CHAPTER 3

David’s Sins and Punishments

The discussion of verbal irony in chapters 3–8 will concentrate on verbal irony as it appears in single verses or small groupings of verses. This analysis will include a discussion of the three essential elements of irony namely; (1) two different levels in the text, (2) an opposition between the levels, and (3) the presence of innocence. The element of innocence is always present in the ironist's dissimulation (where the ironist feigns innocence) and is present in the unknowing victim of the irony (if there is a victim). The victim of irony is a person who is "confidently unaware" of the irony, and not a person who is just deceived. Indeed, the victim of irony is typically an arrogant character who is confidently unaware of the incongruity in a situation.

I also include a discussion of those elements of verbal irony that are characteristic of satire. These include: the object of the ironic attack, and the identification of the grade and the mode of the irony. These latter categories will be applied systematically. For ease of reading the differences between some of the sub-categories of the modes of impersonal irony will be outlined repetitively up to the point at which it can be reasonably expected that the reader no longer needs this assistance.

Due to the vague and ambiguous nature of irony, including verbal irony, evidence of the verbal irony in the following sections will be stronger in some examples than in other examples. The examples for which the evidence is weaker are still included in this analysis in order to provide a reasonably comprehensive account. Another difficulty that arises from the vagueness and ambiguity of irony is the presence of over-lapping sub-categories of verbal irony. When this overlapping occurs the dominant sub-category is identified and other sub-categories ignored. Moreover, sometimes the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of irony makes it difficult to identify an instance of verbal irony as belonging to one sub-category rather than another or to both. In the context of limitations of space, this has resulted in some instances of verbal irony being discussed under one sub-category at the expense of doing so under other possibly equally applicable sub-categories. This process is not ideal. Nevertheless, it is a process that identifies instances of verbal irony. Uncertainty with respect to which sub-category of verbal irony an instance of irony belongs is merely a residual matter.
3.1 2 Samuel 9:1–13

3.1.1 2 Samuel 9:1–10

The lower level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the victim of the irony, or as it is deceptively presented by the ironist, and may be spoken of as the explicit text. At the lower level of 9:1 David inquires if there is anybody left in the House of Saul to whom he may show kindness so that he might honour his relationship with Jonathan. Saul’s servant, Ziba, is summoned, and informs David that Jonathan’s crippled son is still living (9:2–3). David asks where Jonathan’s son is and sends for him (9:4–5). Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, does obeisance to David and tells David that he is his servant (9:6). David tells Mephibosheth not to be afraid and that David will show חסד to Mephibosheth. Furthermore, David promises to restore all of Saul’s land to Mephibosheth, and invites Mephibosheth to eat permanently at David’s table (9:7). David then orders Ziba, Saul’s servant, and his sons to be Mephibosheth’s servants (9:9–10).

The upper level of the narrative is the situation as it appears to the ironist (be the ironist a character, the narrator or the author), and may be spoken of as the implicit message in the text. This need only be a hint that all is not what it seems in the lower level. At the upper level of this passage there is a hint that all is not what it seems as David’s pledge of חסד appears to be overstated. Note, I interpret hesed, in this context, as covenant loyalty. The overstated mention of חסד is anomalous. Furthermore, the over emphasis on David’s pledge of חסד draws attention to David’s so-called pledge of חסד. It is more likely that David only offered חסד to Mephibosheth because it was in David’s own interests to do so and not because he was doing goodwill to Mephibosheth or, strictly speaking, honouring a covenant he made with Jonathan (this will be discussed further below). The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition—David says that he is showing חסד to Mephibosheth but in reality this is not the truth. Instead, David is making a display of showing חסד to Mephibosheth while David is ‘honoring’ a political covenant that he had previously made and did not want to honour. To look after any able-bodied kin members of Jonathan would be risky to David, considering there is evidence that David usurped the throne from Saul. An able-bodied kin member could, potentially, mount a revolt against David. At the lower level it appears as though David is showing חסד to Mephibosheth. However, in the upper level, the overstated mention of חסד implies an opposition in the narrative—that David is not showing חסד to Mephibosheth. The three mentions of the חסד in this passage, in context, are as follows.
All three of these verses refer to the covenant that David made with Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20:13–15 and that is repeated in 1 Samuel 20:42. In this everlasting covenant David and Jonathan agreed to preserve each other’s family line. This is particularly salient not only for the bond of friendship that existed between Jonathan and David, but also because Jonathan could presume that David would take the throne (1 Sam. 20:31). Therefore, in this exchange Jonathan facilitates David’s kingship at the expense of his own kingship, given that Jonathan is directly in line to succeed Saul. However, this exchange is not entirely unconditional as it appears that Jonathan has conceded the throne with the understanding that David will honour Saul’s descendants—presumably because Jonathan was entitled to be king.

The connection to royal entitlement is conveyed in David’s bequest of Saul’s estate to Mephibosheth, complete with servants to maintain the estate, and the offer to Mephibosheth to eat at the king’s table (9:7). Therefore, Mephibosheth will enjoy the privileges of his royal status, which is in keeping with the covenant that David made with Jonathan.

At the lower lever it appears as though David is honouring the covenant he made with Jonathan. This is the view that is endorsed by Craig Morrison among others. However, the overstatement of the concept of חסד implies that

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1 Author’s translation.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
David is not truly treating Mephibosheth with חסד. Instead, the חסד that David offers to Mephibosheth is tainted חסד. The notion of impropriety in the upper level is further implied by the suggestion that David had slaughtered everybody in the House of Saul (9:13). With this in mind, David’s display of loyalty to Mephibosheth becomes suspicious. P. Kyle McCarter argues that Shimei’s later claim that David slaughtered the Saulides (2 Sam. 16:7) adds suspicion to this scene. McCarter argues,

It may be more than accidental, moreover, that the one male Saulide who survived the purge was lame. A man who was lame—or had any physical blemish—could not function as a priest (Lev 21:16–23). We are nowhere told that a blemish excluded a man from becoming king but in view of the sacrosanct character of the king’s body (2 Sam 1:14) it seems most unlikely that a man “crippled in both legs” could have been regarded as a qualified candidate for the throne.6

Thereby, David honours the covenant with Jonathan in word but not in spirit, and as such David is the object of ironic attack. I note that the object of attack should be distinguished from the victim of irony. The victim of irony is sometimes also the object of attack. Arguably, David, who is the object of attack may also be the victim of irony if it can be demonstrated that he is confidently unaware of the irony. However, in this instance David is not the victim of irony as he is aware that he is not truly honouring the covenant he made with Jonathan. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is not necessarily the victim of irony. For the victim of irony could be a bystander, namely, a bystander who is confidently unaware of this irony.

The pejorative criticism in this passage concerns David’s overstated assurance to honour Jonathan’s covenant by showing loving kindness to his kin, in contrast with the upper level where it appears that David is keeping Mephibosheth under ‘house arrest’.7 David’s ambivalence, if not hostility, towards Mephibosheth is also evident later in the narrative when David gives all of Mephibosheth’s estate to Ziba on the basis of Ziba’s mischievous claim (2 Sam. 16:1–4; 19:24–26).

The mode of irony, in this instance, is impersonal, as the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The grade of irony is covert as the intended meaning is not immediately apprehended. The irony is only apprehended by means of

knowledge of the background information just discussed and the anomaly in
the language—the overstatement of חסד.

In this section the evidence of satire consists not only of the irony but
also the coarseness characteristic of satire—notably, Mephibosheth’s self-
description as a “dead dog” (9:8). This comment was particularly vulgar in the
Ancient Near East.8

3.1.2 2 Samuel 9:10–13
At the lower level (the explicit level) of 9:10–11 Ziba promises David that he and
his large body of sons and servants will serve Mephibosheth as David has re-
quested. Mephibosheth is said to eat at the king’s table as the king’s son would.
It is also noted that Mephibosheth had a son named Micah. At the lower level of
9:13 it is said that Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and always ate at the king’s
table, and that he was lame in his feet. At the upper level (the implicit level) of
the narrative it is implied that David is not showing חסד to Mephibosheth. This
implied message arises in the contrast between the description of the lavish
treatment that is given to Mephibosheth (9:10–13a) and the final comment that
Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet (9:13b). Note, this contrast relies on
the background knowledge that David hated cripples and that a man who was
crippled could not be King of Israel.

This contrast is emphasized in the anomalous language in the text.
Specifically, the language in 9:10–13a is verbose and the content of what is said
overstated whereas the language in 9:13b is curt and the content of what is said
curtly stated. This combination of overstated language and curt language has
the effect of emphasizing the ironic exaggeration in the longer section and
the damning information in the curt section. It is argued that when a prolix
comment is combined with one which is curt, it is the shorter section which is
emphasized, as the reader is compelled to give the second segment the same
attention as he or she gives to the first section (pausing after reading each
word). This slower reading adds emphasis to the curt section which contains
the damning information. Furthermore, the anomaly of the verbose and curt
sections is jarring to the reader who will in turn re-read the verbose section
and notice the exaggeration in this section in addition to the brevity in the
curt section—which is emphasized (this mode of irony is discussed further in
2 Sam. 11:1).9 Therefore, the fact that Mephibosheth was lame in both of his feet
is emphasized. This is significant as Mephibosheth’s disability ensured that he

8 Craig E. Morrison, 2 Samuel, 125.
9 Perry and Sternberg, ‘The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary
was not a threat to David. Therefore, David is able to make a display of honouring his covenant with Johnathan, but doing so in a manner that does not honour Johnathan’s right to succession, as Mephibosheth could never be king, given his disability.10

Suspicion also arises when we consider David’s view of the lame and blind as inferior. For instance, “David had said that day, “Whoever would strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those who David hates.” Therefore, it is said, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house” (2 Sam 5:8). Given David’s earlier statements can we really believe that he is well-disposed to Mephibosheth who is lame in both feet—or, in other words, very disabled?

The irony in this section is covert as it is not immediately apparent, and is only discerned with the benefit of background knowledge and by the anomaly in the presentation of facts—verbosity followed by curtness. The irony is impersonal and is an example of the sub-category of irony displayed. In particular, the events are displayed in a manner that is intended to be ironic, and there is a distinct ‘contrast of incompatibles’. The contrast of incompatibles is between 9:10–13a, where David treats Mephibosheth exceptionally ‘kindly’, in contrast to 9:13b, where it is noted that Mephibosheth was lame in both feet (and is therefore hated by David). From the background material we know that David did not care for the disabled, and we can suspect that David did not care for Mephibosheth either, despite the message in the lower level of the narrative. We also suspect that the author has arranged the facts in such a way so as to imply a pejorative criticism of David.

The opposition in the narrative concerns the explicit message in the text, that David was exceptionally kind to Mephibosheth, in contrast to the implicit message in the text, that David hating the crippled and was only kind to Mephibosheth as David was calculating and self-serving. Therefore, David is the object of ironic attack. The innocence in the narrative is provided by the feigned ignorance of the narrator.

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10 I note, although, Mephibosheth’s son (and potential heir) Mica is mentioned (2 Sam. 9:12) there is no mention of what became of him. Indeed, there is no further mention of Mica in the entire Succession Narrative.
3.2 2 Samuel 10:1–19

3.2.1 2 Samuel 10:1–2

At the lower level (or the explicit level) of the narrative it is reported that Hanun becomes the king of the Ammonites (10:1). David says that he will be loyal to Hanun to repay the loyalty that Hanun's father had shown to David. David then sends an envoy to Hanun to console him over his father’s death (10:2).

