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presents

the Annotated Popular Edition of

DAVID AND BETHSABE

by George Peele

Performed c. 1596

First Published 1599

Featuring complete and easy-to-read annotations.

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DAVID AND BETHSABE

By George Peele

Performed c. 1596
First Published 1599

The love of King David and Fair Bethsabe.
With the Tragedie of Absalon.
As it hath ben diuers times plaied on the
stage.

Written - by George Peele.
LONDON,
Printed by Adam Islip.
1599

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

David and his Family:

David, King of Israel and Judah.

Cusay, a lord, and follower of David.

Amnon, son of David by Ahinoam

Jethray, Servant to Amnon.

Chileab, son of David by Abigail.

Absalon, son of David by Maacah.

Thamar, daughter of David by Maacah.

Adonia, son of David by Haggith.

Salomon, son of David by Bethsabe.

Joab, captain of the host to David, and nephew of
David and son of his sister Zeruaia.

Abisai, nephew of David and son of his sister Zeruaia.

Amasa, nephew of David and son of his sister Abigail;
also captain of the host to Absalon.

Jonadab, nephew of David and son of his brother
Shimeah; also friend to Amnon.

Other Characters:

Urias, a warrior in David's army.

Bethsabe, wife of Uriah.

Maid to Bethsabe.

Nathan, a prophet.

Sadoc, high-priest.

Ahimaas, his son.

Abiathar, a priest.

Jonathan, his son.

Achitophel, chief counsellor to Absalon.

Ithay, a Captain from Gath.

Semei.

INTRODUCTION to the PLAY

George Peele's *David and Bethsabe* is the only history play (of the era's approximately 600 extant dramas) to be adopted totally from the Bible, specifically retelling much of the story of King David. Though the characters constantly appeal to God, Peele knowingly and gleefully focuses on all the elements of David's tale that he knew his audience would enjoy the most - murder, rape, incest, adultery and war.

Written in iron-fisted and rigorously unwavering iambic pentameter, yet containing in almost every line a touch of alliteration, *David* shows off Peele's great skill as a poet, and possesses a number of passages, especially in the Prologue and opening scene, of undeniable beauty and grace.

NOTE on the TEXT'S SOURCE

The text of the play is taken from Alexander Dyce's 1874 edition of *David and Bethsabe*, cited below at #3.

NOTES on the ANNOTATIONS

Mention of Dyce, Bullen, Keltie, Blistein and Manly in the annotations refers to the notes provided by each of these editors in their respective editions of this play, each cited fully below.

The most commonly cited sources are listed in the footnotes immediately below. The complete list of footnotes appears at the end of this play.

1. Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online.

2. Crystal, David and Ben. *Shakespeare's Words*. London, New York: Penguin, 2002.

3. Dyce, Rev. Alexander. *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Robert Greene and George Peele*. London: George Routledge and Sons: 1874.

4. Bullen, A.H. *The Works of George Peele, Vol. II*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888.

5. Keltie, John S. *The Works of the British Dramatists*.

Hanon, King of Ammon.

Machaas, King of Gath.

Woman of Thecoa.

Messenger, Soldiers, Shepherds, and Attendants.

Concubines to David.

Chorus.

Edinburgh: William P. Nimmon, 1873.

6. Blistein, Elmer, ed. *The Works of George Peele* (Charles T. Prouty, gen. ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

22. Manly, John Charles. *Specimens of Pre-Shakspearean Drama, Vol. II*. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1897.

A: Background: Saul and the Rise of David.

Saul was Israel's first king. Having led his people to numerous military victories, Saul finally fell into the Lord's disfavour when, in attacking the Amalekites, he ignored God's injunction to "have no compassion on them, slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheepe, camel and asse" (1 Samuel 15:3). Samuel instead captured the Amalekite king Agog alive, and his soldiers saved the enemy's best lambs, sheep and oxen in order to sacrifice them to the Lord.

God, angry ("*Beholde, to obey, is better then sacrifice*", 1 Sam. 5:22), rejected Saul, and chose David, son of Jesse, a shepherd boy, to become Israel's next king. The Lord's spirit deserted Saul, and was replaced by an evil spirit, which tormented ("*vexed*") him; Saul took the advice of his servants and sent for David, a known musician, and when David played his harp for Saul during his fits of madness, the evil spirit left the old king.

Saul kept David in his household, and David grew up to be a strong military leader; but Saul, jealous of the younger man, tried for years to kill David, but to no avail, as David was protected by the Lord. David spent years in hiding, until Saul was finally killed – he actually fell on his own sword – during a battle with the Philistines, at which point David fulfilled his destiny to become king of Israel.

After ruling from the city of Hebron for the first seven and a half years of his reign, David founded a new capital for Israel at Jerusalem; here he built a Palace, and here he also housed the Ark of the Covenant, thus making Jerusalem Israel's combined political and religious center.⁹ Israel's second king continued to roll up military victories, finding further glory as a slayer of all of Israel's enemies - the Philistines, the Moabites, the Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Syrians.

Our play begins as Israel's army, under the command of David's nephew Joab, is besieging the Ammonite city of Rabbah, located about 40 miles north-east of Jerusalem. David is not with the army, but rather at home, in the Palace. To this point in the Biblical account, David has never done anything wrong in the eyes of the Lord.

B: 16th Century Bibles Available to Peele.

George Peele had several Bibles to use as potential sources for *David and Bethsabe*. A close comparison of the play's text to various passages in the different Bibles makes it clear that the *Bishop's Bible* of 1568 was Peele's primary go-to version, but he did also borrow from other Bibles as the spirit moved him.

The close degree to which Peele followed the Bible verse-by-verse as he wrote much of *David*, especially in a number of the longer speeches, is striking. So much so, that your editor decided to include in the notes many of the Bible verses adopted by Peele so that you, the reader, may enjoy the comparisons; indeed, it is pleasing and easy to imagine Peele sitting with quill in hand and an open Bible on his desk or table, glancing frequently at each successive verse as he wrote line after line of his play.

For the record, here is a list of the various Bibles Peele had to choose from in the mid-1590's as he composed *David*:

1. **The Wycliffe Bible** was the first English language Bible, a translation composed, at least in part, by the theologian John Wycliffe in the 1380's. Wycliffe died in 1384 before finishing his project, but others completed the Bible for him. The Wycliffe editions are handwritten, as they predate Gutenberg's invention of the printing press by more than half a century.

2. **The Tyndale Bible**, written by William Tyndale (c. 1494-1536), was the first Bible printed in the English language; Tyndale only completed the New Testament and the first five books of the Old before being strangled and burned at the stake for his heresy of publishing a Bible in a vernacular language.

3. **The Coverdale Bible**, published by Miles Coverdale (1488-1568), a disciple of Tyndale's, in 1535, completed Tyndale's translation, and was hence the first complete printed English translation of the Bible.

4. **The Matthew Bible** was published in 1537 by another Tyndale follower, John Rogers (c.1500-1555), who worked under the pseudonym Thomas Matthew. Rogers was the first Englishman to translate the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew languages, rather than from the Latin *Vulgate* Bible, as earlier translators had done.

In 1539, Richard Taverner (1505-1575) published what became known as the **Taverner Bible**, a modestly revised version of the *Matthew Bible*.

5. **The Great Bible**, initially published in 1539, was the first authorized English language version of the Bible. The project was overseen by Thomas, Lord Cromwell (Henry VIII's secretary), and Miles Coverdale; the resulting Bible borrowed heavily from previous translations.

6. **The Geneva Bible** was first published in completed form in 1560 by the Church of Geneva in Switzerland. It was the first Bible to add numbered verses to the Chapters. This was the Bible most used by Shakespeare.

7. **The Bishop's Bible** of 1568 was basically revised version of the Great Bible, published under the authorization of Elizabeth I.

All Biblical quotations in the annotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *Bishop's Bible*.

This Note was prepared in large part from information appearing in the website *GreatSite.com*.²³

C: the Strange Case of Multiple Spellings of Proper Names Within *David and Bethsabe*.

The 1599 original quarto of *David and Bethsabe* contains myriad printer's errors; the most striking of these mistakes is that many of the proper names are spelled in two or more different ways throughout the quarto.

An additional curiosity is that there is a difference in the preponderance of spellings based on whether the name appears *between* the two Choruses of the play (the second section) or in the first and third sections that occur before the first and after the last Chorus respectively. (To make this easy to follow, let's call the first section, which comprises about the first 800 lines of the play, up to the first Chorus, **Section I**; **Section II** comprises the approximately 1400 lines between

Chorus I and II; and **Section III** the final 450 lines from Chorus II to the end).

Here is a list of the major offenders:

1. The name of the woman known in modern times as Bathsheba is spelled **Bethsabe** only in Section I, mostly **Bersabe** in Section II, and mostly **Bethsabe** in Section III.
2. The capital city of the Ammonites is spelled **Rabath** only in Section I, and only **Rabba** in Section II.
3. **Absalon** appears almost exclusively as **Absolon** in Section I, about twice as many times as **Absalon** over **Absolon** in Section II, and **Absalon** only in Section III.
4. The name of the King of the Ammonites is spelled **Ammon** only in Section I, but mostly **Hannon** in Section II.
5. Abisai's name appears in multiple ways throughout the play: **Abisai**, **Abisay**, **Abysus** and **Abysai**.

With respect to the sharp difference between the way most of these names are spelled in Section II on the one hand and the outer sections I and III on the other, *David* Editor John Manly provides a simple explanation: to wit, Section II was set or printed by a different person than the one who prepared the outer sections.

As to how and why such blatant discontinuities could occur, no one knows, but it provides a good example of the lack of quality control, and a seeming absence of any proof-reading, that plagues early copies of Elizabethan plays.

D: Peele's Choice of Proper Names for *David*.

Another intriguing feature of *David and Bethsabe* is that Peele does not appear to have borrowed his spellings for the characters' names from the same Bible.

For example, **Rabath** appears this way only in the *Wycliffe Bible*, and **Rabba** is from the *Bishop's* and *Coverdale Bibles*; we also have **Bethsabe** (*Bishop's* only) and **Bersabe** (*Wycliffe* only).

Many of the name choices appear in multiple Bibles; **Isboeth**, for example, is found in the *Bishop's*, *Coverdale*, and *Geneva Bibles*.

On the other hand, Peele's spelling for **Ammon** (David's son), **Ithay**, and both spellings for the Ammonite king - **Ammon** and **Hannon** - appear in none of the Bibles at all.

Of course, the modern reader has enough to do to focus on following the densely allusive and poetical language of the play to have to worry about dealing with multiple spellings of the major characters' names; so, in order to minimize confusion, I have settled on the following spellings for this edition of the play:

1. **Bethsabe** for David's lover and later wife.
2. **Rabbah** for the capital city of the Ammonites, following Dyce.
3. **Absalon** for David's third son.
4. **Hanon** for the king of the Ammonites.
5. **Abisai** for David's nephew.

In addition, this edition will employ **Ammon** for David's first son, following Dyce, which is the spelling found in all the Bibles (other than the *Wycliffe*).

E. Peele's Use of Alliteration.

Alliteration has a long and noble history in English poetry. The earliest English epic poems, such as *Beowulf* and the later *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, were written in densely alliterative lines (but without regular meter).

Peele uses alliteration almost continuously throughout the play. While the notes point out some of the more dramatic and interesting of the examples, you may wish to note as you read the healthy proportion of lines in the play which contain even just a pair of alliterative words, and sometimes two pairs.

Examine, for example, the following four lines chosen more or less at random from David's first speech; every line contains an alliterative pair of words:

*Of moss that sleeps with sound the waters make
For joy to feed the fount with their recourse;
Let all the grass that beautifies her bower
Bear manna every morn instead of dew.*

F. Settings, Scene Breaks and Stage Directions.

The original quarto of *David and Bethsabe* did not identify scene settings, nor were there any scene breaks; we have generally adopted the setting suggestions of Manly; the scene break suggestions are the editor's

As is our normal practice, some stage directions have been added, and some modified, for purposes of clarity. Most of these minor changes are adopted from Dyce.

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PROLOGUS.

1 Of Israel's sweetest singer now I sing,
2 His holy style and happy victories;
Whose Muse was dipt in that inspiring dew
4 Arch-angels stillèd from the breath of Jove,
Decking her temples with the glorious flowers
6 Heavens rained on tops of Sion and Mount Sinai.
Upon the bosom of his ivory lute

Prologus: the Prologue, sometimes called a Chorus, is a device used to introduce the play to an audience, and is recited by a single actor.

The first part (lines 1-15) of the Prologue consists primarily of an extolling of David's musicianship. In the second part (lines 16-23), the narrator asks for inspiration from the Muses to inspire him as he tells his tale in order to raise or elevate the minds of his readers.

1: the Prologue may indeed be sung; the singer will sing about David, Israel's second king, who was also famous for his skill as a musician. Blistein notes that only the *Geneva Bible* refers to David as "*the sweete singer of Israel*" (2 Samuel 23:1), but he misidentifies the sourced verse as Psalms 23:1.

2: ***holy style*** = could mean "the excellence of his expression".

happy victories = ie. (many) military victories, which demonstrate the favour shown him by the Lord.

3-4: David's sublime musical skills were inspired by a ***Muse***.

The ***Muses*** were the nine goddesses who protected the various arts; artists were often described as being inspired by a Muse. *Terpsichore* was the name of the Muse of choral dance and song.

4: ***Arch-angels*** = numbering seven, the arch-angels comprised a specific class of angels who took part in the affairs of humanity (see the note at line 8 below).⁷

Note how Peele easily mixes pagan and Christian imagery.

stillèd = distilled.

Jove = the name of the Roman king of the gods was often used to refer to the Christian God.

= adorning her brows.

6: ***Heavens*** = ***Heavens*** and ***Heaven*** will almost always be pronounced as a monosyllable, with the medial *v* omitted: ***Hea'ns***.

Sion = ie. Zion, originally a fortress on the top of a hill in south-east Jerusalem, then used, as here, to mean the hill itself; eventually Zion came to refer to the city of Jerusalem, and then the nation or people of Israel as a whole.⁸

Mount Sinai = the mountain on the Sinai Peninsula where Moses received the Ten Commandments.^{8,9}

= a small plucked instrument, usually used to describe an early guitar; in the Bible, however, David is always described as playing a harp, which he was believed to pluck

8	The <u>cherubins</u> and <u>angels</u> laid their breasts;	with his fingers, and not a pick (Lockyer, p. 734). ⁹ = the beings known generically as <i>angels</i> are divided into 3 classes (called <i>hierarchies</i>), each of which contained 3 sub-classes (called <i>choirs</i>); the second hierarchy is named the <i>counselors</i> , of which the <i>cherubim</i> are the second choir; the third hierarchy is called the <i>messengers</i> , whose first choir is comprised of the <i>arch-angels</i> (see the note at line 6) and second choir the <i>angels</i> . ⁷
	And, when his <u>consecrated</u> fingers <u>strook</u>	= sacred, sanctified. ² = ie. struck.
10	The golden <u>wires</u> of his <u>ravishing</u> harp,	10: <i>wires</i> = pronounced with two syllables: <i>WI-yers</i> . <i>ravishing</i> = entrancing; ¹ <i>ravishing</i> is also pronounced with two syllables: <i>RAV-'shing</i> .
	He <u>gave alarum</u> to the <u>host of Heaven</u> ,	11: <i>gave alarum</i> = "raised an alarm for", or "raised a call to arms to", ie. alerted. <i>host of Heaven</i> = ie. the angels; though the phrase was often used to refer to the stars and planets.
12	That, winged with lightning, <u>brake</u> the clouds, and <u>cast</u> Their crystal armour at his conquering feet.	= archaic language for "broke through". = tossed. 13: a line in Christopher Marlowe's <i>Tamburlaine, Part One</i> , describes "angels in their crystal armours" who "fight a doubtful battle".
14	Of this sweet poet, Jove's musiciän, And of <u>his beauteous son</u> , I <u>prease</u> to sing.	15: <i>his beauteous son</i> = ie. Absalon, the beautiful third son of David, whose tale here complements that of David and Bethsabe. <i>prease</i> = press, ie. endeavor, strive. ¹
16	Then help, divine <u>Adonai</u> , to conduct	= alternate title for God, used as a substitute for his "ineffable name"; ¹ St. Jerome employed this epithet in Exodus 6:3 of his famous Latin translation of the Bible known as the <i>Vulgate</i> : " <i>qui apparui Abraham Isaac et Iacob in Deo omnipotente et nomen meum Adonai non indicavi eis</i> ". <i>Adonai</i> is pronounced as a three-syllable word, with the stress on the second syllable: <i>a-DON-ai</i> .
18	Upon the wings of my <u>well-tempered</u> verse The hearers' minds above the <u>towers</u> of Heaven, And guide them so in this <u>thrice-haughty flight</u> ,	= pleasant, agreeable. ¹ = pronounced as a mono-syllable. = ie. lofty flight; <i>thrice</i> is simply an intensifier.
20	Their mounting feathers scorch not with the fire That none can temper but thy holy hand:	20-21: "so that they do not get burned by the fire that only thou, God, can control and moderate." There is an allusion here to the mythological story of Daedalus and Icarus, who were being held prisoner by King Minos on the island of Crete: Daedalus built wings for his son Icarus and himself to use to escape Crete; Daedalus warned the boy not to fly too close to the sun, but Icarus ignored his father, and in his pride flew too high; the sun melted the wax holding the feathers of his wings together, and he plunged to his death into the sea.
22	To thee for succour flies my feeble Muse,	22: the narrator's Muse will not be up to the job to inspire him to tell his tale with enough skill, and so the Muse (and

24 And at thy feet her iron pen doth use.

26 *The Prologue-speaker, before going out, draws a*
curtain and discovers Bethsabe, with her Maid,
28 *bathing over a spring:*
she sings, and David sits above viewing her.

