

○ EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

THE CONSTRUCTION OF JONATHAN IN THE NARRATIVE OF SAUL AND DAVID

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The question driving the article is the constructions of Jonathan. The thesis is that Jonathan initially articulates one stance but ends up with quite another, an education which is available to us in careful linguistic detail. In between our meeting him abruptly in 1 Samuel 14 and hearing him eulogised after his death in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1, we have two short moments and one lengthy scene with him. In the first short moment (1 Samuel 19:1–7), Jonathan urges his father to desist from suspecting any threat from and thus opposing David; much later (1 Samuel 23:17), Jonathan has acceded to the reality of David's ascendancy over Saul. The key chapter for present purposes is 1 Samuel 20: There, Jonathan begins with one point of view about Saul's intents on his lips (v. 2) but has changed his position substantially by the end of that long chapter (vv. 41–42). Thus Jonathan's education, managed primarily by David but also by Saul, is accomplished as he makes his way through a long narrative comprising fifteen pairs of utterances, interacting with 'brother' or father. Careful attention to language, genre and readerly presuppositions will show us the process. The dialogical theory and utterance genre articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin are utilised.

The *questions* driving this study are able to be subsumed under the issue of Jonathan's construction: How will I read him and offer him to you? How will I suggest that he has been drawn by the story's author, handled by its narrator? How might he have been plausibly interpreted by intended readers and re-readers? How is Jonathan read and dealt with by other characters in the story, notably by Saul and by David?¹

My *thesis* is that Jonathan initially articulates one stance but ends up with quite another, an education which is available to us in careful linguistic detail. In between our meeting him abruptly in 1 Samuel 14 and hearing him eulogised after his death in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1, we have two short moments and one lengthy scene with him. In the first short moment (1 Samuel 19:1–7), Jonathan urges his father to desist from suspecting any threat from and thus opposing David; much later (1 Samuel 23:17), Jonathan has acceded to the reality of David's ascendancy over Saul. The key chapter for present purposes is 1 Samuel 20: There, Jonathan begins with one point of view about Saul's intent on his lips (v. 2) but has changed his position substantially by the end of that long chapter (vv. 41–42). Thus Jonathan's education, managed primarily by David but also by Saul, is accomplished as he makes his way through a long narrative comprising fifteen pairs of utterances, interacting with 'brother' or father. Careful attention to language, genre and readerly presuppositions will show us the process.

An initial point to raise is the *socio-historical context* of the narrative. Given the impacted state of questions regarding date, composition and context of the Deuteronomistic History and its components, I will simply stipulate that a moment of great relevance for the production and proclamation of the long narrative seems the early post-exilic period, when issues of leadership in Persian-sponsored Yehud were fraught. Ehud Ben Zvi reminds us how thoroughly the Deuter-

onomistic History features the topic of leadership, specifically as failing. If dynastic leaders failed repeatedly and dismally in the past, what sort of governance holds better promise? If dynastic kings were implicated in the loss of land in the early sixth century, how will a new such catastrophe be avoided once the land has been re-entered and the community has a fresh chance to live there fruitfully? (Ben Zvi 1998: 32–35). My conviction is that the story of Saul and his ‘sons’ (Jonathan and David in the present story) was re-composed to be meaningful in the moment when the prospect of post-exilic royal leadership was possible but not ultimately chosen.²

RELEVANT CONCEPTS FROM BAKHTIN

The *theory* to be utilised is provided by Mikhail Bakhtin (1875–1975) and nuanced by various contemporary scholars. Bakhtin’s most basic concept is ‘*dialogism*’: the conviction that all reality is fundamentally engaged with and embedded tensively within other reality. Though the word was coined by scholars rather than by Bakhtin himself, in some of his last writings he alluded briefly and impressionistically to ‘dialogical relations’ (Bakhtin 1986: 104–106, 117, 125). The concept is specifically modern, arising in the twentieth century’s discovery of alterity, its turn to language, and its science. Dialogism is thus actually a set of ostensibly diverse concepts unified by the insight that encountering the other is crucial for the construction of our consciousness and being, and of course for every other’s as well. Two Bakhtin scholars who occasionally publish excerpts from what they call a ‘heteroglossary’ offer the useful insight that there are several levels of the dialogic, among which Bakhtin moves without signaling, perhaps confusingly for us (Morson and Emerson 1997: 264–266). The concept of dialogism becomes useful beyond a general situation of mere alternation of interlocutors in life or literature or of simple disagreement or contradiction. In a technical sense, every exchange is dialogic, assuming two participants shaped foundationally by their interaction. In a more factored sense, we can think of such discourse as either monologic or dialogic – located along a spectrum from one of those ideal points to the other. In monologic discourse, each speaker retains his or her own point of view with virtually no spillage from what the partner is saying beyond reinforcement of the original view. In dialogic discourse there is a reverberating shaping of one viewpoint under the influence of another. Gaps and differences are crucial, while bridges and continuities are stressed as well, perhaps more. The genuinely dialogic requires two or more distinct speakers, each with a voice, a set of experiences, distinct placement, attitudes and outlooks on the world. For language to be dialogic in this sense, the two voices and their relationships must both register with hearer/readers. A yet more intense level of dialogism opens out on the polyphony that Bakhtin found most clearly in Dostoyevsky, and which is beyond the scope of this particular reading.