At the upper level (or the implicit level) of the narrative the implication is that David is not going to show חסד to Hanun, or at least only tainted חסד to Hanun. This implication can be drawn from the discussion in the previous section where it is implied that the ‘loyalty’ that David extends to others is largely self-serving. Thereby, there is an implication that David has another motive for sending an envoy to Hanun, given that David is not concerned with consoling Hanun. The conflict in the narrative is a direct opposition. The explicit message that David is going to show loyalty and console Hanun is in direct opposition to the implicit message that David is going to wage war against Hanun and the Ammonites. This is somewhat confirmed by the response of the princes of the Ammonites (10:3). Their rhetorical questions are as follows:

המכבר דוד את־אביך בעיניך כי־שׁלח לך מנחים
(Do you think, because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honouring your father?)

הלוא בעבור חקור את־העיר ולרגלה ולהפכה שׁלח דוד את־עבדיו אליך
(Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?)

Indeed, it would appear that Hanun and the princes of the Ammonites are so certain that David has sent spies to the city on a reconnaissance mission that they: (1) send David a clear message that they have seen through his ruse by exposing the men as spies and not diplomats (indeed, publicly humiliating them) (10:4), and (2) prepare for war (10:6). The second point is stressed in the overstated preparation that the Ammonites make for war. Certainly, McCarter

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11 Translation care of the Revised Standard Version.
12 Ibid.
13 The fact that the Ammonites prepare for war would seem to support the interpretation of “overthrow” rather than McCarter’s interpretation of “to explore”. P. Kyle McCarter, II Samuel, 270.
argues that it is unlikely that the Ammonites had the resources to hire such a large army.  

David supplies the feigned innocence in the irony by suggesting that he is going to show loyalty to Hanun (10:2). It may also be suggested, that Hanun’s father did not show loyalty to David, thereby creating a possible double opposition in David’s remark. Indeed, there is no mention in the Bible of Nahash’s loyalty to David. The implied message in this instance would be, “I will not deal loyally with Hanun, just as his father did not deal loyally with me.” It is certainly true that the princes of the Ammonites could see no reason why David would deal loyally with them.

The irony is covert as it must be discerned from context, in this case, the context is David’s lack of true חסד in the preceding chapter. The irony is impersonal and is either an example of an insinuation (in the instance of David’s intention to wage war against the Ammonites) or an example of praising in order to blame. In the later example, David praises Hanun’s father, when his intention is to blame him. Either way David is the object of ironic attack as he manipulates the concept of חסד.

3.3 2 Samuel 11:1–27

3.3.1 2 Samuel 11:1

At the lower level (the explicit level) of 11:1 David sends Joab, his officers, and all of Israel to war, whilst David stays behind in Jerusalem. In this instance, the ironist emphasizes that David does not lead the Israelites in war even though he was expected to do so (2 Sam. 5:2–3). The incongruity in this passage is between what is said and what is meant. The statement of facts at the lower level seems to be a morally neutral presentation of facts, however, the message of this verse is that David should have been fighting with his troops.

The verbosity in 11:1 and the pointed comment that David remained in Jerusalem, may be interpreted as the ironist’s mode of dissimulation (as discussed below). David is considered to be the object of attack. The irony is an instance of simple irony arising from the incongruity between the levels. At the upper level the ironist’s criticism which is informed by the background knowledge of David (and expressed in the anomalous language), invalidates the moral neutrality at the lower level. This tension then points to the criticism that David is not living up to his covenant with the Israelites, nor is he living God’s favour seriously.

14 Ibid. 274.
The grade of the irony in this narrative is covert, as it is not immediately apparent. Instead, the irony is conveyed in the specific use of language in the narrative, and with the help of the background knowledge that the reader has of David.

The unusual language which has been used in this verse (and has also been mentioned in reference to 2 Sam. 9:10–13) has been discussed extensively by Perry and Sternberg in their paper, *The King Through Ironic Eyes: Biblical Narrative and the Literary Process*, and will be outlined in reference to 2 Samuel 11:1 briefly. Perry and Sternberg suggest that the syntax in 11:1 points to irony, and can be spoken of in reference to the two proposed sections—11:1a which ends with the comment that Rabbah was besieged, and 11:1b which states, אודוד יושׁב בירושׁלם. 11:1a is prolix and 11:1b is curt. As mentioned earlier, it is argued that when a prolix comment is combined with one which is curt, it is the shorter section which is emphasized, as the reader is compelled to give the second segment the same attention as he or she gives to the first section (pausing after reading each word). The emphasis of 11:1 is that David remained in Jerusalem.

Perry and Sternberg claim that after the reader is aware of the anomaly in the syntax, he or she will refer back to the wordiness of the first section to evaluate it for subtext. In this case the reader will notice the excessive amount of information that is given in 11:1a and identify it as ironic exaggeration. The verbosity in the middle of the verse thereby adds irony, as the criticism is delivered with “who-what-where details” which seem to suggest an innocent arrangement of facts, or in other words, point to the dissimulation of the ironist with respect to the content of the lower level. The dissimulation which is communicated, albeit implicitly, is communicated in the upper level of the narrative.

The background knowledge which aids the irony is the knowledge that David acts contrary to the expectation that he would lead the Israelites out to war. This expectation is documented in both of the books of Samuel. In the First Book of Samuel, Israel wants a king to go out before her and to fight her battles (1 Sam. 8:20), and in 1 Samuel 18:16 the Israelites begin to shift their allegiance to David as it was, "he who marched out and came in leading them." In the Second Book of Samuel the Israelites make a covenant with David and anoint him as the King of Israel because he led them out to war ahead of Saul.
(2 Sam. 5:2–3). This background knowledge of David creates the conflict in 11:1, as David is loved by Israel for leading the army out to war, yet, in this verse David sends Joab and his officers and all of Israel out to battle, while David stays in Jerusalem. This not only demonstrates a conflict between the expectations that Israel had of David and David’s actions, but it also confounds the idea that Israel won battles with David as “the LORD was with him” on the battlefield (1 Sam. 18:14).

The mode of verbal irony in this case is impersonal, and the specific subcategory of the mode of impersonal irony is irony displayed. In this instance of irony displayed the ironist has presented the situation of all of Israel at war, yet with David remaining in Jerusalem, as a close confrontation of incompatibles. All of Israel at war is incompatible (in terms of the expectations of the time) with David remaining in Jerusalem. The specific object of attack in 2 Samuel 11:1 is David and the ironic object more broadly understood (the ironic content, so to speak) is David’s broken promise to the Israelites.

At this point it is helpful to consider the results of this discussion in the light of the debate surrounding the interpretation of 11:1a. The mainstream interpretation of this verse is, “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle …”18 However, this interpretation has been widely contested and needs further discussion. The difficulty in translation arises as the verse is literally translated to mean “And it was the turn of the year;” however, the text is ordinarily interpreted to mean, “In the spring of the year.” The latter interpretation has been favoured as military campaigns were traditionally held in springtime when the conditions were optimal for fighting. The word מלאכים which is literally translated as ‘messengers’ is ordinarily interpreted as ‘kings’ for the same reason.19 However, David Clines makes a persuasive argument that the New Year came around in autumn at the time of this verse—a season when traditionally kings did not go out to battle.20 Given all this ambiguity with respect to seasons, kings and messengers, McKenzie suggests that the text is referring to David’s battle with the Ammonites, when the army went out to war without David (2 Sam. 10:7), and where the author does not appear to be critical of David’s decision to remain in Jerusalem.21 Moreover, it is argued that on the literal interpretation (messengers going to war at the turn of the year)

18 See also Good, Irony in the Old Testament, 35–36.
19 McCarter, Jr. II Samuel, 284.
a contrast cannot be assumed between King David and other kings, (which
Robert Polzin suggests destroys the irony).22 Furthermore, McKenzie argues
that 11:1 points ahead to what happens during the period when David remains
in Jerusalem.23

However, Muecke’s methodology still finds ironic criticism in this passage
regardless of this ambiguity, as David did not meet the expectations that the
Israelites had of him, namely that he lead his army into battle whatever the
season. This incompatibility remains regardless of the narrator’s lack of com-
mentary in 2 Samuel 10:7, and is not dependant on a comparison of David with
other kings. Thus, “In the return of the year when the messengers march out
to battle, David stayed in Jerusalem,” is equally as damning as “when kings
march out to battle.” It has even been suggested that the ambiguity sur-
rounding the word kings/messengers heightens the irony in the text as it contains
the additional irony, that when kings are meant to go to war, messengers go
out instead.24

3.3.2  2 Samuel 11:2
At the lower level (or the explicit level) of 11:2 David arises from his couch,
walks around on the roof of the palace and sees a beautiful woman bathing. At
the upper level of the narrative the ironist, who has criticized David because he
did not lead his troops in battle (11:1), is similarly critical. This time the criticism
consists in the implication that David is more interested in a nap and a beauti-
ful woman than the war effort (11:2). This incongruity is an incongruity in the
narrative between what is said and what is meant. Although David is portrayed
(explicitly at the lower level) as doing rather innocuous things such as napping,
walking, and looking from his palace, the message of the verse (implied
at the upper level) is that David is cavalier and lascivious. David is the object of
ironic attack. The innocence in the narrative is present in the dissimulation of
the ironist who pretends that he/she is unaware of the conflict in the narrative.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The irony
is conveyed by means of narrative context (notably 11.1), the choice of language
used, and by means of the contrast with 11:1. For instance,25 מָשָׂא indicates
that David was taking a siesta prior to spying the woman from the roof of the
king’s palace, and the hitpa’el of הַלָּכַת suggests that he was casually strolling

22   Polzin, David and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History,
25   Author’s translation, “his bed”.

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around the roof of the palace. These words which denote relaxation heighten
the stationary appeal of יושב in 11:1a and contrast with the frenetic energy of
the Israelites in war (2 Sam. 11:1a). This adds to the contrast between the self-
indulgence of David and the self-sacrifice of the Israelites who are in battle.26

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of im-
personal irony is the innuendo. An innuendo may be assumed given the em-
phasis of the verse on Bathsheba’s beauty in the context of prior criticism of
David. Moreover, the language follows the same pattern as 11:1. 11:2 may also be
broken into two smaller sections; 11:2a which is prolix, and 11:2b which is the
curt statement,

והאשה טובת מראה מאד
(The woman was very beautiful.)27

In keeping with Perry and Sternberg’s suggestion, this pattern indicates that
there is ironic exaggeration in 11:2a and an emphasis which should arouse sus-
picion in 11:2b. Of note, although there is a commonality in the language in 11:1
and 11:2, this verse is better interpreted as an innuendo as there is less of a clash
of incompatibles (however, this still exists) and more of a suggestion of David’s
weakness for a beautiful woman.

Pairing the presentation of David as a self-indulgent king who is not con-
cerned with his responsibilities to the Israelites, with the emphasis in 11:2b
leads the reader to suspect that the woman’s exceptional beauty is a tempta-
tion to David. The innuendo in the verse is that David is attracted to the woman.
The innuendo in 11:2b coupled with the exaggeration in 11:2a leads the reader to
identify the implicit message at the upper level of the narrative as being criti-
cal of David’s self-indulgent behaviour, particularly when all of Israel is at war.
This in turn is the content (or object, broadly understood) of the ironic mes-

3.3.3 2 Samuel 11:3
At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:3 the (explicit) content is that
David sends a person to discover the identity of the woman he sees bathing.
The servant tells David that the woman’s name is Bathsheba, and that she is the
daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah. At the upper level of the narrative the
ironist implies that the details of the men associated with Bathsheba (details
to be discussed shortly), are important as these men are presumably members

26  Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2),” 51.
27  Translation care of the Revised Standard Version.
of David’s elite troops and are presumably at war when David is not. Moreover, if the innuendo in 11:2 is correct, and if it can be assumed that David is tempted by Bathsheba, it may then be inferred that David is guilty of coveting another man’s wife (Exod. 20:17, Deut. 5:21). This is a further implication.

