



# And Then There Were the Women in His Life: David and His Women

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**H**ow then shall we think of David? Have you noticed that David is surrounded by women? Might not these women provide a clue as to how we might think of this king, of this man?

Women introduce David's story—Naomi, Ruth, and Hannah. Ruth and Naomi, his maternal ancestors, make possible his birth through their loyal and loving behavior. The book of Ruth serves as a transition book, beginning “In the days when the judges ruled” and ending with the announcement that Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David. In this book of David's grandmothers, David was a king not warned against but anticipated, the grandson of one who restored life and pointed to a time when lives were lived as God would have them lived. The David anticipated by Naomi and Ruth would usher in a kingship in which the violence and bloodshed of the time of the judges would become a time of order and peace led by a king who, unlike the men of Judges, would not do only “what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>1</sup> These women, Naomi and Ruth, set the pattern

<sup>1</sup>See Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.

*The relationship between David and the women in his life is complex and often disturbing. Examining the question will require the use of several lenses (political, literary, feminist, and artistic); in the process, we will learn about David and the women, but we will also learn a good deal about ourselves.*

for ideal family relationships in which one pledges loyalty (“Whither thou goest, I will go”) and sticks by one’s family through thick and thin.

Naomi and Ruth are joined in this work of setting the better example by Hannah, whose story introduces the books of Samuel. Technically, Hannah is the mother of Samuel, not David, but, like Elizabeth in Luke’s Gospel, her story joins that of Ruth and Naomi to set an introduction to the coming king. Standing at the beginning of the books of dynasties and familial wars and favorite sons, Hannah sets the example of how to be a proper parent. She yearns for her son, gives thanks to God for his birth, provides initial love and nourishment, and then gives him back to God, knowing her son is not hers to grasp. Her sacrificial parenting stands in sharp contrast to that of Eli and particularly of David and those who come after. In the stories of these precursor women, we learn something of David by counter-example. Would that David had followed his grandmothers’ lead!

These women set the ideal pattern, but they are only the beginning of the women in David’s life. In the books of Samuel through the first two chapters of 1 Kings we will hear tell of at least eight named wives, one named concubine, and scores of others who remain unnamed.<sup>2</sup> Oh, and David also had at least one daughter, Tamar, though in her story she is never referred to as David’s daughter, only as the sister of David’s sons. Many of these women, named and unnamed, mark something about the character of David, but what? In the past twenty plus years a rich scholarly conversation has developed around the relationship of David and the women in his life, inviting us to approach their role in a number of different ways, using a variety of lenses: political, literary, feminist, and artistic. By looking at David and his women through these lenses, we learn not only about how we might think of David, we learn a good deal about how we might think of ourselves.

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#### POLITICAL LENS

Some would approach David’s relationship with women wearing political spectacles. Each of David’s marriages helped in some way to build his kingdom.<sup>3</sup> The most obvious illustration is his marriage to Michal, the daughter of Saul. By marrying Michal David becomes the son-in-law to the king, a common enough political move in the history of empire building. Levenson also provocatively suggests that David’s wife, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, was previously the wife of King Saul.<sup>4</sup> This identification would account for Nathan’s report of God’s words to

<sup>2</sup>See 2 Sam 3:2–5; 5:13; 15:16.

<sup>3</sup>For the most thorough treatments of this approach, see Jon D. Levenson, “1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978) 11–28; and Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, “The Political Import of David’s Marriages,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99/4 (1980) 507–518.

<sup>4</sup>For Ahinoam as David’s wife, see 1 Sam 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam 2:2; 3:2, and as wife of Saul, see 1 Sam 14:50.

