

וְאֵנִי לֹא אֶחָד מֵעַלְמֵי  
הָעֵיזֵר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר  
יִשְׁבְּבוּהָ הָרַבָּה מִשְׁתַּ



*Journal of*  
HEBREW SCRIPTURES



VOLUME 22 | ARTICLE 4

EKATERINA E. KOZLOVA

*2 Samuel and the Architecture of Poetic Justice*

Articles in JHS are being indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, RAMBI, and BiBIL. Their abstracts appear in Religious and Theological Abstracts. The journal is archived by Library and Archives Canada and is accessible for consultation and research at the Electronic Collection site maintained by Library and Archives Canada.

ISSN 1203-1542 <http://www.jhsonline.org> and <http://purl.org/jhs>

## 2 SAMUEL AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF POETIC JUSTICE

EKATERINA E. KOZLOVA  
LONDON SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

Recent biblical and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) studies, variously focused, have begun to pay attention to the use of space in ancient societies and their literature.<sup>1</sup> Regarding ancient Israel

---

<sup>1</sup> Z. Herzog, *The City Gate in the Land of Israel and Her Neighbours* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Makhon le-Arkheologyah, Tel Aviv University, 1976) (Hebrew); V.H. Matthews, "Entrance Ways and Threshing Floors: Legally Significant Sites in the Ancient Near East," *Fides et Historia* 19 (1987), 25–40; J.W. Flanagan, "Ancient Perceptions of Space/Perceptions of Ancient Space," *Semeia* 87 (1999), 15–43; J.W. Flanagan, "Mapping the Biblical World: Perceptions of Space in Ancient Southwestern Asia," in J. Murray (ed.), *Mappa Mundi: Mapping Culture / Mapping the World* (Ontario: Humanities Research Group, 2001), 1–18; J.L. Berquist, "Critical Spatiality and the Construction of the Ancient World," in D.M. Gunn and P.M. McNutt (eds.), "*Imagining*" *Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of J.W. Flanagan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 14–29; V.H. Matthews, "Physical Space, Imagined Space, and 'Lived Space' in Ancient Israel," *BTB* 33 (2003), 12–20; C.V. Camp and J.L. Berquist (eds.), *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2007); idem, *Constructions of Space II: The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2008); N.N. May, "Gates and Their Functions in Mesopotamia and Ancient Israel," in N.N. May and U. Steinert (eds.), *The Fabric of Cities: Aspects of Urbanism, Urban Topography and Society in Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 77–123; J. Økland, J.C. de Vos, and K.J. Wenell (eds.), *Constructions of Space III: Biblical Spatiality and the Sacred* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2016); M. George (ed.), *Constructions of Space IV: Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2013); G. Prinsloo and C. Maier (eds.), *Constructions of Space V: Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2013); C. Walsh, "Testing Entry: The Social Functions of City-Gates in Biblical Memory," in D.V. Edelman and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *Memory and the City in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 43–59; C. Quine, "On Dying in a City-Gate: Implications in the Deaths of Eli, Abner, and Jezebel," *JSOT* 40 (2016), 399–413; P. Schreiner, "Space, Place and Biblical Studies: A Survey of Recent Research in Light of Developing Trends," *CBR* 14 (2016), 340–71; R. Payne, "'He Opened the Doors of the House of Yahweh': Door Imagery in the Hebrew Bible in Light of Its Ancient Near Eastern Context" (PhD Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017);

and the Hebrew Bible, for example, V.H. Matthews observes that one way to approach a biblical text is by assessing how it deploys space, place, and architectural structures. Drawing on the work of the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, among others, Matthews explains that by using the categories of physical, perceived, and lived space it is possible “to classify how space is associated with events, legal formulations, architectural design, political boundaries, and personal ambitions.”<sup>2</sup> He further notes that “mundane social practices take on different meanings, purposes, or intentions, . . . , depending on where in space and time they occur and who is performing the action in question. Thus the content or substance of the act. . . derives its meaning from (1) the rank, authority, or status of the person involved, and (2) the physical and ‘symbolic’ space (including time, place, occasion, or setting) involved.”<sup>3</sup> Addressing the interplay between place, ideology, and behaviour in modern contexts, T. Cresswell in turn notes that “[s]patial structures and the system of places provide historically contingent but durable ‘schemes of perception’ that have an ideological dimension. In particular, the place of an act is an active participant in our understanding of what is good, just, and appropriate.”<sup>4</sup> By being in space and acting in it in a “particular way the actor is inserted into a particular relation with [their society’s] ideology.”<sup>5</sup> Disrupting or transgressing spatially defined norms and structures, i.e., by behaving in ways unexpected for certain locales, the “transgressor” may subvert, critique, and resist these norms. In the process of “transgression” the “out-of-place” may bring the “in-place”, or the absence of it, into stark relief. Therefore, understanding notions of spatiality and transgression is important. Spatiality is a factor in defining transgression, and “transgression, conversely, provides valuable insights into the way places affect behaviour and ideology.”<sup>6</sup>

The so-called Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 9–20, 1 Kings 1–2) makes a good case study for the intersection of place, ideology, and behaviour as it abounds in references to locales and architectural elements used by royals and their aides to their advantage in matters of private and national interests.<sup>7</sup> In the broader textual context, these locales are interconnected forming a web of motifs which cumulatively build a telling “topography” of Israel’s early monarchy. Thus, in 2 Samuel 11, king David spots a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, from the roof of his palace.

---

D.A. Frese, *The City Gate in Ancient Israel and Her Neighbors: The Form, Function, and Symbolism of the Civic Forum in the Southern Levant* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); etc.

<sup>2</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> T. Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 (cited in Matthews, “Physical Space,” 12).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> For the pre-history of the book of Samuel, see J.M. Hutton, *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009). The focus of this discussion is on the text’s final form.

Towering over her physically and socially, he fancies her, sends for her, and rapes her (2 Sam 11:2–4). In 2 Samuel 16, Absalom, David’s son, re-enacts his father’s crime in a tent pitched on the same roof of the royal house (2 Sam 16:22; cf. 2 Sam 12:11–12). Entrance ways and city gates are likewise prominent features in the story. Thus, Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah, first finds himself sleeping at the entrance to the palace honouring, unlike David, a war-time protocol (2 Sam 11:9) and then is killed at the entrance of the city gate in a cover-up of David’s liaisons with his wife (2 Sam 11:23). Regarding the interplay of thresholds in the text, C. Walsh observes that Uriah’s “death outside the gate enables David’s entrance into Uriah’s home and the taking of his wife . . . but his killing at a gate, even the enemy’s gate, highlights his exclusion from his home city by his own king.”<sup>8</sup> References to city gates likewise punctuate Absalom’s revolt against David (2 Sam 15:1–4; 18:1–5; 18:24–32; 18:33–19:5; 19:6–9). Placing the two royal males in and around city gates, a site of socio-political significance, the text oscillates between two contenders for the throne indicating Israel’s perilous position. Thus, hinged on the city gate in the narrative, is Absalom’s change of status “from elder to usurper, from son to traitor, and from contender to corpse, slain by David’s (more) loyal army.”<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the mention of city gates in relation to David denotes the weakness of his leadership—“derelict in his duties as commander-in-chief” he must let the office of king take over his status of father. When the two clash, “Israel is at a precarious threshold.”<sup>10</sup>

Hence, elevated and public, secluded and clandestine, the varied locales in the Succession Narrative provide a structural support for its story line as well as a running commentary on the actions of its protagonists. Offering a space-and-place-sensitive reading of some aspects of David’s story, V.H. Matthews has noted that the “actions of the monarchy to identify [and use] icons, sacred space, monumental architecture, political boundaries, as well as an ideology justifying their rule demonstrate their knowledge of how space and power can be conjoined.”<sup>11</sup> Taking his and similarly oriented studies on board, this discussion will focus on two episodes in the Succession History, both of which feature individuals lamenting near entrance ways—in 2 Sam 13:1–20, Tamar, David’s daughter, laments on either side of the door to Amnon’s, her brother’s, private quarters, and in 2 Sam 18:33–19:4, David laments in a chamber over the city gate. Locating these scenes within a wider narrative space (i.e., the Absalom crisis [2 Samuel 15–19]) and focusing on the bolted door and the chambered gate in their respective episodes, this article will consider the role these structures play in the construction of David’s reign. More specifically, it will argue that together with

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, “Testing Entry,” 46.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. For more on Absalom’s use of the gate in 2 Sam 15:1–6, see S.C. Russell, *The King and the Land: A Geography of Royal Power in the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 68–83.

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, “Testing Entry,” 50.

<sup>11</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 18. More on spatial expressions of power, see Russell, *The King and the Land*.

their structural “actors” these episodes create a “topography” of lawlessness in David’s rule.