In 11:3 there is an incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The messenger gives David a detailed explicit description of Bathsheba and her family, however, the messenger implicitly passes judgment on David by way of his rhetorical question to David, “Do you not know that she is the wife of…” (of which more below). For it may be inferred that the messenger wanted to communicate, but would be afraid to explicitly state, that it would be deeply immoral for David to sleep with Bathsheba.

David may be spoken of, not only as the object of ironic attack, but also as the victim of irony as he is spoken to ironically, and does not appear to understand the implied content and, therefore, the significance, of the messenger’s speech. The grade of verbal irony is covert as it is implied by way of the context and the language of the narrative. In this instance, the background knowledge of Bathsheba’s family suggests irony. The most damning information in this passage is that Bathsheba is married, and that David has begun to pursue a married woman. However, the implied criticism of David is amplified in the knowledge of Bathsheba’s family, of which there is a discussion to follow.

Bathsheba is identified as the daughter of Eliam. The identification of a married woman with her father is unusual, and suggests that Eliam was a man of considerable importance. Given this, it is possible that Eliam was Ahithophel’s son, and also a member of David’s elite troops, as is mentioned in 2 Samuel 23:34. Uriah the Hittite, is clearly spoken of as Bathsheba’s husband. Furthermore, Uriah is thought to be one of David’s elite warriors called the Thirty, as his house was in close proximity with the palace, which suggests that he was of the elite class. It has also been suggested (and would be further damning) that Uriah was associated with nobility, however, this is questionable as this assumption rests on scant biblical proof (Ezek. 16:3). Given what is known of Bathsheba, Eliam, and Uriah, it would be immoral for the king to pursue Bathsheba.

The mode of verbal irony in question is that of impersonal irony, and it could be argued that the sub-category of verbal irony is that of rhetorical question. However, this remark is contentious. Most translations present the messenger’s

28 However, there is not enough information in the text to identify Eliam positively. McCarter Jr. II Samuel, 285.

29 Ibid.

response to David as a statement of fact, yet, it is more persuasive to interpret
the speech in 11:3 as an interrogative. For instance, הלוא הזאת appears to indicate
that this is a "speculative inquiry." Moreover, the placement of the verb דרש
after the verb אמר suggests that David is the subject of the inquiry.31 It has even
been suggested that this might better be translated ‘thought,’ leading this verse
to read as David’s own conscience speaking.32 Yet, as the context does not sup-
port the strength of David’s conscience, it is more persuasive to suggest that
the messenger spoke to David with a rhetorical question.

The use of a rhetorical question creates a subtext, and emphasises the de-
tails of the remark. The emphases of the verse are that Bathsheba is married
and that her husband and father are men of great stature in the community.
This justifies strong criticism of David. This justified criticism of David forms
the ironic content and the connection with 11:1 strengthens this criticism. For
Uriah is on the battlefield, and Eliam can be assumed to be, whilst David is not.
In 11:3 David ‘sends’ someone to inquire about the beautiful woman he sees
bathing, which contrasts with the image of the Israelites whom he ‘sent’ to
war in 11:1. The object of ironic attack is David and the ironic content (object,
broadly understood) is that David is coveting the wife of a soldier who is at war.

### 3.3.4 2 Samuel 11:4–5
At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:4 David sends messengers to
get Bathsheba, she comes to him, he lies with her, and she returns home. In
11:5 she realises that she is pregnant and sends a messenger to tell David that
she is pregnant. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level of the narrative
the ironist represents the incongruity in the situation: The King of Israel, who
is called to uphold the laws, commits adultery. However, this immoral act has
been implicitly communicated by way of understated language.33

David is the object of ironic attack. The criticism of David that he has
broken a law is made at the upper level and this criticism contrasts with the
understated events at the lower level. The irony is covert irony as it is not im-
mediately apparent, and the identification of the irony relies on background
knowledge in the text, and the language used.

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31 R. C. Bailey, David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–2 (Sheffield
Academic Press, 1990), 94.
32 Keith Bodner, “The Royal Conscience According to 4 QSam,” Dead Sea Discoveries 11, no. 2
(2004), 158–166, 162.
33 The subject of Bathsheba’s complicity in the affair will not be discussed in this book as the
ironic criticism appears to be directed towards David. See the following article for a full
discussion of Bathsheba’s role in the act of adultery: Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Was
The background knowledge is best understood with reference to the laws which prohibit adultery. Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18 clearly state that adultery is a sin against God. The death penalty for adultery can be found in Deuteronomy 22:22. However, there is debate surrounding the actual enforcement of these laws. Henry McKeating argues that there is no account in the OT of a person being executed for committing adultery, and therefore, the enforcement of these laws cannot be taken at face value. Rather, it has been suggested that they may represent ‘ideals’ to be strived for. McKeating’s argument is not valid. From the fact that adultery might not be enforced by the death penalty it does not follow that it was not enforced by lesser penalties. Moreover, it has been argued that the laws governing adultery were understood as laws protecting a man’s property, or protecting the paternity of a man’s children. In these cases adultery was viewed as a crime rather than a civil matter, which would make adultery a community concern potentially requiring the death penalty. Regardless of the gravity of the transgression, or the punishment for the action, it can still be said that a negative view of adultery informs this text, this conflict is then heightened by the knowledge that the adulterer is the King of Israel.

The anomalies in the use of language are best understood in terms of ambiguity and understatement. An example of ambiguous language can be found in the word שכב. This word can mean to sleep, or lie down in illness, as well as being a euphemism for sexual intercourse. In this case, it is clarified unambiguously by the context, which relates that Bathsheba conceived (11:5). However,
the more striking anomaly in the narrative is the understated language. The curt presentation of facts is not only striking considering its contrast with the verbosity in the first few verses, but striking also in the light of the importance of the events which are being described. Most saliently, the King of Israel commits an act of adultery which results in a pregnancy.

Therefore, the verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. According to Muecke understatement is not always ironic, for instance, “I am not feeling the best” is better understood as a common expression of direct language without a hidden meaning. By contrast, ironic understatement is found in situations which call for strong emotional language but which are made light of. The king’s act of adultery which left a married woman pregnant should have been expressed with strong language, and therefore the designation of understatement is appropriate. The content or broad object of the irony is David’s act of adultery.

3.3.5 2 Samuel 11:6–8
At the lower (and, therefore, explicit) level of 11:6 Joab sends Uriah to David, on David’s command. In 11:7 David asks Uriah how Joab is, and how the war is going. In 11:8 David tells Uriah to go home and wash his feet, and Uriah finds a present awaiting him as he leaves the palace. At the upper (and, therefore, implicit) level there is a dual meaning in David’s suggestion that Uriah wash his feet. This suggestion could mean that Uriah should wash his feet since his return to Jerusalem has been tiring. However, there is another meaning

286). This assessment would not only be more critical of David (as he would have made Uriah’s wife pregnant and defiled himself), but it would add a further element of obscenity which is that trademark of satirical writing. Another interpretation (which rests on the assumption that the word מתקדשת means consecrating or self-sancifying) asserts that Bathsheba is presented in this narrative as the sanctified “mother of Israel.” (J. D’Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11,” JSOT. 2008, 32, 339–352, 339). This claim does not fit readily with Deuteronomy 22:22 where Bathsheba would have been considered guilty of adultery, and would have received the same punishment as David. This background knowledge contradicts the argument that Bathsheba is presented as the sanctified “mother of Israel” in this narrative. A less clumsy interpretation might be that this sentence refers to Bathsheba’s act of purification after she had been involved with David. This interpretation is possible as the noun מטמאתה combined with מתקדשת can suggest cleansing which follows sexual relations. (J. D’Ror Chankin-Gould, et al., “The Sanctified ‘Adulteress’ and her Circumstantial Clause: Bathsheba’s Bath and Self-Consecration in 2 Samuel 11,” 351). Regardless of the ambiguity, it can still be said with certainty that David and Bathsheba had intercourse, and that Bathsheba fell pregnant. This is the damning information as far as the ironist is concerned.

Muecke, The Compass of Irony, 80.
which is damning for David. For this comment could be taken as a directive for Uriah to go home and have sexual relations with Bathsheba. This claim can be made with some degree of certainty. First, המרגלים in other biblical references connote the genitals (Ruth 3:4, 7; Ezek. 16:25). Second, there is the allusion to sexual relations in 11:4, so, it would be consistent if this verse was an allusion to sexual intercourse also.

David’s comment to Uriah that he should have intercourse with Bathsheba and defile himself points to the incongruity in the narrative, as David is known as a person who is very strict when it concerns the rules of ritual purity (1 Sam. 21:5), and the customs of hospitality (1 Sam. 25:13). This opposition indicates that David is the object of ironic attack. Of note, Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony as he is not arrogantly unaware.

The grade of irony is covert, and is conveyed by the anomalies in the language, and by recourse to the background information. 11:6 begins with the familiar word שלח. So far in the narrative this word has been attached to all of the tension surrounding David’s actions. For example, David ‘sent’ Joab and all of Israel out to war when he ought to have been leading the army (11:1), David ‘sends’ the servant to inquire about the woman he sees bathing (11:3), David ‘sends’ for the woman (11:4), and she ‘sends’ word back to David that she is pregnant (11:5). Thereby, the use of שלח three times in 11:6 is significant. In the following verse, in contrast to the three mentions of שלח there are three mentions of the word שלום. This contrast, and the repetition of the word שלום point to the insincerity of David for the narrative thus far suggests that David is not concerned with the harmony that the word שלום implies.41 Furthermore, if shalom is interpreted to mean ‘peace’, as I interpret it to be, then this verse is highly ironic. First David asks Uriah if there is peace with Joab, if there is peace with the soldiers in the war, and then if there is peace with the war itself!

The pertinent background information of the narrative is that David is otherwise excessively concerned with the standards of sacral law. In 1 Samuel 21:5 David assures Abimelech that the soldier’s כלי (which means ‘vessels,’ another euphemism for genitals)42 were קדש or ‘holy’ on ordinary journeys, and especially when the soldiers were on active duty. David’s extreme (if not overstated) assurance to Abimelech of the soldiers’ purity in 1 Samuel 21:5 then calls into question his insistence that Uriah go to his house for sexual relations. If Uriah were to do as David instructs he would be guilty of contravening the

strict sacral regulations of soldiers in battle. This knowledge was fully known to David. The gift which David has presented to Uriah is, in context, best considered as a bribe, which makes the criticism of David even sharper.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of verbal irony is irony displayed. In this instance, the close confrontation of incompatibles is best understood in the contrast of David’s apparent concern for Joab, the Israelites at war, and the war itself in 11:7 with his directive to Uriah to compromise himself and the war effort by lying with his wife in 11:8 (particularly, when this is considered with the knowledge of David’s reported concern for the purity of soldiers in battle). This contrast is heightened by the three mentions of שֶׁלום in 11:7, and with the lack of שֶׁלום in 11:8. The content of the irony is David’s attempt to cover-up his transgression, and his abuse of hospitality in the process.

