characters—in Hebrew no less—as a dedicated literary reader: "the eloquence of my poor nephew had the coarseness of the illiterate soldier . . . how many times had he repeated "today": And nevertheless it gave off an impression of vigor, of the natural . . ." (339).[34] Here, David close-reads Joab's discourse in the annals (actually a speech

[32] These annals seem to constitute the canonic text of the Bible: usually David refers to 1 and 2 Samuel or Chronicles, but he also often makes references to the Pentateuch and other books.
[33] "'De bonne mine, au teint vermeil, avec de beaux yeux'. . . (description de nos annalistes, très exacte). . ." (174). See 1 Sam. 16.12.
[34] "L'éloquence de mon pauvre neveu avait la rudesse du soldat analphabète . . . combien de fois avait-il répété "aujourd'hui": hayôm, hayôm, hayôm? Et pourtant cela dégageât une impression de vigueur, de naturel . . ." (339). See 2 Sam. 19.5-7 in *BHS*.

from 2 Sam. 19) noting the thrice-repeated "today" that stands out within the biblical text and moving towards a description of Joab's characterization as implied by his speech—he is rough, uneducated, and yet exudes raw vigor. In these scenes, as elsewhere, David links his analysis to the annals. But though on other occasions he analyzes the language of his memory, the text he recalls is often also direct translation of biblical text, emphasizing the textual, "source"-like quality of even past spoken language. For example, when David analyses Jonathan's speech to Saul (recounted to David by a third party in the novel's reimagining) he wonders if any onlooker "had noted that the heir had said "David and not, ceremoniously, 'the son of Jesse' [avait remarqué que l'héritier avait dit "David" et non pas, cérémonieusement, "le fils d'Isaï"]" (126).[35] Just as literary critics draws attention to the revelatory ways in which characters are named in biblical narrative,[36] here David himself highlights Jonathan's intimate use of his name, rather than his title.

Sometimes these remarks simply resemble the marginal notes of a close reader's edition, but more often they contribute to David's search for his identity, part of the novelistic response to the "Who is David?" question that haunts the work as a whole. In this sense, the novel becomes more than merely a close commentary or a new version filled in by David's perspective. Instead, the novel builds on the philological form to express David's existential searching. Towards the end of his narrative, for example, David highlights the word "blood," in

[35] See 1 Sam. 20.28.

[36] Robert Alter, for example, writes that "when a relational epithet is attached to a character, or, conversely, when a relational identity is stated without the character's proper name, the narrator is generally telling us something substantive without recourse to explicit commentary: Michal oscillates between being the daughter of Saul and the wife of David according to her fortunes in the story, and Tamar, most painfully, is identified as the sister of Amnon when he rapes her" (*Art* 224). In the verse Coccioli's David cites, Jonathan's use of David's name contrasts with Saul's references to "the son of Jesse."

an insult he receives on the road following Absalom's revolt ("man of blood"), which recalls to him to the words of his wife Abigail in her first speech to him.[37] An attentive self-reader, David observes the keyword "blood" and the designation "man of blood" that accumulate provocatively in his story. He summarizes and cites Abigail's speech, and it is while standing on the roadside drawing these two iterations of a single word together in his mind that David feels a bout of nausea, reflects on the blood he has caused and the difficulty in discerning "useful" or "useless carnage" and "plunges into himself," to reflect on "the inevitable misery of man" (321).[38] Here again, even while living his story, David's attention to the 'text' of his life (here a biblical *leitwort*) is what reminds him of the turns along his life path, prompting physical and emotional reactions and reflection in (novelistic) real time.

David also uses the textual material of the annals themselves to reassess his own behavior, but though he compares his remembered feelings with those recorded for posterity, often the annals text functions as a memory-aid or emotional barometer to help him recall what he felt then. On the one hand, he underscores the annals' accuracy and faultless reflection (they are "meticulous [minucieuses]" "are careful to specify [préciser]," particular words and actions, and write with "habitual diligence") and yet contests the deeper, inward qualities that they nevertheless veil, but which he recalls through the reminder of their words (351, 346, 330). After a citation from the annals (Chronicles) highlighting David's calm acceptance of his kingly role and stature, David comments on his contrasting feelings (238). He notes that the annals version is "very elegantly expressed" but that in reality, "at midnight, I contemplated the sky and

[37] 1 Sam. 25.23-31; 1 Sam. 16.7.
[38] "Chose ardue de distinguer entre un carnage utile et un carnage inutile . . . de nouveau je plongeai en moi-même, je réfléchis sur l'inévitable misère de l'homme" (321).

repeated to myself that I was more insignificant than a speck of dust" (1 Chron 14:2; 238).[39] Elsewhere, he notes the fear that pervaded him, even when according to the annals he was full of religious fervor: he only whirled virulently with the ark to hide his improper emotions (248).

Yet on each occasion, David cites the annals themselves diligently, "verbatim [textuellement]" as if it were always necessary to base his own revisions upon their version, to recall with their help the emotions they reveal to varying degrees. On occasion, David even asks his servant to bring him the physical copy of the 'source-text,' in order to work from it, a scholar of the primary text paradoxically employing it to further probe *himself*, its subject. Here, David-as-philologist reads the ossified written text, and David the character who lived it inserts the actual vibration of its liveliness. In the touching scene in the cave with Saul, for example, David cites Saul's last words at length as they are repeated "almost verbatim . . . from Dan to Beersheba" and notes the annals' exaggerating tendency, which "[add], to finish in apotheosis, that I promised Saul what he asked" in order to stress the few personal, emotional words of the account he himself remembers: Saul's haunting cry: "Is that your voice, my son David? [Est-ce bien ta voix, mon fils David?]" (167).[40] By juxtaposing David's memory-text with citations of the annalistic account, David's new description of the scene preserves the most important words of the older version, granting them new resonance: he dwells on these last words in the Hebrew ("benî David," "my son David") and describes the mixture of love and anger they instigated, summarizing his conflicted feelings towards Saul (248, 167-8). Elsewhere, the text of the annals quite literally recalls to him a moment he did not remember and prompts further reflection.

[39] "Très élégamment exprimé, mais à minuit . . . je contemplais le ciel et me répétais que j'étais plus insignifiant qu'un grain de poussière" (238).
[40] "C'est, presque textuellement, ce qu'on se répète de Dan à Bersabé, et nos annales en donnent confirmation, ajoutant, pour finir en apothéose, que je promis à Saül ce qu'il me demandait" (167). See 1 Sam. 26.17.

"Overwhelmed with anger [Bouleversé par la colère]" following Michal's disdainful reception of David and the ark, he only remembered the beginning, a "début de phrase" of his reaction speech, but happily turns to the annals to fill in the blanks: "But I only have to read our annals to know what David cried to his undeserving wife Michal" (250).[41] He cites the entire speech, and even intersperses a comment on the brilliance of the annalistic version: "too faithful, the annalist didn't leave out from the text a glimmer of the passion that shook me" (250).[42] The annalistic version and the memory it helps him recall causes him to reflect on his relationship with Michal, the love he feels for her despite her barrenness and the gossip the annals version inspired, and his own relationship to public opinion. Here David's philology acts as an almost therapeutic crutch for subjective reconstitution.

Indeed, whether he explicitly connect his words to the annals or not, David sometimes analyses himself (or his past self) as if he were a literary reader trying to imagine an opaque character's motivations or to piece together foreshadowing: introspection as close-reading. Thus, when remembering a decree (on behalf of Ziba, the servant of Jonathan's surviving son Mephibosheth) given during David's exile from Jerusalem at the beginning of Absalom's revolt, David comments: "And this decree, emitted from a vengeful mouth—would it not prove that in the depths of my soul I never believed I was ruined?" (317)?[43] Rather than simply recall his emotions or motivations, here David isolates the emotions of his character as reflected in the speech. He describes his words (in the impersonal, Racinian locution, "une bouche vengeresse") in order to "prove" something about his past self and what might happen later in the story. In the

[41] "Mais je n'ai qu'à lire nos annales pour savoir ce que cria le roi David a son indigne femme Mical" (250).
[42] "Trop fidèle, l'annaliste n'a pas omis dans son texte un reflet de la passion qui me secouait" (250).
[43] Et ce décret, émis d'une bouche vengeresse, ne prouverait-il pas qu'au fond de mon âme je n'ai jamais cru à ma ruine" (317).

same scene, David describes his own speech, (words that "came from my lips [sortirent de mes lèvres]") as if it were already canonized as text, and distinguishes between this record and the truth of his soul: the words are "not from my soul) . . . not from [his[soul" but perhaps from "a David who remained attached to the fallacious dimensions of human history in order to insist on marking it with his maneuvers" (316).[44] Remarkably, David uses his past text (these "words that came out of [his] mouth") to distinguish between two parts of his famously conflicted character: the corporeal, historically-oriented, machinating David and his more spiritual counterpart.

In these ways, David melds the role of Bible scholar or literary critic and diegetic character, embarking on a process of self-discovery aided by his own text. David's spoken memoir thus both responds to and side-steps the questions David's character calls up for readers, scholarly and otherwise. David deals with the same conflicting information, the same events, and though he often 'supplies' additional information, correcting the annals and remembering past emotions, the novel reads less as a document filling in gaps than as a reading journal for a man questioning his origins and his identity through the texts that constitute him and those he constructs in order to do so. In this sense, Coccioli's text preserves David's ambiguity as representative of universal mans' confusion with himself, a confusion merely heightened by David's particular role (as intercessor between man and God) and his particularly 'doubled' nature (emotional psalmist or violent warrior, weeping father or vicious king, here "spiritual David" "instinct David"). *Mémoires'* deep and abiding use of the biblical text preserves the specificity of this paradoxically universal man—and leverages his story for a strange novel of philological self-examination.

[44] "Non pas de [son] âme . . . d'un David qui demeurait attaché aux fallacieuses dimensions de l'histoire humaine pour s'obstiner à la marquer de ses manœuvres" (316).

Moreover, David's (and Coccioli's) philological style reinforces the link between the ancient and the contemporary so appealing to many readers of David's story. In *Mémoires,* though David exists in Ancient Israel, not only does he speak from in a twentieth-century consciousness, but he also analyses the Bible text like we do. His textualized meditations strike the reader as unstintingly modern. In his author's note, Coccioli emphasizes the 'truth' of this novel, due to the way in which his reverence toward the text brings past time forward "to occupy, while ennobling it, my personal space—so demanding, so constraining" (7-8).[45]

The interaction between biblical intertext and new meditative memoir accesses a kind of present psychology made clearer by relation to Coccioli's own parallel self-reading journalistic style. Elsewhere, Coccioli experimented with metafiction and blurred boundaries between writerly memoir and novel, questioning both forms: in his famous *Fabrizio Lupo*, (1952) the eponymous hero recounts his tale to a fictional writer, Carlo Coccioli, also author of *Il cielo e la terra* (1950). *Tutta la verità* stages Coccioli's conversations with a fictional journalist, and *Journal* (1957)*; Le tourment de Dieu* (*Documento 127* 1970) (1971)*;* and *Piccolo Karma* (1987) constitute not-quite straightforwardly autobiographical reflections. And just as David uses the annals to reevaluate himself, founding his written expressions of interiority on the past, ossified evidence and gains a sense of self through his relationships to the texts of the law and the psalms, Coccioli himself describes his self-constitution and affirmation as occurring through textual artifacts. He too, uses the old texts in contrast and in combination with his search for self-authenticity: In *Le tourment de Dieu* he emphasizes this obsession with ancient texts and their capacity to found an individual, recalling his obsession with the Koran, among other "impregnating" Islamic texts, in terms of a process of losing and regaining the ability to act in

[45] ". . .pour occuper, en l'ennoblissant, mon espace personnel, si exigu, si contraignant" (7-8).

the world: "I used myself up [m'épuisais] and reconstituted myself in books" (43, 65). In accordance with this "scrupulous, pedantic, maniac" approach, he adopts the Islamic practice of refusing to destroy any paper upon which he had written the name of Allah (47). The text is both preserved and preserving. Coccioli concludes at multiple moments that his behavior indicates "a Talmudic sensibility [un esprit talmudique]" within him (47). Furthermore, just as David applies this "esprit" to his own story, Coccioli, too, cites previous personal "annals," like his earlier, *Journal* (1957) as evidence for current musings, past data on himself worth reanalyzing.[46] Elsewhere, Coccioli comments on his past novels, treating each as a step in his journey of self-discovery. He highlights one novel (*Il cielo e la terra*) as unusually non-autobiographical, but marks others as representative of earlier self-incarnations. Like *Mémoires,* this 'journal' intersperses various religious texts; here, in this blatantly autobiographical work, Coccioli even highlights the sources, citing names and book titles—his own and those of others—in scholarly precision.

Yet Coccioli returns us to David as a specific kind of universal: David is not merely an avatar of an authorial memoirist, but is the ultimate *human*, both embedded in time and space and outside of them. In his note to the novel, Coccioli explains David's strange reach: He writes of "David, son of Jesse, who lived in the Promised Land of 3 million years ago" as "universal, eternal, and consequently modern, our contemporary" (Coccioli, *Tourment* 112, 8). This diction hints at a link not simply between times and humans, but between thinkers and writers too – as the novel makes clear, David is the contemporary of Coccioli. At the end of the novel, moreover,

[46] When questioning his past feelings about "anti-Jewish furor" in Italy, for example, he wonders, "was this excessive emotion simply an excess of sensibility? I don't think so [Sensibilité pure et simple? Je ne le crois pas] (50). He responds by transcribing directly a passage from the *Journal* to assure himself—and the reader—of the strength of his emotions, which he suggests may have been related to a resurgent sense of his own Jewish heritage (50).

David himself calls for this kind of temporal flux, in which all humans relive the lives of the patriarchs and the entire history of Israel ("live all that has been lived [vivre toute chose vecue]" 362[47]) and in which all people ought to be contemporary/contemporaneous with everything, "even that which is to come [même de ce qui viendra]" (362). In the same way careful analysis helps a scholar romantically reach back in time towards the texts, in communion with that which he studies, Coccioli and David bridge the divide through their textual work to present a model of a subject who somehow, beautifully, transcends history.

Remarkably, then, Coccioli gives us a "universal" tale of a man both ancient and contemporary. By imitating the work of scholars and attentive, scrupulous authors, David's own philological self-writing perfectly highlights his ambiguous position between then and now, the ancient and the modern world. This philologist's mémoire does not solve David, or 'man,' but it stages a personal re-reading of the Bible, an ideal version of Coccioli's journaling, and an apparent literalization of rewriting as self-writing: David asks "who is David," and must answer by negotiating between his remembered experience and the life chronicled by a text to which he still cleaves.

Rewriting of Rewritings: *God Knows*

Though Joseph Heller (1923-1999) never again achieved the widespread acclaim granted *Catch-22* (1961), he continued to write until his death. When told that he had never reproduced anything like Catch-22, he famously responded, "Who has?", and yet his later novels sold well and often ranked at the top of the bestseller list (Severo and Mitgang). *Good as Gold,* (a 1979

[47] Je suis convaincu qu'en David fils d'Isaî, qui a vécu dans la Terre Promise d'il y a trois mille ans, ne manque aucune des frontières de l'homme universel et éternel, et partant moderne, notre contemporain" (8).

satire of an ambitious, self-aggrandizing Jewish college professor) and *God Knows* (King David's memoir) are often categorized as Heller's two "Jewish" novels, though both were also criticized for their ambivalent treatment of Judaism.[48] In the writing of *God Knows* (1984), Heller's life imitated art: he was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome in 1981, sharing with David his bedridden, invalid status. Though the novel was not well-received by the critics, it was nevertheless a best-seller.

Like *Mémoires du roi David,* Joseph Heller's *God Knows* presents an autobiographical David rewriting in philological style. Like *Mémoires, God Knows* represents a transcription of a lengthy death-bed monologue in which King David reflects on his life and his text, though this David is explicitly both ancient and timeless: the reader understands through comedic touches that he has knowledge of fashions, history, and art of the ages that 'follow' his story. Bathsheba serves him tacos. Like Coccioli's David, however, this David uses his words to pass the time before his encroaching death. Perhaps more explicitly here, he also writes and speaks in an attempt to assure the *lasting* of his creative lineage.[49] He promises a swashbuckling story, both in the old and this new version: not only has he "got the poetry and passion, savage violence and the plain raw civilizing grief of human heartbreak," but as he puts it, "I honestly think I've got the best story in the Bible" (5)[50]

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[48] As David Seed amply describes, reviewers criticized "Good as Gold" for its Jewish (and non-Jewish) caricatures and *God Knows* for its vulgarity, working "to diminish the stature of spiritual standards to which it has fallen heir but which it cannot be bothered to honor" (Clemons "Turning Scripture into Shtik," in Seed 112). Seed also draws the parallel between criticism of Heller's Jewish novels and those of Philip Roth, "vilified by the Jewish press" (113).

[49] Daugherty and others have noted the possible affinities between Heller himself and David, including Heller's desire to meet critical expectations following the success of *Catch-22*, (David's refrain is "nothing fails like success") though David Seed notes the lack of comparison between the particulars of David's life and Heller's (Daugherty 398; Seed 112).

[50] Heller cites this line as the genesis for the novel as a whole (Daugherty 361)

Both 'autobiographies' place David as the solution to his own enigma; both treat the protagonist-narrator's difficult relationship to God; both are expansive retellings that trace the entirety of David's long life as preserved in the Biblical accounts; and both ostentatiously attend to particularities of the biblical text. But if Coccioli presents David as the most human figure in history, and also one for whom the entirety of the Biblical text serves as fodder for identity exploration, Heller's novel takes both these notions and pushes them to a postmodern extreme. Where Coccioli's David called upon many different biblical texts to support David's self-expression, Heller's novel calls upon the entire tradition of David rewritings. This David is not simply a man self-assessing via texts, but a man self-constituting as part of an endless series of revisions, of which his own 'novel' memoire is simply one more. Furthermore, if Coccioli's David ultimately explores his own identity—"who am I"—even as he suggests his universal, atemporal presence, Heller shifts attention explicitly towards David's authorship and his placement in a tradition of telling. Here David stands in not simply as the 'most universal' man, but as the most *rewritten* man—a stand-in for and a (comedic) fictional prototype of a writer confronting a textual tradition that he at once feels defined by and writes in intertextual relation to.

Like Coccioli's David, Heller's David analyzes himself through his past text, playing with the particularities of its language and assessing its relative merits. Yet where Coccioli's David relies on the "annals" to recall his own behavior or remind himself of his emotions, calmly assessing and musing like a dedicated philologue, transferring techniques used for ancient texts to assess even his own past speech, Heller's David stands in a contentious relationship with his past text. His 'philological style' uses the same kind of careful attention in order to simultaneously recall, reuse, and attempt to best the past account, as well as all other rewritings

that 'precede' his anachronistic consciousness. If Coccioli's David acts like a philologue in a more traditionally staid, plodding style, Heller's David's intertextual engagement plays not simply with the biblical text but with the tradition of Western Literature writ large to which he relates it: he adapts philological style to a postmodern mode.

In some ways, the tone of Heller's novel strikes a reader as diametrically opposed to Coccioli's serious, brooding reflection. Heller's novel reads a s a Jewish-American satire, and indeed, his King David monologues less as a 'good' devoted reader like Coccioli's hero than, as critics have observed, like Mel Brooks.[51] To some readers, Heller's reappropriation of the biblical king seems merely like an excuse for shtick—perhaps a comedic response to the book Bruce Gold (the Jewish academic protagonist of Heller's 1974 *Good as Gold*) never managed to write about "the Jewish experience in America" (*Good as Gold* 11).[52] In this view, Heller has taken up King David's voice partly in order to show readers how fantastically bizarre this venerated religious text actually is and to deflate its pomp for a contemporary audience.[53] He takes the raunchy story of a biblical king—famously the most 'human,'—and plays him for gags. Critics often excoriated the novel's frivolity, and biblical scholars treat the text with bemusement. Though Baruch Halpern acknowledges the similarity between Heller's treatment of

[51] Leon Wieseltier wrote in the *New Republic* in 1984, "Joseph Heller's new novel will inevitably be compared, its joylessness notwithstanding, to Mel Brooks. It does not deserve the compliment" (32).
[52] Wieseltier coins "the schlock of recognition" for texts of "American-Jewish culture" like Heller's which he excoriates for attempting "to comfort the present for the magnitude of its difference with the past" and "to entertain," through representing everything under the sun through the lens of Brooklyn (32).
[53] Friedman and Ruderman's religiously-inflected take is much more positive than that of some early reviewers, but nevertheless concludes that Heller's novel reclaims the Bible for modern readers by balancing "sacred and profane, high and low," in order to highlight *human* truths of scripture (301). In this way, "David's great deeds and noble aspirations shine all the greater in contrast to his pettinesses, lusts and ambitions," and "the holy and untouchable David whom many readers—Christians and Jews, theologians and Rabbis—have misrepresented in the ancient texts is not Heller's delight. To him the Bible is better red (read!) than dead" (301).

the Goliath episode and his own, he dismisses the novel as a "disappointing satirical theodicy" (5). In a polemic response to postmodern biblical criticism, John Van Seters acknowledges that the book might represent a "'close reading'" (in scare quotes) of the biblical text, and even a parody of "the mode of midrashic interpretation practiced in the Yeshiva," but concludes that the novel is light and safe: "It is not scholarship and it is certainly not intended as an alternative to historical criticism; it is a novel and is to be read as a novel, and as such I have no difficulty with it. The book is entertainment and as such it is very funny, even if at times it is a little over the top" (9-10).

But as Heller facetiously wrote to his friend, author Chris Buckley, "Keep in mind, it is possible to be both humorous and mordantly serious . . . have you read the novels of Joseph Heller? If you've not read *God Knows,* do so right now" (Daugherty 459). Like the best humor, Heller's novel functions through juxtaposition, but not simply through bringing the high low. Like the scholars, who gauge David's inconsistencies (even if in order to 'solve' them) and like Coccioli, who retains these tensions as constitutive of David's character and his own method of self-probing, Heller too moves beyond a simple reformulation of David's remembered duality (warrior-poet, soldier-lover, King-father, rising youth, fading potentate) to play up the particular messy ways the tensions in David are represented. Further, as for Coccioli, these tensions are inevitably textual. Heller's novel both moves according to a deep, almost scholarly engagement with David's story, and, like Coccioli, reinscribes the character with renewed attention to the writing process itself. Here, David's doublings are both mirrored in the very style of Heller's prose and reflected in the sustained friction between 'versions' that animate this 'new' retelling. The novel pivots from a close-reading of an 'original' text to treat issues of authorship and appropriation integral to the novel's own status as yet another rewriting. Like all biblical

rewritings, the novel implicitly reflects on an author's relationship to an earlier, highly authoritative and canonic text: here, however, the novel represents the position of an author confronting previous texts transposed onto a figure—a character-author—confronting hypertexts and intertexts.

Though Heller apparently does not treat the biblical text with *appropriate* deference, the novel nevertheless models a different kind of deep engagement with it. *God Knows* reads like creative commentary: it treats all episodes, methodically, some more than once, in Heller's typical winding recursive narrative, builds extensive scenes from small biblical moments, and attends deeply to the language of the King James Version**.** In many senses, moreover, the novel evinces a relationship to historical and philological scholarship not so far from that of Baruch Halpern or Stephen McKenzie. Not only does Heller's version of the Goliath episode match Halpern's (David relies on subverting the conventions of hand-to-hand combat), but Heller's David also drops in historical details, waxing lyrical on the sophistication of Philistine weaponry ("double-edged straight swords of iron that could splinter in a single swipe our clubs and axes and maces and our curved swords of bronze, all mounted on shafts of brittle wood") and describing the "forced labor" conscription of temple construction (61-2; 63). Furthermore, though unlike *Mémoires, God Knows* does not treat the 'original' Hebrew language,[54] Heller's text nevertheless plays with scholarly reading strategies: like a good philologue, David highlights the Hebrew version of the "beguiling refrain" that welcomed him home from war, "Saul hath slain his thousands/ and David his ten thousands," insisting "in the original it's even better" (6).

[54] The single exception is the transcribed chant praising David's battle prowess, appended apparently as a sort of 'Fig. A' to drub in the joke. Heller lists the chant twice, the first time in English first, followed by the Hebrew ("in the original it's even better") and the second in Hebrew followed by English ("or, in translation") (6, 125).

Like a critic highlighting narrative discontinuities, he corrects a discrepancy in the timeline of the biblical version: "Now, strictly speaking, this was not true. In fact, it was a bald lie, for it was not until afterward, in Samuel 1, Chapter 16, that the Lord, . . . commanded Samuel. . ." (115). And the novel makes a joke out of a moment of textual confusion reflected in the *KJV* translation and David's own bemusement: Jonathan recounts Saul's comments to David in a close transcription of the 'original':

> Then he told me I was the son of a perverse, rebellious woman, and that I had chosen to side with you to my own confusion. Half the time I did not know what he was talking about. He added something else that makes no sense to me at all. David, you're smart, maybe you can figure it out. He told me also—this is not easy to say—that I was a confusion to my mother's nakedness. (171)

David's interpretive skills are no help: "It's Greek to me," I was forced to confess" (171).[55]

Despite the rampant anachronisms, furthermore, Heller's David reveals historical context behind the biblical propaganda. Like biblical scholars, who seek historical knowledge behind the "textual veil," Heller too reads to elucidate possibilities the text might obscure (Halpern 55). In one passage, Heller acknowledges the historical reality of David's tiny kingdom and also both reflects and undermines the brashly propagandistic biblical story which praises David's great battle triumphs and empire-building activities. Joab, David's highly successful army leader, poses the possibility of *world* domination using biblical battle formulae drawn from the books of Samuel. At the famous time of "king's going out," Joab urges David to authorize military action:

> The English are coming down from the trees. . . . The Germans are coming out of their caves. . . . Abishai will turn east to his right hand with three hundred men to conquer the Caucausus, India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Tibet, Siberia, Mongolia, China, Vietnam, Korea, Japan and Formosa. . . . I will turn westward to my left hand. . . . (260)

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[55] See 1 Sam. 20.20 and McCarter on the difficult syntax. McCarter reads with LXX, "'Son of a young woman of rebellion,' which, however, misinterprets *hmrdwt* as a plural participle and therefore *n`rt* as plural also—thus 'Son of rebelling young women!'. . . MT: 'Son of a perverse woman of rebelliousness!'" (*I Samuel* 339).

After a few more paragraphs of Joab's extravagant plan, David's final one-liner blasts apart Joab's ambition and highlights the actual remarkably small scale of David's 'glorious' reign: "Maybe you'd better just walk across the Jordan into Ammon instead and surround Rabbah again." (261). The scene represents a biblically fueled joke that works via anachronism—like those of Mel Brooks' 2000-year-old Man—but it also attends to characteristic formulae of the text (the 'coming out of holes,' the 'turning')[56], reflects scholarly views (the small-scale empire-building),[57] and playfully exaggerates the kind of modernization found in historical novels or scholarly biographies. The novel may represent a parody of scholarly exegesis, but it is perhaps even more closely linked to these techniques than Halpern and Van Seters pretend.

But the novel's most striking philological engagement with its biblical source emerges through its virtuosic stylistic play. A poetic humorist's canny close attention to the text in its *KJV* manifestation yields moments of electric silliness that deftly yoke together ancient and modern. Sometimes the familiar formality of the *KJV* simply provides a satisfying foil to David's chatty language. Often, however, David not only cites *KJV* language but distinctly connects biblical stylistic tropes to reflection on his 'life' material. Even the sentence that describes his first encounter with Bathsheba pivots from stylistic imitation to interpretation: In the first clauses,

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[56] The faux-parallelism seems to parody Jonathan and his armor-bearers' perspective early in 1 Samuel: "And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves" (*KJV* 1 Sam. 14.11). The description of Joab's battle strategy parodies both Joab's plan against the Ammonites and the Arameans in 2 Samuel 10.10, in which he and Abishai split up to face separate battles, as well as the King James' consistent reflection of the biblical verb פנה, to turn towards a path, an action, etc. (i.e. "And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way that leadeth to Ophrah, unto the land of Shual: And another company turned the way to Bethhoron: and another company turned to the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness" *KJV* 1 Sam. 13.17-18).

[57] See, for example, Halpern's reading of Samuel and its "drastic reduction in traditional views of the early empire", as well as his chapter on the "Geography of the Davidic State" (226, 243-276).

David employs a biblical series of swift verbs such as those Alter famously describes ("I saw her, I sent for her, I lay with her")[58] before interpreting their very juxtaposition in the sentence's conclusion: ". . . and as simple as that was the imperceptible drift into the turbulent and depressing second half of my life . . ." (192).

The Bathsheba incident and God's punishment, particularly the death of David's first child with Bathsheba, haunt the novel as a whole. One 'version' of the scene in which Nathan the prophet hands down God's response to the affair exemplifies the novel's brilliant manipulation of biblical prose to reflect David's inner life, here his depth of feeling. The novel parodies the 3-4 number pattern common in Wisdom texts and the prophets[59] through Nathan's own version of the poetic parallelism, in which he adds highfalutin language from "The Raven" to his pompous speech: "Three ways there are to humble thee with repentance," he began, "No, make that four. Yea, four things there are that know no surcease of sorrow" (18). An attentive listener, David mocks Nathan's pedantry with his own parallelism: "Nathan Moralizing is as vinegar to my teeth, as smoke to my eyes," concluding with wry intertextual comparisons: "Compared to Nathan, Polonius was as silent as the Sphinx" (18). Biblical scholars mark Nathan's didactic speech as part of a prophetic writer's ideologically motivated commentary, and

[58] The *KJV* is swift, though not quite so swift. 2 Sam. 11.4 in *KJV*: "And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house." On this scene, Alter writes: "It is not uncommon for biblical narrative to use a chain of verbs in this fashion to indicate rapid, single-minded action" (Alter, *David Story* 251 n.4). In *Art of Biblical Narrative*, he explains "Verbs tend to dominate this biblical narration of the essential, and at intervals we encounter sudden dense concentrations or unbroken chains of verbs, usually attached to a single subject, which indicate some particular intensity, rapidity, or single-minded purposefulness of activity. . ." (2011 101).

[59] For example: "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not turn away *the punishment* thereof" (*KJV* Amos 1.3);"There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going:" (*KJV* Prov. 30.21).

the speech does indeed strike a reader as extremely different from surrounding material.[60] David's joke plays up this contrast, riffing on biblical style to highlight Nathan's pomposity, a verbally virtuosic man's response to what he sees as a staid lecture. Though David continues to pirouette around Nathan's plodding speech, the scene's conclusion reveals that all this talk is but anxious hot air. David reacts again to the biblical composition, here to the speech's jarring conclusion. He recalls the biblical punchline, the "zinger": "But the child . . . shall surely die" (19).[61] In marked contrast to the speedy volubility of his earlier commentary, David releases but two enjambed lines that fall with as much leaden weight as Nathan's phrase: "Trust in the Lord for a twist like that/ I lost my God and my infant in the same instant" (19). The syntactically spare phrases and brutally simple diction (only two words of more than one syllable) as well as the near-parallel assonance of "trust"/ "twist" and "infant"/ "instant" produce the impression of raw poetic lines and seem to reflect and pass on the cutting blow felt in Nathan's last phrase. Rigorous stylistic interplay like that of the Nathan scene drives the novel. Like Coccioli's David, this David analyzes his own life through its narrative form, but this David also interprets his life through stylistic homage.

Furthermore, the constant juxtapositions and variations in style which characterize David's voice in *God Knows* add to the novel's depiction of the tensions in David's character so familiar to any reader and stressed by scholarship—his violence and his tenderness, his role as

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[60] See McCarter. Indeed, many scholars see Nathan's intervention "as secondary with regard to the surrounding narrative," though McCarter marks it as part of a larger work by a prophetic writer (McCarter, *II Samuel* 306).

[61] "And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (*KJV* 2 Sam. 12.13b). "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (*KJV* 2 Sam. 12.14). Heller's somewhat simplified version retains the *KJV* "shall," but rings closer to the simplicity of the biblical Hebrew syntax, which concludes even more directly and ends with an infinitive-absolute modifying the verb (*BHS*).

leader of state and as troubled family patriarch. Rather than separate out good David and bad David, even as Coccioli's David attempts when he tries to define "David-flesh" and "David-soul," Heller focuses crushingly on slippages between multiple aspects of David's personality and roles, reflected in David's language. Bawdy, brash speech gives way to haunted insecurity by turns, as when David's comedy-sketch scene with Uriah ("Uriah, go home," I importuned the unyielding blockhead until I was hoarse from the effort and sick from repeating, "Uriah, Uriah, go home and fuck your wife") leads in the very next scene to a discussion of Bathsheba's baby's death (284). Here, Lear's haunting cry over Cordelia is drawn in (along with Ecclesiastes 3:20) to supplement David's famous lament ("He'll come no more, never, never, never. I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me") and David releases a final snarl of vitriol at God himself: "I'd just love to hear Him try that kind of shit with me. I would not answer with the patience of Job" (288, 289).[62] Following a lengthy citation of God's speech out of the whirlwind, David imagines his final response, perhaps a more 'normal,' human reaction: "'But that doesn't matter anymore,' I would contend with my Almighty God and instruct Him in biting reply. 'Can't You see? That no longer matters at all'" (289). In the case of Uriah, the contrast between the stately *KJV* language and David's violent, crass enjoinings renders the king a petty, desperate, ruthless ruler, if a verbally dexterous one. In the language following the baby's death, however, David's "response" to God's eloquence highlights the unfeeling grandeur of the biblical words and brilliantly brings us back to a man simply distraught over his son. In moving contrast to the verbal virtuosity displayed elsewhere, David concludes the scene with gentle repetition and simple language, evoking the biblical parataxis here not for its high associations but for its

[62] "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (*KJV* Eccl. 3.20). "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (*KJV* 2 Sam. 12.23).

grounded qualities: "I went to her room when our baby was dead, to comfort her as she lay in her bed, and I held her hand while she lay in her bed, and she cried quietly for more than an hour. Her tears flowed slowly" (290).[63] His style is mercurial, glinting and shifting, incorporating Biblical and Shakespearean phrases and syntax into his colloquial repartee, but the sheer continuity of his rant, the recurrence of certain styles and ticks—the dead baby scene is followed by a scene of Song of Songs-infused bawdy banter with Bathsheba—lends an inevitable aura of consistency to David. Heller's lengthy commentary maintains the vital contrasts in David's character, highlighting their juxtaposition through the continuous vertiginous leaps and bounds, starts and stops of David's verbal and intertextual emphases.

Perhaps most importantly, Heller's novel highlights David's combined roles (warrior-poet, shepherd-king, lover-killer) by drawing on David's capacity as *writer* and *author* to bring the ancient king forward. If Coccioli's David, the "universal man," simultaneously acted like a contemporary philologue of his own story as well as a 'contemporary' 20th century journaling subject parallel to Coccioli himself, Heller's David acts like a parodic version of a 20th-century Jewish male subject and writer. The novel updates the contrasts in David's biblical character—the warrior, poet, and lover—in a man apparently obsessed with the links between his virility and his language, his violence and sexuality and his words. In a compelling study of literary American-Jewish masculinity, Warren Rosenberg describes the "ambivalent relationship between an American expectation of masculine physical power and the stereotype of the verbal

[63] "And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon . . . " (*KJV* 2 Sam. 12.24).

Jewish man" combining in a figure like Bugsy Siegel, who must "talk and kill" (14).[64] Heller's David talks, kills, and also engages in the kind of constant sexual activity of a Rothian hero.[65]

In the novel's adaptation of the canonic biblical text, David's power as a lover and as a warrior is constantly linked to his ability to manipulate words, often words readers know from other contexts: David's 'creative' authorship asserts his masculinity.[66] So, David's phallic superiority in battle is reflected in his linguistic skill: he recalls the "lusty chorusing of a jolly bit of opportune doggerel" (a parody of Disney's "Heigh Ho" from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*) "extemporized" for the companionable harvesting of Philistine foreskins and marks the success of the raid by the success of his pun (136).[67] He consistently links his libido (unquenchable to the end, though hampered by age and impotence as he reflects) to his verbal abilities, returning over and over to the power of his language, over Bathsheba in particular. Recalling the age-old link between seduction and violent conquest, David "applies" his

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[64] Fascinatingly, Rosenberg analyses the King David story as a foundational model for a little-studied Jewish male legacy of violence, and even uses citations from Heller's novel with its "more explicit sex and violence than even this sexiest and most violent story in the Bible" as a helpful aid to his exposition (59 n. 20). As Rosenberg highlights, King David's story turns again and again on the wielding of violence, and Heller's novel certainly makes no attempt to downplay this central motivator and method.

[65] Heller planned initially to write an "erotic romp along the lines of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*" and later incorporated this material into *God Knows* (Daugherty 516 n 402).

[66] The combination and exaggeration of these modes of masculinity makes this novel read as a playful send-up of its forbears, even as it participates to some degree in the form. In his excoriating *New Republic* review, Leon Wieseltier wrote that "there is a kind of cultural perfection to the book, since it has successfully fused the narcissistic autobiography of the American Jewish writer with the crazy anachronisms of the American Jewish comedian" (32). Wieseltier's criticism astutely links this novel to other American Jewish novels in style and thematic content. But in some sense this statement recalls the same unironic view as those critics who took *Portnoy* merely as a shocking autobiography. In its unabashed "romp," balanced with fierce moments of introspection that bely the braggery, perhaps this 'autobiography' functions both to satirize and uphold the potency of the genre.

[67] The doggerel is very silly, and surely contributes to the crass banality the critics found so repulsive in the novel, but it elegantly encapsulates the links David draws between violence, language and sex. Heller seems to humorously excoriate the Rothian hero by catapulting him back in time and rendering his attitudes all the more ridiculous by their anachronistic context: "'*Hi-ho, hi-ho. /It's down to Gath we go. Who'll give two pins/ to get foreskins?/Hi-ho, hi-ho.'* My racy pun was received with hilarity, I am satisfied to recall" (159).

"romantic eloquence" and "use[s] . . . pure, poetic, rapturous words" and "talk[s] in torrents, use[s] words in flowing cascades" to "overcome . . . objection" and "dissolve and overcome her forthright determination" (46). Later, he connects his deathbed weakness, (the famous description of a great warrior reduced to shivering impotence) not only to his decline in battle strength but to the current inefficacy of his words. David swears that with a little help from Bathsheba he might still be able to please her, his dying wish, but realizes that the old words ("I want you, my darling. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled") only bring rejection: Bathsheba is "sick of love" (90). As is evident here, moreover, the majority of David's seductive words are direct citations from the Song of Songs. David's amorous compositions are a pastiche of canonized material, such that even these moments of creative assertion seem drawn from Heller's own philological attention (294). Potency is clearly a combination of violence, virility, and linguistic prowess.

For Heller's treatment is not simply an adaptation of the 'original' Jewish tough guy that capitalizes on David's reputation for poetic propensities to allow for a Jewish-American macho fictional voice. David's speech, not just within the psalms but throughout 1 and 2 Samuel, seems to call out for the kind of update Heller grants it. Here is a man who knows how to use words, famously, both for political purposes and to express himself lyrically at times of deep emotion: David's transcendent poem over the death of Jonathan and Saul, his measured, pathetic speech following Joab's helpful murder of Abner, the famous couplet of misery after the baby's death, and the rhetorically skilled "Godfather" deathbed injunctions show David's words used as tools, as weapons, and as potent medium. Whether or not they express the 'truth' or obfuscate, adding to David's opacity, they offer potent examples of rhetorical skill.

But Heller's novel builds on the link between David's masculinity and his verbal skill to reflect on David's status as writer and rewriter of his own story. In this way, David becomes both a satirical model of a writer working with canonized texts as well as a hilarious avatar of Coccioli's philological David, analyzing himself through his past text. Here, traditional male worries manifest in the David story—over control, self-determination, legacy—are transfigured into problems of the writer/rewriter who is also, paradoxically, rewritten. Rather than extending the image of David as "singer of Israel," the novel stages a conflict between David's exaggerated self-aggrandizing and his simultaneous awareness of his contingency. Not only is David the writer competing against the creative output of the centuries, but his story must compete against all others for prominence and 'reputation,' and David must analyze himself through it. Heller's novel moves beyond the philological style of Coccioli's prose towards a more postmodern manifestation of such a style, which pits David's attempts to analyze past texts and to mark new ones with his own signature against a network of possible intertexts expanding as David writes.

