

# Cupidity and Stupidity: Woman's Agency and The "Rape" of Tamar

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"You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride."  
לבבתי אחתי כלה (Song 4:9)

Everybody knows Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar.<sup>1</sup> English speakers know because English translations make a different interpretation untenable. Bible scholars know because it has been the received reading for well over 1000 years, because it fits nicely into the larger story, and because Absalom seems to believe it. They cling to their knowledge, though it requires them to ignore or to misconstrue copious contradictory evidence. The purpose of this article is to present this exculpatory evidence. By a close reading of 2 Samuel 13, its sister-text, 1 Samuel 25, and related passages, I seek to demonstrate that the sexual intimacy of Amnon and Tamar is consensual, and that their incestuous union is encouraged by Tamar's flirtatiousness and supported by her easy virtue, persistent ambition, and implacable stupidity.

Although there is unanimity on the rape verdict, opinion is divided on the question of incest. The majority of commentators believe Amnon is not also guilty of incest because marriage between the half-brother and sister was permissible at that time.<sup>2</sup> According to source-critics, the Books of Samuel predate the Pentateuch, and so at the time of the monarchy, the incest laws of Lev. 18:9, 11; 20:17, and Deut. 27:22 were unknown.<sup>3</sup> These critics find proof of their theory in Tamar's plea that Amnon ask their father, David, for her hand (2 Sam. 13:13). They reason that she would not have suggested an impossible marriage, for such a notion would have

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1. "The rapist is guilty. In the reception of the text, so far as I can ascertain, this has never been disputed"; Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits of Patriarchy: Between Rape and Seduction (2 Samuel 13 and Genesis 38)," in M. Bal, ed., *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (London, 1989), 145.

2. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London, 1989), 240. Charles Conroy lists scholars on both sides of the question, *Absalom Absalom!* (Rome, 1978), 17–18, nn. 3, 4.

3. See, e.g., Gary Rendsburg, "David and His Circle in Genesis XXXVIII," *VT* 36 (1986), 438. Susan Rattray considers the possibility that the rules of Leviticus were known, but the royal family was exempt, "Marriage Rules, Kinship Terms and Family Structure in the Bible" *SBL Seminar Papers* 26 (1987), 538, n. 4.

been too preposterous for Amnon to entertain and would not have restrained rape. Therefore the marriage of half-siblings must have been acceptable in those days.<sup>4</sup>

The rabbis of the Talmudic period also thought Tamar's suggestion decisive and infer from it that Tamar was somehow permitted to Amnon by Jewish law. As a plausible though legalistic explanation for the acceptability of the union, they propose her mother was an unconverted war captive when Tamar was conceived, and so she was not the daughter of a legitimate marriage.<sup>5</sup> Mindful of David's honor and reputation as beloved of God and hero of the Jewish people, traditionalists do not believe he would have condoned incest, and therefore they follow the Talmudic teaching.

Between these camps is a middle ground. J. Fokkelman, for example, finds approval of brother/half-sister marriage in Gen. 20:12. Even though this alliance antedates the giving of the law at Sinai, he maintains the prohibitions listed in Leviticus and Deuteronomy cannot be applied because the "extratextual facts" conflict, and the incest question must be decided wholly within the text of 2 Samuel 13. He decides it by pointing out that Amnon's impasse in verse 2 is caused by Tamar's virginity, not by her consanguinity. He also agrees with both the source-critics and the traditionalists that Tamar's appeal for marriage is a "genuine alternative" that proves the legality of such an affiliation.<sup>6</sup>

From my perspective, the order in which the books of the Hebrew Bible were composed is immaterial.<sup>7</sup> My bias is toward a text that has, at the least, been heavily edited by a master of literary sophistication for an audience of acute sensibility. I believe the inspired "author" (authors, editors, final redactor) intended it to be read as an integrated, consecutive, coherent document. Accounting for what others have explained away as misplaced verses, grammatical anomalies, and other errors, this article will show that incest can be established within the text but that rape cannot. Although to other feminist exegetes the so-called rape of Tamar is a proof-text of male domination, my analysis will demonstrate that it is a story of woman's opportunity to be an agent for peace and of Tamar's failure in that agency.

In 2 Sam. 13:1 we are unnecessarily, redundantly informed that Absalom and Amnon are sons of David. Their patrimony was established in 3:2-3 and need not be repeated.<sup>8</sup> Tamar, who is introduced for the first time in 13:1, is not identified as a daughter of David.<sup>9</sup> The reticence about her parentage admits the possibility that she is not a daughter of David and that she and her brother, Absalom, are half-siblings through their mother. She and Amnon (half-brother to Absalom on the father's side)

4. E.g., William Propp, "Kinship in 2 Samuel 13," *CBQ* 55 (1993), 45, n. 22.

5. *TB Sanhedrin* 21a.

6. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1 (Assen, 1981), 103.

7. Every reference to the Bible or to Scripture in this article refers to the Hebrew Bible.

8. In "The Discourse Structure of the Rape of Tamar," *Vox Evangelica* 20 (1990), 24, Jenny Smith says the repetition serves the "very practical function of reminding the hearers that David has two sons called Absalom and Amnon." This would then be an exceptional case; the biblical audience seemed to enjoy genealogies (hence those long series of "begats") and to be able to remember them.

9. Van Dijk-Hemmes notes this omission with no comment; "Tamar and the Limits," 139. Bar-Efrat says that Tamar is defined as Absalom's sister to indicate that she is his full sister; *Narrative Art*, 241. Phyllis Tribble refers to the LXX addendum to 13:21 and says that David and Tamar are never termed father and daughter because David identifies with and supports his son, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia, 1984), 53.

would therefore have no common parent, and the love Amnon bears for Tamar would be appropriate.<sup>10</sup>

This possibility is obviated in verse 2 when Tamar is delineated further as Amnon's sister also. Why are readers given the opportunity for confusion in verse 1? It might be to lead them on a short trip down the garden path, complacent in the contemplation of Tamar's beauty and Amnon's love, only to confront them with an uncomfortable fact in the next verse. With a shock, their sentimental image of licit romance is superseded by an incest problem. Had this been the author's sole aim, he could have achieved it more economically by omitting both "son of David" phrases. Instead, by the inclusion of these phrases, he both jolts the reader and dissociates Tamar from David. Absalom is a true son of David in his propensity for revenge; Amnon is a true son of David in his desire for a woman forbidden to him, but Tamar, so dense and tactless (as we shall see), is completely unlike her father who was notably discerning of speech (1 Sam. 16:18).