### **PARACLAUSITHYRON IN ANE SOURCES, CLASSICAL LITERATURE, AND THE HEBREW BIBLE**

In view of the locales accommodating laments in 2 Sam 13:1–20 and 2 Sam 18:33–19:4, and the interpersonal dynamics in 2 Sam 13:1–20, a few words are in order on an ancient genre known as *paraklausithyron*, “a lament beside a (closed) door”. The basic configuration of this trope consists of the lover, the beloved, and the barrier separating the two; usually, although not exclusively, the individual on the outside petitions the one on the inside, or the door itself, to be let in. This genre is found in ANE literature, particularly in Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources, and is richly attested to in Latin and Greek love poetry.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for example, in a Middle Babylonian text, the young goddess Ishtar stands inside her parents’ house speaking to Dumuzi on the outside, “Come in, shepherd, [Ištar’s lo]ver, spend the night here, shepherd, [Ištar’s lo]ver . . . At your entering, may the bolts rejoice over you, may the door be opened [for you] by itself!”<sup>13</sup> The Hebrew Bible has its own exemplars of *paraklausithyron*, the better-known of which is in the Song of Songs. In it, the male lover stands outside his beloved’s bedchamber pleading, “Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one . . .” (Song 5:2).<sup>14</sup> An intriguing variation on the trope is also Hosea 2, where in an extended marriage metaphor God, a spurned lover, declares concerning Israel, his unfaithful wife, that he will “allure” her into the wilderness to speak to her.<sup>15</sup> There, he hopes, she will respond as in the days of youth and he in turn will make the valley of Achor, a point of entry into the Promised land (?), a door of hope/לפתח תקוה (Hos 2:14–15).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> F.O. Copley, *Exclusus Amator: A Study in Latin Love Poetry* (New York: American Philological Association, 1956). For the clarification of terms related to the genre, see F. Cairns, “The Terms *komos* and *paraklausithyron*,” *GRBS* 60 (2020), 262–71. See further B.P. Gault, *Body as Landscape, Love as Intoxication: Conceptual Metaphors in the Song of Songs* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 76–80; N. Wasserman, “Talking to Doors’: *Paraklausithyron* in Akkadian Literature,” in A. Az-zoni, A. Kleinerman, D.A. Knight, and D.I. Owen (eds.), *From Mari to Jerusalem and Back: Assyriological and Biblical Studies in Honor of Jack Murad Sasson* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 305–18.

<sup>13</sup> Wasserman, “Talking to Doors,” 307.

<sup>14</sup> For the discussion of this scene in light of Egyptian love lyrics, see, among others, J.B. White, *A Study of the Language of Love in the Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Poetry* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); M.V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 282–83; J.C. Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2005), 49, 193; Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 225–37.

<sup>15</sup> “I am about to seduce her . . .”. B. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 210.

<sup>16</sup> For God’s aggression and redemptive efforts in this text, see B.P.

In view of the texts to be discussed below, it is note-worthy that ancient Greek and Latin poetry often linked this topos to a procession performed by intoxicated youngsters. Hence, in its classical manifestation this genre contained an element of violence perpetrated by men in a state of inebriation. Thus, for example, reversing the trope by giving voice to the door, Propertius reads, “. . . I am now wounded by the night-time brawls of drunks, and often I protest, beaten by unworthy hands, and I’m never without disgusting wreaths hanging all over me or torches lying about, signs of one who’s been locked out.” (*Prop* 1.16:1–8).<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, the Hebrew Bible contains texts that showcase a form of *paraklausithyron* with elements of overt violence, force, and coercion. Genesis 19, for example, holds an account centred around Lot and his guests fighting off sexual advances of a Sodomite mob made through the door of Lot’s house. Judges 19 preserves a similar tale of violence, this time perpetrated by the Gibeonites against an unnamed concubine. In a course of negotiations carried out by men through and by the door, the woman finds herself thrown outside and gang raped. When the ordeal is over, she returns to her husband falling and expiring in the doorway, with her hands on the threshold (*Jdg* 19:26–27). V.H. Matthews explains that the threshold at this juncture is not a neutral textual detail; it is in fact of legal significance, that is, it indicates the concubine’s “futile attempt to elicit justice from the community and her master.”<sup>18</sup> Prominently featuring doors (Genesis 19 [x5]; Judges 19 [x4]), these texts represent some of the darkest versions of *paraklausithyron* in the Bible, which, incidentally, outnumber their positive counterparts.

As shown by V.H. Matthews, the way individuals use and control “space may empower [them], granting them identity, agency, and expanded social or political status.”<sup>19</sup> As one of the dark samples of *paraklausithyron* in the Hebrew Bible, 2 Sam 13:1–20 features a piece of architecture, a bolted door, instrumental in stripping one of its actors of their identity and demoting them socially. In the Succession Narrative, this episode is programmatic for 2 Samuel 15–19: not only do the events transpired in 2 Sam 13:1–20 result in a civil war related in 2 Samuel 15–19, but 2 Sam 13:1–20 also introduces themes and motifs in the depiction of this crisis. The bolted door in 2 Samuel 13 is one of the elements signalling violence in its immediate narrative space as well as portending aggression in the subsequent presentation of the national calamity. In the broader web of Samuel’s spatial details, it is also tied with the chamber above the city gate in 2 Samuel 19. Constructing and deconstructing the portraits of royal males, these spatial aspects are among the key factors in Samuel’s construction of Israel’s emerging monarchy.

---

Gault, “Avenging Husband and Redeeming Lover? Opposing Portraits of God in Hosea,” *JETS* 60 (2017), 489–509.

<sup>17</sup> C. Nappa, “Elegy on the Threshold: Generic Self-Consciousness in Propertius 1.16,” *CW* 101 (2007), 57–73 (61–63).

<sup>18</sup> Matthews, “Entrance Ways,” 34.

<sup>19</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 18.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF VIOLENCE: THE BOLTED DOOR IN 2 SAMUEL 13

In 2 Samuel 13, Amnon, David's firstborn, rapes Tamar, his half-sister. The ruse to entrap the princess appears to have been orchestrated by Absalom, Tamar's power-hungry full brother, through Jonadab, Amnon's confidant.<sup>20</sup> The text presents this heinous crime as an augmented version of David's rape of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, casting the deeds of both men as deserving of capital punishment.<sup>21</sup> Of interest here is that following the assault, Tamar finds herself unceremoniously thrown out of her assailant's bedchamber. The narrative twice references the door guarding Amnon's private quarters—first, Amnon tells his servant, “Get this one out of my sight and bolt the door after her”/וּנְעַל הַדֶּלֶת אַחֲרֶיהָ, and then the servant executes the order by casting the princess out and locking the door behind her (2 Sam 13:17–18). Although the scene contains all the usual elements of *paraklausithyron*, their configuration is complex creating, within a single story, a few variations on the traditional trope.<sup>22</sup> Regarding Amnon's order to his aide, C. Conroy explains that the act of locking Tamar out highlights “the finality of [her] dismissal.”<sup>23</sup> Reading the episode with Genesis 19, A. Kalmanofsky notes that if the locked door of Lot's house signals safety and belonging for his daughters, the bolted door in 2 Samuel 13 highlights Tamar's vulnerability and that in her ruined state she does not belong anywhere.<sup>24</sup> Linking the story to Egyptian love poetry

<sup>20</sup> A.E. Hill, “A Jonadab Connection in the Absalom Conspiracy?” *JETS* 30 (1987), 387–90. A.E. Hill demonstrates that Absalom and Jonadab worked together as co-conspirators to eliminate Amnon as the main contender for Israel's throne. Absalom's awareness of the specifics of Tamar's rape is seen in 2 Sam 13:20.

<sup>21</sup> R.G. Smith, *The Fate of Justice and Righteousness during David's Reign: Narrative Ethics and Rereading the Court History according to 2 Samuel 8:15–20:26* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 148–49; cf. R. Adelman, “The Rape of Tamar as a Prefiguration for the Fate of Fair Zion,” *JFSR* 37 (2021), 87–102 (92). F.M. Yamada in turn analysed 2 Sam 13:1–20 alongside other rape narratives, i.e., Genesis 34, Judges 19: F.M. Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008). On the relationship between David and his sons, Amnon and Absalom, see W. Dietrich, “David, Amnon und Absalom (2 Samuel 13): Literarische, textliche und historische Erwägungen zu den ambivalenten Beziehungen eines Vaters zu seinen Söhnen,” *Textus* 23 (2007), 115–43. For a view that the Bathsheba story was politically advantageous to David, see R. Gilmour, “Sex Scandal and the Politics of David's Throne,” *JBL* 141 (2022), 83–104.

<sup>22</sup> For discussions of 2 Sam 13:1–20 alongside Egyptian love poetry, see C. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 27 (see also sources cited there); P.K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 320–21; Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 310–21.

<sup>23</sup> Conroy, *Absalom*, 33.

<sup>24</sup> A. Kalmanofsky, *Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 109.

with all the features of *paraklausithyron*, R. Payne in turn asserts that 2 Samuel 13 is a distortion of the ancient genre.<sup>25</sup> For him, the door imagery enables the author to present Amnon as “especially perverse and deserving of punishment.”<sup>26</sup> Signalling the irrevocability of the crime against an Israelite virgin, the barred-door detail can be shown to add a further, ironic and tragic dimension to it. Thus, utilizing the same lexeme נעל/“to lock”, Song 4:12 describes the beloved, often referred to as “sister”, and her chastity as a “locked garden” (x2) and a “sealed spring”/גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול מעין חתום.<sup>27</sup> Relatedly, like the beloved in the Song, Tamar is called a “sister” (2 Sam 13:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 20, 22) and is profiled as a בתולה/“virgin” (2 Sam 13:2, 18). Song 8:9 supplies another ironic intertext. In it, a group of siblings, most likely brothers, strategize to reward their sister’s purity metaphorizing her sexuality by means of architectural structures—“If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.”<sup>28</sup> Surrounded by brothers in 2 Samuel 13—Amnon (a half-brother), Jonadab (a cousin), and Absalom (a full brother)—Tamar, a royal virgin, is brutalized by them and then a door is bolted behind her.