On one level, Heller's use of verbatim passages inflected with David's commentary and extra allusions often highlights moments of expressivity in David's biblical speech, and employs them as part of David's novel's ironic campaign for this authorized, canonized biblical text's inclusion in the canon of literary greats. David's comment after the death of his first child with Bathsheba does not *need* Lear's "never, never" (the biblical verse is a much-commented poignant line of its own) but the addition reinforces its status as worthy of remembrance—it somehow goes *with* the Lear, and belongs in the same category: "He'll come no more, never, never, never. I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (288). Wittingly or unwittingly, David claims with his phrase the same devastating emotional quality for his own personal moment. Similarly, David's words over Abner, cited by David in the novel, are so beautiful that

David describes "boisterously bewail[ing]," and "lifting up [his] voice in such mighty lamentation that [he] soon was admiring [his] own sorrow" (232). Heller interprets political motivation behind this speech ("I made certain to say so out loud, in exactly those words, in public where everyone could take note and spread the news of my condemnation of the base deed") and so David's word-play version builds on the cited text, adding interpolated Shakespearean passages ("Oh, what a fall was there!" My hands, these hands are clean," and lamenting that he cannot use his older, highly effective "noble line," "How are the mighty fallen," from his earlier elegy (232; 2 Sam. 1:25). By recourse to other 'noble lines,' both from his own compositions and those of literary history, David seeks to grant his own special verbal moments the same status.

Through his words, David attempt to regain authority, here the authority of the *author*, apparently that which might trump God's. So, he complains that his story is not eponymous ("what really gets my goat is that Samuel has I and II, even though he dies in I . . . those two books of Samuel should be named for me, not for him") and proceeds to rectify things by writing his own version—the novel—though he couches its writing in self-serious avoidance ("And I still won't have a book of the Bible named after me, unless I rewrite the whole thing myself, and who has so much time?") (31, 146). He highlights his wordsmithery as a vital component of his persona, his "flare for nature writing" and glorious poetry, contrasting his skill with that of others (Goliath has memorized his speech and "had no penchant for extemporizing," and Solomon is unimaginative scribal *schlemiel* who copies David's words down without understanding and will take credit for them later in his book of Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and even perhaps Ecclesiastes) (63, 60). David even becomes the epitome of the grandiose macho writer attempting to correct his wife's apparently half-baked poetic efforts in a hysterical conversation

with Bathsheba over Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd:" ("Shall not want what? You're raising questions instead of answering them. At least change it to 'won't' and save a syllable") (272).

But in each of these occasions David also dramatizes through his own story the situation of a writer establishing his own voice in relation to literary precedent, paradoxically relying on past iterations in order to apparently override them. Like Coccioli's David, he 'corrects' the past biblical version and even uses it to help self-assess, but here the emphasis is less on gentle self-reflection than fraught self-assertion. So, at times David quibbles with the biblical record (of his pompous, pious speech threatening Goliath he comments, "now, quite frankly, this doesn't sound to me like anything I would have said under normal circumstances, although back then the underlying sentiments might have been mine"), its *KJV* translation ("They weren't much good with Hebrew, and they weren't much better with English, either. Go figure out what they're saying half the time") and its redaction or first rewriting in Chronicles (on fighting for the Philistines: "Now that's another good part of my struggles with Saul that you aren't likely to find in Chronicles, are you? They bowdlerized us both") (73; 96; 37).

Moreover, where Coccioli's David faced the versions of himself found in the Biblical texts and in Jewish interpretation, the David of Heller's rewriting must confront the entire history of his interpretation in Western art. His worries about authorial control are manifest: he repeatedly fears people will forget his deeds with Goliath or misattribute his great elegy (he petulantly reminds Bathsheba that Solomon did *not* compose it), and constantly bewails the works of his attributed to Solomon (Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes) (152, 105). Perhaps in a grandiose attempt to secure his artistic acclaim, he also claims to have authored *Ode to Joy*, the *Goldberg Variations* and the *Moonlight Sonata*, Handel's *Messiah*, and possibly even the

Iliad and *Paradise Lost* ("I proceeded boldly to some lengthier and more complex inventions of my own. Of arms and the man I sang, of the wrath of Achilles, and of man's first disobedience to God, in that order") (120).

Ironically, however, David draws himself close to his literary precedents even as he discards them. He establishes himself as tightly and antagonistically linked to such models as Browning, Michelangelo, and Shakespeare, both as historical/literary character and as artist. David describes himself by referring to his sculpted depiction but caustically corrects Michelangelo's misrepresentation, citing the uncircumcised member as greatest deceit: the statue represents "not David from Bethlehem in Judah but . . . what a handsome Israelite youth might look like if he were a naked Greek catamite instead of the hardy ruddy-faced shepherd boy. . ." (177). He uses Michelangelo's Moses as a comparative example that might better represent him ("I had that same superior and sublimely articulated physique and that same unquestionable aura of immortal greatness and strength") (43). In referring to Browning's earlier literary depiction of himself, moreover, David manages to make fun of the very act of rewriting as he takes part in it, highlighting his own 'first person account' that nevertheless comes *after* – and is inevitably changed by—those of Browning and the Bible. When David meets Saul to play for him for the first time, he gives a tender, somewhat lengthy description of the dispirited king that recalls Browning's evocative poem "Saul" on the same subject. Though the scene is described differently, David frames it similarly: as in the first-person account of the Browning, he describes stepping through the door and seeing Saul; Saul's hanging head; and the contrast between the King's strong stature and incapacitation. The poignancy of the moment (Saul "struck [David] tragically as a mighty machine fallen into disuse. . . . diffusing a silent gloom")

inevitably recalls Browning's parallel description (118).[68] And yet as if anticipating that this description might call up another in a reader's memory, David defends his own version against Browning's adamantly: "The room was dim, the atmosphere thick, but the entire experience was nothing at all as you may have been led to imagine it was by Robert Browning—no , not the least bit like Robert Browning. Why listen to him? I was there, Browning wasn't; he was in Italy sending home thoughts from abroad" (118). He goes on to summarize the Christological imagery of Browning's poem as anachronistic tripe, both sketching anew the other scene—bringing it back—as he throws it away to make room for his renewed description of the encounter. Even this new description is clarified by the contrast: according to David, Saul did not stand in a cross, but remained "wretched, inert" (119). David is a first person witness, his narrative has authority and his beautiful description is the one that counts, and yet he *needs* other versions in order to give his own.

This paradoxical necessity, in which David both strives for individuality and relies on other versions to bring this new one into literary orbit, is perhaps most striking in David's frequent use of Shakespeare. Heller's novel seems to capitalize on the sense that the tragedy and drama of this tale should share prestige with Shakespeare's plays, and David frames Shakespeare

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[68] At the first I saw naught but the blackness: but soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness--the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, showed Saul.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,--so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb. (Browning 24-34)

as both the ultimate copycat and his greatest literary competitor[69]: "A bard of Avon they called him yet. Some bard. *Him* I have to be measured against?" (146). Not only did Shakespeare steal David's lines ("my 'separating the sheep from the goats' is used in more than one of the works by that overrated hack William Shakespeare of England,") he also lifted characters from David's story: "the idea for *King Lear,* of course, he got from me and Absalom. . . . Who else but me was every inch a king? Do you think the unscrupulous plagiarist could have written *Macbeth* had he never heard of Saul?" (65)[70]. Even David's "antic disposition' before the king of Gath became fodder ("where do you think Shakespeare really got the idea for *Hamlet?"*) (175).

Heller brilliantly ironizes David's concern with "originality" and creative legacy (which seems to reflect the anxieties of a re-writer dealing not only with previous versions of this text but the monumental splendor of literary history (how to insert oneself in it?)) by embedding it within an incessant, overwhelming pastiche of literary allusions. But despite David's protestations, his virtuosic and sustained intertextual web renders old-fashioned Authorship as David imagines it utterly irrelevant. 'Originality' simply looks different here in this palimpsestic context. Indeed, many of David's most personal, expressive moments are also his most allusive, as though in an attempt to explain himself he had to resort to all possible prior works, pulling in as many as possible to aid his efforts. Most poignantly, the passage that describes David's

[69] Hellenistic writers comprise the other pole against which David places himself. In a line he might have cribbed from Erich Auerbach in "Odysseus' Scar," David writes "We're Jews not Greeks. Character is destiny" (56). David also critiques Homer's storytelling for its 'foreground:' Where would the climax be if I were merely one famed fighter who'd triumphed over another? Achilles' defeat of Hector is the weakest part of the *Iliad*—he was the odds on favorite going in. Homer was really not much good at building a story, was he . . ." (130).

[70] The connections proliferate: "The armor bearer, seeing Saul dead, fell likewise upon his sword and died with him. Something like that happened to Brutus at Philippi, didn't it, and to Marc Antony after Actium, according to that *gonoph* William Shakespeare, who pilfered from Plutarch too, as well as from Saul and me" (146).

feigned madness before Agag, King of Gath begins with a reference to Hamlet's copy-cat "antic disposition" that underlines David's 'originality,' later explicitly reflects David's story's superiority (by way of a dig at Romeo and Juliet as well as Hamlet) but ends with another reference to Hamlet (and Song of Songs, and Nabal in 1 Sam. 25) that reveals David's true concerns—over his self-constituting noble act, its truth, and its retelling. Just after putting on his 'antic disposition,' ("I did better than Hamlet with my madness. I saved my life") David describes his miserable situation (176). Though he killed Goliath, fought like a hero, and soothed Saul with his beautiful songs, now he finds himself sleeping in the open, a fugitive. David the riotous humorist is here reduced to lower tones:

> Eventually, I slept, and my lashes were stuck together with tears I shed while I slumbered. When I awoke, my **head was filled with dew and my locks with the drops of the earth**. At once I felt worse. Watching *the morn in russet mantle clad creep o'er the hills*, I felt my heart die within me as I realized suddenly that just about no one ever mentioned Goliath anymore, neither Philistine nor Israelite, and I began to wonder if the day of my killing him had ever really taken place. (178, emphasis mine)

Like Hamlet playing mad, evoked again by "the morn in russet mantle clad," David has been abandoned by a father-figure and avoids another with murderous intent; like Nabal, whose heart "died within him like a stone," he is abandoned and afflicted by God. Here, David both ironizes his future imitator and marks himself as figural precursor to literature's greatest melancholic figure, that one so famously preoccupied, of course, with the telling.[71] As we have seen, David is nothing if not desperate to be reported.

As in this passage, sometimes it seems as though great swaths of literary language flow through the net of David's prose, some pieces catching on the cords. In one paragraph, he takes on the language of 1 and 2 Samuel melded with his own colloquial idiom, but also leaps

[71] "Had I but time—as this fell sergeant Death is strict in his arrest—O I could tell you—but let it be. Horatio, I am dead; Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright to the unsatisfied" (V ii 289-293).

virtuosically to many other biblical books as well as a plethora of Shakespeare plays, Romantic poetry, Presidential addresses, and even lines from Jesus in the Gospels, such that in some sense all of Western literature and rhetoric—every Western hero—becomes part of the rewriting of David.[72] In a particularly jarring note, David quotes the entirety of Shelley's "Ozymandias" sonnet—that most famous story of a King whose monumental legacy crumbles to nothingness—to Solomon as if David himself were simply telling a story of something he had seen: "In Ammon once. . . I met a traveler" (247). Unlike Ozymandias' erections, Shelley's work has lasted at least long enough for David to reappropriate it, though apparently any sense of lasting authorial authority has been displaced by its refiltered use as David's own recollection. Here David is truly one of the "wealth of figures which literature has formed and which can forever pass into new bodies," as Ernst Robert Curtius famously described the possibilities of literary evolution, only here this David seems to hold the "inexhaustible wealth of possible interrelations" Curtius describes in a single body (15).

In scenes like these, David expresses both his particular situation and "universal" human struggles through recourse to past/future texts. On the one hand, he brilliantly *employs* such intertextual play for his self-writing goals—he performs a kind of creative philological analysis of a vast network of texts—but his anxieties over authorship and creativity make it easy to read this 'use' as an attempt to stem the tide, to control or filter in some way the frightening and overwhelming barrage of material which David crystallizes in his palimpsestic body. The novel's subtle engagement with manifestations of the biblical text merely reinforces the way in which

[72] For example: "They were telling me in tactful words that my right hand had lost its cunning [Psalm 137:5] There comes a time in the affairs of men [FDR Message to Congress 1939] when you cease striving [Psalm 46, Ecclesiastes] to ward off the encroaching and unavoidable truth that you are no longer merely aging but are growing old, and that you've already embarked on that downhill journey from which no traveler ever returns [*Hamlet*]" (241).

this David is woven from and through text. *God Knows* thus represents a send-up of returns to authoritative 'sources' and postmodern pastiche grounded in the experience of a character who both participates in and is interpellated by adaptation. He may represent the ultimate king and the ultimate poet, but here he is surely the *over-written* man par excellence.

Conclusion

In his introduction to the 1989 Italian edition of Coccioli's *Mémoires du roi David* (in Italian, simply *Dávide*) critic Domenico Porzio wrote that the novelist had intuited that God wrote two books: "one, which is explicit, is the Bible; the other, which is secret, is the Creation—of which, according to a suspicion underscored by Borges, we are, unbeknownst to us, the words, the syllables, the humble letters" (Porzio 3).[73] For Coccioli and Heller, it seems, David's story provides the perfect means to concretize this image, to depict one "universal" "modern" man's attempts to draw the 'texts' he has before him on the table and to study the links between them.

In these two 'autobiographies,' David is neither wrenched from his context and brought forward nor embedded completely in his historical and textual moment. Rather, he acts as a pivot-point between writing then and writing now. Remarkably, however, the authors are not content to mine the cultural memory of this figure or even the contours, characters, and events that make up his very famous life. Instead, the novels retain a strange relationship with the very texts used to conjure David—'originally' and in earlier adaptations—producing philological self-writing. While biblical scholars seem to bring David forward and to explain how he is like us

[73] "Il romanziere ha intuito, come altri, che Dio ha scritto due libri: uno, quello esplicito, è la Bibbia; l'altro, quello segreto, è la Creazione della quale – secondo un sospetto sottolineato da Borges – noi siamo, a nostra insaputa, le parole, le sillabe, le umili lettere" (Porzio 3).

even as they attempt to contain him within his particular historical time and place, the novelists revel in the contrast between the 'universal' man paradoxically specified by his location in particular texts.

For Coccioli, David provides a means to explore an authentic and universal subject accessed through relation to a common canonic text, transcending time, and in the process inaugurates a new version to stand in relation with the old. If Coccioli uses text to access mankind, Heller's novel explores man-as-text, producing a parodic send-up of a writer confronting freighted written precursors and finally a virtuosic intertextual reveling in re-writing itself.

Like all biblical retellings, these novel implicitly reflect on an author's relationship to an earlier, highly authoritative and canonical text, but both also engage in highly unusual sustained reuse of biblical prose. A certain kind of biblical-textual imbrication can feel both transcendent—as for Coccioli's David—or, as for Heller's, rather frightening. In some senses, these authors merely shift this encounter onto David himself. In doing so, they develop a prose that moves beyond simple citation, imitation, or allusion to biblical accounts, but rather presents David as reader, David as critic, David as autobiographer, telling about the 'true' David in a philological style.

2. Editing Kings: Faulkner and Heym

> The fact that philology turns its attention to the constellation of phenomena, to the configuration of figures, and to the composition of sentences indicates that it is no less interested in the dark ground out of which phenomena, figures and words take shape than in these themselves. For that ground is their sole "co" or "con" or "Cum." (Werner Hamacher, "Ninety-Five Theses on Philology," *Minima Philologica,* 41)
>
> Philology is love of the *non sequitur.* (Hamacher, 40)
>
> Interpolation is first a reader's writing. . . . everything happens therefore as if the interpolator intended to transform the text not only mentally—as every reader is likely to do—but also materially.[1]" (Sophie Rabau, "Pour une poétique de l'interpolation" ¶43)

The Book of Samuel troubles readers: this section of the bible has long stood as a difficult example of some kind of biblical historiography. Though many explanations have been supplied to describe the account's various degrees of unity, the book also reads as an ancient testament to the constructed nature of any history-writing, especially in a narrative that repeatedly blurs any more modern distinctions between fictional storytelling and factual history.[2] It is a complex document: it contains a story about one man's life; the story of the rise and fall of one kingdom and its usurpation by the next; and the story of a nation and its conflicted relationship to divine and earthly sovereignty. Stories within the book are juxtaposed and at times conflicting: scholars have long debated the Sitz im Leben of various apparently distinct

[1] "L'interpolation est d'abord une écriture de lecteur. . . . tout se passe donc comme si l'interpolateur entendait transformer le texte non seulement mentalement—comme tout lecteur est susceptible de le faire—mais aussi matériellement" (Rabau, "Poétique" ¶43). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own.

[2] Leonhard Rost (1926) describes the mixing of artistic and invested historical work in the author of the Succession History, for example: "the most probable explanation is that real historical facts are related here, but in a strongly stylized dress. Fact and fiction join hands in this succession narrative as in every work of an artistically sensitive historiographer. . . . it is sufficient to establish that this source is an historical narrative which rushes along with the excitement of a drama" (104).

sections (such as the Arc Narrative, The History of David's Rise, or the Succession History), arguing for a compilation of separate elements, each with separate ideologies and reasoning (for example: a pro-Saulide account, a Solomonic apology, a prophetic edition).[3] David's actions, too, are sometimes hard to stomach as those of the man after God's own heart, and even secular readers wonder at the inclusion of certain events. Noticeable doublets and disjunctures call attention to the text's possible history of transmission and compilation (David's two introductions, Saul and David's two cave-meetings, and Saul's two deaths are perhaps the most striking examples).

This chapter will treat Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and Stefan Heym's *The King David Report* (1973), two novels which retell David's story and also reflect the competing interests, disjunctures, and overlapping narratives that characterize the biblical account. This chapter will begin by positing two canonic historical-critical works on Samuel as editorial near-fictions parallel to the more properly novelistic work of Faulkner and Heym, and which help theorize the kind of philological epistemology the novels evoke, before reading *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The King David Report* and through this biblical-philological lens. As this chapter will argue, both novels employ distinct styles that mirror the manifest construction and edition present in the biblical account, forming philological-historiographic fiction drawn from the model of the Bible and 1 and 2 Samuel. These novels perform an aesthetics in which editorial composition, the process of compiling—and concomitant disjunctures, fissures, and interpolations—take on more narrative power than any false sense of narrative wholeness or continuity. In so doing, they suggest a hybrid genre shared with the bible as these works encourage their readers to re-conceive it. Furthermore, in their attempt to negotiate between

[3] See McCarter, *I Samuel* 12-30 for discussion of historical-critical readings.

ideological commitments and a story which proves open to interpolation, extension, and mixed compilation, the compiler-characters in both novels figure the position of authors placed before the canonic weight and power of the Bible as hypotext. *The King David Report* and *Absalom, Absalom!* build on the composite construction and unstable historicity of the biblical narrative for an editorial esthetics.

Noth and Rost: Critical Fictions

The historical-critical work of two foundational biblical scholars, Leonhard Rost and Martin Noth, provides a useful model for the kinds of philological editorial esthetics elaborated novelistically in Heym and Faulkner, in which reading produces secondary texts and highlights the generative potential of interpolations and disjunctures.

A schism in biblical scholarship divides historical critics of various kinds who look *behind* the text—see it as fragmented and suspect and often in desperate need of solution—and literary critics, who often see the text as some version of a unified whole in beautiful balance. Robert Alter, for example, describes the "architectonic cohesion" of King David's narrative in the Hebrew Bible books of Samuel, and laments that "much of the richness and complexity of the story is lost by those who imagine this book as a stringing together of virtually independent sources: a prophetic Samuel narrative, a cycle of Saul stories, a history of the rise of David, and so forth" (Alter, *David Story* x).

Alter alludes here to a strain of Samuel scholarship that essentially builds on two foundational studies, works that are now considered classics of biblical scholarship: Leonhard Rost's seminal work, *The Succession to the Throne of David*[4] (1926) provided a seminal analysis of

[4] Originally *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids*.

smaller independent compositions Rost found implied within the larger book, such as the History of David's Rise, The Arc Narrative and most famously The Succession to the Throne of David, (whose author also combined earlier sources[5]). German tradition-historical scholar Martin Noth's *The Deuteronomistic History*[6] (1943) outlined a larger work he saw stretching from Deuteronomy-II Kings, and which included many older sources—a cycle of Saul stories among them—edited together, with additions, by a single editor Noth called the Deuteronomist (Dtr.).[7] According to Noth, the Deuteronomist compiled and composed his work during the exilic period, editing his sources and inserting his own theological viewpoint to explain the problems facing Israel as the result of past insufficiencies with regard to the Deuteronomic covenant.[8] In both these critical works, through their speculative philology, Noth and Rost unearth new texts 'hidden' within the biblical corpus as well as author-editor figures to go along with them.

With some exceptions, Rost and Noth's legacy persists in historical-critical scholarship: scholars continue to refine the composition histories they outlined, identifying further extraneous interpolations, shifting the beginning or end-point of a proposed composition. As Regina M. Schwartz has convincingly argued, the tradition of biblical historical criticism is firmly rooted in 19th century theories of history and has therefore imposed models of development upon biblical

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[5] Rost writes of the way the author used the Ark Narrative as "a point of departure, a convenient way into his own story (so, too, his use of the Ammonite war report), and thus provided us with one of the oldest examples of this literary method, so widely employed in Israel, of making use of older material" (88-89).
[6] *Uberlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (*Transmission History Studies*), the first part of which discusses his new concept, The Deuteronomistic History, later translated and reprinted as *The Deuteronomistic History* in 1981.
[7] "For the story of Saul and David Dtr. had access to an extensive collection of Saul-David traditions compiled long before Dtr. From different elements—the old tradition on Saul and, in particular, the story of the rise of David and the story of the Davidic succession" (54). Here and elsewhere, Noth cites Rost (1926) on the Davidic Succession.
[8] Noth speaks of Dtr. perceiving "a just divine retribution in the history of the people . . . the great unifying factor in the course of events" which he "speaks of . . . not in general terms but in relation to the countless specific details reported in the extant traditions" (89).

history-writing which focus on discovering clean, tidy, originary texts beneath the mess. According to Schwartz, such scholarship obscures "the voices of biblical historians who depict history as we know it and as we live it" (210). She suggests instead that "when we read the very discontinuities, duplications and contradictions that biblical scholars want to smooth out, perhaps we could take note of them . . . we may even like ancient Israel's founding fiction better, not despite, but for all the cracks in its foundation" (210).

Reading Noth and Rost not for the solutions of their scholarship (the proposed originary text divisions) but instead dwelling on the language on the page, however, reveals a particular kind of editorial aesthetics produced by their writing that privileges the "cracks" in alternate ways. Though the ostensible purpose of each critical text is to outline some kind of ultimate unity and history—for Rost, the contours of the "Succession History," for Noth the "Deuteronomistic History" as a whole—by attending to the seams and junctures within the text these critics sketch a vital composite structure in their own work, a critical tale of compiler-author-scholar and the text he constructs, as well as that of David himself and his house, interstitially evoked.

As literary theorists have long discussed, the distance between criticism and fiction is not so very far.[9] French classical scholar Sophie Rabau has written extensively on this proximity, particularly on the relationship between classical philology and fictional forms. In a recent book with Marc Escola tracing the links between scholarly commentary and fiction treating *The*

[9] In the post-structuralist sense, see for instance Geoffrey Hartman's article "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature; Derrida's practice in essays such as "Living on: Borderlines;" with regard to theories of rewriting, see André Lefevère in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Regarding philology, Werner Hamacher writes : "philology is not literature; however, it is also not a philology when it has nothing in common with literature. . . . Philology accompanies literature, listens to it—and therefore must often fall silent—and amplifies literature's voices by repeating, translating, and transforming literature passage for passage, fragmentarily, and by placing accents as it goes along" (139).

Odyssey's Circe episode, Rabau describes the proliferation of versions—the rewriting—inherent in such reading strategies: "if we conceive of commentary not as an instrument to restore a unique and intangible text, but rather as a means, among others, of varying the text, of pluralizing it, one would have to be aware of the overlap between hyper and metatextuality" (18).[10] Furthermore, despite philology's roots as a discipline which consists of a subject intervening in a text, more recently the discipline works to separate the subjectivity of the practicant from the text itself: as Rabau writes, "reading philology according to a novelistic paradigm returns to heroising and personifying it, and bringing to light and valuing the intervention of the subject" ("Roman" 385).[11] Reading Rost and Noth through this lens allows us to see their own texts as a 'version' of the biblical text they analyze; reading them novelistically means recognizing both the intervention of the subjects Rost and Noth and the authorial-compiling figures they describe.

Rost and Noth create the new texts from the old, which they describe and evoke themselves, as well as new characters—the authors or editors who might have put them together. Though they ostensibly tell the story of the text, they end up sketching a narrative about its editors, even if that narrative is never fully realized in properly novelistic form, but only evoked, glimmering behind the criticism. Indeed, in analyzing Noth's Deuteronomistic History, Roland Boer imagines Noth creating a Lukàcsian historical novel from the biblical text, as well as the Deuteronomist "Dtr," a fictive authorial subject who Boer reimagines as a holographic figure

[10] ". . . si l'on conçoit le commentaire comme un instrument non de restitution d'un text unique et intangible, mais un moyen, parmi d'autres, de faire varier le text, de le *pluraliser,* on ne pourra qu'être sensible aux "recoupements" entre hyper- et métatextualité" (Escola and Rabau 18).
[11] "Lire la philologie selon un paradigme Romanesque revient alors à l'héroïser et à la personnifier et mettre à jour et en valeur l'intervention du sujet" (Rabau, "Roman" 385).

(91).[12] Throughout their works, Rost and Noth as narrators toggle between the world of the text (calling attention to a strange verb form, or an expressive piece of dialogue); that of the possible author or compiler (and the way the text might express his curiosity, or his interpretation); and their own perspective: Noth "discovers" the Deuteronomistic history and presents the Deuteronomist to the world; Rost finds the History of David's rise and its author, who likes "full-sounding, well-rounded sentences (91).

Furthermore, Roth and Noth's textual adventures uncover authorial-editorial figures who come after the events they narrate but are nevertheless interpellated participants in the cultural legacy of the histories they describe and compose. Both critics explore their author-compiler's motivations and theological positions: for Noth, Dtr's work, after the exile, was "probably the independent project of a man whom the historical catastrophes he witnessed had inspired with curiosity about the meaning of what had happened" (99). For Rost, each author has a style and motivation appropriate to his position: "No longer does the question of authorship have to do with lifeless stereotypes but with flesh-and-blood people, with living personalities. We can look into their hearts and perceive their piety, nurtured in the same soil but in each person shaped somewhat differently" (4). Rather than describe the insertions and discrepancies they find simply as textual difficulties, Noth and Rost explicitly connect these textual problems to the human figures they imagine interceding in the text.

[12] "Novel Noth: The 'Deuteronomistic History" (377-103). Boer expands on the apparent projection of Dtr. in Noth's text in playful ways. In the imagined reunion of biblical scholars he describes, Dtr. waits in Noth's cabin: "Already resident in the cabin is still another figure, a hologram operated by an artificial intelligence. The hologram introduces itself to the group with the completely uninteresting name of 'Deuteronomist', but after some discussion they agree to call it Dietmar, maintaining some connection both with the AI's original name and with the German connection via Martin." (91).

Both also describe the ways in which the authorial protagonists they project venerate and reuse old artifacts, even as they work to re-contextualize them and create through various kinds of juxtaposition and interpolation: Rost, for example, speculates on the reasons for his narrator to reuse old material both for formal purposes (as a framework for his own narrative, in the case of the Ammonite war report and the Bathsheba affair) (89), to build prestige for his own work, or perhaps in order to avoid competing with a "recognized account" (88); for Noth, the work of art Dtr. creates is deeply linked to his general respect for the traditions, though he does pick and choose, "reconcile conflicting information," "fill in gaps," and "occasionally correct" his sources (84, 87). In this sense, whether or not Noth and Rost explicitly describe both kinds of authorial-editor figures as interpolators (though both do, at times) they show the ways "an individual tries to assert himself while hiding himself, by modifying the work of another after the fact, though he nevertheless does not destroy it" (Rabau "Poétique" ¶50).[13]

In particular, by searching for divergences—places in which the style changes, or the theology, or the theme—Noth and Rost evidence a deep, almost loving concern for the messy, "cracked" text they have at hand. In dwelling on the seams, they point towards a poetics of interpolation like that elaborated by Sophie Rabau. For Rabau, classical scholarship's constant desire to rid the text of interpolations in favor of a clean original marks the interpolator as a devilish figure, but also hints at a possible poetics of interpolation that would value the aberration, which both contributes to the text as unmarked and must be different enough to be recognizable.[14] The interpolator "signe sans signer [signs without signing/signaling]" and reveals

[13] "Un individu tente de s'affirmer tout en se dissimulant, en modifiant après coup l'oeuvre d'un autre, qu'il ne détruit pourtant pas" (Rabau "Poétique" ¶50).
[14] In biblical studies, as is apparent in Noth and Rost but also in later critical work, interpolations are not sought out to be excised, but rather to aid in the division of sources, etc.

"une hesitation entre la distinction et la fusion stylistique [a hesitation between stylistic differentiation and fusion]" (Rabau "Poétique" ¶46). Rabau's poetics of interpolation imagines a philological discursive mode dedicated to preserving otherness and discontinuity within a text: as valued participants in the text, interpolations can both smooth seams and, when highlighted, provide an alternative re-vision. A poetics of interpolation would "dire la rupture et non pas la réduire [state the rupture and not reduce it] (Rabau ¶14).

Read as biblical-critical fictions, Faulkner's 1936 *Absalom, Absalom!* and Stefan Heym's 1973 *The King David Report* extend the editorial esthetics intimated in Rost and Noth.[15] These adaptations of the David Story redeploy critical editorial techniques as part of their novelistic construction and worldview, producing a philological model of epistemology that parallels a narrative epistemological model. In so doing, they return readers to the bible as seen through Rost and Noth's eyes and through those of a novelist, retraining us to read the books of Samuel neither simply as a rollicking story, a store-house of cultural values and legendary mythic figures, or as a historical document necessitating endless reconstruction, but as something in between. Each novel uses an editorial aesthetics to confront historiography and constructed narrative with deep attachment to stories and artifacts: like Noth's Dtr, those who receive the narrative in Faulkner and Heym's novels—a scion of the South and a writer tasked with compiling David's legacy, respectively—must balance reverence for past tales with the destabilization that inevitably comes of their sorting, revising, and reframing. In Faulkner's novel, the model expands: Faulkner's novel itself functions as part of another kind of Yoknapatawhpa Bible, part of the shimmering mass of interacting texts and bodies that make up

[15] Alter deems Faulkner "ultimately a better reader of the David story than Rost" for his understanding and depiction of the curse slowly enacted on David's house (*David Story* xi).

the irresolvable Faulknerian corpus. Heym's novel's philological historiography presents a more concrete version of editorial esthetics, an alternative to the demands of a prescribed univocal history like those of the modern and ancient régimes he critiques.

Absalom, Absalom! and Embodied Edition

Faulkner's monumental work has been read as a kind of meta-historical novel which plays with the ways in which historical knowledge is told, passed down, and constructed and whose complex structure presents an irresolvable narratological mystery story. In 1963, Cleanth Brooks described *Absalom, Absalom!* as "from one point of view a wonderful detective story" as well as "a persuasive commentary upon the thesis that much of 'history' is really a kind of imaginative construction" (Brooks 34). Beyond the complexities of the manner in which it is told, *Absalom, Absalom!* presents a dark version of the South highly distinct from the wistful picture imagined in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), which initially received much greater success (Hobson 5). In this novel in particular, the racial trauma of the South is clearly present: As Fred Hobson notes in the introduction to a casebook of *Absalom* criticism, "*Absalom* is the Faulkner novel that . . . deals most centrally with what C. Vann Woodward called "the burden of southern history" – that is, the racial burden"; "Faulkner deals with the sins of the fathers . . . and the burdens of the regional past, and he views that past with a mixture of love and hate, pride, shame, and guilt" (4, 6). Edouard Glissant's description of Faulkner's oeuvre might describe the "primordial" background of this novel in particular:

> When Faulkner was writing, what he put at risk was the supreme institution of this Southern community. He questioned its very legitimacy, its original establishment, its Genesis, its irrefutable source. All his works are shaped by an unsurpassable *a priori,* a question putting everything in vertigo: how to explain the "beginnings" of the South. . . how can one understand, or at least envision, the South's "damnation"? Is it connected to

> the South's dark entanglement with slavery, inextricable from its roots and its tormented history? (21-22 qtd. in Parrish 59).

The novel tells the story of Thomas Sutpen, a ruthless, ambitious man who takes over a plot of land and intends to found a dynasty, but who fails, a failure paralleled by that of the South, vanquished in the Civil War.

Absalom, Absalom! retells David's story in this historiographic context, in a looser rewriting than many others, but one at least explicitly signaled by the novel's title. In *Absalom, Absalom,* the troubles of a 'royal' family—a father's adultery, murder and incest among his children—plague the leader of the Sutpen house in the civil-war era American South. The history of the House of David and Israel is paralleled by the rise and fall of Sutpen's house, the South, and the structures that support their existence. The four narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* recall and retell Sutpen, during a different historical period, (1909) only slightly removed from Faulkner's own. Quentin, the youngest and final narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!*, is the inheritor of Sutpen's story and the South's legacy, whose "very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (7).

Seen as a critical-biblical fiction rather like Noth and Rost's work, *Absalom, Absalom!* explores the possibilities of editorial esthetics, and the work of editing and interpolation. Though the novel filters Sutpen's story through speech (Aunt Rosa tells Quentin, Mr. Compson tells Quentin, and Quentin tells the story to himself as well as to his Northern roommate Shreve, who tells it back to Quentin) this telling belies a deeper meditation on textuality. Particularly through Quentin, a kind of "final redactor" as Glenn Meeter first described (118), the novel traces the

ways in which an embodied-philological epistemology takes the place of other kinds of narrative or historical ways of knowing.

Absalom, Absalom! might be classified as an intermediary literary retelling: as a rewriting, the novel shares elements both with the kinds of large-scale structural adaptations that use the story as a foundational myth centering around a single figure (a King torn between family and politics, trios of fathers and sons, a young, fiercely ambitious newcomer who takes the kingdom) and presages later fictions that that dwell instead on the text's messier qualities (how it might have been composed, who might have been interpreting and observing this story, the way it simultaneously hangs together and still does not read as a coherent, undisrupted, linear narrative).[16]

Though it is not a neat and tidy rewriting, as criticism has amply shown, *Absalom, Absalom!* establishes a network of intertextual relations with the story of King David in 1 and 2 Samuel alluded to in its title, ranging from tiny verbal allusions as well as larger scale sets of relationships and narrative arcs. In 1974, John Hagopian mapped relatively detailed correspondences, arguing for Sutpen's tale as an ironic reversal of David's; others followed, shedding more light upon various biblical aspects of the novel. These include the mythic structure, perhaps recalling the bible's entire arc from Genesis to revelation (Rose) the powerful influence of the *KJV* in its key diction (bones, blood) and many linguistic tendencies (Alter, "*Absalom*") and of course the integral though never perfectly parallel links between the family drama of David, Absalom, Amnon, and Tamar and Sutpen and Henry, Bon and Judith (Behrens).

[16] I.e. the difference between Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) or J.M Barrie's play, *The Boy David* (1936) and any of a number or earlier works; and later works such as Lionel Abel's play *Absalom* (1956); Dan Jacobson's *The Rape of Tamar*; R.V Casill's *After Goliath* (1985); and of course Heym's *King David Report* (1973) and García-Valiño's *Urías y el rey David* (1997).

This last relation is particularly clear and compelling. Following David's sinful adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, Nathan relays a judgment upon him: "God says, though he "gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah" because of David's sin, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house" and furthermore, God warns, "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (*KJV* 2 Sam 12:8, 11). The following drama chronicles the chaos of a kingdom whose King is destroyed by what rises out of his own house—a son rapes his stepsister, another son murders the rapist in revenge, and subsequently rises up in armed rebellion and must be killed in order to preserve the father's reign. Sutpen is also a hero who sees destruction rise up out of his own house, as indeed Faulkner himself famously stressed: "As soon as I thought of the idea of the—of the man who wanted sons and the sons destroyed him, then I thought of the title" **(**Gwynn 76). As Robert Alter notes, Quentin's grandfather might easily be describing David's famous charisma, tenacity and terribly pragmatic violence when he describes Sutpen: "that was where his power lay . . . that anyone could look at him and say, *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*" (Faulkner 35; Alter, "*Absalom*" 79).

The story of David's rise and fall provides one of the structuring 'myths' that undergirds Faulkner's great novel, even as the novel resists any easy mapping of one story onto another. Further correspondences between Bon (Amnon), Henry (Absalom) and Judith (Tamar) are clear (though miscegenation takes the place of rape as murder's impetus and the war here is not caused specifically by a son's revenge). Small moments in *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative reinforce the connections between characters, as when Sutpen meets Henry in a military tent, kisses him, and calls him "Henry. . .my son," in a potent mixture of the famous last reconciliatory kiss between

David and Absalom (2 Sam 14:33) and David's keening ("O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!") (*KJV* 2 Sam 19:4).

But the correspondences between David's family and Sutpen's are never perfect: *Absalom, Absalom!* moves beyond merely recapitulating a family structure to reflect the doublings and uneven overlap between multiple family structures and narratives in the David story itself.[17] These intertextual echoes provoke a series of shifting parallels: just as readers have appreciated Bon's David-like qualities (universally attractive and beloved) or Henry's striking similarity to Jonathan (his passive love, his repudiation of his father), the framework changes – perhaps a new narrative voice begins—and Bon seems more Amnon, David's effete firstborn, heartsick for his sister, pushing Henry into the position of Absalom, who "repudiates" his father in order to fight for his own claim to the throne. The doublings are intercalated and intermingling.

Absalom, Absalom! also recalls David's biblical account in its peculiar composition, however. By focusing on linguistic and thematic parallels between the stories, criticism has until recently ignored the deeper ways the novel parallels biblical composition. In 1991 Glenn Meeter astutely described "Quentin as Redactor" and linked the work to certain understandings of

[17] Though few scholars dwell on the text's relationship to other parts of 1 and 2 Samuel, Sutpen and his family in many senses also parallel Saul's rise and relationship to David in 1 Samuel. In a "Speculative Contemplation" part of a collected volume of essays about King David's afterlives, Faulkner scholar Stephen M. Ross elegantly sketches the vital link to Saul's story ("The father/son/brother relationship in *Absalom Absalom!* reflects the Saul/David/ Jonathan triad in 1 Samuel more than the David/Amnon/Absalom family of II Samuel") and lists possible parallels: Saul attempts to murder David just as Sutpen brings on Bon's death; Saul like Sutpen "places dynasty above moral law;" Saul attempts to warn off Jonathan from loving David, but Jonathan rejects his own inheritance in favor of David, just as Henry rejects his own birthright for love of Bon (Ross 145). Indeed, the correspondences between Sutpen's house and Saul's go deeper than Ross's brief analysis indicates—in particular, the strange love triangle between Bon (an androgynous sylph extremely reminiscent of young David—harpist-poet and warrior, who effortlessly attracted success, love and lust from all around him) and the siblings Henry and Judith mirrors the triangle between Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal, and David. Both siblings are linked in their self-sacrificing love for David and concomitant rejection of their father.

biblical accrual, particularly the tradition-critical school and oral tradition;[18] more recently, Scott T. Chancellor's 2011 dissertation *William Faulkner's Hebrew Bible: Empire and the Myths of Origins* explores Faulkner's use of the Hebrew Bible from a post-colonial perspective: his first chapter, "Redacting the Empire," links the narrators of the *Absalom, Absalom!* to the J, E, P and D sources of Pentateuchal criticism, with the Faulknerian narrator as the "final redactor" (70).[19]

Just as the work of biblical criticism worked to destabilize the divine unity of the biblical text, pointing out conflicting allegiances and interpretations in its editors, the different versions of Sutpen's story mark it as incomplete. Indeed, the sophisticated structure of Absalom, Absalom! as a whole may be read as an exaggerated model of a spliced-together biblical text, in which competing versions of events, with competing ideologies and sometimes competing facts,

[18] In a later article, "Beyond Lexicon: Biblical 'Allusion' in Faulkner," Meeter poses the term "conceptual allusion" to account for the biblical feeling evoked by even those texts in Faulkner's oeuvre with much less explicit references to the bible: "The web of "Faulknerian intertextuality, even if we attend only to its biblical strands, is indeed extensive--but not so extensive that it cannot be at least partially unraveled. Between the level of verbal quotation, on the one hand, and the "general field of anonymous formulas whose origin is seldom identifiable," on the other, there is the realm of what I have called the conceptual allusion, where such intertextual exploration can be fruitful."
Meeter argues helpfully that Faulkner was probably aware of the higher criticism and possibly even accessed the Cambridge critical editions, which make evidence of redaction and compilation explicit ("Quentin" 114-115).