David in 2 Sam 12:8 “I gave you your master’s house, and your master’s wives into your bosom.” Slightly less politically transparent than David’s marriage to Michal is his marriage to Abigail, the wife of the then deceased Nabal. Nabal’s widow brings to their marriage both great wealth and a significant connection to the powerful southern tribe of Caleb, thus helping David build towards his crowning at the central Calebite city of Hebron. Levenson and Halpern suggest more. Presumably each of the more obscurely named wives of David brings her own political connections. The south is further solidified through David’s marriages to Maacah, daughter of King Talmi of Geshur, to Haggith, to Abital, and to Eglah. Presumably more political alliances are made through David’s marriages in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> The wife obviously missing from this political list is Bathsheba, widow of Uriah the Hittite. No scholar I know of suggests that this marriage was made to court the support of the Hittites. Here the political argument shifts. David no longer needs a wife to build his kingdom. Now we see a king at the height of his political power, and the story illustrates acquisition of a different sort. Shrewdness turns to lust, and the woman becomes the instrument of his downfall rather than his building up. One can still look at this marriage through a political lens, but unlike the other political implications of David’s marriages, any political insight involving Bathsheba depends on the telling of the story. Another lens is needed.

#### LITERARY LENS

So, we put on the spectacles of literary insight, and the spectrum of color is astonishing. Many of those who study these texts as literature look at the overall pattern of women in David’s life. Adele Berlin has noted and illustrated in the following chart how each of David’s narratively significant wives reveals something of David’s character, each appropriate to a different stage of David’s political life.<sup>6</sup>

DAVID’S WIVES	DAVID’S CHARACTER	DAVID’S STAGE IN LIFE
Michal	Emotionally cold, but David uses her to political advantage	The cold, calculated gaining of power
Abigail	Eager but gentlemanly response	Self-assurance as a popular leader
Bathsheba	Lust, grasping what is not his	Desire to increase his holdings, expand his empire
Abishag	Impotence	Loss of control of the kingdom

Through their stories the women who surround David mark the progression of David’s character in ways largely unflattering to this ideal king of Israel. In contrast to the political view, David is more subtly developed. As supporting characters, the

<sup>5</sup>See 2 Sam 5:13: “In Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, David took more concubines and wives; and more sons and daughters were born to David.”

<sup>6</sup>Adele Berlin, “Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David’s Wives,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982) 79; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 33.

women themselves play different roles. Michal is the most complex and nuanced of the four wives, with a fully developed character marked by contrasts. Berlin sees Abigail as more of a stock character, a stereotyped “woman of worth”—clever, in control, and embodying wisdom. The final two women, Bathsheba and Abishag, exhibit no developed character in their wifely roles; they serve rather only as objectified “agents” who further the plot. Both are mere bodies—Bathsheba, the woman taken in adultery; Abishag, an available body to warm old bones.<sup>7</sup> John Kessler notes further that the women’s displaced husbands also mark this same character development and stand in contrast to David. Abigail’s husband, Nabal, the fool, is vilified, in contrast to David whose behavior is impeccable. Paltiel, the husband of Michal, evokes our sympathy, in contrast to an unfeeling David. And finally Uriah is idealized, in contrast to a now vilified David.<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of this progression of David’s character from politically ambitious to charming to grasping to impotent, the details of stories involving women in David’s life markedly play one off of the other. For example, Michal never speaks directly with David, in marked contrast with the voluminous conversation between Abigail and David. Through contrasting individual stories of women, the rape of David’s daughter Tamar by David’s son Amnon now enters the mix. Michal first loves and then hates David, in contrast to Amnon who first loves and then hates his sister Tamar. Neither Tamar nor Michal bear children, a sign in Tamar’s case of her victimization. So we ask, is Michal also a victim, or is her lack of children rather a sign of judgment?<sup>9</sup>

The stories of Abigail and Bathsheba stand in the most direct contrast with one another.<sup>10</sup> In the first story Abigail, through persuasion, saves David from murder and blood-guilt. Sexual relations take place only after Nabal’s well-deserved and entirely natural death. In the second story the nearly silent Bathsheba is the instrument of illicit sex and the spilling of innocent blood. David’s encounter with Abigail sets up and invites the reader into his encounter with Bathsheba. One wonders if the contrast between husbands and the marked change in David’s behavior also sets the reader up to imagine, correctly or not, a contrast between the characters of Abigail and Bathsheba, one wise and the other wicked. However, just as these two stories are set over against each other, so also is the story of David’s adultery set in contrast with his son Amnon’s rape of Tamar. Like David, his son Am-

<sup>7</sup>Berlin, *Characterization*, 74–76, draws a contrast between Bathsheba as wife in 2 Sam 11–12 and Bathsheba as mother in 1 Kings 1–2, where she does function as a full character.

