

## Some Reflections on Current Narrative Research on the Book of Samuel

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*The development of narrative criticism as a discipline within Old Testament studies and study of the books of Samuel are integrally related. This essay examines the significance of Samuel for the ways in which narrative criticism has developed, arguing that it is the narrative poetics of Samuel that have come to be largely definitive for our understanding of the poetics of narrative within the Old Testament. At the same time, the developing understanding of narrative criticism has shaped the ways in which Samuel is interpreted, with narrative criticism becoming a dominant model. This development is explored through major studies of Samuel published as and since this shift took place, showing the fruitfulness of this approach for contemporary study, while also showing that issues left unaddressed in the rise of narrative criticism leave important questions about their interpretation unresolved.*

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The books of Samuel have been the focus of an expanding body of research for some time. Given the explosion of such work in recent years, it is not possible in any one paper to address all the issues that have emerged in research on the book. This paper is therefore selective. In it, I offer reflections on studies which are focused on the Book of Samuel since the 1970s. Although for some this date might not seem especially “current”, it is chosen because it was a time that marked a significant change in how the Bible was interpreted with the rise of narrative methods. It is my contention that issues left unresolved at the point of this development continue to impact the interpretation of Samuel. Within this period, it is also argued that the narrative quality of Samuel means it became a central text in developing narrative approaches. Narrative criticism will thus emerge as the key tool for interpreting Samuel, but problems with this interpretative shift will be highlighted. It should be made clear that these criticisms come from someone who regards himself as a narrative critic, but hopefully situating these reflections in this setting means that we can reflect self-critically on what this means.

As a selective study, commentaries on Samuel are not considered. This limitation is because the form of the commentary forces a high level of

summary which other forms, especially the monograph, do not require. Monographs are accordingly the main focus of the paper. As my concern is with Samuel as a discrete text, works on the Deuteronomistic History are also excluded. This limitation is not because I no longer regard it as a viable model for interpreting the block of texts found in Joshua – 2 Kings (though I don’t), but because methodologically this approach is concerned with Samuel only to the extent that it is part of a wider text. Nevertheless, studies which examine Samuel as a component within the Deuteronomistic History, but which focus only on Samuel are included. However, even with these limits in place it is not possible to include everything, so what is offered is also a personal list of those works which I judge to represent the issues best.

### The Development of Narrative

#### Samuel and Narrative Studies

The 1970s marked a significant change how the Old Testament was studied. Several factors influenced this shift, and the changes that we observe were also evident in a range of other disciplines in the humanities. But we can note that this change occurred when Biblical Studies took a literary turn. Prior to that point, academic study had been primarily concerned with what is now described as diachronic interpretation, with the text approached through well-established methods such as source, form and redaction criticism, even as more synchronic approaches began to develop. Although it was conceived as an extension of form criticism, and thus something that was initially diachronic, James Muilenberg’s famous SBL Presidential address advocating the development of rhetorical criticism was an important contributing factor.<sup>1</sup> More important from our point of view is the arrival of *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, which is now one of the key Old Testament journals. Launched in 1976, its concern with the interpretation of the texts as we now have them was apparent from the start, and David J. A. Clines, for many years the driving force behind *JSOT*, has demonstrated this concern in a number of his publications even as he has also moved more towards the world of the reader. Nevertheless, *JSOT* remains one of the most important places for publishing such studies, and it continues to foster an interest in synchronic studies as well as more traditional diachronic ones.

The mid-1970s were a time of rapid change in Old Testament hermeneutics, though not many textbooks fully reflect that. Muilenberg’s proposal, coupled with the forum provided by *Semeia*, and even more so by

<sup>1</sup> James Muilenberg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 1–18.

*JSTOT*, opened the door for a serious study of the whole of the Hebrew Bible from a synchronic viewpoint. However, making the study of the text's current form acceptable did not mean that issues associated with narrative were properly addressed. It is probably true to say that the Muilenberg school was generally more effective in its treatment of the prophets, wisdom, and poetic texts, which have a more obvious rhetorical function, than narrative. They had paved the way, but the road was not yet open in terms of Hebrew narrative.

A year before, *JSTOT*'s first issue of two significant publications appeared, both of which were specifically concerned with matters related to Hebrew narrative. The first of these was J. P. Fokkelman's *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*.<sup>2</sup> In it, Fokkelman analyzed selected passages from Genesis in terms of the literary techniques employed by the narrators. As such, matters of source criticism, which had for so long dominated Pentateuchal study, were pushed to one side. Instead, Fokkelman provided an extraordinarily detailed analysis of the Hebrew text of these passages. In particular, Fokkelman was concerned with the literary artistry of these passages as they now stand. Instead of determining a series of historical questions about what lay behind the text, Fokkelman attempted to interpret the text alone. It was thoroughly synchronic, or text immanent. Since then, he has also published both a four-volume literary interpretation of Samuel and an introduction to Old Testament narrative, both of which will feature in this essay.<sup>3</sup>

Because Fokkelman largely eschewed formal method, a more significant publication (at least in English) was probably Robert Alter's essay, "A Literary Approach to the Bible,"<sup>4</sup> an initial published probe that is a clear pointer to his later *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.<sup>5</sup> Alter is a literary critic. Coming from this background, he argued that consideration of such issues as plot, scene, characterization, and the like had a valid and relevant role to play in the interpretation of the biblical narratives. After the initial essay, Alter published several others, and these, though heavily re-written, form the basis of his 1981 book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. More than

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 4 vols. (Assen: van Gorcum, 1981–1993); Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Commentary* 60 (1975): 70–77.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

many other books in the history of Old Testament study, this truly was a watershed work. Here, Alter gave shape to the interpretive program he was proposing, providing the necessary literary and intellectual coherence. Alter was building on both a tradition of studying narrative in English departments and also a growing movement in works published in Modern Hebrew by scholars such as Shimon bar-Efrat and Meir Sternberg, which was beginning to influence some strands of Old Testament studies. But Alter is pivotal because it was his work that established the importance of understanding the Old Testament's narrative on its own terms. After Alter, more substantial works were published by Adele Berlin,<sup>6</sup> Sternberg,<sup>7</sup> and bar-Efrat<sup>8</sup> (among others). So rapidly did this become an established method in Old Testament studies that it took less than a decade for scholars to begin producing introductory texts that explained narrative criticism to students<sup>9</sup> and survey articles examining the interpretative possibilities of such approaches.<sup>10</sup>

My purpose in outlining this change is not to focus on narrative studies in and of themselves so much as to point to how influential Samuel was in the formation of this approach. To do this, we will take some soundings from each of Alter, Berlin, Sternberg, and bar-Efrat. The intention is not to give a comprehensive survey, but hopefully the examples chosen will be illustrative of the point. In Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative*, he entitled one chapter "Characterization and the Art of Reticence."<sup>11</sup> Alter's primary examples are taken from the presentation of David in Samuel, focusing in particular on his "unfolding relationship with his wife Michal."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, he takes us from Michal's introduction in 1 Sam 18:14–30, her

<sup>6</sup> Adele Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Shimon bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us": *An Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1990); Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*; Jerome T. Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Its Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). The time-pressed can now read Tod Linafelt, *The Hebrew Bible as Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27–49.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Joe M. Sprinkle, "Literary Approaches to the Old Testament: A Survey of Recent Scholarship," *JETS* 32 (1989): 299–310.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 114–30.