[19] Chancellor also suggest Faulkner may have been aware of higher criticism, as implied by his treatment fictional Yoknapatawhpha lawyer Gavin Stevens (*Light in August,* the Snopes trilogy, *Go Down, Moses, Knight's Gambit, Requieum for a Nun"* who not only embarks on a project to translate the Old Testament to Greek, but who also received a doctorate in Heidelberg, the "hub of modern Biblical scholarship" (63-64, 24, 11). Glenn Meeter also highlights the links between "searching for Sutpen" and the search for historical biblical figures, and links critical reading of Faulkner to critical Bible study: "Moreover, the various questions about the relationship between text and truth, between novel, chronology, and genealogy, between the voices of characters and the editorial/authorial "overvoice" that recent readings of *Absalom* have generated, may themselves take on meaning in the context of Faulkner's Biblical analogy. For it is exactly these questions that modern scholarship's view of the Bible has presented us in regard to the central document in Western culture. The quest for the fictionally historical Sutpen(s) is not more convoluted and tortuous than the quest for the historical Jesus or Moses. As we ask these epistemological questions concerning Quentin's (and Faulkner's) "final redaction," we repeat the relationship of the higher critics to the Bible, and thus extend Faulkner's Biblical analogy to include the criticism, as well as the story and the narration, of his novel" ("Quentin" 122).

are juxtaposed.[20] In positing young Quentin as an editorial figure (the character who would relate Sutpen's story to his own place in the South who "tells it, or ties it together . . . the protagonist so it is not complete apocrypha" in Faulkner's own resonant words) moreover, the novel stages the bodily intervention of an editor-interpolator, a more fully physical enactment of the imbrication of editor and text than that evoked in Noth and Rost's works (letter to Hal Smith, cited in Watson 149).

Though *Absalom, Absalom!* in many senses turns on orality, as Stephen M. Ross describes in his discussion of oratorical voice in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the novel repeatedly links the oral transmission that in part makes up the stories to artifacts and "monuments" (Ross 218). The novel's incessant returns to images of writing and inscription (speech occurs "without comma or colon or paragraph," for example**)** further reinforce the sense of language as text to be manipulated (Faulkner 253).[21] Typographical signals (shifts in italics, em-dashes, paragraph breaks) and paratextual materials (the appended map and list of names that recall a biblical commentary or some other reference guide), too, return readers to the printed, textual nature of the novel-document. As Ross writes of the novel's concluding scene, in which Quentin and Sutpen's surviving son Henry's words stand in the air in some palindromic stasis, "the text erects

[20] Which version of Saul's death? Which version of Goliath's murder? See Chancellor for a reading which isolates the perspectives of the different narrative voices and compares them to Pentateuchal sources. Of course these sources, which the novel treats as created by separate people, in separate times are in actuality the product of one author's (Faulkner's) imagination, unlike the proposed biblical sources.
[21] Ex: Sutpen's "code of logic and morality, his formula and recipe of fact and deduction" (221); a gravestone inspires "reading among the lettering more of maiden hope and virgin expectation" (155); Rosa "embalmed the War and its heritage of suffering and injustice and sorrow on the backsides of the pages within an old account book," (137); Judith's describes a letter as a "scrap of paper" passed on "at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once" (101). Ross writes "The novel's discourse repeatedly evokes versions of the past and then seeks to elaborate these versions into textual *monuments* of various literal or symbolic kinds . . ." (218).

the strange silence of writing as a memorial to talking itself, engraving the power of *was* in the silence of voices" (233).

Though the narration of Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, perhaps most obviously links narration to documents and text, Mr. Compson's attempts to create a unified narrative by juxtaposing documents reveal the vital insufficiency of any such totalizing history-narrative. Mr. Compson describes the rift between written evidence and the human figures it purports to record in his own failed attempts at 'editing.' In describing the evidence he gathers, Mr. Compson might be describing the sorts of sources Noth's Deuteronomist might have used, both "mouth-to-mouth tales, and "letters without salutation or signature," found in "old trunks and boxes," or "that forgotten chest," with "paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful" (80). These are dusty, dry, non-living pieces, and they are attended to in the same dry, scholarly way, "tedious and intent, poring" (80).

Where Noth might happily imagine the Deuteronomist filling in the gaps with his own interpolations, however, Mr. Compson laments the impossibility of his task's completion, employing the metaphor of scientific scholarship and historical philology to underscore the absent whole, the inexplicable living extra missing from reconstructed events. As Mr. Compson describes it, the *lack* stems from an inability to properly link the pieces in any vital way. Rather than communicate and relate to one another, these artifacts are "now merely initials or nicknames . . . which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw" (80). These are the indicative strands that must be interpreted, but the scholar has no Rosetta Stone, no resources with which to do so. He continues: even if interpreters follow the "chemical formula," the combined elements will not spring to life in some magical reconstruction, but remain discrete: "just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene" in contrast to the fleshy,

messy, “turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs” (80). The dry and the dusty brim with a vital furor that is inaccessible, and the evidence interrupts the totality to which it purports to refer.

By contrast, Rosa’s narration in one scene in particular presents a kind of parable of interpolative poetics, in which an attempt to enter into and control the story is figured as a physical intervention into a text. Rosa, the sister of Sutpen’s wife, is the first person who begins to narrate Sutpen to Quentin. Towards the end of her long discourse in Chapter 5, Rosa’s telling initiates an unusual little scene composed of a small network of readings and rewritings. Here Rosa reads her own history, an objective scholar reanalyzing events who nevertheless becomes drawn in, returned to the drama. After recounting Sutpen’s offer of marriage, (though she does not reveal the details of the offensive bargain he proposes) Rosa’s narrative halts and doubles back, attending to the moment of the proposal. Though the reader has as yet been denied a full understanding of Sutpen’s words, Rosa freezes them in time, summarizing “the courtship” briefly:

> That was my courtship. That minute’s exchanged look in a kitchen garden, that hand upon my head in his daughter’s bedroom, a ukase, a degree, a serene and florid boast like a sentence (ay, and delivered in the same attitude) not to be spoken and heard but to be read carved in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy. I do not excuse it. I claim no brief, no pity, who did not answer ‘I will’ not because I was not asked, because there was no place, no niche, no interval for reply. Because I could have made one. I could have forced that niche myself if I had willed to—a niche not shaped to fit mild ‘Yes’ but some blind desperate female weapon’s frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried ‘No! No!’ and ‘Help!’ and ‘Save me!’ no, no brief, no pity, who did not even move. . . . (Faulkner 132-3)

The marriage offer that cannot be forgotten, that crystallizes as it is returned to again and again in the coming pages, here literally becomes the fixture, the artifact she cannot help but return to: so his “boast,” of an offer is “like a sentence . . . not to be spoken and heard but to be read carved

in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy," (132). As she continues, Quentin and the reader witness Rosa reflect on her possible response to Sutpen's proposal: the sentence carved in stone apparently leaves no room for interpolation or interjection, and as Rosa insists, the sentence "was delivered in the same attitude," an immovable declaration (132). But apparently as a result of and in combination with close attention to the surrounding 'text', a possible insertion arises. Rosa imagines a "niche" in the stonework of Sutpen's words that she might (but did not) open: "a niche not shaped to fit mild "Yes' but some blind desperate female weapon's frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried 'No! No!' and Help!' and 'Save me!' (132). The chink in the stone words becomes a fleshy cut, and the possibility of a verbal reply takes on a wild and violent quality: the woman violently slashes open the text to make a place for her rebellious words. The words issue from the cut like a scream.

Though she does not act on it, in this small scene Rosa dramatizes the force of an interpolation—a small alteration in the defining narrative that could have powerful consequences. Through this (hypothetical) interpolation, retroactively inserted into the scene as she narrates it, we are catapulted into the perspective of its author. Furthermore, the interpolation itself takes on a life of its own, as actively assertive as Rosa's subsequent actions (her retreat, her rejecting by receding) are passively so. In Rosa's version, editorial work—the deep attention, the invested alteration—is signaled by textual language but transposed onto human actors, a dream of editorial aesthetic possibility foreclosed by Sutpen's brutal power over the story, not unlike the way David's centrality comes to determine the place of minor, particularly female characters in Samuel.

But it is Mr. Compson's son, Quentin, who must reconstruct Sutpen's story (and therefore the legacy of the South) both through access to Aunt Rosa's more direct spoken

narration in the novel's early chapters and through Mr. Compson's letter, which he receives in his Harvard dorm room. Quentin's versioning elaborates the kind of embodied editing imaged in Rosa's interpolative slash. In Quentin, moreover, the novel presents a compiler-editor who does manage to re-instill some of the living quality of Sutpen, reinserting vital force lacking in Mr. Compson's artifacts through his personal versioning of the narrative. Like Dtr., Quentin and his narrative partner Shreve use the data, but like Dtr., they read it and manipulate it, inserting interpretation and imagination.

Dtr. reframes the stories he receives to fit them to his own understanding of the world and Israel's destiny. In much the same way, Quentin *must* explain this story to himself to explain his past and his creed, bound as he is to the South's legacy ("his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names" (7). Though Glenn Meeter does not mention the Deuteronomist in particular, he aptly posits Quentin as later figure redacting a past narrative that nevertheless affects his position in the world: "Quentin Compson in his Northern exile at Harvard parallels the work of the biblical exilic and post-exilic redactors, revising older versions of the Sutpen story as the biblical editors revised and reshaped earlier versions of the history of Israel"); he also links Quentin and a later biblical redactor, who both reflect on a "nation in defeat" ("Beyond Lexicon;" "Quentin" 109, 110). In an early passage of the novel in which Quentin interprets and recasts Rosa's version of the story, Quentin is famously listens to two "separate Quentins," both separate from the story (the Quentin "preparing for Harvard in the South") who will exist beyond the South, and the Quentin nevertheless linked to the "ghosts" of "the deep South dead since 1865," himself simultaneously a ghost as well "still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and

bred in the deep South the same as she was" (4). He is both separate from the story and inevitably implicated in it.

Quentin's "version," elaborated through dialogue with his Canadian roommate Shreve, stylizes an editorial poetics in which bodies and text merge. In what reads like an exaggerated fantasy of the editorial interventions Noth and Rost describe, here the dull and dry maneuvers of an editor or interpolator take on embodied vitality; bodily participation and the visceral are equated with abrupting text and language. Describing the David figure is a project here in which scholarly and bodily interpretation seem to meld.

Quentin and his room-mate Shreve embark about a re-telling of Sutpen's story, in which they famously fill in the gaps in the testimony Quentin has heard and the version described in Mr. Compson's letter. Remarkably, despite the firmly oral nature of their dialogic editing process, readers witness in the novel's textual version of their reconstruction a deft equation of speech, bodies, and text that draws the reader into a position like that of Noth and Rost or the biblical readers that come after them, who read to work through the seams. In the novel's version of Quentin and Shreve's conversation, on the page, spoken language and typographical and discursive marks of edition meld. Not only does the passage consist of sets of text set off in dialogue, with Quentin's speech, and Shreve's interruptions marked, but it also contains continuous italicized sections, interrupted speech linked to its continuation by extended em-dashes, etc. Interpolations, usually consisting of Shreve's commentary or questions, but occasionally Quentin's own reflection on the material and the situation, either in his thoughts or in a spoken digression continuous with the narrative) are marked in a variety of ways on the page.

At times, Quentin's own narration is interrupted by a narrative digression "interpolated" into his running version of the story; when Shreve reminds him to come back to the subject he left, he returns to it by repeating the words with which he left off, in a kind of spoken version of the "resumptive repetition" biblical scholars observe following a narrative interpolation in a biblical text.[22] In Faulkner's text, the contrast between spoken phrases is highlighted by the typological standards for dialogue, such that no repetition would be necessary to indicate when Quentin's narration continues. Yet Quentin resumes his speech with a repetition of the word that closed it, thus doubly marking both the continuity and the interruption. For example, Quentin and Shreve's narration of Sutpen's path to riches and the dynastic "design" undergirding all his efforts, for instance, includes a double-repetition. Quentin leaves off his speech:

"'. . . and him getting rich good and steady now—'

'Yes,' Shreve said; 'Mr Coldfield: what was that?'

'I don't know,' Quentin said. 'Nobody ever did know for certain. . .'" (208).

And a page later, after a long digression, he returns to it:

" 'Sure,' Shreve said. 'That's fine. But Sutpen. The design. Get on, now.'

'Yes,' Quentin said. 'The design. – Getting richer and richer. . .'" (209).

The pattern repeats a page later with Quentin making reference to "(Sutpen's) children," "The two children," and again "the two children" after two distinct digressions (210).

[22] In this case, Quentin's own digression is followed by his own "resumption" of the term with which he left off; Shreve's additional interjections sound something more like the interjections of a Bible critic observing a digression. See Kuhl for the original formulation of "Wiedraufnähme" as an aid to Higher Criticism. As Robert Kawashima notes, referencing Shemaryahu Talmon's work, the term can be used to describe material considered to be inserted from a separate source, or a rhetorical technique of a single writer: "If one obvious use for such a device, as scholars have long recognized, is the editorial insertion of secondary material into an existing text, Talmon does take the next logical step, reasoning that a writer as well as a subsequent editor could use this device to insert a secondary sequence of events into a primary narrative thread" (134).

Similarly, the telling of Quentin and Shreve is marked by an interplay of verbal and textual stopping and starting. In this way, Sutpen's narrative is cordoned off as a source, and the stopping melds the original speaking bodies, the voices which recall them, and their manifestation as textual edition. At one point in the conversation, Quentin tells Shreve of Sutpen, but Sutpen filtered thorugh Mr. Compson, who told of Quentin's grandfather, who told of Sutpen's own autobiographical recollections during a shared journey through the forest. The original telling was marked by stops and starts, mirrored by Quentin and Shreve's reconstruction of it. In a moment of comic clarity, Quentin and Shreve's dialogue delineates the link between physical and verbal pause. Quentin tells:

> " . . and when he recovered he and the girl were engaged. Then he stopped."
> "All right," Shreve said. "Go on."
> "I said he stopped," Quentin said.
> "I heard you. Stopped what? How got engaged and then stopped yet still had a wife to repudiate later? . . . . That he got engaged and then he decided he would stop, only one day he found out he hadn't stopped but on the contrary he was married?"
> "He stopped talking, telling it," Quentin said. (205)

A paragraph ending marks the conclusion of Quentin's spoken "source." Moreover, soon after, the bottom of the page contains an open, offset ellipsis—its tiny points easy to ignore in a first reading. The ellipsis mirrors Quentin's own "stop," which Shreve intuitively connects to Sutpen's own: "Quentin ceased. At once Shreve said, "All right. Don't bother to say he stopped now, just go on." Quentin pauses, and finally admits the temporal gap which the ellipsis makes textually manifest: Sutpen waited 30 years before telling Quentin's grandfather any more.

Just as Quentin's telling renders spoken language as edited text and begins to draw together human and textual forms, Quentin's scenes with Shreve enact a kind of embodied edition impossible in Mr. Compson's attempt to link artifacts, an editorial poetics which figures

the textual through bodies and inhabited space. Theirs is an editing work so potent as to move beyond the confines of even an imagined text. It is newly lived—a myth of interpolative possibility, and of the blended worlds of text, editor-interpreter and critic-reader. Quentin and Shreve engage in an almost ideally personal manipulation of the narrative through their "play" (224). Mr. Compson's letter lies before Shreve and Quentin on the table—the link to the evidence, the data to be manipulated—and yet they veer away in mutual creation, famously conjuring the story between them through some shared consciousness such that it begins to be told without their focalization, and the shapes and figures of the tale quite literally merge with the two young men telling it.[23] They perform an exaggerated dialogic editing process, now estranged from the paper documents but working on their own verbal 'edition': "some happy marriage of speaking and hearing . . . hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true," and Shreve even interpolates his own narrative seamlessly into Quentin's: Quentin "did not even falter, taking Shreve up in stride without comma or colon or paragraph" (253, 225). Further, as they begin to identify with Sutpen's legitimate son Henry and his illegitimate son Bon, respectively, the two students become wholly interpolated into the narrative: "So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark . . . four of them and then just two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry" (267). Here even the

[23] Brian McHale, for instance, writes of this scene as pointing from a modernism concerned with epistemology to postmodern ontological concerns: "When ontological doubt, uncertainty about what is (fictively) real and what fantastic, insinuates itself into a modernist text, we might well prefer to consider this the leading edge of a new mode of fiction, an anticipation of postmodernism. . . . Only in such cases as the joint imaginative projection of the Sutpen story by Quentin and Shreve in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) must the reader fully relinquish ontological certainty" (66).

"spoken edition" they worked on yields to the re-worlded one: "now neither of them was there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago" (280).[24]

The final scenes of *Absalom, Absalom!* enact a slow shift out of embedded narrative layers, in which readers recognize the imbrication of worlds, artifacts and documents that characterize Quentin's retelling. Here with some finality readers recognize Quentin and Shreve's creative dialogue as but one long interpolation intervening in the letter's account of Mr. Compson's words[25], an em-dash finally recapitulated and closed. We return from the scene of doubling to the letter on the table and the conclusion of the interpolation marked by two em-dashes and a transition from and to italics on pages 142 and 301.

The novel dramatizes the interpolation physically, furthermore, by describing the conclusion of the interpolation as a return to the written object, the letter itself. Quentin watches, rapt, as the narrative skips another layer to return to Mr. Compson's letter, that artifact on the table which inspired so much of their dialogue. Shreve's summation ("And so she died") and the light from the window reveal again the contours of the letter:

> Then he could not tell if it was the actual window or the window's pale rectangle upon his eyelids, though after a moment it began to emerge. It began to take shape in its same curious, light, gravity-defying attitude—the once-folded sheet out of the wisteria Mississippi summer, the cigar smell, the random blowing of the fireflies. . . . It was becoming quite distinct; he would be able to decipher the words soon, in a moment, even almost now, now, now. (301)

Ever so delicately, as the dialogue and the cold reappeared out of the italics, now the letter reappears in the room, another square mirroring the oblong of light. The window and letter are so juxtaposed that readers might equate them (is the square of letter the window, the window the

[24] Fittingly, the scene which solidifies Quentin and Shreve's conflation with Bon and Henry rotates around recollections of Absalom's 2 Samuel narrative, crystallizing the combination of textual interpolation and play with the novel's biblical undergirdings.

[25] An actual printed em-dash: from page 142 to page 301 in the Vintage International Edition.

letter?) and wonder which world the text evokes (the world of the house, the world of the letter, or the world of the spoken telling?). Even the final description of Quentin's engagement with the shape-taken letter is complicated by another few words of delay that seem to help the reader slowly draw the letter into focus as a readable artifact as the same time as Quentin does the same ("in a moment; even almost now, now, now") (301). Where the letter lay between the two students, like some kind of talisman inspiring their mutual world-creation, now it returns as prose: "Now he (Quentin) could read it, could finish it—the sloped whimsical ironic hand out of Mississippi attenuated, into the iron snow: —*or perhaps there is"* (301). The letter literally appears lit in the darkness, clarified. The seamless, other-worldly scene of italicized, non-focalized narration yields once more to the voices in the room, the artifact on the table, and even the ecstatic embodied telling is revealed not as a solution to Sutpen, or to the narrative, but another piece of the disjointed, edited whole.

The scene represents the physicalized conclusion of an embodied editorial history; the editing work of Faulkner himself makes apparent yet another layer in the possible progress from one world to another framed as editorial interpolation. Faulkner's own interpolations extend and emphasize the transition between worlds and artifacts, 'documents' and readers. According to Langford's compiled comparison of Faulkner's manuscript and the first print edition, the scene at Quentin's window was initially much briefer in Faulkner's manuscript. Quentin's ". . .staring at the window without even blinking, breathing the chill heady pure snowgleamed darkness" is followed in the manuscript simply by a brief description of Aunt Rosa's death directly linked to Quentin's vision of the window: "now. 'And so she died.' Quentin did not answer, staring at the window. And now it began to emerge, take shape in its curious, light-defying attitude" (Langford 361 Ms. Pg. 175[172]). The later edition interpolates a recapitulation of the description of the

decaying house such that Quentin's window-fixation is initially interrupted by a diversion to the other scene. When the window reappears, Quentin's vision of it is complicated as well, such that the gradual transition is emphasized, and occurs incrementally: Even the final few words of delay, "in a moment; even almost now, now, now" that seem to help the reader slowly draw the letter into focus are also new to the later manuscript.

As the return to the dorm-room makes clear, even this most dramatic interpolation did not reconfigure or 'solve' the Sutpen narrative, for Quentin or his readers. Quentin's editing work does not overturn the larger story of the Sutpen house or solve Quentin's complex relationship to his Southern heritage and its bloody record. Just as the Deuteronomist's re-versioning inevitably reflects his own position, Quentin participates in and is implicated in the story he looks back, in contrast to any objective sense of historicity or narrative, through his bodily interpolation. As Carolyn Porter astutely notes, Quentin's "very endeavor to secure and maintain a detached perspective on history by imposing narrative coherence on it leads inexorably to Quentin's participation in it." (Porter 49, cited in Parrish 43). The cold dorm room reappears, and with it the return to ambivalent miscomprehension, of the South and the Sutpen-story that represents it. When Shreve asks once more about Quentin's place of origin, his people, Quentin replies with consistent equivocation ("You can't understand it. You would have to be born there. . .Yes of course I understand it. . ." "after a moment," 'I don't know'") (289). And of course, Quentin's final expression of ambivalence towards the South closes the novel, its frenzied repetition perhaps evoking David's cry over Absalom: "I don't hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I don't hate it," he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!"* (303).

But the editing work, even if it does not solve the story or create a coherent, streamlined narrative, creates the novel. Even after the letter has ended and after the book cover has been closed, the novel itself remains strangely incomplete, open. Like the biblical book of Samuel, *Absalom, Absalom!* is part of a larger world—a kind of Yoknapatawpha County Deuteronomistic History, with contested relationship to its parts. As critics have shown, the map which is the true conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!* and which recalls those of myriad biblical editions and commentaries draws us towards other Yoknapatawpha texts, but does not reliably describe either the world of the novel itself or its relationships to others.[26] Is this text linked explicitly to *The Sound and the Fury,* as Quentin's presence would imply, or are they two fictional worlds whose corners may meet, but whose dates and personages do not quite align? Are early Faulkner stories like "Wash" and "Evangeline," to be read as editorial precursors to the novel, interpolated within it with some changes, commented by scholars—or are they extensions of its world? As for the biblical text of Samuel, moreover, whose textual history is especially conflicted, an entire world of traditional and postmodern textual criticism surrounds Faulkner's text.[27] Langford's collation itself functions as a kind of text-critical aid, as do Faulkner's published manuscripts in Noel Polk's beautiful editions, the myriad Faulkner line-by-line commentaries, and the Faulkner concordances. As perhaps Faulkner's grandest and most complex novel, *Absalom* crystallizes these forms: it is one book of many, a possible clue to the larger complex, and an unstable compendium of narrative sources in its own right, a model for reading through editorial aesthetics that preserves a sense of unity and motion despite the fragmentation it simultaneously

[26] See, for example, Pamela Dalziel. Hortense Spillers writes, "Could it be said that the appendix of *The Sound and the Fury* and the Chronology of *Absalom, Absalom!,* both added after the respective facts of publication, parody epical, even Biblical, design by staging the ambition of the 'genome'" (25).
[27] See Philip Cohen for discussion of Faulkner and postmodern text-criticism.

expresses. Faulkner creates a new edifice, an alternative Yoknapatawpha Bible, one that shares similar cultural power and which stages complex possibilities of interpolation and edition.

The King David Report: 'History' Between the Seams

Stefan Heym's 1973 novel *The King David Report* also relates David's biblical kingdom to a modern regime (though the novel is set in Ancient Israel, it allegorically refers also to the USSR or the GDR) and reflects a similar obsession with the possibilities of "editing" for ways of constructing narrative knowledge. Heym's novel, however, is linked much more closely to the biblical narrative and to biblical scholarship's understanding of its compilation. If Faulkner's novel provides poetic images of interpolative possibility, Heym's novel describes editing work and its creative potential much more concretely.

In the opening scene of Stefan Heym's 1973 novel *The King David Report*[28], our narrator Ethan finds himself forcibly presented before King Solomon to accept a position as official redactor of a new history. The threat of rumors concerning Solomon's right to the throne (and even the legitimacy of David) necessitates the commissioning of a Report[29], which must at all times present a likeable, chosen David who always favored Solomon. As a vital member of the editorial team charged with the report's creation, Ethan must compile existing documents and

[28] All references to The King David Report are to the English edition, which Heym composed first, before self-translating the work to German. See Heym *Nachruf* 849, 851 for a description of his decision to write the work in English with King James Version biblical references. See Tait, "Between the Lines" 103-110; Steinitz 123-135; Hutchinson, "Using the 'Self-Translator" for comparison of German and English editions and writing process.

[29] Or, "The One and Only True and Authoritative, Historically Correct and Officially Approved Report on the Amazing Rise, God-fearing Life, Heroic Deeds, and Wonderful Achievements of David the Son of Jesse, King of Judah for Seven Years and of Both Judah and Israel for Thirty-three, Chosen of God, and Father of King Solomon" (9).

testimony, redacting and editing these as necessary in order to comply with the 'truth' Solomon's authority demands.

Ethan first responds to his call with obsequious attempts to avoid it, wary of his own propensity for seeking a different kind of truth (he "could recommend several younger men of stouter health and of a more flexible mind, just what was needed for the writing of books that contained *One Truth* and ended *All Contradiction and Controversy,"* for example) and the dangers it might entail (Heym 11). Finally, however, Ethan accepts the commission, hoping internally both to survive the process and furthermore to "insert in the King David Report a word here and a line there by which later generations would perceive what really came to pass in those years and what manner of man David ben Jesse was" (11). Not only will Ethan interject smoothing transitions and clarifications into his text at the behest of the Commission and the King, but he seeks to intersperse small interpolations—even at the level of single words or lines on a page—to affect later interpretation.

Where Faulkner's novel presents four juxtaposed though internally complex and fragmented narratives, Heym's novel is structured as an even more fully composite text, but one compiled by Ethan: we read something like Ethan's own composition notes, which contain a jumble of transcribed 'archival' data of all kinds, the occasional poem, journaling, and commentary. Further, the novel presents the historical 'data' Ethan explores as subjective or textualized facts: the documents and interviews he must compile often contradict and present second-hand information (the war reports of a general constrained by his duty, manipulative letters feigning expedient politesse, and so forth). The idea of biblical composition is not only a neat device, but grounds for a sophisticated exploration of the role of a scholar, writer, and reader confronted with and retelling an authoritative source. Here Solomon is the ultimate

author, supposedly of the final "King David Report,"—the story ought to be unified and clean—but as the novel and Ethan's work makes clear, the document is very messy.[30]

Though Heym was earlier lauded as a socialist writer within East Germany, *The King David Report* confirmed his new reputation in West Germany and abroad as a dissident (Tait, "Between the Lines" 97). As was immediately clear to critics and reviewers, Heym's novel parodies many aspects of Stalinist and GDR historiography (the idea of a new history to solidify power, the label 'commission' and its prolix title, etc.) and critics delighted in the anachronistic and parodic socialist key words sprinkled through the nouveau-*KJV* style (Tait, "Between the Lines" 101; Hutchinson, "Problems" 133-4). Accordingly, much criticism of the novel unpacks specific parallels with particular leaders such Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev and frames the novel as a trenchant critique of socialist institutions.[31]

As Heym articulates in his author's note, the novel might be described as, or read as "a historical novel or a biblical one, or a story of today, charged with political meaning" (254). For Heym, it is "all three" (254). Yet the novel's reception has divided along the lines Heym himself

[30] Rather like *Absalom, Absalom!, The King David* report plays on the very notion of a narrative history, and shares elements of the kind of postmodern fiction Linda Hutcheon identifies as "historiographic metafiction." Though Ethan the character hopes to find some stable "truth" about David himself, whether or not he manages to insert elements of it into the final text, the novel underscores "the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today" and blurs boundaries between fiction and history by self-consciously attending to the construction of both (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 93, 93; see also "Historiographic Metafiction").

[31] By allowing Heym to engage with current history through describing the Bible's composition, *The King David Report* therefore approaches more closely Noth's work as Roland Boer describes it in "Novel Noth: The 'Deuteronomistic History." Boer relates Noth's 'Deuteronomistic History' to Noth's own time, understanding the "punishment for sin" represented by the exile as parallel to that of the Second World War for Germany. So, as Lukács's "historical novel past its prime undertook to archaeologize the present concerns of the writer while simultaneously modernizing the period of history chosen for the historical novel . . . the effects of the Second World War comprise, albeit unconsciously, the dominating issues in the literary reconstruction of a 'Deuteronomistic History'. The concerns of this time are thereby archaeologized, while the period of Israel covered in the proposed 'Deuteronomistic History' is modernized to provide a backdrop for these concerns" (88).

outlines: to critics of East German literature, the novel represents primarily an example of Heym's conflicted relationship to socialism, Stalinism and the GDR;[32] to US critics at the time of its publication the novel represented a trenchant and much-appreciated critique of the GDR régime.[33] Few readers have been content to read it as a 'historical novel,' in the tradition of Lukács and Sir Walter Scott – and indeed, the novel does not conform to the stipulations and aspirations of socialist realism and the historical novel in the Lukácsian sense.[34]

It is perhaps as a 'biblical novel,' however, that *The King David Report* was taken up as a 'historical novel,' or a novel about history. Though most biblical scholars responding to Heym's novel see the scholarship on which it is based as highly suspect and generally superseded, from the 1970's onward *The King David Report* reappears strikingly in biblical scholarship as a useful contemporary 'example' of how competing ideological elements might have incorporated into the biblical narrative, often paired with more recondite examples from the Ancient Near East: Ethan's story becomes instrumentalized. In some senses, Heym functions as a useful segue, a way in to the complexities of historical scholarship. So, for Walter Brueggemann, the novel was "decisive" in his approach to certain ideological texts in Samuel: "The point of Heym's work, and the reason I cite it, is that the text as we have it has been carefully handled and shaped and managed to serve political interests" (70). In his introduction to the chapter entitled "Royal Propaganda" in his David biography, Steven L. McKenzie gives a brief description of Heym's novel, which describes the result of Ethan's work as "royal propaganda" and outlines the purpose of the document for Solomon ("controlling what people believe about him") (26, 25). Similarly,

[32] Heym first composed the novel shortly after publicly calling for renewed attention to Stalin's legacy (Tait, *Taking Sides* 83).
[33] See Tait, *Taking Sides* 83-93.
[34] See Tait, "Between the Lines" 112.

Marc Zvi Brettler calls the novel "The best starting point for understanding the ideological nature of the biblical Book of Samuel," and concludes that "although Israel was not a communist nation, nor was its government totalitarian, the fundamental observations of Heym seem applicable to Israel as a strongly centralized, pre-modern society;" Baruch Halpern asserts that "no novel is so accomplished in the historical art" (Brettler 93; Halpern 5).

These authors of course freely dismiss the novel after invoking it, moving on to their own historical-critical concerns. Brueggemann reminds us that it is not *really* Biblical ("It is clear to you, I hope, that Heym is not in fact writing about the Davidic material. His appeal to the Davidic material is heuristic, because his intention is to comment on the way in which his own totalitarian regime manipulates truth for the sake of the regime") (66). John Van Seters even deems the novel *frighteningly* close to historical work, as if the history were strong it could cancel-out the world-making properties of a novel and require an external historical referent: "the danger with Heym's novel is that it only works so long as the scholarship about the historical David to which it is tied is viable, but once it has become suspect, then the story of Ethan the historian no longer works" (70).[35]

But the biblical scholars' assessments of Heym stop short of treating the ways the novel itself challenges the conception of history it outlines and moves towards a creative, fictional, aesthetic through its work with the biblical text. The propaganda, the "report" and traditional scholarly "history," are joined by a third term, *The King David Report* the *novel* and its editorial esthetics. The novel is indeed based on a theory about the composition of David's story in 1and

[35] Halpern, exceptionally, mostly agrees with Heym's assessment of the work as Solomonic propaganda. Halpern includes Heym in his index of "scholars cited." Tellingly, though Halpern compares his understanding of David and Goliath to Heller's novelistic treatment in *God Knows,* Heller is not included as a "scholar cited" (488-492).

2 Samuel and the first chapters of Kings which Heym himself intuited based on his own reading of the text.[36] But scholar and novelist merge: as Heym describes his first encounter with the story, the scholarship merely helped him understand his own initial reading experience: he perceived David's as an obviously slanted story, "to legitimize the rule of David's successor, the wise King Solomon", and yet was puzzled that "its words about the son of Jesse are often contradictory" (253). In particular, Heym worked with the 1909 edition edited by Emil Kautzsch, which he cites in his author's note: "From this it appears that not long after the death of David the story of his life and royal rule must have been patched together from various source materials, and where the several parts refused to fit together, the seams remained visible" (254).[37]

Heym's process was both remarkably scholarly and remarkably creative. He writes in his 1988 autobiographical work *Nachruf* (*Obituary*) that he felt challenged to compete with the biblical writer; he remarked upon reading the biblical text not "what a history," but "What a novel! [Welch ein Roman!]" (Heym, *Nachruf* 848**,** 847).[38] And yet he corresponded with a scholar of religion, Professor Walter Beltz, who in an article Beltz later penned concerning *The*

[36] The construction of the novel itself necessitated close study. The Stefan Heym Archive at Cambridge University Library (Box A199 "The King David Report: Studies, Outline, Sources") includes notecards that describe elements of local color, such as "clothes, color, cosmetics," "holidays," "forms of address," "weights and measurements," "calendar," "furniture" (Heym, "Index cards"). These include references to relevant biblical passages from outside of Samuel and to secondary sources including the German translation of E.W. Heaton's *Everyday Life in Old Testament Times* and Prichard's *Archeology and the OT* (Heym, "Index cards").

[37] Heym apparently attended both to the text-critical notes at the bottom of each page as well as to the marginal sigla, which mark the hand believed to have composed a given line or section (Heym, "Summary").

[38] Heym picked up the King James Bible, apparently at random, following the death of his mother. He notes the life-changing fortune that let his finger fall at 1 Samuel 16, the scene of David's anointing (Heym, *Nachruf* 847). See Fox on Heym's ambivalent relation to Judaism, common to many East German intellectuals; as well as his interview with Herlinde Koelbl (115-116). Unless otherwise specified, all German translations are the work of Matt Johnson, with many thanks.

King David Report's relation to biblical scholarship, describes Leonhard Rost's early scholarship explicitly: "It is certain that the available biblical texts are the conglomeration of various strands of transmission. Reference could be made to . . . above all to the specialized study by L. Rost, "Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids [Sicher ist, daß die verhandenen biblischen Texte das Konglomerat verschiedener Überlieferungsstraänge sind. Zu verweisen ist auf . . . vor allem auf die Spezialuntersuchung von L. Rost "Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids . . .]" (Beltz 7).[39] Heym also describes that while planning the book he was gratified to have Professor Walter Beltz, confirm that a commission like the one he imagined existed (Heym, *Nachruf* 850-51).[40] As Heym recalls, Beltz explained that the commission took place during the exilic period, and in all probability Beltz referred to theories of Deuteronomistic redaction current after Noth's seminal work.[41] Unlike the biblical scholars, however, Heym seems unshaken by this discrepancy, retaining his original imagined scenario in the Solomonic court[42]:

[39] Beltz also refers readers to Kittel's analysis in Kautzsch, Eisfeldt's introductions to the Old Testament, and an article by Herrmann. Beltz concludes, "In the novel [by Heym], there is an attempt to separate out the individual groups of transmission [*Überlieferungsgruppen*] and to sketch their historical background. In the process, full congruence is achieved [Im Roman ist der Versuch unternommen, die einzelnen Überlieferungsgruppen zu trennen und ihren historischen Hintergrund zu skizzieren]" (Beltz 7).

[40] Heym's author's note to the novel spells Beltz "Belz." Walter Beltz was apparently introduced to Heym by Peter Hacks (Schoeps 183).

[41] In fact, though Heym apparently felt justified by Beltz's confirmation of an exilic commission, his proposed scenario is similar to that described by Gerhard Von Rad in his seminal essay "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," (originally "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel" in AKuG 32 [1944], 1-42). Rost, also, speaks of the 'Succession Narrative' as written by "a member of the royal court" and "'in majorem gloriam Salomonis' – to the greater glory of Solomon," citing Caspari (1910) "The Opening Style of the Israelite Novelle" (105).

[42] The Heym Archive housed in Cambridge contains an undated typewritten draft of an article written by Walter Beltz himself, entitled "Historische und alttestamentliche Implikationen in Stefan Heyms Roman "König-David-Bericht." In this article, Beltz describes how the scenario Heym narrates might be historically possible while recognizing that one hypothesis posits a post-exilic writer (though he insists repeatedly that Heym's novel is artistic is ""isn't a new ideological-critical investigation of the biblical textual corpus from 1 Samuel to 1 Kings . . . Heym's book is a novel – poetry {. . . keine neue ideologiekritische Untersuchung des biblischen Textbestandes von 1 Samuel bis 1. Könige . . . Heyms Buch ist ein Roman – Dichtung-]") (9).

Heym writes his own fanciful biblical criticism as creative composition, history and also critical-fiction.

Rather than a seamless, coherent narrative with beginning middle and end—of history or fiction—Heym's novel proposes instead a fiction of juxtaposition and interpolation, a philological and editorial epistemological mode drawn from the work of biblical scholarship's analysis of the Bible. The presence of Ethan the author-compiler-interpolator, furthermore, underscores an interpolative model of a text that preserves otherness and discontinuity within it, or, as Sophie Rabau describes it, that could "conceive an intention of the other that could not be reduced to an intention of the same [concevoir une intention de l'autre qui ne puisse se réduire à une intention du même]" (Rabau "Poétique" ¶3).

In this case, 'seams' become opportunities. Here, rather than simply ripping apart the seams and showing the documents themselves, the novel capitalizes on these moments of tension within the original. In the hands of the novelist, the biblical critic's notes expand to rich narrative scenes, as when the commission charged with the report must discuss the discrepancies in multiple versions of David's introduction. David cannot be introduced to Saul as an unknown singer and instrumentalist as well as the young boy who killed Goliath, so the group introduces resolution by adding a line, one scholars cite as an attempted smoothing interpolation, in fact.[43] The rather obtuse Benaiah proposes: "We shall write—let me see—we shall write, *But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem,*" and continues to threaten any who feel this might still produce a slightly incoherent story (50). Here Heym takes a

[43] McCarter writes: "Note especially the redactional character of vv. 14b-15: this is designed to harmonize the two stories, in one of which David is already in the service of Saul while in the other he is still at home with Jesse" (*I Samuel* 303). Kautzsch's version annotates the interpolation as "harmonizing with 16:22 [Ausgleichung mit 16, 22]"), connected to the verses that describe the moment Saul hires David as musician (Kautzsch 403).

proposed interpolation from the biblical text and re-contextualizes it in his own story as part of the novel's emphasis on propagandistic strictures of the regime while simultaneously supplying an explanation for its position in the canonical 'report.' Similarly, many other famous scholarly cruxes provide fertile material: the doubled scenes in which David chases Saul and refuses to kill him; the two conflicting accounts of Saul's death; and the possibility that David actually fought for the Philistines against his own people, among others. Heym's novel uses the notion of interpolation and philological speculation to elaborate a process of textual development, a postmodern novelization of Noth's description of Dtr.'s work complete with court intrigue and witty repartee.

