

Problems of the Deuteronomist's Poetics: David, Saul, and an Allegory of the Cave
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This paper explores 1 Samuel 24 from a Bakhtinian perspective. During David's long period as a fugitive in the wilderness, direct confrontation between the king and his son-in-law has been avoided. The events of 1 Samuel 24 report an extraordinary change, as Saul and David come face to face (in rather embarrassing circumstances, it must be said), and have their longest conversation thus far in the story. This *tête-à-tête* is the focal point of the chapter, with significant speeches from both major characters. David will speak first, and the reader is impressed with a subtle political genius in this *public* discourse of David. There is both scatology and eschatology in this chapter; that is, after the awkward lavatory moment, the future (and the destinies of two houses) is a central topic of discussion. After an analysis of this chapter that highlights a number of the literary features on offer, I will conclude my paper with a short discussion of how Bakhtin's notion of the "hero" might be integrated into a reading of 1 Samuel 24. In my conclusion, I will explore several passages from Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, including this one from the beginning of Bakhtin's reflection on "the hero in Dostoevsky's art":

The hero interests Dostoevsky not as some manifestation of reality that possesses fixed and specific socially typical or individually characteristic traits, nor as a specific profile assembled out of unambiguous and objective features which, taken together, answer the question "Who is he?" No, the hero interests Dostoevsky as a *particular point of view on the world and on oneself*, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality. ... The hero as a point of view, as an opinion on the world and on himself, requires utterly special methods of discovery and artistic characterization. And this is so because what must be discovered and characterized here is not the specific existence of the hero, not his fixed image, but the *sum total of his consciousness and self-consciousness*, ultimately *the hero's final word on himself and on his world*. (47-48)

TEXT OF CHAPTER 24

And David went up from there and stayed at the strongholds of En-Gedi. As soon as Saul returned from following the Philistines, they reported to him, “Look, David is in the wilderness of En-Gedi!” Then Saul took 3000 chosen men from Israel, and went to seek David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

As he came toward some walls for sheep on the road, there was a cave there, and Saul went inside to “overshadow his feet.” But David and his men were sitting in the back of the cave. Then the men of David said to him, “Look, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I’m giving your enemy into your hand – do to him whatever is good in your eyes.’” And David arose and secretly cut off the wing of Saul’s robe. After this, David’s heart was struck, because he had cut off the wing of Saul’s robe. He said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing against my master – the LORD’s anointed – to send my hand against him, for he is the LORD’s anointed!” David tore into his men with these words, and did not permit them to rise up against Saul. Then Saul arose and went onto the road.

David arose after this, and marched out of the cave. He called after Saul, saying “My lord, the king!” Saul stared behind him, and David was prostrate, face to the ground, bowing low. David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to merely human words, saying, ‘Behold, David is seeking to harm you.’ Look, this very day your eyes have seen that the LORD gave you *today* into my hand in the cave. Although some said to kill you, I looked with compassion on you, and I said, ‘I won’t stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’s anointed.’ Now look, my father, see the wing of your robe in my hand. Since I cut off the wing of your robe and I didn’t kill you, know and see that there is no evil or transgression in my hand. I haven’t sinned against you, but you are hunting me down to seize my life! May the LORD judge between me and you! May the LORD take vengeance against you on my behalf, but my hand won’t be against you. Just like that old proverb says, ‘From the wicked, wickedness marches out’ – but my hand won’t be against you. Who has the king of Israel marched out after? Who are you pursuing? After a dead dog? After but a single flea? May the LORD act as a judge a make a decision between me and you. O may he see and plead my cause and grant me justice from your hand.”

When David finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice, and he wept. He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you’ve dealt well with me, but I’ve dealt with you in an evil way. Today you’ve reported that you’ve acted well with me: the LORD closed me into your hand, but you didn’t kill me. Now, who has *ever* found his enemy, and then let him just happily walk away? May the LORD generously repay you for the way you’ve treated me today. And now, look, I know that you will surely reign, and that your hand will be established over the kingdom of Israel. So now, swear an oath to me by the LORD that you won’t cut off my descendants after me, or exterminate my name from my father’s house.” And David swore an oath to Saul. Then Saul went to his house, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

ANALYSIS OF 1 SAMUEL 24¹

24:1-2

The final line of the previous chapter (in most English versions) begins a new chapter in the story: “And David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of En-gedi.” Through this sentence (23:9 in the NRSV, 24:1 in the Hebrew text) we have both closure to the episode of Saul’s pursuit at Slippery Rock, and a new scene in a different locale. After a messenger interrupts Saul’s pursuit of David to announce the Philistine invasion, Saul then departs to face the Philistines as David moves to a new region, probably looking for a more secure domicile after the narrow evasion at *Selahmahlekoth*.