<sup>12</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 115.

assisting of David's escape in 1 Sam 19:11–17, her being taken from David in 1 Sam 25:44, her forced return to David in 2 Sam 3:12–16, and finally to her encounter with David in 2 Sam 6:20–23. In filling this theme out, Alter also mentions David's other wives in 1 Sam 30<sup>13</sup> and Bathsheba.<sup>14</sup> The predominant influence of Samuel in Alter's development of the Old Testament's narrative poetics is not restricted to this chapter. We might also note that all the key examples in his fourth chapter, an exploration of the relationship between narration and dialogue,<sup>15</sup> are taken from Samuel. So, although his starting point is the Judah and Tamar narrative,<sup>16</sup> it is Samuel that has been most influential in his understanding, or at least his demonstration, of the narrative techniques of the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup>

We can note a similar pattern in other pioneering studies. In Adele Berlin's work, it is notable that about 40 percent of all biblical citations are taken from the books of Samuel.<sup>18</sup> Like Alter, when she discusses characterization, her examples are almost all taken from Samuel, the only variation being her inclusion of 1 Kings 1–2 as a means of concluding her treatment of Bathsheba.<sup>19</sup> Sternberg's work is by far the most detailed of the earlier works on Old Testament narrative, but although he has differences in approach to Alter and Berlin, he is united with them both in providing a particular focus on Samuel. So, when he examines gaps and ambiguity in the reading process,<sup>20</sup> his central example is taken from 2 Sam 11.<sup>21</sup> Even his other text, the story of Abimelech and the woman from Judges 9, appears only because it is referred to in 2 Sam 11.<sup>22</sup> Sternberg draws on a wider range of texts than the other works considered here, but Samuel (along with Genesis) provide his key sources, comprising

<sup>13</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 121.

<sup>14</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 63–87.

<sup>16</sup> Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3–22.

<sup>17</sup> This is true even of points where one might think that Samuel would not feature so significantly, as for example his treatment of the type scene, where even here Samuel appears (Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60–62).

<sup>18</sup> As is easily seen in the Index of Biblical Passages in Berlin, *Poetics*, 171–73.

<sup>19</sup> Berlin, *Poetics*, 23–33.

<sup>20</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186–229.

<sup>21</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 186–219.

<sup>22</sup> Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 219–22.

about 40 percent of his texts.<sup>23</sup> Shimon bar-Efrat's text is similarly influenced by Samuel, and again about 40 percent of his texts are taken from Samuel.<sup>24</sup> Not only are many of his examples are taken from Samuel, but when he presents an analysis of a text to draw together all the elements he has explained in the preceding chapters, he chooses the story of Amnon and Tamar from 2 Sam 13.<sup>25</sup> We can also note in passing that bar-Efrat would go on to write a commentary on Samuel that was expressly concerned with its narrative elements.<sup>26</sup>

What conclusions can we draw from this overview? Obviously, we cannot know why these scholars selected the texts that they did to illustrate the points that they wished to make. But it is striking that Samuel has provided so many examples of the narrative art of the Old Testament—only Genesis comes close to it in terms of influence and citations. Yet time and again it is Samuel that provides the key text for examining how narrative works. Because of this textual selection, the generation that has learned the poetics of Old Testament narrative through these studies (and they have been hugely influential) have particularly been exposed to Samuel. The narrative techniques of Samuel have, in effect, come to be seen as the standard model through which to read the narrative texts of the Old Testament. Other books in the Former Prophets feature considerably less and in a much lower ratio relative to their length. For example, Joshua and Judges combined (to achieve a text closer in length to Samuel and so make the ratios more relevant) appear only about one third as often as Samuel in Sternberg, one sixth as often in bar-Efrat, and one tenth as often in Berlin and Alter. For whatever reason, these books have not been as influential in developing our understanding of narrative, leading to the occasional complaint that these texts are overlooked in narrative studies of the Old Testament.<sup>27</sup> Samuel's narrative quality has particularly shaped our understanding of the Old Testament's narrative poetics, and this understanding in turn has encouraged more focused narrative studies of Samuel.

<sup>23</sup> See the index in Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 576–80.

<sup>24</sup> See the index in bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 287–92.

<sup>25</sup> bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 239–82.

<sup>26</sup> S. bar-Efrat, *Das Erste Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007); and bar-Efrat, *Das Zweite Buch Samuel: Ein narratologisch-philologischer Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009). The same, of course, is true of Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton & Co, 1999). However, in spite of his subtitle, his commentary does go on to include 1 Kings 1–2.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 4.

### Early Narrative Studies of Samuel

Alongside the pioneering works on the poetics of Old Testament narrative, a number of early works on narrative began to appear. What is again notable is that Samuel dominated such studies, even if other texts like Esther, which had previously been on the margins of Old Testament studies, moved more into the mainstream. So, Samuel's narrative qualities were being recognized quite early in the literary turn, though as we will note, the level of formal methodological reflection that has informed this recognition has risen over time.

Pride of place for this movement, not least in that his earliest works predated Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative*, and to some extent even his *Commentary* essay, must go to David M. Gunn, who published two studies on Samuel employing narrative methodology. Gunn's earlier volume examined the story of David,<sup>28</sup> almost immediately distinguishing itself from the then-dominant approaches to Samuel, which had been shaped by Rost's source critical analysis.<sup>29</sup> He managed this change by reading the story of David as king, reaching back to 2 Sam. 2 rather than following the more or less agreed structure of the so-called Succession Narrative.<sup>30</sup> However, Gunn did follow Rost (and indeed many others) in continuing to read through to 1 Kings 2 on the basis that this concluded David's story. That is, the canonical boundary between Samuel and Kings was not deemed significant by Gunn. But what was more important was that Gunn's concern was with the story quality of the narrative,<sup>31</sup> something he argued would enable a better appreciation of the narrative's genre and purpose. This is not to say that Gunn rejected the existence of Rost's source, but that he refocused the way it was read.

In *King David*, Gunn does not devote much attention to the theoretical underpinnings of his task, his introduction largely being given over to an outline of what follows. But in his second major study, looking at Saul,<sup>32</sup> Gunn provides some initial reflection on the task of the literary critic

<sup>28</sup> David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978). In his preface (p. 9), Gunn notes that aspects of the book had appeared in journal articles, some as early as 1974.

<sup>29</sup> See Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982). German original, 1926.

<sup>30</sup> Although it was generally agreed that this putative source began before 2 Sam 9, exactly which verses should be included was not settled.

<sup>31</sup> Gunn, *King David*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

(which we might now call a narrative critic). He is particularly concerned with what it means to read this material as a work of serious entertainment, something that requires attending closely to its presentation as story.<sup>33</sup> He makes it clear that his goal is to provide an interpretation of the story, but he also indicates his own reservations about providing theoretical foundations for his reading.<sup>34</sup> He was more concerned with *what* he offered than *how* he offered it. Without taking time to explore the detail of his readings, it is notable that a key motivation for Gunn was to take stories that he judged to be well-known and interpret them for a wider range of readers. His approach was to examine these as embedded stories, rather than as part of a final form, but method as such did not play a significant role.

About the same time as Gunn's work on David, another narrative study of more or less the same story was published by Charles Conroy.<sup>35</sup> Conroy's study differed from Gunn's in staying within Samuel but was still largely a study of the Succession Narrative, albeit approaching it from the perspective of its narrative form. Since 2 Sam 13–20 forms a particular narrative segment, it was possible for Conroy to narrow his focus, so he does not comment on the place of 1 Kings 1–2. Like Gunn, Conroy does not give much attention to method, his methodological comments serving more as a summary of what will happen in the balance of his study.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps more importantly, he starts from the position that the literary excellence of Samuel is such that, beyond brief citations from Gunkel and Whybray, there is no need to justify this aspect of Samuel, thus permitting his study.<sup>37</sup>

Something similar can be said of Fokkelman's massive four-volume study of the books of Samuel, a work that took seriously its subtitle as a "full interpretation based on stylistic and structural analyses."<sup>38</sup> Fokkel-

<sup>33</sup> Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 11–19.