SCENE I.

The Royal Palace, Jerusalem.

David sitting on the Palace roof,
watching Bethsabe below bathing over a spring.

THE SONG.

1 *Hot sun, cool fire, tempered with sweet air,*

2 *Black shade, fair nurse, shadow my white hair:*

4 *Shine, sun; burn, fire; breathe, air, and ease me;*
Black shade, fair nurse; shroud me, and please me;
6 *Shadow, my sweet nurse, keep me from burning,*
Make not my glad cause cause of mourning.

hence the narrator himself) asks God to assist her.

= ie. a chisel to engrave or carve out her poetry;²⁴ *pens of iron* are mentioned frequently in the literature of the time; the Bible mentions *iron pens* in Job 19:24 and Jeremiah 17:1.

Note that the Prologue ends with a rhyming couplet; important speeches, the last speeches of characters in a scene, and scenes in and of themselves often signaled their conclusions by use of a rhyming couplet.

= reveals.

The Prologue: Peele's Prologue was held in high enough regard to be included in later collections of religious - and especially Jewish - poems and the such; examples include 1913's *The Hebrew Anthology* and *The Standard Book of Jewish Verse* of 1917.

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene I: 2 Samuel 11:1-6.

Scene Settings: the original 1599 edition does not provide locations for the scenes; I have largely adopted those suggested by Manly.

Entering Characters: *David* is the King of Israel; he would perhaps appear to the audience on the balcony at the back of the stage.

Bethsabe is a beautiful woman whose husband *Urias* is in the Israelite army, which is at present besieging the Ammonite capital city of Rabbah, about 40 miles north-east of Jerusalem.

124: *The Song* is sung by Bethsabe; note that the song is comprised of rhyming couplets (except perhaps for the final two lines).

= moderated.

2: *fair* = beautiful.

shadow = screen (from the sun).

white hair = no doubt meaning blond or golden; the OED identifies some specific usages of *white* to mean "pale-yellow"; such light colouring would support the suggestion of the song that the singer owns a light complexion that is too delicate to stand the strong Middle-Eastern sun.

Note the coupled antonyms in the first two lines: *hot* and *cool*, *black* and *white*.

6: "do not let that for which I have reason to rejoice - my fair complexion (which in Elizabethan times was considered most attractive) - become a liability by burning in the hot sun."

	<i>Let not my beauty's fire</i>	Note the wordplay in doubling-up the use of <i>cause</i> in this line, a feature greatly favoured by Peele.
8	<i>Inflame <u>unstaid</u> desire,</i>	7-10: these lines give us a good example of dramatic irony: the audience knows that David is watching, and about to seduce Bethsabe, while Bethsabe herself remains ignorant of her immediate fate. 7-8: note how <i>fire</i> , which Bethsabe previously used to describe the sun, is in line 7 used to describe her own beauty, which may <i>inflame</i> the passion of anyone who might see her. = immoderate, unrestrained.
10	<i>Nor pierce any bright eye That wandereth lightly.</i>	9-10: "nor come into the field of vision of any man who happens to be glancing around." <i>pierce</i> = penetrate. <i>lightly</i> = unthinkingly; but <i>light</i> also was used to mean wanton or unchaste. ¹
12	Beth. Come, gentle <u>Zephyr</u> , <u>tricked</u> with those perfumes That <u>erst</u> in Eden sweetened <u>Adam's love</u> ,	12-26: Bethsabe's first speech is an apostrophe to <i>Zephyr</i> , the west wind of mythology. <i>tricked</i> = adorned. 13: the wind is described as having refreshed Eve (<i>Adam's love</i>) in the Garden of Eden. <i>erst</i> = formerly, once upon a time.
14	And stroke my bosom with thy <u>silken</u> fan: This shade, sun-proof, is yet <u>no proof</u> for thee;	= balmy, soft. ¹ 15: Bethsabe's shade is safe from the sun, but cannot stop the wind from entering. <i>no proof</i> = ie. not impenetrable. ¹
16	Thy body, smoother than this waveless spring, And purer than the substance of the same,	
18	Can creep through <u>that his</u> lances cannot pierce:	= ie. that which. = ie. the sun's. Note the miniature metaphor in this line comparing the sun's rays breaking through the vegetation to a soldier's <i>lance piercing</i> an object like a body.
20	Thou, and thy sister, soft and sacred <u>Air</u> , Goddess of life, and <u>governess</u> of health, Keep every fountain fresh and <u>arbour</u> sweet;	= properly speaking, there was no deity of the air <i>per se</i> , as there were for the various winds. = another word for <i>goddess</i> . ² = shady retreat, ie. a bower, formed by encircling trees, shrubs and vines. ¹
22	No <u>brazen</u> gate her passage can repulse, Nor <u>bushly thicket</u> bar thy <u>subtle</u> breath:	22: no brass (<i>brazen</i>) gate can stop the air from passing through it. 23: <i>bushly thicket</i> = dense growth of brush; <i>bushly</i> may be a typo for <i>bushy</i> or even <i>bosky</i> , as <i>bushly</i> exists nowhere else in literature. ³ <i>subtle</i> = fine or delicate. ¹
24	Then <u>deck thee</u> with thy loose <u>delightsome</u> robes,	24: <i>deck thee</i> = "dress yourself" (especially with beautiful or rich garments). ¹ <i>delightsome</i> = delightful; <i>delightsome</i> was a popular word in the 17th century.
26	And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes, To <u>play the wantons</u> with us through the leaves.	= the phrase carries the sense of "behave playfully" or "flirt". ¹

28	<i>David.</i> What tunes, what words, what looks, what wonders pierce	
	My soul, <u>incensèd</u> with a sudden fire?	= inflamed; note how David returns to the fire imagery of the <i>Prologue</i> and the <i>Song</i> .
30	What tree, what shade, what spring, what paradise, Enjoys the beauty of so fair a dame?	
32	Fair Eva, placed in perfect happiness,	32: "beautiful Eve, set in Eden"; note the use of <i>Eva</i> for <i>Eve</i> for purposes of meter. 32-36: briefly, even Eve with her heavenly singing did not bring more joy to Adam than Bethsabe is giving to David with her speech and music.
	Lending her praise-notes to the <u>liberal</u> heavens,	33: ie. "praising generous (<i>liberal</i>) Heaven in song".
34	<u>Strook</u> with the accents of arch-angels' tunes,	34: sung in the sublime style or manner of, or perhaps accompanied by, the arch-angels. <i>strook</i> = struck. = worked, ie. brought.
	<u>Wrought</u> not more pleasure to her husband's thoughts	
36	Than this fair woman's words and notes to mine.	
	May that sweet <u>plain</u> that bears her pleasant weight	= could mean "meadow". ¹
38	Be still <u>enamelled</u> with <u>discoloured</u> flowers;	= beautified by colour. = ie. multi-coloured, variegated. ¹
	That precious <u>fount</u> bear sand of purest gold;	= fountain, ie. spring.
40	And, <u>for the pebble</u> , let the silver streams	= ie. in place of the pebbles.
	That pierce earth's bowels to <u>maintain the source</u> ,	= ie. keep the spring filled with water.
42	Play upon rubies, sapphires, <u>chrysolites</u> ;	= name given generically to any of various green gems. ¹
	The <u>brims</u> let be <u>embraced</u> with golden curls	= waters. ¹ = ie. surrounded.
44	Of moss that <u>sleeps</u> with sound the waters make	= note the lack of subject-verb agreement with <i>curls</i> and <i>sleeps</i> .
	For joy to feed the fount with <u>their recourse</u> ;	= ie. the waters' flow.
46	Let all the grass that beautifies her <u>bower</u>	= shady retreat.
	Bear <u>manna</u> every morn instead of dew,	= the food miraculously provided for the Israelites in the wilderness during their exodus from Egypt.
48	Or let the dew be sweeter far than that	
	That hangs, like chains of pearl, on <u>Hermon hill</u> ,	= the highest peak in the Anti-Lebanus mountains that lie on the border between Syria and Lebanon; the reference is from Psalms 133:3: " <i>It is also like unto the dew of Hermon, which falleth down the hill of Zion.</i> "
		Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotes in the notes are from the 1568 <i>Bishop's Bible</i> , Peele's most frequent source, with modernized spelling.
50	Or balm which trickled from old <u>Aaron's</u> beard. –	50: from Psalms 133:2: " <i>It is like unto a precious ointment poured upon the head, which runneth down upon the beard, even upon Aaron's beard, which also runneth down the skirts of his garments.</i> " <i>Aaron</i> was the brother of Moses, and the first high priest of the Hebrew nation. ⁹
	Cusay, come up, and serve thy lord the king.	51: his lyrical interlude complete, David calls for his servant.
52		Entering Character: Cusay, a lord and retainer of David's, appears on the roof, ie. the balcony at the rear of the stage.
54	<i>Enter Cusay above.</i>	
	<i>Cusay.</i> What service doth my lord the king command?	
56		= ie. Bethsabe.
58	<i>David.</i> See, Cusay, see <u>the flower of Israel</u> ,	= meaning only that she is one of the king's subjects.
	The fairest daughter that <u>obeys the king</u>	

60 In all the land the Lord subdued to me;
Fairer than Isaac's lover at the well,

Brighter than inside-bark of new-hewn cedar,

62 Sweeter than flames of fine-perfumèd myrrh,

And comelier than the silver clouds that dance

64 On Zephyr's wings before the King of Heaven.

66 **Cusay.** Is it not Bethsabe the Hethite's wife,
Urias now at Rabbah siege with Joab?

68

David. Go know, and bring her quickly to the king;
70 Tell her, her graces hath found grace with him.

72 **Cusay.** I will, my lord.

74 [Exit.]

76 **David.** Bright Bethsabe shall wash, in David's bower,

In water mixed with purest almond-flower,

78 And bathe her beauty in the milk of kids:

Bright Bethsabe gives earth to my desires;
80 Verdure to earth; and to that verdure flowers;

60: **Isaac** was the son of Abraham, who instructed his oldest servant to return to Abraham's home in Mesopotamia to find Isaac a wife. Arriving at a **well** outside the city of Padan Aram, the servant asked the Lord for a sign; a young woman, named Rebecca (who turned out to be the granddaughter of Abraham's brother) happened by, who gave the servant water, and from this act the servant new this was his gal. (Genesis 24).

61: because wood of the cedar, the famous evergreen tree, was used to build David's Palace, he would be familiar with the appearance of cut cedar trees (2 Sam. 5:11); (it is unclear how flattering it would be to Bethsabe to be compared to a tree's innards).

= **myrrh** is a resin extracted from certain trees, used in perfume (see e.g. Proverbs 7:17); earlier editors note that **fine** probably should be **fire**, to go with **flames**.

= more graceful;² **comlier** is pronounced with two syllables here: **COM-lier**.

= **Zephyr** is the west wind, mentioned earlier by Bethsabe in her first spoken line in Scene I at line 12.

66-67: **Bethsabe** = **Bethsabe** will always be stressed on its first syllable: **BETH-sa-be**.

Hethite = ie. the Hittites, a people who flourished in Asia Minor from 1900 to 1200 B.C., but at the time of David's reign (1010 - 970 B.C.),¹⁰ had a presence in Palestine.⁹

Urias = Bethsabe's husband; at this moment, Urias, an officer in David's army, was with the besieging army at Rabbah.

Rabbah = the first seven times the city is mentioned in the original edition, it is spelled **Rabbath**, as it appears in the *Wycliffe Bible*; the remaining eleven times, it is spelled **Rabba**, as it appears in both the *Bishop's* and *Coverdale Bibles*; I have chosen to follow Dyce's decision to print **Rabbah**, the *Geneva Bible's* spelling, everywhere (the KJV would also go on to use **Rabbah**).

Joab = a nephew of David, and commander-in-chief of David's army.⁹

70: in this punning line, **graces** means "good qualities" and **grace** means "favour".

76-82: David's brief soliloquy both begins and ends with a rhyming couplet; his speech also gives time for Cusay to go downstairs to Bethsabe.

= the almond tree's light-pink blossoms appear before the tree leaves.⁹

= young goats.

= ie. "is a living embodiment of".¹

= ie. "gives verdure"; **verdure** refers to green vegetation generally.¹

To flowers sweet odours; and to odours wings
 82 That carry pleasures to the hearts of kings.

84 *Enter Cusay, below, to Bethsabe,
 she starting as something affright.*

86 **Cusay.** Fair Bethsabe, the King of Israel
 88 From forth his princely tower hath seen thee bathe;
 And thy sweet graces have found grace with him:
 90 Come, then, and kneel unto him where he stands;
 The king is gracious, and hath liberal hands.

92 **Beth.** Ah, what is Bethsabe to please the king?

94 Or what is David, that he should desire,
 For fickle beauty's sake, his servant's wife?

96

Cusay. David, thou know'st, fair dame, is wise and just,
 98 Elected to the heart of Israel's God;

Then do not thou expostulate with him
 100 For any action that contents his soul.

102 **Beth.** My lord the king, elect to God's own heart,
 Should not his gracious jealousy incense
 104 Whose thoughts are chaste: I hate incontinence.

106 **Cusay.** Woman, thou wrong'st the king, and doubt'st
 his honour,
 Whose truth maintains the crown of Israel,
 108 Making him stay that bade me bring thee straight.

110 **Beth.** The king's poor handmaid will obey my lord.

112 **Cusay.** Then come, and do thy duty to his grace;
 And do what seemeth favour in his sight.

114 *[Exit, below, with Bethsabe.]*

116 **David.** Now comes my lover tripping like the roe,

= **flowers** is pronounced as a single syllable here.

79-82: a chain of connections of "the house that Jack built" variety: Bethsabe gives wings to the sweet smell (**odours**) that she gives to the flowers that she gives to the verdure that she gives to the earth that she gives to David's desires.

85: Bethsabe is startled at Cusay's appearance.

= ie. is generous.

= who.

94-95: Bethsabe is censorious: basically, "why would David want to commit the sin of taking Urias' (**his servant's**) wife just because he is attracted by her beauty?" Bethsabe describes her beauty as **fickle**, meaning "changeable", because it is so transitory (a common trope in Elizabethan drama).

= selected; to this point in David's history, he has been fully in God's favour.
 = remonstrate.²

102-4: much debated lines, primarily revolving around who **his** in line 103 and **whose** in line 104 refer to: they could mean God, but Keltie suggests Bethsabe has Urias in mind. **gracious jealousy** = perhaps an oxymoron; **gracious** suggests showing favour; **jealousy** is a common attribute ascribed to God, who tolerates no unfaithfulness; but if Urias is meant, the meaning of **jealousy** is more obvious.
incense = provoke, kindle. ^{1,5}
chaste: I = an early editor cited by Bullen suggested replacing the colon and **I** with **and**.

= suspects; Cusay, who has never yet seen David act in any manner that could be called wicked, finds Bethsabe's resistance to appear before the king blameworthy.

= wait. = commanded. = right away.

110: Vivien Westbrook, in her book *Long Travail and Great Paynes*,¹¹ notes the similarity of Bethsabe's response to Cusay to that which the Virgin Mary responded in part to the angel in Luke 1:38 ("*Behold the handmaiden of the Lord*"); Peele's intent, she argues, is to completely exonerate Bethsabe for what David will do to her. (See her introduction, p. xxxiv).¹¹

113: ie. "and do that which will deserve his favour".

= moving lightly or nimbly. = a small species of deer.