There is no report about the outcome of Saul’s fight against the Philistine raiders, but the reader can at least be certain that the king is still alive. No sooner does Saul “return” from the fight than yet another report is transmitted: “Behold, David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.” That the narrator does not share details about the skirmish with the Philistines but *instead* returns to the pursuit of David must be a comment on Saulide priorities. We are not sure who reports to Saul that David is in En-gedi—or how this messenger finds out—but Saul responds by mustering three thousand chosen men. Notably, the last time Saul chooses this number of men is at the beginning of chapter 13, an episode where Samuel informs him that his dynasty will not be established, and that another has been chosen in his place. Since Saul’s confession at the end of this chapter will confirm as much, the intertext with chapter 13 should be kept in mind.

With his pack of three thousand soldiers, Saul heads in the direction of the “Cliffs of the Wild Goats” to seek his prey. Virtually every serious commentator feels obligated to make some remark about the terrain of this area, usually informing us about the topographically distinctive features of the En-gedi landscape. From these serious commentators the reader learns that this region is (theoretically) ideal for a fugitive, since

¹ This section of the paper is derived from my forthcoming book, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

the cliffs and rocks are perforated with caves. In the symbolic lexicon of the narrative to this point, a “cave” is highly appropriate spatial setting. As Peter Miscall (1986: 144) reflects, “At this point of the story, we can say that Saul’s career has been marked by seeking and not finding or by seeking one thing and finding another. Here Saul finally finds David, but the outcome of the encounter is not what he sought.” It may not be significant, but “wild goat” (יָעֵל) in Hebrew is spelled the same as Jael (יַעֲל) in Judges 4. Aside from this orthographic similarity, there are other interesting parallels between the two stories: in both narratives (1 Samuel 24 and Judges 4:17-21), a powerful figure moves indoors where he thinks he is safe, but is not—because an enemy with a weapon is lurking within. In Judges 4, Sisera seeks the tent of Jael because he is motivated by survival; in 1 Samuel 24, Saul enters a random cave of En-gedi because of different primal urges.

24:3-4

At some point during this journey to seek David, Saul arrives at a place where “sheepfolds” (or pens) are by the road, and there is a cave nearby. Naturally, Saul chooses this particular cave as a makeshift latrine, and turns aside from the road. The king of Israel is thus completely alone—only the most foolhardy soldier would accompany him on this campaign, since the object of this mission is to “overshadow his feet,” a euphemism for using the men’s room. The next line is one of the most serendipitous in the entire Deuteronomistic History: while the Saul is indisposed, the narrator then reveals *this is the very cave where David and his men are hidden!* Over the past few chapters, Saul’s pursuit of David has been one of uncommon assiduity. He has looked high and low for David and his men; now he finds them, but he is completely unaware that they are concealed in the “thighs” (בְּיַרְכְּתָי) of the cave. By means of the olfactory sensations tingled by this scene, one is reminded of Eglon king of Moab in Judges 3, the same Eglon who is stabbed by Ehud, the left-handed man from the right-handed tribe (Benjamin). Here in 1 Samuel 24 it is a man of Benjamin who is on the throne, and many of David’s men would like to thrust a double-mouthed sword into his royal belly.

The awkward (verbal) silence in the cave is ended by David's men. With a forceful avowal, the men urge David—probably in some sort of troglodyte glottal whisper—to *carpe diem*: “Behold, the day that the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I am giving your enemy into your hand, and you can do to him whatever is good in your eyes!’” On the one hand, there is a wide assortment of body parts here: Saul overshadows his *feet*, David and his men in the *thighs* (or sides) of the cave, the men claim that God has given the enemy into David's *hand*, and so David is told to do what is good in his *eyes*. But on the other hand, what the men are urging is very serious: Saul's unexpected entrance must be God's design, since they claim that God has previously spoken words that justify regicide. This would all be well and good, and the men certainly plead with compelling immediacy, except that God is recorded as having said no such thing. As Graeme Auld (2003: 226) explains, this is an *unverified quotation*: “We readers have never been told of this promise; David has never spoken of Saul as his enemy.” In other words, the narrator has never disclosed God's words that give David a license to act as people did in the days of Judges: “do whatever is good in your eyes, and there will be no king in Israel.”