<sup>34</sup> Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 16–17.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Conroy, *Absalom! Absalom! Narrative and Language in II Sam 13–20* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978).

<sup>36</sup> Conroy, *Absalom!*, 6–12.

<sup>37</sup> Conroy, *Absalom!*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Fokkelman is careful to note that a "full interpretation" is not to be confused with "the impossible pretension of having the last word about Samuel." See J. P. Fokkelman, *King David*, vol. 1 of *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1981), 7. Calling this particular volume *King David* represents Fokkelman's nod to the importance of Gunn (p. 427).

man had already begun exploring the possibilities of narrative interpretation with his earlier studies in Genesis, but it is in his work on Samuel that this approach bears full fruit. Again, methodology plays a comparatively small role in his study. He is clear that his goal is to read the text, asking questions that arise from within it.<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that he is methodologically naïve, and indeed he mentions bar-Efrat's original work in Modern Hebrew as an influence,<sup>40</sup> though he does not make much reference to it in the work itself. Part of the reason for this lack of methodological reflection, as he engages in both micro-textual and macro-textual studies, is his desire to identify those features of the text that most clearly require comment rather than feeding his interpretation through a specific grid, while also aiming to provide an interpretation of the whole. This is why each volume concludes with an integrating synthesis for the portion of text covered save for his third covering 2 Sam 5–8 and 21–24.<sup>41</sup> However, this section is then integrated into his conclusions on the whole book in his fourth volume.<sup>42</sup> Fokkelman is thus more concerned with a deep appreciation of the text than with offering a sustained reflection on method.

Apart from their lack of conscious reflection on method, these early narrative studies are also notable for the fact that they are not directly concerned with Samuel, but rather draw on the source-critical paradigm offered by Rost. Conroy, of course, is explicit that he is interpreting a part of the Succession Narrative, and although Gunn does not agree with Rost's boundaries for this source in *King David*, he was still working with this model as a basic structure. Although Fokkelman would go on to provide a detailed interpretation of the rest of Samuel, his decision to include 1 Kings 1–2 and to include 2 Sam 21–24 with 2 Sam 5–8 in his study shows that although he was not particularly persuaded of the source critical analysis, it was still a significant factor in shaping his reading. That is, these early narrative works are, to some extent, studies of sources which have been more or less taken over whole into Samuel but not consciously studies of the book of Samuel itself.

<sup>39</sup> Fokkelman, *King David*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Fokkelman, *King David*, 1–12.

<sup>41</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Throne and City (II Sam. 2–8 & 21–24)*, vol. 3 of *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> J. P. Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire (I Sam. 1–12)*, vol. 4 of *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1993), 540–49. It should be noted that 2 Sam 5–8 and 21–24 fit awkwardly in his final structure, with 2 Sam 21–24 brought back to follow immediately on 5–8 (p. 542).

### From Narrative Studies to Narrative Criticism

It is notable that at about the same time as Fokkelman's first volume appeared, Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative* was also published. One cannot draw an immediate cause and effect conclusion, but it is notable that later narrative studies of Samuel have been more focused on method than the early studies. Alter's work is largely descriptive, though clearly well-informed about wider discussions in poetics, something that can also be said of the other works on narrative in the Old Testament that appeared shortly thereafter. But what Alter established was that it was possible to define the major features of narrative in the Old Testament, and from this it was then possible to establish testable methods in narrative. So, where the early studies in narrative found Samuel to be an attractive text for understanding narrative poetics, and the early narrative studies on Samuel emerged because of the interest the text generated, it now became important to provide a methodological foundation for what was done. Along with this growing methodological awareness, and in dialogue with wider movements in Old Testament studies that can largely be traced to Brevard Childs's pioneering work at about the same time,<sup>43</sup> there emerged a greater interest in reading the text as a final form. This shift has considerable importance for how we regard 2 Sam 21–24 in particular, though it also affects how large parts of the text are read. However, as we shall see, there remains an unresolved tension over the nature of the text even as a greater focus on method has emerged. Even so, a shift had begun from narrative approaches to narrative criticism.

To understand this shift, we need briefly to turn aside from studies focused on Samuel to consider Polzin's *Moses and the Deuteronomist*.<sup>44</sup> Although the reference to the "Deuteronomist" might lead one to think of this as a work indebted to Martin Noth,<sup>45</sup> it quickly becomes clear that in this work "the Deuteronomist" is largely used as a means of referring to the authors of the text. This early work established the importance of reading the text's final form and that tensions within it may be creative

<sup>43</sup> Most obviously in Brevard S. Childs, *An Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

<sup>44</sup> Robert Polzin, *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges*, vol. 1 of *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980). This was intended to lead to a study of the whole of Deuteronomy to Kings, though at this point no work on Kings has appeared.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). The German original was published in 1943.

parts of a narrative. Rather than looking to sources, Polzin wanted to read the whole of Deuteronomy to Kings as part of a narrative that should be judged on its own terms rather than by the historical-critical methods that had previously been applied.<sup>46</sup> In this early work, Polzin begins to build on several literary critics, notably Wayne Booth and Mikhail Bakhtin, though Alter's influence is also felt.

But before Polzin published his works on Samuel, Lyle Eslinger issued a narrative reading of 1 Sam 8–12.<sup>47</sup> Although long considered a text that contained conflicting sources that could be analyzed as either pro- or anti-monarchical, Eslinger set out to provide a reading of these chapters that understood the text as a unity, albeit a unity where the phenomena that had previously led to source-critical analysis still needed to be understood.<sup>48</sup> Eslinger draws on the work of Seymour Chatman in explaining his “close reading” (even if not fully convinced by aspects of it), though like Polzin he devotes more of his methodological attention to explaining why the older historical-critical approach was unsatisfactory. Although neither outlined their methodology in any detail (if understood as a positive statement of approach), these two works are crucial because they introduce a significant methodological discussion to the process while then reading the finished text rather than focusing on the sources which lay behind it.<sup>49</sup>

Polzin developed this approach further in his studies of Samuel.<sup>50</sup> To the extent that he provides any further introduction to these further volumes, they are focused on why the dominant scholarly paradigms and their focus on features behind the current text were inadequate.<sup>51</sup> His approach retained a focus on the final form of the text, but in these readings (which were much fuller than in his first volume) it becomes clear that he

<sup>46</sup> Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 16–18.

<sup>47</sup> Lyle M. Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 8–12* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985).

<sup>48</sup> Eslinger, *Kingship of God*, 40–43.

<sup>49</sup> For a methodologically related approach, see also Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics and Polemics in a Narrative Stretch about David (2 Samuel 5.17–7.29)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part Two: 1 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), and Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History. Part 3: 2 Samuel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 1–17.

was particularly influenced by the literary models of Mikhail Bakhtin, routinely referring to classical Bakhtinian elements such as “dialogic contrasts” or “double voiced language.” More particularly, the importance of Bakhtin as a major methodological partner becomes apparent as early as the discussion of the interplay between Elkanah and Hannah in 1 Sam 1:1–8, where Polzin draws on Bakhtin and his concept of a character zone.<sup>52</sup> This focus is continued in his examination of 2 Samuel, where Bakhtin and his literary concepts remain important.<sup>53</sup> What is perhaps surprising is that Polzin makes no sustained attempt to justify the use of Bakhtin, though this work and its use of Bakhtin would influence numerous later narrative-critical interpretations of Samuel.