We learn that Amnon loves Tamar from the omniscient narrator in 2 Sam. 13:1 and from Amnon's direct speech in verse 4. He expresses his love vigorously by placing the verb in the emphatic final position of the sentence.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, he loves Tamar so much he becomes ill for love of her. If he *could* marry her, as most commentators posit, why does he not do so? Men were allowed multiple wives; what difference would one more make? Such a marriage would serve his interest politically, for it would solidify his position as putative heir to the throne; David's first-born son legally married to a daughter of David's would have a formidable claim.<sup>12</sup>

If these analysts are correct and Amnon could gratify his desire by marrying Tamar, the fact that Amnon loves his sister raises no dramatic tension. In order to provide a conflict, they must assume Amnon is a scoundrel. They need to paint him as a villain of so deep a dye that he prefers rape to the easily attained fulfillment of his love in a politically advantageous marriage. With their understanding of the law, they must postulate Amnon's caddishness, for, without it, there is no reason for the story to develop along any lines other than simply "boy meets girl, boy loves girl, boy marries girl." Though the reader has not been given a textual basis to suppose Amnon's love any less honorable than the love of Jacob for Rachel, P. Tribble, certain of his "brutality" and "cruelty," translates "love" as "desire" throughout. In speaking of Amnon's illness, she coins a new word, "lust-sickness."<sup>13</sup>

In verse 2 we learn that in Amnon's eyes it is hard/difficult or wonderful/marvelous to do anything regarding Tamar. The word פלא has both meanings and both are simultaneously descriptive here. It is impossible for him to do anything regarding

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10. Against Bar-Efrat, who says: "From v. 1 where we read that Tamar is Absalom's sister and that both Absalom and Amnon are David's sons, it is clear that Tamar is Amnon's sister by his father"; *Narrative Art*, 244.

11. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 40; Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!*, 29.

12. That marriage to the king's daughter is an advantage to the succession is shown by Saul's retraction of Michal (1 Sam. 25:44) and by David's insistence on regaining her (2 Sam. 3:13).

13. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 38–40, 46. Tribble's translation is adopted by Alice Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men," *Semeia* 61 (1993), 87. Even *BDB*, which as a dictionary should be neutral, has made up its collective mind about Amnon and defines the verb, אהב, as "love" in every case except in our chapter's citation where it is defined as "of carnal desire" (12–13).

her because she “is a virgin,” but in his love-sick fantasies, doing something to or for Tamar would be extraordinarily wondrous. The expression לָהּ is always translated here as “to her,” bolstering the universal rape interpretation, but “for her” is equally correct.<sup>14</sup> For all we know he may dream of doing something *for* Tamar, rescuing her from drowning or dragons; we do not know what he wants to do, and neither, I think, does he. The narrator admits us into the privacy of Amnon’s thoughts where circumlocutions are unnecessary.<sup>15</sup> If Amnon pines to consummate his love for Tamar, I would think him able to admit his amorous design to himself. C. Conroy says the reader is “alienated from Amnon . . . from the start, for the euphemism of v. 2 hints fairly clearly at the merely lustful nature of his love.”<sup>16</sup> To me, especially in connection with the double meaning of פֶּלֶא, it hints of Amnon’s ambivalence.

To his cousin, Jonadab, Amnon confesses love for Tamar, whom he identifies as Absalom’s sister (v. 4). He prefers to gloss over the fact that she is his own half-sister by mentioning only her full relationship with Absalom. Thus he shows his awareness of, and his uneasiness with, the incest problem. Jonadab advises Amnon to feign illness and, when his father visits, to ask that Tamar give him bread, לַחֵם, and prepare food, בְּרִיחַ, in his sight that he might see it and eat at her hand (v. 5). Amnon repeats to his father the elements of seeing and of eating at Tamar’s hand, but asks for two heart-cakes, לִבְבוֹת, instead of bread and food (v. 6). The word, לִבְבוֹת, that I, along with many others, have translated as “heart-cakes” (because of לֵב, “heart,” embedded in it) may have aphrodisiacal implications.<sup>17</sup> It is frequently associated with the word לִבְבוֹתִי in my epigraph, which is said to mean “sexually aroused me” rather than the familiar rendering, “ravished my heart.”<sup>18</sup>

Why does Amnon use this loaded word rather than Jonadab’s “bread” or “food” and so expose his libido to his father? F. van Dijk-Hemmes says it is a slip of the tongue by which Amnon might unconsciously be asking permission for sexual access to his sister.<sup>19</sup> I think Amnon may, equivocally, be seeking both permission and prohibition. The ambiguity in verse 2 shows us he was ambivalent in his intentions toward Tamar, and he has not lost his inhibition.

It is difficult to imagine David’s thoughts upon hearing Amnon’s request. If he believes Amnon fears poison, Amnon’s mother, if she were alive, or his full sisters, if he had any, would be safer food preparers than the full sister of Absalom, a rival for the throne.<sup>20</sup> Amnon must seem gravely ill. His appearance was sufficiently hag-

14. The preposition לַ after the infinitive construct לַעֲשׂוֹת, to do, is used to mean “for,” in 2 Sam. 12:4; 2 Kgs. 4:13–14; Isa 63:12, 14; Ezek. 16:5, 36:37; Job 28:25; Neh. 13:7; and 2 Chr. 25:9. Joel Rosenberg maintains the translation “to” our verse but recognizes the dual sense of פֶּלֶא as “was wonderful/was unthinkable”; *King and Kin* (Bloomington, 1986), 140.

15. Smith says these words are a euphemism denoting lustful thoughts; they are used by Amnon to disguise the truth from himself; “The Discourse Structure,” 26–27.

16. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!*, 23.

17. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, vol. 1, 105–6; van Dijk-Hemmes, “Tamar and the Limits,” 140.

18. P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel, AB* (Garden City, 1984), 322; Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, 1985), 135; Nahum Waldman, “A Note on Canticles 4:9,” *JBL* 89 (1970), 215.

19. Van Dijk-Hemmes, “Tamar and the Limits,” 140.

20. Smith says the references to watching Tamar cook and eating at her hand might allude to poison, and, if so, they cast an indirect aspersion on David’s court; “The Discourse Structure,” 29.

gard to cause concern in verse 4, and now he is pretending to be even sicker than he looks. If David, who just lost a son in the preceding chapter (12:19), fears Amnon is dying, he would want to indulge any craving that might comfort or cure him. And, yet, in repeating Amnon's request to Tamar, David rejects the intimacy stipulated by both Jonadab and Amnon in the phrase "from her hand," מִיָּדָהּ. He tells his daughter to make her brother food; he does not tell her to serve him. He also censors out the erotic "heart-cakes" and replaces them with בְּרִיָּה (13:7).<sup>21</sup> The word David uses is not a generic word for edibles but the rare noun form of a verb used in 3:35 and 12:17 to signify breaking a fast. This is surely more suitable fare for an emaciated patient than heart-cakes.

Numerous exegetes have said that David is "unwitting" or sends Tamar to Amnon "unwittingly,"<sup>22</sup> but these variations on Amnon's request show he has his wits about him. He may have made the changes because he thought בְּרִיָּה more curative than heart-cakes, or he may have been conscious of Amnon's secret thoughts and unwilling to encourage his suit by authorizing a tête-à-tête between the siblings. Supposing the latter case, why does he, nevertheless, dispatch Tamar? I think he believes Amnon far too ill to be a threat, knows there will be chaperoning servants about, and trusts his hitherto virtuous daughter to call out in the case of a sexual advance.<sup>23</sup> Mindful of one dead son and apprehensive of losing another, David makes a mistake with Amnon and a mistake with his daughter.<sup>24</sup>

Obediently, Tamar goes to her half-brother's house and sets about her cooking. Disobediently, she makes heart-cakes (v. 8).<sup>25</sup> The author's use of the minor character, Jonadab, while also indicating that Amnon is not so sly as to originate his stratagem, deftly permits the fourfold repetition of the patient's menu—accenting the psychologically revealing appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of the heart-cakes. The text is careful to tell us that Amnon can observe all Tamar's actions.<sup>26</sup> With what joy the love-sick swain must have watched her work! Either his father

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21. Against Bar-Efrat who says that to David "it is immaterial what food Tamar prepares for Amnon"; *Narrative Art*, 255; and Fokkelman who says, "The unsuspecting monarch indeed hears 'a few cakes'"; *Narrative Art and Poetry*, vol. 1, 105.