Why is dialogism helpful, and what proceeds differently for us as a consequence of attending to it and incorporating its wisdom among our strategies? First, it counts foundationally on the ignorance of all of us, the necessary presence of gaps in all our fondest schemes and most elaborate systems and our need for an other to contribute. Second, it challenges us to a revised concept of the self: Though we may look like tidy little units, bounded by our own skin and quite able to tell where one of us ends and another begins, in fact dialogism shifts ‘... the differential relation between a centre and all that is not that centre’ (Holquist 1990: 18). We need to be aware of the limits of our apparent autonomy and of the importance of our own particularity and that of the other. To commit consciously to construct meaning as pervasively as possible in relation to others

alters most things considerably. Third, voices in life but also in literature will need to undergo a repositioning. Characters and narrator alike will achieve their positions and make their meaning while contending with each other; the readerly task will involve our discerning a way amid the cacophony, claiming our own path forward as we construe speech in our particular way. The reliable and omniscient narrator is displaced from an erstwhile natural authority.

A second most useful insight of Bakhtin's is his conviction that the basic unit of discourse is the *utterance*. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist name it as the basic building block of Bakhtin's dialogism, and Ken Hirschkop goes so far as to say it is co-pivotal with dialogism in Bakhtin's language theory (Clark and Holquist 1984: 10; Hirschkop 1999: 209). 'Bakhtin defines utterance as the simultaneity of what is actually said and what is assumed but not spoken' (Clark and Holquist 1984: 207). Bakhtin develops the discussion about utterance somewhat polemically in relation to formalist thinking about language.³ Hence we can usefully see what utterance is not: a syntactic, linguistically marked unit like the sentence. An utterance can take sentence form, but not every sentence is an utterance. An utterance is identifiable by a pause, a relinquishing of the floor, a change of speaker; that the first speaker stops indicates that the utterance is, temporarily, complete and awaits, invites, a response. Bakhtin specifies various aspects that an utterance rolls together: grammar and syntax, certain compositional structures, style (at various levels, including that of the language or dialect used, the genre, the individual speaker's patterns), intonation (Bakhtin 1986: 60–102). He stresses that the utterance is simply a small part of a much broader flow of communication: 'The utterance proves to be a very complex and multiplanar phenomenon if considered not in isolation and with respect to its author (the speaker) only, but as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other, related utterances...' (Bakhtin 1986: 93; Hirschkop 1999: 210). The enthymemic character of the utterance invites and even compels us to work out its logic creatively if we are to take advantage of all that is on offer. Part of participating well in language and literature is taking joyful advantage of the fact that all goods are second-hand, with the patina of associations available from some of the many places our language has already been.

Vital to understand in this concept of utterance is its relational and malleable nature. As a speaker shapes an utterance, he or she is already taking into account the responses of the listener; the listener is also authoring the utterance and the speaker is simultaneously a listener. An utterance is shaped *for* someone, is addressed *to* a particular recipient (not necessarily a named individual but to a receiving and co-shaping party) (Bakhtin 1986: 95–99). And as the elements compose the utterance, they bring with them associations they have had previously, which are likely to be in contention with each other. Utterances have their own internal politics, say Morson and Emerson (1990: 130). These features of the utterance explain why Bakhtin classifies it as a 'border phenomenon,' living its life at the crossroads of many users and usages, its 'fated in-betweenness' making it thoroughly social (Holquist 1990: 60–61). To understand an utterance is to commit actively to construe as many of the circumstances of its production that we are able; passive decoding will fall short. Such reading must also be relational; understanding is an effect of interaction. And part of what must be queried is the evaluative aspect of the utterance, which is inevitably present and anticipates both the speaker's angle and that of the intended hearer, who will re-evaluate it while construing it.

Germane here are two caveats: First, our reading of ancient literature is typically disabled from access to the social context so vitally necessary in Bakhtin's thought. To stipulate a historical-social context as I have done is scarcely adequate to what really needs to be explored for discourse to be understandable. Second is that with Bakhtin, we need to make the sometimes difficult distinction between character psychology (which is *not* our concern, not available to us) and the language which we as interpreters manage in our own centres of consciousness (which *is* of urgent concern). In a word, the Jonathan, Saul and David that we – you and I – are reading is primarily our own and needs to be owned as such. We have 'the same' text before us, the same discourse; but how we construe it will vary as we each take it up. We likely will not agree, a situation which roots less in our explicit procedures than in our more implicit and possibly unrecognised assumptions and ideologies as we work with the text.