Polzin's focus on the final form of the text also means that his work attempts to read Samuel as a complete text: his division of his studies into two volumes being a matter of convenience. This focus means that rather than reading the narrative of 1 Kings 1–2 as the natural continuation of 2 Sam 20, with 2 Sam 21–24 essentially an appendix made up of miscellaneous pieces, he focuses on how 2 Sam 21–24 work within the book, noting that the careful structure of these chapters requires a more careful reading of them.<sup>54</sup> Of course, since he has not written a volume on Kings, we cannot know how he would have treated 1 Kings 1–2, but the focus on Samuel as a complete text represents an important step in studying the final form, albeit one that is still debated.<sup>55</sup>

Although numerous narrative-critical studies of Samuel have appeared since Polzin, we will note only three others. This restriction is because the pattern that was emerging in the earlier narrative-critical studies, with their developing approach to methodology, has been extended in subsequent works. That is, although focus on the final form is not the only way narrative-critical readings of Samuel have developed, such readings have increasingly reflected on the appropriate use of literary theory and its application to Samuel. The first of these is Barbara Green's reading of Saul in Samuel, which expressly develops a Bakhtinian focus.<sup>56</sup> Given her earlier

<sup>52</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 202.

<sup>55</sup> Although not employing Bakhtin, Timothy F. Simpson, *Not “Who is on the Lord's Side?” but “Whose Side Is the Lord On?": Contesting Claims and Divine Inscrutability in 2 Samuel 16:5–14* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014) is a more recent work which stands very much in the model of Polzin.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003). She also published a more

work on the importance of Bakhtin for reading the Bible,<sup>57</sup> this approach is not surprising, but Green's work is consciously a development of Polzin. What is perhaps most remarkable is the shift that has taken place within this, with methodological concerns now brought to the foreground. As well as providing a helpful introduction to Bakhtin (with awareness of problems that derive from some aspects of his work),<sup>58</sup> Green introduces relevant parts of Bakhtin's work for each section of 1 Samuel, which she sets in dialogue with Polzin's contribution before moving to her own reading. Her focus on the final form also means that she considers any assessment of the time of Saul through this text to be "off the table"<sup>59</sup> for her approach. Where Polzin and Eslinger largely employ narrative criticism because of their dissatisfaction with the existing models of reading Samuel, Green now makes narrative criticism something that is itself as firmly grounded in method as the older source and redaction critical approaches.

Although Bakhtin has been a major dialogue partner for narrative-critical treatments of Samuel, other options are also present. But just as with Green, these other approaches have also focused much more on method than the earlier narrative critics. One unusual approach is developed by Grenville Kent in his treatment of 1 Sam 28.<sup>60</sup> Kent's decision to use film narrative theory was shaped by his interest in repetition as a particular aspect of the books of Samuel, demonstrating that repetition was not adequately covered by literary approaches.<sup>61</sup> As a newer approach to a narrative text of the Old Testament, it was natural that he should give ample attention to method, but it is still notable that about two thirds of his book is focused on method. Like Green, his approach is concerned with the final form of the text, with the questions of history largely bracketed.

A similar focus on method can be seen in Andreas Käser's study of 2

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popular version of the same study, Green, *King Saul's Asking* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?*, 19–29.

<sup>59</sup> Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?*, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Grenville J. R. Kent, *Say It Again Sam: A Literary and Filmic Study of Repetition in 1 Samuel 28* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011). In the interests of full disclosure, I should point out that Kent was a student of mine and completed this work as his PhD under my supervision.

<sup>61</sup> Kent, *Say It Again Sam*, 9–47.

Sam 11–12,<sup>62</sup> though unlike other narrative critics he is also concerned with the relationship between the historical development of the text and final form interpretations. As with Kent, his work is largely a case study of how this relationship is worked out in a particular text. But where Kent had drawn on film narrative theory, Käser makes more use of the French narrative critic Gerard Genette,<sup>63</sup> finding in his work (though not only his) a mechanism for comparing and contrasting more literary approaches with historically focused work. Käser's work is important because although he develops the sort of model for reading the text that has characterized final-form approaches, he has also demonstrated that such approaches to Samuel need not ignore the fact that the text itself has developed in various ways while remaining communicative literature (*mitteilende Literatur*). This insight is something recognized only when one appreciates that Samuel is more than just a literary artifice; it is something that intends to refer to things outside itself and so requires an interdisciplinary approach,<sup>64</sup> though without failing to attend to the literary dimensions of the text.

The move to narrative criticism has thus been central to the interpretation of Samuel, but it is also clear that as narrative criticism replaced narrative approaches, key questions have remained unanswered. What text should we interpret? Are there earlier stages that are valid to study or is it the final form? What are the boundaries of the text? And in narrative criticism, who should our dialogue partners be?<sup>65</sup> These issues are central to the other dimensions of research on Samuel that we now survey more briefly.

## Themes and Issues in Narrative Criticism of Samuel

### The Structure of Samuel

The questions that have impacted narrative criticism have also shaped the question of the structure of Samuel, an issue that cannot be separated from the issue of sources. Most fundamentally, can we read Samuel as a

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<sup>62</sup> Andreas Käser, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Interpretation und historische Exegese: Die Erzählung von David und Batscha als Fallbeispiel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016).

<sup>63</sup> Käser, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Interpretation und historische Exegese*, 49–55.

<sup>64</sup> Käser, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Interpretation und historische Exegese*, 267.

<sup>65</sup> To the options noted already, one can also add speech-act theory, as developed by Steven T. Mann, *Run, David. Run! An Investigation of the Theological Speech Acts of David's Departure and Returns (2 Samuel 14–20)* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

text in its own right, or is the division of Samuel from Kings (and indeed the rest of the Former Prophets) simply an accident of history, a literary convenience rather than an interpretative datum?<sup>66</sup> As we noted, the early literary studies of Samuel continued (more or less) to read Samuel as part of a story that was to be read through into 1 Kings, resulting in the treatment of 2 Sam 21–24 as an “Appendix” even though its own careful structure had long been noted.<sup>67</sup> Equally, it is often suggested that the division of the books in the so-called “Deuteronomistic History” is largely an accident of history. If so, does this mean that the relationship of Samuel to Judges as the text immediately preceding it is also open to question?<sup>68</sup> Has the literary turn resulted in a different appreciation of the structure, and therefore literary integrity, of Samuel? For the sake of brevity, we will address this question only through the place of 2 Sam 21–24 since this text illustrates the issues.

Because of the continuing influence of Rost’s model, it would be fair to say that many studies of Samuel have continued to treat the book’s boundaries as irrelevant for interpretation. In any case, David’s story demonstrably continues into 1 Kings 1–2. It would be fair to say, therefore, that on this issue the dominant approach has been to read the sources behind Samuel.<sup>69</sup> But should we read 1 Kings 1–2 as a continuation of David’s story, as the source model might suggest? Or should it be read as a separate story which knows of the account in Samuel and therefore uses it to launch its own narrative? If, as Keys has argued using a mixture of source and narrative criticism, 1 Kings 1–2 comes from a separate source, then it becomes possible to read 1 Sam 9–20 (or 10–20 in Keys’s case) as a discrete narrative portion within Samuel.<sup>70</sup>

The possibilities that emerged from this analysis were recognized by Koorevaar<sup>71</sup> and Klement,<sup>72</sup> both of whom presented similar proposals

<sup>66</sup> For a slightly fuller discussion of this topic, see David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Kingdom Comes* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 18–29.

<sup>67</sup> Going back at least to Karl Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel erklärt* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902), 304.

<sup>68</sup> See David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 27–37.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., S. Seiler, *Die Geschichte von der Thronfolge Davids (2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kön 1–2): Untersuchungen zur Literarkritik und Tendenz* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Gillian Keys, *The Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the ‘Succession Narrative’* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 43–70.

<sup>71</sup> H. J. Koorevaar, “De macrostructuur van het boek Samuël en de theologische implicaties daarvan,” *Acta Theologica* 17 (1997): 56–86.