22. David Gunn, *The Story of King David*, *JSOT Supp.* 6 (Sheffield, 1978), 9; George Rideout, "The Rape of Tamar," in J. Jackson, ed., *Rhetorical Criticism, Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburgh, 1974), 77; Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 146; Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!*, 18; Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 42; Keefe, "Rapes of Women," 93.

23. "If there is a young woman, betrothed to a man, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring out both of them to the gates of the city and you shall stone them with stones that they die: she, because she did not cry out, being in the city, and the man because he had intercourse with the wife of his neighbor" (Deut. 22:23–24). Though these verses refer to one betrothed, the principle—that the cries of a woman in the city will be overheard—is clear.

24. Against Gerald Hammond, "Michal, Tamar, Abigail and What Bathsheba Said: Notes Toward a Really Inclusive Translation of the Bible," in George Brooke, ed., *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (Lewiston, NY, 1992), 62, who says that in sending her to Amnon, David plays a "shady part."

25. Smith is so sympathetic to Tamar, and so determined to believe the rape hypothesis, she challenges the etymology of "heart-cakes" for the reason that, as Tamar made them, they cannot have had an erotic connotation; "The Discourse Structure," 31.

26. Against Rideout, "The Rape of Tamar," 79, who says, "At this point the narrative becomes even more expansive, introducing details of no particular importance to the basic plot."

relayed the heart-cake request, thus giving his tacit permission for sex, or the heart-cakes are Tamar's flirtatious idea; his love is reciprocated.

As the reader knows, the heart-cakes are indeed Tamar's independent idea. She has another idea; she wants to marry the heir apparent and one day be queen. If she can arouse Amnon's desire with heart-cakes, she is sure her father will not stand in the way of their union (v. 13). After all, theirs would be a liaison no more proscribed than David's with Bathsheba or David's with Michal.<sup>27</sup> It is a foolish aspiration, for it is one thing for David to gratify his own illegal longings and quite another for him to advance someone else's. But Tamar is not a clever woman.

Amnon, doubtless delighting in the sight, watches Tamar until her work is done and then refuses to eat. In direct speech, he orders all men/everyone (כָּל־אִישׁ) out.<sup>28</sup> The narrator, reiterating the point, tells us that everyone leaves. Is Amnon a peevish patient or a vacillating lover? Is he too sick to continue, or has he recognized the impropriety of his incestuous attraction and abandoned his ruse? Is Tamar, her father's assignment accomplished, among those who heed Amnon's directive? We are led to suppose that she is, for, had the author intended simply to record the departure of the servants, he could have said, "Amnon sent his servants away." There would have been no need to introduce the possibility that everyone is commanded to leave nor to repeat the nonspecific phrase in stating that all men/everyone indeed left (v. 9). By the astutely crafted double employment of the ambiguous expression, all men/everyone (כָּל־אִישׁ), the reader is steered to presume Tamar's withdrawal.

As previously noted, Fokkelman assumes Amnon has scruples about violating Tamar's virginity. Amnon's longing, however, is not frustrated by her virginity, for this condition still obtains in verses 11 and 14 when he finds it quite possible to lay her (a literal, though vulgar, translation). Tamar's maidenhood thwarts Amnon only because it makes her physically inaccessible to him. The necessity for application to David in order to be visited by his sister supports this analysis (v. 6).<sup>29</sup> Virgins, obviously, were not free to visit even sick male siblings.<sup>30</sup> When everyone is ordered from the room, an alarm should go off in the brain of such a well protected, strictly raised virgin.

Tamar's work is finished; her father's instructions are fulfilled. Instead of choosing to leave the room with the servants, however, as her upbringing dictates and as the reader expects, Tamar startles us by boldly venturing beyond David's mandate. Remaining alone with Amnon, she accepts the summons to his inner chamber. She joins him with the heart-cakes "that she had made." Both J. Smith and S. Bar-Efrat find the words "that she had made" in verse 10 redundant. We already know who made the cakes, they argue (they do not specify "heart-cakes," so inconsequential do they find this detail); why stress the fact? Smith believes the repetition slows the

27. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and, according to Deut. 24:1-4, his first wife, Michal, was forbidden to him after her interim marriage to Palti (1 Sam. 25:44).

28. Just as in English, the Hebrew for "all men," כָּל־אִישׁ, can refer literally to males or idiomatically to all humankind. See 1 Chr. 16:3 for a conclusive illustration of the latter usage.

29. Thus, contra Fokkelman (see my n. 6), the incest factor cannot be dismissed by Amnon's use of "virgin" rather than "sister" in v. 2.

30. With McCarter who says "most commentators" agree virginity was vigilantly safeguarded, *II Samuel*, 321, n. 2.

narrative and increases suspense. Bar-Efrat says the words convey a hint of irony in that Amnon does not eat the food that has been prepared.<sup>31</sup> I contend the words are repeated here to show Tamar's complicity in the coming denouement.

The words *וַיִּחְזַק בָּהּ* in verse 11, usually translated as "And he took her," need convey no physical menace. A better translation for these same words (allowing for the gender difference *בּוֹ/בָּהּ*, him/her) is that employed in Judg. 19:4, "And he urged [her]."<sup>32</sup> This rendering respects both the high regard in which Amnon still holds Tamar and his tender appeal which follows, "Come lie with me, my sister."

If Amnon were committing rape, why need he importune Tamar at all? He could take her and ravish her without a word, as Shechem takes Dinah in Gen. 34:2. Amnon's invitation shows he is not heartlessly indifferent to resistance, but is an ardent lover seeking concession and even reciprocity. The words "come" and "with" imply mutuality. The phrase "my sister," while it underscores the incest, is a term of affection, as in my epigraph.<sup>33</sup> So entrenched, however, is the conviction that Amnon is a ruthless rapist, that P. McCarter, in the Anchor Bible, liberally translates the request as a demand: "'Come on, sister!' He said to her. 'Lie with me!'"—making Amnon sound like a gangster.<sup>34</sup> Even so sensitive and meticulous an exegete as R. Alter omits the persuasive "come" in his analysis and says: "Amnon addresses to his half-sister exactly the same words with which Potiphar's wife accosts Joseph—'lie with me'—adding to them only one word [*sic*], the thematically loaded 'sister' (2 Sam. 13:11)."<sup>35</sup> He includes all Amnon's words in a later work but still labels his supplication a "brutally direct imperative."<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, linguistically Amnon's entreaty is affectionate, and phonetically it is mellifluous and poetic, for in Hebrew all four of his words rhyme.

Sexual intercourse between an unbetrothed virgin and a man to whom she is not related constitutes marriage, but, even though Tamar wants matrimony and considers their relationship no impediment, this impetuous disregard of marital protocol is unseemly. There ought to be a betrothal, a bride-price, whatever court etiquette dictates for the nuptials of a king's daughter, whatever is usually done in Israel (*יעשה כן* בִּישְׂרָאֵל, v. 12). Were she to submit to an indecorous and hasty tryst, she would not only miss out on the betrothal amenities, but she might also suffer derision and bear reproach (*אוליך את־חרפתִי*, v. 13) as a loose woman for having been alone with a man in a position to be seduced. And what if word of those heart-cakes circulated?