3.3.6 2 Samuel 11:9–11
At the lower (explicit) level of 11:9 Uriah sleeps at the entrance of the king’s palace instead of going home. In 11:10 the servants tell David that Uriah did not go down to his house, and David asks Uriah why he did not go to his house. In 11:11 Uriah asks David if David thinks it would be inappropriate for him to go to his home and enjoy the comforts of his wife. At the upper (implicit) level of the narrative the ironist implies that David is immoral for asking Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. This irony is evident in Uriah’s rhetorical question in 11:11:

אָם מָאוּ הָא לֶכְתָּב לַעֲלֵה וְלָשֹׁב עִמָּשֵׁנָּה
(Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife?)

This question can easily be identified as a rhetorical question as Uriah does not wait for an answer from David, and Uriah answers his own question in the following way,

חִכְּךָ וַחִי נַפְשֲׁךָ אִם־אֶאֱכֹל אֶלְעָשֹׁת וְלָשֹׁב עַל־אָשָׁנָּה
(As you live, and your desire lives, I will not do this thing.)

Also, of note is the damning information which prefaces Uriah’s rhetorical question in 11:11,

43 Translation care of the Revised Standard Version.
44 Author’s translation.
Mention of the ark is significant, as it strengthens the pejorative content of the irony displayed in the previous passage. For the presence of the ark in battle required that all soldiers be ritually pure, and abstain from sexual activity (Deut. 23:9–14). Thereby, it would seem that David put his need to cover-up his transgression above the need for ritual purity in soldiers, and presumably therefore, potentially compromised the war effort. The fact that it is a foreigner, or a soldier of foreign descent who has to inform the king of Yahweh's rules for ritual purity could be regarded as a parodying feature of satire.

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Uriah says and what he means. Uriah asks David a question, however, Uriah does not want an answer from David. The rhetorical question creates a stark contrast between Uriah's upright behaviour and David's duplicity. Uriah is not prepared to enjoy the luxuries of civilian life whilst all of Israel is away fighting, nor is he prepared to breach any rules which may be damaging to the army and Israel as a whole. Whereas, David is presented as living in self-indulgent luxury and being injurious to those he is meant to administer justice to. The personal pronoun אני in 11:11b creates a contrast between Uriah, who righteously will not lie with his wife, with David who has already done so illicitly. The pejorative criticism here is heightened by a further contrast between Uriah and David, in the exaggerated vow that Uriah makes in David's name. David is obviously the object of ironic attack and the content of the irony is David's attempt to defile Uriah which would compromise the war-effort. Moreover, this rhetorical question in this context renders the implied criticism fairly obvious. So, the form of verbal irony is overt.

3.3.7 2 Samuel 11:12–13
At the lower level of 11:12 David requests that Uriah stay in Jerusalem for an extra day. In 11:13 David invites Uriah to eat and drink with him and David makes Uriah drunk. However, Uriah does not go home and sleep with Bathsheba. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist insinuates that David actions are underhanded, and that although he appears to be showing hospitality to Uriah,
David's real and deceptive intentions are contrary to his apparent innocuous intentions. The ironist insinuates that David gets Uriah drunk in another manipulative attempt to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba. The opposition in this passage concerns the difference between the matter-of-fact presentation of facts, with the real message of this section which is as follows: David who is otherwise strict when it comes to matters of hospitality is a hypocrite.

Yet again, David is the target of ironic attack. The grade of irony is covert as it is conveyed by relying in part on the background knowledge concerning David. In particular, the irony relies on features of the context of the narrative, specifically, the story of David and Nabal which displays David's knowledge of the importance of showing hospitality to a guest. In 1 Samuel 25 David demonstrates how important hospitality is to him when Nabal refuses David hospitality. In this narrative Nabal refuses to feed David and his men. (See the rhetorical question in 1 Sam. 25:11.) David is so angered by Nabal that he is prepared to kill Nabal for ignoring the proper customs of hospitality (1 Sam. 25:34). Therefore, observing the custom of hospitality would appear to be important to David.

However, the story of David and Uriah is different from the story of David and Nabal. David does provide Uriah with food, drink, and the offer of shelter. Yet, the חסד—an inherent part of hospitality—is not demonstrated in David’s actions. In 11:11–12 the offer of food and alcohol is given to Uriah to make him pliable so that David can manipulate him into sleeping with Bathsheba with the ultimate purpose of covering up his own transgression. The offer of shelter in this instance further heightens the criticism of David. For Uriah is not offered to sleep in the palace—an action which would protect Uriah from tainting his reputation. Instead, David commands that Uriah go to his own house (11:8). Thereby, the ironist in this passage is critical of David’s decision to extend the acts of hospitality, but not the חסד which is an inherent element of hospitality. This too is the content of the irony. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, as the ironist is not a character in the narrative. The subcategory of impersonal irony is irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles in this instance is best expressed in 11:13. In 11:13 the King of Israel acts in a manner which is contrary to the conventions of Israel. By contrast, Uriah, who may be a foreigner, or is at least of foreign descent, nevertheless lives in accordance with the standards of Israelite law.

3.3.8 2 Samuel 11:14–15
At the lower level of 11:14 David writes a note for Joab, which he gives to Uriah to deliver to Joab. In the note David commands that Uriah be placed at the front of the heaviest fighting, and that the other troops withdraw from Uriah in the fighting (11:15). At the upper level of the narrative the ironist does not
see the situation as David sees it. Here the ironist’s contrasting view relies on important background information that the ironist has with respect to God’s laws and the expectations of David as a king. David’s request for Joab to, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die” (11:15) is shocking, as the reader expects the king to administer justice, and be obedient to the laws. The opposition in this section arises from the difference between what David does and what is expected of David.

David is the target of ironic attack. David’s actions are in breach of God’s laws and, as king, he has a special—indeed, God-given—duty to see to it that Joab complies with these laws. Crucially, David is not only breaking the law himself and not doing his duty to ensure others comply with the law, he is strenuously trying to cause others to break the law; in this instance he is trying to cause Joab to break the law. Moreover, David is trying to cause Joab to break a central and important law. This is not only ironic, but morally wrong and profoundly corrupt.

Uriah is not the victim of verbal irony, as Uriah merely follows a command to deliver the letter and is unaware of the contents of the letter. Nor is Joab the victim of irony. For while the irony of the situation may escape him, this ignorance is not the product of arrogance or stupidity, i.e. it is not in Muecke’s terms, “confident unawareness”.

The irony is a simple irony arising from a contrast between the two levels. At the lower level David, in effect, orders the killing of an innocent, at the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity between David’s actions and the expectation that the king administer justice (as explained above).

The grade of irony is covert, as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be understood after consideration of the context. As already mentioned, the King of Israel is meant to uphold the laws. In 1 Samuel 8, the Israelites demand a king to govern them and deliver justice, as Samuel’s sons were corrupt (1 Sam. 8:5). Yet, in 11:14 David is presented as a king who views himself as above the law and readily breaks and causes others to break the law when it suits him. Instead of providing justice David signs the death warrant of an innocent man. This puts Israel at risk, as bloodguilt has not been properly regarded. Furthermore, David’s instruction to kill an innocent is incongruous and


as he is called to be a king who administers justice (2 Sam. 8:15) but is, in this instance, a king who the innocent need protection from!

The mode of irony in this instance is irony displayed, and the confrontation of incompatibles can be seen in the contrast of the King of Israel sending a note with an upright soldier to take to the general (11:14), with the knowledge that this note was a death warrant (11:15). The object of irony, or that which the ironist is being ironical about, is David’s act of ordering Uriah’s execution.

Of note, in isolation the motif of Uriah carrying his own death letter, could be considered to be observable irony. In observable irony the state of affairs in and of itself brings forth the irony of the cosmic order, rather than requiring a satirist to engineer the irony (and in satire the ironic content is critical of someone or something). Moreover, it might be said that something is ironic but not a cause for moralizing, as opposed to verbal irony—used in satire—where the ironist is being deliberately critical of someone’s moral defects. However, as argued, it is preferable to regard this verse as an example of verbal irony. For one thing, the event is not to be taken in isolation of background facts about the role of the king. For another, it is possible to detect the impersonal ironist’s criticism of David—criticism which has been consistent throughout the narrative.

3.3.9  2 Samuel 11:16–17
This episode extends the verbal irony in 11:14–15. At the lower level of 11:16 Joab places Uriah in the heaviest fighting. In 11:17 some of David’s servants are killed along with Uriah in the fighting. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist’s emphasis is on the number of soldiers who had to die to conceal David’s transgression. The opposition in the narrative concerns the incongruity between what is said and what is meant. The facts are presented without a moral judgement. However, the moral judgement is revealed in the anomalous language in the verses. David is the target of ironic attack, as his attempt to cover-up his sin by recourse to, in effect, causing soldiers engaged in fighting on Israel’s behalf to face inevitable death, is spoken of ironically.

The grade of irony is covert, as the irony is conveyed in the language and reliant on the context of the narrative. For example, Uriah’s death in 11:17 almost reads as an after-thought. However, this verse conforms to the same structure

50 The motif of a soldier carrying his own death note is well-known in world literature. See McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 287.
51 For a fuller account on the differences of isn’t it ironic, and “the ironist being ironical,” read, D. C. Muecke, Irony (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970) and, D. C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony.
as 11:1, and 11:2, where the emphasis is contained in the truncated section. Thereby, the emphasis in this verse is that Uriah is killed (11:17b). Yet, there is still another damning proposition which comes through in 11:17a, namely, that some of the servants of David were sacrificed in order to implement his plan. This contrast makes the verbal irony in this section impersonal irony and irony displayed. The confrontation of incompatibles, which is a necessary element of irony displayed, could best be described as the contrast of the Israelites dying in a battle the king sent them to fight, with the knowledge that the King of Israel was responsible for their deaths not because they need to die in the service of Israel but rather because they died in order to conceal his transgressions.

This verse reflects on the criticism in 11:1 where it is plainly stated that the servants of David, and indeed all of Israel, went out to war even as David stayed in Jerusalem. Now the reader is aware that not only did David stay behind in luxury when there was an expectation that he would lead the army out to war, but that David from the comfort of Jerusalem, caused the death of a number of elite soldiers in order to conceal his transgressions. This verse, then, heightens the irony displayed in 11:1, and adds a more sinister edge to it, as the criticism of the ironist is now two-fold; (1) David did not lead the Israelites out to war, and (2) David culpably caused the deaths of a number of the soldiers he sent out to war. These events conflict with the expectations that Israel had of David, and Yahweh’s expectations as they are laid out in the laws.

There is a further ironic twist. David’s original plan to conceal his transgression involved only Uriah being exposed to certain death. Joab immediately recognised that this would not work since singling out Uriah in this manner would raise widespread suspicion and draw attention to David’s transgression rather than conceal it. Thus, Joab modified David’s plan by exposing not only Uriah to death but also some of the elite soldiers. This episode is ironic in that David’s original plan far from concealing his transgression would have exposed it to all and sundry. Here David is the target of ironic attack and his foolishness is implied. Moreover, he is the unknowing victim since he is confidently unaware of his foolishness.