<sup>72</sup> H. H. Klement, *2 Samuel 21–24: Context, Structure and Meaning in the Samuel*

for the structure of Samuel as a whole. Although Koorevaar’s essay was published earlier, his proposal is actually a slight reworking of Klement’s doctoral thesis, which was subsequently published. There are small variances between them, but it is notable that both see Samuel as an integral unit that is made up of a range of chiasmic units.<sup>73</sup> For Klement, this structure emerges from a narrative approach to the text, one that builds on the turn to narrative criticism leading to a proper focus on the finished text.<sup>74</sup> The key result that emerges from this analysis is that rather than 2 Sam 21–24 being treated as a miscellany in the appendix, he argues that it should rather be seen as an intentional conclusion to Samuel.<sup>75</sup>

This sort of approach has been taken much further in the recent thesis of James E. Patrick.<sup>76</sup> Although rejecting the terminology of “chiasm” as inadequate and opting instead for “concentrism” as a more appropriate term that reflects the patterns of parallelism found in Hebrew poetry,<sup>77</sup> Patrick argues that a study of the final form of Samuel leads to the conclusion that the work as a whole is an inverted parallelism with an unparalleled center. It is this structure, Patrick argues, that allows the book’s key theological themes to be developed. Patrick’s conclusions cut across much of the traditional source analysis of the book and in the case of 2 Sam 21–24 places these chapters within the second major section of the book as an integrated component within it (on his analysis, 2 Sam 7–24).<sup>78</sup> Moreover, by taking the final shape as his starting point and working back from there, he concludes that his narrative-critical rhetorical analysis requires that Samuel be treated as a cohesive work in its own right, meaning that its relationship to Kings (and indeed Judges) needs to be reassessed.<sup>79</sup>

These studies have not yet broken the hold that the source-critical model has long held over these chapters, but they suggest that narrative criticism is leading to a re-evaluation of the relationship between the levels

*Conclusion* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Klement, *2 Samuel 21–24*, 157–60; Koorevaar, “De Macrostructuur,” 58–60.

<sup>74</sup> Klement, *2 Samuel 21–24*, 53–60.

<sup>75</sup> Though not making the case as strongly as Klement, a not dissimilar position is developed by László T. Simon, *Identity and Identification: An Exegetical and Theological Study of 2 Sam 21–24* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2000).

<sup>76</sup> James E. Patrick, *The Prophetic Structure of 1–2 Samuel* (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Patrick, *Prophetic Structure*, 33–38.

<sup>78</sup> Strictly speaking, Patrick, *Prophetic Structure*, 204, regards the closing section of the book as 2 Sam 20:23–24:25. He sees 2 Sam 20:23–26 as an intentionally displaced unit, creating a structural imbalance for emphasis.

<sup>79</sup> Patrick, *Prophetic Structure*, 285–86.



of composition within the book. This emerging pattern therefore raises the question of whether it is possible to interpret Samuel as a specific text in its own right, an issue that is still unresolved. Nevertheless, as is apparent in Patrick's work in which compositional issues frequently raise their head, such narrative critical approaches do not abandon the question of layers within the text, but they do ask us to reconsider the boundaries of the text that we interpret.

### Samuel and Historiography

If the possibility exists that Samuel is to be treated as an independent text, then this possibility in turn raises questions about the independence of its witness to a range of themes. Whether one places Samuel in the "Former Prophets" or "Historical Books" (as per either the Hebrew canon or the LXX), it is still literature that presents itself as representing Israel's past. How reliable that representation might be is a disputed matter (whether judged by ancient or modern standards), though this issue is seldom something rooted only in the study of Samuel. However, several studies have explored the issue of Samuel and historiography, and these too have been marked by a gradual move towards narrative criticism.

Clear evidence for this shift can be seen in the work of V. Phillips Long.<sup>80</sup> Long studies 1 Sam 13–15 in light of earlier issues that arise in 1 Sam 9–11, which have resulted in a general lack of confidence in the historical reliability of these accounts.<sup>81</sup> As is well known, there is a long established view that 1 Sam 9–12 contains a mixture of source materials, some pro- and some anti-monarchic. Furthermore, Saul is seemingly rejected twice, once in 1 Sam 13 and again in 1 Sam 15. For Long, the means of resolving this seeming duplication is through application of narrative criticism, arguing that these problems can be addressed through the interplay of synchronic and diachronic methods.<sup>82</sup> Although interested in narrative art, a central claim of Long's work is that this art can also contribute to a better understanding of the history represented in the text. Indeed, it seems for Long that the very things that had caused earlier critics to raise questions about these chapters in Samuel are now understood as a skillful means of communicating the past.

<sup>80</sup> V. Phillips Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

<sup>81</sup> Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*, 10–14.

Another key early voice in this regard is found in the work of Edelman.<sup>83</sup> Although operating with a model of Samuel as part of the Deuteronomistic History, her work on the place of Saul within Judah's historiography is shaped by a commitment to narrative criticism, offering a sequential (as if) first-time reading of the text.<sup>84</sup> Her reading also sees Samuel as providing historiographical material that would be taken up by the Deuteronomistic History, and she regards the material about Saul as having most probably been composed in the seventh century, although she is open to an eighth-century date.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps more importantly, she looks at the structuring devices within the text that would most probably have been recognized by an ancient Israelite reader, regarding these as tools for communication.<sup>86</sup> As a result, Edelman's study is in large measure an example of narrative criticism that is specifically concerned with the issue of how Saul is characterized and therefore the lessons that an ancient audience would have derived from this characterization.<sup>87</sup> There is, however, an important distinction between her study and Long's in that while Edelman sees her work as something rooted in the past, her main concern is not so much with the reliability of the account as the lessons ancient readers might have derived from it.

Klaus-Peter Adam then takes this approach further,<sup>88</sup> though in doing so he situates the text of 1 Sam 16—2 Sam 5 much later than Edelman, pushing it well into the post-exilic period. However, he is prepared to concede that the traditions began to be written up earlier, although how we might recover these is difficult as he regularly finds evidence of continued rewriting (*Fortschreibung*).<sup>89</sup> Perhaps more importantly, drawing on

<sup>83</sup> Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). Methodologically related is Simcha Shalom Brooks, *Saul and the Monarchy: A New Look* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> Edelman, *King Saul*, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Edelman, *King Saul*, 20–22.

<sup>86</sup> Edelman, *King Saul*, 27–36. Although Patrick also seeks such structuring devices he does not interact with Edelman's work on this.

<sup>87</sup> Edelman, *King Saul*, 312–21, focuses specifically on aspects of characterization in her conclusions.

<sup>88</sup> Klaus-Peter Adam, *Saul und David in der jüdischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Although differing on numerous points, John van Seters, *The Biblical Saga of King David* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009) is methodologically related.