Of further interest for the discussion at hand is that hinged on the barred-door element in 2 Samuel 13 are Tamar’s two “speeches”, or two “laments”. While on the inside, Tamar petitions with words; while on the outside, she uses ritual gestures; and both “speeches” are of significance. Separating these elocutionary acts of the princess, the barred door itself stands as a pregnant rhetorical symbol, and thus is “vocal” as well. Regarding Tamar’s first speech, wherein she reasons with Amnon before and after the rape (2 Sam 13:12–13, 16), it is noteworthy that the Succession Narrative as a whole holds details akin to those found in Israel’s sapiential traditions; so much so that some older studies sought to classify it as reflecting the genre of wisdom.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the chapter at hand contains lexemes

<sup>25</sup> Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 310–21.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 322. Alter observes that Amnon locks the door against Tamar as if she is “some insatiable, clinging thing against which he had to set up a barricade.” R. Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 270.

<sup>27</sup> Based on the use of גל/גל in rabbinic literature, Y. Eidelkind argues that גל נעול should be viewed as a “locked door”. Y. Eidelkind, “Two Notes on Song 4:12,” L.E. Kogan, N. Koslova, S. Loesov, and S. Tishchenko (eds.), *Babel und Bibel 3: Annual of Ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament and Semitic Studies* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 217–236 (222–24).

<sup>28</sup> B. Gault considers Song 8:8–10 in light of its ANE background, arguing that “wall” and “door” are synonymous terms representing the girl’s sexual purity. Gault, *Body as Landscape*, 73–87; cf. R. Lansing Hicks, “The Door of Love,” in J.H. Marks and R.M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East* (Suilford: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987), 153–58.

<sup>29</sup> On the Succession Narrative representing two genres, “wisdom” and a “political novel”, see R.N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9–20; I Kings 1 and 2* (Naperville: A.R. Allenson, 1968),



traditionally, although not exclusively, associated with wisdom literature—e.g., “wise”, “fool”, “folly”. Additionally, Tamar, the only female character in 2 Sam 13:1–20, is surrounded by males concerned with, and promoting the interests of, Amnon’s libido. This in turn echoes the book of Proverbs, which, among other things, serves as a handbook for young men on how to control their desire. Given the wisdom-like details figured in the chapter, and the prominence accorded to the door in Amnon’s private quarters, Tamar’s spatial positioning, i.e., near a door, coupled with her wisdom-esque rhetoric anticipates the iconic image of Lady Wisdom from Proverbs.<sup>30</sup> Located at key entrance ways herself (e.g., Prov 1:21; cf. Prov 9:3), she blesses those who listen, watch, and wait beside her doorways and the posts of her gates/אשרי אדם שמע לי לשקד על־דלתתי יום יום לשמר מזווח פתחי (Prov 8:34; cf. Prov 9:13–18). Additionally, not unlike Lady Wisdom who is paired up with Dame Folly, Tamar has her own counterpart, i.e., Jonadab, who is profiled as “very wise”/חכם מאד (2 Sam 13:3), yet advocates “folly”/נבלה (2 Sam 13:12).<sup>31</sup>

---

56–95. For a survey of the debate about wisdom influence in the Succession Narrative, see, among others, G. Keys, *The Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the “Succession Narrative”* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 171–74. See also, S. Weeks who argues that as a genre “narrative wisdom” did not exist in ancient Israel. S. Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 92–109. On the Succession Narrative as a royal apology, see A. Knapp, *Royal Apologetic in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015). On this material as “satire”, see V. Miller, *A King and a Fool? The Succession Narrative as a Satire* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019). On David’s story as “an unapologetic apology”, see B.J.M. Johnson, “An Unapologetic Apology: The David Story as a Complex Response to Monarchy,” in S. Kipfer, W. Dietrich, R. Hunziker-Rodewald, T. Naumann, and J. Klein (eds.), *The Book of Samuel and Its Response to Monarchy* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2021), 225–42. Although as a genre “wisdom literature” has been recently reassessed, this discussion uses the term “wisdom” or “wisdom-esque” for convenience, to point out thematic and linguistic affinities between 2 Samuel 13 and the book of Proverbs.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P. Tribble’s discussion of Tamar as an embodiment of wisdom, albeit in light of a different selection of texts. P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 37–63. For Tamar’s rape foreshadowing the fate of Zion, see Adelman, “The Rape of Tamar,” 87–102.

<sup>31</sup> Jonadab may have tailored his advice to Amnon in accordance with Egyptian love poetry. Hill, “A Jonadab Connection,” 387–90. Interestingly, the women designated as “wise” in 2 Samuel (the Tekoite, the woman from Abel Beth Maakah) advocate the well-being of God’s people (2 Sam 14:16; 20:19). By contrast, the men said to be “wise” or in an advisory role (Jonadab, Ahithophel) advocate sexual violence (2 Sam 13:3–5; 16:21). Also, David is said to possess “the wisdom of the angel of God” (2 Sam 14:20), yet he commits, and covers up, sex crimes (2 Samuel 11; 13). Furthermore, Ahithophel’s advice is said to be as good as God’s (2 Sam 16:23), and God in turn, through Nathan, promises David that his wives will be violated by his kin (2 Sam 12:11–12). Hence, 2 Samuel equates wisdom dispensed by men with sex crimes exposing dark aspects of the male psyche (human and divine). Cf. *Middle Assyrian Laws* (MAL) §55, according to which, if a single girl is raped,

In view of Amnon's crime, and that his love for Tamar gave way to hate/loathing (cf. Ezek 23:17, 22, 28), Lady Wisdom's warning in Proverbs 8 is also of relevance—"He who sins against me *injures* himself [cf. 2 Sam 13:13, 28–29]; all those who *hate* me *love* death [cf. 2 Sam 13:15, 28–29]" (Prov 8:36; cf. Prov 1:32–33).<sup>32</sup> Cumulatively, these intertexts link Tamar to the figuration of wisdom as a woman in the book of Proverbs. Considered alongside ancient samples of *paraklausithyron*, 2 Samuel 13 is one of the heinous versions of the *topos*; read alongside the *paraklausithyron* in Proverbs 8, 2 Samuel 13 is a *fatal* failure of its ideal.<sup>33</sup> If spatial structures can be used to encode or communicate ideas of civility, decorum, and order, they can likewise form and channel antithetical categories, such as aberration, impropriety, and folly.<sup>34</sup> Having committed a נבלה/"an outrage/a folly" in relation to Tamar and having shut the door on her pleas to rectify the deed, Amnon has crossed a boundary turning the "out-of-place" into the "in-place".<sup>35</sup> Together with his father (2 Sam 11:2–4) and brother (2 Sam 16:21–22), he made predation a commonplace. Thus, accommodating high-ranking offenders and their crimes, the *private* and *common/visible* areas of royal residences (2 Sam 11:2–4; 13:7–18; 16:21–22), form, as a merism, a comprehensive "topography" of normalized and routinized violence.

Another "elocutionary" act delivered by Tamar is found on the outer side of the bolted door—that is, she "speaks" by means of solemn gestures, i.e., "Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went." (2 Sam 13:19).<sup>36</sup>

---

her father can punish the rapist by raping his wife.

<sup>32</sup> Also, not unlike Tamar, Lady Wisdom prepares a feast for those with no sense/understanding, and then pleads with them to leave their ways and walk in the way of insight (Prov 9:2–6; cf. 2 Sam 13:8–10). Prov 9:8 then states, "Do not rebuke mockers or they will *hate* you; rebuke the wise and they will *love* you." On the significance of food, and on Tamar herself as "food", see E. Brownsmith, "Getting Steamy in Amnon's Chamber: Philological and Metaphorical Observations on 2 Samuel 13," *V/T* (2021), 1–31.

<sup>33</sup> In ANE literature, to open the door to a lover was tantamount to formalizing marriage. Payne, "He Opened the Doors," 320. A.K. Gudme demonstrates how in some biblical narratives the door of the house may serve as "the dividing line between safety and danger and life and death." A.K. Gudme, "Inside-Outside: Domestic Living Space in Biblical Memory," in *Memory and the City*, 61–78 (75). Even though she does not discuss 2 Samuel 13, her observation applies to this text as well.

<sup>34</sup> Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 11–27.

<sup>35</sup> In the Hebrew Bible the term נבלה/"an outrage/a folly" encompasses various sexual indiscretions (Deut 22:13–21; Jer 29:23), including rape (Gen 37:4; Jdg 19:23; 20:6; cf. Isa 32:6). A. Phillips, "*Nebalah*—A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *V/T* 25 (1975), 237–42.