Finally, the *plan* here is to make central to our study the galvanising experience of Jonathan represented in 1 Samuel 20. With its impact made clear, the other four scenes involving Jonathan will be commented upon more briefly and in terms of the longer piece.

THE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION OF JONATHAN: 1 SAMUEL 20

Robert Polzin contributes to the present reading several general observations. He notes the apparently anomalous characterisations of Jonathan, Saul, and David, who all may seem to be acting against expectation here. Jonathan seems naive beyond belief, Saul unrealistically oblivious of recent events, David foolish to wager that Saul might change. Polzin finds coherence in a careful rereading: Jonathan consistently views matters in a straightforward and uncomplicated way, unless carrying out another's plan. Saul's outbursts are credible, given David's provocation and the stakes involved. Polzin (1989) finds David hardest to recharacterise, a result of the narrator's tendency to withhold David's inner view, leaving me a path for making him intent on provoking Saul to chase him (187–190). Polzin's second helpful point: The double-voicing of the covenant language is obvious, its emotional tone, vehement urgency, and participation in political and personal realms carrying those involved (our reading selves included) into multiple pools and their deep waters. David induces Jonathan to use duplicitously this language which pledges mutual fidelity; can such contradictory assertions be relied upon? Polzin asks (third) who is set up to learn new information about Saul? Jonathan may seem to be helping David gain clarity, but Polzin prefers that David is assisting Jonathan to see a reality about his father that the son has heretofore resisted to accept (190–194). The drama we are about to witness is staged tactically for Jonathan, if more strategically for Saul.

The event of chapter 20 unfolds in great detail.⁴ It seems simple at first: Saul reinforces his opposition to David, such that David must flee the court definitively. But it is also possible to characterise the chapter as detailing a manipulation of Saul by David and Jonathan (or of both king and prince by David), such that by the conclusion Saul himself must go more decisively on the defensive in order to survive as king. Jonathan will not again intervene to dissuade Saul for all that he remains at his father's side to death. Utterance language – direct discourse in all its complexity – is the means used to draw this scenario. Especially in the front part of the story there is only the minimum narrator intervention needed for the clear arranging of the scene. We hear the characters struggle to engage each other: to set traps and spring them, alternatively to detect danger and escape it. Of fifteen pairs of utterances, some are very simple (even non-verbal),

others more complex: four of David (to Jonathan, who responds); two of Jonathan (to David who responds); four of Saul (to himself and to Jonathan, who counters); and finally five apparently very one-sided ones between Jonathan and ‘the boy’ in the field (which are actually as response-shaped as any of the others).

DAVID AND JONATHAN’S FIRST SIX UTTERANCE PAIRS: (20:1–23)

All flows from David’s initial question, “‘What is my guilt... my sin against your father that he is seeking to take my life (*nepeš*)?’” David’s question both hides and reveals a quick pair of his answers: Saul’s unprovoked assault on David is either malicious or irrational. In either case, the king is at fault. A question may be pursued independent of the intent which we may presume underlies it. So David’s asking what he has done prompts me, at least, to review from the angle of Saul what in fact David *has* done that makes Saul wish him dead or disabled (e.g., 18:10–12, 29; 19:2, 10, 11). There are two levels to the question, which we can scrutinise in terms of David. The first is the problem of the old king’s alienation from YHWH’s favour, made tangible by YHWH’s spirit leaving Saul and resting with David (16:13–14; 18:10–29; 19:9–10, 20–24). Mixed right in with that language of God’s spirit is something more ‘horizontal’: the pattern that persistently evokes Saul’s hostility to David is his registering (rightly or wrongly) other people being drawn to the young man: Saul’s people in general (18:12–16, 29), the women (18:6–9), Saul’s younger daughter (18:20–29, 19:11–18), Jonathan (18:1–4; 19:1–7), perhaps even Saul’s prophet (19:18–24). In the six utterance rounds here, David will in fact set up the same entrapping dynamic to which Saul has already reacted and use it to re-shape Jonathan’s viewpoint.