Tamar is willing to flirt, to arouse Amnon's desire with libidinous confections, and to be alone with him after the servants depart, but this quick coupling without parental permission or preparation is not what she wants. Her assurance to Amnon in verse 13 that the king will not refuse him her hand tells us her objective. Many commentators, as noted above, maintain Tamar's exhortation proves that half-sibling marriage is legal; if it were not, her suggestion is nonsensical as a deterrent. In fact

31. Smith, "The Discourse Structure," 33; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 256.

32. See also 2 Kgs. 4:8.

33. Bar-Efrat says, "He speaks to her gently, in a tone designed to win her heart"; *Narrative Art*, 259.

34. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 314.

35. Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), 73.

36. R. Alter, "Putting Together Biblical Narrative," in M. Griffith, ed., *Cabinet of the Muses. Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmayer* (Atlanta, 1990), 120.

her suggestion does not deter Amnon and proves only that, in her ignorance, her foolishness, or her ambition, *she* believes she and Amnon can marry in propriety and with David's blessing.

In Scripture, calling out is the efficacious response to sexual assault, but Tamar is not being attacked, and she does not call out.<sup>37</sup> She attempts to curb Amnon's impetuosity with argument. Her first words to him in verses 12–13 contain four negatives. [The italics are, of course, mine.] “*No*, my brother. Do *not* subdue me, for it is *not* done thus in Israel. Do *not* do this foolish thing.” She then speaks first of herself and asks rhetorically where she will go with the reproach she will receive. Speaking next of him, she predicts that he will be “like one of the fools in Israel,” and, finally, she asks that Amnon go to the king, “for he will not withhold me from you.”<sup>38</sup> It would have been simpler and more direct for her to have said: “for he will give me to you,” and so her phraseology catches our attention—of which more later.

Tamar's words are ineffective. Not only does Amnon go on to have his way with her, but he also comes to hate her. What should she have said? The Bible answers this question in advance by providing an example of a woman's skillful deterrence in the sister-text to this pericope, 1 Samuel 25. I call the scene between David and Abigail a sister-text because of the duplication of theme and language in the two chapters. Although the physical settings of the two scenes differ, both women are faced with passionate men bent on wrong-doing. Both offer food in the preface to the confrontation. Both attempt to control the behavior of the men and assuage their intensity by force of argument. Abigail succeeds and averts bloodshed at a sheep-shearing party; Tamar fails and fratricide at a sheep-shearing party results. Abigail engenders admiration in her initially hostile adversary and, finally, marries him. Tamar provokes hatred in her initially loving pursuer and seems to live forever single.

The use of identical language in the two chapters, especially terminology exclusive to these passages, adds rhetorical emphasis to the thematic intertextuality. The word for sheep-shearers, **גִּזְזִים**, is used in Scripture only in these two chapters. The expression “withheld me,” that we noticed in 2 Sam. 13:13, occurs only there and in the Abigail scene (1 Sam. 25:34). The locution “from her hand”—a *Leitwort* in 2 Samuel 13 (vv. 5, 6, and in v. 10: “from your hand”)—also occurs only there and in the Abigail scene (1 Sam. 25:35).

Additional evidence of the thematic nexus between the chapters is the summary of David's treatment of Abigail in 1 Sam. 25:35. David's acts are not recited in order of their performance, as one would expect, but instead are named in the order in which Amnon performs the opposite of these same acts in 2 Samuel 13. The tension created by the otherwise inexplicable progression in 1 Sam. 25:35 is resolved by the sequence of events in 2 Samuel 13.<sup>39</sup> David is said to accept what she brings him

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37. See my n. 23.

38. *BDB* defines **נבל** as “foolish, senseless, or churlish with the collateral idea of ignobility and disgrace—especially with sins of unchastity” (614).

39. Because the inventory of David's actions is not listed in the order in which they occur in 1 Samuel 25, Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, vol. 2 (Assen, 1986), 519, says the last three clauses of 1 Sam. 25:35 are inverted as a *hysteron proteron*. Such reordering is uncharacteristic of Fokkelman, who sternly calls McCarter a “bull in a china shop” in *ibid.*, 513, for placing v. 31 after v. 26.

from Abigail's hand; Amnon does not seem to take what she brings him from the hand of Tamar. David says *עלי*, "go up," to Abigail; in his lover's petition to Tamar, Amnon says *בואי*, "come"—the reader may supply the implied moral and physical direction, i.e., down (to his bed). Abigail is sent by David in peace (*שלם*, wholeness, completeness) to her own house; Tamar is callously dismissed by Amnon, hymen and garment torn, and she dwells in the house of her brother. David says he heard Abigail's voice; Amnon would not hearken to Tamar (v. 16). Finally, David says he lifted Abigail's countenance (made her happy and smiling); whereas we see Amnon's conduct casts down Tamar's countenance, leaving her wailing, with ashes of mourning on her head. David's words in 1 Sam. 25:35 gain increased resonance because "your house," "your voice," and "your countenance," the final words of his three clauses, rhyme in Hebrew (just as Amnon's sexual invitation to Tamar rhymed) and will ring in the reader's memory when compared to 2 Samuel 13.

Oblique allusion to the analogy between these texts is insinuated further by less striking (because not restricted to these two chapters) verbal correspondences. The word *חרף*, reproach, occurs in 2 Sam. 13:13, 1 Sam. 25:39, and five other places in the Bible. The curious name of Abigail's husband, *נבל* "fool, villain," is the root of Tamar's words, "foolish thing" and "fools in Israel."<sup>40</sup> In Abigail's peroration to David, she predicts that he will be bound in the bundle of life with God (v. 29). "Bound" and "bundle" share the root *צרר*, "straits, distress." Her figure of speech is unique and is the only distinctly amiable application of this root in the Bible.<sup>41</sup> The doubling of the root may be employed to secure the reader's attention. In 2 Sam. 13:2 the narrator uses the same root to tell us of Amnon's distress. The atypical positive use of *צרר* applied to David contrasts with its negative denotation when applied to Amnon. Scripture suggests; it does not insist. The reader may be led as early as the second verse in our chapter to compare Amnon to David and one scene to the other.

The inference made by the signal thematic and verbal parallels of these two chapters is that had she followed the example of Abigail, whose words are a paradigm of artful persuasion, Tamar would have halted Amnon's lust and kept his love. Abigail does not say "no" to David, put consideration of herself first, predict an evil name for him, or omit mention of God. She abases herself, calling him "my lord" and herself "your handmaid," takes blame upon herself instead of casting it on David, and flatteringly predicts God will reward him by slinging out his enemies and making him a prince over Israel (as opposed to a "fool in Israel").<sup>42</sup> Her speech is also quite long, giving David time to calm down (1 Sam. 25:24–31). In the course of her monologue she repeats the sacred tetragrammaton seven times (vv. 26 [twice], 28 [twice], 29, 30, 31). Seven is a mystical number in Scripture used to influence events

40. Robert Polzin finds similarities between 2 Samuel 13 and Judges 19–21 (especially in the use of the word *נבלה*, "foolishness") and draws parallels between the tragedies in David's immediate family and the history of Israel; *David and the Deuteronomist* (Bloomington, 1992), 137–38; Rendsburg finds seven correspondences between the story of Amnon and Tamar and the Genesis story of Judah and Tamar and concludes the latter was written during David's monarchy as a political satire; "David and His Circle," 445.