3.3.10 2 Samuel 11:18–21
At the lower level of 11:18 Joab decides to tell David all the news of the fighting. In 11:18–21 Joab warns the messenger that David may become angry when he hears the news of the war. (Note that we learn later in 11:24 that the Israelites sustained many losses in the battle, in part because they got too close to the enemy’s wall and were killed.) Joab informs the messenger that David may tell the messenger the story of Abimelech. (Note that it is well-known that Abimelech
got killed when he got too close to the enemy’s wall (Judg. 9:52–54). Joab advises the messenger to tell David that Uriah the Hittite is also dead—or, at least, to do so if David gets angry. At the upper level of the narrative there is more than meets the eye in Joab’s mention of Abimelech. Abimelech created a kingdom through murder and deceit (Judg. 9:1–6). However, he was killed at a battle in Thebez when a woman threw a millstone at his head from a tower, and he asked his armour-bearer to kill him with a sword, lest people find out a woman killed him (Judg. 9:51–54). Abimelech’s death was attributed to divine justice: “Thus God repaid Abimelech for the crime he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers. God also made all the wickedness of the people of Shechem fall back on their heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham son of Jerubbaal” (Judg. 9:56–57).

The opposition in the narrative is the difference between what Joab says and what Joab means. In Joab’s speech he refers to Abimelech, the unrighteous king, however, the truth of his message is that he believes that David is as unrighteous as Abimelech. The innocence in the narrative is the ironist’s dissimulation in the various rhetorical questions asked by Joab. The grade of irony is covert, as it is conveyed through the ambiguity in the passage, in particular, in Joab’s mention of Abimelech.

This message will be discussed further, as the meaning of this message is the subject of debate. McCarter suggests that the ambiguity in this passage is designed to convey a message to the king, whilst hiding it from the messenger. Carole Fontaine expands on this idea and remarks that Joab’s reference to the woman who killed Abimelech, leads the reader to believe that Joab is aware of David’s activities with Bathsheba. The reference to the woman who brings death is then a metaphor which veils Joab’s knowledge of the crime from the messenger, but allows the king to know of his disapproval. However, these interpretations rest on the assumption that Joab is telling the messenger to relay the information about Abimelech to David, whereas, Joab suggests that the messenger may mention Abimelech’s misfortune, if David is angry.

Furthermore, Joab lets the messenger know that David’s anger will be assuaged by the knowledge of Uriah’s death (11:20; 21b). Joab also lets it be known to the messenger that Joab is well aware of the dangers of fighting too close to the city and that, nevertheless, Joab went ahead and did it anyway (11:20–21). Thereby, the interpretation that Joab coded his message to David in order to

52 Note that Uriah the Hittite is mentioned as Joab’s armour-bearer in 4QSamuel 11:3.
conceal the truth from the messenger, is not correct. Instead, it might be argued that the reason for Joab’s outburst of rhetorical questions can be attributed to the presence of impersonal irony. That is, criticism of David is to be found in the rhetorical questions in Joab’s speech, making the sub-category of rhetorical question the primary sub-category of verbal irony found in this passage. Therefore, the ironic content in this passage is to be found in Joab’s rhetorical questions, and in particular in Joab’s mention of Abimelech. Here clearly David is the object of ironic attack.

The allusions, and criticisms in Joab’s rhetorical question are heightened by the same pattern of verbosity and conciseness that have been mentioned in other passages. Going by this pattern, the emphasis in this narrative is that Uriah is dead (11:21b), and it is the exaggeration in 11:20–21a which contains the ironist’s criticism of David. The exaggeration in the first section can point in a number of different directions. Fokkelman suggests that the main criticism in this narrative is that David has allowed himself to fall victim to a woman.55 So too has Blenkinsopp, and Gunn who mentions the ever-present motif of “the woman who brings death.”56 While this claim has merit, it is not the only interpretation of this verse. Up to this point in the narrative, pejorative criticism has concentrated on David, and in an unmitigated way. In the case of Abimelech’s death, although, it was a woman who killed him, his death is also recorded as God’s repayment for Abimelech’s iniquity. The curse of Jotham, then, is a stern warning that kingship which is dishonourable will be met with a violent end.57 This curse addresses the need for an honourable relationship between the king and his subjects, otherwise, the entire community is at risk of God’s wrath.58 Thereby, Joab’s rhetorical questions (and the ironist’s criticism of David) surely is not only the criticism that David has allowed a woman to get him into trouble, but also that David has gotten himself into an unrighteous relationship with God.

3.3.11 2 Samuel 11:22–25
At the lower level of 11:22–24 the messenger gives David the news of the war. In 11:25 David tells the messenger to relay a message of encouragement to Joab. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist contrasts the messenger’s troubling report to David of Israelite deaths and David’s off-hand message to Joab that

55 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2),” 67–70.
58 J. Clinton McCann, Judges (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 73.
is dismissive of these deaths. There is an opposition in the narrative between what David says and the grim reality behind these deaths. At the lower level, David's message is that it is the nature of war to consume men, yet at the upper level, the ironist knows that it is David's desire to conceal his transgressions and resulting command to Joab that was the cause of the deaths in 11:17.

The striking contrast is between the messenger's report that Uriah is dead (11:24b) and David's understated response in 11:25,

אליהו בעיניך את הדבר הזה כי כזה תאכל ההרב

(Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.)

In this sentence, it would appear that David is suggesting to Joab that he need not be concerned as men die all the time in battle. This verse, then points back to 11:1, where there was only a hint that David was doing anything wrong by not leading the Israelites in war. Verse 11:25 suggests that David's character is worse than was originally thought. Now, David is responsible for the deaths of his own men, despite being far away in Jerusalem. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative, then, has a complex grouping of criticisms of David, most recently that he is ambivalent about the lives of his soldiers. David is the victim of irony, as he is unaware that his own words betray him. The messenger is not the victim of irony, because, although the messenger is unaware of David's conspiracy, the messenger is not ‘confidently’ unaware. Or in other words, there is no indication of intellectual hubris in the messenger. The verbal irony may be spoken of as covert as it needs to be discovered. The irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is understatement. In this kind of irony, a situation which calls for a strong emotional response is made light of. Note, though, David may not have a strong emotional response to Uriah's death (or may even be pleased that Uriah has died) in the lower level of the text, the comment may also be understood to be understated in the upper level of the text. The object of the irony is David's coldness in response to Uriah's death.

3.3.12 2 Samuel 11:26–27a

The verses 11:26–27a are transition verses. However, these verses may still be regarded as examples of impersonal irony. The sub-category of impersonal irony in question is that of understatement. 11:26–27 are not dissimilar from 11:4–5, which contain a good number of events which are spoken of concisely. In some regards, these verses are a counterpart to 11:4–5. For example, in 11:4–5

59 Translation care of the New King James Version.
Bathsheba goes to her house, and informs David of her pregnancy, in 11:26–27a, David takes Bathsheba to his house, and she bears him a child. This is all spoken of in understated language which gives the impression that everything is back to normal for the king. It may even be suggested that he has come through his transgressions unscathed, or even that he is now in a better position than he was before his sins.

3.3.13  **Summary of Irony in 2 Samuel 9:1–11:1–27a**

The irony in 9:1–10 is an example of overstatement. David’s act of חסד to Mephibosheth is overstated and insincere. The irony that is displayed in the following section (9:10–13) highlights this insincerity further when David’s ‘kindness’ to Mephibosheth is contrasted with David’s dislike of the disabled. An insinuation that David intends to wage war against Hanun rather than show חסד to him arises in 10:1–2. Verse 11:1 is an example of irony displayed. The ironist is critical of David’s decision not to honour the covenant he made with the Israelites (2 Sam. 5:2–3). Whilst remaining in Jerusalem, David is presented as a self-serving king in the innuendo in 11:2. The rhetorical question in 11:3 adds a further ironic criticism that David is coveting the wife of another man. The knowledge that Uriah and Eliam were away fighting when David was organising a tryst with Bathsheba, adds depth to the criticism that David did not go out to war, when it was expected that he would. Pejorative criticism of David is further strengthened in the understatement in 11:4–5. Not only has David refused to go to war, and coveted another man’s wife, the seriousness of the ironic criticism increases as he commits an act of adultery with Bathsheba, and impregnates her.

In 11:6–8, the ironist is critical of David’s disregard for the rules of ritual purity for soldiers. This is expressed by means of irony displayed. The criticism of David’s disregard for the laws of ritual purity is further explored in 11:9–11, where there is a contrast between Uriah who is righteous with David who is corrupt. David’s manipulations continue in 11:12–13, when David gets Uriah drunk in an attempt to make Uriah do David’s will. These verses are instances of irony displayed as they suggest a contrast between the righteousness of Uriah with the corruptness of David. For instance, Uriah remains in a right relationship with Yahweh when he refuses to break the laws of ritual purity. This creates a broader contrast with David who appears to be falling away from Yahweh. David’s behaviour declines further when he sends Uriah out to battle carrying his own death-note (11:14–15). The criticism in this section emerges by means of irony displayed, as David is shown to be a king who has no regard for administering justice, and who, in this instance, became a king who killed an innocent man and put all of Israel at risk of bloodguilt. The same criticism
follows through to 11:16–17 when David's command to have Uriah executed costs the lives of more of his own soldiers.

Verses 11:18–21—which include Joab's rhetorical question which alludes to Abimelech's kingship—point to the dire consequences for the monarchy and its subjects if the king is not in a right relationship with God's laws. This criticism is then applied to David. The irony in 11:22–25 is an understatement. The ironic criticism in this section suggests that David does not care for the lives of the soldiers that he sends out to war; after all he is the cause of their deaths. Throughout these verses there is a pattern of consistent and somewhat relentless pejorative criticism of David by means of verbal irony in which he is the object of ironic attack. Therefore, at this stage of interpretation it can be concluded that there is a militant form of verbal irony throughout the narrative to this point.

3.4 2 Samuel 11:27b–12:31

3.4.1 2 Samuel 11:27b

2 Samuel 11:27b states,

\[ \text{וירע הדבר אשר־עשה דוד בעיני יהוה} \]

(But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD.)\(^{60}\)

This statement links back to David's cavalier remark that Joab need not see the death of Uriah as anything evil. In this regard, God voices the ironist's criticism of David explicitly. Given that God's evaluation of the events is representative of absolute moral authority,\(^{61}\) it can then be assumed that the ironist's criticism is in keeping with the integrity of the narrative.

3.4.2 2 Samuel 12:1–6

At the lower level of 12:1–6 God sends a message to David via Nathan. Nathan tells David a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man is accused of stealing the poor man's ewe lamb and feeding it to a traveller. In 12:5–6 David is made angry by the story and requests that the rich man make severe restitution. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is a connection between the situation of the parable and David's own life. David is the object of ironic attack since the parable is about him. He is also the victim

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\(^{60}\) Translation care of the New American Standard Bible.

\(^{61}\) Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, 19.
of irony as he is confidently unaware that the parable is about him. The ‘confident’ element is expressed in the extreme sentence that David gives to the rich man who resembles David (12:6). The opposition in the passage exists in the difference between what is said and what is meant.

The grade of the verbal irony is covert, and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-category of impersonal irony is irony by analogy. Irony by analogy can be detected when the ironist presents an imaginary situation in order to criticise one that is real. There are no strict rules for irony by analogy, as it can take a number of different forms. However, in all instances of this sub-category of verbal irony one situation (or action, pattern of behaviour etc.) that is explicitly spoken of implicitly points to a secondary situation. Moreover, it is implied that the second situation is analogous to the first one.