<sup>89</sup> See especially, Adam, *Saul und David*, 169–205.

aspects of Paul Ricoeur's work,<sup>90</sup> he largely regards the narrative as fiction. However, he still employs aspects of a narrative-critical approach as he then reads this narrative (more or less) backwards, since he believes it emerged in that order and could ultimately address a much later audience, with these narratives largely dependent on later texts in Kings. I am not concerned here with whether or not Adam's conclusions are correct. Rather, I wish to note that apart from reading the text in reverse (which is because of the need to present his conclusions clearly), Adam's deployment of narrative criticism agrees with Edelman. For both, the main concern is the issue of how the past was represented so as to persuade a later audience (something with which Long agrees), though Adam differs from Edelman in his dating and understanding of the historical value of the text. Long applies narrative criticism to demonstrate the historical plausibility of Samuel, whereas for Adam it is a tool (though not the only one since Adam draws on a range of ANE materials too) which demonstrates the fictional nature of Samuel.<sup>91</sup>

Adam's work might be contrasted with the more recent study of Gilmour.<sup>92</sup> She too recognizes that Samuel's historiography addresses a later audience, though the relative timing of the two works meant that Gilmour was not able to interact with Adam. What is distinctive in Gilmour's work is that the narrative form of the text is her express starting point. Furthermore, attention to the book's narrative features shape her research, with her narrative explorations shaped by the pioneering works on narrative studies noted above.<sup>93</sup> More particularly, she explores the ways in which attention to narrative form enables a better understanding of how causation of events is expressed and also how it is to be evaluated.<sup>94</sup> From this perspective, she is able to explore how Samuel can contribute to a better

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<sup>90</sup> Adam, *Saul und David*, 22–28.

<sup>91</sup> Given the substantial variants between his work and theirs, it is unfortunate that Adam does not engage with the substantial works of either Long or Edelman. A surprisingly similar mode of argument (though reading the text forward) by J. Randall Short, *The Surprising Election and Confirmation of King David* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010) comes up with conclusions that are radically different from those of Adam and more consistent with those of Long.

<sup>92</sup> Rachele Gilmour, *Representing the Past: A Literary Analysis of Narrative Historiography in the Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>93</sup> Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Gilmour, *Representing the Past*. One chapter is subsequently addressed to each of these issues, exploring relevant portions in the book.

understanding of Israel's history, albeit recognizing that the Israel presented in the book is a literary construct. In light of her approach, it is also interesting to note her attention to how the final shape of the book contributes to the understanding of Samuel.<sup>95</sup> Gilmour's conclusions about the value of Samuel for historical reconstruction are then more positive than those of Adam, arguing that within the model of historiography employed it was acceptable to approximate, but facts should not be invented.<sup>96</sup>

More than the others considered here, Gilmour attends to the ways in which narrative criticism can be employed to identify the poetics of historiography rather than attending to the narrative form of the text in order to read through it to discover the actual history that lies behind it. She is still interested in this history, but the important point is that narrative criticism becomes a tool not just for understanding how the text presents its story, but the means by which this story can be employed to represent (within limits) an actual past. But at this point, we face a significant contrast with the work of Adam, whose use of narrative criticism leads him to believe that much of the historiography of Samuel does indeed represent an invented past. Hence, although all agree that Samuel uses narrative to convince a later audience, exactly how we determine the identity of this audience remains uncertain. Narrative criticism has thus opened up our understanding of the historiography of Samuel, but important questions about how this works remain.

### The Text of Samuel

Narrative criticism has also begun to impact the study of the text of Samuel in recent years. In some ways, this development is relatively surprising since for many years textual criticism was viewed as the process of comparing manuscripts to identify an original, or at least something like an original, text. But although the influence of narrative criticism is perhaps less marked than in other areas, even here its impact is seen as differing textual traditions have been seen to have value in their own right, often giving insight into the scribal traditions behind them.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 99–102.

<sup>96</sup> Gilmour, *Representing the Past*, 291.

<sup>97</sup> Philippe Hugo, "Text History of the Books of Samuel: An Assessment of the Recent Research," in *Archaeology of the Books of Samuel: The Entangling of the Textual and Literary History*, ed. Philippe Hugo and Adrian Schenker (Leiden: Brill,

Although aspects of a narrative-critical approach are evident in some earlier works,<sup>98</sup> a key development can be found in the work of Benjamin Johnson.<sup>99</sup> Johnson examines the well-known variants in the story of David and Goliath in both Greek and Hebrew, explicitly taking a literary approach. The details of the variants need not detain us here<sup>100</sup> because the more important point is that the “literary approach” Johnson signals is in fact a narrative-critical treatment of the text, one that involves a careful reading of each tradition as something of value in its own right.<sup>101</sup> This approach provides a marked contrast with the earlier study of this text best exemplified in the work of Barthélemy, Gooding, Lust, and Tov for which the deployment of a range of literary critical techniques was still principally focused on the identification of an original text.<sup>102</sup> Rather, Johnson recognizes that both LXX and MT represent narrative texts in their own right, though LXX presents particular interpretative challenges because it is both a telling of the story in its own right and also a translation. This fact means that it is possible to see in it both the tendencies of the translator and also the “nuanced emphases of the Greek story.”<sup>103</sup> Moreover, it enables him to demonstrate that variances between these text forms often represent different narrative strategies.<sup>104</sup> Rather than seeing variants as a problem to be solved, Johnson sees textual plurality as an opportunity to explore what each version has to offer.<sup>105</sup> As

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2010), 11–13. This development should not be taken to mean the more traditional work of textual criticism, long regarded as crucial for what is often a difficult text, has been left aside. For a recent example, see Tuukka Kauhanen, *The Proto-Lucianic Problem in 1 Samuel* (Göttingen; Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Robert Rezetko, *Source and Revision in the Narratives of David’s Transfer of the Ark: Text, Language, and Story in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, 15–16* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). In this case, narrative criticism is related to a particular source-critical approach which makes the narrative critical elements less distinctive.

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin J. M. Johnson, *Reading David and Goliath in Greek and Hebrew: A Literary Approach* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

<sup>100</sup> Johnson (*Reading*, 2–4) lays the principal issues out clearly.

<sup>101</sup> Johnson, *Reading*, 9–17.

<sup>102</sup> D. Barthélemy, D. W. Gooding, J. Lust, and E. Tov, *The Story of David and Goliath: Textual and Literary Criticism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>103</sup> Johnson, *Reading*, 222.

<sup>104</sup> Johnson, *Reading*, 225.

<sup>105</sup> Johnson, *Reading*, 228.

a relatively recent contribution, it remains to be seen how Johnson’s contribution will be developed in Samuel studies, but there are certainly other passages which could be explored.

### Theological and Ethical Themes in Samuel

The move to narrative criticism has also affected the ways in which particular theological and ethical themes are treated within Samuel. These works accept that Samuel should be read through narrative criticism, but the key questions that have affected other aspects of the study of Samuel remain. That is, to what extent do we read Samuel through its final form as opposed to attending to its sources? Going further, to what extent do we read it as part of a larger canonical unit? There is also the additional question of how narrative is to be related to ethics.

An important theological work is Michael Avioz’s study of the reception of 2 Sam 7 through the rest of Samuel and then Kings and Chronicles.<sup>106</sup> As with all the works considered in this section, his work engages with a range of interpretative elements, but his fundamental approach is shaped by narrative criticism and intertextuality, in particular author-centered intertextuality.<sup>107</sup> In a manner reminiscent of the earlier narrative studies, and perhaps reflective of the work of his doctoral supervisor Moshe Garsiel,<sup>108</sup> Avioz does not give much attention to questions of method, focusing instead on a close reading of 2 Sam 7 in its final form and particular key words within it, though this reading is also informed by comparative ANE sources. He then notes the way this chapter’s themes are taken up elsewhere in Samuel, arguing that the integration of these themes and motifs across the whole of Samuel points to the book being a consciously planned composition whose parts are integrally linked to one another.<sup>109</sup> Moving from elements within Samuel, he explores the Davidic covenant’s reception in Kings and Chronicles, showing the different emphases in these texts relative to Samuel. For Avioz, therefore, narrative criticism, in dialogue with intertextuality, becomes a key mechanism for discerning the different ways in which a key theological theme is

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Avioz, *Nathan’s Oracle (2 Samuel 7) and Its Interpreters* (Bern: Peter Lang 2005). To some extent, Avioz’s work is also a study of historiography through a particular theme, so it could also have been considered in the previous section.