<sup>8</sup>John Kessler, “Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62/3 (2000) 409–423. Note also the extensive analysis of Nabal’s character in Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 13–17.

<sup>9</sup>As indicated by Berlin, *Characterization*, 70–71, Michal is most stunningly contrasted with her brother Jonathan, both children of Saul. In texts directly juxtaposed, Michal loves David, while David loves Jonathan. Both Michal and Jonathan serve David and protect him from their father.

<sup>10</sup>See comments by Berlin, *Characterization*, 76–77; Levenson, “1 Samuel 25,” 23–24; Kessler, “Sexuality and Politics,” 409–423; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) 75–77; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985) 186–229; and Regina M. Schwartz, “Adultery in the House of David: The Metanarrative of Biblical Scholarship and the Narratives of the Bible [2 Samuel 9–20, 1 Kings 1–2],” *Semeia* 54 (1991) 35–55.

non is unable to control his passions. Both encounters lead to violence, the later both familial and pervasive. Just as the reader is invited to contrast Abigail and Bathsheba, so also is the reader invited to compare Bathsheba to Tamar. Bathsheba might be seen then as helpless victim in parallel with Tamar, rather than wicked temptress in contrast to Abigail. As for David, his absence from the story of his daughter's rape speaks as loudly about his character as his central presence in the other stories of women. His solicitous care of his sons stands over against his callous disregard of his daughter. Certainly, whether viewed as progression or as contrast, the stories of women in the life of David serve to complicate, humanize, call into question, and deepen his character.

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At the center of David's encounters with women and pivotal to any understanding of his character stands the episode with Bathsheba. Literary analyses of this story abound. Most influential has been the detailed and insightful reading of Israeli scholar Meir Sternberg.<sup>11</sup> Sternberg speaks of the active role necessarily played by the reader of 2 Sam 11 because of how the story is written. With its lack of direct judgment and lack of “moral characterization” of David (until the very last verse), this story is told so sparsely as to be opaque, with no hint of the characters' inner lives or motivations. So the story is filled with gaps that the reader must fill. Moreover, the first verse of chapter 11 sets the story within the ironic framework of David staying home and napping at the very time that kings were to go forth to battle, thus locating this central private encounter firmly within the political context. Separating public from private behavior is not an option; they are intertwined.<sup>12</sup> The first verse raises the question of why David “remained at Jerusalem.” Throughout the remaining sparse narration, questions multiply. What was David thinking? Did Uriah know, and thus cleverly refuse to play the role of dupe? And the always pressing larger question: How could David, God's chosen king, be both adulterer and murderer?

This question of David's surprising sinfulness has troubled readers and interpreters from the very beginning. The event is noticeably absent in Chronicles. Early on, rabbinic interpreters fashioned various explanations for why David was not guilty as apparent.<sup>13</sup> One possible way of minimizing David's guilt was to maximize

<sup>11</sup>See in Sternberg, *Poetics*, his chapter entitled “Gaps, Ambiguity, and the Reading Process,” 186–229. Note also Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 75–77.

<sup>12</sup>See the insightful article of Schwartz, “Adultery.”

<sup>13</sup>Helen Leneman, “Portrayals of Power in the Stories of Delilah and Bathsheba: Seduction in Song,” in *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, ed. George Aichele (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 139–155; Sternberg, *Poetics*, 188–189; Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 145–146.

the guilt of Bathsheba. And the narrative with its gaps makes room for this move. The corollary question of what David was thinking emerges as the pressing question of Bathsheba's possible innocence, complicity, or seduction. The literary interpreters come out at various places. Some remain neutral as to Bathsheba's behavior;<sup>14</sup> some see her as victim or tragic figure;<sup>15</sup> and some suggest her possible collusion with or even manipulation of David.<sup>16</sup> In the midst of filling in this particular narrative gap dealing with the motivations of Bathsheba, what finally draws our attention are the strong emotions that surround this conversation about her in the literature.<sup>17</sup> Settling on Bathsheba's role has both history and depth beyond the text, as becomes apparent when one looks at this issue wearing feminist glasses.