In the case of Nathan’s Parable, most scholars have tried to match David’s misdeeds in 2 Sam 11 exactly with the events in 2 Sam 12. However, it would appear that the allusions are more complex. Although there does appear to be

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62 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 304–305. This speech also referred to as a לְשׁוֹן which is a “judgement-eliciting” device in the Hebrew Bible, as opposed to ἀριστολόγημα which is a Greek term. However, both terms have a similar meaning which Kruschwitz has written as being, “similarity or comparison.” (Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, “2 Samuel 12:1–15: How (Not) to Read a Parable,” Review and expositur 109, no. 2 (2012), 253–259, 254.)

63 For example, most scholars consider that Uriah represents the poor man in the narrative, and that Bathsheba is analogous to the ewe (Jeremy Schipper, “Did David Overinterpret Nathan’s Parable in 2 Samuel 12:1–6?” 384 & Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, “2 Samuel 12:1–15: How (Not) to Read a Parable,” Review and expositur 109, no. 2 (2012), 254). Yet, Blenkinsopp, remarks, “… Bathsheba was Uriah’s wife not his daughter, she was destined for David himself not a visiting guest, and it was Uriah not Bathsheba who ended up dead.” (Joseph Blenkinsopp, Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament. The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism, Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40). Rabbinic writers Rashi and Kimchi speak of the poor man as Uriah, and the traveller and wayfarer as “the Evil Inclination.” (As cited in, Peter W. Coxon, “A Note on ‘Bathsheba’ in 2 Samuel 12, 1–6,” Bib 62 (1981), 248). Yet, Uriah has also been placed in the position of the traveller, as has David. Schipper suggests that Joab is the rich man as he is the one who ultimately organises Uriah’s murder; David is the traveller, Uriah the lamb, and Bathsheba the poor man. (Shipper, 384). Gunn suggests that Uriah is the lamb. (Gunn, The Story of King David. Genre and Interpretation, 41). Lienhard Delekat writes that God is the rich man, as God was the transgressor because he could have saved Uriah. (Lienhard Delekat. ‘Tendenz und Theologie der David-Solomo-Erzählung,’ in Das ferne und nahe Wort: Festschrift Leonhard Rost zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 30. November 1996 Ed. Fritz Maass; BZAW 105; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967, 33. David Janzen, “The Condemnation of David’s ‘taking’ in 2 Samuel 12:1–14,” JBL 131, no. 2 (2012), 213). Daube has suggested that Saul is the rich man, David the poor man, and Michal the ewe, and that this is a parable which David was previously aware of, and which suggested that David had become as oppressive as Saul whom he replaced. (David Daube, “Nathan’s Parable,” Novum Testamentum 24, no. 3 (1982), 275–288, 281–282). Polzin suggests that God is the rich man, the poor man is a metaphor
similarities in these stories, it does not seem to be possible to create an abso-
lute equivalent.

To order to address this difficulty, it has been suggested that the narrative is
disguised in order to keep David from identifying it as his own case.\textsuperscript{64} However,
there is a problem with this interpretation. Notably, if the crime differs too
much from the parable then the analogy breaks down and, as a consequence,
the corrective self-judgement cannot take effect.\textsuperscript{65} David Daube, in addressing
this concern, presents a number of interesting interpretations which allow for
a broad understanding of the text. Daube's potential interpretations of the text
include the idea that a simile need not be created with exactitude, that the ge-
neric character of the parable engenders creative analogical interpretation, or
that the author was plainly inept. The most persuasive argument must be that
it is not necessary to try and harmonize all of the elements of the events in the
parable with David's crime as an exact match cannot and need not be found.\textsuperscript{66}
It might also be noted that an exact duplication of David's crime would not
work as a corrective given that, as suggested by David's comment in 11:25, he is
in no way troubled by his actions. Accordingly, the parable that is analogous to
David's behaviour needs to be both similar and different to David's behaviour.
It needs to be similar in order for a comparison to be drawn. It needs to be
different—and pointed—in order for corrective self-judgement to be possible.

Irony by analogy does not require an exact representation of events and
characters. Instead, its focus is to set up an analogy by means of which to make
a criticism of the object of ironic attack. This can be achieved by means of two
sets of events and characters which mirror each other perfectly. Alternatively,
the analogy might be imperfect and the explicitly described situation might
only hint at the situation that it seeks to criticise. The difference in these pos-
sibilities is the grade of irony which is used. In the latter case the irony is covert
as it is not immediately apparent and needs to be uncovered.

Contrary to other scholars who have discussed this passage, I argue that
Nathan's Parable reflects on two prior stories; the story of David and Nabal, and
the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba. An outline of the encounter of David
and Nabal follows. Nabal was a rich man who had three thousand sheep, along
with a thousand goats (1 Sam. 25:2), yet, he would not provide for David and
his soldiers who were travelling through the land (1 Sam. 25:11). David armed

\textsuperscript{64} Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 277.
\textsuperscript{66} Daube, "Nathan's Parable," 275.
himself with his sword to approach Nabal (1 Sam. 25:13). David suggested that Nabal had repaid David’s good with evil (1 Sam. 25:21). Yet, Abigail intervened and provided food for David and his soldiers and thus saved David from the bloodguilt of killing Nabal (1 Sam. 25:23–26). Abigail calls upon Yahweh to bless David and save him from having a guilty conscience for shedding blood without cause (1 Sam. 25:28–31). Nabal dies and David says (1 Sam. 25:39),

ברוך יהוה אשׁר רב את־ריב הרפתי מיד נבל ואת־עבדו השׁך מרעה ואת רעת נבל

(Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from evil. The LORD has also returned the evildoing of Nabal on his own head.)

David marries Abigail (1 Sam. 25:39b).

Knowing how inflamed David was by Nabal’s refusal to provide for him in a fair manner (and that this narrative shared the themes of hospitality and bloodguilt with the story of David and Bathsheba), it would be reasonable for the storyteller to incorporate this story into the overall narrative of David’s transgressions (in 2 Sam. 11). For doing so might serve the purpose of getting David to see the error of his ways and make a corrective self-judgement.

If we assume, as other scholars have not, that this story (i.e. the story of David and Nabal) informs Nathan’s Parable—and does so in addition to the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba—then we can provide a richer and more adequate interpretation of Nathan’s Parable. From this perspective, reference to the rich man and the traveller in Nathan’s Parable hint at the David and Nabal episode in which Nabal was the rich man and David was the traveller. Yet, in Nathan’s Parable, David is the rich man, and also the fool. By comparison, in the David and Nabal episode, Nabal is the fool for not providing hospitality to David. After all, David and his soldiers will kill Nabal if he fails to provide food etc. Given this, let us now reconsider Nathan’s Parable. In Nathan’s Parable it is David who is the rich man. Therefore, by analogy with the David and Nabal episode, it is David who is the fool. נבל means fool in Hebrew.

Characterising David as a fool fits in well with the fact that he is the object of criticism in Nathan’s Parable which is something most commentators agree on (albeit they do not necessarily agree with me that David is the object of ironic attack). However, an exact comparison between the episode in David and Nabal and the episode in Nathan’s Parable is not possible. Whereas Nabal did not offer hospitality to David (1 Sam. 25:31), the rich man in Nathan’s Parable

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67 Translation care of the NAS.
does offer hospitality to the traveller. However, the hospitality in Nathan’s Parable is given without חסד (2 Sam. 12:4). Moreover, to bring in the David, Uriah and Bathsheba episode, when David extends hospitality to Uriah he does so without goodwill. A further point, again relying on the story of David, Uriah and Bathsheba, pertains to the poor man and the lamb. In Nathan’s Parable the poor man has his lamb taken from him. In the David, Uriah and Bathsheba story, Uriah has Bathsheba taken from him. Accordingly, there is an analogy between Uriah and the poor man, and between Bathsheba and the lamb. I note that the analogy is strengthened by the fact that Bathsheba, like the lamb, would have been regarded as property and, therefore, taking her is akin to theft (as in the case of taking the lamb).

A somewhat tangential point about the relationship between the David and Nabal story and the David, Uriah and Bathsheba story, concerns the criticism of Bathsheba. In 1 Samuel 25:32–34 David recounts that God sent Abigail to intervene on Nabal’s behalf in order to prevent David from incurring bloodguilt. However, there is a noticeable absence of any intervention by Bathsheba on Uriah’s behalf, which would have prevented David from incurring bloodguilt.

Returning to Nathan’s Parable or, at least, its aftermath, not only is David oblivious to the analogy between himself and the rich man, David imposes an excessive punishment upon the rich man: the death penalty. The irony here is that David is imposing an excessive penalty on the rich man in the context of his own transgressions being analogous to those of the rich man. A number of scholars have mentioned the disproportionate sentence in relation to the crime in 12:5. Janzen remarks that the only crime the rich man was guilty of was to steal a lamb, which is not punishable by death. These interpretations align with an ironic interpretation which views David’s exaggerated response as another indication that he is the object of ironic attack as well as being the unknowing victim of irony in this passage. The excessive punishment is also an illustration of David’s failings to administer justice adequately. Daube, on the other hand, suggests that while the death penalty is too extreme for the killing of a lamb (one of the rich man’s crimes) it is entirely fitting for David’s own transgression of murder.

68 Cartledge writes that interpreting the “son of death” (12:5) as an invective takes away the incongruity of a death sentence sitting alongside a small fiscal restitution. Cartledge, SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel, 515. Yet, this interpretation diminishes the irony which is pronounced with the overstatement.


A further point not entertained in previous interpretations of Nathan’s Parable relies on invoking the story of David and Nabal. This point pertains to David’s strictness in respect of breaches of principles governing the provision of hospitality, i.e. that hospitality be provided and that it be provided ethically and lawfully, e.g. Not by theft of someone else’s lamb. In the David and Nabal story, David responds to Nabal’s lack of hospitality by sentencing him to death (1 Sam. 25:33; 34). In Nathan’s Parable, David sentences the rich man to death because the rich man stole and killed a lamb to provide hospitality to a traveller. However, David himself breaches the principles of hospitality when he offers Uriah hospitality but does so only to conceal his own transgressions. Presumably, this warrants the death sentence, at least by the lights of David’s strict understanding of the principles of hospitality. The irony here is irony by analogy and the ironic content pertains to David’s behaviour with respect to the principles of hospitality. David is the object of ironic attack and also the unknowing victim of irony.

The upshot of this novel strategy of identifying connections between all three stories, i.e. David and Nabal, David, Uriah and Bathsheba, and Nathan’s Parable, is as follows. First, David is the object of multiple ironic attacks on his moral character—all being instances of verbal irony—including: murder of Uriah; ‘theft’ of Bathsheba; violator of hospitality customs; punitive judge of the transgressions of others. Second, David is the object of ironic attack with respect to his foolishness, in particular—a further instance of verbal irony. (Note that communicating the latter defect in David relies on connecting the story of David and Nabal with Nathan’s Parable).

3.4.3 2 Samuel 12:7–15a
The following passage is not verbal irony for the reason that the criticism in these verses is explicit, and not hidden. Indeed, the criticism in this passage is direct and the reader has no doubt of the severity of the situation. The explicit criticism begins with the indicting words, שָׁאִיתָ נַעֲשֶׂ (12:7). This reference creates a contrast between David, who is the man who is meant to follow divine laws, with Yahweh who is the God, and creator of the laws. Yahweh then makes the judgement in clear and unambiguous terms. This speech begins with a formal address from אלהי ישראל which means that David is being judged as a king, and this speech has implications for all of Israel. Most importantly, David is shown to be the king because Yahweh has given him the kingship and all of the

72 Fokkelman, “King David (II Sam. 9–20 & I Kgs. 1–2),” 83.
trappings which come with it (12:7–8). Therefore, although David is the king in this passage, Yahweh is the higher authority.