<sup>107</sup> Avioz, *Nathan’s Oracle*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> See especially Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990).

<sup>109</sup> Avioz, *Nathan’s Oracle*, 68.

developed and received.<sup>110</sup>

Avioz's work is to be contrasted with two recent studies that employ narrative criticism but do so through attention to redactional layers within the text. The first of these is Samuel Han's study of the Spirit in 1 Samuel.<sup>111</sup> His approach is shaped by narrative concerns, tracing the various narrative portions containing the word רוח through 1 Samuel and exploring the means by which it serves to legitimize or delegitimize rulers. But although Han is familiar with narrative criticism, he also seeks to date different layers within the text, identifying an early layer associated with David and a later layer associated with Saul.<sup>112</sup> Something similar can be seen in Lee's study of royal symbols in Samuel.<sup>113</sup> Like Han, Lee's work is often shaped by the use of a particular lexeme (though in his case, the lexeme varies depending on the royal symbol under investigation), and he is methodologically broader than Han in that he also considers the way the same symbols are used in other ANE sources and occasionally other parts of the Old Testament.<sup>114</sup> It is also notable that Lee is prepared to let contradictory readings of the text stand rather than seeing them within the more integrated model of composition that Avioz proposes. For example, Lee regards the two accounts of Saul's death as containing different views of how he died as opposed to the more typical narrative move of noting that 1 Sam 31 represents the narrator's own account whereas 2 Sam 1 is an account of a character within the narrative and therefore possibly less reliable.<sup>115</sup> As with Avioz, both Han's and Lee's work can be considered as a species of historiography, though it is notable that their assessment of the integration of Samuel's components is less cohesive

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<sup>110</sup> His approach therefore stands in marked contrast to Petri Kasari, *Nathan's Promise in 2 Samuel 7 and Related Texts* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2009), who divides the chapter into various redactions from DtrG through DtrH, DtrP, DtrN<sup>1</sup>, DtrN<sup>2</sup>, which in turn becomes DtrS. His work is distinctive because of its steadfast move away from narrative criticism, but as something that is primarily concerned with the Deuteronomistic History, albeit focused on Samuel, is not considered in depth here.

<sup>111</sup> Samuel Han, *Der »Geist« in den Saul- und Davidsgeschichten des 1. Samuelbuches* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015).

<sup>112</sup> Han, *Der »Geist«*, 199–202.

<sup>113</sup> Keung-Jae Lee, *Symbole für Herrschaft und Königtum in den Erzählungen von Saul und David* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2017).

<sup>114</sup> E.g., Lee (*Symbole*, 112–16) traces anointing through references in 1–2 Kings.

<sup>115</sup> Lee, *Symbole*, 124–25.

than that of Avioz, or indeed of Gilmour. It would, perhaps, be instructive to see their approach in dialogue with the work of Käser, though as these works all appeared more or less at the same time this is a step that will need to be taken with future works that need to integrate narrative criticism with understanding the text's development.

Alongside the treatments of specific themes, it is notable that studies of the ethics of Samuel have also been shaped by narrative criticism, though once again the question has been one of identifying the dialogue partners that enable this development. Narrative approaches to ethics in the Old Testament are only a recent development, but just as Samuel stood at the forefront of the initial turn to narrative criticism, so it has also been a vital text in pioneering initial works on narrative ethics.

Two pioneering studies in this regard were published by Jonathan Rowe in 2012.<sup>116</sup> In these studies he integrated a Bakhtinian approach to narrative with wide-ranging anthropological studies through which he sought to understand the ways ancient readers might have understood the moral choices made by characters within the narrative, though in his concluding reflections he does point to ways these might inform contemporary readers in discerning what might be appropriate moral choices.<sup>117</sup> For Rowe, it is vital to approach texts in some depth rather than taking a model, whether literary or anthropological, and applying it to the text. This depth approach is needed because a model on its own can never convey the complexity present in the text and so too easily fall prey to anachronism. Although not employing the work of Geertz to any significant extent,<sup>118</sup> it is a good example of "thick description," which is attentive to the importance of a proper dialogue between narrative criticism (as the means by which we access the story) and anthropology (as a tool which might enlighten it). In his case, anthropology plays a role not dissimilar to Lee's use of ANE sources since in both cases the idea is to shed light on parts of the narrative that are not explained, presumably on the basis that initial readers would have understood them without explanation, something not true for modern readers. Through this approach, Rowe opens up the moral goods that would have been perceived within Israel as something significant for moral reflection today, though by so

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<sup>116</sup> Jonathan Y. Rowe, *Michal's Moral Dilemma: A Literary, Anthropological and Ethical Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012); and Rowe, *Sons or Lovers: An Interpretation of David and Jonathan's Friendship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> See Rowe, *Michal's Moral Dilemma*, 208–12.

<sup>118</sup> There is only a passing reference in Rowe (*Michal's Moral Dilemma*, 1).

doing he also contributes to the understanding of Samuel as historiographical literature.

A work that shows some crossover with Rowe is Matthew Newkirk's study of deception in Samuel.<sup>119</sup> However, where Rowe uses narrative criticism in conjunction with anthropology to explore the nature of Michal's moral conundrum when she deceived Saul in 1 Sam 19:10–18a, Newkirk deploys it to understand how Samuel develops a theology of deception. His conclusions are somewhat more nuanced than a simple statement like "one should always tell the truth" because examining all instances of deception in Samuel leads to the conclusion that where the motivation of a character was just, then the deception could be viewed positively.<sup>120</sup> This conclusion is achieved by looking for the clues of how the implied author evaluates an act of deception, in part by noting significant features in how the story is told.<sup>121</sup> Although Newkirk draws only on studies of Old Testament poetics rather than Bakhtin,<sup>122</sup> his reading of Michal (for example)<sup>123</sup> coincides well with that of Rowe.

Michal also appears as a significant figure in the work of April Westbrook,<sup>124</sup> though in her study Michal's deception is not a significant feature. This distinction is because both Rowe and Newkirk are concerned with the particular moral issue of deception, whereas Westbrook explores broader ethical concerns. Westbrook, by comparison, uses the presentation of women as key characters in Samuel's presentation of David (something absent from the parallels in 1 Chronicles) as a means of demonstrating the complexity of David's characterization and from this analysis the ethical evaluation of the monarchy in David's story. Staying with the example of Michal, rather than focusing only on one passage, she traces Michal's story through the whole of David's life. Like Newkirk, her narrative criticism is shaped by existing works of Old Testament poetics. She uses them as a key tool for identifying the evaluation which the narrative

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<sup>119</sup> Matthew Newkirk, *Just Deceivers: An Exploration of the Motif of Deception in the Books of Samuel* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015).

<sup>120</sup> Newkirk, *Just Deceivers*, 204.

<sup>121</sup> Newkirk, *Just Deceivers*, 14.

<sup>122</sup> Principally the works discussed in "Samuel and Narrative Studies" above, though in his methodological summary (*Just Deceivers*, 11–13) the work of Wayne Booth also appears briefly.

<sup>123</sup> Newkirk, *Just Deceivers*, 60–68.

<sup>124</sup> April D. Westbrook, *'And He Will Take Your Daughters...': Woman Story and Ethical Evaluation of Monarchy in the David Narrative* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2015).

offers, an evaluation that stays within Samuel, even though Bathsheba (another important figure) continues her story (and presumably her evaluative function for David) into 1 Kings 1. For Westbrook, every female character becomes a means of asking whether David is as good as he is successful,<sup>125</sup> and so questioning the value of monarchy itself. Each "woman story" calls into question the ability of the monarchy to do justice, pointing instead to the degenerative nature of monarchy itself. Only in her closing comments does Westbrook point to the possibility of the ethical significance of this reading for modern readers, showing that her ethical reading is concerned with the world of the text alone.