118	And brings my <u>longings tangled in her hair</u> .	= desires. ¹ = perhaps a subtle bit of foreshadowing of the ultimate fate of David's son Absalon.
120	To <u>joy</u> her love I'll build a kingly <u>bower</u> , Seated <u>in hearing</u> of a hundred streams, That, for their <u>homage</u> to her <u>sovereign joys</u> ,	= enjoy, clearly suggestive. = shady and leafy retreat. = within the sound.
122	Shall, <u>as the</u> serpents fold into their nests In <u>oblique turnings</u> , wind <u>the[ir]</u> nimble waves	121: homage = reverence shown. ¹ sovereign = greatest. ¹ joys = Dyce suggests the meaning is "charms". = "like the way", or "just as".
124	About the circles of her <u>curious</u> walks; And with their murmur summon easeful sleep	123: oblique turnings = literally "slanting revolutions". ¹ their = ie. the hundred streams of line 20. = delicate, careful, or prompted by curiosity. ¹
126	To lay <u>his</u> golden sceptre on her brows. – Open the doors, and <u>entertain</u> my love;	= ie. personified Sleep's. 127-9: David commands his servants.
128	Open, I say, and, as you open, sing, Welcome, fair Bethsabe, King David's darling.	entertain = receive as a guest. ¹
130	<i>Enter, above, Cusay, with Bethsabe.</i>	
132	Welcome, fair Bethsabe, King David's darling.	
134	<u>Thy bones' fair covering, erst discovered fair,</u>	134: Thy bones' fair coverings = a unique description of Bethsabe' skin; Elmer Blistein, in his notes to our play contained in <i>The Dramatic Works of George Peele</i> , observes that the imagery of bones is a favourite of Peele's, who mostly uses them in a figure of speech known as a <i>metonymy</i> (meaning that bones is used to represent something else, usually the human body) (p. 259); ⁶ indeed, bones appears 15 times in our play. erst discovered fair = previously revealed to be beautiful.
	<u>And all mine eyes with all thy beauties pierced:</u>	135: And = as Dyce notes, And perhaps means "have", or else a line may have dropped out, another common printer's error. pierced = this is already the fifth time Peele has used pierce / pierced in the play; there will be eight appearances in all.
136	As <u>Heaven's bright eye</u> burns most when most <u>he</u> climbs	136-9: just as the sun is the strongest when it is at its highest point in the sky, so Bethsabe scorches, ie. inflames, David's soul. Heaven's bright eye = common poetic description of the sun. he = ie. the sun.
	The <u>crookèd zodiac</u> with his <u>fiery sphere</u> ,	137: crooked = curved, referring to the path of the sun. ⁶ zodiac = the celestial belt along which the planets, the sun and the moon appear to revolve around the earth; we may note that though Copernicus had announced a century earlier that the sun was in fact the center of the solar system, Elizabethan authors continued to describe the heavens as rotating around the earth. fiery sphere = the word sphere likely simply refers to the geometric shape of the sun. However, in the plays of the era, spheres was primarily used to describe a Ptolemaic view of the universe, in which the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars were imagined each to occupy a particular and literal celestial sphere around

138 And shineth furthest from this earthly globe;
So, since thy beauty scorched my conquered soul,

140 I called thee nearer for my nearer cure.

142 **Beth.** Too near, my lord, was your unarmèd heart
When furthest off my hapless beauty pierced;

144 And would this dreary day had turned to night,
Or that some pitchy cloud had cloaked the sun,
146 Before their lights had caused my lord to see

His name disparaged and my chastity!

148 **David.** My love, if want of love have left thy soul
150 A sharper sense of honour than thy king,
(For love leads princes sometimes from their seats,)

152 As erst my heart was hurt, displeasing thee,
So come and taste thy ease with easing me.

154 **Beth.** One medicine cannot heal our different harms;

156 But rather make both rankle at the bone:
Then let the king be cunning in his cure,

158 Lest flattering both, both perish in his hand.

the earth, the spheres all concentric, and each rotating around the earth as they carry the heavenly bodies with them; thus *fiery sphere* may describe the sphere *containing* the sun.

We may note that there was an alternate conception of the heavens, one in which the universe comprised a different set of concentric spheres, four in total; each sphere was composed of one of the four elements all matter was believed to be made up of, to wit (from the outermost to the innermost), fire, air, water and earth; in this sense *fiery sphere* could be used to refer to the largest and furthest sphere (see line 138).

= *scorched* connects with *burns* (line 136) and *fiery* (line 137).

140: David puns on *nearer*: the first *nearer* means "closer" (the modern meaning), and the second means "most direct way (to cure me)."¹

142-3: "I was already too near to you, when your heart, unprotected as it was (as if by armour), was pierced by my luckless (*hapless*) beauty."

= if only.

= black.

= ie. the light of the day and the sun both. = ie. permitted.

147: "both his reputation and my honour disgraced." Note how awkwardly the sentence is written to fit the iambic meter: a more standard arrangement of the words - "His name and my chastity disparaged" - does not work metrically.

=lack.

= ie. with a. = ie. "than that possessed by your king".

= ie. kings. = from their thrones, a metaphor for "to behave in ways inappropriate for a monarch".

152-3: "then, as earlier I had displeased you, which gave me pain, come and give relief to my injury while getting a taste of pleasure yourself."

Suddenly, David, who is decreasingly subtle, sounds like a bullying pervert.

Note that David again has finished a speech with a rhyming couplet.

155-8: Bethsabe picks up on David's talk of injuries and responds to his sleazy offer with a dense medical metaphor of her own.

155: Bethsabe points out (1) their injuries are of a different nature, as David's are self-inflicted, and (2) thus cannot be cured by a single act.

Note that *medicine* is disyllabic: *MED-'cin*.

= fester.²

157: "so why don't you find a more clever way to heal your wound".

158: "so as to prevent you from successfully beguiling or misleading both of us, which would cause us both to die through your fault."

160 **David.** Leave it to me, my dearest Bethsabe,
Whose skill is cónversant in deeper cures. –
162 And, Cusay, haste thou to my servant Joab,
Commanding him to send Urias home
164 With all the speed can possibly be used.
166 **Cusay.** Cusay will fly about the king's desire.
168

[*Exeunt.*]

= ie. David means himself here.
= hurry.

David Recalls Urias: in the Bible, David sends for Urias only after finding out that Bethsabe is pregnant with his (David's) child; his purpose in doing so is to have Urias sleep with his wife so that he will believe the child is his. This delicate factor is omitted in our play, so that David's motive in sending for the soldier would be technically unclear at this point in the play.

The Dialogue Between David and Bethsabe: in the Bible, there is no conversation between the king and his new mistress; it is all invented by Peele, which allows him to portray Bethsabe as entirely innocent in the matter, wholly unwilling to submit to David's sexual aggression.

Here are the Bible's relevant lines (2 Sam. 11:2-6):

² *And in an evening-tide, David arose out of his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's palace, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing herself, and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.*

³ *And David sent to enquire what woman she should be: and one said, Is not this Bethsabe the daughter of Eliam, and wife to Urias the Hethite:*

⁴ *And David sent messengers, and took her away: and she came in unto him, and he lay with her...and returned unto her house.*

⁵ *And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said: I am with child.*

⁶ *And David sent to Joab, saying: Send me Urias the Hethite. And Joab sent Urias to David."*

SCENE II.

*Before the Walls of the City of Rabbah,
the Capital City of Ammon.*

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene II: 2 Sam. 12:26-28.

Backstory to Scene II: when King Nahas of the neighbouring kingdom of Ammon died, David, in a gesture of friendship, sent some ambassadors to Rabbah, the Ammonite capital, to express Israel's condolences; but the new Ammonite king, Nahas' son Hanon, was convinced by his advisors that the messengers were really spies, so Hanon stripped them of their clothing ("*cut off their garments in the middle, even hard unto the buttocks of them*"; 2 Sam. 10:4), and in the ultimate act of humiliation, shaved off half their beards, before sending them packing. (2 Sam. 10:1-4).

David recognized an insult when he saw one, and he sent his army to fight the Ammonites; led by Joab, the Israelite army engaged the Ammonites in battle outside the gates of Rabbah, while the mercenary Syrian army Hanon had hired just for the occasion ran away, then returned, and then were crushed as well by the Israelites. (2 Sam. 10:5-18)

The Syrians consequently made peace with the Israelites; the following spring, the Israelites returned to Ammon and

Enter Joab, Abisai, Urias, and others,
with drum and ensign.

1 **Joab.** Courage, ye mighty men of Israel,
2 And charge your fatal instruments of war
Upon the bosoms of proud Ammon's son[s],
4 That have disguised your king's ambassadors,
Cut half their beards and half their garments off,
6 In spite of Israel and his daughters' sons!
Ye fight the holy battles of Jehovah,
8 King David's God, and ours, and Jacob's God,

10 That guides your weapons to their conquering strokes,
Orders your footsteps, and directs your thoughts
To stratagems that harbour victory:
12 He casts his sacred eyesight from on high,
And sees your foes run seeking for their deaths,
14 Laughing their labours and their hopes to scorn;

While 'twixt your bodies and their blunted swords
16 He puts on armour of his honour's proof,
And makes their weapons wound the senseless winds.

defeated the Ammonites; the Israelites then went on to besiege their capital city Rabbah. (2 Sam. 10:19, 11:1).

Entering Characters: **Joab** is the commander-in-chief of the Israelite army; since he is the son of David's sister Zerua, Joab is a nephew of David's.

Abisai is Joab's brother; he is one of Israel's greatest warriors, and leader of a group of soldiers known as the "*Mighty Soldiers*", who showed unwavering loyalty to David (the Bible refers to them also as "*The Thirty*", though they numbered 37). **Urias**, Bethsabe's husband, was a member of The Thirty. (2 Sam. 23:18-19, 38).

ensign = the soldier who carries the army's banner.

= load.¹ = death-dealing weapons.

= the men or soldiers of Ammon, the name of the nation the Israelites are fighting.

4-5: see the introductory note entitled **Backstory to Scene II** at the beginning of this scene above.

disguised = changed the appearance of, or disfigured.¹

= "in defiance of" or "in scorn of".

7: **Ye** = old plural form of **you**.

Jehovah = common Old Testament name for God.

= **Jacob** was one of a pair of twin sons of the aforementioned Isaac and Rebekah. Peele uses the expression **Jacob's God** seven times in the play (two of those times **righteous** and **jealous** appear between **Jacob's** and **God**) and **Jacob's ruler** once.

The expression is metrically clean and can be used to easily complete the ten-syllable count of a line. The phrase had been used repeatedly by Thomas Sternholde (1500-1549) in his important translation of the Psalms into English verse; the work, originally called *Versification of Certain Chapters of the Proverbs of Solomon*, was reprinted multiple times, and, in the words of the *National Biography*, "has had a larger circulation than any work in the language, except the authorised version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer."¹⁴

= who.

= manages, directs.

= contain, comprise.¹

13: "in order to avoid".

14: God laughs at the enemies' efforts and scorns their expectations (**hopes**).

Blistein notes that **to laugh one to scorn** was a common trope in the Bible; e.g. 2 Kings 19:21.

= between. = ie. the edge removed to make the enemy's swords ineffective.

= tested power, or impenetrability.¹

17: the sense is that the enemy's swords, thanks to God's

<p>18</p> <p>20</p> <p>22</p> <p>24</p> <p>26</p> <p>28</p> <p>30</p> <p>32</p> <p>34</p> <p>36</p> <p>38</p>	<p><i>Abis.</i> Before this city Rabbah we will lie, And shoot forth <u>shafts</u> as thick and dangerous As was the hail that Moses mixed with <u>fire</u>, And threw with fury round about the fields, Devouring Pharaoh's friends and Egypt's fruits.</p> <p><i>Urias.</i> First, mighty captains, <u>Joab</u> and <u>Abisai</u>,</p> <p>Let us assault, and scale this kingly tower, Where all their <u>conduits</u> and their fountains are;</p> <p>Then we may easily take the city too.</p> <p><i>Joab.</i> Well hath Urias counselled our attempts; And as he <u>spake</u> us, so assault the tower: Let Hanon now, the king of Ammon's son[s], Repulse our conquering passage if he dare.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;"><i>Enter Hanon, Machaas, and others, upon the walls.</i></p> <p><i>Hanon.</i> What would the <u>shepherd's-dogs</u> of Israel</p> <p>Snatch from the mighty issue of King Ammon,</p>	<p>intervention, will only be good for slashing at the wind. <i>senseless</i> = without possession of the physical senses, ie. unable to feel. Bullen notes the similarity between this line and one in Christopher Marlowe's <i>Tamburlaine, Part One</i> (Act III.ii): "and make your strokes to wound the senseless lure." = arrows. 21-23: allusion to the seventh Plague of Egypt, in which the Lord sent hail mixed with thunder and lightning (<i>fire</i>) against the land of the Pharaoh, destroying the crops of this agricultural nation. (Exodus 9:19-26). 25-28: Urias recommends they assault the city's water supply. <i>Joab</i> is always pronounced with two syllables (<i>JO-ab</i>), while <i>Abisai</i>, as noted earlier, has three (<i>a-BI-sai</i>). = a disyllable: <i>CON-duits</i>. 25-28: commentators have long explained that Rabbah had a fortified upper town, in which most of the population lived, and a lower town, where the stream that supplied the city with its water was located. Capturing the city's source of water puts its citizens in a particularly perilous situation. Except for the <i>Matthew Bible</i>, all the contemporary Bibles describe the water source as the <i>city of waters</i> or <i>water city</i> (2 Sam. 12:27); Peele, however, seems to have borrowed his idea of a <i>kingly tower</i> from the <i>Matthew Bible</i>, which calls the water supply "<i>the castle from whence they had their water</i>." = spoke to, ie. recommends to. Entering Characters: <i>Hanon</i> is the king of Ammon; <i>Machaas</i> is the King of Gath, a Philistine city located about 30 miles south-west of Jerusalem. Machaas appears as an ally of the Ammonite monarch. What follows is what had become one of the fabulous conventions of Elizabethan literature, in which the leaders of two armies, prior to battle, approach each other and exchange hilariously infantile insults. This mutual taunting between foes first appeared in Christopher Marlowe's <i>Tamburlaine</i> plays. The idea may have been inspired by the actual practice of English armies during times of civil war to send demands of surrender to each other before battle. = Hanon plays on the phrase <i>shepherd's dog</i>, a common expression used to refer to a sheep dog; <i>shepherd</i> is a reference to David, who as a young man worked as the shepherd of his family; to call another a <i>dog</i> was a serious insult in Elizabethan times. 38: "take from the children (ie. citizens) of the king of Ammon". At 2 Sam. 10:19, the Bibles all refer to the "<i>children of Ammon</i>": see the note in the next line.</p>
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	<p>The valiant Ammonites and <u>haughty Syrians</u>?</p> <p>40 'Tis not your <u>late successive</u> victories Can make us yield, or <u>quail</u> our courages; 42 But if ye dare <u>assay</u> to scale this tower, Our angry swords shall smite ye <u>to the ground</u>, 44 And <u>venge</u> our losses on your <u>hateful</u> lives.</p> <p>46 Joab. Hanon, thy father Nahas gave relief To holy David in his hapless exile,</p> <p>48 <u>Livèd his fixèd date</u>, and died in peace: But thou, instead of reaping his reward, 50 Hast <u>trod it under foot</u>, and scorned our king; Therefore thy days shall end with violence, 52 And to our swords thy <u>vital</u> blood shall <u>cleave</u>.</p> <p>54 Mach. <u>Hence</u>, thou that bear'st poor Israel's shepherd's- hook,</p> <p>The <u>proud lieutenant</u> of that base-born king,</p> <p>56 And keep within the compass of his <u>fold</u>;</p> <p>For, if ye seek to feed on Ammon's fruits,</p> <p>58 And stray into the Syrians' fruitful <u>meads</u>, The <u>mastives</u> of our land shall <u>worry</u> ye,</p>	<p>= proud or high-minded Syrians, the name used to collectively identify all the allies of the Ammonites;⁶ we may note that the Bible asserts that the Syrians had made peace with the Israelites prior to the siege of Rabbah, "<i>and so the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more</i>" (2 Sam. 10:19).</p> <p>= ie. "recent series of". = intimidate, dispirit.¹ = attempt, assault.¹ = ie. off of the tower. = avenge. = odious.¹</p> <p>46-47: the Bible, at 2 Sam. 11:2, states that David had sent emissaries to Hanan to express his condolences for the new king at the death of his father, King Nahas, who had "<i>shown kindness unto me</i>"; but what the nature of that kindness was is described nowhere in the Bible.</p> <p>Commentators have suggested that when David was in exile during the period when he was running from Saul's persecution, he found sanctuary in Moab, where Nahas, as the king of neighbouring Ammon, also kindly received David at the time; Nahas did this, goes the theory, as a snub to Saul and Israel, the Ammonites' longtime enemy.</p> <p>Note that Hanon, showing at least a modicum of respect, has addressed Joab as you, but Joab, showing his disdain for the Ammonite, does not reciprocate, choosing instead to address the king with the highly insulting thou; Machaas, in addressing Joab, follows the Israelite's lead.</p> <p>= "and lived to his appointed time"; the idea is that he died a natural death, rather than prematurely falling in a war.</p> <p>= "stepped all over it".</p> <p>= life-sustaining.² = adhere.</p> <p>54: Machaas, reminding Joab once again of David's humble beginnings, compares Joab to a shepherd, and thus indirectly likens the Israelites to sheep, being led to slaughter. Hence = "go away!" or "begone!"</p> <p>55: proud = arrogant. lieutenant = a military officer acting in the name of a superior.¹</p> <p>56: "and stay within the boundary of David's sheep's pen (fold)"; Machaas is highly disrespectful of the Israelite king.</p> <p>57-58: Machaas scorns the attempts of the Israelites to defeat and plunder both the Ammonites' and their the allies' lands. = meadows.</p> <p>59: mastives = ie. mastiffs, large guard dogs. worry = seize by the throat and tear to pieces; the verb to worry was commonly used to describe dogs attacking sheep.¹</p>
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60	And pull the <u>weesels</u> from your <u>greedy</u> throats.	= windpipes. = rapacious. ¹
62	Abis. Who can endure these pagans' blasphemies?	
64	Urias. My soul <u>repines</u> at this disparagement.	= complains, feels discontent. ²
66	Joab. <u>Assault</u> , ye valiant men of David's <u>host</u> , And beat these <u>railing dastards</u> from their doors.	= "attack!" = army. = abusive cowards.
68		
70	<i>[Assault, and they win the tower; and then Joab speaks above.]</i>	
72	Thus have we won the tower, which we will keep, <u>Maugre</u> the sons of Ammon and of Syria.	= "notwithstanding the power of". ¹
74		
76	<i>Enter Cusay below.</i>	
78	Cusay. Where is Lord Joab, leader of the host?	
80	Joab. Here is Lord Joab, leader of the host. Cusay, come up, for we have won the <u>hold</u> .	= stronghold or fortress. ²
82	Cusay. In happy <u>hour</u> , then, is Cusay come.	= hour is disyllabic here: <i>HOW-er</i> (we may note that the first syllable actually sounded more like <i>ho</i> at the time).
84	<i>Cusay goes up.</i>	
86	Joab. What news, then, brings Lord Cusay from the king?	
88	Cusay. His majesty commands thee <u>out of hand</u> To send him home Urias from the wars, For matter of some service he should do.	= immediately. ¹
90		
92	Urias. 'Tis for no <u>choler</u> hath <u>surprised</u> the king, I hope, Lord Cusay, 'gainst his servant's <u>truth</u> ?	92-93: "I hope that no anger has seized (<i>surprised</i>) ¹ the king which has caused him to suspect my loyalty (<i>truth</i>) to him?" choler = also known as yellow bile, one of the four humours, or fluids, which in the Middle Ages were believed to comprise the human body (the others being blood, phlegm and black bile). An excess of yellow bile was thought to cause irritability or bad temper.
94		
96	Cusay. No; rather to <u>prefer Urias' truth</u> .	= ie. promote Uriah for his loyal service.
98	Joab. Here, take him with thee, then, and go in peace; And tell my lord the king that I have fought Against the city Rabbah with success, And scalèd where the royal palace is, The <u>conduit-heads</u> and all their sweetest springs:	98-104: these lines are adopted from 2 Sam. 12:28. = reservoirs or water sources. ¹
100		
102	Then let him come in person to these walls, With all the soldiers he can bring besides, And take the city as his own exploit, Lest I <u>surprise</u> it, and the people give The glory of the conquest to my name.	102-6: Joab knows that the residents of Rabbah will soon be desperate without fresh water, and so wants David to come finish the job and capture the city proper himself, so that he may reap the glory of having done so, before the Ammonites surrender; this is an honourable offer by Joab. = seize. ¹
104		
106		
108	Cusay. We will, Lord Joab; and great Israel's God Bless in thy hands the battles of our king!	