The reason why such an oracle is not recorded is because it never existed. To discharge a popular saying, David's men are full of—how shall I put it—the same *foul refuse* that Saul is presently evacuating from his person. In the cave, the men fabricate God's words, but what is their motive? The group that gathers around David, we recall from 22:2, are distressed, discontent, and in debt. These are men, therefore, who have every reason to want Saul liquidated—and given their various states of debt and distress, probably are not above fibbing. If Saul is destroyed, so are their criminal records. In fact, this is not the last time the reader will see a manipulation of divine speech (in 2 Samuel 3, Abner will show himself an adroit master of this genre). Meanwhile, when Saul shows up in the cave unaccompanied, the men are no doubt gleeful as the odds suddenly change in their favor: 3000 against 600 now become 600 against 1.

Under pressure from his men to act, David arises from a squatting position toward the king of Israel. He sneaks up and cuts off *not* the king's head (as his men desire), but rather a corner of Saul's robe (מַעֲיֵל). This sartorial moment reminds us of another damaged robe, that of the prophet Samuel in 15:27, "As Samuel turned to leave, Saul took hold of the corner of his robe (מַעֲיֵל), and it ripped." For the second time in his ill-starred career, Saul is involved in a robe ripping incident. In chapter 15 Saul unintentionally tears Samuel's robe, and is subject to a bitter prophetic indictment. This time, it is David who cuts Saul's royal robe, and all the symbolic resonance of losing the kingdom in chapter 15 boomerangs with interest here. In 15:28 Samuel announces, "The LORD has ripped the kingdom of Israel from you today, and given it to your friend, one who is better than you!" In chapter 24, Saul unsuspectingly enters a cave where that "friend" is concealed, and his own robe is severed by the one to whom the kingdom is transferred.

24:5-7

After slipping back to his hiding place with his men, suddenly "David's heart struck him" because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. The same expression is used in 2 Samuel 24:10 when David is conscience-stricken after performing a census. However, taking the census will be a comparatively serious transgression, whereas excising Saul's robe here seems commendable. I am not altogether sure why David's heart "strikes him" after returning from Saul to his men, but it is certainly to David's rhetorical advantage—given his next speech—to have his men see him in a conscience-stricken state.

As it turns out, David rather quickly recovers from his cardiac arrest, and proceeds to address his men with some searing words: "Far be it from me by the LORD, that I should do thing to my lord—to the LORD's anointed—to stretch out my hand against him! For the LORD's anointed is he!" This speech, I would submit, cannot be understood apart from the audience to whom it is delivered. After all, David is speaking to a group who have just *invented* a divine rationale for regicide. Quite conceivably, this

same group might be tempted to dream up a divine rationale for doing away with another “anointed one.”

We note that the epithet “LORD’s anointed” is twice enunciated by David. To be sure, David seems to have a deference for Israel’s royal office that is conspicuously lacking among other characters. Yet it is possible that a hint of self-interest might also be here, since David himself is *also* the LORD’s anointed. There is an intrinsic advantage, therefore, for David to emphasize this doctrine of never stretching a hand toward the LORD’s anointed in any circumstances. This is a refrain that the reader will hear again before long, not surprisingly uttered by David himself.

David’s speech effectively restrains his men from carrying out their insidious wiles, and with these words David “tears into” (עֲשֵׂה) his audience. The entire sentence makes it sound as though David is holding his men back from rising up and destroying Saul themselves, and he accomplishes this restraint through words rather than physical intervention. Meanwhile, Saul has not been privy to this discourse. With his temporary mission accomplished, Saul rises up and returns to the road that hopefully leads to David, oblivious to damage inflicted on his royal accoutrement by the very hands of the one he resumes seeking.