In the first exchange (*round one*, 20:1–2), each young man sketches his sense of the king. David assays most obviously that Saul is mistaken in his pursuit of David and that he himself is unaware of his own guilt or sin, hence the similarity of his claim to Jonathan’s assertion of 19:2. The alternative, also subtly proffered, is that Saul hunts David without rational cause, perhaps with malicious intent. And yet Saul has turned back from the project of David’s death at Jonathan’s intervention (19:6) and apparently abandoned pursuit of David when thrown into prophetic behaviour (as ch. 19 ends). So Saul seeks David’s life intermittently at most. David has also hinted that Saul seeks to kill Jonathan as well, since their lives are intertwined (18:3). That point is not made explicit by David but remains available to any interpreter who picks up on the doubled speech. Whether David’s self-portrait (innocence) is specious is not relevant here; that his sketch of Saul is partly right (seeking characterises Saul, and the life of the sons is his objective), but also off the mark is to some extent evident. Saul is reactive to many impulses, not excluding David’s actions (whether guilt or sin) but not limited to David’s qualities. That Saul has dismissed such concerns verbally to Jonathan in 19:1–7 does not mean he banished them, as the rest of chapter 19 has shown. David has begun to undermine Jonathan’s confidence, prompting him first to defend it.

Still within this utterance Jonathan makes five rebuttals to David’s initial three questions, his view of his father differing from David’s, in a number of particulars. Jonathan verbalises Saul as confiding all his purposes and plans to his son, from great to small. That Jonathan does not know of a plan to kill David, he reasons, means it cannot be so. But Jonathan’s portrait of Saul, which he urges on David, overlooks a lot to draw this unity between them and reactivates the question of the singleness of life shared between David and Jonathan. Though a reader may catalogue times and places where Saul has hurled a spear or urged his people to kill David or

sent messengers to take him, nonetheless Jonathan is committed to the sense that such are not Saul's current thoughts. That Jonathan can overlook these moments suggests that his father may be able, driven, to do so too. Toward the end of his strong denial Jonathan poses to David's lead question the query that moves the whole chapter forward: Why might Saul hide such a thing from his son? By asking that question, Jonathan admits the possibility that David's charge may be true. Saul may be seeking David's life without David's deserving it and without Jonathan's knowing it. Though there is a push on the part of commentators to resolve the complexity of Saul's intent in favour of single-minded pursuit of David by Saul, in fact that is not quite so simply the case. Jonathan's defense of Saul, though it will be overrun, is not wholly without merit.

In 20:3–4 (*round two*) David responds less to Jonathan's denials of his father's deeds than to his question of his father's motive and mode of secrecy. He explains away that portrait of Saul who confides in his son by suggesting that Saul is unwilling to split Jonathan's feelings by making him choose between his father and 'brother': "Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved", David explains, is Saul's inner process (hypothetical quoted direct discourse). David offers Jonathan and intensified sense of the closeness of the father and son but denies it simultaneously, draws a different conclusion from that bond than had Jonathan.

Jonathan seems convinced by what David has said, shifting his picture of Saul who would not hide plans from a son for what David has urged, a sketch which draws the father concerned for his son. Jonathan consequently offers David a blank check: "Whatever you say, I will do for you." The phrasing is key: 'What you(rself) (*nepes*) say(s), I will do for you.' Thus begins Jonathan's direct and doubled discourse on the topic of his bond with David (for which the narrator primed us at the start of chapter 18). The language here picks up as well on the exchange between Jonathan and his armour-bearer (14:7), a pregnant allusion in terms of the exchange with the weapon-bearing boy at the end of this chapter. There is a series of minor, unnamed and untextured figures throughout this book, attracting our notice in their consistency and homology. Jonathan's armour-bearer accompanied him obediently and faithfully, assisting him in his victory over the Philistines (14:1–15). David begins as armour-bearer to Saul (16:21), then accepts the weapons of Jonathan (18:4). From this moment Jonathan acts for his friend rather than for his father and to some extent acts against his father, thus tripping, trapping, Saul into the murderous pursuit of David. Who is the hunter here, and who the quarry?

The next lineaments of the royal portrait (*round three*, found in 20:5–9) are supplied by David, though they shrewdly capitalise both on Jonathan's claims to intimacy with his father's plans and on the closeness between the two 'sons'. He first sketches the king's festal table on the morrow, situating himself in hiding rather than at table – a summary sketch, in fact, of the whole scenario to follow. Picking up on a technique utilised by Saul and servants in chapter 18, David hands his own words to Jonathan for him to recite at the proper time. David proposes a small drama that will scrutinise the issue that is most fraught between himself and Saul: sonship. Whose son is David: Saul's or Jesse's? Whose servant: Saul's or Jonathan's? David is now altering the father-son bond shared by Saul and Jonathan. We note also that the plan presumes that Saul expects David at his table (their rift being not total yet), and makes diagnostic Saul's reaction when he learns David has gone to Bethlehem with Jonathan's permission. David calls Saul both 'the king' and 'your father'. He avoids referencing his own father clearly, saying rather 'his city', 'the family'.