### FEMINIST LENS

In many ways the literary and feminist views of the role of the women in David's life overlap. Several of the feminists writing about these texts fall largely in the camp of literary critics.<sup>18</sup> What separates the feminists from the other literary critics are certain attitudes toward and questions put to the text, as well as a tendency to move consciously beyond or outside of the text for interpretive insight. When Bach, Bal, and Exum turn their attention to the texts dealing with the women in David's life, they make at least three pertinent observations.

First, for most readers of these texts, these women are important only as they relate to David. Or as Bach says, the women are defined "as foils for David's development."<sup>19</sup> David is the unifying principle and thus, even when other literary clues might point to the woman being at the center of her own narrative, as in the cases

<sup>14</sup>Berlin, *Characterization*, sees Bathsheba as a plot tool rather than a full-fledged character, and Sternberg is strangely silent on this particular gap, though, as Bach observes (*Women*, 139), Sternberg (on pages 201 and 202) does refer to Bathsheba's "infidelity" and "love affair," suggesting through his own vocabulary that she played a role in the adultery.

<sup>15</sup>So Moshe Garsiel, "The Story of David and Bathsheba: A Different Approach," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993) 244–262; and Larry W. Spielman, "David's Abuse of Power," *Word & World* 19/3 (1999) 251–259, who draws a comparison between the behavior of King David and President Clinton and notes the important links of sex to power and public to private behavior. Spielman says that blaming Bathsheba is "ludicrous," viewed from the perspective of professional misconduct.

<sup>16</sup>Leneman ("Portrayals of Power," 146) notes that both H. W. Hertzberg and Randall Bailey "argue for Bathsheba's complicity." See also three articles by George G. Nichol, "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 73 (1997) 43–54; "Bathsheba, a Clever Woman?" *The Expository Times* 99 (1988) 360–363; "David, Abigail, and Bathsheba, Nabal and Uriah: Transformations within a Triangle," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998) 130–145. Nichol argues that Bathsheba's behavior is ambiguous at best and that she may well have manipulated the king. He claims that once Bathsheba is pregnant, the balance of power shifts.

<sup>17</sup>See particularly the articles by Nichol (note 16, above), Spielman, "David's Abuse," and some of the feminist readings below.

<sup>18</sup>True, for example of Bach, *Women*; Alice Bach, "Signs of the Flesh: Observations on Characterization in the Bible," *Semeia* 63 (1993) 61–79; Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt': Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1993); and J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).

<sup>19</sup>Bach, *Women*, 129.

of Abigail, Michal, and Tamar, they are always set in the context of the larger story that points to David.<sup>20</sup> Worse yet, when the women are treated by the biblical narrator and by commentators as merely literary tools, functionaries for a story, the text itself becomes a type of violation of their person. As Exum explains,<sup>21</sup> readers can speculatively argue back and forth about Bathsheba's guilt, about what Bathsheba did or did not feel, but the point is that the text precludes her point of view. This device may have narrative merit,<sup>22</sup> but readers are still left with a picture of a woman's role being that of a sexual pawn in the larger narrative of a powerful king. Further "the withholding of Bathsheba's point of view leaves her open to the charge of seduction."<sup>23</sup> Skillfully written as the story is, the very skill itself becomes part of the larger problem.

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The second observation is related to the first. The women in David's life, in particular Bathsheba, are seen only through the male gaze<sup>24</sup> and are thus defined by "signs of the flesh."<sup>25</sup> In the case of Bathsheba, this gaze begins in the narrated text itself. As Bach notes, "the reader is privileged to observe signs of her flesh through the narrator's gaze: (1) the woman is bathing; (2) the woman is beautiful; (3) the woman is having sex with the king. She is identified in a traditional way [as daughter and wife].... Then we are sent more sexual signals: (4) she has just been purified from the unclean state of her menstrual period and is presumably at the fertile time in her cycle; (5) she has conceived and is pregnant."<sup>26</sup> And Exum adds that "by introducing Bathsheba to us through David's eyes," as he casually strolls out on his roof and spies a beautiful woman bathing, "the biblical narrator puts us in the position of voyeur."<sup>27</sup> We stand with David looking out at Bathsheba.