24:8-15

In an unexpected turnaround, the hunted now marches out after the hunter, and calls out “My lord, O king!” For Saul this must be a moment of incredulity, as he simply “stares behind him” and beholds an image of David nose-diving to the ground, doing obeisance in the vicinity of the cave lately departed. During the moment that Saul is stunned and silent, David begins his longest speech to this point in the story. It might be his best speech to date as well, and my guess is that David is addressing an audience that is bigger than Saul. The reader might have expected David to begin with his customary “What have I done now?” tirade, but the occasion demands something rather more original than this. David begins as follows: “Why do you listen to the words of man,

saying, ‘Behold, David is seeking your evil?’” For two reasons, this line marks an effective beginning to the speech. First, David asks Saul why he is listening to human urgings, since David himself (as he will stress), has *not* listened to such homicidal voices. Second, taking a rhetorical cue from his cavemen, David supplies an “unverified quotation” of his own, since no one has yet been recorded as saying to Saul “Behold, David is seeking your evil.” Such a quotation sounds effective, and a bit of hyperbole serves to enhance David’s point.

Rather than lingering over this unverified quotation, David rather efficiently moves from the theoretical to the practical by stressing *the cave*. Without commenting on the irony of the rendezvous—Saul is left to ponder that one on his own—David instead moves to a more probing issue: while Saul was in the cave, “someone” urged him to kill the king. Telling Saul about his refusal of this offer, David quotes himself in the cave as saying “I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for the LORD’s anointed is he.” With the piece of Saul’s clothing in hand, the moment is tailor-made to proffer the evidence of the cut robe, emotionally enhanced with the tender title “my father.” The term “hand” (יָד, *yad*) thus becomes a keyword in the speech, as Diana Edelman (1991: 195) reflects: “The motif *yad* appears twice in David’s speech, emphasizing his potential physical power over Saul, but indicating his acknowledgment that such power must be exercised properly, even when the opportunity for improper use arises, as it had in the cave.” According to David’s argument, Saul has been abusing his power. David stresses that there is no “evil or rebellion” in his hand, yet the king has been stalking his life.

The final movement in this long speech looks to heaven above and invokes the divine Arbitrator. Not only does David call on God to adjudicate this dispute, but he also calls on God for vengeance, since “my hand will not be against you.” One barely notices David’s quick shift from divine agency to ancient wisdom, as he quotes a proverb of the east: “From the wicked proceeds wickedness” (מִרְשָׁעִים יֵצֵא רָשָׁע). In the three Hebrew words of this (probably verifiable) quotation David is outwardly addressing *himself* rather than Saul, but no doubt a discerning listener can sense an application to Saul and his pursuit. After the proverb, David turns to metaphorical self-deprecation, commenting that

Saul is chasing a dead dog—or worse, a parasite on an unclean carcass—which must be construed as a waste of royal time and resources.

24:16-21

David rounds off his speech with a plea for God to judge in his favor, and then—as he finishes speaking “these words”—Saul speaks for the first time in the chapter: “Is this your voice, my son David?” While David’s “my father” finds its immediate counterpart with Saul’s “my son,” there may be other echoes heard in Saul’s troubled question. Walter Brueggemann (1990: 171) wonders if by means of this question the Deuteronomist is evoking an allusion to the story of Isaac, Jacob, and Esau in Genesis 27, a story that is about the transfer of blessing: “The language is powerfully reminiscent of Isaac, who was feeble and could not identify his son (Gen. 27:18, 32). Is the question placed in Saul’s mouth intended to recall Isaac? Is Saul, like Isaac, old and feeble? Is Saul afraid of being duped? Is Saul dealing with a David who is as swift and crafty and unprincipled as the stealthy Jacob? Is David, in this forceful encounter, about to seize something from Saul that is not rightly his, as Jacob seized from Isaac and Esau?” When Saul asks the question “is this your voice, my son David?,” he already knows the answer, and hence there is only one response: “Saul lifted up his voice, and wept.” Like Esau, Saul weeps when confronted with his future, and the bleak house wherein he now dwells. As we will see in the next chapter, the allusions to Genesis continue.

Saul has been subject to many emotions in the narrative thus far. Israel’s first king has had many bad days, but this is the first—and indeed the only—time that Saul weeps. As we reflect on *what is represented* on the narrative canvas here, it should be noted that kings do not often cry in the Deuteronomistic History. In fact, the king who weeps the most of any royal figure in the story is none other than Saul’s interlocutor here, David himself. Saul’s tears for a lost kingdom anticipates David’s weeping on numerous occasions, including the loss of his (potential) successor, Absalom, in 2 Samuel 19. I am not sure whether Saul’s expression of grief here is cathartic, but after weeping he finds his voice again, and utters a remarkable confession to David:

You are more righteous than I, because you dealt me good, but I have dealt you evil. For *you* have reported today that you have done good to me; how God closed me into your hand but you did not kill me. For what man finds his enemy, but then happily sends him on his way? May the LORD requite you with good today on account of what you did for me. And now, behold, I know that you will *surely* reign, and the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. And now, swear an oath to me by the LORD, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house.