David similarly crafts for Saul two utterances: either ‘Good’, which will approve David’s return to his father, or a wordless anger, which will signify the opposite.⁵ David again draws Saul clearly either able to approve or to grow angry; and yet it seems that Jonathan’s very presence in the experiment will affect how his father responds, a Heisenbergian factor that seems to surprise Jonathan when it happens. David delicately does not articulate to Jonathan what Saul might say besides ‘Good’. The plan implicates Jonathan, since he will have known and approved David’s plan, whether Saul likes it or does not. Though David’s moves seem reactive to Saul’s earlier ones, it is also patent that David is closing in on Saul here, closing down his options to two, from which the king will select one. The positive response – owned by all its speakers, ‘Good!’ (*twb*) – is a loaded word in this narrative, tasting bitterly of the occasion when Saul was fired from kingship and a better man appointed in his place (15:28). Though it has been made obvious to the reader who that man is, Saul’s information on the identity is less unequivocal. The word ‘good’ has hovered around David in the appraisal and even in the words of Jonathan about David. Is it likely that Saul will be able to use this word wholeheartedly of his protégé? David seems certain of his quarry, and indeed he is not wrong in his plottings. We can hear David reminding Saul as well as Jonathan (and ourselves) that the two ‘sons’ are one and that they deal with each other apart from him. David is also making that bond one strand thicker by his plan here. More than a test of Saul – though framed as showing what is set or established (*klb*) this is an experiment precipitating new outcomes as well as reinforcing old ones, since it implicates Jonathan and forces awareness of collusion onto Saul. And more than a test, it is arguably an entrapment, whether that awareness is shown as David’s or not. David also prescribes for Jonathan a conclusion and an implicative order: If I am to be killed, you do it; why let your father do it? A rhetorical question? Is David relatively safe in asking Jonathan to kill him? Jonathan’s response is to deny the possibility of filial complicity, with strong language and with a loaded question anticipating David’s assent: “‘If I knew that evil was decided by my father to come upon you, would I not tell you?’” David has extracted a choice from Jonathan now.

In 20:10–11 (*round four*) the conversation moves from what will happen to how the king’s response can be communicated. David asks that detail, prompting Jonathan to propose a change of venue. They go out to the field, the site where the rest of their planning and communication will take place. It is, perhaps, a reminder that the court is unsafe for David (to some extent a fugitive), or that the court is unsafe for the conversation the two are holding. It also prompts the question of why their talk is dangerous for them. Is the court dangerous for Saul?

Jonathan takes the initiative in 20:12–17 (*round five*) in the field, rehearsing the communication of the information,⁶ making three complicated, condition- and oath-laden assertions: The first sentence involves the reconnaissance and communication of each alternative Saul may take, depending on Saul’s dispositions. A second voices an oath that Jonathan will send David away safely if Saul is not well-disposed toward him. The third pronounces a blessing for David with proviso for David’s reciprocal commitment to survivors of Jonathan’s house. The detail of the king’s possible anger is elaborated ominously. Jonathan’s emotional reaction can scarcely be missed within this very strong utterance. Jonathan binds David to himself and his own life to David again, recommitting them to the matters begun – granted one-sidedly and non-verbally – in 18:1–5. Jonathan’s language locks all three principals – God as well – in the roles just evolved in the exchanges set up here by David. Jonathan will assist David, who is, in turn and in time,

to reciprocate to Jonathan or his seed. David does not utter, but the narrator implies (by verb form) that David completes his own oath as urged by Jonathan and reminds us of the significance of what we have just heard: Jonathan loves David as himself. Whether Jonathan sketches his own father as the opponent so dangerous to David whom YHWH is to cut off is unclear but not impossible, at least to a reader. Part of the trap here is this strong language of Jonathan about David's enemies, one of whom, the narrator has told us (18:29), is Saul. Jonathan's words intensify the enmity, anticipated as they are before Saul has had his chance to choose an option. We are again reminded of the language between Jonathan and his armour-bearer in 14, where Saul is again the eventual if unintended fall guy of his son's speech. His own awareness of the import of his words is uncertain. Does Jonathan intend to set his father up here by oath? Jonathan aligns himself against those who see David as enemy and curses them.

The final planning utterance (*round six*, 20:18–23) opens with Jonathan now echoing anti-phonally David's speech of 20:5–8, envisioning both the king's table and the missing David, whose position Jonathan specifies in detail, sending David as the two rehearsed, though not to Bethlehem but to the field nearby. Jonathan reiterates the particulars of the table, never quite filling in the moment of denouement, and promises information. He then responds more specifically to the question David proposed in 20:10: Who will communicate the bad news and how? Presumably the difficulty will not arise if the king turns out to say, 'Good!' The plan he crafts seems perhaps overly complex, but for our purposes it can be classed as another doubled speech, in that it is rehearsed here for a later use and will be directed to a boy with one ostensible referent and to the hidden man with another.⁷ The heft of the communication of the arrows is on the 'flee danger' option, as before. That the system will break down in the event does not mean it is not sensible when set up.