<sup>36</sup> Some note that Tamar's assault silences her, but J. Stiebert evaluates Tamar's mournful acts as "performative communication". J. Stiebert, *Rape Myths, the Bible, and #MeToo* (London: Routledge, 2020), 46. On the gradual move from speech to silence in Tamar's story, see

Regarding these acts, L. Quick asserts that they are “designed to remind men of their social obligations . . . Beyond merely expressing her humiliation and grief, these acts can be understood as a call to action. Just as the women in the Greek literary traditions bare their breasts purposefully as part of a plea, Tamar rips her clothes and exposes her body in order to petition her brother Absalom to act.”<sup>37</sup> Although insightful, Quick’s observation can be slightly adjusted. Considering that (1) 2 Sam 13:1–22 is saturated with references to David (2 Sam 13:1[x2], 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13, 18, 21), (2) every person behind the assault is related to him, and (3) David himself procured Tamar for Amnon (2 Sam 13:7),<sup>38</sup> Tamar’s manipulation of the garment worn by the daughters of the king was indeed a call to action; but aimed not at Absalom, but at her royal father.<sup>39</sup> Given David’s first-hand involvement in Tamar’s entrapment and in view of the laws on female virginity meant to be guarded by parents (Deut 22:13–21), Tamar’s ripping her tunic appeals to, and indicts, first and foremost, her *father*.<sup>40</sup> Since David ignores the crime giving Absalom a cause

---

R.S. Higgins, “He Would Not Hear Her Voice: From Skilled Speech to Silence in 2 Samuel 13:1–22,” *JFSR* 3 (2020), 25–42.

<sup>37</sup> L. Quick, *Dress, Adornment and the Body in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 78. *Contra* S. Olyan, who thinks that Tamar’s behaviour here has no petitionary purpose. S.M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 100–101.

<sup>38</sup> Note that in the Hebrew Bible, high-ranking rapists are said to send for their victims (2 Sam 11:4; 13:5–7; cf. Ezek 23:16, 40).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. S.M. Koenig’s statement that “Tamar’s act of tearing her garment was in part an act of protest against the monarchy and her royal status, as if to say that because the insignia of royalty meant nothing, she would destroy it.” S.M. Koenig, “Tamar and Tamar: Clothing as Deception and Defiance,” in A. Finitis (ed.), *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: ‘For All Her Household Are Clothed in Crimson’* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019), 87–108 (105). Cf. C. Bender’s discussion on how torn garments signify a person’s diminished status. C. Bender, *Die Sprache des Textilen. Untersuchungen zu Kleidung und Textilien im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 139–41. J. Stiebert in turn reads this gesture as Tamar’s re-enactment of her rape, i.e., “the tearing of her hymen.” Stiebert, *Rape Myths*, 73, n. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Deut 22:13–21 stipulates that if an unmarried girl is sexually active, she is taken “to the door of her father’s house”/פתח בית אביה/ for execution. “This is done to pinpoint the blame for the crime committed against the husband squarely at the father’s door (a place as legally significant for the father in this case as the gate is for the citizens of the town).” Matthews, “Entrance Ways,” 32; cf. C.B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: The Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and Deuteronomical Law* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 87–91; Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 116–17. For raping a single woman who is not engaged, the rapist pays 50 shekels to her *father* (Deut 22:28–29). See also A. Kunz-Lübcke, “Behind Closed Doors and Between the Lines of Deuteronomy: Tamar’s Rape in 2 Sam 13:1–22 as a Narrative Rereading of the Juridical Text Deut 22:13–29,” *ZABR* 19 (2013), 235–48. On David’s guilt in this episode, see also K. Peters, “Together in Guilt: David, Jonadab, and the Rape of Tamar,” *JSOT* 45 (2021), 309–19.

for an insurrection (2 Sam 13:20–21), Tamar’s ripping act also portends the ripping of David’s kingdom. Seen this way, Tamar’s gesture is reminiscent of Samuel’s earlier prophecy to Saul centred around his own torn robe, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you . . .” (1 Sam 15:27–28; cf. 1 Sam 28:17; 24:5–7). As such, it also anticipates Ahijah’s prophetic sign-act featuring a robe torn into twelve pieces signalling the cessation of Israel’s united monarchy (1 Kgs 11:29–30).<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, mirroring her act of tearing a garment, David and his aides will tear theirs, first when Absalom murders Amnon (2 Sam 13:31) and later when Absalom’s conspiracy gains momentum (2 Sam 15:32). Relatedly, Tamar’s covering her head with her hands (2 Sam 13:19) is echoed in David’s flight from Jerusalem, when he and his entourage all had their heads covered (2 Sam 15:30).<sup>42</sup> Finally, Tamar’s sprinkling dust on her head resonates with later, similar occurrences, namely, when Hushai, David’s counsellor, smears dust on his head (2 Sam 15:32), and when David himself is “showered” with curses, stones, and dirt by Shimei (2 Sam 16:13).

As suggested earlier, the barred door itself is a potent “vocal” symbol in the text. R. Payne, and others before him, has rightly linked 2 Sam 13:1–20 to ancient love poetry, which often featured an architectural obstacle separating lovers. Concluding his comparative analysis, Payne observes that in 2 Samuel 13, “the locked door symbolizes estrangement [between Amnon and Tamar], the inverse of the emotion portrayed uniformly in love lyrics.”<sup>43</sup> Of further pertinence, however, is that the barred-door detail is part of the wider context of royal crimes, the punishment for which—estrangement and fragmentation on a much larger scale—was prophesied by Nathan (2 Sam 12:11–12). Joining Nathan’s prediction and reinforcing Tamar’s elocutionary acts, the barred-door symbolism portends the breakdown of Israel’s social fabric. Since the events in 2 Samuel 13 lead to a civil war, it is of interest that the barred-door imagery is found in a well-attested ANE trope of hardship or adversity. In biblical and extrabiblical texts, doors in various conditions (open, locked, or dislodged) could and did represent crises and catastrophes. In some traditions, the barred-door symbolism appears on its own indicating the collapse and cessation of urban communities as, for example, in the description of the City of Chaos in Isa 24:10—“The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Kalmanofsky, *Dangerous Sisters*, 111; Adelman, “The Rape of Tamar,” 95. On “garment snipping” as a symbolic act, see Quick, *Dress, Adornment and the Body*, 36–39. Cf. M. Köhlmoos’ observation that garments rent by the messenger also hold communicative power, and as such, carry the message (1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; 15:32; etc.). M. Köhlmoos, “Tearing One’s Clothes and Rites of Mourning,” in C. Berner, M. Schäfer, M. Schott, S. Schulz, and M. Weingärtner (eds.), *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2019), 303–14 (305).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Isa 20:2–4, where being naked and unshod represents military defeat and exile (cf. 2 Sam 15:30, 32).

<sup>43</sup> Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 320.

house is barred.” (cf. Isa 24:12).<sup>44</sup> But some war and siege-related texts expand the barred-door imagery to include family members envisaged on the opposed sides of the partition. Thus, for example, a birth omen in the *Šumma izbu* series speaks of a national calamity as follows, “there will be bad times and the mother will bar her door against her daughter; there will be no (sense of) brotherhood; that land will disappear . . .” (I 50).<sup>45</sup> Used to depict extreme crises, i.e., war, siege, and famine, this augmented version of the *topos* stands for “the dissolution of the very foundations of society and the disintegration of the family framework”.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the barred-door detail in 2 Samuel 13 in the first instance signals the dissolution of ties between two siblings (sister and brother); equally, however, it also anticipates fragmentation within a more extended royal family (brother will be estranged from brother, son from father), which eventually will tear the whole kingdom apart.

Hence, the effects of the crime committed in 2 Samuel 13 will reverberate across a much wider narrative space. Linked to the material before and after it, 2 Samuel 13 emerges as a pivotal chapter, retrospectively and prospectively looking at David’s reign marked by corruption in all its varied forms. As previously noted, the bolted door in this chapter, and the lamentations around it, are thematically and linguistically tied to the chamber above the city gate in 2 Samuel 19. As the climax to Absalom’s *coup d’état*, which ends in a massacre of his men and his own death, the episode in 2 Samuel 19 features David mourning his son over the gate. As indicated earlier, “social practices take on different meanings, purposes, or intentions, . . . , depending on where in space and time they occur and who is performing the action in question.”<sup>47</sup> To understand the full implications of the grief scene in 2 Samuel 18–19, this discussion will now consider its “who”, “what”, and “where”.

### THE ARCHITECTURE OF POETIC JUSTICE: THE CHAMBER OVER THE GATE IN 2 SAMUEL 18–19

As David’s mourning for Absalom deviates from previous, fixed patterns of his grief (2 Sam 3:31–39; 12:15–17; 13:30–37),<sup>48</sup> some scholars believe that his display of emotion at this juncture

<sup>44</sup> For dislodged city doors representing crises and catastrophes, see Isa 45:1–2; Zech 11:1; Lam 2:8–9. *Ibid.*, 202–04.

<sup>45</sup> E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (Locust Valley: J.J. Augustin, 1970), 36.

<sup>46</sup> I. Eph’al, *The City Besieged: Siege and Its Manifestations in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 129–32 (130); Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 173–76. Cf. “the metaphor ‘Do not bar the doors of your life’ [that] compares the lives of the city’s inhabitants to a walled city. The metaphor asserts that choosing to bar the city’s doors against invaders was suicidal” (Payne, “He Opened the Doors,” 223).

<sup>47</sup> Matthews, “Physical Space,” 13.