In his classic work of literary criticism *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster opined that a fully-developed literary character is one with a *capacity to surprise*. Through this speech—the most articulate of his career—Saul meets Forster's criteria by exhaling words that are in turn humble, thoughtful, and even deferential toward his rival, whom he now faces in the most surprising of circumstances. Saul begins with an acknowledgement that David is in the right, and he is not the first character in biblical narrative to say “you are more righteous than I.” In Genesis 38, Judah makes a similar confession to his daughter-in-law Tamar, after he has just said “Bring her out and let her be burned” as a penalty for harlotry. Saul declares that even though God “closed him” (סגר) into the hand of David (the verb occurs five times in the previous chapter), David does not choose to kill him. In return for this unexpected mercy, Saul quotes, if not a proverb, than certainly a rhetorical question that sounds like a popular expression: “who ever heard of someone letting an enemy go?” Such an act, Saul says, deserves a divine reward.

Not only does Saul acknowledge that David is in the right, but he also confesses—replete with enhanced syntax—“reigning you will reign.” After hearing the song lyrics in 18:8 Saul darkly whispers to himself that only the *kingdom* remains for David. This muttering precipitates Saul's downward spiral into jealousy, as he “eyes” David from that day onward. Yet on this day, in the aftermath of the cave, the king now publicly affirms that the same kingdom will be established in David's hand. Some commentators argue that in these declarations Saul gives a great deal away. For all his words in lines 8-15, David really does not ask for very much. In a series of rhetorical questions, though with an eye to his wider audience, David only asks Saul to stop

pursuing him. In his rejoinder, Saul concedes far more: righteousness, reign, and an established kingdom.

On one level, it certainly appears as though Saul caves in. But on another level, it is possible that Saul makes the most of a bad situation, and through his initial concessions, he is actually positioning himself for a petition that would be hard to deny. Through his long series of opening words, Saul is setting up David such that the latter cannot but “swear an oath” as Saul requests. With this, Saul sounds like his son Jonathan, who on numerous occasions has asked David to swear an oath. Like Jonathan, Saul moves from the present to future, calling on David to promise that he will not “cut off” (כרת) his offspring, and poignantly it is the same verb that is used for David’s action in verse 5; Saul has had his royal robe “cut off” symbolizing his loss of the kingdom to David, whom he now asks for an oath so that his family and *his own name* will not be cut off when David becomes king. Saul has not made a plethora of politically astute moves in the past, but it could be argued that securing this oath is his smartest move so far.

24:22

This “vivid” chapter—as H. W. Hertzberg describes it—draws to a close as David swears the oath. What king has an enemy’s house in his hand, yet allows that house to live? In Judges 9, Abimelech does not shy away from destroying the house of *his own* father, and later kings in the Deuteronomistic History will efficiently destroy rival houses. But an oath is sworn by David, and one wonders if the oath will be sorely tested in the days to come. After securing the oath, Saul then goes “to his house,” the same house that will never produce a successor to Saul, and the same house that David has sworn an oath not to exterminate. Rather than accompanying his father-in-law, however, David and his men go up “to the stronghold.” Is David rather less sanguine than one might have expected after such a stunning (public) endorsement from Saul? Does David not quite trust Saul? The final line of the chapter suggests that David’s fugitive period is not yet over. The next time “stronghold” is mentioned in the story will be 2 Samuel 5:7,

when David captures the stronghold of Zion, and renames it “the city of David.” Jerusalem is the very place where David will reign, just as Saul confesses.