Which brings us to the third observation of feminists reading these texts: the male gaze lasts beyond the text. This happens in a number of ways. One stems from the nature of narrative itself, as discussed by Bach, citing Seymour Chatman.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>20</sup>In the case of Tamar, the rape becomes the occasion for warring factions between men, and Tamar is literally left behind at home to fade away.

<sup>21</sup>Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 22–25; see also Bach, *Women*, 135.

<sup>22</sup>See Garsiel, "Story," 261–262.

<sup>23</sup>Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 23.

<sup>24</sup>Hence, the title both of Bach's article and the chapter in her book that deals with Bathsheba (notes 13 and 18, above). Bach, *Women*, 136–140, notes that Michal is a woman who gazes at a man's flesh (i.e., David's) but unlike a gazing man, she gains contempt rather than power.

<sup>25</sup>This phrase is used by both Bach and Exum throughout their discussions of this text.

<sup>26</sup>Bach, *Women*, 135.

<sup>27</sup>Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 25.

<sup>28</sup>Bach, "Signs of the Flesh," 70.

They note that we respond to characters in ways not dreamed of or controlled by the narrator of the text. We bring our own ideas and preconceptions to the character, and this in part controls what we take away from it, how we remember the characters, where our sympathies lie. Thus, in the case of Bathsheba, we do not look simply to the text to fill out her character. We bring to our reading our own notions about women and adultery. This in turn helps to determine our reaction to the final verse of chapter 11, where “the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” What “thing”? Murder or adultery or marrying Bathsheba? Bathsheba’s role in this “thing” depends a good deal on “the loyalties of the reader.”<sup>29</sup> More than this, we do not read this text in isolation, as the first reader or community of readers in history. In truth, what we think of the character of Bathsheba is determined by many layers and many centuries of observation. And these observations are most vividly seen by looking at the portraits of Bathsheba that have been painted and emblazoned in our mind’s eye throughout the intervening centuries. As Exum notes, “Bathsheba has become the quintessential object of the gaze in literature and art through the ages.”<sup>30</sup>

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#### ARTISTIC LENS

We come then to the final lens with which we look at David and women, though to call it a lens is somewhat anachronistic. All of the women who surround David have been drawn and painted often down through the centuries. Looking at these pictures adds an important perspective on what one learns from the women in these texts. Biblical scholars are just beginning to use these artistic renderings, together with film, to explore how interpretation of texts and characters is thus illumined. Discussing these pictures without reproductions is awkward, but one can often find them either in books and articles or on the web.<sup>31</sup> In looking at some of the pictures of Bathsheba, among the many observations that might be made, I highlight just a few.

The number of painted portraits of Bathsheba is voluminous. At one level, the paintings reflect the same diversities of view about her character that one finds

<sup>29</sup>Bach, *Women*, 140.

<sup>30</sup>Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 27.

<sup>31</sup>For various discussions of artistic renderings of the women in David’s life, some with special emphasis on Bathsheba, see Exum, *Plotted*; Bal, *Reading Rembrandt*; David M. Gunn, “Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations,” *Semeia* 74 (1996) 75–102; Martin O’Kane, “The Biblical King David and His Artistic and Literary Afterlives,” *Biblical Interpretation* 6 (1998) 313–347; and Dorothee Sölle, Joe Kirchberger, and Herbert Haag, *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). The finest reproductions of Bathsheba are found in Sölle et al., Bal, and Exum, *Plotted*.

in literary interpretations. Bathsheba is almost always painted in the nude.<sup>32</sup> In a few portraits, King David is pictured lurking, even leering, suggesting his major role in the coming adultery.<sup>33</sup> However, most often David is either very distant or absent all together.<sup>34</sup> Bathsheba is often painted with some implied sympathy reflected in her expression, her posture, or in the attitude of the serving women, who are usually also present in the picture, often themselves naked as well. At times a piece of cloth is the telling feature. It can be used as a sheet or towel protecting her from prying eyes and suggesting modesty,<sup>35</sup> or draped, suggestively or not, across significant portions of her body.<sup>36</sup> But no matter the implied sympathy, Bathsheba is almost always painted seductively. At times her seductive quality blots out any sympathy whatever. Of particular note are the paintings in which she or a servant holds up a mirror so that we might watch her admire her own reflection.<sup>37</sup> She becomes the essence of vanity, adding to her crime of seduction.