<sup>48</sup> Z. Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice and Wept: David’s Mourning in the Second Book of Samuel* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2013), 233 (see also chapter 1, §2.2.1a).

is not *bona fide* but staged; it is nothing more than a politically motivated show.<sup>49</sup> Germane to the present discussion is that the site of David's grief itself is of a heightened significance.<sup>50</sup> Noting the public nature of mourning in ancient Israel, some observe that rites for the dead were generally performed on roofs and other elevated locales, which could explain David's choice of a chamber above the gate.<sup>51</sup> Others believe that David climbed over the gate searching for privacy, although his distress did become known (2 Sam 19:1–3).<sup>52</sup> In view of the mourner's status, i.e., he is a monarch, and the time of his mourning, i.e., the end of a national crisis, the grief locale should be given further thought. Of relevance here is that in the ancient world, gates served as legal sites accommodating a range of judicial activities and processes.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, since "justice is generally conceived to have originated with a god or gods, both physically and metaphorically the gate provided a link between two realms of existence. The gate was also the tie that bound the average citizen to the operations of his government and the temple. And it was the symbol of the continuity of law and social stability."<sup>54</sup> As previously noted, inhabiting space and acting in it in a certain way individuals cannot help but engage with their society's ideology. Hence, performed in a place cross-culturally associated with law, justice, and order David's lament, and other acts, take on a new significance. Before considering this pregnant locale, we need to analyse the king's behaviour in it.

### DAVID'S VISCERAL AND KINAESTHETIC GRIEF

The first note-worthy element in the depiction of David's response to Absalom's death is in 2 Sam 18:33. Upon hearing the

<sup>49</sup> E.g., P.T. Reis who speaks of David shedding "crocodile tears" in 2 Sam 18:33–19:1–4. P.T. Reis, "Killing the Messenger: David's Policy or Politics?" *JOT* 31 (2006), 167–91 (185–88). She notes that when David mourns properly, he lies prostrate on the ground. "If one biblical occurrence sets a precedent, two constitute a practice [2 Sam 12:16; 13:30–31]; David, in genuine grief, is stricken to the ground." *Ibid.*, 188. Others, however, see David's mourning at this point as legitimate. B. Kelle, for example, discusses war laments, including David's (e.g., 2 Sam 1:19–27; 3:33–44; 18:33), as part of his project on moral injury. B. Kelle, *The Bible and Moral Injury: Reading Scripture Alongside War's Unseen Wounds* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), 104–37.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Neh 3:31–32; Zeph 1:16. On chambered gates, see Frese, *The City Gate*, 52–65; *idem.*, "Chambered Gatehouses in the Iron II Southern Levant: Their Architecture and Function," *Levant* (2015), 75–92.

<sup>51</sup> E.F. De Ward, "Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel," *JJS* 23 (1972), 1–27 (4–5). Olyan sees this as a semi-public space. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 75; Smith, *The Fate of Justice*, 198; Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice*, 237–38, 240; D.T. Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 268; Frese, *The City Gate*, 140 (although Frese states that it is not "an unambiguously private affair").

<sup>53</sup> May, "Gates and Their Functions," 95–100; Frese, *The City Gate*, 141–59. Cf. Zech 8:16; Amos 5:10, 12, 15; Isa 29:21; Prov 22:22.

<sup>54</sup> Matthews, "Entrance Ways," 26.

dreadful news, David is said to be moved or shaken/רגז, which is usually read in terms of strong parental grief—e.g., David “convulsed with emotion”.<sup>55</sup> Noting the potent semantics of the verb, A. Davies, for example, says that here, the king is “shaken to the core and indeed torn apart by the sheer anguish of the news he has just received”.<sup>56</sup> M. Suriano in turn views the usage of רגז in this text as the inversion of traditional mortuary rites. Considering a commemorative pillar Absalom erected for himself *antemortem* (2 Sam 18:18), he notes that in ANE memorial inscriptions *rgz* represents the disturbance of burial remains (KAI 9.A.5; 13.4, 6, 7; cf. KAI 214.23; cf. 1 Sam 28:15; Isa 14:9). Since by erecting the pillar Absalom reversed posthumous remembrance practices—i.e., to commemorate and lament were filial duties for the deceased parent, in 2 Sam 18:33–19:4 David, a father, assumes the unexpected role of a lamenter and is the one disturbed/רגז.<sup>57</sup> Insightful as this take on רגז is, there is a more fruitful reading of this verb. Given that רגז is not frequent in biblical narratives and since in 2 Sam 18:33 it appears at the end of a war, a punitive measure for an errant king (2 Sam 12:10–12), it is worthy of note that elsewhere רגז features in covenantal curses (Deut 28:65) and is part of covenantal promises to David and his house (2 Sam 7:10–11).

Thus, it appears in Deut 28:16–68, which contains curses and maledictions meant to befall those who violate God’s law. Addressing the threat of exile, the section in vv. 63–68 warns the Israelites that under God’s judgement they can experience ceaseless wandering about and psychosomatic restlessness (Deut 28:64–65). Of relevance for the Absalom crisis, which, among other things, led to the exile of the royal house, is that the displacement of God’s people in Deuteronomy 28 is reinforced by inner turmoil and unrest—“the Lord will give you a trembling/agitated heart, failing eyes, and a languishing spirit” (Deut 28:65b). The phrase “an agitated heart”/לב רגז is usually seen as a form of anxiety caused by external forces,<sup>58</sup> and “the failing of eyes”/כליון עינים is understood as copious, unceasing weeping

<sup>55</sup> Tsumura, *Samuel*, 268. Regarding the root רגז, M.G. Vanoni explains that with human beings it denotes the idea of “a somatic phenomenon (‘tremble’)” or “a psychic emotion (‘be[come] disturbed’)”. M.G. Vanoni, *TDOT*, vol. 13, 306–07. Incidentally, if the Massoretic vocalization of 2 Sam 18:26 is ignored, v. 26 may read as if the watchman on the wall is speaking to the gate (Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice*, 230–31, n. 46); and though he himself is not lamenting near it, the individual waiting for the news the watchmen will deliver, i.e., David, will utter a lament.

<sup>56</sup> A. Davies, “Tears in Jerusalem: David’s Response to the Death of Absalom in 2 Samuel and Tomkin’s ‘When David Heard,’” in D.J.A. Clines and E. van Wolde (eds.), *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J.C. Exum* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 132–44 (133); Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice*, 235.

<sup>57</sup> M. Suriano, “Remembering Absalom’s Death in 2 Samuel 18–19: History, Memory, and Inscription,” *HeBAi* 7 (2018), 172–200 (194–200).

<sup>58</sup> Vanoni, *TDOT*, 307.

(cf. Jer 8:23; 14:5–6; 1 Sam 2:33; etc.).<sup>59</sup> Considering these judgments in Deut 28:64–67, it is not surprising that David, an errant monarch, would be subjected to comparable experiences and circumstances, i.e., exile, restless mobility (2 Sam 15:19), profuse weeping (2 Sam 13:36; 15:23, 30; 18:33; 19:1, 4), and a condition formulated through the verb “to tremble/to agitate”/2( רגז Sam 18:33). Furthermore, as part of the covenant in 2 Samuel 7, God made a pledge to David and all of Israel to give them a home free from disturbance/agitation by the wicked/“ולא ירגז עוד ולא” (2 Sam 7:10; cf. 1 Chr 17:9).<sup>60</sup> Casting Israel’s enemies as agitators (note the verb רגז),<sup>61</sup> the covenant, inadvertently, offers a commentary on David’s opponent, Absalom, and his conspiracy—agitating David in life and in death, Absalom comes close to undoing the kingdom by taking it to the pre-covenantal condition. Relatedly, given the feature of רגז among covenantal curses and sanctions in Deuteronomy 28, David’s agitation/disturbance in 2 Samuel 18 implicates *him* in provoking the insurrection by subverting justice and righteousness, by not adhering to God’s laws (cf. 2 Samuel 11, 12, 13).<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, having got the report from the battlefield, David climbs to a chamber over the gate. While in the chamber, he begins to lament *while walking* (2 Sam 18:33).<sup>63</sup> This kinaesthetic form of mourning coheres with other biblical and ANE grief and mourning accounts which attest to similar, somatic expression of grief.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, however, David’s walking while lamenting and crying out (2 Sam 18:33; 19:4) echoes the sorrowful procession of Tamar, his daughter, after her assault—“she went away, *crying aloud as she went*” (2 Sam 13:19). This in turn is duplicated in the depiction of David’s and his people’s flight from Jerusalem—“David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, . . . and *wept as he went*”; “. . . they went up, *weeping as they*

<sup>59</sup> M. Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1980), 386–400.

<sup>60</sup> D.E. Kim, *Rest in Mesopotamian and Israelite Literature* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2019), 166–76.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the King of Babylon, who is האיש מרגז/“the man who agitated” the earth (Isa 14:16; cf. 14:8).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Amos 8:8 where רגז is paired up with אבל indicating God’s punishment of evildoers (cf. 2 Sam 18:33 [אבל]; 19:1 [רגז]). On the punitive use of רגז, particularly in contexts of exile, see Isa 14:3; Ezek 12:18–19; cf. Ezek 4:16. On restlessness/agitation as negative and punitive conditions in the Hebrew Bible and ANE, see E.E. Kozlova, “Acedia, ‘Bourgeois Ennui’, and Kingship in the Hebrew Bible and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*,” *JTS* 72 (2021); Kim, *Rest in Mesopotamian and Israelite Literature*, 108–11.

<sup>63</sup> Unlike the MT, the LXX<sup>LMN</sup> variant has “in his weeping” here. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 403.