CONCLUSIONS:

I now want to return to the quote from Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* with which I began my analysis, agreeing for the moment that “what must be discovered and characterized,” as Bakhtin writes, “is not the specific existence of the hero, not his fixed image, but the *sum total of his consciousness and self-consciousness*, ultimately *the hero’s final word on himself and on his world.*” What we see in 1 Samuel 24, in my view, is the consummation of Saul’s long journey toward “*consciousness and self-consciousness*” as Bakhtin puts it in his discussion of the relative freedom and independence of the hero in a work of polyphonic design. The overall presentation of Saul – one could statistically argue – is manifestly the most transparent of any royal figure in the Deuteronomistic History: Saul’s inner thoughts and speech is recorded the most; that is, measured against any other king, it is the thoughts, intents, and inner musings of Saul’s mind that are revealed more often than any other monarch. For example, consider three instances. First, Saul’s own interior voice is heard in 18:8, “Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?’” Second, the narrator provides an interior view of Saul’s mind in 18: 25, “Then Saul said, ‘Thus shall you say to David, “The king desires no marriage present except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king’s enemies.”’” Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.” A third instance comes from another major character ... as even David gets in on the psychoanalytic action when he claims to read Saul’s mind in 20:3, as he provides an alleged word from Saul’s interior consciousness, “Taking an oath, David again said, ‘Your father is very much aware of the fact that I have found favor with you, and he has thought [or said], “Don’t let Jonathan know about this, or he will be upset.” But as surely as the LORD lives and you live, there is about one step between me and death!’” The

reason for this cognitive transparency (from three different voices: Saul himself, the narrator, and another character, David) is precisely to bring us to this moment of self-conscious realization in the cave—a moment that begins with tears—and is an integral part of Saul’s overall characterization. As Bakhtin further observes in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*:

Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero’s image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world – but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his voice; only on condition, consequently, that accents of the hero’s self-consciousness are really objectified and that the work itself observes a distance between the hero and the author. If the umbilical cord uniting the hero to his creator is not cut, then what we have is not a work of art but a personal document. (51)

The special genius in the construction of Saul—as I see it—is the ability of this character to resist easy finalization. Even a hasty survey of recent commentators illustrates a striking divergence in deliberation and conclusions about Israel’s ill-starred inaugural monarch. David Gunn (1980: 23) summarizes the situation even across denominational lines: “Saul’s reputation has been hardly an enviable one, at least in Christian circles. While Jewish tradition has treated this first king of Israel with some sympathy, Christian tradition has shown him a large measure of hostility.” The reason that Saul resists easy finalization (by contrast with, say, Omri or Jeroboam II) is surely “the umbilical cord is cut,” and Saul enjoys a measure of creative distance from the author of the Deuteronomistic History. The range of emotions and “accents of self-consciousness” Saul exhibits must be indicative of a creative distance, a creative distance that is poignantly evident when Saul arrives at a definitive moment of self-realization here in 1 Samuel 24, beginning with the remarkable words “Is this your voice, my son, David?” Once more Bakhtin’s discussion of the hero is worth considering:

The special sort of moral torture that Dostoevsky inflicts upon his heroes, in order to force out of them that ultimate word of a self-consciousness pushed to its extreme limits, permits him to take all that is merely material, merely an object, all that is fixed and unchanging, all that is external and neutral in the

representation of a person, and dissolve it in the realm of the hero's self-consciousness and self-utterance. (54)

Glancing through the book of 1 Samuel, it would be hard to challenge the notion that Saul goes through a long and torturous journey. His first words to Samuel are a seemingly an innocent request for directions ("Where is the house of the seer?"); but since "house" can mean "dynasty," these words from the soon to be anointed king could be misconstrued by Samuel. After being anointed with a "flask" of oil (rather than a "horn," as we see with David later), Saul endures the stressful situation of a lot-casting ceremony—most often used in the Deuteronomistic History to uncover guilt—and chaired by a prophet having a bad heir day. Things get worse for Saul when his dynasty is rejected after the "7 day" error in chapter 13, and this error no doubt contributes to the cultic madness that is evident throughout the long day of chapter 14. I will comment on the matter of Saul's "firing" (to use Barbara Green's term) of chapter 15 in a moment, but the "evil spirit from God" that terrorizes Saul in chapter 16 cannot be perceived as encouraging, and thus the "self-talk" begins in chapters 17 and 18, leading to the manic pursuit of David that climaxes here in chapter 24.