Heym's own extensive composition notes, preserved in his archive in Cambridge, attest to the way in which his efforts simultaneously combined scholarly and creative, novelistic ways of reading. The document labeled "summary of biblical story" in the archive's catalogue is a meticulous, typewritten personal commentary on each chapter of the biblical account, a precis of the plot with occasional *KJV* quotations, with new headings (i.e. "David Kills His First Strong-Arm Man II Sam 1") and, penciled in the margins, columns noting the division of sources Kautzch provides in his Bible edition (Heym, "Summary"). These summaries also include musings on and analysis of the construction of the biblical text (i.e. "David sings mourning song to Jonathan- "very pleasant hast though been to me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (V. 27) - this now becomes pattern: David orders someone killed and then destroys killer or, at least, publicly mourns his victims" (Heym, "Summary"). At one point, moreover, Heym even plays the biblical critic himself. A marvelous handwritten note describing Kautzsch's breakdown veers into a parenthetical comment in which Heym seeks to correct Kautzsch's literary-critical assessment: "Kautzsch wants us to disregard contradiction to I, S, 31

– acodg [sic] to Kautzsch the Amalekite merely has "seen" the dead Saul. This is unlikely - why doesn't Kautzsch consider this as an earlier (or later) source?" (Heym, "Summary"). This "scholarly" questioning leads to analytic and creative reflections. In a lengthy set of notes Heym lists and describes sets of "Themes," the titles of which sound like the sources described by biblical critics ("Saul-Samuel complex," "Saul-David complex," "Pursuit Stories,") and in which his commentary, interspersed with capitalized questions and speculation about possibilities of composition, obviously points towards a novelistic retelling (Heym, "Themes").[44]

Heym's Ethan, by contrast, is almost a parodic version of a diligent, normative historian, concerned with documents and their objective truth. He wants to 'get to the bottom' of the story. It seems historical accuracy is the goal, and diligent scholarship the method. Ethan stresses his own detachment, partially as a protective gesture against those who might mistrust his intentions: "I am a historian. I deal with facts, not with suppositions" (59). He converts the sung performances of the Goliath epic into concise bullet points, sifting the 'facts' from the embellishments: "1) Tactical placement of Israel and Philistine armies at Ephes-dammim. . . 2) Goliath, a champion of the Philistines. His height (six cubits and a span); his armour: brass helmet, brass coat of mail. . ." (59, 45). He performs his studious diligence in the royal archives, observing, "I am as tired and bedraggled as either of you . . . but in the service of the Wisest of Kings, Solomon, and of history, I know neither fatigue nor weariness, and . . . I shall return

[44] For example, of David's marriage to Saul's daughter Michal ("Michal-David complex") Heym speculates "It would be Michal who puts Saul up to the hundred-Philistine-foreskins idea, after David modestly declines the idea of marriage . . . BUT COULDN'T THE MERAB-MICHAL STORY BE ANOTHER LATER PUBLICITY ITEM? WHAT IF HE ACTUALLY FORCED ABNER TO HAND HIM MICHAL AT THE TIME OF ISHBOSHETH'S DECLINE SO AS TO ESTABLISH AN ADDITIONAL CLAIM TO SAUL'S THRONE? THE PHALTI STORY WOULD THEN BE MUCH MORE POIGNANT, BUT WE WOULD HAVE TO ASCRIBE MICHAL'S FLUCHTHILFE TO THE REALM OF THE FAIRYTALE, WHICH WOULD BE A SHAME" (Heym, "Themes").

another day," (103). He carefully examines archival data and works to preserve material texts, and the text comically mimics scholarly disclaimers: "where a tablet, or potsherd, was damaged and the missing part or parts could not be restored despite the most diligent effort, I have left the text in its fragmentary form. Any annotations, queries, and so forth are mine" (100). In his compilation and composition, Ethan expresses both the thrill of the archival chase for its own sake and his attachment to the *story* of David itself. He hears the "thumping of his heart" when discovering new documents (Ahitophel's first-person account of the Absalom revolt from the perspective of the enemy side) and notes the thrill of discovery for its own sake ("they supplied the answers to much that had puzzled me about David,") even though the information could never be included (201, 218). At one point, Ethan comments that despite his own fears that another would "add the last touches and strike out what truths I was hoping to convey," he continued to toil in the archives, "digging among the confusion of potsherds and tablets of clay and pieces of leather in an attempt to round out my knowledge of the final years of the rule of King David" (231).

Beyond the complications of Solomonic "truth" and historiography, which recall that of Stalin or other totalitarian regimes, the novel counters Ethan's own search for objective history by enacting a gradual conflation of the slanted personal and the dry historical as Ethan goes about his work—what Heym does to the scholarship of Kautzch, he does to Ethan, too. As they are compiled within the novel, the objects Ethan collects and examines also bridge more personal, evocative narrative with scholarly objectivity. Here, Ethan's 'scholarly' work reflects the imbrication of personal and historical modes necessitated by his retelling of this story, and the increasing difficulty he has in separating the two. Ethan labels his journal entries as documents among the others ("Thoughts of Ethan Ben Hoshaiah, one night after his return from

Jerusholayim, as he lay upon the roof of his house in Ezrah, with Lilith his concubine ready to minister to him) and labels even the most personal perspectives, such as Michal's story of David's abuse and emotional anguish, as a "deposition," fueled by his own questions concerning past events, and highlighting the distinction between the emotional, personal resonance of the story and its position as part of the larger report, standardized and collated (59, 45, 13).

Ethan presents himself as caught between between critical work and creativity: Ethan proves himself an artistic author as well as a scholar. He composes love poetry (pieces of the Song of Songs, in fact) for his concubine, and psalms when in distress. In the reader's "edition" of *The King David Report,* moreover, Ethan often presents 'data' with descriptions of the research process as well as reflection on the material at hand, all interspersed with more truly personal writing that describes Ethan's relationships with his wives and his beloved concubine, Lilith, as well as his fears concerning his dual roles as truth-seeker and Solomonic servant. Furthermore, though Ethan avidly seeks the full story of David, Ethan describes the legacy he hopes for not as some historical 'truth' about David but as his own *personal* contribution, his "thought:" "The most [man] can do is to try making his thought last a little beyond him, a dim signal to generations to come. I have tried. Let me be judged accordingly" (239).

Brilliantly, moreover, this slippage between the objective-historical and the subjective-personal is figured through the editorial esthetics of the novel as a whole. The novel's form places documents part of Ethan's history and the personal and ideological ramifications of these texts on an equal plane, highlighting the ways in which they are mutually enforcing. It seems the Bible is all of these stories. Inevitably, readers engage in the same kinds of 'sifting' work Ethan performs as they attempt to separate parts from the whole and 'history' from interpretation: Heym-David, Bible-David, and Ethan-David. Part of the novel's brilliance lies in the way it

manages to place such disparate elements in close juxtaposition, playing with reader's awareness of the 'old' and new texts, as so many rewritings do, but in a manner that mirrors the experience of a bible reader at times shocked by divergence—by the insertion of the arc narrative, for example, by any number of stylistically jarring annalistic entries, or by the famous doublets—and who at other times happily reads through discrepancies. Readers both attempt to separate Ethan's thoughts from David's story and simultaneously drift through the melded language. Here Ethan acts as an interpolator in Sophie Rabau's formulation—simultaneously marked and unmarked, revising and part of new composition.

Furthermore, even within the documents Ethan provides, the novel's language drifts between different permutations of King James Version prose.[45] In this novel, the reader too becomes a philologist, and learns to perceive the novelistic historiography not as a monumental representation of a frozen past but as a dynamic process of interpolation and literary creativity. On the one hand, the novel inculcates in readers a reading strategy attuned to editorial alteration: again and again, characters speak *KJV* text alternated with fictional speech imitating biblical style and occasional anachronisms or parodic elements that jolt the reader out of the familiar. This intertextual strategy forces the reader into a pseudo-scholarly position, tantalized by familiar language to sort out which part is the 'true' Bible somehow interpolated within Heym's

[45]Heym's composition notes reveal that this kind of melding was highly intentional, and even reflects Heym's own kind of critical-editorial composition technique. A lengthy section of handwritten notes described in the catalog as "Table of organization of chapters" is divided into three columns along a horizontal page: "Organization of Chapter," "Method of Telling," and "Points Covered." The "Method of Telling" section includes descriptions of the way in which purely invented material will be conveyed ("directly told by Ethan," or "as told to Ethan by Treasury Officials, with Ethan's comments in brackets") as well as precise descriptions of myriad ways the biblical text is manipulated, parodied, pastiched: ("Interview with Bath-sheba; straight telling with dialogue; modern with antique features" "Directly told by Ethan, modern and biblical mixed, direct quote" "Stream of consciousness monologue; entirely modern; biblical quotes only for shock effect," "Entries of Achitophel – modern, occasional use of direct biblical quotes – dialogue partially indirect partially in quotation marks" ("Table").

novel. Simultaneously, however, it allows readers to revel in the juxtaposition, the biblical text somehow thickened. On pages 116-117 alone, for example, Heym's intertextual pastiche reflects a version of 2 Samuel 4 (in which King Ishbosheth is murdered by Rechab and Baanah) but alternates between paragraphs of verbatim *KJV* prose, faux or parodic *KJV* imitation, re-focalized *KJV,* and snippets of anachronistic modern speech patterns.[46]

At times, moreover, the novel's composite structure does not highlight 'seams' and interspersions in biblical narrative—the additions—so much as it highlights what might have been cut out, inciting readers to reflect on the possible missing pieces in the Authorized Version: the *KJV* is at times both creatively reworked in a sustained manner and reframed as an open document. In the case of David's famously ruthless general Joab, who often took action and the blame to remove Davidic opponents, *The King David Report* exaggerates his role as scapegoat and directly insinuates the biblical account we have has been bowdlerized.[47] We read verbatim excerpts from the *KJV* narrative of the entire final scenes of Absalom's revolt and Absalom's death, interspersed with Ethan's comments highlighting the apparently propagandistic nature of this story ("The answer . . . appears to be Item One in establishing Joab as the sole culprit . . . David's innocence is once more being stressed. . . . The armour supplies additional evidence, if such were needed, of Joab's guilt") (223).

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[46] In his notes on "Method of Telling" Heym does not this time refer to biblical language, but merely describes the manner of the reports: "Report from Baanah and Rechab to David (letter form)

> Letter David-Abner
> (…)
> Two reports (or two fragments of same report) by B+R to David)
>
> Letter from B+R to David" (A 199)."

[47] See Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym* on this 'show-trial' and other elements of GDR context (153-4).

Joab is killed before his trial, in a scene also reflected directly in (or drawn from) the biblical account. Thus, Benaiah's 'version' and subsequent events comprise two pieces of a compiled document we have read in the canonical text of 1 and 2 Samuel. In the biblical account, moreover, Joab's perspective and person are firmly and irrevocably cut out of his death scene, in which Solomon gives a prolix discourse disavowing Joab's deeds;[48] Heym's version repeats the scene verbatim, but adds 'back' Joab's voice. In their exaggerated use of the language of blood-guilt returning upon another, Joab's own words mirror the curses of David and Solomon:

> I was beaten, O Israel. . . and tormented in mind and body, until I weakened before the Lord and confessed to the most heinous crimes, and took upon myself the guilt of others, and upon my head the blood that was on the hands of my betters. . .Assuredly the blood of war is upon my hands, and on my girdle, and in my shoes, and also the blood of those that I killed in the service of the cause as I believed. But all this blood I return upon the head of David, who commanded these murders, and upon the head of his seed forever: for it was not shed in the cause of the Lord, nor in any cause that was noble or necessary, but for the aggrandizement of the man David and so as to seat him upon the neck of Israel and tighten his rule. (229)

Here, we read the extra that apparently must have been excised from the story in order to allow the clean, sealed absence. In the passages surrounding Joab, the novel provides a vivid explanation and exposition of the canonic text as propaganda and forces readers to appreciate the editorial bowdlerizing that perhaps made the biblical version what it is: Solomon's canonic

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"And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness" (*KJV* 1 Kings 2.31-34).

Furthermore, this language echoes David's own lengthy curses against Joab and his house, in which he earlier had distanced himself from Joab's bloody deeds. ("Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that *was* about his loins, and in his shoes that *were* on his feet") (*KJV* 1 Kings 32.5)

speech reads as unnecessary exaggeration precisely because it is, we are to imagine, a manner of responding to and overturning a speech expressing its opposite.

In Ethan's world, of course, layered language is also explicitly political. The editing he commits is dangerous, potent, and "[words] are of many hues, they both conceal and reveal, and behind each line that is written lurks danger" (118). At the novel's conclusion, Ethan is by Solomon's court and found guilty of "Literary High Treason," consisting of the added misinformation, "interspersion of doubts, and of evil thought, and of mischievous notions," "slip[ping] in matters detrimental," as well as the style of the additions, "words inserted by the accused" and "in a language that pretends to be artless and pleasing to the eye of the Lord," (243, 247). Though Ethan is the report's writer, it is Solomon, as chair of the committee, who stands as ultimate authorial authority over the final document and who seeks to control its contents. Ethan's work, however, slips around and among the mandated prose. Disparate elements superficially blend in with the whole but remain perceptibly distinct from it, and the court will "have to sit for months like nitpickers, searching this mess for hints of subversion and godlessness," much as traditional classicists might pick through to rid a text of interpolations (247).

For though it is easy to imagine Ethan as a heroic voice of dissent, aiming to take down the bloated bureaucracy and hypocrisy of Solomon's reign (and the problematic heritage of Stalinism in the GDR, perhaps) Ethan's tactics are markedly distinct from the propagandistic endeavors of the Solomonic commission. In the end Ethan's crime—for which he is sentenced to silence and exiled from Jerusalem, literally excised from the text and the authorial community—is not his absolute rejection of Solomonic power: he is not a martyr who writes a conclusive alternate history of David, even in the "document" (the novel) that we hold. Instead, his is a

crime of insertions, tiny phrases that destabilize the whole and create ambiguities: "interspersion" creating complex fiction.

Heym's participation in the biblical narrative works similarly. Ethan's interpolative work under Solomonic authority stylizes the work of a novelist re-appropriating any historically authoritative text, and particularly that of King David. In this sense, Heym's writing stands somewhere between authorship and the hiding-yet-visible presence of a traditional interpolator or editor, perhaps someone like Noth's Deuteronomist. Indeed, Heym's own work as an author seems to enact processes of edition described within the novel. Not only does the novel manipulate and reframe pieces of the King James version of Samuel, but the archive contains long compiled lists of proverbs to be interpolated into the narrative and meticulously gathered lists of references to each character in the novel (Heym, "Lists of verses"; "Details of characters"). The editing of the book manuscript itself produced striking palimpsestic documents, typewritten draft pages constructed of layers of cut and pasted carbon paper in different colors, with additional levels of pen and paper markings (particularly "English revised version I" and "Draft").[49]

By foregrounding the text's fragmentary nature and the possibilities of its fraught textual history, Heym returns readers to a different bible: Ethan's anti-establishment interpolations require and encourage the participation of future readers (who after all, read of his work in *The King David Report* or perhaps, we are to imagine, in the biblical books of Samuel and Kings), the response to his Ethan's "dim signal" projected to later generations (239). Through stylistic

[49] K.E Attar has also analyzed an additional source for the novel in an early, unpublished short story found in Heym's archive. The story concerns a kind of heavenly editorial board discussing putting together the Bible; Attar reads this story as a "microcosmic precursor" to *The King David Report* (Attar 1).

means (biblical citation, the commission's inserted lines) and subject matter (Ethan's call to future generations) the novel indoctrinates its readers in the search for and validation of the possible disjunctures in a text, the "seams." Alternately, or additionally, it renders Heym's entire fiction a provocative series of interpolations: as one reviewer wrote, "Stefan Heym has slipped through the seams of the official story of King David") (Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym* 162).[50] Moreover, readers both dwell on the seams and relish reading through them, appreciating all the stories—of the text, the compiler, and the characters within it—available in this composite text. Like Ethan's insertions, Heym's grand series of interpolations destabilizes the biblical text's authority as a coherent, univocal text while nevertheless upholding its authority as freighted cultural object and generative intertext —it's still worth retelling, after all**.**

Read as a philological biblical work, then, Heym's novel itself complicates the distinction and juxtaposition of Heym's own descriptors ("a historical novel or a biblical one, or a story of today, charged with political meaning") (254) Rather than confronting "true history" with "fiction," as the bible critics read the novel, and rather than simply instrumentalizing the bible for allegorical means, Heym's novel proposes an alternate editorial epistemology that takes juxtaposition and differing perspectives as inevitable and part of its structure—needed for a time and a situation (the GDR in 1973) in which normative narration (and its historical other) are revealed to be far too smooth and plausible.

[50] Heinrich Böll in *Der Spiegel,* cited and translated by Hutchinson ("Stefan Heym ist durch di Nähte geschlüpft, die der offizielle David-Text hat" (Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym* 162). The phrase is evocative, and recalls Faulkner: we might imagine a physically self-interpolating Heym literally sliding through the biblical pages into an ancient world or simply slicing through the materiality of written text (the seams of a book or those of a scribal scroll) to insert his own words.

Conclusion

Like novelistic expansions of Noth and Rost's criticism, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The King David Report* narrate the story of David via the stories of the text itself and its compilers. In these novels, a loss of faith in traditional narrative is compensated by a metanarrative about compilation. Read as *biblical* fictions, particularly in relation to the Bible as understood by the kind of critical work of scholars like Noth and Rost, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The King David Report* propose a philological epistemology parallel but alternative to a more traditional narrative epistemology, for fiction or history. By narrating the processes of composing protagonists through composite narrative structures, furthermore, Faulkner and Heym's editorial novels both formally and thematically treat a common tension between attachments to ideologies, powers, and their written forms and competing propaganda and constructed views of history and narrative. Quentin and Ethan are caught in between commitments and compilation: like any interpolator worth his salt, they both build on an earlier narrative—previous 'versions' or stories that make up Sutpen or David's life, or the history of the South or the Solomonic régime—and break through it.

Unlike Coccioli and Heller's novels, which remain in some senses novels of biblical commentary read in the context of their biblical predecessor, Heym and Faulkner's works are to different degrees literary monuments in their own right. *Absalom, Absalom!,* its title notwithstanding, can easily be read as simply a great novel with a biblical title, an almost unbelievably influential work remembered as a superior example of 20th century literature**.** Though it draws connections to David's biblical story more frequently and explicitly, *The King David Report* has also taken on a life of its own outside its relationship to the biblical text; Heym's German translation of the novel spawned its own series of adaptations, including a 1994

radio-play, a Rock-Opera staged at the Volkstheater Halberstadt in 1984, and a series of "paintings of scenes and characters" from 1979-80 (Miklós, Fritsch, Glückhauf). These paintings depict *biblical* figures, but in their novelistic representation, and each painting contains notes on the back which describe the scene or episode from the novel to which they relate.

Yet as adaptations, both novels nevertheless send readers back to the Bible, in this case a Bible simultaneously authoritative and undermined (Sanders). These novels expose the capacity of biblical rewriting to reflect both preserved reverence and complex re-construction. Heym aptly describes the mixture of reverence and renewal with which he approaches the David story. On the one hand, he needs no other sources: "But the bible had it all in itself [aber just die Bibel hatte es in sich]" (Heym *Nachruf* 848).[51] On the other, he must negotiate a different approach, one which retells the narrative obliquely, but still works to "weave in" more explicitly concerns about authority with the pieces of cloth which, "tailored" together, create the story in both versions:

> How to narrate anew that which was so thrilling, seductive, and simply told in the David story [*David-Story*], if not better, which is impossible, then still differently, perhaps more transparently, [with] our insights about power and its seductions interwoven with the fabric from which the fates of David and his comrades, wives, sons, military leaders, and prophets were sewn? (Heym, *Nachruf* 848-9)[52]

Like Quentin and Ethan, it seems these authors don't "hate" the Bible and can't "curse" it, but they do claim for their new texts the strange and generative ability to simultaneously take apart, supersede, and preserve their textual precursor. Literary scholars of the Hebrew Bible may

[51] The bible author(s) are also his ultimate "competitor" (Heym, *Nachruf* 848-9).
[52] "Wie die drin so packend und verführerisch einfach erzählte David-Story[52] neu erzählen, wenn schon nicht besser, was unmöglich, dan dochanders, transparenter veilleicht, und unsere Erkenntnisse über die Macht und ihre Verführungen verwebend mit dem Stoff, aus dem die Schicksale des David und seiner Kampfgenossen, Weiber, Söhne, Heerführer und Propheten geschneidert waren?" (Heym, *Nachruf* 848-9).

lament the way in which critics break down a unified text (Alter's "architectonic cohesion"); for these novels, it is 1 and 2 Samuel's very dis-jointed, non-unified, messy internal structure (its "stringing together," it's "tailored cloth") which models a new editorial aesthetics: a way to re-write and reframe this part of the canon, the King edited once more.

Ultimately, through their rewritings Heym and Faulkner project a bible that is both complete and fragmented. This Bible represents something like Sophie Rabau's interpolative poetics: its seams remain open to interpolation; its fragments both run together and rub against one another to produce possible new editor-characters and perspectives: the "turgid background," the Ethans and the Quentins, as well as the Faulkners and the Heyms who feel compelled to respond to this text's power and prominence and revise it for themselves.

3. Playing David and Saul for Israel: Kalisky's Mediated Mode

> Je crois que l'art ne peut être qu'ambigu, et, je dirai même à la limite, équivoque. Équivoque mais tragique. Ambigu mais tragique. C'est mon seule engagement" (René Kalisky, "Interview sur Pasolini," (1978?), 9:36-10:00)[1]

René Kalisky's 1975 play *Dave au bord de mer* takes as its starting point the canonical, near-mythical power of David's narrative. As Kalisky describes it in the theoretical essay which accompanies the play in publication, David and Saul's story seems foundational and eternal. It is "a theme belonging to universal history [un theme appartenant à l'histoire universelle]" resonant today; "if Saul survives in memories, it's because his tragedy, which has been transmitted to us in an archetypal form, remains profoundly human [c'est que sa tragédie, qui nous a été transmise sous une forme archétypale, demeure profondément humaine]" (218, 219). Indeed, Kalisky writes, "The subject of *Dave au bord de mer* is one of those that defies time and space [Le sujet de *Dave au bord de mer* est de ceux qui défient le temps et l'espace.]" ("Surjeu" 218-19).

By attending to David and Saul's story as a still-resonant legend and re-writing it in contemporary Israel, Kalisky's play recalls the strategies of Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan. Kalisky, like Ben-Gurion, felt deeply that the transition from Saul to David (and so the transition to a united monarchy) represented a crucial moment in the history of Israel, the moment in which, according to Kalisky, Israel truly entered into history (Kalisky 1974 54). Kalisky's play

[1] "I believe art can't be otherwise than ambiguous, and, I would say even, at a push, equivocal. Equivocal but tragic. Ambiguous but tragic. That's my only commitment [*engagement*]" ("Interview sur Pasolini" 9:36-10:00). Translations from Kalisky's untranslated writings, letters, and audio transmissions are my own. Translations from *Dave au bord de mer* are for the most part from David Willinger and Luc Deneulin's 1984 *Dave on the Beach,* although I have occasionally noted where I have modified this translation to be more direct, or simply included the page number of the French edition if using my own translation.

dramatizes synchronic history by staging an encounter between David and Saul replayed on an Israeli beach.

But though the idea of layered times implies a system of equivalences which would *explain* contemporary events by way of the ancient ones, Kalisky's project shies away from offering solutions. Though Kalisky's play reflects a Ben-Gurionian model, and though the idea of layered times implies some kind of equation, Kalisky's work also troubles any triumphal or messianic model of juxtaposition. Indeed, in his 1968 *essai* on the history of the Arab world, revised in 1974, Kalisky criticized the justification of the contemporary by the biblical past:

> As for Israeli nationalism, we'd like to believe that it will turn away in the end from those modern prophets who draw from biblical literature justifications for all their enterprises, past or future. We want to hope that if Arab intransigence disappeared, it would automatically bring with it the end of a certain Israeli radicalism.
>
> But while waiting, could we be permitted to hope that Israel remains worthy in victory as it was in persecution, using its superiority with wisdom and moderation? (363)[2]

Kalisky's entire oeuvre reflects his obsession with a concept of ambiguity, which for him was deeply connected to post-war history as well as to his vision of a new theatrical genre. According to Kalisky, his theater would not incite viewers to action but would instead seduce them into ambiguity, and into a non-Manichean history, the better to appreciate the dangerous undercurrents that might lurk within. Rather than give a new message, the drama would upset complacency and produce heightened critical awareness in actors and audience members alike. Through Kalisky's concept of "surtexte," moreover, the work would contain within it the

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[2] "Quant au nationalisme israélien, nous voulons croire qu'il se détournera finalement de ses "prophètes" modernes qui puisent dans la littérature biblique la justification de toutes leurs entreprises passées ou futures. Nous voulons espérer que si l'intransigeance arabe venait à disparaître, ce fait entraînerait automatiquement la fin d'un certain radicalisme israélien.

Mais en attendant que l'horizon se dégage, nous sera-t-il permis de formuler le vœu qu'Israël reste digne dans la victoire comme il l'a été dans la persécution, en usant avec sagesse et pondération de sa supériorité?" (Kalisky, *Monde* 363).

complex layers of its own interpretation. Actors and audience members could "play" freely, unhampered by the interpretation of a single director, critically alert and aware of their own roles: actors play that they play, audiences see that they see.

Rather than using the Bible to anchor a promised future vision, *Dave au bord de mer* dwells in ancient and contemporary history in order to produce a constant, unsettling, destabilizing interplay between characters and times, an experimental counter-narrative to the versions of Ben-Gurion and Dayan. René Kalisky's *Dave au bord de mer* produces not a conversation between worlds but a synchronic conflation of them. Here characters drag and force times together and deploy their histories and texts, sometimes with playful cajoling, and often in violent coercion. Kalisky's play, which is itself a re-mediation of the biblical narrative, presents David's story as a mediated and mediating text in which one story is filtered by another, by different translations, and by the way in which the characters on stage 'report' it and reframe it. By drawing together the chronicle of the biblical text with contemporary news, moreover, Kalisky's play effects an unstable textual conflation, a new compilation of contemporary and ancient media pasted together and made flesh through dramatic dialogue. As Kalisky uses it, not only does the Bible itself ironically offer an alternative to strong, positivist narratives and myths, but it becomes an ambiguity machine, churning out not timeless truths, but timeless instabilities which recur and reproduce on stage and in the contemporary.

Reinstating Ambiguity

René Kalisky was born in Brussels to a Polish-Jewish family in 1936, and though his brother, sister, and mother survived the war, his father was deported and killed in Auschwitz in

December 1944 **(***Sarah et ses frères***)**. René Kalisky remained haunted by the war[3] as well as by the continual failings of mankind he perceived as following it.[4]

Kalisky was initially trained as a journalist and wrote for and was editor of a Belgian Jewish newspaper before he turned to essayistic texts, including a two volume history of the Arab world written after a 1962 trip to the Middle East and subsequent research and a 1974 volume devoted to the history of Zionism (*Sionisme ou dispersion?*), and later to theater. Kalisky was recognized during his lifetime (he was unanimously granted the Belgian "Grand Prix annuel de littérature – Prix triennial d'art dramatique'" in 1975 for *Jim le téméraire* (1972) and *Le pique-nique de Claretta* (1973)) and received the early support of the great editor Jacques Lemarchand**,** who published four of his early plays at Gallimard in the prestigious "Le Manteau d'Arlequin" collection; later, two of his plays were staged by the famous Parisian director Antoine Vitez (*Le pique-nique de Claretta* (Théâtre de Poche, in Brussels, and Quartiers d'Ivry, Paris 1974) and *Dave au bord de mer,* (Odéon, Paris 1979)) (MLT 7/34). But his correspondence, as well as interviews with the Belgian critics who supported him, attest to a life often spent seeking support (including financial support) from publishers, directors, and ministers of culture without feeling fully accepted by the Francophone theatre world of the day ("Correspondence," Bertin). *Dave au bord de mer,* a play Kalisky considered "crucial [capitale]" was written between March and September, 1975 and published in 1978 (Théâtre Ouvert Stock) ("Correspondence" 82).[5] Though the play was put on at the Odéon from November-December

[3] Indeed, Kalisky's entire family remained so: in 2007, the Jewish Museum of Belgium held an exhibition dedicated to the Kalisky (Kaliski) siblings, René, Sarah, and Jim, all of whom became artists dedicated to reexamining the war and fascism (*Sarah et ses frères*).
[4] In a letter to his brother and mother from October 1973, for example, Kalisky criticizes Israel's support of Pretoria and Santiago, as well as the lack of Jewish response to Genocide in Biafra ("Lot" 108).
[5] Letter to Raymond Pouilliart, 7 June 1976.

1979 by celebrated director Antoine Vitez, the run was short and not well received, much to the disappointment of Kalisky's champions in the Belgian press (De Decker, "Portrait"). Since then, it has been produced again only in 1993 in a Belgian production by Jules-Henri Marchant at the Théâtre du Rideau de Bruxelles and in an abbreviated staged reading in Brussels in 2006 (Quaghebeur 47 n. 3).

Kalisky's plays all deal with recent history in some way or another, often treating famous figures and their imbrication in famous ideologies, and often of the twentieth century (for example: Hitler in *Jim le Teméraire* (1972), Trotsky in *Trotsky, etc.* (1969), Mussolini in *Le pique-nique de Claretta* (1973), Pasolini and Christ in *La passion selon Pier Paolo Pasolini* (1978)). For Kalisky, the threat of fascism's re-emergence and the risk for humanity was real. Prominent Belgian theater critic Jacques de Decker wrote of Kalisky's unceasing desire to confront recent history in his works:

> Because he was marked from infancy by active brutality, because he lived the horror of the insanity of the State, he was gifted with a faultless vigilance to note advance signs of the terrifying repetitions of history that haunted him. . . . But he was never a resigned witness to his fears, never a kind of contemporary Cassandra. He believed, in order to adopt this attitude, too much in mankind and in his capacity to fight, to remake the world. (De Decker, "Portrait" 16)[6]

Kalisky's theoretical writings signal his attempt to unsettle both the concept of a theatrical or a historical *text* itself and any sense that such a text ought to convince. In his writings and commentary, Kalisky returns again and again to an "ambiguity" inherent in man and in history which he seeks to affirm. This ambiguity, broadly speaking, he saw as a necessary antidote to the

[6] "Parce qu'il avait été marqué dès l'enfance para la barbarie agissante, parce qu'il avait vécu dans sa chair l'horreur de la folie d'Etat, il était doué d'une vigilance sans faille pour repérer les signes avant-coureurs de ces répétitions terrifiantes de l'histoire qui étaient sa hantise. . . . Mais jamais il ne fut le témoin résigné de ses craintes, jamais il ne fut une manière de Cassandre contemporain. Il croyait, pour adopter cette attitude, trop en l'homme et en sa faculté de combattre, de refondre le monde" (De Decker, "Portrait" 16).

dangers of over-determined ideology. He notes, for example, in a 1978 interview, "The crisis" in French theater "comes, perhaps, from the fact that ambiguity is refused. And what is ambiguity? It's that nothing is clear. And at the same time everything is marvelous . . . because man, with his problematic, is so much richer than man through an ideology" (Kalisky, "Rencontre" 27:09-27:40).[7] The "revolutionary," for Kalisky, is such unstable ambiguity: "It's to be ambiguous. It's to disturb. It's to question yourself all the time [C'est d'être ambigu. C'est de déranger. Ce'st de se remettre en question tout le temps]" ("Rencontre" 47:00-47:25).

Kalisky proposes a theater that would draw audiences closer—seduce them—in order to show them uncomfortable things, to "disturb [déranger]" them. For Kalisky, a self-proclaimed "homme de gauche," his political commitment manifested in a theater that would preserve ambiguity, seemingly in order to disturb the kinds of unambiguous ideologies that might lead again to fascism ("Je refuse" 206). In a later essay from 1979 in which he details the post-Brechtian ambitions in his earlier theater, Kalisky criticizes the theater of his time and hopes for a new theater which would use "seduction to kill the lie [la seduction pour tuer le mensonge]" ("Séduction"). For a "Manichean" time in which Fascism was a clear evil, the Brechtian response of writers and directors was appropriate, Kalisky argues. The fight against a "racist ideology reclaiming a mythic Middle age . . . a criminal neo-obscurantism . . . absolute evil" was as clear as the fight between bad and good in a movie Western; this fight, however, led to a theater "almost entirely devoted to convincing and no longer to seduction [séduire] " (12).[8] In his own time, in which "the adversary [absolute evil] is everywhere and dispersed," such a

[7] ". . . cette crise provient peut-être du fait qu'on refuse l'ambiguïté. Et qu'est-ce que l'ambiguïté. C'est que rien n'est clair. Et en même temps tout est merveilleux . . . parce que l'homme, avec sa problématique, est tellement plus riche que l'homme a travers une idéologie" (Kalisky, "Rencontre" 27:09-27:40).
[8] ". . . cette idéologie à fond raciste se réclamant d'un Moyen Âge mythique . . . un néo-obscurantisme de caractère criminel . . . le mal absolu;" "presque tout entière voué à convaincre et non plus à séduire" (12).

technique represents a weak response to "underground fascism [le fascism souterrain]" (19).[9] Instead, Kalisky proposes in this essay a "seduction to kill the lie." Just as Shakespeare had audiences confront Richard in all his fascinating humanity in order to better denounce him, and that part of him that might be in us, in Kalisky's play *Jim le Téméraire,* in which a Jewish victim is entranced by Hitler, Kalisky writes that "Hitler seduces us, and he must seduce us if we want to extirpate, kill the message that he incarnated [Hitler nous séduit, et il faut bien qu'il nous séduise si nous voulons extirper, tuer le mensonge qu'il a incarné]" (15).

This attention to preserving and propagating ambiguity manifests also in Kalisky's new genre of writing, the "surtexte," which he describes in the theoretical text published alongside *Dave au bord de* mer and *La passion de Pier Paolo Pasolini,* ("Du surjeu au surtexte").[10] In a "surjeu" work, characters, actors, and audience members all remain aware of and participants in the "play" as a means of preserving agile critical faculties in all involved: "It's the capacity to overcome theatrical convention, to *play* (surjouer) as if it didn't exist: it's the capacity, finally, to liberate theater from the psychology of the text to the benefit of a constantly critical psychology, actively critical at the level of all the protagonists of the show—actors and spectators" (217).[11] Rather than hope for a director who could provide sophisticated additional elements of play to a given text, moreover, Kalisky hoped to infuse the text itself with all the possibilities necessary; he hoped to contain the germ for a new liberated theater within the play's text:

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[9] "L'adversaire est partout et agit en ordre dispersé" (13). In passing, Kalisky notes that a theater of derision/mockery has replaced the ultra-serious Brechtian vision, but that such theater is complacent, and reflects the great fear of its practicants of a true "theater of conviction . . . which would disturb [théâtre de la conviction . . . qui dérange" (19).

[10] Serge Goriely shows that this text was written at the same time as *Dave* (48).

[11] "[. . .] c'est la capacité de surmonter la convention théâtrale, de *jouer* (surjouer) comme si elle n'existait pas; c'est la capacité enfin de libérer le théâtre de la psychologie du texte au profit d'une psychologie constamment critique, activement critique au niveau de tous les protagonistes de la représentation: comédiens et spectateurs" (217).

> The 'surtexte' authorizes the actors to make their illusion themselves, even if it means denouncing it, disavowing it later, but without letting the spectator ever lose the certainty that he has before him but an atrocious or droll game, perverse or innocent. Just as some write that they write, the actor plays that he plays, and the spectator sees that he sees. (221)[12]

Free of the need to supply complacent convention ("the precision of caricatural strokes [la precision du trait caricatural],") the author of the *surtexte* can allow instead for the "equivocal, ambiguous, disconcerting truth [la vérité equivoque, ambiguë, déroutante]" (218). Kalisky describes his own version of engaged theater—a theater whose capacity for play necessitates that all involved be disconcerted in some way. As the *surtexte* play par excellence*, Dave au bord de mer* draws on the legendary biblical text at its core to produce just this kind of continuous destabilization.

A Nation like the Others?

Kalisky's play is in many senses built on the kind of synchronic logic of Ben-Gurion and Dayan's writings. Just as Ben-Gurion saw the Arab-Israeli war as an "interpretation" of Joshua, in *Dave au bord de mer,* Saul and David interpret their ancient conflict on stage as actors, drifting between biblical prose and a contemporary idiom[13] on a beach in Israel. Jewish diasporic history is evoked (Saul at one point refers to the world outside Israel as "Hitler. . . the Cossacks," (196)) but the play primarily relies on the continuity between biblical world and present. Indeed, like Dayan and Ben-Gurion, Kalisky sees the conflict between David and Saul as foundational for the development of Israel, and therefore in Jewish history. As Kalisky wrote in his history of

[12] "Mais le surtexte autorise les comédiens à créer leurs illusions eux-mêmes, quitte à la dénoncer, à la désavouer plus tard, mais sans que le spectateur perde jamais la certitude qu'il n'a devant lui qu'un jeu atroce ou drôle, pervers ou innocent. Tout comme d'aucuns écrivent qu'ils écrivent, l'acteur joue qu'il joue, et le spectateur voit qu'il regard" (221).

[13] Saul is 'anointed' with tanning oil; David tears Saul's pant leg instead of his royal garment.

Zionism, (*Zionism or Dispersion: The Hebrews, The Jews, The Israelis,*[14] published by Marabout in 1974 and written immediately preceding his work on *Dave*), "Saul and David, or rather the conflict that opposes them, are representative of the history of the monarchy in Israel and even beyond. We owe them everything. And, simply by evoking them, one evokes the whole history of the Jewish people" (54).[15] Just as Ben-Gurion writes of Saul that he is "tragic as the first king at a time of difficult transition," Kalisky sees the story as an archetypal tragedy: "The tragic conflict that opposes David and Saul. . .is undoubtedly the most "theatrically" tragic of the whole Bible" (Ben-Gurion 263; "Surjeu" 218). Like Ben-Gurion, moreover, who writes of the beginning of Samuel as "a new era. . . in the life of the Jewish people," Kalisky saw the book of Samuel as a crucial moment of transition in Jewish history (252). In *Sionisme ou dispersion?* he marks 1 Samuel 8, the passage in which the people ask for a King[16] and in which Samuel warns the people of the dangers of Kingship, as a vital moment in Israel's development: "The royal state closes the nomadic period; Israel will be incarnate in world history" (52).[17] In an interview on the book's publication, Kalisky underscores the importance of this moment. Like Ben-Gurion, he sees the "transition from nomadic to sedentary society," in Samuel's speech, as well as the conflict between the spiritual and the monarchic or political (*Interview sur Sionisme* 10:50-11:20, 51-52). Moreover, both Kalisky and Ben-Gurion highlight the idea of Israel as both moving towards becoming a nation "like the others" by dint of statehood, but which retains its status as a different kind of nation—for Kalisky, one marked equally by diaspora, and for Ben-

[14] *Sionisme ou dispersion: Les Hébreux, les Juifs, les Israéliens.*
[15] "Saül et David, ou plutôt le conflit qui les oppose, sont représentatifs de l'histoire de la monarchie en Israél et même au-delà. On leur doit tout. Et, à ne parler que d'eux, on parlera de toute l'histoire du people juif" (54).
[16] "Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (*KJV* 1 Sam. 8.19b-20).
[17] "L'Etat royal clôt la période nomadique; Israël va s'incarner dans l'histoire du monde" (52).

Gurion, perhaps, one divinely marked off and bound to high ethical obligations (Ben-Gurion 292-3; Kalisky, *Monde* 361).

But where Ben-Gurion relies on 1 Sam 8 as a pivotal moment of transition towards a stable outcome, then, and it is implied, in contemporary time as well (". . . only in the days of Samuel did the recognition of the need for full and continuous unification gain strength among the Israelites, and it is this which brought about the request to appoint a king over them") Kalisky finds rather that the original text, despite its "archetypal" quality, contains fundamental instabilities—originary ambiguity (Ben-Gurion 252). For Kalisky, 1 Samuel 8 represents a crucial transitional moment, but a transition whose poles (Zionism or Diaspora, state or spirit) remain in flux, both in the biblical text and in the present. So, the tragedy of Saul is "a tragedy whose ending left even the doctors of the Talmud perplexed [Une tragédie dont la final laisse perplexes jusqu'aux docteurs du Talmud eux-mêmes]" (Kalisky, "Surjeu" 218). Where Ben-Gurion sees Samuel's opposition to kingship as "not justified from any point of view," Kalisky elevates Samuel's text as *the* biblical text which should be remembered: "The most extraordinary text to me, the most revolutionary text in the Bible, is Samuel's warning to the Jewish people demanding . . . a king. Which is to say, a state" (Ben-Gurion 253, Kalisky, *Interview sur Sionisme* 10:50-11:20).[18] Samuel's speech precedes kingship itself, however, and the two modes are combined.[19] Kalisky reads the conflict between the prophetic and the monarchic which plays out between Samuel and Saul and David as continuously unstable, a complex dance between the

[18] "Le texte le plus extraordinaire a mon sens, le plus révolutionnaire que contient la bible, c'est la mise en garde de Samuel au people juif demandant aux hébreux, demandant un roi. C'est à dire, un état . . . le passage de la societé nomadique a la société sédentaire" (Kalisky, *Interview sur Sionisme* 10:50-11:20).
[19] As Kalisky notes, "This text . . . situates with such economy of means the fundamental contradiction between the idea of royalty and ethical monotheism [Ce texte . . . situe avec quelle économie de moyens la contradiction fondamentale entre l'idée de la royauté et le monothéisme éthique]." (51).

spiritual mode—which he relates to the social-justice preachings of prophets such as Amos and Hosea—and the human and political (*Sionisme* 54-55). Though Samuel loses his power as prophet, and Saul fails in the spiritual register, David manages to combine the spiritual and political realms; nevertheless, Kalisky argues, the interplay between the two, as well as the never-complete transition between diaspora and statehood that this chapter marks will both continue to haunt the history of the Jewish people (*Sionisme* 47-59). In a sense, David mediates between the intersecting Saul and Samuel, monarchic and the prophetic, political and the spiritual, but these modes are also overlapping and combined in the biblical text.