41. The root is, of course, frequently used with neutral coloration.

42. In "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *JSOT* 23 (1982), 77, Adele Berlin says Abigail's prophecy of David's eventual authority "is hardly relevant to the events of the Abigail story"; Alice Bach denigrates Abigail's "cloying humility" in "The Pleasure of Her Text," *USQR* 43 (1989), 43.

by divine power. Seven priests bearing seven ram's horns circling Jericho seven times on the seventh day is but one example of the use of this number.<sup>43</sup> Abigail uses the potent formula here to gain the aid of God in diverting David from violence.

Abigail is introduced as intelligent and, secondly, as beautiful (v. 3).<sup>44</sup> Tamar is only beautiful (2 Sam. 13:1). The Bible teaches physical beauty in a woman or in a man is not enough.<sup>45</sup> The narrative's original audience, primed by Abigail's brilliant rhetorical ability, and prompted to make a comparison, must have writhed at Tamar's gaucherie and stupidity.<sup>46</sup> To approach the skill of Abigail's oratory, and to effect an equally salutary outcome, Tamar needed to say something similar to the words improvised below (but at a length sufficient to allow Amnon's fervor to subside):

Upon your handmaid, my lord; upon your handmaid is the blame. Your handmaid should not have tempted my lord with heart-cakes, for, as God lives and as thy soul lives, my lord is beloved of the king and is stainless in his sight. Surely, as my lord has not offended him in any way, he will make thee his successor over all thy brothers, and thou shall have a sure house in Israel. Blessed be God who has kept thee from transgression. And when the king shall have dealt well with my lord, remember your handmaid.

Could Amnon have hated the speaker of such words? Hardly. But Tamar is no Abigail, and her speech is quite different from the one synthesized above.

Crucial to the interpretation of verse 14 is the translation of the verb עננה, which I have construed above as "subdued." Although the verb censures the incestuous act, it specifies only heterosexual intercourse.<sup>47</sup> Usually translated here as "forced," "ravished," "defiled," or "humbled," it may, with equal correctness, be translated as "subdued" or "seduced"—in the sense that the woman acquiesced, submitted, accepted the man as her master (בעל, lord, husband).<sup>48</sup> Amnon, being more determined than Tamar,<sup>49</sup> first subdues, or seduces, her and then lays her, שכב אִתָּהּ. Because שכב is accompanied by the impersonal definite direct object indicator, אִתָּהּ, the coarse expression is a more literal translation than "lay *with* her."<sup>50</sup> This is not to suggest that

43. Josh. 6:4. In 1 Samuel 28, Samuel uses the same sevenfold repetition of God's name in a futile attempt to turn Saul from his treacherous course; Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Eating the Blood: Saul and the Witch of Endor," *JOT* (1997), 44.

44. Hammond prefers the REB translation which reverses the order of these adjectives because, he says, David values beauty over intelligence; "Michal, Tamar," 66.

45. Absalom, who commits fratricide and goes to war against his father, is praised for beauty over all others in Israel (2 Sam. 14:25).

46. Tribble says, "She [Tamar] speaks reason and wisdom," and "replies with wisdom," "speaks wise words," and "is a wise woman"; *Texts of Terror*, 46, 56.

47. Moshe Weinfeld says, "When used in connection with women the verb עננה appears, then, to connote sexual intercourse in general rather than rape, and it is to be rendered accordingly"; *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomical School* (Oxford, 1972), 286.

48. Note that in v. 12 Tamar is resisting seduction not rape. The current convention is that the reluctance of one partner precludes further suit, but it is not so very long (1924) since a popular song lyric said, "Your lips tell me 'No, no,' but there is 'Yes, yes' in your eyes." In the Bible, genuine protest is signified by calling out (see n. 23).

49. Though חזק is often rendered here as "strong," it may be translated as "resolute" or "unyielding" as in Deut. 12:23.

50. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, vol. 1, 105, and Tribble understand, as I do, that the use of the direct object indicator here serves to objectify Tamar; *Texts of Terror*, 47. According to Conroy its use is pejorative *Absalom Absalom!*, 32.

two separate sex acts took place; the use of these two verbs, in this order, with their respective suffix or direct object indicator connotes a change in Amnon's feelings.<sup>51</sup> His regard for Tamar undergoes development. Once she surrenders to him, he no longer sees her as an ideal of virtue; she becomes an object of lust in his eyes.

Amnon had admired Tamar's virginity. It was not a stumbling block to him; it was proof of her virtue. We may assume the moral tone of the court is low, for the king sets the standard for his people and the model for his children. If the father stoops to adultery, attempts passing off his child as another's, and conspires to accomplish manslaughter, we are not surprised when his children commit incest and fratricide. Virginity may have been a rare attribute at David's court.

Amnon adored Tamar's chastity, but now he sees that the woman once thought so pure, not only flirts, but submits to intercourse without attempting to call out (we learn in v. 17 that her call would have been heard),<sup>52</sup> has inane ideas about sibling marriage, and, additionally, has more or less called him a scoundrel. In the course of verse 14 Amnon's love turns to hate. Tamar is the archetype of the virgin who gives in to immoral suasion and is not respected in the morning. Analysts who consider Tamar's speech eloquent, and do not even conceive of her consent, explain Amnon's revulsion of feeling as a sort of heightened post-coital *tristesse* or as projection: rather than acknowledge his own guilt, Amnon hates the object of his lechery.<sup>53</sup> In my exegesis, Amnon may well recognize their mutual guilt in the crime of incest, making him all the more resentful of Tamar's apparent insensibility to the transgression.

The verb treatment in Gen. 34:2, which reverses that of 2 Sam. 13:14, corroborates my reading above. In this verse, Shechem ceases to objectify Dinah and falls in love with her. At the beginning of the verse, he sees, not Dinah, but a direct object with a feminine suffix, וִירָא אֶתָּהּ. He takes this object, וִיקַח אֶתָּהּ (Amnon, by contrast, takes or urges the individual "her," בַּהּ), and lays it, וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶתָּהּ. And then he seduces "her," וַיַּעֲנֶה—no direct object indicator; she becomes not an object but a person to him. In the next verse we are told his soul cleaves to Dinah, he loves her (and, to her, he becomes a lover). Here, in Genesis as in 2 Samuel, two verbs are necessary to describe emotional development during the sexual act. A pivotal metamorphism is conveyed by the verbs, by their order, and by the use of either the dehumanizing

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51. Alter says the narrator gives us "a string of three verbs where one would suffice"; "Putting Together," 121. However, חֹזֵק ("firm, determined") is not used as a verb, and the two verbs are necessary to express Amnon's transition from love to hate.

52. Amnon's servants hear and respond to his summons. Though it might be argued that Tamar does not call out because she believes Amnon's attendants will not come to her aid, she can be certain neither of their reaction nor of the range of her voice. By the Bible's unequivocal acceptance that the cry of a woman in the city will be heard (Deut. 22:23), the reader understands that, in urban situations, a shout will invariably achieve succor. Failure to call out is legally valid proof of consent according to Deuteronomy. That the Bible records no outcry from Tamar (a woman in the city, within earshot of help) conclusively compromises her virtue, confirming complicity. Contrariwise, report of Dinah's cries is unnecessary. The silence of Scripture in this regard does not incriminate Dinah (Gen. 34:2), as futile screams are always assumed of a woman taken in the field ("But if, in the field, a man finds a betrothed woman and the man seizes her and lies with her, only the man who lay with her dies. Do nothing to her . . . for he found her in the field; she cried out, but there was none to save her"; Deut. 22:25–27).