In terms of plot structure, one could posit that part of the reason for Saul's long and torturous journey is to "force out" that "ultimate word of a self-consciousness"? By any measure, it is quite a word: after weeping, Saul says to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you've dealt well with me, but I've dealt with you in an evil way... who has *ever* found his enemy, and then let him just happily walk away?" Surely there is an arresting degree of depth to this confession, but the more surprising part comes immediately after acknowledging the justness of David's cause: "And now, look, I know that you will surely reign, and that your hand will be established over the kingdom of Israel." Not only does Saul acknowledge that David will be his successor, but he also turns to the future, rather than the present: "So now, swear an oath to me by the LORD that you won't cut off my descendants after me, or exterminate my name from my father's house." For the first time—so it could be argued—Saul is thinking about *life after kingship*. Again, one might suggest an intersection with Bakhtin's illuminating discussion of the hero:

...the “*truth*” at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself to himself, can essentially be for Dostoevsky on *the truth of the hero’s own consciousness*. It cannot be neutral toward his self-consciousness. In the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth. Only in the form of a confessional self-utterance, Dostoevsky maintained, could the final word about a person be given, a word truly adequate to him. (55-56)

In terms of the Deuteronomist’s poetics, Saul’s “confessional self-utterance” unfolds in the context of an intertext with chapter 15. As I mention in my analysis, when David cuts Saul’s robe (מַעֲיֵל) in the cave there is an immediate connection with another damaged robe, that of the prophet Samuel in 15:27, “As Samuel turned to leave, Saul took hold of the corner of his robe (מַעֲיֵל), and it ripped.” In chapter 15 Saul unintentionally tears Samuel’s robe, and not long after feels the stings of a bitter prophetic indictment. In chapter 24, it is David who cuts Saul’s royal robe, and all the symbolic resonance of losing the kingdom in chapter 15 is re-accentuated in this new context. In 15:28 Samuel announces, “The LORD has ripped the kingdom of Israel from you today, and given it to your friend, one who is better than you!” In chapter 24, Saul unsuspectingly enters a cave where that “friend” is concealed, and his own robe is severed by the one to whom the kingdom is transferred. It is hard to know whether Saul sees the fragment of his own robe in David’s hand and makes the connection with chapter 15, but the fact that he weeps certainly makes a compelling argument that Saul links the two events – prompting a realization that propels him towards self-consciousness in a way not seen before. Despite numerous rejections—personal and dynastic—from Samuel, Saul *internally finalizes* something here, in many ways congruent with Bakhtin’s notion of the hero:

... a living human being cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing cognitive process. *In a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing secondhand definition.* (58)

This leads me to a final comment on 1 Samuel 24, a chapter that—in a multi-tasking sense—is about more than just Saul: at the moment Saul is undermined, there is an anticipation of the undermining of the Davidic kingdom. At the risk of turning this episode into an *allegory of the cave*, it should at least be mentioned that Saul’s robe is not the last such garment to be damaged in the Deuteronomistic History. I would argue that in the context of the larger storyline, this cave-cutting incident becomes an eschatological moment for David, since his own son shortly will be—by extension—on the wrong end of a ripped robe illustration by a prophet from Shiloh. In 1 Kings 11, Jeroboam is walking out from Jerusalem dressed in a “new robe” (שִׁלְמוֹהַ). He is met on the road by the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh, who seizes the new robe (the syntax is ambiguous, but in my view Jeroboam—like his ancestor Joseph—is the one wearing the new robe). Ahijah tears the robe into pieces, anticipating the kingdom of David’s son Solomon (שִׁלְמוֹהַ) being torn apart. The reader of the Hebrew text notices a wordplay on robe (שִׁלְמוֹהַ) and the name Solomon (שִׁלְמוֹהַ). Since one function of wordplay is to draw attention to a reversal of fortune, and there is hardly a more dramatic reversal than the great Solomonic kingdom being dismantled. In 2 Samuel 2, David eulogizes a king’s death with the words, “How the mighty have fallen.” With some *double entendre* these words may be a requiem for his own house as well. Consequently, when Saul turns aside to a cave and gets his royal robe trimmed, neither he nor David have any inkling of the long-term symbolic dimensions. The timing is not coincidental: *at the moment Saul reaches self-consciousness, we have a simultaneous allusion to the undermining of the Davidic kingdom!* 1 Samuel 24 becomes a moment where the reader is acquainted with the fragility of David’s own (future) kingdom, and a strong suggestion that David will have to walk on the same journey—and experience a not dissimilar “mental torture”—as his predecessor.