Dave/David, Qish/Shaoul: Role-playing

Dave au bord de mer was composed shortly after *Sionisme ou dispersion?* (September-March 1975) and represents a theatrical response to Kalisky's reading, feeding off the ambiguous tension of 1 Samuel 8 and propagating this tension in the ancient and contemporary layers of Kalisky's new version of theatrical play. Perhaps not surprisingly, critics reacted to the initial 1979 staging with shock, many offended by its complex, layered language. As Kalisky's wife Mechthild noted in an interview, a director slammed the door on the event, crying out "Oh, c'est du verbiage, c'est intellectuel!" (Meger 91). Mechthild Kalisky described that "These old academics, who were then asleep, had read nothing, knew nothing, and could not remember anything of the Bible" (Meger 90).[20]

Kalisky's play is unsettling. Kalisky's characters speak with barbed words, crude slang, and spiky, complex dialogue. In *Dave,* modern-day avatars of the ancient personages replay their

[20] ". . . diese alten Akademiker, die dann da schliefen, hatten nichts gelesen, wussten nichts und konnten sich an nichts erinnem, was in der Bibel je gestanden hätte" (Meger 91, translation my own).

old roles with biting verbal and physical violence. Kalisky's play, and the new genre of theater it attempts to inaugurate, explicitly call audiences, characters, and actors to critical reflection: this old myth is not dead, and it's worth reexamining. Taking seriously Kalisky's play's use of its primary intertext allows us to see the generative force Kalisky harnesses in the biblical text, which produces a provocative new kind of rewriting. This text draws together ancient and contemporary, myth and current events in order to force *play* and the kind of "seduction" that pushes toward Kalisky's idea of *engagement* through sustained ambiguity.

Dave au bord de mer finds the family of Shaoul ben Qish, an Israeli real estate speculator, relaxing on the beach as they await Dave, a young Brooklyn émigré, a cellist and a Handel specialist, who has been hired to play for them (in accordance with the play's emphasis on mediation, *Dave* "plays" recordings of his performances from a cassette tape). The play's dramatis personae introduces the central characters in the drama as doubled: David is listed as "David Ben Ishai: Dave, *the shepherd and the emigrant from Brooklyn;"* Saul is *"*Shaoul Ben Qish: Shaoul, *the king and the real estate speculator;"* (Jonathan (Jon) and Michal (Mimi), Shaoul's children, and his wife, Achinoam (Achi) are simply listed by relationship to Shaoul) (417).[21] From the audience's perspective, these characters appear for the most part as their modern-day iterations. The scenes take place during one day on the beach, as Shaoul and his family consume a picnic; the sun sets at the play's conclusion.[22]

As the play progresses, however, it becomes clear that Shaoul's family (the biblical family) is in the process of re-playing the historic rivalry between David and Saul while

[21] "David ben Ishai: Dave (le berger et l'émigrant de Brooklyn) Shaoul Ben Qish: Shaoul (le roi et le promoteur immobilier)" (106).
[22] As Serge Goriely observes, the play is in some senses more 'standard' than one might expect, and attends to the unities (Goriely 58-60). As Anne Neuschafer notes, David's musical interludes even mimic the separation of five acts (Neuschafer 60).

'playing' present-day avatars of themselves. As Saul says, "Dave will pay for the egoism of David" (111).[23] In "Du surjeu au surtexte," Kalisky describes the set-up in this way: "*Dave au bord de mer* doesn't present itself as a tragedy that repeats, but is perhaps the penultimate attempt by its protagonists to change the trajectory, to disrupt the dénouement" (222).[24] At first, Dave does not seem to understand that he is being welcomed as both Dave and David, or perhaps resists being drawn in, but at a certain point he admits his part in the replay: "DAVE. Dave accepts to become David again [Dave accepte de redevenir Dave]"(167). As the play continues, the battle becomes increasingly violent. Saul's family forces Dave to consume massive amounts of food, and later attempts to murder Dave in various ways, eventually with a revolver. The conflict only ends with a terrorist attack on Saul's compound which takes place, in accordance with classical French theatrical style, off-stage. Jonathan disappears into the house, where his sister is being held hostage; shots and shouts are heard; Saul lies on his back, moaning after having been hit by the revolver, in his wife's arms. Amidst all this, David ties together Jonathan's and Qish's prayer shawls and lowers himself off the balcony, onto the beach, and away. Saul's family will perish once more and David escapes to an uncertain future.

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[23] Dave payera pour l'égoïsme de David" (111); Multiple critics have interpreted the complex play of temporalities as simply part of Kalisky's "baroque" writing (Neuschafer) and a highly opaque mixing of times; Serge Goriely in particular, however, describes the way in which Saul's family and David act as actors "playing" themselves in an updated, contemporary iteration (Goriely 62-69). Kalisky's "Surtexte" article supports this reading: "In Dave the characters *are* the protagonists themselves. What they incarnate is their own past. [. . .] the character-actors of *Dave* have no existence, no concrete reality, except to the extent that they play themselves [Dans *Dave au bord de mer,* les personnages *sont* les protagonistes eux-mêmes. Ce qu'ils incarnent, c'est leur propre passé. [. . .] Les personnages-protagonistes de *Dave au bord de mer* n'ont d'existence, de réalité concrète que dans la mesure où ils se jouent eux-mêmes]" (*Surjeu* 222). Indeed, the implication is that Saul may have 'played himself' before, as when Jonathan describes "la dernière fois" in which they fled the Spanish Inquisition (113; Goriely 62-69**).**

[24] "*Dave au bord de mer* ne se présente pas comme une tragédie qui se répète, mais est peut-être la pénultième tentative de ses protagonistes d'en modifier le déroulement, d'en déranger le dénouement" (222).

As this broad outline implies, the text presents a dizzying, complex play with re-use. It is not simply a re-writing, or even a 'replay,' but an adaptation in which texts and times are imbricated and mediated through one another as enacted by the characters and actors on stage. As Serge Goriely has convincingly shown, the play's metadrama and "surtexte" places the biblical *figures* on stage to re-play themselves in a contemporary idiom. Goriely helpfully highlights the way Saul's family behaves both like their characters and like actors preparing to play roles—they 'warm up' by giving exposition, they 'practice' how they will greet Dave; they are both characters and actors (63-65). The characters are familiar with the contours of their life, and with interpretive and artistic tradition built around it (they speak of Handel's Saul, they hum Gershwin's Porgy and Bess); not only does Saul's family reflect on this story and this tradition, however, but Saul's family seeks to replay it and change the ending.

The play's opening sequence ostentatiously draws attention to the layers of interpretive tradition to which the play responds, in a microcosmic representation of the play's interplay between legendary, archetypal 'canonic' stability—of the biblical text, the memory of it, or of conceptions of Israel and Jews—and the dangerous, playful, renewed sequence. The opening scene follows the Qish family as they travel through interpretative tradition to land at the current updated iteration. According to the very specific stage directions, Qish's family is to be arrayed in a vignette like figures in a Chirico painting **(**107). Framed by ruins which emerge from their chests, "they appear as stratified, statue-fied characters [ils apparaissent tels des personnages stratifies, statufiés]" (107). The figures appear caught in static legendary representation: the chairs "seem too small for them [semblent trop petits pour eux]" their heads are "too heavy [trop lourds]" and "enclosed in immense smooth white oval-shaped shells [enfermées dans d'immenses coquilles blanches et lisses de forme ovale]" (107). Handel's *Saul*, in particular the

famous dirge on Saul and Jonathan's death, plays as the family begin to come to life, physically undoing themselves from plaster trappings and artistic constraints to the tune of another canonic retelling (107). Shaoul ("Qish") and his wife Achinoam begin to reflect on Saul's story and retell it in a mixture of elevated language and biblical text, with exaggerated theatrical stylings. Saul describes his life story and tragedy in words taken from a Bible translation (Maredsous), mixing in his own poetic description and exaggerating his speaking tone for dramatic effect:

> QISH. Let them send the son of Isahi [sic, Ishai] to me! And David appeared to me like a morning without clouds. At a time when my dynasty was stable, well-ruled, and assured. (*His voice lively.*)[25] Let David stay; for I like him. (*Once again grave and far away.)* Each time the evil spirit was upon me, the handsome youth took up his harp and strummed it. (419)[26]

This high prose seems to establish the play as a retelling like all the others, a reflection by a character on his life, concluding with a summary of the rest of the story and David's triumph—Saul describes his tragedy, concluding with his death and the promise of David's dynasty. The stage is set for a self-conscious re-writing. We see these characters filtered by layers of interpretive tradition, a bit like Heller's David, and watch as they emerge.

But this introduction is revealed as merely an intermediary position in the Qish's transition to new re-play. Our impression of these characters is mediated through the contemporary. Achi pushes Saul to get his attention, and he responds with a low-register "Hein?" (109) as the stage lights rise to reveal the modern beach scene in all its mundane, banal

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[25] For clarity, I have enclosed stage directions in the English translation in parentheses rather than in the square brackets employed in Willinger and Deneulin's translation.

[26] "Qish: Qu'on m'envoie le fils d'Ishaï! Et David m'apparut comme un matin sans nuage. En un temps où ma dynastie était stable, bien en règle, et assurée. (*La voix enjouée:)* Que David reste, il m'est sympathique *(Redevenu grave et lointain:)*. Chaque fois que le mauvais esprit était sur moi, le beau garçon prenait sa harpe et la pinçait" (108). Maredsous: "Je t'en prie, que David reste à mon service, car il m'est sympathique" (1 Sam. 16.22). The second part of Saul's line, "Chaque fois," is an adaptation of 1 Sam. 16.23 that also includes part of the Maredsous translation ("David prenait la harpe et la pinçait").

particulars—the "Deck-chairs, foam rubber mattress, umbrellas [. . .] an immense refrigerator containing the meal," a ping-pong table, a radio, a telephone (420). The juxtaposition of ancient and current is abrupt: Achi begins to put on sun-tan oil; Saul employs a battery-powered fan. Shaoul (biblical) or "Qish" (modern) and his family, having shaken off the plaster trappings and static legendary and artistic memory, began to retell their story; now, in this new set, Shaoul shows a level of ironic distance and initiates a more improvisatory, manipulative relationship to the story. Shaoul continues his monologue, but now laughingly, and with renewed conviction "his voice loud with a note of challenge [*la voix haute avec un accent de défi*]" (420/110). He chats in casual language about past circumstances and the present situation, in which the Saulides wait for David to appear and replay with them ("And I have a feeling that David won't have any problem adapting to it. [. . .] It'll be hard to envision him as Dave, a miserable cellist from Brooklyn") so that, as Qish says, David will get his comeuppance ("Sorry . . . Oh, am I sorry, but Dave will pay for David") (420, 421, ellipsis in original).[27] The play's opening sequence physically deconstructs the legend of Saul and David by presenting characters extricating themselves from a static tableau and moving through traditional language and a classical opening to a contemporary idiom and *surjeu* style. The sequence also immediately challenges a static memory of Saul's role: he is not simply a tragic figure who lies down and gets out of the way so that David may succeed him. By the time Dave arrives, despite the clear repetition of legendary events, the reader or spectator has been disabused of any sense of a stable version of this story.

[27] "Je devine que David n'aura aucune peine à s'adapter [. . .] Nous aurons du mal à l'imaginer sous les traits d'un contrebassiste misérable de Brooklyn;" "Désolé… Oh! Je suis désolé, mais Dave payera pour David (110, 111). Unless enclosed by square brackets [. . .], all ellipses cited in the play are in Kalisky's original.

Not surprisingly, the play's treatment of David and Saul's characters both exacerbates their remembered qualities and undoes the clear distinction between them, highlighting the disconnect between some conception of this story as clear and the ambiguity generated even by the original. In Kalisky's reading of the Book of Samuel, evident both in "Du surjeu au surtexte" and in *Sionisme ou dispersion*? the ambiguity of the transitional moment is caught up in the ambiguity of its two characters. Saul seems to break the biblical rule that good things happen to good people, and Saul's failure is confusing[28]: "But how to explain that this election, which put him in his place, is taken from him for reasons which make him greater, not smaller, in our eyes?"(*Sionisme* 53).[29] That Saul spares the Amelekite king and some choice cattle seems not so bad to Kalisky, particularly in comparison with David's later crimes, which include brutally eliminating any successors to the Saulide throne: "From the perspective of certain criminal actions of his immediate successors, Saul represents a saint and his "sin" a peccadillo" (53).[30] As Kalisky describes the combination of David and Saul however, the puzzle is retained in the tension that binds them, as one serves as an interpretive key to the other: "Saul's enigma in the history of Israel is explained only by David's enigma. Here, the mentality of the vanquished only remains opaque because it keeps being opposed by the mentality of the conqueror: Saul fails

[28] For this insight, Kalisky draws on the first few pages of André Neher's essay "Saül, un mystère biblique" (47-59).

[29] "Mais cette élection qui l'a mis à la place qui est la sienne, comment expliquer qu'on la lui retire pour des motifs qui le grandissent plus qu'ils ne le diminuent à nos yeux?" (53). According to the biblical text, Saul erred twice—first in making sacrifices without waiting for Samuel, despite the fact that Samuel was late, and second in sparing the king of Amalek and some livestock rather than killing them along with the rest of the Amelekites (see 1 Sam. 13; 15). For this reason, according to Samuel, God turned away from Saul and towards a new king: "And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou." (*KJV* 1 Sam. 15.26-28)

[30] "Au regard de certaines actions criminelles de ses successeurs immédiats, Saül fait figure de saint homme et sa "faute" de peccadille" (54).

where David succeeds" (*Sionisme* 53-54).[31] Kalisky recapitulates the mystery that binds the two together in "Du surjeu au surtexte": "The repentance of God towards Saul and his house remains an enigma. An enigma that one is no nearer to resolving in interrogating the character of David: 'The ruddy youth of fair countenance' fascinates and unnerves at the same time" ("Surjeu" 218).[32]

Rather than solving the biblical enigmas by creating another legend, Kalisky maintains and exacerbates the ambiguity of the biblical original. Kalisky writes that he "refuses to fix David in bronze," or to "draw the strokes of the tragic king [Saul], his unhappy rival, with a firm hand" ("Surjeu" 219).[33] Instead, Kalisky's method of characterization draws out and exaggerates key aspects of David's *biblical* character so, like readers of *The King David Report,* spectators may see him in all his contradictions, less blinded by his golden-age reputation. Perhaps most obviously, Dave is here as seductive as his biblical character. In the biblical narrative, Michal loves David, Jonathan dedicates himself to David abjectly, Saul vacillates between enmity and sincere devotion– Gide's drama most famously plays with Saul's desire for the youthful shepherd who plays before him– [34]and indeed, "all Israel and Judah loved David" (1 Sam. 18.16). A stylized current of sexual desire runs throughout *Dave,* as one by one the Qish betray their own frustration with their attraction. Each of the family gives David sly looks and caresses, discussing David's good looks ("QISH. He's no redder than he was the other time. . . . ACHI.

[31] "En fait, l'énigme de Saül dans l'histoire d'Israël s'explique par l'énigme de David. Ici, la mentalité du vaincu ne demeure obscure que parce que l'on persiste à l'opposer artificiellement à la mentalité du vainqueur. Saül échoue là ou David réussit" (54).
[32] "La repentance de l'Éternel envers Saül et sa maison est resté une énigme. Une énigme que l'on n'est pas près de résoudre en interrogeant le personage de David: "Le jeune rouquin à la figure vermeille" fascine et inquiète en même temps" (218).
[33] ". . . se refusant à fixer un David dans le bronze, à dessiner d'une main ferme les traits du roi tragique, son malheureux rival. . . " ("Surjeu" 219).
[34] Anne Neuschafer points to the possible links between Kalisky's play and Gide's in this regard (61).

You're thinking about his hair; you haven't stopped thinking about it for one minute") and teases each other brutally about the way he fascinates them (434-5)).[35] Each vacillates, however, between gestures of infatuation and repeated reminders of the other side of David's charisma, his contrasting brittle absence and false, seductive words. Qish in particular highlights David's hypocrisy, through recalling both particular episodes (David fighting for the Philistines and David's politically-motivated speech on the death of Saul and Jonathan at Gilboa, a battle from which he was strikingly absent[36]) and general qualities. David is cold and ambitious ("Dave did what he did . . . killed, deceived, trafficked . . . but he did it without passion" (494); "he gives nothing; he only receives. He accepts people loving him. He accepts the sacrifices that are made for him, since that raises him in his own eyes" (492)[37]) and uses his charisma for his political ends ("That Jew is just too charming. He's got a frightening kind of innocence" (463)).[38] According to the Qish, Dave must be punished for his callous rise: "Dave will pay for David. Dave will pay for the selfishness [égoïsme] of David, for the indifference of David to the pain of Saul and his house, for the dead eyes of David, for the joyful shamelessness [impudeur] of David" (421).[39] Saul may be a complacent bourgeois, but he is also framed as the unjustly

[35] "QISH. Il n'est pas plus roux que l'autre fois. . . . ACHI. Tu y penses à ses cheveux, tu ne cesses pas d'y penser" (123).
[36] "QISH. The redhead with blue eyes: a collaborator. While Jon and I were defending the country, he was flirting with the Philistines. An artist in every way. Talented at everything, including treason. He wasn't even there at Gilboa; but he sure did sing an aria called Gilboa" (472). "QISH. Le rouquin aux yeux bleus: un collaborateur. Tandis que Jon et moi défendions le pays, il faisait la coquette avec les Philistins. Un artiste dans tous les genres. Tous les talents, entre autres celui de la trahison. Il n'était pas à Guilboa, mais il a chanté Guilboa" (159).
[37] "David a fait ce qu'il a fait…, tué, trompe, trafique…mais il l'a fait sans passion" (179). "Il ne donne rien; il reçoit. Il accepte d'être aimé puisque ça le grandit à ses propres yeux qu'on l'aime, qu'on se sacrifie pour lui" (177).
[38] "Ce Juif a trop de charme. Une innocence a faire peur" (151).
[39] Willinger has "impudence' for "impudeur." "Dave payera pour l'égoïsme de David, pour l'indifférence de David à la douleur de Shaoul de sa maison, pour les yeux morts de David, pour l'impudeur joyeuse de David" (111).

vanquished, the foil to this preternaturally successful golden boy's triumph; the Qish provide an alternative vision of Dave/David that represents an astute reading of the biblical text which similarly sees David from a Saulide perspective.

Kalisky's *surtexte* invites the characters-actors to participate in the renewed versioning of their biblical figures, to *play*, in this case with the past textual version. The result is recurring explosions of metatheatrical language that seems to parody the legendary qualities of David and Saul—and, perhaps, the idea that new Jewish heroes are unproblematically continuing their legacy in Israel—by providing equally legendary, extremely stereotypical updated roles. As Kalisky writes, rather than being "fixed in bronze," the actors are free to "vagabond, to feel their way [tâtonner], to define themselves by their own play, their own desire to live to be reborn (better/otherwise)" ("Surjeu" 219-220).[40] The play's character-actors try on stories and roles for themselves which they feel might best correspond to their original versions in this update and argue over which is most efficient. So, both Saul and David play at versions of themselves which present them in a good light in the contemporaneous climate, as over-the-top perfected expressions of Jewish types and heroes: Dave plays a diasporic Jew who survived the Holocaust in hiding as a child and became an artist, a secular, pacifist double-bass player (or cellist, in Willinger and Deneulin's translation) from Brooklyn come to try his luck in Israel. If this weren't enough, Dave wears his nature on his sleeve: he arrives in a skin-tight t-shirt blazoned with a six-pointed star and the word: "Universal" (115). Shaoul, by contrast, prepares his story before Dave's arrival as that of a perfect Zionist pioneer:

> QISH. [. . .] And what happened to us was, we set sail on an old Panamanian boat. We were shot at. We were shot at by the English. *(A pause.)* Mmmm! Ya, people would believe that, a shipwreck [. . .] The secret emigration that took place during

[40] ". . . vagabonder, tâtonner, se préciser par leur proper jeu, leur proper désir de vivre de renaître (mieux/autrement)" (219-220).

> the English occupation, hanh? Achi and I, we're pioneers, we're the original zionists. The nation's pride and joy. Its courage. We have reclaimed the soil *(He laughs.)* . . . lifted out the rocks *(Again a laugh.)* . . . built the roads and . . . and . . . planted the trees! (422)[41]

Shaoul and his family pray and follow certain Jewish traditions and vaunt their military service; David is resolutely secular and pacifist.

The play's *surtexte* builds on the ambiguity of David and Saul's character, their enigma, to destabilize other famous versions of Jewish identity, disturbing in the process any neat links between Biblical heroes and modern-day counterparts. Some critics have seen in these alternating stories relatively straightforward correspondences to modern versions of Jewish identity.[42] Such a description, however, minimizes the constant destabilizing 'play' both character actors engage in, as well as the less positive aspects of both Dave and Shaoul the interplay draws out; indeed, the characters fight over their stories, puncturing the legendary qualities of even the new versions of the combatants, each mediating the version of the other. David is not only portrayed by the Qish as callously self-interested and individualistic, but as a self-righteous lefty without follow-through: Jon sarcastically notes "Dave's an idealistic Jew. Always the champion of a good cause. His rage is sacred. I mean, just look at how bad off the country's gotten on account of these rich, grasping Jews who exploit his people"[43] and later, Saul

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[41] "Quant à nous, nous avons embarqué sur un vieu bateau panaméen. On nous a tire dessus. Les Anglais nous ont tire dessus. (*Un temps.*) Oumm! C'est très plausible, un naufrage. . . L'émigration clandestine du temps de l'occupation anglaise, hein? Achi et moi, nous sommes des pionniers, des sionistes de la première heure. L'honneur de ce pays. Son courage. Nous avons défriché le sol (*Il rit.*).., enlevé les rochers *(Rit encore.*) ..., construit les routes et... et... planté les arbres!" (112-113).

[42] For example, even as David Willinger acknowledges the "open dilemma," of the play in the introduction to his 1984 translation of *Dave,* he defines the two sides Saul and David might represent: "two strands of Jewishness are opposed; in broad outline, they are the Jew who strives to uphold the traditions and adheres to (not necessarily religious, but cultural) orthodoxy, and the Jew who assimilates into the gentile world and, in the view of the former, abandons his heritage (298).

[43] "Dave est un Juif désintéressé. Toujours le roi d'une bonne cause. Sa fureur est sainte, car si le pays est mal en point, c'est bien sûr la faute de ces Juifs riches et égoïstes, qui exploitent son people sans vergogne" (195).

asks "Why do you pretend you weren't in the war, Isahi [Ishai]? Makes for a strange life story"[44] (511, 514).[45] Jonathan and Saul criticize Dave's caricatured choice of roles—could he have chosen an easier, more standard story? Jonathan comments, "He's pastiche-ing some hardworking Brooklyn Jew, Gershwin from Brooklyn. The Benny Goodman Story![46] [Il pastiche quelque Juif besogneux de Brooklyn. Gershwin de Brooklyn, Benny Goodman Story!] and Qish highlights the mythical perfection of both old and new 'roles:' "Ishai played it safe. . ., the adventures of a humble emigrant, that's a deluxe role, just like the part of the little shepherd with the ruddy face"[47] [Ishaï a joué la sécurité…, les aventures de l'émigrant modeste, c'est un role doré sur tranche comme l'était celui du petit berger à la figure vermeille…]" (441/130, 479/165). Dave, in turn, critiques the model of Qish as Zionist hero. Not only does Dave deem the story a bad choice for the family, and a misappropriation of other Jewish stories ("At first glance the Qish don't look the least bit like illegal emigrants. Just because you're a Jew doesn't mean you can play any Jewish part you feel like" [Les Qish n'ont pas la tête de l'émigrant clandestine. Suffit pas d'être juif pour jouer n'importe quel Juif"] but Dave emphasizes Qish's hypocrisy, reminding Qish of his quick exit to Italy in time of war and his appropriation of resources (441/129, 165). Dave calls him "a rich bastard [un saligaud de riche]," happy to vaunt his participation and that of his Sabra children and criticize David for his late arrival on the scene, effectively shut off from the Israel around him in his villa by the sea: "You don't inhabit the Promised Land . . . off in a corner, a tip of beach with your name on it . . . antiseptic [T'occupes

[44] "Pourquoi inventer que tu n'as pas fait la guerre, Ishaï? Drôle de biographie" (198).
[45] In a self-deprecating gesture, Kalisky reflects many of his own views as "homme de gauche" in some of these descriptions of David, though they are also complicated and undermined by the play's incessant critique.
[46] Willinger and Deneulin translate "He's making like" for "il pastiche."
[47] Willinger and Deneulin translate "modest" for "modeste" and "that part's a piece of cake," for "c'est un role doré sur tranche."

pas la Terre promise… C'st un coin, un bout de plage à ton nom… aseptisé]" (479/165). Similarly, Dave notes the racist views and behavior of Achinoam and the Qish generally.[48]

Controlling the Story

Structurally, *Dave* builds on and recapitulates the ambiguous power shift in the biblical version in a *surtexte* mode. Why does Saul fail and David succeed, and when does the change occur? On the one hand, Qish/Shaoul himself meta-theatrically calls the audience's attention to the economy between Saul and David Kalisky noted in *Sionisme:* when one rises, the other must fall. In this recurring Drama, Saul tells us, David is the always-impervious protagonist, no matter the role: "It's because he doesn't feel anything that he repeats himself in all guises. . . . I don't care if he's an American Jew or a survivor from the ghetto, he's a hypocrite. He's dressed himself up in the finery of another century only to conclude that if Saul's the unhappy hero of a tragedy, David's its central figure. We're only his stooges" (182, my translation).[49] Saul sees himself transposed from the most important protagonist to its theatrical opposite—tragic hero to stooge—by David's theatrical centrality.

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[48] In his introduction to his translation with Luc Deneulin, David Willinger notes "the plethora of issues facing Jews today" Kalisky treats, "including their own reactive racism and chauvinism." He also notes the "subservient position of the Jewish mother" (298). "Actually, Mrs. Qish is just like all those other old battle-axes: transplanted from Eastern Europe to the Promised Land, who can't smell anything that's colorful, wooly, and smells a little strong [. . .] against the Canaanites, the Africans, the Palestinians ! And they all go through their lousy lives retailing those people from head to toe, or holding their noses in the buses stuffed with Arab workers [. . .] You employ Arab workers; That's cheap labor. Arabs are perfect in the construction business, aren't they? [Au fond, Mme Qish est pareille à toutes ces vieilles rombières transplantées des pays de l'Est en Terre promise, et enragées contre tout ce qui est en couleur, contre tout ce qui est crépu ou qui sent un peu fort, contre la peau en berne [. . .] contre les Cananéens, les Africains, les Palestiniens! Et ça passe leur chienne de vie à vous détailler des pieds à la tête, ou bien à se pincer les narines dans les autobus bourrés de travailleurs arabes [. . .] Vous employez des ouvriers arabes? C'est une main-d'œuvre bon marches. Très efficaces dans le bâtiment, les Arabes..."] (456-7/144-5).

[49] C'est parce qu'il ne ressent rien qu'il se répète dans tous les styles. [. . .] Juif américain ou survivant du ghetto, c'est un hypocrite. Il a revêtu les oripeaux d'un autre siècle pour conclure que si Shaoul est bien le héros malheureux d'une tragédie, David en es la figure centrale. Nous sommes ses faire-valoir" (182).

But the text also reflects the arc of the original biblical narrative by transposing the transition of power to a *surtexte* mode. Though the play does not follow the biblical plot chronologically, characters do revisit key episodes in David's story, either by referring ironically to moments in the story or by citing it directly (beginning with his arrival at court, progressing through his marriage to Michal, his victories in battle his escape from Saul's house and stint as a Philistine warrior, etc.). The more dominant progression, instead, is the unsteady transition between Saul and David that characterizes the biblical account, in which pro-Saulide and pro-Davidic elements intersect so that readers are only gradually led to support the Davidic kingdom, and in which Saul gradually loses power to the young pretender. In the biblical conflict between David and Saul, David is revealed to Samuel as God's choice before Saul knows he will be deposed, and Saul must fight between his affection for David and the suspicion that David is an ambitious pretender. In Kalisky's play, this transition is re-mediated in the new drama: Saul's family attempt, again and again, to draw Dave out so he will reveal his true nature as David and join fully and unabashedly in their re-play game. Just as David the young shepherd is revealed as an ambitious warrior, the Qish push Dave to admit to being David. As Saul puts it, "We've been giving you a hard time, I grant you that. But otherwise it would have taken an eternity for your self to finally surface. I was warned about your tricks. I knew that you were going to pretend to be shy, Ishai, like the first time" (440).[50] In the biblical account, David 'reveals' himself as an anointed King shortly after Saul's death (2 Sam. 2). In Kalisky's version, similarly, Dave's "outing" as David precipitates his rise and the downfall of the Qish, despite the best efforts of Saul's family, who seek to kill David and change the ending of their story.

[50] "On t'a un peu chahuté, je te l'accorde. Mais tu allais mettre une éternité à te découvrir. J'étais prévenu contre tes manières. Je savais que tu feindrais la timidité, comme la première fois" (129).

Crucially, Qish and David wrest and display their control over the situation—over the "play"—by showing their control over the biblical *text* of their story. Again, Kalisky's play provocatively disturbs any sense of the biblical version as an easy, closed legend: instead, it is an open, ambiguous text, but one whose modern-day manipulation is as suspect as any notion of the original's clarity. For Dave and Qish, quite literally, he who has control over the story and its retelling is he who can command the ambiguous text itself and best deploy it for his needs, framing and reporting it appropriately. So, while David is apparently the underdog, he shows at first very few signs of his knowledge of the biblical text, which Qish's family cites at will and with great dexterity. David reveals himself only at intervals, such as when he once calls Qish "Shaoul." Qish, by contrast, baits Dave and the audience with his knowledge of events, as when he drops hints about repetition ("You can almost see the sun moving. All you have to do is stare at it for everything to seem as though it were spreading out in front of your very eyes, as if you were conscious of the entire order of events"[51] or ostentatiously notes his own accurate citations of biblical text by remarking, "Textuel [Verbatim] (426; 142). In this way, Kalisky both draws attention to the legend as narrative text and its textual malleability; neither Qish nor David's perspective, or "interpretation" of the texts they cite, takes precedence. In this play, any distant Ur-text or originary legend is long gone, diffused by the layered play to which it is subjected.

Kalisky's play is stuffed with sources not merely referred to, but actually reframed within the drama. These include excerpts from Handel play; images adapting de Chirico; Gershwin hummed; but also, as we shall see, contemporary news reports; as well as re-contextualized chunks of biblical text in (at my count) some five different French translations, some canonic,

[51] "On pourrait presque voir bouger le soleil. Il suffit de fixer le ciel pour que tout semble se dérouler comme si on avait conscience de l'ordre des événements" (116).

and some more idiosyncratic. Kalisky's letters and scholarly work reflect a similar desire to gather together myriad sources in a new whole—the bibliographies for his "essais" are chock full of French thinkers from across the political spectrum, news reports, and ancient texts alike; in letters to his mother and brother Jim (Chaïm) he mentions Rabbi Kook, Jesus, Amos and Hosea, B.H Levy, Begin (Kalisky, "Lot"). If Coccioli's close-reading of his own journals is reflected in the philological style of his David, and if Heym's incessant editing and splicing work prepared for a novel about a compiler, Kalisky's play—and the characters within it—perform similar gestures of gathering and re-mediation. Even if readers or play-goers might not catch the specific distinction between different translations (Kalisky writes in "Surjeu" that they need not know the translations of Segond, Kahn, and Chouraqui (217)) they perceive the reshaped juxtaposition of what nevertheless feel like multiple variants. My own "philology" is interested in examining the gamut of ways in which Kalisky makes the ancient and contemporary frame each other through re-spoken citation.

In certain scenes, Kalisky draws attention to multiple translations at once, and famous biblical lines are decontextualized and mobilized in the characters' virtuosic manipulation of their story.[52] The whole family relishes their skill at playing with the text—they "play that they

[52] Both Agnèse Silvestri and Serge Goriely note the moment in which Qish comments on his own citation by calling it "verbatim" (Kalisky 9, 142; Goriely 71; Silvestri 206 n. 12) and Goriely notes that the citation comes from the Segond. Neither, however, acknowledges the number of translations Kalisky's text employs or analyses their use: Silvestri discusses Kalisky's use of the Maredsous Bible, which she finds he uses almost exclusively and which Kalisky's brother confirmed Kalisky owned, but remarks that though Kalisky mentions Segond, Kahn and Chouraqui's translations in "Surtexte," "his works don't retain significant traces of these [ses oeuvres n'en gardent pas de traces signinficatives]" and that he was "influenced, rather, by the translation of the Maredsous [il a été influence plutôt par la traduction de Maredsous]" (202 n. 4). Goriely acknowledges the manipulation to which the Qish subject the biblical account, "filtered by their memory and by the choices they make in how to use it [filtrées par leur mémoire et par les choix qu'ils font de la manière de s'en servir]" but also mentions that the citations "have no pretentions to being accurate [n'ont pas la pretention d'être justes]" (71). Willinger's recent article refers somewhat obliquely to "recitations of the Old Testament text (but rewritten in the first

play," as Kalisky describes the "Surjeu" —by trying on different translations and lobbing lines from the biblical text back and forth amongst themselves. At one point, a kind of sing-song frenzy arises between Michal and Saul through these repeated references: Qish/Shaoul criticizes Jonathan for choosing to side with David in his famous insult, citing the Chouraquï translation verbatim ("Son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Didn't I know that you chose the son of Ishai to your confusion and to the confusion of your mother's womb! [Fils d'une tordeuse de révolte! Ne savais-je pas que toi, tu as choisi le fils d'Ishaï, pour ta confusion et pour la confusion du sexe de ta mère"] (438/127; see 1 Sam. 20.30[53]) and repeats the phrase in three different translations.[54] Michal does the same, nearly simultaneously, with her "bit," (the threat she claims David made against her life in order to gain her help escaping (1 Sam 19.17)[55]) and the stage directions mark the different ways she chooses to play each iteration: first, "laughing":

person) and, for instance, Achi's "self-consciously quoting "les paroles d'Eliave, le frère aîné du petit berger" (83, 84).

[53] The only difference between Saul's words and Chouraquï's translation is Chouraquï's transliteration of the Hebrew "fils d'Yshaï" which Kalisky adapts to his own conventions for biblical names (he does the same in other comparable cases). The insult is memorable, and a Bible reader might have noted certain familiar phrases, just as those familiar with the *KJV* (Joseph Heller included!) might recall the "perverse rebellious woman" and the "confusion of thy mother's nakedness. ("Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?") (*KJV* 1 Sam. 20.30).

[54] Chouraqui**,** Segond, Kahn ("Fils perfide et rebelle! Crois-tu que j'ignore que tu chéris le fils de Ishaï [Kahn: Jesse], a ta honte et à la honte des flancs de ta mère?" (127, Kahn 1 Sam. 20.30). Unfortunately, Kalisky' English translators have apparently chosen to translate from the French here, rather than interpolating comparable English translations, so the 'play' is less apparent.

David Willinger refers to moments in which characters repeat biblical lines as part of Kalisky's technique of "verbal repetition," with "resonant incantatory phrases, just as the recitations of the Old Testament text (but rewritten in the first person) are all incantatory," though he does not note that the words are often in fact direct citations of distinct Bible translations, (he describes Saul's repetition of his insult as "slight variation" and "paraphrase" ("in yet another verbal repetition, Qish cries at his son Jonathan again and again with curious slight variations—in the accents of *The Book of Samuel* that he is surely paraphrasing") (83, 85).

[55] "And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?" (*KJV*).

"He told me: Let me go or I'll kill you! [Il m'a dit, laisse-moi aller, ou je te tue!]" (Segond), then, in a "mischievous tone," "David m'a dit: Laisse-moi aller. Pourquoi te mettrais-je à mort?" (Maredsous); and finally "wringing her hands," in exaggerated drama, "C'est lui qui m'a dit: Laisse-moi partir ou je te tuerai, Michol" (Kahn) (127).[56] As always, the Qish seem to play for the sheer pleasure of the game, but also always with an eye to David's reactions, which they observe closely. Here, the grave or unfamiliar language of the translations, the varied rhythms of their syntax—and indeed, the ridiculous insult of Saul's lines—is played up against the ribald atmosphere in which they are re-spoken; Jonathan stands by, egging them both on. The Qish draw attention both to the legend's lasting and to its multiple textual forms and capacity for manipulation. Not only does the play adapt the biblical narrative to dramatic form, but these characters themselves re-mediate distinct translations of the text. There is no "original" here, only the already-secondary translations cited and re-framed.

Eventually, David reclaims power by reclaiming the text, announcing and playing out his own version of the story, in which his humble goodness renders him impervious to harm. The Qish are dominated by Dave's own potent replay, which might be read as a kind of tongue-in-cheek allegory for other kinds of re-use of legendary, national texts to gain power or support. At first, the Qish control the text and the scene: Saul and Mimi (Michol) act out the biblical episode in which David refuses to kill Saul, instead merely taking a piece of his cloak as evidence of

[56] In "Surtexte," Kalisky refers to the translations of "Segond, Kahn, et Chouraquï" (117). The Maredsous edition, which Kalisky often uses (varied by the others in addition) also contains scholarly notes and an introduction to each book. The introduction to 1 and 2 Samuel contains a description of the book's historical importance that is similar to Kalisky's interpretation in *Sionisme* with regard to the move towards nationalism: "The *historical* importance of the books of Samuel for the history of Israel is absolutely exceptional. They tell, in fact, of the events that gave the tribes gathered by Moses their definitive features and national cohesion [L'importance *historique* des livres de Samuel pour l'histoire d'Israël est tout à fait exceptionnelle. Ils rapportent en effet les événements qui ont donné aux tribus rassemblées par Moïse leur physionomie définitive et leur cohésion nationale]" XIX).

David's loyalty to Saul as king – though he *could* have killed him, he *wouldn't*.[57] The Qish create a rousing musical number from their citation of the passage, emphasizing their speed and playing with their facility to use different translations as they join in the dance.[58]

> MICHOL. I will not suffer my hand to touch my lord Shaoul, for he is the balm of the Eternal . . . [Kahn 1 Sam 24:11]
>
> QISH. Is it . . . ? Is it really your voice, my son David? [Segond 1 Sam 24: 17] *(Snapping his fingers.)* Let's go faster . . .
>
> ACHI. *(Also imitating Dave's voice and clapping her hands):* After who does he run, Shaoul, king of Israel? [Adapted Jerusalem Bible?]
>
> MICHOL. *(Same business as before):* Against whom has Shaoul taken to the field? [adapted Kahn 1 Sam 24: 15]
>
> QISH. Is it . . .? Is it. . .? Is it really your voice, my son, David?] *(Snapping his fingers.)* Let's go! Let's go!
>
> JONATHAN *(To Dave):* Anytime you feel like joining in with the music, go right ahead. (452-3)[59]

[57] David's men bait him, and he "went and stealthily cut off the corner of Saul's cloak" as he relieves himself in a cave, though David regrets doing something to the Lord's anointed and reproaches himself and his men afterward. David calls after Saul as he leaves and gives him a prolix speech: "Why do you listen to the people who say, 'David is out to do you harm?' You can see for yourself now that the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave today. And though I was urged to kill you, I showed you pity, for I said, 'I will not raise a hand against my lord, since he is the Lord's anointed. Please sir, take a close look at the corner of your cloak in my hand; for when I cut off the corner of your cloak, I did not kill you. You must see plainly that I have done nothing evil or rebellious, and I have never wronged you . . . . Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing?" Saul responds by capitulating and agreeing he has treated David badly (*JPS* 1 Sam. 24.5, 10-12, 15). In this version of the doublet David comes out on top again.

[58] Translations used include Kahn, Chouraqui, Segond, Maredsous, and possibly the Jerusalem Bible, with apparently little rhyme nor reason beyond the sheer complexity of the mixture itself.