Yet no matter whether one views Bathsheba with sympathy or with judgment, the centrality of her nudity remains. And this naked reality has led to the most telling comments from Exum and Bal. When we look at the portraits of Bathsheba, we become David looking at Bathsheba, naked before our gaze. We become David, and the picture isn't pretty. "We replace David as voyeur,"<sup>38</sup> headed for adultery and murder, though the mere looking is so enjoyable. In so doing, we are now not reacting to the text, we are reacting to the portrait.<sup>39</sup> There we see Bathsheba seducing us; and our sympathies or at least our understanding of David become personal. We stand ready to forgive David as we stand ready to forgive ourselves, but at the same time we stand ready to look askance at and to blame Bathsheba. In these portraits, we learn about Bathsheba. We learn about David. But mostly we learn about ourselves.

As David is surrounded by women, we also are surrounded by interpretations that determine what and who we see when David stands before us. If the women

<sup>32</sup>Some exceptions are the paintings of Wolfgang Krodel (Sölle et al., *Great Women of the Bible*, 186); Cranach the Elder, 1524 (Sölle et al., 188); and Cranach the Elder, 1526, available online at <http://www.abcgallery.com/C/cranach/cranach50.html> (cited 6 August 2003).

<sup>33</sup>See Codex Germanicus (Sölle et al., *Great Women of the Bible*, 184); Bible Moralise (Sölle et al., 187); and Cranach the Elder, 1526 (note 32).

<sup>34</sup>See, for example, van Haarlam (Sölle et al., *Great Women of the Bible*, 184); Peter Paul Rubens (Sölle et al., 184); and Rembrandt (Sölle et al., 184).

<sup>35</sup>See Hans Memling (Sölle et al., *Great Women of the Bible*, 184) and Heinrich Fueger (Sölle et al., 184).

<sup>36</sup>As in Rubens and Rembrandt. See also Jan Massys, 1562, online at <http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/art/m/massys/jan/index.html> (cited 6 August 2003).

<sup>37</sup>As in the paintings of Carlo Maratti and Hans van Aachen (Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 39–40) as well as Sebastiano Ricci, "Bathsheba in Her Bath," online at <http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/r/ricci/sebastia/2/index.html> (cited 6 August 2003). See the discussion of this feature by Exum, 38–43.

<sup>38</sup>So Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 32.

<sup>39</sup>Bach, *Women*, 132, comments on the many-layered conversation about how this stance differs in women from men. She cites John Berger, who observes, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (See Berger, *Ways of Seeing* [London: BBC, 1972] 46.)

who surround David are the key to his character, what sort of key are they? As with any biblical character, the answer depends on which glasses we put on. Each set of lenses results in certain images that tell us as much about ourselves as they do about David.

Is David, are we, primarily political? We then see biblical characters or ourselves either as movers or shakers, that is, like David, or as appendages or pawns, that is, like the women in his life. Is David, are we, primarily part of a larger story? Then we note that some folks, like David, play the part of central characters who both set and dominate the stage, while others, like the women, play secondary roles or even bit parts. Note however that one of the stunning realities of Scripture is how often the details of the stories can help us move away from center stage characters, if we let them, encouraging us to see secondary characters as centrally important. But such a reality passes us by if we are too quick to see the scriptural story as purely linear, with a straight, one-directional plot line.<sup>40</sup> Is David, are we, primarily ruled by our sexuality? If so, are some then predators and some victims; some lookers, some objects of another's gaze? We would then contrast those for whom sex is power, as seems to be the case with David, with those for whom sex involves mutuality. Is our view of David, or of ourselves, finally determined by multiple layers of interpretation and tradition? The women who surround David invite us into these questions as surely as they invite us to consider the character of David himself.<sup>41</sup> ⊕

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<sup>40</sup>See the discussion about "metanarrative" in Schwartz, "Adultery," 35–55.

<sup>41</sup>For a more complete bibliography on the women who surround David, as well as other books and articles about women in the Old Testament, consult the bibliography for my class "Harlots and Heroines," listed on my webpage (<http://www.luthersem.edu/djacobso>).