53. Rideout, "The Rape of Tamar," 82; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 324; van Dijk-Hemmes, "Tamar and the Limits," 142.

direct object indicator or the personalizing suffix “her.”<sup>54</sup> The second verb and choice of particle or suffix reveal a change of heart: a rapist becomes a lover in Genesis, and a lover becomes a hater in 2 Samuel. In each instance this lexical representation of growing affection or disaffection is affirmed by the text (“And his soul clung to Dinah, daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl, and he spoke to the heart of the girl,” Gen. 34:3; “Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her,” 2 Sam. 13:15).

The Talmud says the penultimate verb in Gen. 34:2 refers to natural intercourse and the final verb to unnatural intercourse.<sup>55</sup> M. Sternberg finds the use of the direct object indicator, אֵת, with שָׁכַב “reduces the victim to a mere object” in Genesis but continues that the employment of more than one verb “quashes the idea of seduction” and “calls for an integration of the verbs in some ascending order of violence.”<sup>56</sup> N. Sarna also says the verb order implies that Shechem intensifies his ferocity toward Dinah.<sup>57</sup> Shechem does accost Dinah as a rapist, but it is counter-intuitive and inconsistent with the text to conclude that a man falling in love increases the viciousness of his attack. The Bible, furthermore, indicates intensity by a doubled use of the same verbal root rather than by the use of two different verbs.<sup>58</sup>

As the sequence of verbs in Gen. 34:2 leads Sternberg and Sarna to claim Shechem rapes Dinah with progressively greater savagery, the logical extension of their position is that in 2 Sam. 13:14, where the verb order is reversed, the obverse is indicated: Amnon addresses Tamar with progressively greater tenderness. Here again, it offends common sense and opposes the text to presume that a man who has come to hate his partner treats her with escalating sensitivity. In contradiction to the opinions above, I submit the use of two verbs in each passage, coupled with their personalizing or depersonalizing suffix or particle, demonstrates evolving affective attitudes. The transposed order of these terms in 2 Samuel 13 relative to Genesis 34 accords with the narrator’s statements that Amnon comes to hate his partner and that Shechem comes to love his.

Amnon brutally expels Tamar after sex. She protests ejection in anguish: “[There is] no cause! This is a greater wrong than the other that you did with me, to send me away” (v. 16). Notice she says “with me.” Though the Hebrew clearly says “with,” אִתִּי, translators, tenacious of the rape hypothesis, unwarrantedly say “to.”<sup>59</sup> Tamar’s use of “with” is another indication of her consent.

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54. Against David N. Freedman, who says, “As the two verbs seem to be synonymous, it is difficult to imagine that the meaning could be affected by reversing the order”; “Dinah and Shechem, Tamar and Amnon,” *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 105 (1990), 54.

55. TB *Yoma* 77b.

56. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, 1985), 446.

57. Nahum Sarna, “The Ravishing of Dinah: A Commentary on Genesis, Chapter 34,” in A. Shapiro and B. Cohen, eds., *Studies in Jewish Education and Judaica in Honor of Louis Newman* (New York, 1984), 145.

58. This stylistic device is ubiquitous throughout the Bible (see Gen. 2:17, Gen. 18:10, and Exod. 17:14 for just three examples among hundreds).

59. *BDB* (794) translates אִתִּי as “with” when used with the verb, אָעַשׂ, in the sense of “do,” “work.” For examples of conjoint action using this verb/preposition combination, see Exod. 34:10, 1 Sam. 14:45, and Ruth 2:19. Even in combinatorial phrases often translated as “do kindness to,” *BDB* translates: “do kindly with” (see Gen. 24:12, 2 Sam. 2:5 and 2 Sam. 10:2).

Followers of the rape theory struggle to explain why a savaged woman is so determined to remain in the presence of her attacker; they also wrestle with the question of why she considers being ousted worse than rape. McCarter and Bar-Efrat quote Exod. 22:15–16 (that a virgin's seducer shall pay a bride-price for her to be his wife), and Deut. 22:28–29 (that rules if a man lies with a virgin, he must make her his wife and never send her away). They assume Tamar's objection is based on these verses.<sup>60</sup> Bar-Efrat further states that Tamar may be concerned with her future social status. Fokkelman, as well as G. Rideout, say that Amnon's rejection sentences Tamar to a bleak future for he renders her unmarriageable.<sup>61</sup> Although he holds her guiltless, W. Propp says her failure to cry out might expose her to criminal conviction (see Deut. 22:24).<sup>62</sup>

My view is that, as she believes sibling marriage legal, Tamar is convinced she and Amnon are husband and wife by virtue of intercourse. Dismissing her is divorcing her; the verb she uses, *שלח*, also means "divorce."<sup>63</sup> To Tamar, the only conceivable ground for divorce immediately after intercourse is contested virginity. Deut. 22:13–21 says if a man marries and then brings wanton charges and an evil name against his bride, saying he did not find the tokens of virginity in her, her parents are to display the tokens of her virginity: "And they shall spread this garment before the elders of the city" (v. 17). The elders fine the man and require him to stay married to the woman for life. If, however, the tokens of virginity are not found, the woman is stoned to death because she "played the harlot in her father's house" (v. 17). Tamar's cry: "[There is] no cause!" affirms her previously virginal state. In her fixed opinion she is wed to Amnon. His divorcing her, bringing an evil name against her, shaming her father, and exposing her to possible stoning is far worse than marriage without parental permission. Amnon's humiliating expulsion of Tamar is boorish, but the reader can understand his wish to put a barred door between himself and such a relentlessly marriage-minded woman.

The Bible now alludes to the distinctive garment Tamar wears (2 Sam. 13:18). McCarter considers this reference a mere "antiquarian notice" describing the fashion of the time. He asserts it is out of place here and better located where her robe is

60. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 324; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 267.

61. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, vol. 1, 108; Rideout, "The Rape of Tamar," 76. I do not agree that lack of virginity precludes marriage, nor do I concur with McCarter and Bar-Efrat (see preceding note) that Deut. 22:28–29 reflects on the future marriageability of the maiden. These verses discourage rape by imposing a stricture on the rapist. Without the law prohibiting divorce in such cases, affluent men could pay her father the virgin's bride-price, satisfy the obligation to marry, and institute divorce when desire subsides—thus relinquishing responsibility and perhaps abandoning an already pregnant woman. That the verses do not imply the unmarriageability of rape victims is shown by the absence of any law regulating the remarriage of such a woman should her enforced marriage end in widowhood. Exod. 22:15–16, which sets the fine a seducer must pay if the virgin's father absolutely refuses such a son-in-law, is further verification that a deflowered maiden remains marriageable, for it is implausible that a father would spurn his daughter's only possible mate.