To sum up: If I am correct to construct David as ultimately tracking Saul (Green 2003a: 367–410), then to re-assign Jonathan from placating the king is key. And insofar as Saul has been shown particularly reactive to collaboration between David and Saul's own intimates, David has chosen an apt curriculum. Splitting Jonathan from his father, David has shown to Jonathan a side of his father whom – as enemy to David – Jonathan must oppose. Notably, Jonathan does not explicitly envision what actually is about to happen, which is to say he does not acknowledge except hypothetically Saul as a danger to either himself or David; but the possibility reverberates in his utterance, given his resolves. Saul has been made near-incorrigible, at least by David and Jonathan whose oaths have asked God's participation as well.

SAUL AND JONATHAN'S FOUR UTTERANCE PAIRS (20:24–34)

The narrator intrudes in 20:24–26 (*round seven*) suddenly, but still primarily to position us for viewing, to cue us to what Saul is about to note. The time is the feast of which David and Jonathan have just spoken, and the place is the king's table. Saul is seated, Jonathan and Abner present, David's place noticeably empty, since the narrator situates him in terms of language used of him recently: hiding, hidden: David, hiding *from* Saul or – and – David hidden as a lure *for* the king. Saul speaks once to himself, in relation with Jonathan, as he and we know. His answer reveals his question: the reason for David's absence from the table: "... he is not clean, surely he is not clean..." The dialogical quality of the rumination suggests the intensity of the soliloquy, though in terms of utterances, Saul is engaged, for us, with David and Jonathan. Saul accounts for David's absence, pictures David as present except for a disqualifying technicality.

The next moment (20:27–29, *round eight*) repeats ‘the same’ query. But time has moved on, though the place repeats: It is the next day, and Saul cannot contain his speech within him any longer and poses his question to his son Jonathan – the narrator’s tag again reminding us of the paternal/filial agenda. Calling David (three times) Jesse’s son, Saul requests, demands, to know where he is. His question now, flushed from the underbrush of his self-talk, reveals the inadequacy of his own previous effort to convince himself that it must be temporary uncleanness, since he backs up to the absence of the previous day. That he is correct to doubt the excuse offered does not alter much the portrait of the king, chased by his own fears into the thicket of testing woven by David and Jonathan. Saul’s calling David by his patronym (disparagingly in the view of most commentators) underlines his failure to make David his own son, retraces the pattern of Saul’s unhappiness when any third party engages David – even his natural father. The language brings forward the verbal struggles of this pair of protagonists from just after the Goliath slaying (17:55–58), from the two betrothals which also redirect us to the Goliath contest which put the boy and the king into competition (n.b. 17:25–27 as well as 18:18 and 23).

Jonathan’s response to his father, echoing David’s words (v. 6) but ringing some crucial changes, starts in a sort of reporting mode: “David urgently asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem...”; then switching into direct discourse, Jonathan amplifies: ‘He said, “Send me, please, for there is a family sacrifice for us in the city; and he has summoned me – my brother. If I have found favour in your eyes, I would slip away (*mlt*), please, so I may see my brother”’ (author’s translation). Jonathan then drops his quasi-direct quoting and resumes the more indirect mode, rounding out the explanation: “For this reason he has not come to the king’s table.” Jonathan first mixes his own language with David’s and David’s with his, making prominent their collaboration in this matter. His changes, whether deliberate or not – and discernible only to ourselves and him, not to David or Saul – each of whom misses either the rehearsal or the performance – highlight some issues to which Saul has been already shown sensitive: the father/son bond triangulating David, Saul and Jesse as well as David, Saul and Jonathan; the favour that David finds in the eyes of diverse appraisers; the escape of David at the hands of Michal; and now also the matter of brothers, which Saul picks up on shortly.⁸ Jonathan places around Saul the scenario he and David have co-authored. Saul is preforming as anticipated and scripted, has responded as prodded to do.

In 20:30–34 (*round nine*) we come to the heart of this section, the place where Saul is most explicit about his understanding of himself and this son. Saul’s anger, directed not unsuitably against Jonathan, slurs him and indirectly his birth.⁹ In one of his most candid reflections, Saul tells Jonathan that he knows that Jonathan is choosing Jesse’s son over against his own lineage (and his mother’s nakedness). Avoiding, for the most part, to make explicit his own interest, Saul charges Jonathan with acting for David to the hurt of his own (i.e. Jonathan’s) kingship. Of course, from another angle, the reference to ‘Jonathan’s kingdom’ denies the information Saul was given so unequivocally by Samuel in 13:13–14 and 15:26. There will be no kingdom for Jonathan, no matter the efforts of any. So Saul’s candour here, even if we take it as sincere, is nonetheless unreal. Then, as if his blunt detailing of realities might convince his son, Saul once again demands that Jonathan send David – not to his father’s table (v. 29) – but to Saul to be killed. Jonathan’s response to the paternal outburst defies that fatherly expectation and echoes both his own and David’s earlier language (19:4; 20:1): “Why should he be killed? What has

he done?” If previously (19:4–7), this intervention of Jonathan dissuaded Saul from pursuit of David, now the effect seems the opposite.