<sup>64</sup> M. Barré, “‘Wandering about’ as a *Topos* of Depression in Ancient Near Eastern Literature and in the Bible,” *JNES* 60 (2001), 177–87; J.S. Kselman, “‘Wandering about’ and Depression: More Examples,” *JNES* 61 (2002), 275–77; P.A. Kruger, “Depression in the Hebrew Bible: An Update,” *JNES* 64 (2005), 187–92; Y. Shemesh, “וילד” שם (Ezra 10:6): ‘Wandering About’ as a Sign of Mourning,” *VTS* 72 (2021).



went up” (2 Sam 15:30; cf. 15:23).<sup>65</sup> Moreover, David’s walking in a locale raised over the city is reminiscent of his agitated locomotion in 2 Sam 11:2 (ויתהלך על-גג בית-המלך). There, finding himself unable to sleep, David saw Bathsheba from the roof of his house and gave in to his lust. In view of the earlier analysis of Tamar as a wisdom exemplar in 2 Samuel 13, it is of interest that thematically and linguistically 2 Sam 11:2–4 echoes Prov 6:22 which speaks of protection and companionship offered by wisdom in times of walking about/pacing (בהתהלך; cf. 2 Sam 11:2), lying down (בשכב; cf. 2 Sam 11:4), or being awake (הקיצות; cf. 2 Sam 11:2). Additionally, Prov 6:22 comes before a series of warnings against relations with the wife of one’s neighbour (Prov 6:24–35; cf. 2 Sam 11:3), offering yet another intertextual link with 2 Samuel 11. Hence, in 2 Samuel both father and son, David and Amnon, disregard the voice of wisdom and commit crimes that will tear their kingdom apart.<sup>66</sup> As previously stated, the civil war in 2 Samuel 15–19 and David’s grief narrative contain reflexes from the Amnon-Tamar episode. Relatedly, they feature experiences and dynamics akin to the Deuteronomic curses and maledictions. Constructing the crisis in such a compound way, 2 Samuel offers a critique of the regime instituted by David and reinforced by his royal house.

#### DAVID’S BROKEN LAMENT

David’s lament for Absalom is a poignant piece of poetry which, arguably, was meant to reflect the king’s paternal sorrow. Concerning the structure of David’s cry, “My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. If only I had died instead of you—Absalom, my son, my son”, scholars note that while it is neatly framed by two vocative phrases, the repetition of the word בני/“my son” and the name אבשלום/“Absalom” creates the impression that David’s speech is messy, if not frenzied.<sup>67</sup> Hence, for example, R. Alter evaluates it as “a sheer stammer of grief”,<sup>68</sup> and Z. Niu refers to it as the king’s “ejaculatory cries”.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, on a rhetorical level, David’s emotive outburst at this stage appears to be excessive, with the utterance “If only I had died instead of you” (2 Sam 18:33) being the only more or less grammatically “clean” statement. Such valuation of David’s cry is in line with studies on disordered and confused speech as a literary device in

<sup>65</sup> Also, in 2 Sam 13:13 Tamar asks Amnon, “Where will I go with [or take, Hiphil of הלך] my disgrace?”/ואני אנה אוליד את-חרפתי. In 2 Sam 15:20, David describes his exile as, “I do not know where I am going . . .”/ואני הולך על אשר-אני הולך/.

<sup>66</sup> On David’s disregard of the wise woman of Tekoa and her advice, as well as the deadly outcome of this decision, see E.E. Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 121–56.

<sup>67</sup> On the structure of the lament, see Conroy, *Absalom*, 75, 77.

<sup>68</sup> Alter, *The David Story*, 311 (cf. “David’s horrendous stutter of grief”. *Ibid.*, xxiii); cf. Conroy, *Absalom*, 75.

<sup>69</sup> Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice*, 234.

contexts of distress in ANE literature;<sup>70</sup> and within 2 Samuel, this technique has already appeared in the Amnon-Tamar episode. Thus, in the precarious saga of three siblings, David's cry marked by a "stutter" effect first echoes his firstborn's utterance—"I am in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister" (2 Sam 13:4). L. Alonso Schökel observed that through the repetition and alliteration of alephs this sentence reads as a series of "faltering sighs."<sup>71</sup> Within its three units, C. Conroy in turn detected a "tormented staccato rhythm."<sup>72</sup> More importantly, however, is that David's crippled lament in 2 Samuel 19 mirrors Tamar's plea in 2 Sam 13:16, when she tried to reason with Amnon saying that sending her away would be a greater wrong than Amnon's assault itself.<sup>73</sup> In fact, scrutinising Tamar's words addressed to Amnon in the episode, scholars have observed the stark contrast in her rhetoric before and after the rape. Thus, P. Willey notes that prior to her assault, the young woman is "relentlessly logical and rhetorically masterful. But after the rape, her words are urgent, marginally grammatical, condensed, just as we might expect from a person in her situation."<sup>74</sup> Noting pain and shock in Tamar's words, T. Frymer-Kensky in turn states that the violated woman "stammers", expresses "partial thoughts", and simply cannot form "a grammatical sentence."<sup>75</sup> Hence, in 2 Samuel 19, David's broken, incoherent lament over the city gate resonates with Amnon's sighs of "love-sickness" and Tamar's anguished syntax of ruin.

Of further interest here is the centre filling David's lament—"Oh, I wish I had died instead of you, [Absalom]!" Regarding this cry, C. Conroy writes that it is "an unforgettable expression of lacerated fatherly love and grief."<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the repeated vocatives in 2 Sam 18:33 indicate that David is addressing his words to Absalom, who is clearly dead and unable to appreciate the sentiment. In connection with David's wish, however, it should be noted that between 2 Sam 12:26, wherein he declares that the offender in Nathan's parable should repay fourfold for his offense, and the end of 1 Kings 2, four of David's

---

<sup>70</sup> G. Rendsburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *JHS* 2 (1999), 1–20. Cf. K. O'Connor's discussion of Jeremiah which owes its "messy" structure to "the massive disorder that produced the book in the first place . . ." K. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 126–27.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. "como en suspiros entrecortados" (cited in Conroy, *Absalom*, 29, also n. 38 there).

<sup>72</sup> Conroy, *Absalom*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> On this sentence, see S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 298–99; T. Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 163–64.

<sup>74</sup> P. Willey, "The Importunate Woman of Tekoa and How She Got Her Way," in D.N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 115–32 (121).

<sup>75</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women*, 163–64; Higgins, "He Would Not Hear Her Voice," 25–42.

<sup>76</sup> Conroy, *Absalom*, 75.

sons lose their lives.<sup>77</sup> Given the focus of this discussion, more casualties of David's crimes should be acknowledged—(1) Tamar who succumbed to a form of death, i.e., social death, and not without David's help (2 Sam 13:20; cf. 13:13);<sup>78</sup> and (2) David's concubines who were violated by Absalom in his attempt to usurp the throne (2 Sam 16:21–22), and who were later put in seclusion (בית־משמרה), “shut up until the day of their death, living as widows” (2 Sam 20:3; cf. 2 Sam 6:23; Isa 54:1, 4).<sup>79</sup> With their social status permanently altered, Tamar and the royal wives add to the overall death toll in David's family and among his subjects. Thus, although David's cry is moving, it cannot be viewed as merely reflecting a father's yearning for his slain son. As it was in David's power to prevent the revolt, what the king is facing now is of his own making. Hence, at this juncture, his display of emotion is tragically ironic.<sup>80</sup>

### DAVID'S SHROUDED FACE

Another element worth considering is the act of face-covering—that is, while in the chamber over the gate, David veiled himself/והמלך לאט את־פניו/ crying aloud, “. . . O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam 19:4). This veiling gesture is usually read as part of the traditional arsenal of mourning rites like the covering of the head (e.g., Jer 14:3–4; Esth 6:12).<sup>81</sup> Again, this is what Tamar did after her rape—i.e., she covered her head with her hands (2 Sam 13:19; cf. 2 Sam 15:30). Some hypothesize that by covering his face, David wanted to be “inaccessible to his followers in a visual and aural way”; he wanted to be left “alone with his grief”.<sup>82</sup> Legitimate as they are, these readings of 2 Sam 19:4 can be nuanced further, and the face-veiling gesture can be shown to hold a communicative valency much stronger than previously

<sup>77</sup> J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: King David (II Samuel 9–20 & I Kings 1–2)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 413–14.

<sup>78</sup> U. Bail notes that Tamar spent the rest of her life as if she was buried alive. U. Bail, *Gegen das Schweigen klagen: Eine intertextuelle Studie zu den Klagepsalmen Ps 6 und Ps 55 und der Erzählung von der Vergewaltigung Tamars* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 155, 198. Cf. Tribble's assessment of Tamar: “Raped, despised, and rejected by a man, Tamar is a woman of sorrows and acquainted with grief. She is cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the sins of her brother; yet she herself has done no violence and there is no deceit in her mouth.” Tribble, *Text of Terror*, 52. Since Absalom told Tamar to “be quiet” and not to take her assault to heart (2 Sam 13:20), she ends up being “locked in the ‘wordless nothing’ of a trauma sufferer.” Higgins, “He Would Not Hear Her Voice,” 35.

<sup>79</sup> MT has אַלמְנוֹת חַיִּית/“widowhood of life”. McCarter reads it as “widows while alive”. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 419, 423.

<sup>80</sup> On David's death wish as ritually inappropriate in this context, see H. Løland Levinson, *The Death Wish in the Hebrew Bible: Rhetorical Strategies for Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 132–39.