110	Joab. Farewell, Urias; <u>haste away</u> the king.	= hurry away to.
112	Urias. As sure as Joab breathes a victor here,	
114	Urias will <u>haste him</u> and his own return.	= hurry himself; note how Urias generally refers to himself in the third person, a common manner of speaking in Elizabethan drama.
116	[<i>Exeunt Cusay and Urias.</i>]	
118	Abis. Let us descend, and <u>ope</u> the palace' gate, Taking our soldiers in to keep the hold.	= open. 119: Abisai suggests they strengthen their defenses now that they have captured the tower.
120		
122	Joab. Let us, Abisai: – and, ye sons of Judah, Be <u>valiant</u> , and maintain your victory.	= valiant is disyllabic: VAL-yant.
124	[<i>Exeunt.</i>]	
SCENE III.		
<i>The House of Amnon in Jerusalem,</i>		
<i>Enter Amnon, Jonadab, Jethray, and Amnon's Page.</i>		
1	Jonad. What means my lord, the king's belovèd son,	Entering Characters: Amnon is the oldest son of David, by his first wife Ahinoam; Jethray is Amnon's servant. Jonadab is a nephew of David, the son of his brother Shimeah, and thus a first-cousin to Amnon; Jonadab is described at 2 Sam. 13:3 as a " <i>friend</i> " of Amnon's, which implies the pair are "bosom buddies". We may note that Peele spelled Amnon's name as Ammon (the <i>Coverdale Bible's</i> spelling) throughout the play; but because this is too easy to confuse with Ammon when it refers to the land of the Ammonites, I have chosen to follow Dyce in using the more common version of the name, with an 'n'.
2	<u>That</u> wears upon his right triumphant arm The <u>power</u> of <u>Israel</u> for a royal favour,	1-8: Jonadab inquires as to why Amnon, who has at his disposal everything that can give a man joy and peace of mind, looks so unwell. 2-3: Jonadab compares the power that Amnon wields to a favour , ie. a token of affection, such as a glove or handkerchief, that a woman gives a man to wear. ¹ That = who. power = pronounced in one syllable; Israel is disyllabic.
4	That holds upon the tables of his hands Banquets of honour and all thought's content,	4-5: Jonadab then compares all the honour possessed by Amnon to a feast he may consume at his leisure.
6	To <u>suffer</u> pale and <u>grisly</u> abstinence To sit and feed upon his fainting cheeks,	6: the independent clause begun in line 1 ("What means my lord") is finally continued here, after a round of dependent clauses (lines 1.5-5). 6-8: personified abstinence is imagined to be drinking away Amnon's blood, causing his sallow appearance; abstinence also contrasts with Banquets in line 5. suffer (line 6) = allow. grisly (line 6) = grim. ²
8	And suck away the blood that cheers his looks?	
10	Amnon. Ah, Jonadab, it is my sister's looks,	10f: Amnon explains that he appears bloodless because he

	<p>is love-sick, consumed with his desire for his half-sister Thamar, the daughter of David with his third wife Maacah.</p>
<p>12 That makes me look so <u>amorously lean</u>;</p>	<p>= an interesting pairing of words: Amnon is gaunt in his love-sickness. The <i>Geneva</i> and <i>Coverdale Bibles</i> describe Amnon as <i>lean</i> at 2 Sam. 13:4; the other Bibles use the word "<i>consumed</i>".</p>
<p>14 Her beauty having seized upon my heart, 14 So <u>merely</u> consecrate to her content, 16 Sets now such guard about <u>his vital blood</u>, 16 And views the passage with such <u>piercing eyes</u>, 18 That none can <u>scape</u> to cheer my <u>pinning</u> cheeks, 18 But all is thought too little for her love.</p>	<p>13-17: difficult lines: Amnon's heart, which is completely (<i>merely</i>) dedicated to serving Thamar, keeps watch (with its <i>piercing eyes</i>) over the blood which passes through it with such diligence that none of the blood can leave the heart to flow to Amnon's cheeks to give it colour. <i>merely</i> (line 14) = the original quarto prints <i>merrily</i> here, properly corrected by all editors to <i>merely</i>. <i>his vital blood</i> (line 15) = its life-giving blood. <i>scape</i> (line 16) = escape. <i>pinning</i> (line 16)= wasted-away.²</p>
<p>20 Jonad. Then from her heart thy looks shall be relieved, And thou shalt <u>joy</u> her as thy soul desires.</p>	<p>= enjoy; Jonadab, who is described at 2 Sam. 13:3 as a "<i>very subtle</i> (ie. crafty)¹ <i>man</i>", has a plan to help his friend get his half-sister.</p>
<p>22 Amnon. How can it be, my sweet friend Jonadab, 24 Since Thamar is a virgin and my sister?</p>	<p>22-23: compare 2 Sam. 13:2: "<i>And he was so sore vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Thamar; for she was a virgin, and he thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.</i>"</p>
<p>26 Jonad. Thus it shall be: lie down upon thy bed, Feigning thee fever-sick and <u>ill-at-ease</u>;</p>	<p>27: "pretend you are sick with a fever and in discomfort;" the phrase <i>ill at ease</i> can be traced back to the 14th century.¹</p>
<p>28 And when the king shall come to visit thee, 30 <u>Desire</u> thy <u>sister</u> Thamar may be sent 30 To dress some dainties for thy malady:</p>	<p>= request that. = ie. half-sister. 30" "to prepare (<i>dress</i>) some delicious food for you in your sickness"; in 2 Sam.13:5, Jonadab's advice adds that she should be asked to prepare the food in Amnon's presence.</p>
<p>32 Then when thou hast her <u>solely</u> with thyself, Enforce some favour to thy manly love. 34 See <u>where</u> she comes: entreat her in with thee.</p>	<p>= alone. 32: Jonadab is euphemistically suggesting Amon should rape Thamar. 33: "look, here she comes; ask her to go inside with you."</p>
<p>36 <i>Enter Thamar.</i></p>	<p>Entering Character: <i>Thamar</i> is David's daughter with Maacah.</p>
<p>38 Tham. What aileth Amnon, with such sickly looks To <u>daunt the favour</u> of his lovely face?</p>	<p>= the sense is, "blemish the attractiveness".</p>
<p>40 Amnon. Sweet Thamar, <u>sick</u>, and <u>wish</u> some wholesome <u>cates</u></p>	<p>40: <i>sick</i> = ie. "I am sick". <i>wish</i> = desire. <i>cates</i> = delicacies.</p>

<p>42 Dressed with the cunning of thy dainty hands.</p> <p>44 Tham. That hath the king commanded at my hands; Then come and rest <u>thee</u>, while I <u>make thee ready</u> Some dainties <u>easeful</u> to thy <u>crazèd</u> soul.</p> <p>46</p> <p>48 Amnon. I go, sweet sister, easèd with thy sight.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[<i>Exeunt Thamar, Amnon, Jethray, and Page.</i>]</p>	<p>41: "prepared by you with your skillful and artful hands." = ie. "yourself". = "prepare for you". = soothing. = impaired by illness.¹</p> <p>Thamar's Arrival: note how the scene jumped from Amnon planning to ask David to send Thamar to him immediately to Thamar's appearance before him, she having already been instructed by David to go to the prince. This lack of continuity is too jarring to be deliberate, and the editors generally agree that there is a missing scene here.</p>
<p>50</p> <p>52 Jonad. Why should a prince, whose power may command, Obey the rebel passions of his love,</p> <p>54 When they contend but 'gainst his consciènce, And may be governed or suppressed by will? –</p> <p>Now, Amnon, <u>loose</u> those <u>loving knots of blood</u>,</p>	<p>51-54: in the first part of this soliloquy, Jonadab notes the irony of Amnon, who has the power to order anyone to do anything, allows himself to be controlled by his own lust.</p> <p>54: Jonadab suggests that Amnon should be able to keep his emotions in check; the undesirability of losing control of one's feelings was a common theme in Elizabethan drama.</p> <p>55-57: Jonadab returns to the image of Amnon's blood being stopped up, causing him to lose the colour in his countenance. <i>loose</i> = release, free. <i>loving knots of blood</i> = the clumping of Amnon's blood, caused by his love for Thamar, which hence cannot flow; Jonadab plays with the expression <i>love-knot</i>, which refers to a complex knot, either literal or figurative, which represents true love.¹</p>
<p>56 That <u>sucked</u> the courage from thy kingly heart,</p> <p>And give it passage to thy withered cheeks.</p> <p>58 Now, Thamar, ripened are the holy fruits</p> <p>That grew on plants of thy virginity; And <u>rotten</u> is thy name in Israel:</p> <p>Poor Thamar, little did thy lovely hands 62 <u>Foretell</u> an action of such violence As to contend with Amnon's lusty arms 64 <u>Sinewed</u> with vigour of his <u>kindless</u> love:</p> <p>Fair Thamar, now <u>dishonour hunts thy foot</u>,</p> <p>66 And follows thee through every <u>covert</u> shade,</p>	<p>= the original quarto prints an ambiguous <i>sokte</i> here, which could be <i>soaked</i> or <i>locked</i>, but I have adopted Dyce's reading of <i>sucked</i>.</p> <p>58f: Jonadab shows his hypocrisy here; his expressed pity for what is about to happen to Thamar seems disingenuous considering he was the one who devised the scheme to help Amnon get access to Thamar.</p> <p>60: meaning Thamar is about to lose her honour and good name throughout Israel; <i>rotten</i> contrasts with <i>ripened</i> in line 58.</p> <p>= predict.</p> <p>= strengthened. = unnatural, ie. lacking natural feeling, as one would have for one's kin.</p> <p>65: <i>dishonour</i> = ie. because she will no longer be a virgin despite her unmarried status. <i>hunts thy foot</i> = ie. it will chase her wherever she will go.</p> <p>= concealing.</p>

Discovering thy shame and nakedness,
 68 Even from the valleys of Jehosaphat
 Up to the lofty mounts of Lebanon;
 70 Where cedars, stirred with anger of the winds,
Sounding in storms the tale of thy disgrace,
 72 Tremble with fury, and with murmur shake
 Earth with their feet and with their heads the heavens,
 74 Beating the clouds into their swiftest rack,
 To bear this wonder round about the world.

76

[Exit.]

SCENE IV.

Outside the Door to Amnon's House.

Re-enter Amnon thrusting out Thamar, and Jethray.

1 **Amnon.** Hence from my bed, whose sight offends my soul
 2 As doth the parbreak of disgorgèd bears!
 4 **Tham.** Unkind, unprincely, and unmanly Amnon,
 To force, and then refuse thy sister's love,
 6 Adding unto the fright of thy offence
 The baneful torment of my published shame!
 8 O, do not this dishonour to thy love,
 Nor clog thy soul with such increasing sin!
 10 This second evil far exceeds the first.

= revealing.

68: **Even** = like most disyllabic words with a medial "v", **Even** is pronounced as a monosyllable, with the "v" essentially omitted: *E'en*.

Jehosaphat = a part of the Kidron Valley, lying on the eastern slope of Jerusalem.

69-70: the mountains of Lebanon were famous for their cedar trees.

70-71: the personified cedar trees of Lebanon spread the news of Thamar's dishonour.

= proclaiming.

74-75: the trees reveal Thamar's condition to the clouds, which will quickly scatter around the world and repeat what they have heard.

rack = moving masses of vapour (Dyce); an interesting word used by writers to specifically describe fast-moving clouds.¹

Jonadab's Pity: we may notice how unfair the world is to Thamar, who will lose her maidenhead, and thus her reputation, through no fault of her own, while Amnon does not have to worry himself about his reputation suffering in the same way.

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene IV: 2 Sam. 13:15-20.

Thamar's Violation: we may note that Peele has chosen not to depict the actual rape of Thamar (2 Sam. 13:11-14), but only its immediate aftermath, on stage.

= "get away"

2: "as does the vomit of bears"; one of the most disturbing similes in the canon; **parbreak** means "vomit", and **disgorged** means "having vomited".¹

= destructive.¹ = proclaimed or well-known.¹

4-10: since she has been robbed of her virginity, the least Amnon can do is let her remain with him, so she does not have to show her shamed self to the world; Amnon's refusal to do this, which in a sense would at least demonstrate his willingness to take responsibility for his actions, is, she says, a worse failing than his rape of Thamar itself.

Compare Thamar's brief speech at 2 Sam. 13:16: "*There is no cause: This evil that thou putteth me away, is greater than the other that thou diddest unto me.*"

12	Amnon. Jethray, come thrust this woman from my sight, And bolt the door upon her if she <u>strive</u> .	= fights or argues, ie. resists. Compare 2 Sam. 13:17: "(Amnon) called his boy that served him, and said: 'Put away this woman from me, and bolt the door after her.'"
14		
16		[Exit.]
18	Jeth. Go, madam, go; away, you must begone; My lord hath <u>done</u> with you: <u>I pray</u> , depart.	= finished. = ie. please.
20		[Shuts her out. – Exit.]
22	Tham. <u>Whither</u> , alas, ah, whither shall I <u>fly</u> , With <u>folded arms</u> and <u>all-amazèd</u> soul?	= to where. = flee. 23: folded arms = ie. her arms wrapped around herself. ¹ all-amazed = completely stunned or dumbfounded. ² = thrown out. = ie. Eve. = land, region. = fluttering, a term from falconry, used with winged .
24	<u>Cast</u> as was <u>Eva</u> from that glorious <u>soil</u> , (Where all delights sat <u>bating</u> , winged with thoughts, Ready to nestle in her naked breasts.) To bare and barren <u>vales</u> with floods made waste,	27-29: Tamar describes the land outside Eden to where she and Adam were banished. vales = valleys. = ie. lightning , pronounced as normal with two syllables. = Dyce feels sit is in error, but is stumped as to what the right word was that was intended here.
28	To desert woods, and hills with <u>lightening</u> scorched, With death, with shame, with hell, with horror <u>sit</u> ;	
30	There will I wander from my father's face; There Absalon, my brother Absalon,	
32	Sweet Absalon shall hear his sister mourn; There will I <u>lure</u> with my <u>windy</u> sighs	33: lure = recall from flight, another term from falconry; lure is disyllabic here: <i>LU-er</i> ; Dyce and others replaced the original word which appeared here, live , with lure . windy = airy, like breath. ¹ = ravens is pronounce in one syllable: <i>ra'ens</i> . = tear.
34	Night- <u>ravens</u> and owls to <u>rend</u> my bloody side, Which with a rusty weapon I will wound,	= give the birds a path. After this line, Tamar may pause, as she contemplates, but is unable to act on, her suicide wish - but she would need to be holding a dagger in her hands; alternately, she may be simply asking why she stands there talking instead of moving on; see the note below at line 46.
36	And <u>make them passage</u> to my panting heart.	
38	Why talk'st thou, wretch, and leav'st the deed undone? Rend hair and garments, as thy heart is rent With inward fury of a thousand griefs, And scatter them by these <u>unhallowed doors</u> , To <u>figure</u> Amnon's <u>resting</u> cruèlty,	= unholy doors, ie. the doors of Amnon's house. = represent or signify. = Bullen wonders if wresting , meaning twisting or tearing, is intended here. = spoil is pronounced as a one-syllable word.
40		
42	And tragic <u>spoil</u> of Thamar's chastity.	
44		<i>Enter Absalon.</i>
46	Abs. What causeth Thamar to <u>exclaim</u> so much?	Entering Character: Absalon is Thamar' brother, and David's third son. = cry out; ² we may note the example here of the stage convention of a character, while alone on-stage, describing his or her thoughts and emotions out loud to no one in particular, but which may conveniently be overheard by any who are nearby.
48	Tham. The cause that Thamar shameth to disclose.	
50	Abs. <u>Say</u> ; I thy brother will revenge that cause.	= "tell me."
52	Tham. Amnon, our father's son, hath <u>forcèd</u> me,	= raped.