The explicit criticism takes shape in 12:9 when Yahweh says,

מדוע בזיט את־דבר יהוה לעשׂות הרע בעיני

(Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?)

The דָּרֶךְ יהוה refers to the law, which David has plainly disregarded. This criticism, then, outlines David's infractions. David has 'despised' Yahweh for seeing Yahweh's authority as not worthy of obeying, and scorned God because David has acted as though God's authority is not worth fearing. These judgements are in reference to David's order to execute Uriah, and his 'taking' of Bathsheba (12:9–10).

Verse 10 points to David's comment in 11:25b,

אל־ירע בעיניך את־הדבר הזה כי־כזה וכזה תאכל ההרב

(Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another.)

This comment shows David to be completely oblivious of Yahweh's potential judgement, despite Yahweh's insistence that he would punish David for his iniquities (2 Sam. 7:14). Since Yahweh's warning is quite clear and yet David is oblivious to it, it follows that, David is being shown to be the fool. Clarity

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73 Yahweh's giving or favour to David is also expressed in Nathan's Oracle (2 Sam. 7) which although offering unconditional regard to the House of David, also contains God's warning, “When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings” (2 Sam. 7:14).

74 The root word נֹתַן (12:8) contrasts with the rich man in the parable who takes (לְקַח) (12:4b) and with David who Yahweh accuses of 'taking' in verses 2 Samuel 12:9–10. This emphasis may suggest the fulfilment of Yahweh's warning that the king that Israel asked for will take Israel's sons and send them off to war (1 Sam. 8:11–12), take Israel's daughters as servants (1 Sam. 8:13), and take their possessions (1 Sam. 8:14–17). Therefore, it could be suggested that the allusions in the explicit criticism radiate out beyond David's misdeeds to include the establishment of the monarchy, and Israel's rejection of God in wanting a king like other nations to rule over them. (1 Sam. 8:7). Thereby, it may be argued that although David is the victim in this narrative, he is also symbolic of the monarchy in general.

75 Translation care of the NRS.

76 Cartledge, SHBC. 1 & 2 Samuel, 517.


78 Translation care of the New King James Version.
is also evidenced in the revelation of Yahweh's punishment. Yahweh's punishment of David will be transparent in contrast to David's conspiracy with Uriah which was hidden from Israel. Yahweh will create trouble within David's house in front of all Israel (12:12) as opposed to all of Israel (2 Sam. 11:1) who were at war when David committed his transgressions.

At this juncture it would appear that David ceases to be the unknowing victim of irony as he develops a degree of self-awareness when he remarks, הטאתי ליהוה (12:13). However, Hugh Pyper is still doubtful in relation to David's self-awareness. Pyper suggests, "David both acknowledges and fails to acknowledge the hand of God in Nathan's intervention. 'I have sinned against the Lord,' he says in (12:13), but such recognition is not necessarily repentance. This ambivalence may be reflected in God's double-edged forgiveness."79 David will not die for his transgressions, instead, David's חטא will be transferred onto the child of the illegitimate union who will die (12:13b–14).80 Moreover, the text relates that the death of the child merely prevents David's death (12:14) and must be considered in addition to the punishment in 12:11. In 12:11 Yahweh's actions of raising calamity and the 'taking' of David's wives mirrors David's misdeeds, and also suggests that there will be a challenge to David's kingship, as taking a king's harem was one method of claiming the throne.81

3.4.4 Samuel 12:15b–18

In this and the following sections in this chapter we return to verbal irony. At the lower level of 12:15b Yahweh strikes Bathsheba's child to David. In 12:16 David pleads with God to spare the life of the child, and fasts and lies on the ground. In 12:18 the servants fear telling David that the child has died. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implies that there is an incongruity in David's behaviour towards the child. Thus far in the narrative David is shown not to care for the deaths of innocent people, however, in 12:16 David desperately implores Yahweh to show mercy to the child of his union with Bathsheba. This is somewhat suspicious, given that David is otherwise described as ambivalent about the child—indeed, he tried to trick another man into accepting the paternity of this child (11:6–13). Accordingly, the vision of David prostrating himself in the dirt, whilst the elders try to rouse him from his supplication

80 McCarter Jr. suggests that the preferable translation of the word חטאת is 'transferred' as the essence of this Hebrew word is that sin has been forgiven but that it must still be atoned for. McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 301.
81 Ibid., 300.
becomes somewhat comical by virtue of being an exaggerated event (an instance of overstatement in Muecke's terminology).

David is, therefore, the object of ironic attack. The grade of verbal irony is covert and the mode of irony is impersonal. The sub-categories of impersonal irony are overstatement and the rhetorical question.

However, the claim that the language is overstated is contentious. The child dies on the seventh day \(\text{ביום־השביעי} \) which has prompted much discussion. Peter Coxon suggests that the reference to the seventh day may be an allusion to Bathsheba's name \(\text{בם שבע} \). Veijola suggests that the term refers to the child’s age at the time of the child's illness. McCarter, on the other hand suggests that this reference to seven days might signify ‘proleptic’ mourning, as seven days was the traditional mourning period.

Yet, I argue that the time period of David’s prostration is exaggerated and that the ironic device of overstatement is being used. This claim is supported by the rhetorical question in 12:18b. The rhetorical question indicates the fear that the servants have of telling David that the child is dead, for they worry that David will harm himself. This indicates that David’s supplication is exaggerated. It may also be suggested that this is a sarcastic jibe, as self-mutilation, although a customary mourning ritual in the Ancient Near East, was not permitted by the Israelites (Deut. 14:1). It was thought that the practice identified the mourner too closely with the dead person, rather than with the holiness of God. Therefore, the object of ironic attack is David, and the ironic content is David’s grand, yet token, act of obeisance. Furthermore, the ironist implicitly makes the pejorative criticism of David that the child has absorbed the punishment of death which David rightly should have suffered (12:13) and

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82 Coxon, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12, 1–6,“ 249.
84 This may also be seen as a case of observable irony where the reader is aware of information which is not known to some of the characters in the story. In this narrative the reader and David know that God has foreordained the child's death as atonement for David's sin. However, this information is not known to the servants in the story. Thereby, the servants, seem to view David as mourning excessively when the child is alive (which is not custom), and not mourning at all after the child’s death (which is similarly out of custom), when it seems apparent the David is not mourning at all, but rather engages in an act of supplication. However, it is more persuasive to consider this an example of verbal irony, as there is a discernible object of ironic attack—David.
that this is yet another example of a life which has been ruined because of David's transgression.

3.4.5 2 Samuel 12:19–20
At the lower level of 12:19 David asks the servants if the child is dead, and the servants tell David that the child is dead. In 12:20 David arises, washes, anoints himself, and changes his clothes before going to the house of the Lord to worship. He then goes to his own house and eats. At the upper level of the narrative there is an implicit incongruity. For David who pleads excessively for the life of the child in 12:17, does not appear to mourn the child's death at all in 12:20.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken of not only ironically but also disparagingly. He is also the unknowing victim of verbal irony. The grade of verbal irony is covert. The anomalous language is particularly notable in the cluster of words רוחץ סוך אכל (12:20) which are otherwise used in biblical stories of feasts and festivities. The placement of these words, which are ordinarily associated with banquets, after the death of David's child emphasises what Diane Sharon calls a “contextual dissonance” between the expectations that the servants had of David, and David's behaviour in the narrative.86

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony and the sub-category of impersonal irony is irony displayed, as the reader expects that David will mourn the loss of his child, but instead David feasts. However, there has been debate regarding the significance of David's lack of mourning after the death of the child, and this must be discussed further.

Most scholars agree that David's behaviour is not customary. Baruch Halpern suggests that this action is an example of David's 'modernity' and practical nature. He reasons that there is no point making a petition to God after the child has died, nor is there any point in mourning as the child cannot return.87 This presupposes, however, that the point of mourning is to try and restore the dead back to life. David Bosworth argues that David's indifference is symptomatic of his psychological resilience which can be misinterpreted as cold-indifference but is rather a coping strategy for grief.88 Yet, it would appear that in this narrative which contains parables and scant psychological data Bosworth's argument might be a case of over-interpretation. Moreover, this interpretation overlooks David's lacklustre character in the preceding chapter, and the

general sense of criticism towards David which is woven into chapters 11 and 12. Bosworth’s argument that children died often in the ancient world and that therefore attachment to them was weaker, is tenuous at best.89 This argument does not explain the servants’ surprise that David ate heartily when the child died (12:21). Nor does it explain why Bathsheba mourned (12:24). Sharon suggests that fasting is not a normative action associated with mourning in the OT, however, David typically does fast whilst mourning (2 Sam. 1:11–12; 11:5–16; 1:19–27; 3:28–39; 3:33–37).90 Therefore, as David does not fast or weep after the child’s death—indeed, he feasts—this would tend to indicate that David does not mourn for the child at all.91 The clash of incompatibles—which is a necessary component of irony displayed—is as follows. David’s knowledge of the death of the child (11:19) followed jarringly by David’s act of feasting (11:20). The content (or broad object, in Muecke’s terminology) of the irony is David’s cool reaction to the child’s death. This reaction alludes to David’s indifference to Uriah’s death in 11:25.

3.4.6 2 Samuel 12:21–23
At the lower level of 12:21 the servants ask David why he fasted when the child was alive, but then ate food as soon as the child died. In 12:22 David tells the servants that he was fasting because he believed that it might change God’s mind. In 12:23 David tells the servants that he does not believe that there is any need to mourn, as mourning will not change the situation. At the upper level of the narrative there is an implication that David is a king who is self-interested, and is not remorseful concerning his crimes. Had David had an appreciation of the harmful impact of his sins, it would be expected that he would mourn for the child, particularly with the knowledge that his rightful punishment was transferred onto the baby. The opposition in the passage concerns the difference between what the servants say and what they mean in asking their rhetorical question.

David is the object of ironic attack as he is spoken to ironically and implicitly criticised. He is oblivious to the servants’ concern (12:21) and here his own words betray him (12:22–23). He is, therefore, also an unknowing victim of this verbal irony. The irony is a simple irony manifesting a contrast between the...

89 Bosworth, “Faith and Resilience: King David’s Reaction to the Death of Bathsheba’s Firstborn,” 701.
91 Anderson, WBC, Vol. 2. Samuel, 164. Anderson also refutes the claim of Hertzberg that this is representative of a child sacrifice, and Fokkelman’s claim that David mourns ‘proleptically’ for the child.
lower explicit level and the upper implicit level. The grade of irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent. The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is the rhetorical question. The main criticism of David is contained in the servant's rhetorical question and statement of fact in 12:21, which is as follows:

מה הדבר הזה אשר עשית בעבור הילד חי צמת ותבך וכארי מת הילד קמת ותאכל

(What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.)

The criticism of David inherent in this question has been explored in the previous section. However, in 12:22–23 David explains the reasons for his actions, and in doing so further demonstrates his uncaring nature and his lack of the appropriate emotional response of grief. Moreover, his use of three rhetorical questions, following on the servants' rhetorical question, amplifies the irony. David's first rhetorical question is in 12:22b,

מי יודע יחנני יהוה וחי הילד

(Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?)