<sup>81</sup> Niu, *The King Lifted Up His Voice*, 236, n. 65.

<sup>82</sup> Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 269. He also notes that David here refuses to face reality, he cannot see anything.

recognized. Of interest here is that a host of biblical and ANE traditions generally indicate that in death the deceased reside in a place of darkness and gloom (e.g., Lam 3:6), but some texts specifically mention the practice of covering the face of the dead for burial. This, at times, served as a punitive measure. Thus, the book of Jonah images Jonah, a wayward prophet, with his head wrapped/חבש with sea weeds *en route* to a watery grave (Jon 2:5).<sup>83</sup> Job 40:13 in turn speaks of the wicked buried in the dust, adding that their faces are shrouded/חבש in the infernal crypt.<sup>84</sup> Relatedly, in the book of Esther, when Hamman gravely insults the king, Xerxes' servants cover Hamman's face/פני המן חפרו. Immediately after, plans for Hamman's execution are set in motion (Esth 7:8–10).<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, some literary traditions from the Second Temple period reference the covering of the face in the realm of the dead as a *penal* act more explicitly—e.g., “cover him [Azazel] with darkness, . . . , cover his face that he may not see light” (1 *Enoch* 10:4, 5; cf. 109:2).<sup>86</sup>

Given the custom of donning the dead in burial clothes and veiling their faces, David's gesture could be read not just as an act of mourning for Absalom, but as an effort to imitate Absalom's fate in the region of the dead. In fact, ANE death-related mourning rites sought to create a certain “convergence of the living's identity with that of the dead.”<sup>87</sup> S. Olyan, for example, explains that “the mourner parallels the spirit of the dead through his physical appearance and his ritual behavior . . . .”<sup>88</sup> Similarly, F. Stavrakopoulou states that by modifying their body and manipulating their clothes mourners “mimic or enact the

---

<sup>83</sup> E.E. Kozlova, “Jonah 2: A Death Liturgy for the Doomed Prophet,” *JHS* (2021), 1–21 (13–19).

<sup>84</sup> J. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 520–21.

<sup>85</sup> For more references, see Kozlova, “Jonah 2,” 13–19. Interestingly, in 1 Sam 21:9 [10], Goliath's sword, as a trophy, is “wrapped up/veiled”/לֶאֱט in the sanctuary at Nob (cf. 1 Sam 31:10). The sword could have been wrapped simply for safe-keeping; however, since weapons were viewed as “extra-somatic body parts” of their owners (M. Smith, *Poetic Heroes: The Literary Commemorations of Warriors and Warrior Culture in the Early Biblical World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 17) and were often interred with their owners (cf. Ezek 32:27; B.R. Doak, *Heroic Bodies in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], 118–23), Goliath's veiled sword could have stood for the dead Goliath himself.

<sup>86</sup> Analysing burial practices from the Second Temple period, R. Hachlili explains that dead bodies were usually wrapped in shrouds (M Kil. 9, 4; M Maas. 5, 12; T Ned. 2, 7); in some tombs, pieces of fabric were specifically found on the skulls of the deceased. R. Hachlili, *Jewish Funerary Customs, Practices and Rites in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 481. Cf. John 11:44; 19:40; 20:7; Matt 27:59.

<sup>87</sup> B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 177–78; G.A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>88</sup> Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*, 43–44.

transformation and fragmentation of the body” in death.<sup>89</sup> Considering David’s expressed desire to take the place of Absalom, his deceased son (2 Sam 18:33), the king’s veiling gesture could be viewed as a mourning ideal seeking to imitate and/or join in death the one who is mourned.<sup>90</sup> In view of the events that precipitated Absalom’s downfall, David’s face-covering must also be seen as a belated attempt to rectify the earlier wrongs. Interestingly, the text indicates that Absalom’s *coup d’état* could have been prevented had David fully restored his son to the court after his time in Geshur. The irony here is that the lingering rift between the two at that point is formulated by means of a “face”-related idiom—i.e., David refused to let Absalom see his face for two years (2 Sam 14:24 (x2), 28, 32).

Furthermore, given the status of the mourner and the deceased as royals and the deadly impact their power struggle had on the subjects, David’s veiling gesture attains yet another, more sinister connotation. Of relevance here is that the verb לָאֵט/“to cover” from 2 Samuel 19 appears in Isa 25:7–9 as part of the metaphorization of *death*—i.e., it is “the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations”/פְּנֵי־הַלּוֹט הַלּוֹט עַל־כָּל־/פְּנֵי־הַלּוֹט הַלּוֹט עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם.<sup>91</sup> With the curse from Isaiah 24 as its likely antecedent (Isa 24:6), the shroud symbolism represents not death *per se*, but some form of pervasive, all-consuming punishment weighing heavily on the people.<sup>92</sup> Since David’s crimes led to a civil war ending in the slaughter of twenty thousand men, his own shrouded figure stationed at the highest point of the city posits him as the embodiment of a malevolent, deadly force, not unlike the one envisaged in Isaiah.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>89</sup> F. Stavrakopoulou, “The Prophet Huldah and the Stuff of State,” in C.A. Rollston (ed.), *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 277–96 (289).

<sup>90</sup> Given the circumstances of Absalom’s demise, his body would not have been properly dressed for interment (2 Sam 18:17). Nevertheless, his presence in the dark underworld could have prompted David’s face-covering.

<sup>91</sup> G. Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2012), 547. Regarding the shroud and the covering in Isa 25:7, J.J.M. Roberts suggests that the former could be identified with the smaller burial cloth used to veil the face of the corpse and the latter could be seen as the larger cloth for wrapping the body. J.J.M. Roberts, *First Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 323. On the “covering/shroud”/מַסְכָּה used to wrap the dead, see Isa 14:11 (“Maggots are spread out beneath you, and worms are your shroud”/תַּחְתִּיךָ יִצַע רִמָּה/וּמַכְסִיךָ תוֹלְעָה).

<sup>92</sup> J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33* (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 333; cf. J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 209.

<sup>93</sup> To describe the battle between Absalom’s and David’s troops, 2 Sam 18:7 uses a somewhat unusual term, מַגֵּפָה, which normally represents a “plague, disease, or some divine punishment.” Conroy, *Absalom*, 59, n. 53. Relatedly, in a self-indicting outburst in 2 Sam 12:5, David profiled himself as בֶּן־מוֹת/“son of death”, that is, as somebody who causes death, not as a person who deserves to die (H. Pyper, *David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12:1–15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood* [Leiden: Brill, 1996],

Incidentally, the fate of the slain insurrectionists is related via the Piel form of סגר, usually rendered as “delivered up”—that is, God “delivered up” the men who lifted their hands against the king (2 Sam 18:28). In light of the preceding discussion, however, this verbal form should be read in its literal, not developed, sense, i.e., as “to imprison” by locking up<sup>94</sup>—hence, the defeated and thus dead rebels are imaged as confined or locked up on the battlefield.<sup>95</sup> Since the region of the dead in the Hebrew Bible was seen as a fortified city with bars and gates, 2 Samuel 18 may picture Absalom’s fallen forces as imprisoned or “locked up” in death.<sup>96</sup> As Absalom himself was behind the assault on Tamar, such depiction of his troops’ demise, as well as his own downfall, signals the reversal of fortunes. The rape of Tamar who was “locked out” of her assailant’s chamber and then shut up in Absalom’s house in a form of living death results in the “locking up” of Absalom and his allies in actual death for perpetuity.<sup>97</sup> Considering the rebels’ fall, the fate of those who

---

159). Interestingly, the calibre of the massacre in 2 Sam 18:7–8 and the all-encompassing impact of Isaiah’s death shroud is achieved through a comparable rhetorical move, that is, both are given a somewhat “liquid” quality. In 2 Samuel 18, the battle between David’s and Absalom’s troops is said to have spread/פּוּץ over the whole land (2 Sam 18:8). One of the meanings of פּוּץ is “to flow, overflow” (HALOT, 919). Therefore, the battle literally was “spilled/poured” over the whole land (cf. 2 Sam 17:12). Isa 25:7b in turn speaks of death as “the covering spread over all the nations”/הַמַּסְכָּה הַנְּסוּכָה עַל כָּל הַגּוֹיִם. The root נָסַךְ II/“to weave, spread” in v. 7b has a homonym, נָסַךְ I, “to pour out” (HALOT, 703). Hence, on a conceptual level, Isaiah’s deadly covering becomes “liquid” as well—i.e., it is “poured” over all the nations.

<sup>94</sup> M. Caspi, “‘You Will Have No Reward for the Tidings’: The Run of Ahimaaz and the Run of the Cushite (2 Samuel 18.19–19.5),” *Beth Mikra* 30 (1985), 59–71 (66–67); Smith, *The Fate of Justice*, 196; HALOT, 743. The Piel form of סגר as “to deliver up” usually appears with the qualifier “into the hand(s) of X” (1 Sam 24:18; 26:8; 2 Sam 17:46; cf. 1 Sam 23:12; 30:15; Ps 31:8, which use Hiphil of סגר), but it is missing in 2 Sam 18:28.

<sup>95</sup> H. Ringgren, *TDOT*, vol. 10, 151. Cf. the Pual of סגר, to “be shut up/barred” in Josh 6:1; Isa 24:10, 22. In Ps 142:8(7), N.J. Tromp read מַסְגֵּר/“prison” as a reference to Sheol. N.J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 156.