62. Propp, "Kinship in 2 Samuel 13," 47, n. 31.

63. *BDB*, 1019 (see Deut. 24:1). Tamar uses the *piel* form of *שלח* ("divorce, dismiss"). Amnon, in the very next verse, 2 Sam. 13:17, uses the *qal* form ("send"). The variation reveals to the Hebrew reader a delicate (and untranslated) disparity in the couple's assessment of the situation. Tamar, under the impression that a marriage has been consummated, perceives divorce; whereas Amnon, from his bachelor perspective, sees dispatch.

again mentioned—after the servant puts her out and bolts the door.<sup>64</sup> This is not an observation of couture, however, nor a literary infelicity that needs revision; this is evidence. Upon this robe is Tamar's hymeneal blood, the token of her virginity. The possibility that her blood-stained robe is seen by witnesses *before* she leaves Amnon's room is established by this opportune report. Without such testimony, she has no case. If her robe were referred to only after the door were bolted behind her, she might be suspected of purposely bloodying it herself when alone.

At least two witnesses are required by Hebrew law in capital cases (Deut. 17:6), and only one servant seems to have expelled Tamar. Yet in 2 Sam. 13:17, the text hints at the presence of the necessary second witness when Amnon, ordering "this female" sent away, uses the imperative plural form of the verb "send," as though he were talking to more than one servant.<sup>65</sup> Further support for this reading is the superfluous "on her" in verse 19, repeating the "on her" in verse 18; the Bible emphasizes that the robe was on Tamar throughout. Those who have read ahead know that an inquiry never takes place. Amnon is not married to Tamar and is not required to keep her. Such a potential exists only in her ambitious dreams, but the first reader is in suspense at this point: is it possible King David will abrogate even the incest prohibition?

Most commentators note the expression describing Tamar's robe is used for Joseph's famous "coat of many colors" (Gen. 37:3) and nowhere else in Scripture. They account for the identity by recalling Joseph's fraternal strife and his attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. Referring to the evidence of Joseph's death concocted by his brothers, Alter adds: "[Her] fine garment, like his, may well be blood-stained, if one considers that she has just lost her virginity by rape."<sup>66</sup> I propose that just as Joseph's brothers produced evidence of Joseph's blood-stained robe for their father, so does Tamar intend to exhibit her bloody evidence to her father and to the community. The Bible uses the same words to denote the two robes so that the reader does not overlook the significance of a blood-stained garment as validating proof.

Rape victims often hide their shame. If Tamar had been raped by her brother and was concerned that the loss of virginity would spoil her marriage prospects, it would be in her self-interest to cover up the event. Amnon would be unlikely to brag of such degeneracy. But Tamar makes a public outcry: "And she went her way and she cried" (2 Sam. 13:19). Bar-Efrat, among others, says the word used for "cried," קָרָא, has a "legal connotation, being sometimes used with regard to lodging a complaint with the authorities."<sup>67</sup> I suggest the reason for Tamar's open display is her expectation that her prior virginity will be officially acknowledged, forcing Amnon to accept the marriage and keep her all his days (Deut. 22:19).

Fortunately, before Tamar reaches her father, she is intercepted by her brother, Absalom. It is not likely that she purposely went to Absalom for protection or vengeance.<sup>68</sup> She seeks her father because she still desires a match with the crown

64. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 325. In his translation, *ibid.*, 315, he relocates this phrase after verse 18b.

65. In *ibid.*, 318, McCarter says the use of this plural verb is "a simple error."

66. Alter, "Putting Together," 120.

67. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 267.

68. Against J. Jacob Hoftijzer, "Absalom and Tamar: A Case of Fratriarchy?" in D. Attema et al., eds., *Schrift en Uitleg* (Kampen, 1970), 60.

prince. Nevertheless, her wail and her hand-to-head posture make a sufficient spectacle to attract attention, and Absalom may have been skulking about his brother's apartments. Jonadab, David's nephew, is cousin to both Amnon and Absalom. That he is privy to the confidence of both brothers is shown by Amnon's revelation of his love to him and by his inside knowledge of Absalom's long held secret resentment in verse 32. Jonadab may have told Absalom about Amnon's scheme simply because he was a busybody, stirring his spoon in every pot. The Bible hints at this trait by his questioning of Amnon, by his offering of unsolicited advice in verse 5, and by his answer, ענה, in verse 32 to David before any question is asked.

Absalom cautiously interrogates Tamar (v. 20). As he asks only if Amnon has been with her, his question can be interpreted as comprehending either consensual sex or rape. Advocates of the rape theory have varying explanations for the vagueness of Absalom's inquiry. Smith, for example, says Absalom's euphemism has "a hollow, cynical ring."<sup>69</sup> Bar-Efrat's more popular explanation is that the euphemism is employed to spare Tamar's feelings and discreetly blur the reality of the outrage.<sup>70</sup> Glossing over such a traumatic event, however, would deny the legitimacy of her grief and would hardly be a therapeutically sound way to calm her if that were indeed Absalom's intention. The woeful sight of Tamar is sufficient to convince Absalom of the reason for her cry. His question is equivocal, and he silences her before she can answer because he does not wish to hear that answer; he chooses to view the coitus as rape (vv. 22 and 32). Envious, perhaps, of Amnon's primogeniture and encouraged by dynastic aspirations, he prefers to believe the worst of his brother.

Absalom's deliberately erroneous assessment will rationalize murder. The duplicate theme in Genesis 34 and 2 Samuel 13 of penetrated virgin, parental immobility, and sibling revenge fosters intertextual analogy, enriching both texts. Justifying their homicides, Dinah's brothers say, "Should he treat our sister as a whore?" (Gen. 34:31). Commerce with a prostitute, however, involves neither rape nor marriage. Their distorted appraisal of Shechem corresponds to Absalom's purposeful misreading of Tamar's grief. Just as Dinah's brothers employ a false sanction for their reprisal, so will Absalom nurse and avenge a spurious grievance.

Absalom's brusque silencing of Tamar poses a problem for some adherents of the rape hypothesis. Conroy characterizes the imperative "be silent," חרש, as gentle and comforting, although he does admit: "This is the only text where the imperative of חרש is used in a comforting function."<sup>71</sup> This is exegesis by fiat. The sole reason for him to suppose that in this text, and only in this text, "Silence!" is an imperative expression of comfort is that, if construed in the usual way, it will not fit into his theory.

Fokkelman terms the imperative "a very curt command" and says that, although Absalom wishes to soothe Tamar, he is even more interested in preventing her from (unspecified) legal action. He wants to avenge the rape himself. According to Fokkelman, Absalom adds "He is your brother" to point out that a scandal in the reigning family would be injurious to the monarchy.<sup>72</sup> Fokkelman's reasoning here

69. Smith, "The Discourse Structure," 40.

70. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 270.

71. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!*, 34, n. 68.

72. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, vol. 1, 110–11.

seems flawed: surely Absalom's premeditated (2 Sam. 13:32) murder of his brother is no less a scandal to the monarchy. If Absalom had wanted to preserve the regime from calumny, he would not have committed fratricide.

I believe Absalom grasps the juridical nature of Tamar's cry. He knows the procedure outlined in Deut. 22:13–21 will not be imposed because the king, contrary to Tamar's expectation, will not condone incest. Her absurd conviction of the permissibility of half-sibling marriage annoys him, and thus his gruff speech, "Silence! He is your brother," both quiets and disabuses her. Her obstinate attachment to a ridiculous marital delusion serves to provoke hatred in one brother and exasperation in the other. Absalom's irritation notwithstanding, he tells Tamar not to take the matter to heart and gives her the protection of his home where a confrontation with her father may be avoided. Mired in the never-never land of her matrimonial fantasy, Tamar does not realize that such an interview would be unpleasant. Awkward questions might be asked about heart-cakes, about remaining alone with Amnon after her cooking was completed, and about failure to call out for help.