[59] MICHOL. Je ne porterai pas la main sur mon seigneur Shaoul, car il est l'oint de l'Éternel… [Kahn] QISH. Est-ce…? Est-ce bien ta voix, mon fils David? *(En faisant claque ses doigts.)* Allons, plus vite… ACHI. *imitant elle aussi la voix de Dave et frappant dans ses mains:* Après qui cour-t-il Shaoul, le roi d'Israël? MICHOL. *même jeu que précédemment:* Contre qui Shaoul s'est-il mis en campagne? QISH. Est-ce…? Est-ce…? Est-ce bien ta voix, mon fils David? *(En faisant claque ses doigts.)* Allons! Allons! JONATHAN. à *Dave:* Si tu as envie de les accompagner en musique, te gêne pas" (141).

The tables turn, however, when David proves an equally, perhaps even more skilled player of the text-game and the Qish are dominated. In the middle of the frenzy, Dave finally reacts, and according to the stage directions, falls upon and clutches and rips Qish's trouser-leg mid-dance, in an updated reference to Saul's cloak (141). Saul tellingly turns around the biblical text, using the biblical David's words to express his own sense as the pursued tragic figure in this new reenactment: "Who are you chasing after? [Qui poursuis-tu?]" (453/141, [Kahn/Segond/Maredsous 1 Sam 24.15]). Dave's moment of capitulation to the game is also a moment of physical and rhetorical triumph. Dave speaks biblical text for the first time, in the same Jewish bible of the French rabbinate that Michal evoked at the beginning of the scene (Kahn):[60]

> DAVE. Look at your trouser cuff in my hand; since I cut it and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand. [1 Sam 24:11]
>
> ACHI. *[Her voice charged with hate]:* It was stronger than he was! The dirty redhead couldn't keep it in any longer. (453)[61]

David comes out of his Dave shell to combine a powerful symbol with his first true David words. As in the biblical event, he calmly asserts his dominance by claiming both his power over Saul and his noble restraint, and the Qish are duly shaken.[62] As the action progresses, Dave uses his biblical words in a similar manner, asserting more and more power in his calm self-assurance,

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[60] Appropriately, Kalisky's English translator here chooses to use the King James Version.

[61] "Regarde le bord de ton pantalon [manteaux] dans ma main; puisque je l'ai coupé et ne t'ai pas tué, [juge et] comprends que je ne t'ai manqué en rien" (141, Kahn 1 Sam. 24.12, differences in brackets). Willinger's translation uses adapted *KJV*.

[62] When Saul completes his biblical lines, in which he capitulates to Dave and recognizes the wrong he has done him, he does so with sarcastic performative distance, a pathetic attempt to continue the scene after David has assumed dominance: "QISH. (*Aping himself):* Thou art more righteous than I, David. . . . *(In a cutting voice.)* Unquote [QISH. *se singeant lui-même*: Tu es plus juste que moi, David . . . *(D'une voix coupante):* Textuel]" (454/142). Adapted from the Segond: "Tu es plus juste que moi; car tu m'as fait du bien, et moi je t'ai fait du mal" (1 Sam. 24.18). Saul further emphasizes his disagreement with the *text* by referring to his line as "textuel" (verbatim, or "unquote").

quoting the biblical text again and again at points which ironically reassert David's innocence and indifferent seduction but which function to destroy the confidence of the Qish and drive them to mad frustration.[63] The very physical conflict between Qish and Dave is overlaid with a verbal conflict over control of the past story.

Fleshed out Chronicles: Israel and the Media

Inevitably, the way Kalisky dramatizes the enigmas of Saul and David and their power struggle also harnesses the ambiguity of the biblical text's treatment of diaspora, spirituality, statehood and politics in Kalisky's reading to force audiences to reflect on contemporary Israel. In a poignant exchange between director Antoine Vitez and Kalisky following the Odéon performance of *Dave au bord de mer*, Kalisky writes that the play was "unforgivable" to its audiences because it had dared to take on and problematize media representation of Israel, to take on "a problem that's the prerogative of the publicists that make opinion, but by deforming it, perverting it; as if we were condemned to only understand the world through newspapers and television; as if the media really tried to clarify (for example) the tragedy of Israel; as if their objective was really to avoid its repetition" (Vitez and Kalisky 7).[64]"

Kalisky's "engagement," through ambiguity means a seductive, virtuosic melding of contemporary and biblical news. Biblical and contemporary history are drawn together as

[63] In a combination of 2 Samuel 1 and 2 Samuel 6, for instance, David sings and dances the entire lament for Saul and Jonathan in a half-naked frenzy ("Mourn Israel, mourn thy beauty lost" (475)).
[64] "C'est que pour une fois le théâtre aborde en profondeur un problème qui est l'apanage de publicistes qui font l'opinion, mais en la déformant, en la dévoyant. Comme si nous étions condamnés à ne comprendre le monde que par les journaux et la télévision; comme si les media essayaient vraiment de nous éclairer (par exemple) sur la tragédie d'Israël; comme si leur objectif était vraiment d'en éviter la répétition" (Vitez and Kalisky 7). See also Quaghebeur for a description of Kalisky's play and Vitez' staging in political and historical context.

reported current events in a pastiche of textual reportage "fleshed out" by the characters who speak it. The collage of ancient/current events works to destabilize single-minded ideological interpretations as well as any triumphalist narratives that would function by equating past and present. The tragedy of recurring violence in this land continues, but rather than resolve it through a proposed solution, Kalisky's play forces readers to dwell in the tensions, interpreting the ancient as mediated through the lens of the modern, and vice versa.[65]

Dave au bord de mer builds on the sustained ambiguity Kalisky reads in the biblical text, as against the more utopian vision of a Ben-Gurion.[66] One scene in particular dramatizes the dense juxtaposition of viewpoints and versions of relating to Israel which Kalisky's play draws from the biblical text and proliferates in his theatrical version, as characters manipulate the links

[65] Many critics write about this melding. See Silvestri for a thorough discussion of the way Kalisky stages the past and the present in what she terms Kalisky's "historical repetition," with regard to his citation of Robert Aron (Silvestri 66-71). Marc Quaghebeur writes of "le théâtre comme lieu d'intersection du passé, du present, et du future" (55); David Willinger lyrically describes the time-melding in another way: "The drama has conflict, the classic ingredient of all drama, but the play also dramatizes a more unconventional process of not characters, but vast time periods shifting and interpenetrating, lifting and dropping the audience out of passing modern time toward eternal time and back, over and over" (85).

[66] Both Kalisky and Ben-Gurion stress the importance of the Hebrew prophets for the identity of Israel as a nation fundamentally *unlike* the others, but where Ben-Gurion describes Israel as a moral compass founded on prophetic teachings, Kalisky uses the social-justice teachings of the prophets to warn against the complacency and self-absorption of a state to the detriment of a simultaneous diasporic identity (Ben-Gurion 292-293; Kalisky, "Lot"). He describes the difficulties of a state at the conclusion of *Sionisme*, clearly recalling his earlier discussion of Samuel as transitional text: "The Jewish existence that is newly incarnated in its *Zionist* dimension—*The State of Israel*—is called to know the same difficulties that biblical Judaism once knew. The ideology of the State, the state Judaism that came into conflict with the prophets, is in no danger of sparing modern Israel. The dichotomy between Jewish values and needs of the State, is already clear. Let's remember the little phrase of general David Elazar in the midst of the Kippour war: "We will break their bones," he declared, speaking of the Arabs. Despite the threat that hovered over Israel at the time, Jewish reactions were far from unanimous [L'existence juive qui s'incarne à nouveau dans sa dimension *sioniste,* c'est-à-dire dans l*'Etat d'Israël*, est appelée à connaître les mêmes difficultés qu'éprouva jadis le judaïsme des temps bibliques. L'idéologie de l'Etat, le judaïsme étatique qui entra en conflit avec les prophètes, ne risqué pas d'épargner l'Israël modern. La dichotomie entre les valeurs juives et les nécessités de l'Etat, est d'ores et déjà apparente. Souvenons-nous de la petite phrase du général David Elazar en pleine guerre de Kippour: "Nous leur briserons les os," avait-il déclaré en parlant des Arabes. Malgré la menace qui planait sur Israël à ce moment, les réactions juives furent loin d'être unanimes]" (330).

between present and past evoked by certain texts. The discomfiting links between past and present simultaneously throw into relief contradictions in both versions of heroes, now and then—the emigrant and the pioneer—and problematize any propagandistic use of the biblical text for contemporary state-building. The scene synchronizes Dave's arrival in Israel with David's arrival on the battlefield before Goliath. In citing the biblical words of David's brother, Eliav, Achi pointedly includes the name of the enemy where the biblical text leaves it out (I have italicized the biblical text, which is in the Kahn translation): "*Que viens-tu faire ici? A qui as-tu laisse tes brebis dans le désert? Je connais ton caractère volontaire et vicieux; c'est pour voir la bataille* contre les Philistins *que tu es venu!* [Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the naughtiness of your heart, for it is to see the battle against the Philistines, it's for that that you've come"] (142/455). Qish returns to the biblical passage (1 Sam 17.28[67]) to make the link even more explicit by questioning David's Zionist credentials with a new substitution: "Un émigrant par intérêt. Un sioniste pour rire. *Je connais son caractère volontaire et vicieux, car c'est pour voir la guerre* contre les Arabes *qu'il est venu* [An emigrant in his own self-interest. A zionist? That's a laugh . . .](455/143), before Achi cries out, adding another biblical antagonist and including the name of her modern-day enemy, "Il est venu pour voir les Canéens, les Philistins, les Palestiniens! [He came to watch the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Palestinians!]" (144/455). Readers and spectators are subjected to a discomfiting correspondence between the earlier time

[67] "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." (*KJV* 1 Sam. 17.28). Willinger and Deneulin retain the memorable *KJV* "naughtiness of heart" in their translation, though they vary the rest.

and the contemporary moment. During this exchange, moreover, a conversation also takes place about David's election as a child. Here, the group debates Zionist and diasporic identities: they conflate David's 'current' story, in which his seven brothers were killed in Nazi camps during WWII, with the biblical version; David claims he *would* fight the war in Israel, while also criticizing Qish for avoiding conflict himself—he was safe in Palestine when David's family was killed, and would simply fly to Italy if war broke out in Israel now. Finally, Achi returns to David's brother Eliav, affirming with the biblical text of Segond that "Seul son frère Eliav doit connaître *son orgueil et la malice de son cœur* [Only Eliav, his brother, knows the arrogance and malice in his heart"] (143/455). Here, a virtuosic interplay of biblical text and new characters juxtaposes a Dave laudable in his critique of racism, which he announces a few moments later (as if in response to the "Canaanites, Philistines, Palestinians!" comment) and willing to fight for the nation, but who is nevertheless a battle-tourist, arrived late on the scene; and Qish, a nationalist on-the-ground nevertheless criticized for his self-interest, who in this scenario, remains away from the battle, as did Saul when David fought Goliath. The biblical text is weaponized here in a bitter fight that brings down both contemporary and ancient heroes.

The play's conclusion, too, highlights the moral ambiguity David and this re-played story engenders and relates it directly to the political situation in Israel. The unsettling nature of Dave/David's final "win," merely reinforces the play's destabilizing juxtaposition of the Saulide and Davidic perspectives and any modern-day equivalents. David clearly wins out in the conflict yet again: he dominates the Qish verbally and successfully disarms them with his words even at their most violent (David continues implacably after being kicked to the ground by a Qish driven mad by his words, "I was sure . . .that you'd fail . . . you've failed at your come back . . . [j'étais sûr… que tu allais rater… vous avez rate votre… votre *come back*...]" (165)). But the outcome is

not celebrated as a triumphant victory of good or righteousness and does not signal a utopian vision of a Golden age of a United Kingdom or state.

In the play's final scene, David escapes from the Qish villa as the Saulides are killed by Philistines/Palestinian attackers who arrive by boat. Saul's family seems curiously oblivious to the growing Philistine threat foreshadowed throughout the play, first by an attack mentioned on the radio, as well as a warning that families should barricade themselves at night and an unanswered phone call. David notes that a rubber dinghy has been abandoned on the beach and sees men running, but Saul's family brushes this off as military exercises (203). As is his wont, Dave escapes again, this time by tying together Jonathan and Saul's prayer shawls and attaching them to the balustrade before lowering himself down to the beach.

David's actions seem to exemplify Kalisky's view of David, expressed in *Sionisme ou dispersion?,* as the king who managed to cannily appeal to the spiritual and the political (55). In this instance, moreover, David's appropriation of the prayer shawls reads as particularly opportunistic: Dave the avowed secularist uses "religion" when it is to his advantage, and escapes unscathed once more, abandoning the others to their fate as hostages or future casualties. Qish's characterization, in which he described David as perpetually "unscathed. . . with a beautiful face and the talent to slip through the mesh of his own destiny [indemne. . . Une belle tête et le talent de se faufiler à travers les mailles de son destin]" is apt (110).

Despite David's canny exit, audiences might be tempted to predict a new kind of unified security for modern-day Israël by relation to its biblical counterpart. In an interview on the publication of *Sionisme ou dispersion?* Kalisky himself mentioned that he believed the two parallel lines of Palestinian and Israeli rights would eventually meet, and that this ought to happen quickly. In the same moment, however, he declared himself a pessimist rather than an

optimist ("les deux parallèles que sont les droits israeliens et les droits des palestiniens vont finir /finirent par se rejoindre . . . a mon avis ça doit se faire très vite [. . .] je suis plutôt pessimiste" (*Interview sur Sionisme* 20:30-21.05). Read generously, the Qish's emphasis on Dave's role as Palestinian apologist might still encourage spectators to see David's escape as the possibility (in contrast to the biblical version, in which David defeats the Philistines) of these parallels meeting in a different kind of "unified" state or states.

But the play does not dwell on David's future or any possible solution to the conflict: instead, it pushes audiences to dwell equally on the Saulide tragedy in David's triumph. The final stage directions focus on the *Qish* family's tragedy, as Achi cradles a wounded Saul and Jonathan runs into the house to join Michal, who has been taken hostage by the Palestinian attackers (*"Achi has followed him with her eyes; she is softly crying. Dave disappears with the help of the rope made of prayer shawls. Shouts are heard gun shots inside the house. Achi has taken Qish's head onto her knees; he moans"*) (527).[68] David's silent, methodical actions contrast with the violent noises within and the static weeping and moaning of Achi and Qish, and any sense of David's triumph is disturbed by the contrasting Saulide failure.

In its poignant depiction of the recapitulation the Qish have sought to avoid—they have not changed the ending, and their family will likely be killed by Philistines again, while David escapes unscathed—the scene enacts a virtuosic swirl of contemporary and biblical events. Not only does the action evoke the Philistine victory at Gilboa in 1 Samuel 31, but David's gesture of escape simultaneously evokes David's biblical escape from Saul, in which he is aided by Michal

[68] "*Achi l'a suivi des yeux, elle pleure doucement. Dave disparaît en s'aidant des châles de prières comme d'une corde. On entend des cris, des coups de feu à l'intérieur de la maison. Achi a pris la tête de Qish sur ses genous, il gémit"* (210).

to slip through the bedroom window (1 Sam 19.12[69]) as well details of particular attacks in Israel which occurred shortly before Kalisky began writing the play, in March 1975, in which residents attempted to escape by lowering themselves on bedsheets ropes.[70] David here escapes two attackers in one.

Furthermore, particular details and phrases in Kalisky's description of the final attack recall French newspaper descriptions of the Savoy Hotel attack in Tel Aviv on March 5th, 1975, rendering the entire play in some sense a contemporary news report filtered through with its equivalent in biblical language: played-out mediatized diachrony, double-timed contemporaneity acted through a script of doubled ancient and modern chronicled events. The similarities with the play are striking: according to *Le Figaro's* March 6th reporting, boats from Lebanon brought a feddayin commando to the shore; the commando abandoned the boat on the beach and entered the hotel on the edge of the beach. The dramatic irony which foreshadows the Qish's decline is produced doubly through biblical knowledge (Saul's impending death at the hands of the Philistines) and contemporary knowledge, such that each revealed detail—and the Qish's oblivion—sounds an ominous note: David sees the boat, then some men running, and then footprints in the sand just in front of the house. What is more, key words in the newspaper stories that recount the events are drawn into the play; if elsewhere, the play manipulates the 'report'—the story of ancient Israel diffused for a French audience, in its multiple translations—here it manipulates the very prose which transported news of Israel to a 1975 Francophone public. In *Le Figaro*, "un bateau avait été trouvé abandonné sur la plage en face du principal hôtel de la

[69] "So Michal let David down through a window, and he went, and fled, and escaped" (*KJV* 1 Sam. 19.12).
[70] The Nahariya attack is particularly similar to the situation Kalisky's play presents, both for the bed-sheet ropes and the rubber dinghy (see Jerusalem Post Reporter "We were playing" and Yaacov Ardon).

ville [a boat was found abandoned on the beach in front of the city's main hotel]" ("Panique"); "il semble que les feddayine sont venus par la mer et ont débarqué sur la plage au moyen de deux canots pneumatiques [It seems the fedayine came by sea and disembarked on the beach using two inflatable dinghies/rubber rafts]" ("Panique"). In the play, Dave comments that "Il y a un canot pneumatique…, sur votre plage…, là… J'ai aperçu deux hommes qui couraient…[There's a rubber raft . . . on your beach . . ., there . . . I saw two men running]" and soon after, Jonathan agrees ("Ouais… un canot pneumatique [Yah. . . there's a rubber raft]") (202/518, 203/519). Indeed, the title of the play itself, *Dave au bord de mer* which of course conjures images of Israel as a small nation pushed up against the shore, here also encapsulates a particular event in which an attack famously occurred "sur le bord de la mer [on the shore]," "dans le quartier du bord de mer [in the shore district]" ("Panique"). Nowhere is the crux of the play's depiction of Israel's precarious, tenuous, and deeply complex situation clearer than here: Qish's family imagines coming illegally on a boat; David came over the sea from Brooklyn; and now a group of Palestinians—though not mentioned in the play, in the Savoy attack a PLO commando hoping to take hostages and negotiate the release of political prisoners—seeks something from this land. As the Qish family realize that an attack is occurring downstairs, Dave underscores this repetition using the language of the newspapers: "Ils sont arrivés par la mer [they came by the sea]" (209).

Reporting "Beit Shean"

The discomfiting links between past and present, like those evoked in the play's ending, are most explicit, however, in the play's treatment of the Beit Shean attack which took place in November, 1974, shortly before Kalisky began writing the play in March of 1975. The play

seduces its audience with clear, near-exact parallels between ancient and current events before quickly distorting and disturbing the link. If early on in the play, Achi blurs the boundaries between biblical and present-day enemies by speaking of Philistines (and Amorites and Moabites and Amelecites) in the same breath, later, the play's action evokes contemporaneous events and links them to the biblical account through references to news events and details of the attacks; the play's treatment of Beit Shean exacerbates the mediated mode.

Kalisky's text juxtaposes a 1974 terrorist attack in Beit Shean, a highly mediatized event, with a biblical text about Beit Shean itself made up of a small network of reported events. In the biblical account, this Philistine city was the location to which Saul's body and those of his sons were brought following the battle of Gilboa. David, after having escaped from Saul, was fighting for the Philistines, though he apparently only pretended to kill his own people. During the battle of Gilboa in which Saul and Jonathan were killed, David was (conveniently) fighting elsewhere, though he later mourned Saul and Jonathan in his famous "How are the mighty fallen" (2 Sam 1.17-27). Saul's body was desecrated by the Philistines and hung on the walls of Beit Shean; later, loyalists took down his body and those of his sons, burned them, and buried the bones:

> The next day the Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons lying on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped him of his armor, and they sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to spread the news in the temples of their idols and among the people. They placed his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they impaled his body on the wall of Beth-shan. When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard about it—what the Philistines had done to Saul—all their stalwart men set out and marched all night; they removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan and came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took the bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days. (*JPS* 1 Sam 31.8-13)

Saul's biblical death is one of the most "reported" event in the book of Samuel – David sings his famous dirge about Saul and Jonathan's death, and exhorts that Philistines *not* to

advertise the event ("Tell it not in Gath!"); Saul's death is reported in two different ways; and the Philistines diffuse information about the event with macabre literalism: Saul's severed head and weapons are disseminated around the land "to spread the news in the temples of their idols and to the people," while his body is hung as another kind of signal.

Dave overlays recollections of this ancient media-storm with references to a November 14th, 1974 attack and its aftermath in modern-day Beit Shean, events which shocked the French public.[71] According to an article in the Jerusalem post, on November 19, three members of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine disguised as workers waiting to be taken to a factory killed four residents inside an apartment building in Beit Shean. The Post describes the aftermath, after Israeli police had killed the attackers and evacuated residents:

> Angry mobs gathered in the street outside, and a few residents broke past a police cordon and threw the bodies of the terrorists down to the crowd, screaming with rage. They fell upon the bodies and finally set them alight before police moved in with water cannon and removed them. (Friedler 1)

As *Le Monde* described the scene (in a description Kalisky would have read in Paris, where he was living at the time) "the crowd quickly threw the bodies of the fedayin through the windows and set fire to them, while observed by journalists and policemen who avoided intervening [La population a aussitôt jeté les cadavres des fedayin par les fenêtres et a mis le feu, sous les yeux des journalistes et des policiers qui évitèrent d'intervenir] (Scemama, "Attaque" 1).

Kalisky's play combines the power of a cultural flashpoint with the biblical episode, capitalizing on doubled perspectives captured in the reports of both the biblical and the contemporary event as well as the striking parallel images they share. The French media cycle devoted significant but polarized attention to the 19 November Beit Shean attack in the days

[71] The events took place only a few months before Kalisky describes beginning to write *Dave* in March 1975 and while Kalisky was immersed in writing *Sionisme ou dispersion?*.

which followed. The events occurred at a period of what the papers referred to as "rising tensions" in the Middle East, following a speech by Arafat at the UN on November 13th, in the midst of the UN's debate on the subject of Palestine (which concluded by reaffirming the rights of Palestinians on November 22nd), and conversations about UNESCO's decision to censure Israel in early November and exclude Israel from regional groups on November 20th.[72] Numerous articles and editorials related the terrorist attacks at Beit Shean to these other conversations about Israel and Palestine. On the one hand, the press signaled a feeling that that the world, including French delegates, was abandoning Israel, a feeling exemplified in a pointed political cartoon by Jacques Faizant on the front page of *Le Figaro* on Nov. 24th (the cartoon depicts a Jewish man wearing a Star of David t-shirt and holding a rifle with his head in a noose, standing on a stool about to be dragged out from under him by the failure of international institutions: he will fall and be hung because the stool is connected to a rope linked to an oblivious suited civil-servant type with a briefcase labelled "UN [ONU]" and "UNESCO;" this man is walking cheerfully away, following a can of petrol dangled in front of him by an Arab man riding on his shoulders). *Le Monde* also described a series of articles in Israel which protested the fact that the international press downplayed the Beit Shean attack itself while

[72] On Nov. 24 the *Figaro*'s front page headline describing the end of the debate on the Palestinian question read: "Un vote qui ignore Israël," and on Nov. 22 *Le Monde* published an article reporting "'La solidarité totale' de la communauté juive de France avec l'état d'Israél" on the part of the Council Representing Jewish Institutions of France ("Solidarité").
As Marc Quaghebeur writes of the political context and Kalisky's provocative stance, "Kalisky does not mean to produce a scenic fable which would comfort anyone's certitudes or ideologies. He writes also at a moment when the Yom Kippur war and the deadly actions of the Fatah had begun to affect some people's perceptions of happenings in the Middle East. The playwright also attacks the basis for any Manichean representation of History [Kalisky n'entend pas produire une fable scénique destinée à conforter les certitudes ou les idéologies des uns et des autres. Il écrit par ailleurs à un moment où la guerre du Kippour et les actions meurtrières du Fatah ont commencé à modifier, pour d'aucuns, la perception des faits au Proche-Orient. . . le dramaturge s'attaque également aux bases mêmes de toute représentation manichéenne de l'Histoire] (60).

highlighting the "collective hysteria" ("It is said in Jerusalem, the terrorists have once more been able to spread death in a civilian population, but it's Israel that provokes the indignation of international opinion" (Scemama, "Profanation").[73]

On the other side, articles decried the profanation of Palestinian bodies; indeed, one letter published in the left-wing *Libération* on November 23rd argued that *Libération*'s coverage of the initial events had been biased against the Palestinian cause (Siné et al). On the 25th, a full six days after the initial attack, a virulent cartoon appeared in *Libération* drawn by famous and controversial cartoonist Siné, which depicted the defenestration of bodies in Beit Shean as a kind of summation of the conflict: the image is entitled simply "Palestine" (Fig. 1).

[73] "Finalement, dit-on à Jérusalem, les terroristes ont pu une fois de plus semer la mort dans la population civile, mais c'est Israël qui provoque l'indignation de l'opinion internationale" (Scemama).

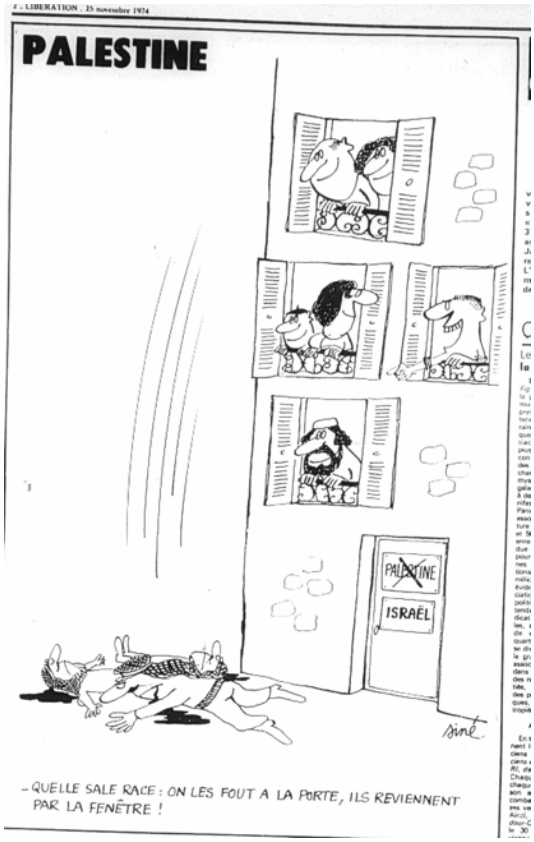

Fig. 1. Siné, "Palestine," *Libération,* 25 November 1974

The image depicts an apartment building and three Palestinian bodies recently fallen from above, as well as a group of Israeli residents cheerfully leaning out of the windows and remarking: "What a dirty race! We block them at the door and they come back through the windows! [Quelle sale race: On les fout a la porte, ils reviennent par la fenêtre!"] The depictions of the human actors are racist caricatures of Palestinian Arabs and North-African Jews. The sign on the door reads "Israel," below a crossed-out "Palestine," apparently in reference to Beit Shean's status as an Arab town before Israel's independence.[74] These signs hint that the macabre defenestration provides an opportunity for a gruesome double-entendre: the defenestrated bodies

[74] According to the organization *Zochrot*, the population of 'Beisan' was 6010 in 1948 and it was occupied on 12 December 1948.

have literally "come back through the windows," but the Palestinians have also "come back" to Beit Shean after having been blocked by Israel.

The events provided a potent image, moreover, taken up here by the cartoonist as well as by Kalisky, in the walls themselves. An article in *Le Monde* describes the reaction of the press in Israel and notes that though television stations abstained from showing footage of the events, images circulated widely in newspapers (Scemama, "Profanation"). Though *Libération* chose as its cover image a view of the gas being used to light the bodies on fire (captioned "La Haine,"), other images show instead the walls of the building themselves: in *Libération*, the image is so distorted that it is not clear if the shapes against the backdrop of the wall are descending bodies; in the image used by *Le Figaro*, however, the action is very clear. Indeed, the diagonal striations of the walls and the shapes of the figures render the image nearly abstract, and it appears stylized and almost aestheticized in the context of the newspaper page (Fig 2).

Fig. 2. "Ivre de colère," *Le Figaro,* 20 November, 1974

The walls of the apartment building in Siné's cartoon clearly evoke this striking image, (though Siné's drawing ironically decorates the building with the accoutrements of typical French countryside style—the curly-cues of ironwork in the windows, an evocation of stone construction, shutters). For a reader as familiar with biblical texts as Kalisky, it would not be hard to see in images such as these the walls of biblical Beit Shean and a body hung upon them.[75]

By evoking an attack at Beit Shean, then, Kalisky draws upon a provocative set of mediatized images and gestures and polarizing viewpoints. The ancient and contemporary events clearly share enough parallels to suggest their juxtaposition—families in danger, desecrated bodies, a prominent wall. In this instance, Kalisky does not merely suggest powerful resonances between biblical time and his own but forces readers and spectators to confront recent events juxtaposed with an ancient story. Powerfully, these two media events are combined and "reported" by the biblical characters on stage in a multi-layered re-mediation. Shortly after Dave has admitted his double role as Dave and David, Qish hears of the Beit Shean attack over the transistor radio:[76] apparently triggered by the place name, Shaoul recalls and cites the biblical events in a slight revision of the Louis Segond translation (he refers to Saul and his children being pinned to the wall, whereas in the biblical account this information is only apparent in the later verse, which describes Saul's body and those of his children being taken down). Even

[75] Though I have not yet found any reference to the biblical walls of Beit Shean in French media sources, the connection was made in two rather poetic articles published in Israel reflecting on the tragedy; Menachem Talmi refers to the walls and the men of Jabesh-Gilead, and G. Binyamin uses a spelling which conflates "Palestinian" and "Philistine."

[76] The radio itself—a crucial element of Israeli civilians' access to current events and updates on attacks, as evident in news articles of the time—functions as a kind of recurring link between the world of the play and the outside world; as for the biblical text, however, the audience only hears the reports as mediated by the characters on stage, who announce them. Kalisky's initial stage directions mention that the radio emits "news in Hebrew" [109], but softly (109), the only way in which spoken Hebrew is heard at length in the play, and whose content is cut off from be audiences, reinforcing their dependency on the mediating "reporters," in this case Qish's family.

Saul's initial report of the radio broadcast blurs the two, as he first uses the biblical term "Philistins" (rather than Palestiniens) to describe events: "QISH. A Philistine commando has taken two families hostage in Beit-Shan [Un commando de Philistins a pris en ôtage deux familles à Beit-Shan…]" (168). The conversation develops into what seems like a life-like discussion between family members, interspersed with the biblical references:

> ACHI. Those Palestinian bastards have gotten as far as Beit-Shan? Are there any deaths reported?
>
> QISH. Beit-Shan. . .
>
> ACHI. You hear, Mimi? Terrorists at Beit-Shan.
>
> MICHOL. *[Drowsy]:* Mmmm!
>
> QISH. They've struck their corpses onto the walls of Beit-Shan! [Ils ont attaché leurs cadavres sur les murs de Beit-Shan] (altered Segond)[77] (168).[78]

Readers or spectators witness the connections the Qish make to past events in real time: and watch as the Qish respond to media reports on the radio, doubly filtered through the Qish perspective; we see the character-actors respond, as if improvising, to the familiar place-name; Qish 'hears' it first, then Jonathan responds, and then David:

> ACHI. How many of those terrorist bastards were there?
>
> JONATHAN. *[As if he were reacting to a signal sent by Qish]* They nailed the corpses of Shaoul and his sons to the ramparts of Beit-Shan

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[77] 1 Sam. 31.10b: "et ils attachèrent son cadavre sur les murs de Beth-Schan" (Segond).
Kahn: "Le lendemain. . . Ils déposèrent son corps à la muraille de Beth-Chân. Les habitants de Jabès-Galaad ayant apppris alors ce que les philistins avaient fait à Saül, les plus résolus se levèrent, marchèrent toute la nuit et enlevèrent le corps de Saül et ceux de ses fils de la muraille de Beth-Chân." (1 Sam. 31. 10b-12a). Maredsous: Ils. . . accrochèrent son cadavre aux murs de Bethsan;" "Ils enlevèrent de la muraille de Bethsan le cadavre de Saül et ceux de ses fils (1 Sam. 31.10b; 31.12b).

[78] ACHI. "Ces saligauds de Palestiniens sont parvenus jusqu'à Beit-Shan? Est-ce qu'il y a des tués?
QISH. Beit-Shan…
ACHI. Tu entends, Mi-Mi? Des terroristes à Beit-Shan.
MICHOL. *assoupie:* Mmmm!...
QISH. Ils ont attaché leurs cadavres sur les murs de Beit-Shan!

DAVE. *[With infinite gentleness]:* The day after Gilboa, the Philistines fastened the body of Shaoul and those of his sons to the high wall surrounding Beit-Shan.[79]

QISH. *[His ear to the transistor]* Three terrorists. They've burned one of them. . . . They mutilated him. The army had to intervene in order to take back the other two. . ." (483)[80]

The moment dramatizes the links between past and present and foreshadows the repetition of Saul's family tragedy: violence at Beit Shean is happening again; mutilation and desecration at Beit-Shean is happening again. For Kalisky, it seems, and perhaps for readers familiar with biblical text and the news, one striking wall conjures the other. And if Saul and Jonathan seem simply triggered by the place-name to recall the biblical text, David's line ("The day after Gilboa, the Philistines fastened the body of Shaoul and those of his sons to the high wall surrounding Beit-Shan") which speaks of an aftermath and which is spoken with "infinite gentleness," seems to imply his knowledge of future events; Saul's family will die once again.

The play's conflation of biblical and contemporary events both relies on the kind of continuity and repetition of Ben-Gurion's logic and subverts it, however, drawing attention both to the tragic rather than triumphal possibilities inherent in the repetition and the danger of relying on such parallels for moral evaluation or future direction. Repetition of the kind that characterizes Ben-Gurion's description of a new, Joshua-like conquest is upheld and doubly undermined in Kalisky's play: here destructive, not productive violence recurs in the biblical

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[79] An error in the translation attributes this line to Qish.

[80] "ACHI. Combien étaient-ils ces saligauds de terroristes?

JONATHAN. *comme s'il réagissait à un signal envoyé par Qish:* Ils ont cloué les cadavres de Shaoul et de ses fils sur les remparts de Beit-Shan.

DAVE. *avec une infinie douceur:* Le lendemain de Guilboa, les Philistins attachèrent le corps de Shaoul et ceux de ses fils à la muraille de Beit-Shan.

QISH. *l'oreille au transistor:* Trois terroristes. Ils en ont brûlé un…Ils l'ont mutilé…Il a fallu que l'armée intervienne pour leur arracher les deux autres…" (168).

land. And the parallels proliferate, but the parallels are all mixed up. This time Israeli citizens are those who desecrate Palestinian bodies. For attentive Bible readers, moreover, the mixture— a violent, reprehensible attack, and an unsettling response by the crowd—reflects the ambiguity of the original passage, which contains multiple opposing viewpoints of the episode: the events described both mark the downfall of Saul, David's persecutor, and simultaneously show the tragedy of his death and respectful treatment by his supporters in Jabesh-Gilead. David, who after all was in some sense a Philistine collaborator, is not present, though he later gives a lengthy 'biased report' of Saul's death in his famous dirge. The mixture is dizzying.

More explicitly here than perhaps anywhere else in the play, the drama is produced through a combination of mediatized reports—accounts—of "contemporary" ancient and present events—combined in a single script and made flesh in performance. David and Saul's dialogue creates a new version of the biblical text that mimics its patterns through spliced ancient-modern accounts. The characters do not cite the continuation of the Bible verse, in which the men of Jabesh-Gilead take down the bodies from the wall and burn them in order to bury their bones properly, but Qish's description of the attack's aftermath further muddles the ancient-modern parallels by recalling both "burning" and bodies which must be retrieved. The biblical text juxtaposes the gestures of "taking down" [arracher] and "burning" [brûler]: "Ils **arrachèrent** des murs de Beth-Shan le cadavre de Saül et ceux de ses fils. Puis ils revinrent à Jabès, où ils les **brûlerent**" [They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the walls of Beit-Shean. Then they returned to Jabesh, where they burned them . . .]" (Segond 1 Sam. 31.12, emphasis mine). Kalisky substitutes for the biblical citation Qish's description of the contemporary mutilation of bodies and a different kind of "lifting off" [arrâcher]: here the police must take back or lift away [arrâcher] the bodies of the attackers from the people, who would burn them:

DAVE. Le lendemain de Guilboa, les Philistins **attachèrent** le corps de Shaoul et ceux de ses fils à la muraille de Beit-Shan

QISH. *L'oreille au transistor*: Trois terroristes. Ils en ont **brulé** un… Ils l'ont mutilé… Il a fallu que **l'armée intervienne** pour leur **arracher** les deux autres. (168, emphasis mine)

David says "The day after Gilboa, the Philistines fastened [attacher] the body of Shaoul and those of his sons to the high wall surrounding Beit-Shan;" Qish completes the story by describing the inverse gesture (the Philistines attached, the Jabesh-Gileadites took down, and burned) but housed in a modern used to describe the current events ("arrâcher" still follows "attacher"). Indeed, Qish even juxtaposes the actions of "taking down" [arracher] and "burning" [brûler], the two concluding gestures of the biblical account. Here, just as the Jabesh-Gileadites recover the desecrated bodies of Saul and his children, the army arrives to recover the bodies of the Palestinian attackers. David and Qish filter the ancient and the modern news together through their dialogued report, and the parallels between the two are unsettingly both evoked and undermined.

Kalisky's text not only combines sources in this way—the news events described on the radio and recounted by the Qish, as well as the biblical *reportage* spoken by characters, but it plays with the highly mediatized nature of both accounts, a collage which requires readers to attempt to work through a confusing mixture of ideological valences.[81] On the one hand, the play accentuates the highly mediated nature of the biblical "report" itself. Apparently in response to David's citation ("Le lendemain de Guilboa, les Philistins attachèrent le corps de Shaoul et ceux de ses fils à la muraille de Beit-Shan,") Jonathan highlights the "news report" quality of David's

[81] 2 Sam. 1.20, 1 Sam. 30 vs. 2 Sam. 1, "They cut off his head and stripped him of his armor, and they sent them through the land of the Philisitines to spread the news in the temples of their idols and among the people" (*JPS* 1 Sam. 31.9).

description of the ancient events, tacitly linking it to the ventriloquized radio updates, by complementing David's declamation: "Tu as recité l'information avec ta voix d'artiste [You recited the news with your artist-voice]" (168, "information" here as something like "journalististic news").

Similarly, Achi and Qish's commentary both emphasizes the sharp division of the media response to the attacks and responds to and pastiches contemporary reports in their own recitation of events as they draw the ancient story close to the contemporary. As the play continues, and the Saulides grow more desperate in their attempt to kill David, Achi continues to intersperse commentary on the ongoing news she hears from the radio, protesting against what she perceives to be a too-high standard for Israeli citizens in response to such attacks;[82] "ACHI. Imagine that! They're talking about the shame of Beit-Shan on the radio. A profanation they say . . . They kill our children, and we're supposed to stay calm . . . How about that, the bodies of those Philistines have been profaned . . . Bravo! Bravo! [Imagine un peu! Ils parlent de la honte de Beit-Shan à la radio. Une profanation qu'ils disent… On tue nos enfants, et il faudrait encore que nous conservions notre calme… Eh bien, oui, on a profané les corps de ces Philistins… Bravo! Bravo!]"[83](494/179). If the moral ambiguity of the scene were not already

[82] Terence Smith, "special to the New York Times," did not hide his horror at such "savage" behavior: "A morning of terror came to a savage end here today when a mob of enraged Israelis seized the bodies of the Arab guerillas who had staged a pre-dawn attack on the town and threw them into a bonfire . . . . Screaming "Burn them! Burn them!" several young men hurled the blood-stained bodies from the apartment windows . . . The crowd beneath kicked the bodies and stabbed them with sticks, then poured gasoline over them and set them afire. They cheered as the flames soared" (1). The account twice describes the "hysterical reaction" and speculates that it "seemed to be partly a reflection of the frustration that most Israelis feel at the recognition given to Mr. Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization in the last few weeks" (1). The Jerusalem Post, in "Beisan and New York" notes that "the reaction of the people of Beisan yesterday was ferocious. The horror of the murdered school children at Ma'alot had been numbing. At Beisan the response was bloodthirsty, as well it might be. A newsman who protested in the name of humanity was told, 'If we become murderers too perhaps we'll also be cheered at the UN.' The organization that was to save mankind seems to have served its purpose very poorly" (9).

great enough, Kalisky destabilizes the contemporary event further by relating it again to its biblical context. Achi again slips into referring to the Palestinians as Philistines, turning the modern-day profanation into a double-timed vendetta, both against those attackers who killed children at Ma'alot and elsewhere, whom she references,[84] and the Philistines—who profaned the bodies of *her* children in the biblical account.