<sup>96</sup> Interestingly, Isa 24:22 speaks of the host of heaven and the kings of the earth as gathered in the pit and shut up (Pual of סגר) in a prison (מַסְגֵּר) to face God’s judgement at a later date. Cf. *1 Enoch* 18:15–16.

<sup>97</sup> The verbs סגר/“to shut/lock” and נָעַל/“to bolt/lock” (cf. 2 Sam 13:17–18) can be used in parallel, e.g., Jdg 3:23. Interestingly, David’s concubines who were left to watch/guard the palace (לְשֹׁמֵר הַבַּיִת) after their assault end up in a guarded place (בֵּית־מִשְׁמֶרֶת), and so become the ones who are watched/guarded (2 Sam 20:3; cf. 15:16). If Absalom and his men become “locked up/imprisoned” in death, they could likewise be viewed as “watched/guarded”. Cf. Isa 65:4, which speaks of the graves and נְצוּרִים/“guarded ones”, whom S. Wagner understands as the dead. S. Wagner, *TDOT*, vol. 9, 548. More on the root נָצַר in death-related contexts, see E.E. Kozlova, “‘Dressed as a Harlot and Cunning of Heart?’ A New Look at the Heart of the Strange Woman

survived the massacre is also telling. By putting on his show over the city gate, David is said to have covered the faces of his people with shame/הבשת היום את־פני כל־עבדיך, preventing them from celebrating the victory (2 Sam 19:5; cf. 19:3). Incidentally, the shroud enfolding the nations in Isaiah 25 is said to bring with it shame and disgrace (cf. 2 Sam 13:13); once it is removed, the people can rejoice in God's deliverance (Isa 25:8–9).<sup>98</sup> Thus, having plunged his people into a crisis that enveloped, like a burial shroud, his entire kingdom, David himself towers over the city with his face veiled.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, given the nature of David's indiscretions, and the prophetic assessment of his rape of Bathsheba as *secret* (2 Sam 12:12), the symbolism of the shrouded face in 2 Samuel 19 attains another meaning. Of interest here is Job 24:13–16, which speaks of transgressions carried out in secret, under the cover of darkness—i.e., adultery, theft, and murder. Framing these illicit acts is Job's take on the individuals responsible for them—i.e., they are rebels against the light (Job 24:12), and they befriend terrors of darkness (Job 24:17). At the core of this diatribe, v. 15 speaks of the adulterer whose face is wrapped with a veil.<sup>100</sup> Bringing the Bathsheba-Tamar-Absalom crisis to an end, 2 Samuel 19 pictures David, an adulterer, a thief, and a murderer, in a chamber over the gate sobbing with his face covered, offering a most damning commentary on his reign.<sup>101</sup>

---

in the Book of Proverbs," *V/T* 71(2021), 607–618. Hence, the aforementioned "topography" of violence in David's reign extends to this world and the netherworld.

<sup>98</sup> Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 547. Joab's words to David that he loves those who hate him and hates those who love him (v. 7) echo the love/hate language in 2 Sam 13:1, 4, 15. Also, Joab's threat in v. 8 regarding "a greater evil" that can befall David resonates with Tamar's words to Amnon in 2 Sam 13:16.

<sup>99</sup> In connection with the "liquid" rhetoric in 2 Sam 18:8 and Isa 25:7, it is noteworthy that David is cast *weeping* over the gate. Relatedly, the verb בלע from Isaiah 25, wherein God swears to swallow the shroud (vv. 7–8), appears in 2 Sam 17:16 ("lest your [David's] people will be swallowed up"; cf. 2 Sam 20:19–20, "to swallow up the Lord's inheritance") representing military defeat (cf. Hos 8:7–8; Lam 2:2, 5, 16; Jer 51:44; Ps 21:9; 124:3). Elsewhere it represents death or other forces swallowing people (e.g., Num 16:30, 32, 34; 26:10; Prov 1:12). In the civil war initiated by Absalom, but provoked by David, the two royal males end up "swallowing up" a significant portion of the Lord's inheritance (cf. the language of "devouring" in 2 Sam 18:8 used to describe the final battle). On the identification of David's enemies (Absalom's followers) as "all of Israel" (North and South) and the close association between Absalom's fate and the fate of all nation, see R. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History; 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 190–91.

<sup>100</sup> Incidentally, Nah 3:5–6 speaks of Nineveh's judgment for her "whorings" saying that YHWH will lift up Nineveh's skirt over her face (cf. 2 Sam 19:4), throw filth/detestable things at her (cf. 2 Sam 16:13), and treat her with contempt (ונבלתיך; cf. 2 Sam 13:12–13).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Auld's observation, that in 2 Samuel 19, "Like thieves, the people melt into the shadows and disappear from view; and David too

### THE COMPOUND GATE ARCHITECTURE IN 2 SAMUEL 19

As demonstrated above, the grief account in 2 Samuel 18–19 serves as a meeting point for textual resonances from the Absalom revolt as well as the events precipitating it. Locating David in a chamber over the city gate, the episode also absorbs and conflates the architectural elements from the prior crimes and machinations of the royal house. Thus, as gates are entrance ways equipped with door-leaves, jambs, bolts, etc., David's position in 2 Sam 18:33–19:1–4 is a nod to the bolted-door detail in the Amnon-Tamar episode and the crime committed therein. With "gate" as its prominent feature, David's grief site is likewise an echo of 2 Samuel 11, in which Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, met death at the entrance of the city gate in the wake of David's "affair" with his wife (2 Sam 11:23). Furthermore, with its private (?) restricted space, the upper gate room is also reminiscent of Amnon's private quarters, his bedchamber, the site of Tamar's assault. Given the raised position of the mourning venue in 2 Samuel 18–19, it likewise evokes the rooftops from 2 Samuel 11 and 16, where royal sex crimes were initiated (David and Bathsheba; 2 Sam 11:2–4) or committed (Absalom and David's concubines; 2 Sam 16:21–22). Hence, from a literary perspective, through the use of these assorted locales, 2 Samuel creates a build-up towards the narrative climax in the gate architecture in 2 Samuel 18–19.

Moreover, and as previously noted, in the ancient world city gates served as sites for civic and legal procedures; as such, they were often associated with the office and duties of kings. Additionally, both biblical and ANE materials attest to cases of "place-oriented legal action." In some traditions, the location used for judgement represented "the crime committed, [which] perhaps even intended to serve as a form of poetic justice."<sup>102</sup> The grief account in 2 Samuel 18–19 exhibits precisely such a compound dynamic. Of relevance here is that in ancient Israel sex crimes were investigated and judged, among other places, at the city gate (e.g., Deut 22:13–30). Considering the nature of David's wrongdoings and the offenses of Amnon and Absalom, which cumulatively led to the civil war, David's position over the city gate at the end of this crisis creates an excruciating irony and points at him as the principal culprit behind it. Furthermore, since to uphold law and order in the land was the king's duty, the mourning scene signals David's blatant disregard for justice. If by choosing the gate he wished to make some political statement, the interlinks with previous crimes and misconduct strip this elevated site of any moral high ground. Placing the king there, the narrative achieves a form of poetic justice.

---

covers his face as he grieves." Auld, *I & II Samuel*, 547. On elements of irony and satire in the Absalom's revolt, see Miller, *A King and a Fool?* 135–88.

<sup>102</sup> Matthews, "Entrance Ways," 33.



## CONCLUSION

According to S. Kent, “architecture creates boundaries out of otherwise unbounded space.”<sup>103</sup> The foregoing discussion has considered the use of architecture, on a literary level, in 2 Samuel by focusing on two episodes, i.e., 2 Sam 13:1–20 and 2 Sam 18:33–19:1–4. Creating boundaries around the civil war in 2 Samuel 15–19 and organizing interpersonal and state affairs in David’s kingdom, these episodes with their architecture contribute to the construction of David’s monarchy. As noted by Cresswell, spaces can be used to define or communicate what is right, just, and benevolent; equally, however, they can represent what is deviant, harmful, and anti-social. Hence, depending on the usage of space, values and beliefs encoded in it can be upheld and reinforced or undermined and rendered obsolete.<sup>104</sup> Considering Amnon’s and David’s “out-of-place” acts has made it possible to emphasise that which was missing in David’s house—i.e., order, civility, and decency. Thus, paying attention to the architectural structures and locales in 2 Samuel has allowed for a reading of David’s leadership. Given the profile of spaces figured in the narrative, i.e., *domestic* and *public*, and the demographic of victims sinned against in these locales, *commoners* and *royals*, the text exposes the ideology of unbounded hubris, desire, and expedience in the royal house. Cast as the climax in the civil war, David’s grief account in 2 Samuel 19 is a time of reckoning for the king—family and kingdom are in shambles: daughter and wives violated and in confinement, sons assassinated and dead, allies humiliated and scattered. Together with their structural “actors”, 2 Sam 13:1–20 and 2 Sam 18:33–19:4 create a “topography” of lawlessness in David’s rule. Framing a national crisis with lamentations by the door and over the gate, these narratives create a damning antiphon for David’s reign.

---

<sup>103</sup> S. Kent, “Activity Areas and Architecture: An Interdisciplinary View of the Relationship between Use of Space and Domestic Built Environments,” in S. Kent (ed.), *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space: An Interdisciplinary Cross-cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–8 (2).

<sup>104</sup> Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place*, 11–27.