Saul’s response, a nonverbal utterance (*round ten*), is to confirm what he hates, the conflation of the two ‘sons’, as he hurls the spear formerly aimed at David now at Jonathan. Saul’s action belies his own verbal utterance and makes manifest his frustration and irrationality on the matter of his son and the kingdom. The narrator ties off the scene, having showed us the basis on which Jonathan seems now convinced that Saul is intent on David’s death. Now not one but two sons are conspicuously missing from the table, as Jonathan leaves, grieving for David, according to words of David in 20:3; the narrator, with clever ambiguity, says his father had shamed him.¹⁰

A summary is once again in order. Saul has been assessed accurately, to some extent, by David. He acts as anticipated, as programmed, calling once again for the death of David. It is a formidable, if not quite definitive, move. Capable of forbearance with David when handled appropriately, Saul will not kill David even when later positioned to do so. It is difficult to make the case that Jonathan anticipated the outcome of the scenes just completed and in any case moot. Saul has clearly now stated his priority, which is to leave his son Jonathan to rule, a goal unable to be accomplished while David survives; it is a subset of Saul’s main drive, which is to remain king. To throw a spear at his son is to admit, by gesture, that the quest is hopeless. It is a startling moment in the story of Saul, a moment of great vulnerability for him. Saul the king overrules Saul the father. Jonathan’s education at the hand of his friend and his father is now complete.

JONATHAN’S UTTERANCES TO ‘THE BOY’ (20:35–42)

The last five verbal utterances are Jonathan’s, spoken both to his boy who bears his armour and to ‘his brother’ who accepted his armour some time back; David is also named as Saul’s armour-bearer (16:21), not the last to fill that role (31:4). These phrasings also are double, in that they rerun language already rehearsed between Jonathan and David (vv. 20–23), now in fresh circumstances. Though most commentators are understandably impatient with this fake flurry of arrows shot in accordance with an earlier plan in a scene which no longer wants such elaborate subterfuge, the narrator’s choice to spend time on it suggests it needs scrutiny.¹¹ So Jonathan bids the boy (*round eleven* 35–36) to run: ‘To run’ is the permission David requested in v. 6. And the boy ran, comments the narrator, in lieu of the character’s verbal response.

When in *round twelve*, 20:37, the boy has come to the place of the arrows which Jonathan had instructed, Jonathan calls, ‘Is not the arrow behind you [i.e., farther on]?’ The wording suggests the boy has turned to face his master, awaiting further cue. The other waiting figure has been instructed in 20:22 to read such a cue as: ‘YHWH sends you away’. In that scenario envisioned days before, Saul is not the one demanding that Jonathan send David to him, but God is sending him away. Saul is at cross-purposes with God, pointlessly, it seems, and perennially. The response to this utterance is not clear at first, but we can see almost at once that it is delay, or hesitation.

‘Hurry, be quick, do not delay,’ is consequently the next command (20:38–39, *round thirteen*) observed well by the one boy, prompting the other as well. And the narrator assists us, directs our vision: The one knew, the other did not.

‘Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, “Go, carry them to the city”’ (20:40, *round fourteen*). A reprise of the transfer of armour in 18:4, matched there by a narratorial comment

that David was successful wherever Saul sent him. Saul's fingerprints are pressed upon this scene. Saul collaborating with God, whether the king knows it or not?

The last utterance (*fifteen*, 20:41–42) is again Jonathan's alone, blending the former oaths of covenant partners with the presence of YHWH's protection and guarantee, reiterating his own words of 20:12–16, which Jonathan exacted from David too. David is wordless here, his prostrations and tears clearly responsive but difficult to read with precision. After the narrator provides, finally, assurances of mutuality between David and Jonathan, the next verse (MT 21:1) indicates that David rose and left and Jonathan went into the city, after the boy.