Achi's lines present an impassioned response to the news stories about the event within the play (what she hears on the radio) and even seem to pastiche the freighted language of the newspaper stories, particularly of the Israeli press as reported in a November 22 *Le Monde* article. Achi responds to the overwhelming condemnation of the events following the attack by reacting to the same words cited repeatedly in *Le Monde*: the attacks are referred to as "**la profanation des cadavres** des fedayin" in the headline, "the shame [**honte**]" of the Israeli citizens following the episode is mentioned twice; Achi also responds to the use of the word "spectacle" to describe the events (Scemama, "Profanation").[85] Here Kalisky mimics, practically verbatim, the biblical and the current-day "account."

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[84] Later, Achi remarks, "Anymore of this and they'd be pouring out tears for those child-killers!" and refers directly to the Kiryat Shmona and Ma'alot attacks of April and May 1974, before referring to the "spectacle" *Le Monde* also describes: "Not a spectacle! Not a spectacle! Not a spectacle worthy of Jews, to profane the cadavers of terrorists [. . .] it's perhaps a spectacle to profane life? Me, I would have smeared those cadavers in pig's shit! [Pas un spectacle! Pas un spectacle!... Pas un spectacle digne des Juifs de profaner les cadavres de terroristes [. . .] C'est peut-être un spectacle de profaner la vie? Moi, ces cadavres, je les aurais barbouillés avec d la merde de cochon!]" (196). *Le Monde* cites "The atrocious spectacle of the profanation of the bodies of the three fedayin [L'atroce spectacle de la profanation des corps des trois fedayin]" (Scemama, "Profanation").

[85] "One of the chief rabbis of Israel, M. Shlomo Groen, condemned the profanation of the bodies, 'which is contrary to all the principles of the Torah.' Many inhabitants of Beith-Shean expressed during the funeral services 'the shame that will stay with them for a long time after the madness that seized some dozens of their co-citizens' [L'un des deux grands rabbins d'Israël, M. Shlomo Goren, a condamné la profanation des cadavres, 'qui est contraire à tous les principes de la Torah.' De nombreux habitants de Beith-Shan ont exprimé durant les obsèques 'la honte qui les poursuivra longtemps après la folie qui s'est emparée de quelques dizaines de leurs concitoyens'" (Scemama, "Profanation") and describes an editorial from Ma'ariv that stated "Before the horror committed by the inhabitants of the city upon the bodies of the assasins, we lower our eyes in shame and pain [Devant l'horreur commise par des habitants

If Achi's virulent reaction dramatizes the divided responses to the attack and its aftermath through her own filtering of the reports, Qish extends her reaction by directly linking the divided modern response back to biblical David and the polarized Saulide/Davidic perspectives.[86] Qish cites David himself as the impossibly calm model Israelis are expected to live up to:

> QISH. They want us to be super-Jews and follow the example of the perfect Ishai. [*A pause]* I was neither brotherly nor calm, nor perfect . . . I did what I could, I took part in the struggle, and they took the redhead over me. David did what he did . . . killed, deceived, trafficked . . . but he did it without passion. That's what everybody says. That's why all Jews everywhere are supposed to model themselves after David and forget about Shaoul. (494)[87]

Here David's distant, unconquerable success seems to stand in for something like a passive, "rational" Jewish intellectual response to the violence, and which to the Qish is perceived as deeply inadequate. The strange juxtaposition of contemporary and ancient reports are given life and embodiment in the raw speech of the characters acting; key words and verbatim quotes are combined, the two sets of "reports" are interwoven, mediated by the seductive speech of the character-actors, and the appropriate response to each is unclear.

Most bitingly in the moments which evoke Beit Shean, Kalisky forces biblical and contemporary events together, but the juxtaposition creates a destabilizing ambiguity in which the audience—who, Kalisky's play seems to presume, knows of current events—must participate critically. In the play's muddled contemporary-ancient pastiche, the divisive media responses

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de la ville sur les cadavres des assassins, nous baissons les yeux sous la honte et la douleur]" (Scemama, "Profanation").

[86] Though Kalisky's play elides the racial aspect of the events, instead having Achi take the part of the crowd, and who would like to violently attack the terrorists herself, the reaction to the events – "shame," and horror at the profanation—seems connected to the North African origins of many of the Jewish residents in Beit Shean.

[87] "Ils voudraient que nous soyons des superjuifs à l'exemple de cet excellent Ishaï. *(Un temps.*) Je n'étais ni fraternel, ni calme, ni parfait…J'ai mis la main à la pâte, et ils m'ont préféré le rouquin. David a fait ce qu'il a fait…, tué, trompé, trafiqué… mais il l'a fait sans passions. C'est ce qu'ils racontent tous. C'est pour cette raison que tous les Juifs doivent ressembler à David et oublier Shaoul" (179).

(pro-Palestinian, pro-Israel, elitist or popular, etc.) are stirred in with the ancient divisions between David and Saul summarized in the scenes at Beit Shean following Saul's death. The issues are present but without clear boundaries: though the play clearly critiques the racism and classed privilege of the Qish family, and though Achi's violent calls for retribution are shocking, it also presents the family as tragic Saulides, bowled over by a David who is by no means a purely laudable savior, but who is also curiously inhumane and unreached by events.

The reference to Beit-Shean most actively demands that audiences or readers recognize what is happening and work to parse the parallels between the two events; the impossibility of relying on any one-to-one correspondence, however, troubles any narrative which would build an argument for action based on the biblical precedent—or on a single news report. Kalisky's play insists on the repetition of violence in this land, no matter its provenance, but also forces spectators to remain ambivalent, or at least critically unsure—neither David nor Saul's model offers any 'solution.'

Conclusions

Reviews of Antoine Vitez's 1979 production of *Dave au bord de mer* described the performance as incomprehensibly baroque and self-indulgent, and criticized what they saw as an overt, derisive critique of the Israeli state.[88] The play seemed doomed—the space at the Odéon

[88] Critics emphasized the complexity of the play and its confusing aspects: "Let's be frank—it's inextricable! Anyone who hasn't read the first book of Samuel won't understand a jot. Neither will anyone who has read it [Soyons francs. C'est inextricable! Qui n'a pas lu le Premier Livre de Samuel n'y comprendra goutte. Qui l'a lu aussi]" (Marcabru); "The play is unreadable . . . thankless writing . . . difficult evening [La pièce est illisible . . . ingrate écriture . . . Difficile soirée]" (Sandier); and repeatedly link these qualities to its left-wing politics and provocative stance towards Israel: "The red brigades have invaded the Comédie Française . . . . I fear that, even from the perspective of the "reds," René Kalisky's play would find few defenders . . . . This bitter critique of Israeli society would have come better if it had been written by a "leftist" from there. . . . But the gravest reproach one can give to Kalisky, is that he's

apparently made it difficult to hear; the "old academicians" Mechthild Kalisky describes did not know the Bible and found the text opaque (Meger 80); Kalisky's champions in the Belgian press describe a production which emphasized derisive comedy over the clearly tragic elements of the play and were struck that Vitez chose a famous comic actor to play Saul and that he downplayed the text in favor of physical comedy (De Decker, "Dave"). Kalisky himself, in a letter to Marc Quaguebeur, one of these champions, wrote that the play demands "great actors [comédiens]. In fact: a play of tragedians. Vitez went the other direction by privileging derisive comedy where tragedy, tempered by the comedy that is also in the writing, was needed." (12 Nov 1979, cited in Quaghebeur 62 n. 24).[89] As Quaghebeur describes the play's opening, it was performed to hissing "of the left as well as the right, and from many members of the Jewish community" (47)[90]"; De Decker described the pall which fell over the car driving Kalisky's friends back to Brussels from Paris (*Sarah* 32).[91]

Kalisky hoped to re-invigorate Francophone theater, and to wrest the theatrical *text* back from a Parisian system in which he saw God-like directors using texts merely as pretexts by

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confusing, verbose—basically, that he does not master either his subject or his style [Les brigades rouges ont envahi la Comédie Française. . . je crains que, même du côté des "rouges," la pièce de René Kalisky ne trouve peu de défenseurs. . . . Cette critique amère de la société israélienne aurait été mieux venue si elle avait été écrite par un "gauchiste" de là-bas. . . . Mais le plus grave reproche qu'on peut faire à Kalisky, c'st d'être confus, bavard, en bref, de ne pas maitriser son sujet ni son style]" (Demur).

[89] "de grands comédiens. Plus précisément encore: une pièce de tragédiens. Vitez a pris le chemin inverse en privilégiant la comédie dérisoire, alors qu'il aurait fallu privilégier la tragédie, en la tempérant par la comédie qui est (aussi) dans l'écriture" (Quaghebeur 62 n. 24).

[90] ". . . sous les sifflets aussi bien de la gauche que de la droite, et de nombreux membres de la communauté juive" (Quaghebeur 47).

[91] "I drove the car that brought us back to Brussels the night that followed the premiere, Thilde Barboni, Jacques Sojcher, Maurice Olender, and myself. We were a bit defeated, as if after a party that hadn't met expectations. I will remember for a long time that interminable route, badly lit on top of everything, and of our arrival in Bruxelles, early in the morning, exhausted and desolated [Je conduisais la voiture qui nous ramena à Bruxelles la nuit qui suivit la première, Thilde Barboni, Jacques Sojcher, Maurice Olender et moi. Nous étions un peu défaits, comme après une fête qui n'avait pas répondu à l'attente. Je me souviendrai longtemps de cette interminable route, mal éclairée au surplus, et de notre arrive à Bruxelles, au petit matin, épuisés et désolés]" (32).

producing a text which contained within it the complex layers and theatrical play he desired—no extra adaptation necessary. Perhaps he overestimated the degree to which his audience would need knowledge of the biblical text and story and the melee was too much. Perhaps, also, by 1979 when the play was first staged, the urgency of the links to current events was not so apparent, or perhaps would never have affected a general audience in the way that Kalisky—an obsessive and invested follower of the situation in the Middle East—might have hoped.[92] In this play, the *surtexte* is quite literally a surfeit of texts, in which biblical translations and contemporary media are interwoven and played against one another by the character-actors on stage.

As Kalisky wrote in his history of the Arab world, he saw danger in an Israeli nationalist project which would "draw from biblical literature justifications for all their enterprises, past or future" (363). His play draws from biblical literature not for justification, or prophecies of a utopian future or the present state, but in order to better illuminate a still-present tragic complexity that for Kalisky ought to be difficult rather than simple—ambiguous. (Kalisky *Monde* 363). Kalisky's play does not overturn, then, Ben-Gurion's model of restaged biblical

[92]See letters from Kalisky to his mother and brother Jim, in which he dissects the situation repeatedly, speaks of his relations in Israel, and tries to calm his mother from worrying about them ("Lot"). Jules-Henri Marchant, the director of the 1993 Belgian production, however, did comment that the text became much clearer when spoken—and it is easy to imagine a production which emphasized the work's play with biblical discourse might "seduce" more easily than the written text. (De Decker, "Kalisky"). "I must admit that I was terrified when starting to work the play with the actors. I wondered if we'd manage to understand it, and everyone was asking the same question. And then . . . from the moment of the reading, the first time the text went through the voice of the actors, it was clear that everything is already done. Not that the direction imposes itself or that the interpretation is immediately obvious, but something springs from the play [Je dois avouer que j'avais une peur bleue en commençant à travailler la pièce avec les comédiens. Je me demandais si on arriverait à la comprendre, et personne n'échappait à cette interrogation. Et puis . . . dès la lecture à la table, la première fois que l'on fait passer le texte par la voix des comédiens, on s'aperçoit que tout est déjà fait. Non que la mise en scène s'impose d'elle-même ou que l'interprétation, immédiatement, coule de source, mais quelque chose sourd de la pièce]" (De Decker, "Kalisky").

events, so much as push it to an extreme. If *Dave au bord de mer* can be seen as a "rewriting" at all, it is one which dramatically places current events and ancient 'events'—and their textual instantiation and mediation, in Bible, translation, and newspaper clippings—in the same temporal and *textual* plane. The character-actors report ancient news filtered through the contemporary.

Rather than sifting apart ancient and current news into discreet, ideologically sound units (nomadic life replaced by statehood, David by Saul, Israel as victim, Israel as victimizer) Kalisky's play consistently draws readers in to a difficulty, tragic, continuous complexity—ambiguity through constant mediation. It is perhaps indicative of this attempt to maintain ambiguity, often implicitly or explicitly in contrast to ideology, that Kalisky once almost bragged in an interview that upon publication of his two volumes on the history of the Arab world, "I was told, that is, the pro-Palestinians told me I was Zionist and the Zionists told me I was pro-Arab [on ma dit, enfin les pro… Palestiniens m'ont dit que j'étais Sioniste et les Sionistes on dit que j'etait pro Arabe] " ("Rencontre" 13:50-14:16). The play's opening was after all booed "from both the left and the right" (Quaghebeur 47).

Regardless of the possibilities the play might yield in performance, then (indeed, it was published as a reader's edition before it was ever staged) as a text, *Dave au bord de mer* functions as an urgent, deeply felt experiment in drawing the biblical story forward. In *Dave,* Samuel is understood as a famous, archetypal myth or legend, but is most crucially explored in the play as *translated text*, harnessed and deployed to systematically link up with and destabilize the contemporary world and news cycle. *Dave* revives the continual destabilization contained in the 'original' itself through the re-mediated "play" to which it is subjected, framed and manipulated by the actor-characters themselves. If in Kalisky's reading, the biblical passages that

describe the transition from Saul to David provide a site of originary ambiguity in Jewish history, then Kalisky's rewritten Bible text remediates the biblical version to perform the same work for the present-day, a play which propagates ambiguity and discomfort for *now*—or at least Kalisky's version of it.

4. Alternate Views: Grete Weil's *The Bride Price*

In retelling the biblical story, the works this dissertation treats also hint metafictionally at the fact of a reader's return to the canonic text, whether by creating author-narrators who re-read and re-write the biblical story, by centering compiler-characters who help us see the Bible in a new way, or by staging character-actors playing with the past text in the present. Grete Weil's 1984 novel *The Bride Price* (*Der Brautpreis*) most openly describes an author's return to the canonic biblical text and the mixture of traditional associations and personal, readerly investment that this return elicits. The fact that the work reflects a twentieth-century subject's interpretation is not a cipher here, but openly acknowledged: the novel consists of alternating chapters narrated by "ancient" Michal, (David's wife and Saul's daughter) on the one hand, and an aging writer named Grete who chooses to write about David and Michal, on the other. Both sets of chapters tell of the narrators' current circumscribed situations and their past without ceremony, and through drifting sequences more evocative of the patterns of memory than of any official chronicle. Though Grete references her relationship to the ancient Michal, and though Michal's narration sometimes hints at contemporary resonances, the two sets of chapters remain interleaved but distinct.

The novel makes Weil's role as a reader of the text very clear, yet Weil's contemporary, personal mode of engagement also maintains a greater distance from the specificities of the biblical text than many of the works treated in this project. The novel's style is drawn less from the text itself than from the imagined perspective of a marginal female character within it. Many of the male authors of this study propose strong, even programmatic new versions of David's story—even if the strong claim is for the text as a complex, destabilizing object. Works like *God*

Knows, *The King David Report* and *Dave au bord de mer* problematize the authority of David's voice and his regime, but David's dominance is nevertheless ever-present in these novels. Perhaps in a reflection of the biblical text's configuration, minor female biblical characters are often reduced (to cite a particularly virulent example: Heller's Michal is a "Jewish American Princess:" "Michal, my bride, was not just the daughter of a king but a bona-fide Jewish American Princess! I had married a JAP! I am the first in the Old Testament to be stuck with one" (142)). *Weil's* writing of Michal's story and Grete's also works through the biblical narrative but maintains a personal distance from it, instead presenting an experimental, exploratory relationship with the older text appropriate to the feminist reading Weil offers of it.

This chapter treats Weil's novel as a biblical rereading which responds both to the dominant points of view the Bible so often serves (whether patriarchy, Christianity or Judaism, or Zionism) and finds in the Bible itself the means to destabilize such perspectives. As Yvonne Sherwood writes of the "feminist biblical criticism" with which Weil's novel shares some impulses, "[it] is concerned with how the Bible exceeds, subverts—as well as props up—all the edifices (all the Judaisms, Christianities, and secure patriarchies) that it has been taken to represent" (10). The novel starts from David's legendary, iconic status, and links ancient and modern Israel together, but it also draws from the text a feminist rewriting which quietly critiques patriarchal territorial violence and suggests an alternative, non-triumphalist, non-objective narration. The alternative narrative is marked by the gentle, contained, persistent voices of two women whose temporalities and perspectives are constructed as calmly contiguous.

Grete Weil's Bible Landscape

In 1986, when she first journeyed to Israel, Grete Weil was a well-travelled and aging novelist based in Munich, a Holocaust survivor who went into hiding in Amsterdam during the war and chose to return to and write in West Germany afterward, but who journeyed frequently around Europe and even the Americas. The body of her work is semi-autobiographical, linked to recollections of the war, survival in Amsterdam, and later, trips to the United States and South America. After a long period without much recognition,[1] Weil successfully published *Meine Schwester Antigone* (1980), a more explicitly autobiographical work which reflects on rebellion and resistance and which drifts between the perspective and recollections of a fictional stand-in for the author herself and the words and story of the ancient Antigone. Weil was familiar with the Greek landscape already. In 1986, however, she travelled to Israel for the first time as preparation for a novel about the biblical King David and his wife Michal.

Despite Weil's ambivalent relationship to the holy land, the novel Grete Weil composed before and after her trip to Israel apparently grows out of exegetical aims similar to those of Israeli state-builders David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan, whose study of the Bible sought to link ancient events to their modern recapitulation in the land, part of a process of forming Israeli national identity through common history. Grete Weil's work, too, expresses the desire to probe the meaning of Jewish identity and Jewish history by reflecting on the heroic events of the Bible drawn forward to the contemporary. Ben-Gurion returned to the Bible as a vital source for a newly-forged national identity and national history; Weil returns to the Bible as an experiment in engaging with the Jewish past as it intersects with her own understanding of her heritage.

[1] See Pascale Bos for discussions of Weil's reception in Germany. In a 1995 interview, Weil recalled her initial difficulties with publication in West Germany in particular (Giese 217).

The novel's opening describes Grete's relationship with the legendary David; she sketches a picture of her complex German-Jewish heritage by relation to images of the biblical king. Grete (a fictionalized version of the author herself) describes her early knowledge of David as centered around traditional Christian interpretations—she knew of David from Joan of Arc's monologue in Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* and from Michelangelo's statue, which she possessed in postcard form. As Grete writes, she "did not connect David with anything Jewish. He was a Florentine and *basta*," and she cherished his heroic stature, good looks, and promise of bildung: "A yokel. A son of peasants. Resolved, courageous. Weighing his possibilities, but capable of anything" (4, 3). Only later, as she grew older and began to be interpellated as Jewish, even when she "knew nothing more than that he had slain Goliath and was king between Saul and Solomon," she was proud "that David had been a Jew" (5). Later, Grete sees Rembrandt's alternative David for the first time while on a trip to Holland, ("a little Jewish boy. . . no hero, a poet and a singer . . . . this dark-haired, rather ugly boy . . . the brother of many from Amsterdam's Jewish quarter . . .") in a prophetic encounter that anticipates the years Weil later spent in Holland because she was persecuted as Jewish (6). Grete pinned the two prints side by side on her bedroom wall.

Grete describes her relationship to the figure of King David as a juxtaposition of the Hellenic and Hebraic framed through biblical artistic afterlives, in parallel to her own juxtaposed identities. She contrasts her assimilated upbringing in Germany with an appreciation of her own Jewishness brought on by persecution, a contrast paralleled by two works of art. The novel is framed as an attempt to negotiate between these two Davids and two parts of Grete through the return to a Jewish *text* from which the two images were drawn ("Michelangelo and Rembrandt, both had given form to a part of David as he has come down to us from the Bible") (7).

Grete will read and meditate upon David's story, one she senses is as important as the Greek epics, in the famous Buber and Rosenzweig German-Jewish translation, no less (7).[2] She summarizes David's fame "as he has come down to us from the Bible, belonging half to history, half to myth, ruling for forty years, at first just over Judah, then over all Israel at the beginning of the millennium before the birth of Christ, a great hero, a great poet, later a great king" (6-7). The novel's exploration of David begins with his status as an icon.

As this opening suggests, *The Bride Price* dramatizes Grete Weil's ambivalent relationship to her own Jewish background. Within the novel, Grete often expresses her feelings about her own lack of a proper Jewish identity, which she considers requires both belief in "Yahweh" and ties to Israel (144). As Weil writes elsewhere, she herself felt linked to the Jewish people through common suffering, undoubtedly, but as a woman from an assimilated German family whose relationship to Judaism was always tenuous,[3] she describes ambivalence towards what she feels are more secure markers of Jewish identity:

> As a Jew I had been persecuted, as a Jew, Waiki, my beloved, my husband, had been murdered. I couldn't put being Jewish aside, like a dress that had become old-fashioned.
>
> Being Jewish is a fact, but I'm not successful in giving it any content. Not possible without belief in God. (51)[4]

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[2] For a discussion of Weil's use of the Buber and Rosenzweig, which is much freer than the way other authors in this dissertation refer to the biblical text, see Uwe Meyer 279-281. John Barrett's English translation uses the New Oxford Annotated Bible with "adjustment toward the German wording" where appropriate ("Translator's Note").

[3] Weil also recalls Christmas and Easter as the large holidays of her childhood; her father had connections to the Jewish community and encouraged her not to abandon it completely; she writes that "After the war I never entered the newly founded community again, for I found it sufficient that I acknowledged myself as a Jew in front of all the world in my books [Nach dem Krieg trat ich in die neu gegründete Gemeinde nicht wieder ein, weil ich es für ausreichend fand, dass ich mich vor aller Welt in meinen Büchern als Jüdin bekannte]" (Weil, *Leb ich denn* 21). Unless otherwise noted, all German translations are by Matthew Johnson.

[4] Weil speaks of a similar definition of Jewishness, alien to her, in contrast to the common experience of Jewish suffering, both in a 1989 interview for "Jewish Portraits," by Herlinde Herlinde Koelbl, as well as in her 1998 autobiography, *Leb ich denn, wenn andere leben* (Weil, *Leb ich denn* 74). "But that is only one thing, this Jewish community of fate [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft der Juden*]. The other is real Jewish

Weil cites Goethe and Schiller as her antecedents often, among other examples of her German-Jewish *Bildung*, though in a prominent section of her 1998 autobiography dealing with her difficulty in defining what "Jew" means to her, she also mentions a (spurious) pride in some connection with "Einstein, Marx, Freud, Chagall (Weil *Leb ich denn* 75). Tellingly, she chose to close her autobiography by recalling in its final lines Heinrich Heine's predicament—a quintessential, German-Jewish dilemma she links to her own (Weil *Leb ich denn* 255).[5] Israel remains distant and strange. In an interview for *Jewish Portraits* by Herlinde Koelbl in 1989, Weil summarizes her feelings of alienated respect for the country:

> That I don't belong there. Ultimately, the country remains foreign to me. And, what is more, I also had – I say it now as if I had just written it – 'at heart a deep affection for the country and its inhabitants, bound up with the wish that it will go well for them, a wish I don't believe will be fulfilled.' I don't believe that it will go well. (Koelbl 256)[6]

In these words, she cites the opinions of one of the narrators of *The Bride Price,* Grete, who reflects on her relationship to Israel when she travels there on a visit: "Despite all the foreignness, deep down in my heart a fondness for the country and its inhabitants, a fondness that

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identity, and still more belongs to that. . . . I mean, above all, that belief in God belongs to Jewish identity – belief that I don't have – and secondly a love for Israel and a certain feeling of ownership with respect to this country. And that – I also don't have [Aber das ist nur eines, diese Schicksalsgemeinschaft der Juden. Das andere ist die wirkliche jüdische Identität, und zu ihr gehört doch mehr. . . . Ich meine, dass zur jüdischen Identität doch in erster Linie Gottesglauben gehört - den ich nicht habe - und als zweites eine Liebe zu Israel und ein gewisses Eigentumsgefühl gegenüber diesem Land. Und das - das habe ich auch nicht]" (Koelbl 256).

[5] She writes in these lines of her return to West Germany with regard to her relationship with Walter, a German friend she rejoins there: "It was a glimmer of hope that—through my knowledge of how often and how intensely I would suffer, like the poet Heinrich Heine, for my Jewishness and my Germanness—could not be extinguished again [Es war ein Hoffnungsschimmer, der durch mein Wissen, wie oft und wie stark ich ebenso wie der Dichter Heinrich Heine unter meinem Jüdisch- und meinem Deutschsein leiden würde, nicht wieder ausgelöscht werden konnte]" (Weil, *Leb ich denn* 255).

[6] Dass ich dort nicht hingehöre. Mir selber bleibt das Land letztlich fremd. Und dabei hatte ich doch auch - ich sage es jetzt genauso, wie ich es gerade geschrieben habe - "im Herzen eine tiefe Zärtlichkeit für das Land und seine Bewohner, mit dem Wunsch verbunden, dass es gutgehen möge mit ihnen, einem Wunsch, an dessen Erfüllung ich nicht glaube." Ich glaube nicht, dass es gutgeht" (Koelbl 256).

encompasses the wish that things may go well with them. A wish, in whose fulfillment I do not quite believe" (173).

Critics have seen *The Bride Price,* unequivocally Weil's "Jewish novel," as Weil's experimental attempt to acknowledge her Jewishness as something other than a mark of persecution imposed on her from without. Though Grete begins by seeking to understand David, throughout the apparently semi-autobiographical chapters she narrates (which describe memories from the war, Grete's recovery from a stroke and desire to bear witness), Grete also builds on David's ambiguity to reflect on her own ambivalent understanding of her Jewish background. The results are decidedly inconclusive. A few chapters before the novel's conclusion, Grete remarks that she may perhaps have "become more Jewish" since writing about David and Michal: "Yes, surely, something has started that was not there before," but that "despite the long preoccupation with David, I don't know much better than I did in the beginning what he was" (128). Many critics have drawn attention to the incomplete nature of Weil's search and stress the narrator Grete's failure to successfully accommodate a Jewish identity. Pascale Bos, for example, notes that Weil may identify more strongly with her Jewishness after the experiment, but associates the mitigated failure with Weil's narrow view of what constitutes Jewishness, concluding that "As a result, the position of Grete in *Brautpreis* remains a position of all or nothing" (69). Miriam Fuchs links Grete's final words as an aging writer to her inability to incorporate Judaism into her sense of self: "Considering the elaborate political and narrational maneuvering that goes on, it is hardly surprising that in the final autobiographical chapter Weil, in her own voice, tacitly acknowledges the failure of integrating Judaism into a self-image that allows her sometimes to despise her religion. Her closing self-portrait is of a very old woman still writing but with nothing left to say, and with no one desiring to hear it" (160); and Dagmar

Lorenz sees Grete's attempt to draw the biblical story and its Jewishness closer as a "failed experiment."[7]

Instead, however, the "failed experiment" in identity nevertheless offers a deeply personal, idiosyncratic reading of the biblical text, a new, often provocative or unsettling version from a writer who does not quite fit (a Holocaust survivor who nevertheless returned to the land of her husbands' murderers, a Jewish writer who feels some solidarity for those in Israel but who also criticizes its military violence). As she writes with regard to the biblical narrative, she must forge her own personal interpretation: "I began to mistrust the historians, the chroniclers. David could be anything: saint and criminal, singer and murderer lover of men, despiser of men, wise man and fool. What was he?" (7). In her decidedly secular, somewhat iconoclastic re-readings of the Bible, which explicitly link ancient past with contemporary time in the land of Israel, Weil's novel reads as a kind of supplement or extension of the biblical 'exegesis' practiced by Israeli state-builders seeking to reformulate Jewish history by means of the Bible. Weil reframes the David Story as a critique wary of masculine histories and nationalisms, which proposes instead a pacifist, feminist narration grounded in small-scale, personal observations rather than grand claims.

Like Ben-Gurion, Grete re-reads the Bible not from a theological perspective but with an eye to the "particular circumstances" of the time and with attention to what Shapira calls

[7] "*Der Brautpreis* represents the attempt of an author more identified with German tradition than with the Jewish heritage to transform biblical characters and motifs in such a way as to bring them closer to her own situation. The emotional and cultural differences that must be overcome are too great, and the experiment fails. Weil can endorse the Jewish legacy only by desconstructing it, and she can affiliate herself with Germany only by remaining at its margins, hence her focus on a powerless, marginalized woman character. By making the attempt to place herself in the position of Michal as well as David, Weil attains a better understanding, not of Judaism, but possibly of herself" (284-5).

"concrete exploits" (Ben-Gurion 253, Shapira 659). She also draws attention to the heroic military events that characterize David's rise and regime, emphasizing his exploits and his kingship, the transition of power from Saul to David, etc. Yet Weil opens the biblical narrative from its "mythical" version by reading those very aspects of the story which appealed to formers of national unity—David and Saul as great military leaders, the unity of David's kingdom—as deeply problematic and troubling. Rather than discard the biblical narrative as patriarchal and useless (the ultimate Meta-Text), Weil's novel attends to and opens alternative ways of reading the text.

In a kind of radical perversion of the links Dayan and Ben-Gurion draw (for example, between Joshua's conquest and a new conquest or, tacitly, between David's new united Kingdom and Israel's new state) Weil draws attention through Michal's eyes to the violent underpinnings of colonialism, nation-building, and war—here all enterprises framed as particularly masculine—in in the biblical account.[8] By pointing out certain aspects of Ancient Israel, moreover, Michal's narration (which is after all penned by the contemporary narrator, Grete) hints at criticisms of modern Israel as well. So, Michal reflects critically on the settlement of her people's past:

> It was not be to [to be] foreseen that when we came here, we would find that there were already other inhabitants: Amorites, Edomites, Moabites, Hittites in the interior, and, on the coast the Philistines. We had to conquer them all, in part even exterminate them, in order to gain a foothold. Even our children learn that there was no other way to do it. I could never really see that, with a little effort we could have been able to live in peace with one another. But perhaps the country is really too small to nourish us all. But why announce with every new war, with every homicide, that it happened by Jahwe's command? (40)

[8] Michelle Mattson refers to "Weil's Critique of Patriarchal Family Politics and Nation-building," discusses possible links between David and Saul's wars of expansion and Nazi *lebensraum,* and draws attention to the palpable, though not easily categorizable, links between Grete's difficult relationship to Germany and Michal's difficult relationship to David (121-124).

This reading of the biblical events speaks to modern-day questions over Palestinian refugees and perhaps even the biblical justifications for the modern state's actions. Later, Michal describes David and Saul's battles similarly: "Men on opposite sides killing each other and creating fear for the women. Thus Jahwe wills it and all find it quite natural;" (72) and, perhaps most pointedly, she tells of David's dream of capturing Jerusalem: "A vision, the vision of a poet, but also that of a conqueror, for whom there is no obstacle" (93). Grete, too, describes not only the devastations of the Shoah and the war, but of human violence more generally: at one point she remarks pointedly, while describing waiting to have her bag checked at a checkpoint in Israel, "Oh, if I could only say: I'm a Jew. Jews don't blow things up. But they do" (173).[9]

Sometimes the links between the two women are based around war and violence more generally, but key chapters explicitly connect them via the land of Israel itself, in an alternate version of the kinds of temporal conflation of Ancient/Modern Israel in Ben-Gurion's Bible readings. Both Grete and Michal describe the expansive desert landscapes of Ancient and contemporary Israel, and here in these spaces, something of Moshe Dayan's style appears in the novel, the romantic link between present and ancient past made manifest in the desert expanse. Grete describes feeling "now I've got to go there" "only after" beginning to write about Michal

[9] Grete Weil was highly critical of the State of Israel, and particularly of its military violence. In an interview published in a Dutch paper in September 1982, just days after Lebanese President-elect Bashir Gemayel was assassinated, Weil strongly criticized Israel's actions in the Lebanon war and towards Palestinians as well as Israel's sale of weapons to South Africa (on the war, she declared "I am not Israeli nor a Zionist, . . . but I allow myself to say that this is a scandal") (Spoor 40-41). Grete Weil described her reluctance to journey to Israel in interviews, sentiments repeated in the discussion of the trip embedded in her fictional counterpart Grete's narration in *The Bride Price*: "Again and again I was asked why I, someone who likes to travel so much and often so far, have never been to Israel. 'I just didn't get around to it,' I answered most of the time. Actually I was afraid of my emotions: I belong there, I don't belong there" (Weil 1991 171). These sentiments were repeated in an interview from 1988, the year of *The Bride Price*'s publication, coupled with explicit fears of war's outbreak and perhaps guilt over the inevitable choice of Germany (interview with Liz Wieskerstrauch cited in Uwe Meyer 193).

(171). Indeed, the novel's most extensive descriptions of landscape are reserved for this comparison. Just as Dayan writes in great detail, for example, of the ibex and the landscape they "still" wander near Ein-Gedi, the "goat spring" near which Saul and David had their famous, emotional stand-off (196-199), Grete recalls the fauna and landscapes she encountered on her travels to Israel and the way she linked them to Michal. Though she has difficulty finding some sites she does find others things:

> Yet I could never have had Michal met up with an ibex if I had not seen those animals myself, so tame, so without fear of man that you can observe them close-up.
>
> And how could Michal have loved the desert, which I didn't know before this trip, and by which I am entranced, by the broad panoramas, the colors and shapes, by the columns of red rock.
>
> En Gedi, where the roses are already blooming at the beginning of March, En Gedi with its waters, steep rocky walls, and the caves in which the young David hid from Saul.
>
> The mount of Olives on which I'm standing, the huge Jewish graveyard at my feet, where Jews from all over the world wanted to be buried and still do. Where I am standing, Michal stood with David during their flight from Absalom and they, too, looked over toward Jerusalem, even if toward a different one from the one I see.
>
> It is certainly one of the most beautiful views of a city in the whole world. (172)

Here Grete describes not the official historical sites, the evidence of the chronicle, but the creatures, the colors, the rocks and the flowers, the natural landscape and its vistas ("panoramas," and "views" (172).

The landscape connects the two characters, but Weil again uses the biblical narrative to torque continuity—the view is similar, but different. Instead, Grete visits Israel for the new kind of depth perception—quite literally—she will gain for her narrative's focalization, a perception she herself could not otherwise supply. She describes going to Israel "not so much because of the landscape. . . I also knew the southern parts of Turkey and Greece, certainly similar and perhaps even 'more biblical' regions" but for a perception of altitude: "Despite good maps, I could only poorly imagine how high, for example, Gibeah is, or was, located, and what you can see from

Ophel, the hill where David, and Michal too, lived in Jerusalem" (171). Not only does Grete initially imagine other regions might be somehow biblical enough, but she also avoids linking sites to events in the archeological model of Dayan, and instead uses this landscape to deepen her understanding of Michal's perspective—her "views."

Moreover, this attention to the biblical land only serves to accentuate Grete's attachment to another land, a former homeland not in Palestine but in Germany. Weil's novel explicitly draws together ancient and contemporary experiences of Israel and its landscape, but subverts the standard narrative of return by describing not a return to Eretz Israel—her visit is just a trip—but a return to West Germany. For Grete, the "biblical" landscape to which she is most attached is that of Western Europe; the *land* to which she belongs is Germany, and the mountains of Bavaria.[10] Weil's oeuvre is deeply imbued with autobiographical material, and in particular, *My Sister, My Antigone* and *The Bride Price* both include protagonists called Grete who recall events from Weil's life.[11] *The Bride Price*, however, pointedly describes Grete's return to West Germany,[12] and the chapter in which she describes her journey in detail (the first illegal trip in

[10] Grete's attention to "altitude" (and topographical maps) also evokes the Bavarian landscape and mountaineering of Grete's childhood (Weil *Leb ich denn* 76).

[11] Much has been written about the autobiographical nature of Weil's works; for example, see Fuchs for a discussion of Weil's use of intertexts as a means of filling in unspeakable events; see Sayner for a detailed analysis of the structure of Weil's autobiography. In a telling interview, Weil pokes fun at the journalistic desire to pin specific events from her novel to her own life and describes the artistic decisions she made in adapting her experience with Michelangelo's David (Giese 218).

[12] Weil also discusses Germany as her *Heimat* in *Leb ich denn, wenn andere leben* and describes at length her relationship to the Bavarian mountains in particular (See Sayner 306-308; Weil *Leb ich denn* 76); Weil refers to *Heimat* explicitly in an unpublished paper in 1990: "I was born on the Tegernsee in the heart of the Upper Bavarian landscape, the landscape which for me became, and remains, the truest sense of the word Heimat, that is to say, something which has always been part of me" (cited in Sayner 307). As Joanne Sayner notes of Weil's autobiography, "In the context of repeated "trajectories of deterritorialization" (Zipes, 1994, 41; Broder 1994, 84) in contemporary German-Jewish literature, such insistence on "Heimat" is striking as a conscious demarcation from any notion of Diaspora. . . . Given the protagonist's experience as a victim and survivor of persecution, the use of "Heimat" is an attempt to recuperate a term used by the Nazis and by those who want to 'normalize' the German past by integrating it into her own life story" (307). Franziska Meyer beautifully traces Weil's difficult thoughts on her return

1947, and then the legal return in 1948) links on to a similarly pivotal chapter in Michal's life which describes a different kind of homecoming in the ark of the covenant's triumphal arrival in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7). Indeed, by contrasting her own land with the holy land by way of the biblical text, she reasserts her own highly individual, controversial version of a long-awaited return. Grete describes the joy she felt in Autumn 1947 as she was led "through woods and heath . . . over the 'green border'" as deeply connected to the very ground she treads: "It was a beautiful night and I was quite drunk with the joy of being outside again, of breathing in the smell of rotting leaves, of having the soft, springy earth under my feet" (101).

Grete does not resist the difficult implications of her return to Germany, but she repeatedly insists on her choice. Grete opens her description of the journey back with a provocative question, perhaps in response to those readers jarred by her return: "How long have I, old Grete, been living in Germany, the land of my murderers, the land of my language? I have never regretted coming back to the place I came from and have never wanted to be anywhere else" (101). She stops short of using the term *Heimat,* which often indicates a yearning for or nostalgia for homeland,[13] to describe Germany in the novel. As she wrote in a letter to Margarete Susman in a discussion of her desire to return to Germany in 1947, "I have lost my homeland in

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to Germany through her post-war correspondence. Meyer shows that Weil's discussion of *Heimat* turns on the landscape itself strangely divorced from its inhabitants: "Weil imagines home as a dystopian space that is stripped bare of its history and people, of reminders of its recent violent past: this is the only space Weil dares to think of as 'home'" (Meyer 129). In two 1946 letters to her German friend, and later husband, Hans Jokisch, she wrote: "Not in the rubble of the cities, but beyond; despite everything, out there is still my country;" "Bavaria [is] just the most beautiful place, and deep down I belong there" (cited in Meyer 129-30). She writes in her autobiography, "A place where one is at home, one is really at home," she insisted, "can even be the case if above the town's name sign there hangs a banner saying: 'Jews enter this town at their own risk.' The banner makes the people uglier, not the place" (cited in Meyer 130; Weil, *Leb ich denn* 50).

[13] See Anat Feinberg 163-165 for a summary of scholarly and popular discussion of the term.

Germany and have not found any other" (*Leb ich denn* 252).[14] Instead, Grete employs a *Heimat* construction to describe both the affinity and yearning for Israel she does not feel ("a bond with the Land [Land] of Israel, the feeling of a homeland in [Heimatgefühl für] Eretz Israel") and, at one point, mentions the "*Urheimat*"– original homeland— she felt in her youth—in "Greece and its myths" (*Brautpreis* 51/*Bride Price* 36; *Bride Price* 127/*Brautpreis* 167). But Germany, she says, "remains my country [*land*] whether I like it or not and very often I don't like it" (*Bride Price* 126/*Brautpreis* 166). Germany, it would seem (and Munich in particular, where she eventually settles) occupies a place in between – as "*land"* that is close to her heart, and a place where, despite everything, she feels "*zu hause*", at home (*Brautpreis* 76). Grete draws together the physical ground on which Michal and Grete walk, but uses the trope to turn to her own particular attachment—if not to a homeland, then to a haunted home. Her emphasis on the natural expanses to which both women are attached, the mountains and the desert, perhaps points to an alternative attachment—not to a *land* as nation, or territory, but to lived landscape, the "broad panoramas, the colors and shapes" of the desert, the "soft springy earth" (172, 101).[15]

Grete's new history is one that can include her individual narrative, but, crucially, which would not erase her memories and the memories of Germany's past; the drifting links between the two women represents an alternative both to the kind of new national narrative Ben-Gurion begins to forge using the Bible,[16] as well as to contemporaneous new narratives moving beyond

[14] "Ich habe die Heimat Deutschland verloren und keine andere dafür gefunden" (*Leb ich denn* 253; see Franziska Meyer on this letter and Weil's use of Heimat, in particular her "relief with the familiarity of landscape (135).