In 2 Sam. 13:20, speaking to Tamar, Absalom identifies Amnon as "your brother." The exaggerated repetition of the terms "brother" and "sister" in our pericope is repeatedly remarked upon by commentators. Those who deny that incest was proscribed at this time claim the reiteration indicates merely that Amnon's ardor was unbrotherly and unfamiliar.<sup>73</sup> Those who embrace the conviction that incest at the time of the monarchy was a criminal act think, as I do, that the undeniable overemphasis of these terms supports their position.<sup>74</sup> Absalom appends "your brother" to clarify the unreasonableness of Tamar's plan and to underscore the repugnance and gravity of Amnon's offense.

We are told Tamar remains desolate, *שממה*, in her brother's house. The Hebrew word implies barrenness (Isa. 54:1), a connotation of interest to the reader who thus learns the succession will not be complicated by the birth of a son to Amnon, nor will David's line be disgraced by the existence of a *ממזר* (though often translated as "bastard," it designates a child born of incest or adultery). Tamar seems to remain unmarried, and analysts, in exacerbation of Amnon's guilt, proffer that the loss of virginity has rendered her unmarriageable. Yet, nowhere in Scripture is it implied that non-virgins are unmarriageable. On the contrary, we learn in Lev. 21:14 the only Israelite who must marry a virgin is the high priest. The lack of virginity would, no doubt, have lowered a woman's bride-price, but history and literature have taught that king's daughters are relatively easy to marry off.<sup>75</sup>

It is David's responsibility, or perhaps Absalom's, since she is living under his protection, to see to Tamar's prospects. David does not do so, I think, because he is angry with her. Absalom does not do so in order to sustain his resentment of Amnon. Were Tamar married and the happy mother of children, it would be more difficult to justify the murder of Amnon when the opportunity for fratricide arose.

David's anger when he hears "these things" (2 Sam. 13:21) is undifferentiated. Many critics accept the LXX addition that, though angry with Amnon, David does

73. E.g., Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 245.

74. E.g., Keefe, "Rapes of Woman," 87.

75. See my n. 61.

not chastise him because he is the beloved first-born. With G. Hammond, I find this gloss “banal”; it impoverishes the text to expound that David’s ire is confined to Amnon.<sup>76</sup> David’s wrath is undifferentiated in the MT because he is not furious only at Amnon; he is angry at Jonadab, at Tamar, and, most deeply perhaps, at himself. After all, he heard Amnon’s request for heart-cakes, he appreciated that such a craving was inappropriate, and he nevertheless sent Tamar to her seducer.

The unusual recurrence of the terms “brother” and “sister” in this chapter serves not only to accent the incestuous fornication, but also the profusion of these familial expressions makes obvious the lack of one particular kinship term: father. David exists as a father only in the imagination of Jonadab (v. 5). Nowhere do his children refer to him as a father, nor does the narrator so refer to him.<sup>77</sup> Throughout the pericope, he is David, the king, or King David. The reader may infer that had he been a pattern father, a good example to his children, their transgressions would not have occurred—not the incest, not the fratricide. As a father (and certainly as ruler and judge) he might be expected to punish Amnon and Tamar, but, just as Nabal turned to stone when Abigail told him “these things,” so David becomes immobilized. If punishment were to start, where would it end? How would he punish himself? David’s heart, like Nabal’s, may have died within him when he learned what his children had done.

The tell-tale heart-cakes, Tamar’s willingness to be alone with a man, and her failure to call out all refute a rape verdict. The use of two verbs for intercourse in 2 Sam. 13:14 when juxtaposed with the same two verbs in the rape of Dinah passage also testifies against sexual assault. In Genesis the verbs, their order, and their associated particle or suffix signify Shechem’s progression from rapist to lover. The syntactical inversion of these same terms in 2 Samuel reveals Amnon’s reversed emotional transformation from one who tenderly loves Tamar and desires her reciprocity to one who hates her and demands her removal.

These arguments are compelling evidence for consensual sex, but they are not the only confirmations of Tamar’s ability to act independently. As early in chapter 13 as verse 2, readers sensitive to biblical style prick up their ears upon hearing that Amnon is in narrow straits, in distress, that is, bound, as David was twice said by Abigail to be bound. This initial impression of possible association between 1 Samuel 25 and 2 Samuel 13 is strengthened and ratified by word echoes that reverberate throughout these two chapters and nowhere else in the Bible and by corroborating behavioral motifs. Guided by these identities, the reading audience is led to consider the similarities between David’s rage and Amnon’s passion and the contrasts between Abigail’s diplomacy and Tamar’s tactlessness. Both David and Amnon are depicted as impulsive, miscreant, initiators of the action; Abigail and Tamar are portrayed as independent agents of possible redemption. The women are not passive receptors but are shown to have the autonomy to conceive and to execute their own plans, shaping the consequences of the men’s initiative.

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76. Hammond, “Michal, Tamar,” 61.

77. Contra Danna N. Fewell and D. Gunn who state: “As the story progresses we see David pulled into its purview, as father, and especially as king”; *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (London, 1993), 150.

Nabal's only provocation is refusing to yield to David's "protection racket."<sup>78</sup> David is wrong to expect a reward for refraining from harming Nabal's shepherds or stealing his sheep (1 Sam. 25:7). Amnon is also wrong to seduce his sister, but these chapters do not focus on the deplorable faults of the men. Their concentration is on the influence, for good or for ill, of the women. There is no doubt that Scripture is androcentric, but in our sister-texts the crux of the narrative centers on the disparate attributes of Abigail and Tamar. David's summation in 1 Sam. 25:35 of the happy outcome of the crisis at Carmel, giving full credit to Abigail, prepares us in every mirrored detail for the unhappy outcome in the royal palace and the murder at Baal-hazor—with the implied blame falling on Tamar as the blundering precipitator of disaster, not on Amnon. Quick-witted Abigail cools and curbs David's threatening recklessness. Tamar feeds Amnon's forbidden passion, fails to deter him, falls to his persuasion and her own ambition, allows Absalom's tragic misapprehension, and ensures future bloodshed.

My analysis of the erroneously termed rape of Tamar may be inimical to those who find her cruelly exploited by an oppressive patriarchal society. Partisans of the rape theory may accuse me of blaming the victim, but Tamar is not the victim of male domination; like her eponymous forebear in Genesis 38, she engages willingly in incest. Not only does this interpretation have the advantage of accounting for and integrating what others have termed mistakes or unimportant details, but the culpability of Tamar is more compatible to the larger story than is the blamelessness upheld by previous exegetes. The sins of Amnon and Absalom are the fruit of David's crimes with Bathsheba and Uriah. Those who believe Tamar's innocence is violated consider her undeserved suffering a regrettable concomitant of the retribution meted David. There are, however, no innocents among David's progeny. Tamar's acquiescence to Amnon's immoral entreaty dishonors her father, and the pair of illicit lovers requites David appropriately for his own prohibited carnality.

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78. Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 49.