54 And thrusts me from him as the scorn of Israel.
 56 **Abs.** Hath Amnon forcèd thee? by David's hand,
 And by the covenant God hath made with him,
 Amnon shall bear his violence to hell;
 58 Traitor to Heaven, traitor to David's throne,
 Traitor to Absalon and Israel!
 60 This fact hath Jacob's ruler seen from Heaven,
 And through a cloud of smoke and tower of fire,
 62 As he rides vaunting him upon the greens,
 Shall tear his chariot-wheels with violent winds,
 64 And throw his body in the bloody sea;
 At him the thunder shall discharge his bolt;
 66 And his fair spouse, with bright and fiery wings,
 Sit ever burning on his hateful bones:
 68 Myself, as swift as thunder or his spouse,
 Will hunt occasion with a secret hate,
 70 To work false Amnon an ungracious end. –
 Go in, my sister; rest thee in my house;
 72 And God in time shall take this shame from thee.
 74 **Tham.** Nor God nor time will do that good for me.
 76 [Exit.]

SCENE V.

Jerusalem.

55-56: **by David's...with him** = a double, and therefore stronger, oath; Elizabethan characters often made vows on body parts.

= "carry his violent act with him".

= (evil) deed. = ie. God.

61-64: the flood of pronouns can sometimes make an Elizabethan sentence hard to follow; here, Absalon is describing God causing Amnon to suffer a destructive crash as he drives his chariot.

62: "as Amnon, boasting (**vaunting**), rides his chariot through the greenery".

vaunting him = this is an example of the grammatical construction known as the *ethical dative*, in which the superfluous pronoun **him** adds emphasis to the clause.

= its.

66: a lovely poetical description of lightning; in fact, it is so lovely, Peele will use **his spouse** again in line 68 to describe lightning.

his = its.

= seek an opportunity.

76: Absalon remains on-stage for the next scene.

Absalon Responds to Thamar's Report of her Rape: in the Bible, Absalon actually tries to soothe Thamar, not revealing to her his seething at Amnon: "*Now yet still be my sister, he is thy brother, let not this grieve thine heart.*" (2 Sam. 13:20).

Two verses later, we learn what Absalon really feels: "*And Absalom said unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad; howbeit, Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.*" (2 Sam. 13:22).

The first part of verse 22 indicates that Absalon did not give Amnon any reason to know how he felt about him; this will be important, because Absalon will need Amnon to not have his guard up if he (Absalon) is going to exact revenge on his half-brother.

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene V: lines 1-64: 2 Sam. 13:21, 23-27; after that, 2 Sam. 11:7-15.

	<i>Enter David with his <u>train</u>.</i>	= retinue; as noted above, Absalon has remained on the stage from the end of the last scene.
1	David. My Absalon, what <u>mak'st thou</u> here alone,	= "are you doing".
2	And bears such discontentment in thy brows?	
4	Abs. Great cause hath Absalon to be displeased,	
	And in his heart to <u>shroud</u> the wounds of wrath.	= conceal.
6		
8	David. 'Gainst whom should Absalon be thus displeased?	
10	Abs. 'Gainst wicked Amnon, thy ungracious son,	
	My brother and fair Thamar's by the king,	= nature or familial relation.
	My step-brother by mother and by <u>kind</u> :	
12	He hath dishonoured David's holiness,	
	And <u>fixed</u> a <u>blot</u> of <u>lightness</u> on his throne,	= ie. affixed. = stain or taint. = wantonness or lewdness. ²
14	Forcing my sister Thamar when he feigned	
	A sickness, sprung from root of heinous lust.	
16		
18	David. Hath Amnon brought this evil on my house,	= allowed. = punish or give a blow to; ¹ note also the nice alliteration in this line.
	And <u>suffered</u> sin to <u>smite</u> his father's bones?	19-23: David addresses himself with an imperative, instructing himself to strike at Amnon.
	Smite, David, deadlier than the voice of Heaven,	
20	And let hate's fire be kindled in thy heart:	
	<u>Frame</u> in the arches of thy angry brows,	21-23: the sense is that David hopes to approach Amnon with such a fierce look upon his face as to frighten him terribly. Frame = Manly, not unreasonably, prefers Flame , given the use of fire and kindled in the previous line.
22	Making thy forehead, like a comet, shine,	22: the sense of the simile is, "so that my countenance produces such a glare".
	To force false Amnon tremble at thy looks.	
24	Sin, with his <u>sevenfold</u> crown and purple robe,	24: Personified Sin is imagined as a monarch; its sevenfold , or seven-layered, crown, alludes to the seven deadly sins which Sin rules over. Note that seven is pronounced as a single syllable: <i>se'en</i> .
	Begins his triumphs in my guilty throne;	
26	There sits he watching with his hundred eyes	26-27: the sense is that Sin sees everything; the conceit of a hundred eyes comes from a commonly-referred to Greek myth, in which a hundred-eyed monster named Argus was assigned to keep watch over Zeus' girlfriend Io, whom his jealous wife had turned into a cow; the idea was that even when Argus was sleeping, at least some of his eyes would always be open.
	Our <u>idle</u> minutes and our <u>wanton</u> thoughts;	idle = empty, wasted. wanton = lewd.
28	And with his baits, made of our frail desires,	28-29: a fishing metaphor: our innermost desires are the bait Sin uses to catch our souls (by leading us to commit sinful actions) and send them to hell.
	Gives us the hook that hailes our souls to hell:	
30	But with the spirit of my kingdom's God	30-31: now David vows, with God's help, to thrust out the usurper Sin from his throne.
	I'll thrust the flattering <u>tyran</u> from his throne,	= archaic form of the word tyrant . ¹

<p>32</p> <p>34</p> <p>36</p> <p>38</p> <p>40</p> <p>42</p> <p>44</p> <p>46</p> <p>48</p> <p>50</p> <p>52</p> <p>54</p> <p>56</p> <p>58</p> <p>60</p> <p>62</p> <p>64</p> <p>66</p> <p>68</p> <p>70</p> <p>72</p>	<p>And <u>scourge</u> his <u>bondslaves</u> from my hallowed court With <u>rods of iron</u> and thorns of sharpened steel.</p> <p>Then, Absalon, revenge not thou this sin; Leave it to me, and I will <u>chasten</u> him.</p> <p>Abs. I am content: then grant, my lord the king, Himself with all his other lords would come Up to my sheep-feast on the plain of <u>Hazor</u>.</p> <p>David. Nay, my fair son, myself with all my lords Will bring thee too much charge; yet some shall go.</p> <p>Abs. But let my lord the king himself <u>take pains</u>; The time of year is pleasant for your grace, And <u>gladsome</u> summer in her shady robes, Crownèd with roses and with <u>planted</u> flowers,</p> <p>With all <u>her</u> nymphs, shall entertain my lord, That, from the thicket of my <u>verdant</u> groves, Will sprinkle <u>honey-dews</u> about his breast, And cast sweet balm upon his kingly head: Then grant thy servant's <u>boon</u>, and go, my lord.</p> <p>David. Let it content my sweet son Absalon, That I may stay, and take my other lords.</p> <p>Abs. But shall thy best-belovèd Amnon go?</p> <p>David. What needeth it, that Amnon go with thee?</p> <p>Abs. Yet do thy son and servant so much grace.</p> <p>David. Amnon shall go, and all my other lords, Because I will give grace to Absalon.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Enter Cusay and Urias, with others.</i></p> <p>Cusay. Pleaseth my lord the king, his servant Joab Hath sent Urias from the Syrian wars.</p> <p>David. Welcome, Urias, from the Syrian wars, Welcome to David as his dearest lord.</p>	<p>= drive away.¹ = slaves, referring to the seven deadly sins, or any who have fallen under the power of Sin. = there are several references to a rod of iron in the Bible (e.g. Psalms 2:9). An iron rod is symbolic of the severity with which a sovereign must rule over, and even crush, his enemies.²⁵</p> <p>= punish. The Bible says only this on David's receiving the news of Thamar's rape: "<i>But when King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth.</i>" (2 Sam. 13:21).</p> <p>37-39: Absalon invites David with his court to attend a sheep-shearing festival on Absalon's property. = ie. Baal-Hazar, a place north-east of Jerusalem which 2 Sam. 13:23 says is near the city of Ephraim.</p> <p>42: "will be too great an expense for you; but some of my court will go." = make an effort (to attend). = pleasant.¹ = Dyce suggests the intended word here was painted, meaning "colourful", since the combination painted flower(s) was so common in the literature of the era. = ie. personified Summer's. = green with vegetation.¹ = ie. the sweet dew that appears on certain plants.¹</p> <p>= request.</p> <p>57: Absalon asks if he may invite Amnon to the festival. It is certainly strange that David is not suspicious that Absalon would want to ask the man who just raped his sister to a party; in the Bible's telling, though, this sheep-shearing took place two years after the rape of Thamar, so that by this time, neither David nor Amnon would have any reason to be leery of Absalon's motives.</p> <p>59: "Why do you want Amnon to attend the festival?" Absalon does not answer this question.</p> <p>66: the scene switches to the royal palace.²²</p>
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74 **Urias.** Thanks be to Israel's God and David's grace,
Urias finds such greeting with the king.

76

78 **David.** No other greeting shall Urias find
As long as David sways th' elected seat
And consecrated throne of Israel.

80 Tell me, Urias, of my servant Joab;
Fights he with truth the battles of our God,
82 And for the honour of the Lord's anointed?

84 **Urias.** Thy servant Joab fights the chosen wars
With truth, with honour, and with high success,
86 And, 'gainst the wicked king of Ammon's sons,
Hath, by the finger of our sovereign's God,
88 Besieged the city Rabbah, and achieved
The court of waters, where the conduits run,
90 And all the Ammonites' delightsome springs:
Therefore he wisheth David's mightiness
92 Should number out the host of Israel,
And come in person to the city Rabbah,
94 That so her conquest may be made the king's,
And Joab fight as his inferior.

96 **David.** This hath not God and Joab's prowess done
98 Without Urias' valours, I am sure,
Who, since his true conversion from a Hethite
100 To an adopted son of Israel,
Hath fought like one whose arms were lift by Heaven,
102 And whose bright sword was edged with Israel's wrath.
Go, therefore, home, Urias, take thy rest;
104 Visit thy wife and household with the joys

A victor and a favourite of the king's
106 Should exercise with honour after arms.

108 **Urias.** Thy servant's bones are yet not half so crazed,

Nor constitute on such a sickly mould,
110 That for so little service he should faint,
And seek, as cowards, refuge of his home:
112 Nor are his thoughts so sensually stirred,
To stay the arms with which the Lord would smite
114 And fill their circle with his conquered foes,
For wanton bosom of a flattering wife.

116

74-75: Urias is no doubt relieved that David is pleased to see him; see Scene II.92-93.

= governs. = the chosen seat, ie. the seat God chose David for.

= about.

= David means himself here; when David was young, God told the prophet Samuel that He had chosen David to succeed Saul as Israel's king; Samuel anointed David at 1 Sam. 16:13.

= ie. by the power of God; the expression *finger of God* appears multiple times in the Bible.
= won or reached.⁵

92: ie. should gather an army in Israel.

= subordinate.

97f: David pours the flattery on Urias.

= sharpened.

= we remember that David has called Urias home for the sole purpose of giving him an opportunity to sleep with Bethsabe, so that he will think his wife's baby-to-be is his, and not David's.

= battle.

108-115: Urias honourably refuses to go home to his wife so long as his comrades in arms remain on the field; nor is his body so broken down (*crazed*) or weak that he should seek rest for the little fighting he has done so far.

= framed or made from.

= ie. aroused with the idea of sex.

= ie. hold back.

= ie. his arms' embrace.

= "to be replaced by the sexually-charged bosom of a beguiling wife."

<p>David. Urias hath a <u>beauteous</u> <u>sober</u> wife,</p> <p>118 Yet young, and <u>framed</u> of tempting flesh and blood; 120 Then, when the king hath <u>summoned thee from arms</u>, 122 If thou unkindly shouldst refrain <u>her</u> bed, Sin might be laid upon Urias' soul, If Bethsabe by <u>frailty</u> hurt her <u>fame</u>:</p> <p>Then go, Urias, solace in her love; 124 Whom God hath <u>knit</u> to thee, tremble to <u>loose</u>.</p> <p>126 Urias. The king is much too <u>tender</u> of my ease: The <u>ark</u> and <u>Israel and Judah</u> dwell</p> <p>128 In palaces and rich pavilions; But Joab and his brother <u>in the fields</u>, 130 Suffering the wrath of <u>winter and the sun</u>:</p> <p>And shall Urias (of more shame than they) 132 <u>Banquet</u>, and loiter in <u>the work of Heaven</u>?</p> <p>As <u>sure</u> as thy soul doth live, my lord, 134 Mine ears shall never lean to such delight,</p> <p>When holy labour calls me forth to fight.</p> <p>136 David. Then be it with Urias' manly heart 138 As best his fame may shine in Israel.</p> <p>140 Urias. Thus shall Urias' heart be best content, Till thou dismiss me back to Joab's bands: 142 This ground before the king my master's doors Shall be my couch, and this unwearied arm 144 The proper pillow of a soldier's head; 146</p>	<p>117-124: some discreditable reasoning from David: if Urias does not go home to his wife when he has a chance to, Bethsabe, young, impressionable and hurt, might take her resentment out on Urias by sleeping with another man, ruining her reputation. beauteous = beautiful. sober = temperate and serious in behaviour; David is hinting especially at Bethsabe's sexual behaviour.</p> <p>= comprised of, made up of. = "called thee away from the battlefield". = ie. "from her".</p> <p>122: frailty = common word used to describe one's weakness in resisting temptation, especially a woman's weakness. fame = reputation.</p> <p>124: Urias should worry about undoing (loose = undo, as a knot) the woman God has united (knit) to him in marriage. = solicitous. 127: The ark = the Ark of the Covenant. Israel and Judah = reference to the two historically distinct but adjacent homelands of the Hebrews in the Middle East, Israel to the north. = ie. are camped outside; in = ie. are in. = the cold of winter and the heat of the sun in summer; this region, known as Amman, can reach temperatures below freezing in the winter. = "who possesses". = feast. = ie. working to defeat the enemies of God (and Israel). = sure is disyllabic here: <i>SHU-er</i>. 134: ie. Urias will not be tempted to engage in such pleasures when he hears about them.</p> <p>Urias' Speech: compare lines 126-135 to 2 Sam. 11:11: <i>"The ark, and Israel, and Judah dwell in pavilions, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord abide in the open fields, and shall I then go into mine house, to cate, and drink, and lie with my wife: By thy life, and by the life of thy soul, I will not do this thing."</i></p> <p>137-8: David does not force the issue with Urias. Here is David's response at 2 Sam. 11:12: <i>"Tarry this day also, and tomorrow I will let thee depart."</i></p> <p>140-4: Urias is satisfied to spend the night on the floor in the Palace; <i>"And so Urias abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow."</i> (2 Sam. 11:12).</p>
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[Lies down.]

148	For never will I lodge within my house, Till Joab triumph in my secret vows.	149: Bullen observes that this line makes no sense.
150	David. Then fetch some <u>flagons</u> of our purest wine,	151-6: David has a back-up plan for Urias: he will get him drunk in the hope that in his inebriated state Urias will be more amenable to go home to Bethsabe.
152	That we may welcome home our hardy friend	flagon (line 151) = a flagon is a drinking cup with a handle and a spout.
154	With full carouses to his fortunes past And to the honours of his future arms;	156: ie. David will follow with his own army to finish off the capture of Rabbah.
156	Then will I send him back to Rabbah siege, And follow with the strength of Israel.	= a servant.
158	<i>Enter <u>one</u> with flagons of wine.</i>	
160	Arise, Urias; come and pledge the king.	
162	Urias. If David think me worthy such a grace, I will be bold and pledge my lord the king.	
164		
166	[Rises.]	
168	David. Absalon and Cusay both shall drink To good Urias and his happiness.	
170	Abs. We will, my lord, to please Urias' soul.	
172	David. <u>I will begin</u> , Urias, to thyself, And all the treasure of the Ammonites,	= ie. David will make the first toast.
174	Which here I promise to <u>impart</u> to thee, And bind that promise with a full carouse.	= give.
176		
178	[Drinks.]	
180	Urias. What seemeth pleasant in my sovereign's eyes, That shall Urias do till he be dead.	
182	David. Fill him the cup. –	
184	[Urias drinks.]	
186	Follow, ye lords that love Your sovereign's health, and do as he hath done.	
188		
190	Abs. Ill may he thrive, or live in Israel, That loves not David, or denies his charge. –	189-190: an awkward sentence: "may any man who does not love David, or who refuses to accept his authority, prosper illy, or languish in Israel."
192	Urias, here is to <u>Abisai's</u> health, Lord Joab's brother and thy loving friend.	= we remember that Joab's brother Abisai is the leader of the Mighty Soldiers.
194	[Drinks.]	
196	Urias. I pledge Lord <u>Absalon</u> and Abisai's health.	= a disyllable here: <i>AB-s'lon</i> .
198	[Drinks.]	
200	Cusay. Here now, Urias, to the health of Joab, And to the pleasant journey we shall have	
202	When we return to mighty Rabbah siege.	
204	[Drinks.]	