[15] See Sayers, who discusses Weil's return to West Germany as a relationship to a *Heimat* as German landscape via Weil's personal correspondence.

[16] This new use of the Bible represented a means of inspiring those taking part in the new experiment of Israel; we might compare Ben-Gurion's invocation of Biblical history to other uses of Biblical texts to inspire emigration or other change in the wake of persecution; the return to Zion in Palestine was often

recent trauma in the West and in West Germany. Weil seems intent on preserving a non-triumphal version of events, even of the war's conclusion, which she recalls with bitter irony: "Belief in the Allied victory, in our victory, which we, sentimentally and mistakenly, called the victory of the good. Luckily we did not know how uncertain it was. Nor how threadbare when it finally came. Evil destroyed, banished from the world. Eternal peace. Shalom, Shalom" (36). She writes disdainfully of the American Jews she meets when visiting Israel (who "reject" her books and "disapprove" of her life in Germany) and their desire to move beyond the past: "They don't want to hear anything more about the time, which, with unintentional irony, they call "the great." They have repressed the persecution, pushed it aside, that happened sometime in the Middle Ages, today, in our civilized, democratic world, such a thing would no longer happen" (170). In a 1982 interview following the publication of *My Sister, My Antigone,* Grete Weil speaks similarly when underscoring the change that followed after the war; she describes a period of hope for change, followed by the push for economic development and the repression of the past, only shaken by the famous screening of the American series *Holocaust* in West Germany in 1979:[17] "It was as if they were told that something terrible had happened in the middle of Africa 30 years ago (Spoors 45).[18]

Weil's unauthorized use of Michal polemically turns to the biblical text not to prop up her own Jewishness or support a narrative of biblical repetition in the land, but for an alternate story disturbing the notion of the biblical text as simply a triumphal chronicle ready for a

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described in the language of the Book of Exodus, as was the Puritan journey to another kind of promised land in America (see Langston; David).

[17] See Anton Kaes; Dominick LaCapra writes, ". . . a minor event that was broadly recognized as a commercialized, offensively Hollywood-type production nonetheless triggered a traumatizing return to the past that perhaps functioned either as a transitory catharsis, or, in the best of circumstances, as the occasion for critical reflection upon events" (818).

contemporary update. As Pascale Bos in particular has shown, Weil's writing, and the *Bride Price* in particular, called for Germans to attend to her stories in the present, "not only as testimony of a Jewish survivor . . . but as an appeal to now confront one's own (German) past," (though Bos writes that the German public did not respond to Weil's call) (Bos 70). Weil's personal, provocative version of the biblical narrative seems to deny certain more positive reclamations of the story in order to reassert her own present, that of a survivor who recursively returns the ever-present past in her writing (58): "I, the late-born, must bear the knowledge of Auschwitz to the end of my life, it will torment me till my last breath" (183).

Michal's Feminism

Weil's highly personal reading of the text allows for a probing narrative of cross-temporal solidarity between two individual women who have witnessed great suffering, one ancient and one contemporary. Weil's new reading does not produce a new version of a national narrative, but a highly contingent, specific kind of doubled testimony.

Weil's novel juxtaposes the narratives of two aging women: one is an ancient princess who falls in love with the sweet singer of Israel, is repulsed by the bloody Philistine foreskin bride price and never consummates her marriage to him, but must watch the violence of his rise to power and remain ultimately barren and trapped in his palace as she ages; the other is Grete, who—like Grete Weil—survived the Shoah in hiding in Amsterdam, whose beloved husband was murdered at Mauthausen, who has returned to her native land, Germany, and who has suffered a debilitating stroke. Both women are linked through the story of the hero David, and the novel turns on these two women seeking to solidify their identities with relation to this man. Like Grete, Michal struggles to reconcile her feelings about two Davids, something like

Coccioli's "doubled" hero: the youthful harpist whose tenderness moved her and the hero, metallic and brittle, public and foreign, who and is later an outright murderer.[19] (99, 83). She notes these contrasts in the terms of Grete's art prints: "A hero is what I got for a husband in the end, though I had wished for a singer" (17), and spends the story of her life trying to understand him, "the shepherd boy, the harp and flute player, the unsullied one who kills no man, but cuts the penises off two hundred men or has them cut off" (31). For Grete, the Davids manifest in Michelangelo and in Rembrandt continue to haunt her, and she admits that her conclusions about David, are always "mere suppositions, speculations, always a tantalizing game, stone is laid against stone until the puzzle reveals a picture. My stones: a charismatic murderer, a good musician, a good poet, a successful general, probably a good lover, a man whose blond hair and light skin were conspicuous in the midst of his people, a believer, visibly blessed by God" (128).

As a text which attends to the gendered subjectivity of its narrators and which problematizes historical representation, *The Bride Price* reflects the post-1970s West German context in which it was written. As Pascale Bos outlines, Weil's novel was written shortly after a period of renewed interest in German-Jewish stories, particularly following the screening of the *Holocaust* miniseries in West Germany in 1979 (55). Weil's novel appeared at a time of conflict in West Germany between "1970s leftist cultural politics" which "[influenced] the (at times compulsive) need for Germans to reconsider and remember the Holocaust. . ." and the opposing "desire to "historicize" or "normalize" the Nazi past," in part as a result of the conservative, nationalist government (Bos 60, 60-63). [20] At the same time, the novel's feminist, first-person

[19] The image of a love between David and Michal turned to bitterness is not uncommon (see the film, *David and Bathsheba;* Rachel Bluwstein's famous poem "Michal" (1927) captures the sense of difficult love Weil's novel describes.
[20] For a description of the *Historikerstreit,* see LaCapra.

account reflects the rise of the German leftist women's movement and a new German women's literature (Frauenliteratur)[21] as well as the trend toward personal versions of history reflected in the "new subjective" literature (Bos 62, 61). Furthermore, Weil's novel was written during or shortly after the 1986 *Historikerstreit,* a debate in the public press about the ways historians should treat the Holocaust and the continuity of German cultural history; Dominick LaCapra notes that the conversation, among other things, drew attention to the question of "whether one could define history in purely professional objective, third-person terms under the aegis of a strictly differentiated or even autonomized paradigm of research" (LaCapra 817).

Weil's alternative history is a feminist one. By writing from the perspective of David's wife Michal, moreover, Weil interprets the biblical narrative in a way reminiscent of the feminist biblical criticism on the rise in the 1970s and 1980s which sought to read against the patriarchal grain of the biblical account—and biblical scholarship—and to recapture the feminine voice.[22] As Yvonne Sherwood comments in her introduction to a recent volume on *The Bible and Feminism*, "The idea that feminist biblical criticism was originally centred on Great Women may be something of a straw woman, a false memory. Feminist scholarship has always been concerned with absences and margins. It has always been preoccupied with the paradox that

[21] Hester Baer and Alexandra Merley Hill describe "*Frauenliteratur* (women's literature) of the 1970's and 1980s . . . a conscious, author-driven attempt to give voice to women's subjective experiences" (6). Bos describes Weil's open appreciation for writers of *Frauenliteratur,* citing a 1985 interview in which Weil commented "I know of no books written by men which reach the level of Bachmann or Christa Wolf" (Bos 119 n. 52; Anke Manschot, "Ook ik heb last gehad van een Asseoestercomplex: gesprek met de Duits-joodse schrifster Grete Weil," *Vrij Nederland Boekenbijlage* (April 13, 1985) 8).

[22] Pascale Bos relates the novel more generally to the "broader feminist critique of religious traditions that had emerged since the late 1970s . . . primarily from within Jewish circles in the United States and England" (64) and Miriam Fuchs notes "Feminist critics Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Mieke Bal, and others have rehabilitated women's stories from the Old Testament" but claims that they have "largely focused on figures such as Esther, Ruth, and Judith who pay more prominent roles than Michal does and are, in some ways, less problematic" (227).

women are more absent, and also more present, than one might expect" (Sherwood 6).[23] Particularly since the 1980s, a tradition of feminist biblical criticism worked to study and theorize the gender-based violence of the text (Bal, Trible); to excavate feminist "countertraditions" within the dominant discourse (Pardes); and to attend to the ways contemporary culture has responded to and perpetuated certain readings of biblical women (Bach, Exum). As Sherwood describes the tradition, varied though it is, feminist biblical criticism acknowledged the subject-position of its interpreters and was not afraid to experiment with linking the Bible to present issues:

> By definition, such criticism broke with the tacit aura of objectivity, historicity, and "epistemological decorum" that presided over the discipline, even when feminist critics were very explicitly not writing in an explicitly "subjective" or "autobiographical" idiom. . . Feminist critics were forced to assert themselves as subject. . . . (Sherwood 7)
>
> Feminist biblical critics, in contrast [to traditional scholars] have been pioneers in promoting anachronistic encounters between the Bible and contemporary socio-political issues, so betraying the traditional contract between biblical studies and the study of the past. (Sherwood 2)

Grete Weil's novel reads Michal from the same kind of perspective as this biblical scholarship; though the novel attends deeply to the text, it reads it through the lens of contemporary issues, sacrificing "epistemological decorum." By adding the perspective of an anachronistic Bible reader (Grete) who is aware of her own interpretation in the contemporary, moreover, Weil's novel stages the scene of feminist biblical exegesis.

[23] Certainly, some strands of feminist biblical criticism *did* expend a energy in celebrating Great Women; I take Sherwood's point to be that even when drawing out feminist interpretations of biblical women that are laudatory, scholars have always been acutely aware of the ways in which biblical women appear and disappear in the narrative. See Alice Ogden Bellis, for example, for a thorough treatment of women in the Bible in light of feminist research—finding and giving attention to biblical women—that is nevertheless highly conscious of the interventions and subjectivity of an interpreting subject.

Michal is an apt character to choose for such a retelling; Though female characters abound in the Biblical narrative, of course, their influence is often brief and circumscribed. Michal, though famously the only Hebrew Bible woman to be said to love a man,[24] only acts in a few memorable scenes, and speaks in even fewer, though she is instrumental to David's successful rise and the decline of Saul's house. Michal is narratively caught between powerful men. When she is remembered, Michal is perhaps most famously portrayed as a shrewish, petty and vain princess in the classic Hollywood Epic *David and Bathsheba*; more recent feminist scholarship and midrash have re-opened an alternate perspective, however (see Judith McKinlay's "Through a Window: A Postcolonial Reading of Michal" in particular, which links Michal's status as Saulide outsider to a postcolonial perspective). Weil's version of the story perhaps anticipates the genre of trans-focalized biblical novels most famously exemplified by Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent.*[25]

Weil's Michal is (perhaps anachronistically) deeply feminist and antipatriarchal, as critics have noted.[26] Her story is structured around the traumatic event of the "bride price," the 200 Philistine foreskins David must extract in order to pay Saul her dowry. This bloody price signifies both the violence and masculine destruction of Philistine lives (she describes "the tears of a hundred weeping women") and the commercialized reality of her formerly pure love: now

[24] See for example Robert Alter, *Art* 118.
[25] For a fuller discussion of women's rewriting during this time, see Liedeke Plate, who treats the genre and discusses Adrienne Rich's highly influential 1972 article, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," which posited that "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich 18, Plate 39-65). With regard to Hélène Cixous's conception of *écriture feminine*, Plate writes, "the literal echoes of Rich's words in Cixous's, suggesting some transatlantic pollination, point towards an international feminist public sphere in which rewriting functions as a central concept in thinking women's way out of the historically oppressive past and into a better future" (50).
[26] See for example Bos 63, Lorenz 283.

she is a commodity to be traded by men (27). She describes "the feeling that I have missed the moment to keep from having myself bought" (27). In a moment of apparent anachronistic ventriloquism by the rewriting's author, Michal comments, "a wife must remain silent. Subordinate herself to her husband. Will it ever be otherwise? Will the day come when a woman is not sold by her father, does not have to be among many in the house of her husband" (42)?

Indeed, Michal's narrative explicitly counters and laments the nationalist territorialism and violence of war she associates with patriarchal leaders like David and Saul. She often criticizes the constant need for war ("We were used to wars. There was always a war. The Amalekites, the Ammonites, and, most often, the Philistines attacked us. Or we them, it was hard to tell exactly which. . . . Reasons for war were quickly found, they were readily at hand, you only had to give them a name" (18-19). Following a sexist remark from David, Michal muses again on a brighter future for womankind: ". . . I have the hope, no, even more, the conviction that the day will come, the beautiful, bright day, when women will be admitted to the council to restrain the men from all too rash actions for which they can no longer make amends, from playing with weapons, with danger. The day when women will no longer be merchandise in the markets . . ." (91-2). Elsewhere, she questions the violence of men repeatedly, as when she notes "To kill human beings seemed to me to be the height of abnormality. . . . was murdering, if most people were followers of a murderer, normal?") (44-45).

As some critics have noted, Weil's novel seems to comment on the violence of her own time as well as Grete's, implicitly linking the biblical text to contemporary concerns in the manner of the feminist biblical critics. Both Grete and Michal's narratives refer again and again to the tragedy of male violence, and the novel's recurring references to the dangers of too much

"ambition," and "heroes" both hint at the Nazi "future" in Michal's case and fears of fascism's reoccurrence in Grete's.[27] Of the violence against the Philistines, Dagmar Lorenz writes

> This episode of indiscriminate violence in biblical times is used to suggest parallels between Jewish and German history. . . . Along with her literary project of appropriating Jewish history goes an antipatriarchal discourse opposing ancient and modern cultural practices. The David presented in Weil's novel is a calculating opportunist and a mass murderer: his sanctimonious speeches show him to be a master of crowd manipulation, and his character traits combine the seducer's sexual allure and the tyrant's brutality. He possesses the intense appeal of a sex symbol, but his frigidity rules out sustained intimacy with him—these very traits have been attributed to Hitler. By way of a Jewish text, Weil probes the roots of genocide, ethnocentrism, and the domination of women (Lorenz 283).[28]

If David at times recalls Hitler, he is also but one of a large number of men involved in what Michal describes as constant battles, to which she has grown accustomed. Michal seem roundly criticize militarism, nationalism, and violence in all forms, such that we might see in Michal and

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Weil herself claimed to be a pacifist in her youth, though she expresses regretfully appreciating the necessity of violence during the war; in a short story, she lambasts the systemic racism confronting African-Americans; in a 1982 interview she describes anti-war sentiments ("Those wars of recent times are terrible because they show that issues can be solved with wars, whether it be the Falklands or Israel") and speaks of her fear of nationalism in all guises in a 1982 interview ("Und jeder Nationalismus, auch der israelishe, macht mir Angst") (Weil *Aftershocks;* Koelbl 256; Spoor 40).

[28] Lorenz's analysis pushes the controversial implications of Weil's novel the furthest, arguing that in *The Bride Price* Judaism itself constitutes the birthplace of current violence. "Ultimately Weil's narrative analysis leads to the conclusion that the patriarchal structures of Judaism contain the roots of imperialism and genocide. . . . To express it more pointedly, in the context of Weil's novel, the much-debated *Sonderweg* leading to Nazism, rather than beginning in nineteenth-century German, started among Jews at the time of David" (284). Lorenz implies that Weil's novel presents a progression from David to Nazism; I rather see Weil's novel, in concert with its stylistic probing, as presenting a series of possible resonances without staging any particular allegory. The novel has also been read productively as reflecting Weil's difficult relationship to Germany through Michal's difficult relationship to David (see Mattson 165-6): "Weil's love hate relationship with Germany resonates broadly with Michal's love/hate relationship with David. The narrator's identification with the great names and masterpieces of German culture, through which she finds a link to classical antiquity, bind her to a history that was also responsible for the destruction of life as she had known it. . . . Similarly, Michal loves and is bound to a man who ultimately ravages her life and robs her of many people she loved: Absalom, Palthi, and in many ways, David himself" (166). Mattson goes on to show the ways in which certain analogies eventually break down, and to agree with Uwe Meier, "who warns us against trying to pin specific labels on the characters in Weil's biblical narrative" (166; Meier *Neinsagen* 300).

Grete's description not an origin story for male violence, but a mournful reflection on its continuous, ever-present nature.

Narrative Views

Michal's life story, then, represents another side of the patriarchal coin. In this version, as signaled by the evocation of the "hundred weeping women," which problematizes the famous story of David's heroic feat by presenting a perspective from the female, and vanquished, side, Weil shows readers an alternative version of events. The novel draws Michal into much of the action surrounding David, in a manner not unusual in biblical novels narrated by minor characters. So, for example, it is Michal who in fact proposes the initial plan to bring Uriah back from war to sleep with his wife, somehow bound by her loyalty to David to protect the life of Bathsheba, though tortured by David's blind passion for her; it is Michal who speaks to David on behalf of Tamar and attempts to discourage David from sending Amnon to his vulnerable sister, and Michal we see vocally lamenting the tragic consequences of Amnon's rape. Michal is present in the background for the key events of David's career as we know it, both attempting to affect and affected by the story.

But this version of Michal is not simply a means of seeing *David* differently, as is sometimes the case in biblical rewritings; rather than simply use Michal to point out the problems in the violent male order, Weil's novel supplies a counter-narration drawn from this woman's particular, circumscribed existence.[29] Though Michal speaks with David at important

[29] In parallel to the work of feminist biblical critics, contemporary writers have explored the perspective of minor characters and of biblical women in fiction. Usually, these perspectives function to 'fill in the gaps' of biblical narrative from an alternate viewpoint. Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent* is perhaps the most famous example of this technique, geared at a wide popular audience. Many David-fictions are narrated by minor characters apparently in order to flesh out the ambiguous gaps in David himself.

junctures and often attempts to influence events, readers experience her understanding of the story as constrained by her position in the palace. She gives us a small, quiet side of the dramatic events: as she puts it on one public occasion, "Naturally, we women remained at home and had the servants tell us about the anointing and coronation of David" (91). The episode in which Shimei curses David and calls him a "man of blood," for example, is brilliantly torqued to present Michal's personal perspective. In the biblical version of 2 Samuel 16, David is surrounded by his military might, and famously lets the frenzied man walk free—perhaps as a sign of his guilt or weariness.[30] Weil frames the episode immediately from Michal's perspective (while on the journey she rejoices to see the desert again) and retains only the Saul-centric thrust of Shimei's insult, reducing it to one line: "I am Shimei, one of the family of King Saul. Whom that one, there, has done out of his throne" (159). Furthermore, Weil renders the military-political event ordinary and personal: "A small stone hits me on the left hand, which begins to swell immediately, becomes blue, and hurts, David and Bathsheba are not hit. And so I, the daughter of Saul, am the only one who gets hurt" (159). In brief but concrete detail, Michal describes a stinging reminder of her own secondary status, inflicted on her body. Michal's alternative perspective here is painfully present. That the pebble also recalls the famous stone that killed Goliath merely reinforces the distinction between David's national history in the biblical narrative and Michal's personal version.

Indeed, though Michal intuits or is present for some part of many of the David Story highlights, her story counters the action-filled, event-heavy forward thrust of the David Story itself. This quiet version of the narrative allows a female space to emerge in the interstices of the

[30] As Michal interprets it, David's calmness is instead a sign of his "influence over others, his superiority and his gift of being victorious. Probably it is his belief in Jahwe that gives him the strength to bear every adversity with such composure" (160).

military and political accounts, a space of waiting and talking complemented by Michal's remembrance of the womanly solidarity of the palace. Michal describes an environment of tenuously-shared solitude. She feels close to her young female maids, and "harbor[s] maternal feelings for Abishag the Shunammite, the beautiful and unhappy maiden whom Bathsheba put into David's bed to warm the old man;" she attempts to befriend Maacha, the mother of Absalom and Tamar, but only remains distant from the sad, vibrant spirit and close to her children (40), and with Abigail who she calls "my unexpected, my late joy," she develops a deep relationship (95). In a powerful moment of attempted female resistance to the violent masculine order held by 'heroic' David and those like him, Michal and Abigail together plead with David in an attempt to dissuade him from murdering Saul's descendants: against David's large-scale, spiritual arguments ("Jahwe has proclaimed to me. . . . I must do it, I must save my people") (110-111). Michal and Abigail argue from the personal, from the perspective of the women and their children who will be killed, the sons of Merab, Michal's sister, and Saul's concubine Rizpah.

Though Michal does treat many of the events readers know from the book of Samuel at some point or another, the novel offers no complete rendition of events or a conclusive reckoning. Michal's monologue does not move chronologically through the events of David's career, but instead presents stories and vignettes associatively, often focusing on a scene or a place rather than an action. The episode in which Michal witnesses her friend Abigail's death gives a sense of the alternative mood and style of the woman's quarters. It is a quiet scene:

> One day around noontime I go to her, she who is always up is lying on her bed, clad in a bright red garment. Smiles when she sees me, but the smile disappears again immediately. . . . I stay sitting beside her, hold her hand. We both remain silent. . . . I bring her the juice of pressed grapes. I know that she likes it. She sits up quickly, reaches eagerly for the cup that I hold out to her. (112)

The vignette is characterized, like Weil's prose in general, by small gestures and movements and simple constative phrases, a matter-of-fact style. After Abigail's death, David's cold, calm and elegant words jar with the gentle intimacy and actions of the two women: David pronounces: *"He, the Eternal One, has deprived us of a person, in his great goodness he will send another one to us"* (112). Weil contrasts David's savvy, complacent speech (here invented but highly reminiscent of his famous speeches in the biblical account) with Michal's unspoken anguish. Her restrained inner emotional outburst is transformed simply into tears: "Not to me, I want to shriek, but I do not get out a single word. I collapse, sobbing" (112-113). Here Weil juxtaposes David's conduct and speech, the pomp and heroism of his story, with an alternate narration of this feminine space, highlighting the contrast between David's speech (and the canonical biblical text that usually presents it) and Michal's personal experience. (112-113).

By interweaving the narrative of Michal with Grete's perspective, furthermore, the novel proposes a different kind of biblical writing, a doubled-witnessing alternative to the temporality and the masculine force of the "chronicle.[31]" Rather than drawing together the victories and triumph of wars and the establishment of states or kingdoms, the novel centers around concomitant experiences of female suffering, in which "epistemological decorum" is sacrificed in the service of proposed links between the two women, "the ancient" and "the late-born" (69, 124). The novel does not give a straightforward, chronological rendition of Michal's life or Grete's, but instead constructs a sense of cross-temporal solidarity through narrative contiguity.

[31] Susanne Baackmann writes of Weil's Antigone novel as part of a contemporary German literary movement challenging male historiography: "By inverting and decentering gestures and tropes of well-known myths, and especially the imaginations of male heroes, women authors challenge the patterns and strategies of patriarchal historiography" ("Battle" 95)

Though Grete never claims total affinity with Michal, the women participate in the shared suffering experienced in traumas of war and violence, and both women are in many senses either outsiders or 'in between'—Michal as a Saulide in David's court, Grete as a persecuted exile in Amsterdam, and later as a German-Jewish writer in Germany. The relationship between the two women is forged through Grete's references to Michal, but primarily through the alternating chapters of the novel's structure. Like a self-conscious feminist biblical scholar aware of her own perspective, Grete at times writes about writing about Michal, at one point going so far as to comment that "She, Michal, was the vessel into which I could pour my thoughts, my wishes, and that which seemed reasonable to me and she was a good vessel for me. For that may she be thanked across all time" (129).[32]

This exegetical strategy bleeds into an experimental structure and style, in which Michal's voice seems to prompt Grete's writing, and vice versa. In one of many moments of evoked parallels, a scene in which childless Michal speaks of her bond with young Absalom ("He snuggled up to me and called me "my little mother. . . . He was not my child, but I forgot that he was not," (123)) seems to instigate Grete's new chapter, which follows and which opens by describing memories of mothers and children, a childless Grete who "can never see a small child holding its mother's hand and her tender, protective looks without remembering with almost physical pain the mothers who, on the ramp of Auschwitz or some other camp, had their children torn from their arms and smashed against a wall or shot in front of their very eyes" (124). Elsewhere, Weil juxtaposes Grete's memories of exile and her husband's deportation with Michal's description of David abandoning her to escape Saul's soldiers ("to have to flee, away

[32] "And Michal, my heroine? What about her? No one could be occupied so intensively with a person without becoming fond of her" (128).

from home, from everything that is familiar and habitual;" Michal's horror at Saul's massacre of the priest of Nob prompts Grete's reflection on her own persecution as a Jew (34-35)). In the child Abiathar whom she hides, described in such modern, colloquial images (". . . before me stands an unfamiliar, teenage boy in a shirt that has been spattered over and over with blood. His thin face is wet with tears") it is impossible not to see a survivor of a later holocaust, and the chapter ends by summarizing the massacre: "Nob was leveled after the murder, even the women and children had been struck down" (48, 50). Directly afterward, Grete reflects on her Jewish interpellation: "As a Jew I had been persecuted, as a Jew, Waiki, my beloved, my husband, had been murdered" (51).

The links never serve to equate the two women, but instead each seems to conjure up the other. Michal's story offers an alternate means of understanding the biblical narrative through a woman's perspective, and in scenes and reflection, rather than stately words and famous acts. In a style reminiscent of the *Neue Subjectivität*, Grete too drifts between subjects through association, moving, for example, from the story of Michal she has been contemplating and writing about, to her illness, and her past in the war. In the context of the *Historikerstreit* in particular, Weil's novel proposes a subjective, but also an incomplete and imperfect, drifting history.

At times, the chapters recall each other even more tenuously only through a type of scene or mood, particularly that of quiet, solitary reflection, a daily experience Michal and Grete share. In contrast to the "tacit aura of objectivity, historicity, and 'epistemological decorum'" of the traditional biblical scholar, Grete and Michal "assert themselves as subject" (Sherwood 7). Each new chapter begins either with the lilting "I, Grete," or "I, Michal," calm re-confirmations of identity in face of the searching that goes on within each narrative. Sometimes these self-

invocations are accompanied by further description: "I, Grete, the late-born," or "I, old Michal ancient Michal" (51, 69). Though the designations separate the two woman, the repetition both links the two and reminds readers of the individual perspectives framing these stories.

Perhaps most strikingly, the contingent specificity of these women's narratives is emphasized by the repeated focus each narrator gives to the setting of her monologue—her visual perspective. Just as Grete sought Michal's "view" from Mount Gilboa, Grete and Michal both draw attention to their particular placement, the personal, contained place from which Grete writes and Michal speaks. Here again the perspective of a nation or a country is countered by the perspective of a woman in a "landscape." Often both narrators open their monologues not with an event but with a description of the space and feeling of speaking or writing which leads toward a more specific thought or account. Michal tells: "In order to restrain my fear, I sit in the shade of the olive tree, watch the play of colors in the glittering green and silver leaves moving in the wind, and tell my story to myself" (8). Later, she writes,

> I, Michal, an old woman in Solomon's palace, shivering in the shade of the olive tree and yet knowing that, without this shade, I would not be able to stand it in the glaring sunlight. . . . Heat is something for young people. For hours I could sit in the sun's rays. . . . Indeed, when David had not yet been away for long, I sat on the flat roof of my house in the sun for many hours and days and thought about the world, about myself, and my solitary life (59).

Michal drifts between temporalities and themes—youth and old age, present situation and the past times—by linking the present space of telling to a place in which she reflected on herself as a young woman. Grete, too, often enters into her narrative through a description of her own present life and even the moment of writing. One scene at her desk exemplifies the reliance on vignettes of present placement to conjure other thoughts: "I am sitting at my desk in my pretty study. Have some pieces of metal sculpture by my sculptor friends in front of me and am looking

at the filled bookcases alongside that signal security. In the window between the shelves stands a pot with bright pink azaleas and a vase with long-stemmed pink roses" (57). The frame of security, a cloister of relationships and laden bookcases opens onto a window filled with pink life; only with this sense of personal perspective secured do Grete's thoughts seem to arise. In contrast to the biblical narrative of David the Hero (or biblical scholarship, or German history-writing) which elides the writing context of a presumed objective male perspective, Michal and Grete's descriptions ostentatiously mark their new version and its particular views, and this grounding seems to allow thoughts and reflections to emerge.

The moment in which Grete sits thinking at her writing table as she tries to write about David and Michal underscores the sense of an alternate, personal, probing reading of the Biblical story and the German past the novel brings about. The passage is exemplary of the kind of fluid movement of the novel's prose, which here glides easily from Grete's reflections on her past, thoughts about her present, to musings on her identity and that of her heroine. She first thinks of her stroke, and wonders at the reasons for her illness: "Was it my ever-present feeling of guilt that I survived? Was it because I made the pain of persecution and sorrow over Waiki [Edgar Weil] the theme of my writing? My knowing about Auschwitz and that I constantly dragged this knowledge around with me?" (58). The idea of sickness brought on through close return with traumatic memories also serves, particularly in the work of an author whose writings about the war had only recently begun to be accepted by a public apparently newly willing to read about the past,[33] as a subtle dig to those who felt Weil wrote too much about the war. Grete questions—ought I to have spent so much time, recording? Her thoughts pivot from what she writes about and knows too fully, to that which she knows, perhaps, not enough "Do my figures

[33] See Bos 60-70 for discussion of Weil's reception in Germany in her later life.

[Michal and David] hold it against me, that I, who know so little about the Bible, have undertaken to write about them?" (57). Do her German-Jewish "roots" make her authorized, alternately, to write about *these* things? Grete's words do not establish a new version of the story to supersede and solve the old; she does not have the right 'credentials.' Not only does she add her personal memories to a record of witnessing, however, but she has opened a double-witness dialogue with the past. She concludes with renewed purpose: despite the death and age that threaten: she will "recognize the uncertain, accept, be alert, be honest, go on writing" (57).

Grete speaks of Michal as a "vessel," into which she could "pour her thoughts" a notion that might imply Grete's perfunctory use of Michal as a secondary narrator (129). Yet this pouring is by no means all. Weil's Grete and her imagined Michal together destabilize the authorized version of David's story: 'trying to figure out David' ostensibly frames the novel, but the novel's sleight of hand renders David secondary. His battles, his power—the version of the "chroniclers and historians" —is secondary to an evocation of these *women*'s dialogue. Rather than simply presenting a new version of the same chronicle, the novel presents an encounter, and an antipatriarchal evocation of a female perspective and voice. Furthermore, the novel draws on the David's Story's status as a national narrative but reads this narrative critically as a representation of masculine histories of violence and war—and simultaneously mines it for a fragmented, tentatively felt-out alternate story. Just as in Ben-Gurion's model, the times are drawn together—the landscapes recall one another—but Weil reasserts a non-unitary conclusion. The evocation of the biblical women's world, the cross-temporal links between women, and the reliance on non-linear descriptions of the past through the frame of particular present voices, present the reader with an alternative way of perceiving History with a capital H, whether the history of the Bible, or perhaps of modern Europe. For a retelling drawn from a story of a hero's

rise and his conquest, this narrative built around small vignettes and women's speech is provocative. The novel does not propose a unitary new history, but it does offer a highly individual, alternative way of engaging with the past drawn from a deep relationship with an "origin story;" though its traditional pre-eminence is perhaps dislodged, the story's effect as an interlocutor for the contemporary remains potent.

Conclusion: Figure and Text

I'd like to return to the scenes of Bible reading, or perhaps more properly, scenes of *poring* that crop up again and again when these writers retell David. In chapter one, I briefly described a section in Carlo Coccioli's journalistic work *Le tourment de Dieu* in which Coccioli recalls his decision to write a David novel, tells of his reading the Louis Segond Bible for the first time, and lists some of his own notes on the biblical narrative. I believe it is worth returning to this passage again to concentrate on the way in which Coccioli draws together the figure, the text, and the re-reader or re-writer in his description.

> I couldn't say when—on what date exactly—I began to think of the possibility of writing a book, a novel, on David. I couldn't say either why—for what precise reason—I began to think, one day, that David could be the central character of a book, a novel. Questions that aren't without importance, but about which I ask myself in vain. It's vain, as well, to consult on the subject the fifty to sixty pages, written or typed, in French, in Italian, in Spanish, to which are consigned the notes that I began to take once I had admitted the idea of writing such a work. These notes don't contain any indication of an exact date nor a precise reason. . . .
>
> I see myself, during melancholy afternoons of early autumn, set up in the little room of a few meters square that I had had converted in an old storeroom when I bought the apartment (and had had it redone) the light turned on, the Louis Segond Bible on my right, and, in front of me, a pile of pink-papered pages: my notes. I have them now before me. "How to get to David," and, in big print, I read the names of Eli, Samuel, Saul. Then: "David" and here I see the names of his brothers, the portrait of adolescent David ("Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to" [*KJV* 1 Sam. 16.12]), the first attacks of Saul (David calmed him by playing the harp) and the Goliath episode. . . . A whole page is devoted to the probable etymology of the name "David" (fruit of research in different texts). In another note titled "Diverse Notes," I read that the Torah was found in the temple of Jerusalem in the time of King Josiah, that Thamar was the half-sister and not the sister of Amnon, that the "ephod" was a priestly garment, more precisely called "éphod bad. . . ." (*Tourment* 223-224)[1]

[1] "Je ne saurais dire quand—a quelle date exacte—je commençai à penser à la possibilité d'écrire un livre, un roman, sur David. Je ne saurais dire no non plus pourquoi—pour quelle raison précise—je commençi à penser, un jour, que David pourrait devenir le personnage central d'un livre, d'un roman. Questions qui ne sont pas sans importance, mais sur lesquelles je m'interroge en vain. C'est en vain, également, que je consulte à ce sujet les cinquante à soixante feuillets, manuscrits ou dactylographiés, en français, en italien, en espagnol, où sont consignes les notes que je me mis à prendre une fois que j'eus

Coccioli later explains the sense of spiritual awakening he felt upon reading Samuel's call narrative. Here, however, he already describes an evocative, intimate new relationship with the biblical text. In the paragraph that connects the two I have cited, readers are drawn in with him to the richly described "monastic" atmosphere in which he attends to the Bible, reading intensely for the first time ("Outside of some passages found at random or consulted by necessity, I had never read the Bible [En dehors de quelques passages trouvés au hazard ou consultéspar nécessité, je n'avais jamais lu la Bible]") (223). He recalls himself ("je me revois") overlooking the roofs of Florence, he sees himself lit by a heavy lampshade, reading the Louis Segond before him (223). Later, he recalls himself turning to Samuel in particular, "in melancholy afternoons of early autumn" while enclosed in a small room, and describes only the light, the Segond, and a pile of pink-papered notes. Readers move with Coccioli into an image of near-absolute textual absorption (223).

Coccioli describes the general contours of his work through David's centrality (he wanted to write a novel about David, with David as the central character), but the process of his reading

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admis l'idée d'écrire un tel ouvrage. Ces notes ne contiennent aucune indication sur la date exacte ni sur la raison précise. . . .

Je me revois, au cours de mélancoliques après-midi du début de l'automne, installé dans la petite pièce de quelques mètres carrés que j'avais fait aménager dans un ancien débarras lorsque j'avais acheté l'appartement (et l'avais fait remettre à neuf), la lumière allumée, la Bible de Louis Segond à ma droite, et, devant moi, un monceau de feuilles de papier rose : mes fiches. Je les ai à présent sous les yeux. "Comment en arriver à David", et, en grands caractères d'imprimerie, je lis les noms d'Eli, Samuel, Saül. Puis: "David:, et ici je vois les noms de ses frères, le portrait de David adolescent ("Or il était blond, avec de beaux yeux et une belle figure"), les premières crises de Saül (David le calmait en jouant de la harpe); et l'épisode de Goliath. . . . Une page entière est consacrée à l'étymologie probable du nom "David" (fruit de recherches dans différents textes). Dans une autre fiche intitulée "Notes Diverses", je lis que la Torah fut retrouvée dans le temple de Jérusalem au temps du roi Josias ; que Thamar était la belle-sœur et non la sœur d'Amnon; que l'"éphod" était un vêtement sacerdotal, plus exactement appelé "éphod bad". . . " (223).

described in his notes is marked by an attention not only to David but to all that surrounds him: other characters (he describes "the drama of Saul is that, very human one, of jealousy (and fear) [Le drame de Saül est celui, très humain, de la jalousie (et de la peur)]" (225)); other historical and religious details (the Torah, the Ephod). Coccioli's work is attentive, poring, and combines impressionistic responses and scholarly research. He responds to the famous character, but also to precise details of the text in which he appears. In this scene, moreover, we see the biblical text thickened, not only by interpretive detail, but by the dense filtering of Coccioli's prose, in which he describes his own position and thoughts, the narrative, and the scholarly apparatus he constructs around it as intermingled in memory.

In the six works examined in this project, I see authors reading the Bible with variations on the scene Coccioli narrates, always returning to different kinds of intensive, intent relationships to the text. They pore over it. Like Coccioli, these authors balance reverence and naiveté, personal context and subjective responses, and precise attention to detail, notes, and sources. Furthermore, theirs is a kind of Bible reading which admits to being drawn by David, deeply absorbed, even moved by his story—if particularly, perhaps, by the smaller, sometimes infinitely poignant episodes that appear within the larger accounts of a rise to power, to consolidation of a state, of a civil war. Theirs is a Bible reading, moreover, which is not satisfied by merely drawing an episode out of the whole—just "David and Goliath", for example—or considering any larger arc or structural frame (such as the pairing of David and Saul, the transition to monarchy, or even the structure of rise and decline of David's life) but which insists on the texture of the narration and the ways in which it forces pause.

Coccioli is unable to answer his own question about the reasons for which he turned to the idea of a David novel. In drawing together these six works, I have sought to ask similar

questions: Why return to the Bible? If it is no longer understood as a container for truth, either theological or historical, should it be remembered simply as a monumental work of art—ancient tales of great beauty, to be recalled and praised? Or should it simply be overturned, discarded, or at best parodied and deflated? Why, in particular, have these authors turned again to this figure and this ancient, canonic text? Why this obsession with David, why this obsession with his text—and what is gained by such a turn?

At a very basic level, it seems, Samuel is a particularly attractive text because of a tension between a famous character and the way he is written. David is famous and mighty by dint of all the things we know and remember about him, and within the text he is a dominant character, a king; but the text of Samuel also undoes David's stability, turns to other issues, presents other voices, and contains conflicting pieces, loose bits, and disarray. As I see it, the balance between David and his text figures a modern relationship to the Bible itself which these authors construct through their works, in which the Book of Books is still central, still powerful, but simultaneously undone, open, and ragged in ways which are sometimes melancholy but which render it newly, differently available for reuse.

This is a kind of Bible reading that dwells in the text as thickened and, as Ziva Ben-Porat writes of prototypical rewritings, that change the way we perceive the original (6). Or, as Borges described Kafka and Browning in a much-cited fragment, influence between an earlier and a later text can be both mutual and continuous: "Browning's poem *Fears and Scruples* is prophetic of the work of Kafka, but our reading of Kafka refines and perceptibly diverts our reading of the poem . . . the fact is that each writer creates his precursors. His labor modifies our conception of the past, as it necessarily modifies the future [El poema *Fears and Scruples* de Browning profetiza la obra de Kafka, pero nuestra lectura de Kafka afina y desvía sensiblemente nuestra

lectura del poema. . . . El hecho es que cada escritor crea a sus precursores. Su labor modifica nuestra concepción del pasado, como ha de modificar el futuro] (Borges 128).

After Coccioli, Heller, Faulkner, Heym, Kalisky and Weil, what kind of a text is Samuel? It is, perhaps, a chronicle of a divided man's development, a conflicted writer of his own life; it is a fraught testament to constructed histories and ideologies, a reminder of perspectives that continually haunt and threaten to intercede in even the most apparently powerful or dominant discourses; it is a container of roiling ambiguity, a story of a transition to statehood that is conflicted and doubled; it is a narrative of violence and male power that simultaneously houses the possibility of resistance from within it.

More than their own reflection back on the biblical object, however, these works propose questions and provide fictional responses only possible through their relationship with David and the text that contains his story. Is it possible to constitute a creative self philologically through reading and rewriting? How can one use editing and interpolation to imagine knowledge of the world? Can we respond to and process a conflicted media landscape by dragging together even more disparate texts and media? Can a non-programmatic, personal narrative of observation and individual experience exist alongside a nationalist, patriarchal chronicle?

There is a coiled tension in the Book of Samuel, by which the dominance of the text as Bible, David's fame, and David's narrative centrality and the boundaries of a canonized biblical edition maintain a taught but vibrating hold on the materials and complexity within. These writers draw from the energy of this spring.

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