These theological and ethical studies thus continue to demonstrate the potential and the problems that face narrative critical readings of Samuel. Indeed, in many ways they encapsulate the issues noted above. At heart, there remain the questions that narrative criticism has not yet resolved—what are the boundaries of the text we are reading? In particular, do we take the shape of Samuel as a work seriously? But even if we do, this decision does not resolve the question of how we integrate this final shape with earlier levels in the text which can still be recognized. The contrast between Avioz on the one hand and Han and Lee on the other makes this issue clear. And although all of the ethical readings noted focus on the final text without straying into Kings, the question of how narrative criticism can shape ethics remains unsolved—for Rowe, it enables readers to understand a character's moral challenge, whereas for Newkirk it is a means of addressing questions asked by modern readers. Westbrook does not really address the contemporary question, focusing only on the world of the text. But the issue of how these ethics address us as modern readers who assign theological value to this book remains unresolved.

### Postcolonial Readings

The issue of how modern readers engage with this ancient text is not limited to ethical readings of Samuel but is also present in postcolonial readings since these are, by definition, about claiming the text for a group that has previously been marginalized in some way. Given the relatively recent development of this approach, the range of contributors here is still small, though the issues that we have noted above continue here.

An early contributor to this discussion is found in the work of Uriah Kim.<sup>126</sup> His study of the David Story is part of a wider program of devel-

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<sup>125</sup> Westbrook, *'And He Will Take Your Daughters...'*, 225.

<sup>126</sup> Uriah Y. Kim, *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story: A Postcolonial Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

oping a postcolonial reading of the Deuteronomistic History, so it is perhaps not surprising that he also moves through to 1 Kings 1–2. Kim undertakes his approach as a Korean-American who draws on the Korean concept of *jeong* as a means of representing 𐤒𐤓𐤏. Kim's conception of narrative criticism focuses on the goals of the narrator, starting from the perspective that this person was more "an apologist than an objective historian."<sup>127</sup> Not all those we examined when thinking about Samuel and historiography would agree with that, but Kim's approach is representative of at least one strand of narrative criticism. More importantly, he brings a select range of postcolonial critics to the table as dialogue partners with Old Testament poetics, aiming to read from the margins as someone with multiple identities.<sup>128</sup> Kim's reading focuses both on how David used 𐤒𐤓𐤏 to forge his kingdom and also how the scribes subsequently undercut this process by making him a nativist, losing his own openness to hybrid culture.<sup>129</sup> The David that Kim constructs is a reader's David, neither the David of the final text nor the David of his enemies. It is this figure that Kim wants to fashion for those with hybrid identities in North America, starting with the (then) newly elected Barack Obama.

Like Kim, Kabama Kiboko also wants to recover parts of Samuel for her own culture in her study of the woman of Endor.<sup>130</sup> Where Kim's theorists are postcolonial critics who are combined with a fairly stock range of narrative studies, Kiboko works with a mixture of Bakhtinian, feminist, postcolonial, and contextual translation theories since her primary goal is to produce a new translation of 1 Sam 28:3–25.<sup>131</sup> Like Kim, Kiboko reads the text of Samuel in order to recover elements that she believes are beneficial for her African context while rejecting what she sees as colonial factors that have hitherto sought to repress features of that culture. A vital component of this approach is to show that certain key terms have been misunderstood, and that these misunderstandings lead to distortions in the reading of the narrative.<sup>132</sup> Because Kiboko focuses only on one story within Samuel it is not possible to see how she

<sup>127</sup> Kim, *Identity and Loyalty*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Kim, *Identity and Loyalty*, 15–26.

<sup>129</sup> Kim, *Identity and Loyalty*, 214–15.

<sup>130</sup> J. Kabama Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor: African Culture, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, and the Politics of Biblical Translation* (London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2017).

<sup>131</sup> Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor*, 217–21, provides this translation in English (as the language of discourse in North America where she is now based), in French (as the colonial language in her native Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Kisanga, her mother tongue.

<sup>132</sup> Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor*, 127–90.

has answered a range of narrative questions, though she does offer a final form reading of the text from which she seeks to recover a more positive view of divination than is typically reflected in interpretation of the woman of Endor.

Although Kim and Kiboko both offer retrievalist readings using narrative criticism, their approaches differ at key points. Kim is clear that there are different layers in the text, an approach similar to Lee and Han, though without the sort of integration offered by Käser. For Kim, certain layers can be retrieved by a postcolonial reader and applied to the modern world. Kiboko does not consider such layers, though they have certainly been suggested for this story, preferring instead to read the text synchronically.<sup>133</sup> Where Kim focuses on the narrator, Kiboko is more interested in lexical stock. Admittedly, these focus points are in part a function of their projects, but it also points to unresolved tensions in what narrative criticism of Samuel is able to do, as well as the larger question of exactly where it is that something which can be retrieved is to be found.

### Conclusion

It is my contention that narrative criticism has opened up our understanding of Samuel as a literary, historical, theological, and ethical work. It has provided real gains in our interpretation of the book. However, this survey also points to unresolved issues. The presence of these issues means that what is seemingly the same method (at least more or less) is applied in such diverse ways that important questions about the interpretation of Samuel have been either marginalized or left with contradictory conclusions.

In light of these contradictory conclusions, we need to recognize that the book of Samuel was a crucial text in the development of narrative criticism as a discipline in its own right. Earlier narrative studies reflected this interest, while the works that have defined narrative criticism for a generation of critics were shaped to a remarkable degree by Samuel. One result of this process is that discussions of narrative poetics in the Old Testament are largely discussions of Samuel's narrative poetics. This discussion thus points to the richness of Samuel as a text to explore through narrative criticism, and to some extent it is the richness of this text which leads to some of the varied conclusions we have noted.

However, because narrative criticism emerged in the midst of wider discussions about "canonical" approaches or "synchronic versus diachronic" debates, there are important questions about it as a method that have not been resolved. It may be that they cannot be resolved, though

<sup>133</sup> Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor*, 191.

part of the challenge that faces us is determining whether or not such a resolution is possible. From the earliest narrative approaches to the more developed narrative criticism, there is uncertainty about what text we are interpreting. Are we interpreting the final form, and if so, what might that mean for Samuel, especially as it has a textual basis that might encourage more pluralistic approaches? Even if we regard textual criticism as the search for an *Ur*-text, and it is far from clear that we should, this decision does not resolve the question of whether we should interpret Samuel in terms of sources (such as a putative Succession Narrative), or at some other level. Postcolonial criticism has taken this issue further by requiring us to determine which level we employ in what is retrieved, so although one might focus either on a specific level of Samuel or the final form, it is possible to work with both synchronic and diachronic readings at the same time. Some works, such as Käser's, are beginning to wrestle with this issue in Samuel, and 2 Sam. 11–12 is a good example for this because layers in the text are clearly visible, but what the presence of such layers might mean for the wider interpretation of Samuel is not clear. Equally important, if we are to read Samuel for its theological and ethical themes, or its historiography, we need to determine how it is that narrative criticism opens up this reading for us. Closely related to this point is the question of whether or not we can read Samuel as a discrete text, a matter that is of great importance for a narrative critical approach since determining a text's boundaries is vital to the method. The diversity of approaches at the moment means that scholarly readings of Samuel can seemingly approach the book with the same tools and reach contradictory conclusions.

That we have not reached definitive conclusions should not be taken as evidence that this enterprise has failed. Samuel is a rich text, and rich texts will almost invariably produce a range of readings that need to be tested against one another, something I have tried to avoid here in order to highlight the methodological questions. But it does mean is that we have plenty of work to do.