206 **Urias.** Cusay, I pledge thee all with all my heart. –
 Give me some drink, ye servants of the king;
 208 Give me my drink.

210 [Drinks.]

212 **David.** Well done, my good Urias! drink thy fill,
 That in thy fulness David may rejoice.

214 **Urias.** I will, my lord.

216 **Abs.** Now, Lord Urias, one carouse to me.

218 **Urias.** No, sir, I'll drink to the king;
 220 Your father is a better man than you.

222 **David.** Do so, Urias; I will pledge thee straight.

224 **Urias.** I will indeed, my lord and sovereign;
 I['ll] once in my days be so bold.

226 **David.** Fill him his glass.

228 **Urias.** Fill me my glass.

230 *He gives him the glass.*

232 **David.** Quickly, I say.

234 **Urias.** Quickly, I say. – Here, my lord, by your favour
 236 now I drink to you.

238 [Drinks.]

240 **David.** I pledge thee, good Urias, presently.

242 [Drinks.]

244 **Abs.** Here, then, Urias, once again for me,
 And to the health of David's children.

246 [Drinks.]

248 **Urias.** David's children!

250 **Abs.** Ay, David's children: wilt thou pledge me, man?

252 **Urias.** Pledge me, man!

254 **Abs.** Pledge me, I say, or else thou lov'st us not.

256 **Urias.** What, do you talk? do you talk? I'll no more; I'll
 lie down here.

258 **David.** Rather, Urias, go thou home and sleep.

= can mean both (1) being full of drink, and (2) state of 'completeness or perfection.'¹

= "drink one health".

219: a short line, as is 225 below.

Generally, there is no real reason to think that short lines are necessarily corrupt, ie. printed incorrectly; however, we will occasionally point out the suggestions of some of the early editors to fill out such lines.

= immediately.

229: Urias begins to drunkenly repeat everything he hears.

231: Dyce omits this stage direction, though he does hazard to guess its meaning to be that Urias hands his glass to the person who is pouring the wine for the party.

260	Urias. O, ho, sir! would you make me break my <u>sentence</u> ?	= promise or vow. ²
262		
	[<i>Lies down.</i>]	
264	Home, sir! no, indeed, sir: I'll sleep upon mine	
266	arm, like a soldier; sleep like a man as long as I live in	
	Israel.	
268		
	David. [<i>Aside</i>]	
270	If <u>naught</u> will serve to save his wife's <u>renown</u> ,	270: ie. "if none of my schemes work to save Bethsabe's good name (renown)". naught = nothing.
	I'll send him with a letter unto Joab	
272	To put him in <u>the forefront of the wars</u> ,	= the front of the battle-lines, the most dangerous location.
	That so my purposes may take effect. –	
274	Help him in, sirs.	
276	[<i>Exeunt David and Absalon.</i>]	
278	Cusay. Come, rise, Urias; get thee in and sleep.	
280	Urias. I will not go home, sir; that's <u>flat</u> .	= certain, absolute.
282	Cusay. Then come and rest thee upon David's bed.	
284	Urias. On, afore, my lords, on, afore.	
	[<i>Exeunt.</i>]	
	 <u>CHORUS I.</u>	
		Bible Verses Described by the Chorus: 2 Sam. 11:16-17, 26-27; and 2 Sam. 12:14.
	<i>Enter Chorus.</i>	Entering Character: mimicking that of ancient Greek drama, our first Chorus comes on stage mid-play to comment on the action so far, but unlike the earlier Choruses, our Chorus also describes some developments in the plot which Peele chooses not present on stage (hence advancing the story-line). Such intra-play Choruses were not the generally the norm in Elizabethan drama; here it lends an archaic touch which is not out of place in our ancient story. Shakespeare used such intra-play Choruses in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> and <i>Henry V</i> .
1	Chor. O <u>proud revolt</u> of a <u>presumptuous</u> man,	1f: the Chorus bemoans David's behaviour. 1: something like "oh, haughty defiance (revolt) ¹ of an arrogant man"; proud and presumptuous are roughly synonymous, both meaning "arrogant", but the former can also be used to suggest "lewdness" or "being in heat", and the latter can carry the sense of "usurping".
2	Laying his bridle in the neck of sin, Ready to bear him past his grave to hell!	292-3: a neat equine metaphor, of David riding the horse of sin on the path to his own damnation.
4	Like as the <u>fatal raven</u> , that in his voice	4-5: the croak of a raven (pronounced <i>ra'en</i> , in one syllable) was considered predictive of misfortune generally, and death particularly. ¹ fatal = prophetic, fate-determining; ¹ the expression fatal

6 Carries the dreadful summons of our deaths,
Flies by the fair Arabian spiceries,

8 Her pleasant gardens and delightsome parks,
Seeming to curse them with his hoarse exclams,
10 And yet doth stoop with hungry violence
Upon a piece of hateful carrion;
So wretched man, displeas'd with those delights
12 Would yield a quickening savour to his soul,
Pursues with eager and unstanchèd thirst
14 The greedy longings of his loathsome flesh.
If holy David so shook hands with sin,
16 What shall our baser spirits glory in?

18 This kingly giving lust her rein
Pursues the sequel with a greater ill.

20 Urias in the forefront of the wars
Is murthered by the hateful heathens' sword,

22 And David joys his too dear Bethsabe.
Suppose this past, and that the child is born,

raven appears in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which was written perhaps around the same time as was *David and Bethsabe*; interestingly, Peele is believed to have possibly worked with the Bard on *Titus*.

6-14: a lengthy simile: just as a raven will ignore, and even be disgusted by, the most pleasant things nature has to offer, but will stop to eat filthy dead flesh, a man will reject behaving in a manner which will save his soul, but will eagerly pursue the sinful satisfaction of his bodily lust.

6-10: Dyce notes that in writing these lines, Peele has translated and adopted some verses from poetry written by the Frenchman Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas (1544 - 1590).

Arabian spiceries = *spiceries* refers to "spices", which were frequently connected with Arabia.

= "hoarse outcries"; in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare also writes "*The raven himself is hoarse*".

= life-giving aroma.

= unquenched.

15: a fabulous metaphor; the expression "shake the hand of sin" became proverbial in the 17th century.

15-16: "if David, God's chosen leader for Israel, can sin, what hope is there for the rest of us ordinary people?"

17-18: the king's allowing his lust freedom to act can only lead to greater woes.

the sequel = what follows next.

Dyce notes line 17 is short, and that some language has certainly dropped out; Bullen proposes adding *ruler* after *kingly*, while Manly rewrites the line as "This king, by giving lust, etc."

19-20: David had ordered Joab to place Urias in the front lines of battle, which Joab having done so, resulted in Urias' death at the hand of the Ammonites (2 Sam. 11:16-17).

Peele has interestingly chosen to spare the audience the horror of having to witness Urias' demise on stage.

murthered = *murther* was a common variation of *murder*.

= enjoys.

22-23: the Chorus explicitly - and a bit awkwardly - asks the audience to imagine we have jumped forward in time; with regard to line 22, 2 Sam. 11:6-7 describes what we are missing:

⁶ *And when the wife of Urias heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him.*

⁷ *And when the mourning was past, David sent and fet (ie. fetched) her to his house, and she became his wife (ie. he married her), and bare him a son (the baby conceived in adultery): but this thing that David did, displeas'd the*

24 Whose death the prophet solemnly doth mourn.

[Exit.]

SCENE VI.

The Royal Palace at Jerusalem.

Enter Bethsabe with her Handmaid.

1 **Beth.** Mourn, Bethsabe, bewail thy foolishness,
2 Thy sin, thy shame, the sorrow of thy soul:
Sin, shame, and sorrow swarm about thy soul;
4 And, in the gates and entrance of my heart,
Sadness, with wreathèd arms, hangs her complaint.

6 No comfort from the ten-stringed instrument,

The twinkling cymbal, or the ivory lute;

8 Nor doth the sound of David's kingly harp

10 Make glad the broken heart of Bethsabe:
Jerusalem is filled with thy complaint,
And in the streets of Sion sits thy grief.
12 The babe is sick, sick to the death, I fear,
The fruit that sprung from thee to David's house;

14 Nor may the pot of honey and of oil

Glad David or his handmaid's countenance.
16 Urias – wo is me to think hereon!
For who is it among the sons of men
18 That saith not to my soul, "The king hath sinned;
David hath done amiss, and Bethsabe
20 Laid snares of death unto Urias' life"?
My sweet Urias, fall'n into the pit
22 Art thou, and gone even to the gates of hell
For Bethsabe, that wouldst not shroud her shame.
24 O, what is it to serve the lust of kings!

Lord."

23: the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to make him see his sin, and to predict the death of the child (2 Sam. 12:1-14).

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene VI: 2 Sam. 12:15.

The Scene: Bethsabe's baby has been born; but "*the Lord strake the child that Urias' wife bare unto David, and it sickened sore...*" (2 Sam. 12:15).

= grieve. = lament.

2-3: note the extended alliteration and repetition of key words, which serve to intensify Bethsabe's emotions.

5: **wreathed arms** = folded arms, a common expression in the 17th century; **wreathed arms** appears in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour Lost*, also written in the 1590's.

complaint = lamentation.¹

6-9: even the sound of music fails to ease Bethsabe's heart.
ten-stringed instrument = ie. a lyre.

7: **twinkling** = the editors all emend the original word **twincling** to **tinkling**, but the OED cites several uses of **twinkle** to mean "tinkle" over the centuries.

lute = an early guitar.

8: David, famous for his musicianship, was especially associated with playing the harp, which in his youth he played for Saul to soothe the latter's fits after the spirit of the Lord left him.

= lamentations.

= ie. Jerusalem; see the note at line 6 of the *Prologus*.

13: ie. the baby is part of David's family.

14: the Bible describes Israel as the land of olive oil and honey; see, e.g., Deuteronomy 8:8 ("*a land wherein is oil olive and honey*") and 2 Kings 18:32 ("*a land of oil, of olive trees, and of honey*").

15: ie. "brighten the faces of either David or Bethsabe."

= **saith** is pronounced in a single syllable.

19-20: **Bethsabe...life** = ie. Bethsabe takes partial responsibility for her husband's death.

= a monosyllable: *e'en*.

= who. = conceal.

26 How lion-like th[e]y rage when we resist!
But, Bethsabe, in humbleness attend
28 The grace that God will to his handmaid send.

[*Exeunt.*]

Scene VI and Bethsabe's Lament: other than this single statement - "*And when the wife of Urias heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him*" (2 Sam. 11:26) - the Bible at no point tells the reader how Bethsabe feels, about her relationship with David, or even the sickness and loss of their first child.

Peele, however, has honourably given her a voice.

Line 9, Bersabe vs. Bethsabe: the bizarre inconsistency in the spelling of Bethsabe's name throughout the 1599 quarto demonstrates what appears to be a complete absence of proof-reading, or any quality control, in the printing process. For example, on the title page of the quarto, we find *Bethsabe*, but when the full title is reprinted above the Prologue, the name appears as *Bersabe*.

The strangest error of all occurs in the quarto's running head, ie. the top of every page in the quarto. Open the book in front of you to a random page, and you will see *David and Bethsabe* at the top of both the left and right-hand pages; turn the page once, and this time you will see *David and Bersabe* in the running head; the alternation of *Bethsabe* and *Bersabe* runs through the entire quarto; a bonus-error occurs on the 8th page of text, in which the running head on the left-hand page prints *Bersahe*, but *Bersabe* at the top of the right-hand page.

But back to Scene VI: in the opening stage direction, and at line 1, *Bethsabe* is printed; but then, from line 9 forward, through Scene VII.143, wherever *Bethsabe's* name should appear, *Bersabe* is printed instead; this occurs 8 consecutive times, before the play returns to printing *Bethsabe* again.

One last complication: *Bersabe*, it turns out, is the name of a town in southern Israel, and appears twice in the play (Scene XI.139 and 187) in the phrase from *Dan to Bersabe*.

So, in order of appearance, then, from the play's beginning to its end, we find the following:

1. *Bethsabe* printed 17 consecutive times;
2. *Bersabe* printed as the character's name 8 straight times;
3. *Bersabe* printed twice as the name of a town;
4. one *Bethsabe*;
5. one *Bersabe* for the character; and finally
6. the return to *Bethsabe* for the character's name for its remaining 6 appearances.

There are numerous such gaffes in the quarto (see, for example, the note after the last line of Chorus II, after Scene XV). In considering these, one can begin to understand the numerous textual challenges scholars must deal as they try to prepare these old plays for modern readers.

SCENE VII.

The Palace.

Enter David in his gown, walking sadly;

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene VII: 2 Sam. 12:1-24.

= a loose flowing garment, worn casually.¹

Servants attending.

1 **David.** [*Aside*]
2 The babe is sick, and sad is David's heart,
To see the guiltless bear the guilty's pain.

4 David, hang up thy harp; hang down thy head;

And dash thy ivory lute against the stones.
6 The dew, that on the hill of Hermon falls,
Rains not on Sion's tops and lofty towers;

8 The plains of Gath and Askaron rejoice,

And David's thoughts are spent in pensiveness:
10 The babe is sick, sweet babe, that Bethsabe
With woman's pain brought forth to Israel.

12 *Enter Nathan.*

14 But what saith Nathan to his lord the king?
16 **Nath.** Thus Nathan saith unto his lord the king:

18 There were two men both dwellers in one town;
The one was mighty, and exceeding rich
20 In oxen, sheep, and cattle of the field;
The other poor, having nor ox, nor calf,
22 Nor other cattle, save one little lamb
Which he had bought and nourished by the hand;

24 And it grew up, and fed with him and his,

= ie. innocent people generally, and his innocent baby specifically.

3: a good example of the figure of speech known as *antithesis*, or balanced contrast, ie. a pair of parallel phrases expressing a contrast of ideas, made even more dramatic by its dense alliteration and repetition.

4-5: Peele borrows but reverses the idea of Psalms 133:3, which describes "*the dew of Hermon: which falleth down upon the hill of Sion*"; Peele's dew **rains not** on Sion.

This is the second time in the play Peele has lifted imagery from Psalms 133: he had earlier adopted verses 2 and 3 in lines 48-49 of Bethsabe's speech which opened Scene I. It is pleasant to imagine our author's attention being captured by Psalms 133 as he borrowed verses 2 and 3 for Scene I, then later on, remembering the image of the dew and Hebron and Sion, employing the same Psalm for use in the present speech.

6: **Gath** and **Askaron** are Philistine cities; naturally the citizens of Israel's great enemy would **rejoice** at the news of David's misfortune.

Peele may have gotten the idea to connect **Gath**, **Askaron** and **rejoice** from David's lament for Saul and Jonathan in 2 Sam. 1:20: "*Tell it not in Gath, nor publish it in the streets of Askalon: lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, and lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.*"

We may note that Peele's use of an 'r' in **Askaron**, instead of an 'l' (ie. Askalon), is in error (*Askalon* is written with an 'l' in all of the Bibles); or perhaps the mistake was the play's printer's. The slip is repeated later at Scene IX.33.

= ie. the pain of childbirth.

Entering Character: Nathan is Samuel's successor as Israel's greatest prophet.⁹

= **saith**, as usual, is monosyllabic.

17f: Nathan speaks a parable (2 Sam. 12:1-4) to David, but the king, misconstruing Nathan completely, takes it as a real occurrence.

= ie. "one of them".

= neither.

= ie. "by hand", a phrase commonly used to describe the raising of an animal by a human, rather than by its own parents.¹

= ie. his family.

26 And eat and drank as he and his were wont,
And in his bosom slept, and was to live
As was his daughter or his dearest child.
28 There came a stranger to this wealthy man;
And he refused and spared to take his own,
30 Or of his store to dress or make him meat,
But took the poor man's sheep, partly, poor man's store,

32 And dressed it for this stranger in his house.
What, tell me, shall be done to him for this?
34

David. Now, as the Lord doth live, this wicked man
36 Is judged and shall become the child of death;
Fourfold to the poor man shall he restore,
38 That without mercy took his lamb away.

40 **Nath.** Thou art the man; and thou hast judged thyself.
David, thus saith the Lord thy God by me:
42 "I thee anointed king in Israel,
And saved thee from the tyranny of Saul;
44 Thy master's house I gave thee to possess;

His wives into thy bosom did I give,

46 And Judah and Jerusalem withal;

= ie. ate. = ie. accustomed to do.
= some editors change *live* to *him*.

27-28: the wealthy man did not want to kill one of his own animals to feed the stranger.
= livestock.¹ = prepare.

29: Dyce reasonably suggests this unintelligible line with its superfluous syllables has suffered "deep corruption". Manly suggests simply replacing *partly* with *the*, which easily fixes everything!

store = (1) abundance, and / or (2) all that he has.²²

22-27: Raising the Poor Man's Sheep: it is worth comparing Peele's speech to the *Bishop Bible's* description of the poor man's raising of the lamb: "*But the poor had nothing save one little sheep, which he had bought and nourished up; And it grew up with him and with his children also, and did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and slept in his bosom, and was unto him as his daughter.*" (2 Sam. 12:3).