At first glance this sentence seems to be favourable to David, as it appears to express David's concern for the welfare of the child. However, it may also be interpreted to mean that David was requesting that God be 'gracious' to him, not merely by not killing the child, but more importantly (from David's perspective) by not following through with the additional punishments in store for David (listed in 12:13–14). For the child's death is only part of this punishment and one that is not directly harmful to David. Moreover, whether or not David is simply being self-interested, as I have suggested, is confirmed by an analysis of the rhetorical questions in 12:23,

ועתה למה זה אני צמ האוכל להשׁיבו עוד

(But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?)
Brueggemann argues that David mourns the child’s death in a manner that is contrary to the conventions of the time, and that David has a revolutionary outlook on life and death. He suggests that David has learnt to live life as it comes, so to speak, and to embrace the freedom which comes with faith. Brueggemann’s assessment, then, is that David’s behaviour is a demonstration of “profound faith.”95 However, the problem with this proposition is that there is no evidence to suggest that David was so touched by the death of the baby. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary: (2 Sam. 1:11–12; 1:15–16; 1:19–27; 3:28–39; 3:33–37). These verses indicate that David is not mourning the death of the child. Moreover, the rhetorical question in 12:23, which suggests David’s lack of caring for the child, is not unlike David’s reaction to the news of Uriah’s death (2 Sam. 11:25). Accordingly, we should conclude that David is the object of ironical attack and that the focus of the ironist’s criticism is the lack of concern that the king has for his subjects. David appears to view the death of the child who absorbed his sin, as unworthy of mourning, and Uriah’s execution as collateral damage.

3.4.7 2 Samuel 12:24–25
The verses 12:24–25 do not readily show forth irony. Fokkelman argues that these verses indicate that David had begun to envision Bathsheba as his wife to be respected, and that peace had finally come about after the tragedy of the Uriah affair. Bathsheba is referred to as David’s wife, instead of the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and David’s actions in this verse, contrast with his cold behaviour in 11:27.96 Heinz Fabry, on the other hand, is rather scathing. He writes that David’s ‘consoling’ of Bathsheba is nothing more than a veiled sexual advance. Fabry is also quick to mention that David’s act of consoling of Hanun (2 Sam. 10:3) can be considered ‘suspect’.97 The fact that two very different interpretations arise in these verses suggests the presence of ambiguity in the text. Note that ambiguity is an indicator of irony. Yet, the other criteria for verbal irony are not readily apparent.

3.4.8 2 Samuel 12:26–29
At the lower level of 12:26, it is reported that Joab had fought successfully against the Ammonites. In 12:27–28 Joab sends a messenger to tell David to
collect the rest of the people and take the town or else he, Joab, will do so and name the city after himself. In 12:29 David collects his people and takes the city. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist is implicitly communicating the incongruity that David, who was once a great warrior leader is now being told what to do by his general. The opposition in the narrative is between what Joab says, and the implicit message in Joab’s speech. David is the object of ironic attack and is also the unknowing victim of the irony.

The irony is a simple irony between the levels. At the lower level Joab tells David to take the city or Joab will take it and name it after himself. This utterance can be assumed to be a mere statement of fact and provision of advice and encouragement at the lower and explicit level. However, at the upper and implicit level, given Joab is David’s subordinate, Joab’s statement manifests contempt. The grade of irony is overt as the criticism is immediately obvious.

The mode of verbal irony is impersonal irony, and the sub-category of impersonal irony is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. In this category the advice which is given in the lower level of the narrative may seem like good advice to the victim of the irony. However, in the upper level of the narrative the advice brings with it pejorative criticism. Arguably, David overlooks the pejorative element, given it is good advice and the situation is urgent. Therefore, he is an unknowing victim.

In the following section the pretended advice is found in Joab’s comment to David in 12:27b–28,

גַּשְׁנִי בִּרְבּוֹה כִּי—לֹכְדִיתִי את־העיר המים:
עַתָּה אֱסַף את־יתר הָעָם וְחַנָּה עַל־העיר וְלוכְדִי פַּן־אֲלַכְדַּד אֶת־העיר וְנָקְרָא שְׁמוֹ

(I have fought against Rabah; moreover, I have taken the city of waters. Now, then, gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it; lest I take the city, and it be called by my name.)98

The repetition of the first-person pronoun in 12:27, and the reference to myself in 12:28 hint at an ironic exaggeration. Joab says, ‘I have fought ... I have taken ... or I will take the city, and it will be called by my name’ (12:27b–28). This emphasis on what Joab has done highlights what David did not do in 11:1 and builds on the irony in that verse. The ironist at the upper level of the narrative is therefore, not only critical of David for not leading the army out to war (11:1), but also for only managing to join in the fighting at the final stages and as a result of Joab’s advice and encouragement. This advice and encouragement may

98 Translation care of the RSV.
be considered to be pretended as it is accompanied by a profound criticism, and is not merely advice and/or encouragement. If it was merely advice and/or encouragement, there would not be an emphasis on what Joab has done (12:27), in contrast to what David had not done and was expected to do. The object of ironic attack is David who is also the unknowing victim of irony. The ironic content is David’s absence from the war and, therefore, David’s breaking of his covenant with the Israelites.

3.4.9 2 Samuel 12:30–31

At the lower level of 12:30 David takes a crown and puts it on his head. He also takes the spoils of war. In 12:31 David deals with the Ammonite people in the city (either by torturing or enslaving them), and then returns to Jerusalem. At the upper level of the narrative the ironist implicitly communicates the incongruity between David’s behaviour and the expectations that the Israelites had of their kings. David is the object of ironic attack.

The grade of the irony is covert as it is not immediately apparent and is conveyed in the ambiguous language in the narrative. The ambiguous language is best recognised in the following example. The crown that David places on his head is described as being ככר זהב which is approximately the weight of a man. In terms of verbal irony this exaggerated situation is an overstatement and it is used to make a pejorative criticism of the protagonist of the story. This interpretation relies on the contrast between the decadent vision of David putting on an oversized crown and the Israelites hope for a king in 1 Samuel 8:20,

והיינו גמ־אנחנו كالנגים והשופטים מלך ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא прежде ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו ויצא לפניינו В(… that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.)

Gnana Robinson even suggests that the implicit criticism in this verse is that David has become a “king like a king of the other nations.”

Yet, there is debate concerning the interpretation of the word מלך. Some translations favour the translation Milcom whereas others, consider malkam to be the correct interpretation. The reason for the uncertainty stems from the weight of the crown, which has been described as seventy-pounds, and too

99 McCarter Jr., II Samuel, 313.
100 Translation care of NKJ.
large for a person to wear. The most popular argument then appears to be that the crown was the crown which sat atop the statue of Milcom the God of the Ammonites. Joyce Baldwin is critical of the suggestion that David would have put the crown of the Ammonite God on his head. However, this interpretation is consistent with satire, as there could be no greater way to ridicule David than to have him wear the crown of a different God. Moreover, even if the interpretation of מִלְכִּים is ‘their king’, and not Milcom, the text still manifests pejorative criticism of David as he symbolically puts on the crown of a different nation.

The narrative lingers over the event of David putting the crown on his head, by including excessive detail of the crown. This information is an overstatement. For instance,

(He took the crown of Milcom from his head; and its weight was a talent of gold and it had precious stones; and it was set on David's head.)

This same overstated language is also found in the excessive detail of what David did to the people of Rabbah.

(And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln ...) Note, here I use the translation from the King James Version which allows for the possibility that David did not set the people of Rabbah to work, but rather had them tortured.

Therefore, the mode of irony is impersonal, and the sub-category of irony is overstatement. The use of ironic overstatement is used to draw attention to the incongruity in the text. In these verses the incongruity consists in the contrast between the expectations that the Israelites and Yahweh had for a king,
and David’s actual behaviour. It has already been argued that David has not been a just king who leads the Israelites out to war (11:1). The image of David taking the city only when Joab pressures him to leave Jerusalem (12:28) reinforces this criticism. The image of David putting on the Ammonite crown escalates this criticism to the level of ridicule.

This criticism may also be extended to include David’s efficiency in taking the spoils of war. Brueggemann suggests that David is a ‘taker’ but that in this instance his behaviour is completely appropriate. For taking the spoils of war is acceptable behaviour in war. Moreover, there appears to be no such criticism in this part of the narrative. However, although there is no explicit criticism in this narrative, it may be argued that there is verbal irony in this passage, that it is covert, and that it implies that David is not living up to expectations. This latter interpretation comes into view when we consider Yahweh’s rejection of Saul as a king who enjoyed the spoils of war and disobeyed the word of Yahweh (1 Sam. 15:10–33). This rejection of Saul is followed directly by the anointing of David as king (1 Sam. 15:34–16:13). The anointing of David implies that there was an expectation that David would not act as Saul did—i.e. would not take the spoils of war—and would, therefore, not be rejected by Yahweh.

In 12:31 David and all of the people returned victorious to Jerusalem. This alludes to 11:1 when all of the people went out to war, yet David remained in Jerusalem. This strengthens the evidence for the claim that the dominant subcategory in this section is an overstatement of events which builds on the criticism in 11:1. The material in 12:31 also offers a further criticism of David, namely, that he delighted in the spoils of war.

In summation the object of ironic attack in 12:30–31 is David. The ironic content is that David puts on the crown of another God (or nation) while continuing to be a transgressor of the laws of the God of the Israelites, despite acknowledging his sin in 12:13.

### 3.4.10 Summary of Irony in 2 Samuel 11–27b–12:31

11:27b is the explicit criticism of David by Yahweh, which confirms the ironist’s hidden criticism. 12:1–6 is an instance of irony by analogy, where the stories of David and Nabal, and David, Uriah and Bathsheba join together to unravel the story of Nathan’s Parable. In this episode David is criticised implicitly for taking Bathsheba, having Uriah executed, not showing proper hospitality to Uriah, and for making punitive and excessive legal judgements. The commentary in 12:7–15a is God’s direct criticism of David for taking Bathsheba, and ordering Uriah’s execution. This section also reveals God’s judgement on David.

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Part of this judgement is the death of the child who was conceived in the illegitimate union between David and Bathsheba. The criticism in 12:15b–18 concerns the overstatement of David's act of supplication, which appears to be a token gesture. This is confirmed in the following section where David is shown not to mourn for the child who dies. The ironist's criticism in 12:19–20 is therefore, that David is indifferent to the suffering of the people who suffer from the consequences of his decisions not to follow the laws of Israel. This pejorative criticism follows through to 12:21–23 where David is shown to be unperturbed and self-interested. The commentary in 12:26–29 reminds the reader of the incompatibility in 2 Samuel 11:1 where David did not go out to war with the Israelites. In this instance, David meets the Israelites in the final stages of the battle, but only after Joab's asks him to, which suggests that the sub-category of irony in this instance is pretended advice or encouragement of the victim. This criticism continues in 12:30–31, which also contains the incongruity that David enjoyed the spoils of war, contrary to the knowledge that it was for this reason that Saul was rejected by Yahweh. The pejorative criticism of David in 2 Samuel 12 is more explicit than the criticism in 2 Samuel 11, which is predominantly hidden. This explicit criticism then reinforces the hidden criticism in the previous chapter, and adds further stories of David's actions which suggest that David is not a just king.