Since it seems obvious that this portion of the narrative is not really 'needed,' which is to say it renders little new information, it must be scrutinised rather for its mode and object of representation. It might seem that the point of the scene is for David to learn of his fate; that is true, but in fact little is made of David's learning except to register his strong emotion. At the level of David's reaction, the scene is all but wasted. David has in fact temporarily receded, both in terms of plot, as Jonathan precipitates events, and in narration, as Jonathan inhabits David's discourse. David is primarily now an object: sent, as he is asked by Saul, by Jonathan, by YHWH, and of course by his own devising. The verbal code which cues him is made otiose as we look on. Once the arrows have been arranged, the two planners interact directly, as indeed they can have done in any case. The code, then, is for us, directs our attention back to chapter 14, where Jonathan and the armour-bearer plan and succeed, evidently with God's approval, at the expense of Saul's position and at the apparent risk of Jonathan's life. And the arrow scene directs us ahead to chapter 31, where both king and prince are thwarted in their rule, a royal armour-bearer in attendance but not acting, and where the deity again seems to abet the human machinations. David appears, by the end of chapter 20, to have made unmistakable the wedge between father and son and between his royal patron and himself. And yet, counterintuitively, the split is not final, in either case. Jonathan is not parted from Saul (as we shall see in 31 and as David himself will affirm in 2 Samuel 1:23), and David and the old king will remain locked together for some time ahead.

CONVERGING THE 'JONATHAN' SCENES

It remains simply to re-view the other 'Jonathan scenes' in 1 Samuel. In chapter 14, Jonathan and his armour-bearer act at cross-purposes with King Saul; by the scene's end, the heir has been sentenced to death on oath but reprieved (14:45). The armour-bearer has disappeared. By the long story's end, both king and prince are dead, together, eulogised efficiently; the armour-bearer has an ambiguous, undecidable and controversial role.

In the other two scenes, less complex, Jonathan seeks first to deny his father's sense of David as threat (19:1–7), only to own its truth in the concentrically matching moment (23:17). Jonathan has, thanks to an education experience we oversee, ceased to resist or reform his father in the matter of David. The representation is powerful and poignant, with resonance both political and personal. Bakhtin's astute sense of the tiny utterance genre has enabled us to read with careful discrimination the intersecting responsibility for what has happened.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This piece on Saul's son Jonathan is a sort of companion to a short study of his daughter Michal: see Green (2003b).
- ² See Green (2003a): 1–19 for a fuller (though still roughly sketched) treatment of these circumstances.
- ³ For more information consult Morson and Emerson (1990): chapter 4, specifically pp.123–139. Bakhtin's essay 'Speech genres' is also shaped in conversation with criticism he holds to be inadequate; he mentions alternative ways of conceiving language (1986: 61–75 but sporadically elsewhere in the essay as well). Though he touches on the concept of utterance in earlier work as well, the 'Speech genres' essay is quite complete in itself.
- ⁴ Fokkelman (1986: 295–350) gives many excellent insights and offers several charts that are visually clarifying. Edelman (1991: 153–191) has good observations of the ways in which language echoes what has been said earlier.
- ⁵ Polzin (1989: 188) queries why the two (or either of them) should continue to trust Saul's expressions of good will toward David. He thinks (192) that Jonathan rather consistently misses the negative undertow of persons and situations, despite David's direction that he be more duplicitous or at least suspicious.
- ⁶ Fokkelman (1986: 308–309) calls the field the antipole of the court – and a different place as well from the field in which David hid when Jonathan successfully urged reconciliation to his father; Fokkelman names Saul's court as the intersection of all the quests of this whole unit (294). Pleins (1992: 34) suggests, that the field (and David's other venues) take him outside the circle of Saul's realm. See Campbell (2003: 209–212) for a thorough review of the apparent inconsistencies as well as a solution to them.
- ⁷ Fokkelman discusses the level of the communication at great length (intermittently, 1986: 319–51), burying some good insight amid a great deal of other detail.
- ⁸ Fokkelman (1986: 332–333) catches them carefully; his reading assumptions demand the question of Jonathan's intent, which in Bakhtin's mode does not arise.
- ⁹ Alter (1999: 127) translates 'perverse and wayward'. Fokkelman (1986: 334) suggests the slur is not directed against Jonathan's mother per se but conveys the notion that the son is congenitally flawed; that may be so, though contemporary feminist theory will not so easily overlook the manner of derogation, nor will a Bakhtinian reader miss the positioning of the old conflict of sons and their parentage. For a more gender-sensitive interpretation, consult Jobling (1998: 178). The disparaging expression also breathes life into the suggestion of Jon Levenson (1978: 11–28) that the Ahinoam who becomes David's wife in 25:43 may be the same as Saul's wife. See also Gary Stansell (1996: 59–61).
- ¹⁰ Stansell (1996: 59–61) brings to bear categories of Mediterranean honour and shame and makes the case that it is Jonathan, not David, who has been shamed (David has been threatened, not shamed). That may be so, but the larger issue of the confusion of 'sons' and the king's disparate hopes for each of them makes the ambiguity of phrasing effective.
- ¹¹ E.g. Campbell (2003: 209–217) insists that the ritual is not properly observed; Fokkelman, at the other extreme, spends pages (1986: 318–350) excavating its possible layers of signification. It is my hope to take a middle path. It is important but not endlessly mysterious.

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