37-38: the wealthy man will be required to give four lambs to the poor one to repay him.

Compare 2 Sam. 12:6: "*he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and has no pity.*"

Note that David does not recognize the significance of the story: he is the rich man, Urias the poor one, and Bethsabe is the lamb; Nathan immediately relieves the king of his ignorance.

= ie. Saul's kingdom.

44-45: compare 2 Sam. 12:8: "*I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom*".

This has always been a mysterious verse, as the Bible mentions only one wife of Saul, Ahinoam (1 Sam. 14:50), and also a concubine, Rizpah (2 Sam. 3:7); commentators have had various takes on this verse:

(1) David, as a king, had the right to marry his predecessor's wives;

(2) David, as a king, had a right to take possession of his Saul's harem;

(3) the verse is not meant to be taken literally: it only means David had the right to take possession of everything that was Saul's; or

(4) David had the right to dispose of Saul's women any way he wanted to, ie. "to give them to whom he pleased."^{12,13}

46: 2 Sam. 12:8: "*and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah*", meaning the Lord gave the twin regions of Israel and Judah to rule over. Peele regularly pairs **Judah** with

And might, thou know'st, if this had been too small,

48 Have given thee more:

49 Wherefore, then, hast thou gone so far astray,
50 And hast done evil, and sinned in my sight?

51 Urias thou hast killèd with the sword;
52 Yea, with the sword of the uncircumcised

Thou hast him slain: wherefore, from this day forth,

54 The sword shall never go from thee and thine;

For thou hast ta'en this Hethite's wife to thee:

56 Wherefore, behold, I will," saith Jacob's God,
57 "In thine own house stir evil up to thee;

58 Yea, I before thy face will take thy wives,
59 And give them to thy neighbour to possess:

60 This shall be done to David in the day,

That Israel openly may see thy shame."

62 **David.** Nathan, I have against the Lord, I have
63 Sinnèd; O, sinnèd grievously! and, lo,
64 From Heaven's throne doth David throw himself,
65 And groan and grovel to the gates of hell!

68 [Falls down.]

70 **Nath.** [Raising him]

71 David, stand up: thus saith the Lord by me:

72 David the king shall live, for He hath seen
73 The true repentant sorrow of thy heart;

74 But, for thou hast in this misdeed of thine
75 Stirred up the enemies of Israel

76 To triumph, and blaspheme the God of Hosts,

77 And say, he set a wicked man to reign

78 Over his lovèd people and his tribes, –
79 The child shall surely die, that erst was born,

80 His mother's sin, his kingly father's scorn.

Jerusalem instead of **Israel** (four times total in the play)
because it better fits the iambic meter.

withal = as well.

47-48: compare 2 Sam. 12:8: "*and might (if that had been
too little) have given thee so much more.*"

too small = ie. not enough.

= why.

52: ie. through the agency of the Ammonites; see the
note at the end of this scene on the use of the word
uncircumcised as a term of abuse.

= for this reason.²

54: David's family will forever know suffering in general,
and death in particular.

Compare 2 Sam. 12:10 "*Now therefore, the sword
shall never depart from thine house*".

= for this reason.

= ie. light of day.

= **Israel** here is disyllabic.

57-61: compare 2 Sam. 12:11-12:

"¹¹...*Behold, I will stir up evil against thee, even out of
thine own house, and will take thy wives before thine eyes,
and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy
wives in the light of the sun.*

¹²*For thou didest it secretly: but I will do this thing
before all Israel, and in the open sun light.*"

63-65: David's repentance here in the play is more elaborate
and heartfelt than is presented in the Bible, in which
David simply confesses, "I have sinned against the
Lord." (2 Sam. 13).

= because.

= rejoice or exult.¹

= again referring to God.

= earlier.

= disgrace.³

Nathan's Curse: compare lines 74-76 and 79 to 2 Sam.
12:14: "*Howbeit, because in doing this deed thou hast given*

the enemies of the Lord a cause to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die."

82 [Exit.]
84 **David.** How just is Jacob's God in all his works!
But must it die that David loveth so?
86 O, that the Mighty One of Israel
88 Nil change his doom, and says the babe must die!
Mourn, Israel, and weep in Sion-gates;
Wither, ye cedar-trees of Lebanon;
90 Ye sprouting almonds, with your flowering tops,
Droop, drown, and drench in Hebron's fearful streams:

82: immediately after verse 14, verse 15 begins, "*And Nathan departed unto his house.*"

= the baby.

= will not.³ = judgment, sentence.¹

= the gates of Jerusalem.

91: note the dramatic alliteration of the line.

Hebron's = Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world, had special meaning to David, who ruled from Hebron for the first seven years of his kingship.

fearful = causing fear, awe, or reverence.

92 The babe must die that was to David born,
His mother's sin, his kingly father's scorn.

92-93: David repeats the last two lines of Nathan's speech (lines 79-80).

94 [Sits sadly.]
96 Enter Cusay.

Entering Character: Cusay does not immediately go over to David, but first approaches one of the other servants, and speaks to him out of David's hearing.

98 **Ist Serv.** What tidings bringeth Cusay to the king?

= news.

100 **Cusay.** To thee, the servant of King David's court,
102 This bringeth Cusay, as the prophet spake;
The Lord hath surely stricken to the death
104 The child new-born by that Urias' wife,
That by the sons of Ammon erst was slain.

= ie. that news of the event which Nathan predicted would happen.

= ie. "who was killed a little while ago by the Ammonites", referring of course to Urias, not Bethsabe.

106 **Ist Serv.** Cusay, be still; the king is vexèd sore:
108 How shall he speed that brings this tidings first,

= severely troubled.

108: "what will happen to the one who delivers this news to David?"

speed = fare.

110 When, while the child was yet alive, we spake,
And David's heart would not be comforted?

108-110: compare 2 Sam. 12:18: "*And the seventh day the child died; and the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, behold, while the child was yet alive we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then bear himself, if we tell him that the child is dead[?]*"

112 **David.** Yea, David's heart will not be comforted!
What murmur ye, the servants of the king?
114 What tidings telleth Cusay to the king?
Say, Cusay, lives the child, or is he dead?

112: David has overheard the last line spoken by the servant.

116 **Cusay.** The child is dead, that of Urias' wife
118 David begat.

= ie. fathered.

120 **David.** Urias' wife, saist thou?

	<p>The child is dead, then ceaseth David's shame:</p>
<p>122 Fetch me to eat, and give me wine to drink; Water to wash, and oil to clear my looks;</p>	<p>121: an interesting and unforeseen development: with the baby dead, David is freed of having to be reminded of his sin every time he looked upon the child.</p> <p>122-3: compare 2 Sam. 12:20: "<i>And David arose from the earth, and washed and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: and afterward came to his own house, and bad (ie. asked) that they should set bread before him, and he did eat.</i>"</p>
<p>124 Bring down your <u>shalms</u>, your cymbals, and your pipes; Let David's harp and lute, his hand and voice, 126 Give <u>laud</u> to <u>him</u> that loveth Israel, And sing his praise that <u>shendeth David's fame</u>, 128 That put away his sin from out his sight,</p> <p>And sent his shame into the streets of Gath.</p>	<p>= a <i>shalm</i> was an oboe-like Medieval instrument.</p> <p>= praise. = ie. God. = protected or defended David's reputation.¹ 128: ie. by letting the baby die.</p> <p>129: roughly, "and removed his shame to some place far away." Gath, we remember, is a Philistine city, so David might also be alluding to the Philistines gloating over his shameful conduct.</p>
<p>130 Bring ye to me the mother of the babe, That I may wipe the tears from off her face, 132 And give her comfort with this hand of mine, And <u>deck</u> fair Bethsabe with <u>ornaments</u>,</p> <p>134 That she may bear to me another son, That may be lovèd <u>of</u> the Lord of Hosts; 136 For where <u>he</u> is, <u>of force</u> must David go, But never may he come where David is.</p>	<p>= adorn. = fancy attire, as opposed to the mourning clothes she would have been wearing.</p> <p>= by. = ie. his dead son.⁶ = necessarily.</p> <p>130-7: David Returns to Bethsabe: David wasted no time in getting himself another heir: "<i>And David comforted Bethsabe his wife, and went unto her and lay with her, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon, and the Lord loved him.</i>" (2 Sam. 12:24).</p>
<p>140 <i>They bring in water, wine, and oil. Music and a banquet; and enter Bethsabe.</i></p>	<p>= ie. a repast, food; Blistein suggests that tables would also be set up.</p>
<p>142 Fair Bethsabe, sit thou, and sigh no more: – 144 And sing and play, you servants of the king: Now sleepeth David's sorrow with the dead, 146 And Bethsabe liveth to Israel.</p>	<p>145: ie. David's sadness has departed with the now-deceased child.</p>
<p>148 [They <u>use all solemnities</u> together and sing, etc.]</p>	<p>= ie. celebrate.¹</p>
<p>150 Now arms and <u>warlike engines</u> for assault Prepare at once, <u>ye</u> men of Israel, 152 Ye men of Judah and Jerusalem, That Rabbah may be taken by the king, 154 Lest it be callèd after Joab's name, Nor David's glory shine in Sion streets.</p>	<p>= machines of war, such as catapults, etc. = old plural form of <i>you</i>.</p> <p>153-5: David is ready to go capture Rabbah himself, so he may receive the glory of the victory, before the city surrenders, a result which would give the credit for the conquest to Joab.</p>
<p>156 To Rabbah marcheth David with his men, To <u>chastise</u> Ammon and the wicked ones.</p> <p>[Exeunt.]</p>	<p>= punish.</p> <p>The Term <i>Uncircumcised</i>: twice in the play do the Israelites refer to their enemies the Ammonites as</p>

SCENE VIII.

A Field.

Enter Absalon with several others.

1 **Abs.** Set up your mules, and give them well to eat,
2 And let us meet our brothers at the feast.
Accursèd is the master of this feast,

4 Dishonour of the house of Israel,
His sister's slander, and his mother's shame:
6 Shame be his share that could such ill contrive,
To ravish Thamar, and, without a pause,
8 To drive her shamefully from out his house:
But may his wickedness find just reward!
10 Therefore doth Absalon conspire with you,
That Amnon die what time he sits to eat;
12 For in the holy temple have I sworn
Wreak of his villany in Thamar's rape.
14 And here he comes: bespeak him gently, all,

Whose death is deeply gravèd in my heart.

16

Enter Amnon, Adonia, and Jonadab.

uncircumcised, and once even the king of Ammon uses the word to describe his own people. What was the significance of this word?

Circumcision was actually common in the Middle East, but except for the Jews, who performed the surgery on infants, other cultures did so on boys as they were entering puberty; According to *Nielson's Illustrated Bible History*,⁹ "the Hebrew people took great pride in circumcision", which "fostered a spirit of exclusion" (p. 235). In time the word **uncircumcised** itself "became a charged term used by Jews to describe outsiders" as a sign of disrespect (p. 236).

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene VIII: 2 Sam. 13:27-29.

Entering Characters: **Absalon** enters the stage with a number of his servants; they are about to begin the sheep-shearing feast, mentioned way back in Scene V, and are only awaiting a number of David's sons, including Amnon, to arrive.

We should note that Amnon has for some reason become the host of the sheep-shearing event; this continuity error is inconsistent with the narrative in the Bible, in which Absalon is in fact the host.

1f: Absalon addresses his servants.

= the person who presides over or hosts a feast,¹ who appears to be Amnon now: see the opening lines of Amnon's speech below at 19f.

= ie. the ruin of Thamar's good name.

= when.

= revenge.

= ie. "speak kindly or civilly to him".

= engraved.

Compare Absalon's speech to 2 Sam. 13:28: "*Now had Absalom commanded his young men, saying: Mark when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I bid you smite Amnon: then kill him, and fear not: have not I bidden you? be bold therefore, and play the men.*"

Entering Characters: two of David's sons arrive at the feast; to recap, **Amnon**, our predator, is the king's son by Ahinoam, and David's eldest; **Adonia** is David's fourth son, by Haggith.

[*Absalon* is David's third son; his fourth son, *Chileab*, will appear in the play's final scene.]

Jonadab, one of David's nephews, is Amnon's close

18	Amnon. Our shearers are not far <u>from hence</u> , I <u>wot</u> ;	friend: it was he who gave Amnon the plan to trap Thamar in his room.
20	And Amnon to you all his <u>brethren</u>	19f: Amnon addresses Absalon. from hence = from here; technically redundant, though commonly used, phrase, as hence alone means "from here". wot = know.
	Giveth such welcome as <u>our fathers</u> <u>erst</u>	= brethren is pronounced with three syllables: <i>BRETH-er-en</i> .
22	Were <u>wont</u> in Judah and <u>Jerusalem</u> ; –	21: our fathers = Amnon and Jonadab's fathers are David and Shimeah respectively; the two parents are brothers, hence making Amnon and Jonadab first cousins. erst = previously, in earlier days.
24	But, specially, Lord Absalon, to thee, The honour of thy house and <u>progeny</u> :	22: wont = accustomed to do. Jerusalem = as usual, Peele uses Jerusalem to mean Israel when pairing it with Judah , in order to more easily fit the meter.
26	Sit down and dine with me, King David's son, Thou fair young man, whose hairs shine in mine eye Like golden <u>wires</u> of David's ivory lute.	= race or family generally, or his ancestors or descendants specifically. ^{1,4} 25: Blistein observes that the tables used for the celebration of the previous scene would be used here.
28		27: wires = here a single syllable. 26-27: Absalon was famous for his beauty, especially that of his hair; here is what 2 Sam. 14:25-26 says about that: "25 <i>But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for beauty: from the sole of his foot to the top of his head, there was no blemish in him.</i> " 26 <i>And when he polled (ie. cut)¹ his head (ie. hair) (for at every year's end he polled it, because the heere (ie. hair) was heavy on him therefore he polled it) he weighed the heere of his head at two hundred sicles (ie. shekels), after the king's weight.</i> " Blistein observes that the Bible nowhere asserts that Absalon's hair was golden .
30	Abs. Amnon, where be thy shearers and thy men, That we may pour <u>in</u> plenty of thy <u>vines</u> , And eat thy goats'-milk, and rejoice with thee?	30: Absalon is eager for Amnon to get to drinking. vines = Dyce not unreasonably emends vines to wines ; but Manly approvingly cites an earlier editor who suggested changing in to the , producing the pleasing and intelligible the plenty of thy vines .
32		
34	Amnon. Here cometh Amnon's shearers and his men: – Absalon, sit and rejoice with me.	34: Dyce, noting the irregularity in the line, suggests adding down after sit , but Bullen's suggestion of inserting Come before Absalon is preferable.
36	<i>Enter a company of Shepherds, who dance and sing.</i>	36: the musical interlude gives Amnon time to get drunk.
38	Drink, Absalon, in praise of Israel; Welcome to Amnon's fields from David's court.	
40	Abs. [<i>Stabbing Amnon</i>]	41: the original play does not indicate how Absalon kills Amnon; but since Amnon's death is instantaneous, stabbing is the logical means; the stage direction is Dyce's.

42 Die with thy draught; perish, and die accursed;
Dishonour to the honour of us all;
44 Die for the villany to Thamar done,
Unworthy thou to be King David's son!

46
48 [Exit with others.]

48 **Jonad.** O, what hath Absalon for Thamar done,
50 Murthered his brother, great King David's son!

52 **Adon.** Run, Jonadab, away, and make it known,
What cruèlty this Absalon hath shown. –
54 Amnon, thy brother Ádonia shall

Bury thy body 'mong the dead men's bones;
56 And we will make complaint to Israel
Of Amnon's death and pride of Absalon.

58 [Exeunt.]

SCENE IX.

Rabbah, Outside the City's Walls.

*Enter David, Joab, Abisai, Cusay, and others,
with drum and ensign against Rabbah.*

1 **David.** This is the town of the uncircumcised,
2 The city of the kingdom, this is it,
Rabbah, where wicked Hanon sitteth king.
4 Despoil this king, this Hanon of his crown;
Unpeople Rabbah and the streets thereof;
6 For in their blood, and slaughter of the slain,
Lieth the honour of King David's line.
8 Joab, Abisai, and the rest of you,
Fight ye this day for great Jerusalem.

10

= drink.

41-45: **The Feast and Amnon's Death:** the Bible does not report any conversation that may have occurred upon Amnon's arrival to the sheep-shearing banquet; instead, immediately after we read in 2 Sam. 13:28 of Absalon's instructions to his servants to kill Amnon, we read, in verse 29, the following:

"And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon even as Absalom had commanded: And the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled."

44-45: note that Absalon's murder-speech concludes with a rhyming couplet.

49-50: these lines contain a striking repetition of the concluding and rhyming words of lines 44-45 of Absalon's speech immediately above.

= this is the only time Adonia's name is spoken in the play; it appears to be stressed on its first syllable.

= ie. David.

= ie. Absalon's arrogant assumption of authority to commit this deed.²

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene IX: all the indicated verses are from 2 Samuel: (1) lines 1-86, 12:29-31; (2) lines 87-140, 13:30-33; (3) lines 142-218, 14:1-23; (4) lines 220-225, 14:25-26; (5) lines 227-247, 14:33; and (6) lines 249-266, 15:1-6.

Peele covers more ground now in fewer lines, as the pace of the play quickens.

Entering Characters: **David**, having raised his own army, has joined up with his commander-in-chief **Joab** at Rabbah; **Cusay**, as always, is near his king; **Abisai**, we remember, is Israel's mightiest warrior, and Joab's brother.

ensign = carrier of the army's banner, ie. standard-bearer.

= ie. the Ammonites.

4: an imperative to David's troops: **Despoil** = strip, rob.
= depopulate, ie. "kill them all".

Enter Hanon and others on the walls.

12 **Joab.** And see where Hanon shows him on the walls;
14 Why, then, do we forbear to give assault,
That Israel may, as it is promisèd,

16 Subdue the daughters of the Gentiles' tribes?
All this must be performed by David's hand.

18 **David.** Hark to me, Hanon, and remember well:
20 As sure as He doth live that kept my host,

What time our young men, by the pool of Gibeon,
22 Went forth against the strength of Isboeth,
And twelve to twelve did with their weapons play;
24 So sure art thou and thy men of war
To feel the sword of Israel this day,
26 Because thou hast defied Jacob's God,
And suffered Rabbah with the Philistine

28 To rail upon the tribe of Benjamin.

30 **Hanon.** Hark, man: as sure as Saul thy master fell,

And gored his sides upon the mountain-tops,

11: once again, we are witness to the traditional pre-battle taunting between the armies' leaders.

= himself.

14: ie. "what are we waiting for?"

= **Israel** is disyllabic here.

16: a seeming threat to rape the Ammonite women, or perhaps only to take them as concubines.

Subdue = conquer by force.

Gentiles' = the term **Gentile** was used by the Jews to describe any people who were not of their own faith.⁹

= listen.

= ie. the Lord. = "protected or watched over my army".

21-23: see the note below after line 28.

What time = at the time when.

= a disyllable: *SHU-er*.

27: permitted. = ie. with its allies.

28: **rail upon** = heap abusive language at.

tribe of Benjamin = one of the twelve historical clans of the Hebrews. Saul, but not David, was a Benjamite. Peele is likely using the term here to refer to the Jewish kingdom generally.

21-23: The Battle at Gibeon (2 Sam. 2:12-23): after Saul had been killed by the Philistines, his son Isboeth assumed the throne of Israel. David had been anointed king himself, but early on only controlled the southern region of Judah.

Isboeth's commander Abner came to the city of Gibeon, located five and a half miles north-west of Jerusalem, to meet with David's generals. The two sides agreed to provide twelve men each to meet in battle; the two dozen soldiers slaughtered each other to a man, lending the battle-site the name of "*Field of Swords*". Immediately a full-scale battle between the two sides ensued, and David's side was victorious.

It may have been perhaps insensitive of David to bring up this incident here, for it was directly after the battle at Gibeon that Azahell, the brother of Joab and Abisai, lost his life when, having chased down Abner, the latter turned and ran him through with a spear, so that "*the spear came out behind him, that he fell down in the same place, and died there.*" (2 Sam. 2:23).

30-37: Hanon reminds David of the defeat by the Philistines of the Israelites at Mount Gilboa, described in 1 Sam. 31.

31: when Saul saw that the battle was going against him, he asked his armour bearer to run him through with his sword; when the armour bearer refused to do so from fear, "*Saul took a sword, and fell upon it*". (1 Sam. 31:4).

32 And Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchisua,
 Watered the dales and deeps of Askaron
 34 With bloody streams, that from Gilboa ran
 In channels through the wilderness of Ziph,
 36 What time the sword of the uncircumcised
 Was drunken with the blood of Israel;
 38 So sure shall David perish with his men
 Under the walls of Rabbah, Hanon's town.
 40 **Joab.** Hanon, the God of Israel hath said,
 42 David the king shall wear that crown of thine
 That weighs a talent of the finest gold,
 44 And triumph in the spoil of Hanon's town,
 When Israel shall hale thy people hence,
 46 And turn them to the tile-kiln, man and child,
 And put them under harrows made of iron,
 48 And hew their bones with axes, and their limbs
 With iron swords divide and tear in twain.
 50 Hanon, this shall be done to thee and thine,
 Because thou hast defied Israel. –
 52 To arms, to arms, that Rabbah feel revenge,
 And Hanon's town become King David's spoil!

54
 56

*Alarum, excursions, assault;
 exeunt.
 Then the trumpets sound,*

32: Saul's three sons were also slain in the battle. Jonathan, the eldest son, had been a close friend of David's, even protecting him from Saul's wrath on a number of occasions.

= valleys, or river valleys.¹ = Philistine city, located 40 miles west of Jerusalem, nowhere near Mt. Gilboa and the battle site.

= ie. Mount Gilboa, about 50 miles north of Jerusalem.

= a barren desert surrounding the city of Ziph, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem, just south-east of Hebron; here David had hidden from Saul at 1 Sam. 23:14f.

= ie. at which time.

= a unit of weight;¹ Blistein points out that a Babylonian talent weighed about 65 pounds (p. 268).

= from here.

46-49: Joab describes the various ways the Jews will tortuously kill off the Ammonites.

46: burn them in *kilns* (ovens) used to bake tiles.

47: tear them to death by dragging over their bodies sledges (*harrows*) armed on the bottom with rollers or sharp spikes, machines otherwise used to thresh grains.

= two.

= ie. "thy people".

46-49: The Intended Slaughter of the Ammonite People: commentators have noted the brutal means by which David intended to exterminate his foe, but observe that these were normal practices at the time, and so the Israelites would have no reason to think God might disapprove of such barbarous tactics.¹⁵

Compare Joab's speech to 2 Sam. 30-31, in which the events Joab predicts in lines 42-50 will happen are described as actually having taken place after David captured Rabbah:

³⁰ *And he took their king's crown from off his head (which weighed a talent of gold, and in it were precious stones) and it was set on David's head, and he brought away the people of the city, in exceeding great abundance.*

³¹ *And he carried away the people that was therein, and put them under saws (ie. sawed them to death), and under iron harrows, and under axes of iron, and thrust them into the tile-kiln: thus did he with all the cities of the children of Ammon. And so David and all the people returned to Jerusalem."*

55: the battle for Rabbah begins!

58	<i>and re-enter David with Hanon's crown, Joab, etc.</i>	
60	David. Now clattering arms and wrathful storms of war Have thundered over Rabbah's <u>razèd</u> towers;	= pulled-down; the original word here is <i>raced</i> .
62	The <u>wreakful</u> ire of great Jehovah's arm, That for his people made the gates to <u>rend</u> ,	= avenging. = open.
64	And clothed the <u>cherubins</u> in fiery coats To fight against the wicked Hanon's town.	64-65: David describes God as having set the angels themselves to fight on behalf of the Israelites. cherubins = ie. the second choir in the hierarchy of angels known as <i>counsellors</i> . The prophet Ezekiel described his vision of the angels at Ezekiel 1:13-14: " <i>And the fashion of the beasts, their appearance was like coals of fire, burning like the appearance of cressets (ie. torches), it ran among the beasts, and the fire gave a glister, and out of the fire there went lightning.</i> "
66	Pay thanks, ye men of Judah, to the King, The God of Sion and Jerusalem,	
68	That hath <u>exalted</u> Israel to this, And crownèd David with this diadem.	= raised. ²
70		
72	Joab. Beauteous and bright is he among the tribes; As when the sun, attired in <u>glistering</u> robe, Comes dancing from <u>his oriental gate</u> ,	1f: Joab praises David, comparing him to the sun. = ie. brilliantly shining. = ie. the east.
74	And bridegroom-like hurls through the gloomy air His radiant beams, <u>such doth King David show</u> ,	= ie. this is what King David is like.
76	Crowned with the honour of his enemies' town, Shining in riches like the <u>firmament</u> ,	= sky.
78	The starry vault that overhangs the earth: So looketh David King of Israel.	71-75: Beauteous...beams = Dyce notes Peele has borrowed and adopted some lines from the epic poem, <i>The Fairie Queene</i> , by Edmund Spenser (spelling modernized): <i>At last, the golden oriental gate Of greatest heaven gan to open fair; And Phoebus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate, Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair; And hurled his glistering beams through gloomy air.</i>
80		
82	Abis. Joab, why doth not David mount his throne Whom <u>Heaven</u> hath beautified with Hanon's crown? Sound trumpets, <u>shalms</u> , and instruments of praise, To Jacob's God for David's victory.	= Heaven is a mono-syllable. = a shalm was an oboe-like Medieval instrument.
84		
86		
88	[<i>Trumpets, etc.</i>] <i>Enter Jonadab.</i>	Entering Character: David's nephew Jonadab arrives to report to David the slaughter at Absalon's sheep-shearing. Peele has temporally merged the conquest of Rabbah with Amnon's murder to increase the drama and the pace of his play, but in the Bible, Amnon's rape of Tamar took place after David had taken Rabbah and returned home, and the murder of Amnon occurred two years after that.
90	Jonad. Why doth the King of Israel rejoice? Why sitteth David crowned with Rabbah's rule?	
92	Behold, there hath great <u>heaviness</u> befall'n In Amnon's fields by Absalon's <u>misdeed</u> ;	= sorrow. = crime.
94	And Amnon's shearers and their feast of mirth Absalon hath o'returnèd with his sword;	
96	Nor liveth any of King David's sons	

To bring this bitter tidings to the king.

98

David. Ay me, how soon are David's triumphs dashed,

100 How suddenly declineth David's pride!

As doth the daylight settle in the west,

102 So dim is David's glory and his gite.

Die, David; for to thee is left no seed

104 That may revive thy name in Israel.

106 **Jonad.** In Israel is left of David's seed. –

Comfort your lord, you servants of the king. –

108 Behold, thy sons return in mourning weeds,

And only Amnon Absalom hath slain.

110

Enter Adonia with other Sons of David.

112

David. Welcome, my sons; dearer to me you are

114 Than is this golden crown or Hanon's spoil.

O, tell me, then, tell me, my sons, I say,

116 How cometh it to pass that Absalom

Hath slain his brother Amnon with the sword?

118

Adon. Thy sons, O king, went up to Amnon's fields,

120 To feast with him and eat his bread and oil;

And Absalom upon his mule doth come,

122 And to his men he saith, "When Amnon's heart

Is merry and secure, then strike him dead,

124 Because he forcèd Thamar shamefully,

And hated her, and threw her forth his doors."

126 And this did he; and they with him conspire,

And kill thy son in wreak of Thamar's wrong.

128

David. How long shall Judah and Jerusalem

130 Complain, and water Sion with their tears!

How long shall Israel lament in vain,

132 And not a man among the mighty ones

Will hear the sorrows of King David's heart!

134 Amnon, thy life was pleasing to thy lord,

As to mine ears the music of my lute,

136 Or songs that David tuneth to his harp;

And Absalom hath ta'en from me away

138 The gladness of my sad distressèd soul.

140

[Exeunt Joab and some others.]

= news; according to 2 Sam. 13:30, an unnamed person first reported to David that all of his sons had been slain (as if it were an unconfirmed but widely believed rumour), while Jonadab, in fact, is the one who corrects David's misconception, telling him, "*Amnon only is dead: for that hath been determined in Absalom's mind, since he forced his sister Thamar.*" (3 Sam. 13:32).

99-103: one of the most dramatic examples of alliteration in all of Elizabethan drama: David fills his speech with words that begin with 'd' over four and a half consecutive lines!

= subside.¹

= magnificence, splendour.¹

= children.

= the sense seems to be "keep your name alive".

107: Jonadab instructs David's servants.

108-9: with the arrival of all of David's sons (excepting Amnon, of course), Jonadab rather awkwardly must correct his previous report.

Entering Characters: *Adonia*, we remember, is David's fifth son; he was present at the sheep-shearing when Amnon was slain.

= unguarded.²

= out of.

= ie. conspired.

= ie. killed. = revenge.

= wail.²

140: the original stage direction here is "*Exeunt omnes. Manet David*" (exit all; David stays); but based on David's speech at line 243f below, clearly not everyone has left the

stage.³

Absalon Flees: Peele skips over even mentioning the events of 2 Sam. 37-38, in which Absalon, after killing his half-brother, flees Israel, remaining with his grandfather Talmai, the king of Geshur, for three years. King David misses Absalon, but makes no move to recall him from his exile.

Geshur was a small kingdom tucked between Aram and Israel. David's wife Maacah, with whom he begot Absalon, was the daughter of Geshur's king.

It is possible, of course, that such a scene existed but was accidentally omitted from the quarto.

Entering Character: the *Bishop's Bible* describes our newest character as a "wise woman" (2 Sam. 14:2) from Thecoa, a town located about ten miles south of Jerusalem⁹ (we note that Peele adopts the spelling of the name of the city from the *Coverdale Bible*, which describes the visitor as a "prudent woman").

The woman is wearing mourning clothes.

The original edition identifies the Woman as *Widow* of Thecoa, but as Dyce points out, she is only pretending to be a widow.

144: Dyce adds the stage direction, but as Blistein observes, David's command at 148, "rise from the earth", suggests she may completely prostrate herself

= Jerusalem.

= deeply, severely.

= "thy servant", meaning herself.

= ie. has happened.

= ie. "and no one interceded in their quarrel".

= strike.

163-6: all of the Woman's relatives are demanding she turn over the surviving son for execution.

164: Dyce notes the loss of a word or two from this line.

167-9: the Woman observes that if her remaining son is slain, she will have no descendants left to follow her.

163-9: compare 2 Sam. 14:7: "*And behold, the whole kindred is risen against thy handmaid, and they said: Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him for the soul of his brother whom he slew, we will destroy the heir also: And so they shall quench my sparkle which is left,*

142 *Enter Woman of Thecoa.*

144 **Woman.** [*Kneeling*]

God save King David, King of Israel,
146 And bless the gates of Sion for his sake!

148 **David.** Woman, why mournest thou? rise from the earth;
Tell me what sorrow hath befall'n thy soul.

150 **Woman.** [*Rising*]

152 Thy servant's soul, O king, is troubled sore,
And grievous is the anguish of her heart;
154 And from Thecoa doth thy handmaid come.

156 **David.** Tell me, and say, thou Woman of Thecoa,
What aileth thee or what is come to pass.

158 **Woman.** Thy servant is a widow in Thecoa.
160 Two sons thy handmaid had; and they, my lord,
Fought in the field, where no man went betwixt,
162 And so the one did smite and slay the other.
And, lo, behold, the kindred doth arise,

164 And cry on him that smote his brother,
That he therefore may be the child of death;
166 "For we will follow and destroy the heir."
So will they quench that sparkle that is left,
168 And leave nor name nor issue on the earth
To me or to thy handmaid's husband dead.

170

172 **David.** Woman, return; go home unto thy house:
I will take order that thy son be safe.
If any man say otherwise than well,
174 Bring him to me, and I shall chastise him;
For, as the Lord doth live, shall not a hair
176 Shed from thy son or fall upon the earth.
Woman, to God alone belongs revenge:
178 Shall, then, the kindred slay him for his sin?
180 **Woman.** Well hath King David to his handmaid spoke:

182 But wherefore, then, hast thou determinèd
So hard a part against the righteous tribes,

To follow and pursue the banishèd,

184 Whenas to God alone belongs revenge?
Assuredly thou saist against thyself:
186 Therefore call home again the banishèd;
Call home the banishèd, that he may live,
188 And raise to thee some fruit in Israel.

190 **David.** Thou woman of Thecoa, answer me,
Answer me one thing I shall ask of thee:
192 Is not the hand of Joab in this work?
Tell me, is not his finger in this fact?

194
Woman. It is, my lord; his hand is in this work:
196 Assure thee, Joab, captain of thy host,
Hath put these words into thy handmaid's mouth;
198 And thou art as an angel from on high,
To understand the meaning of my heart:
200 Lo, where he cometh to his lord the king.

202 *Re-enter Joab.*

and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor issue upon the earth."

= issue a command.

= punish or censure.

= fall.

177: Deut. 32:35, e.g.: "*Vengeance is mine*".

= relatives.

180f: like Nathan before her, the Woman has told an imaginary story with a lesson - a parable - to trick David into recognizing a wrong he is committing.

= why. = judged.

= harshly.

183-5: if David is willing to protect the woman's surviving son against her blood-thirsty relatives, why doesn't he offer the same protection to his own son Absalon (who also seems to be the victim of familial persecution)?

= when.

= ie. "hast judged".

= "he who is banished", ie. Absalon.

189: ie. "and give you descendants."

The Problem of the Woman's Parable (2 Sam. 14:1-17):

in the Bible, the Woman chides David only for leaving Absalon to languish in exile, which is not quite the same as banishing him and permitting members of their family to persecute him; Peele has made the woman's lesson more effective by suggesting David is doing the latter.

= action.¹

= deed.

190-3: David recognizes Joab is behind the appearance of the Woman from Thecoa: "*Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this matter?*" (2 Sam. 14:19).

Joab's Recruitment of the Woman of Thecoa: the Bible tells us in the first verse of 2 Sam. 14, before the Woman appears before David, that Joab, knowing that David missed Absalon, hired this woman to come to David and tell him her imaginary story.

This event actually occurs three years after Absalon murdered Amnon, which is how long it took before Joab had judged the time right to pull this deception on the king.

204 **David.** Say, Joab, didst thou send this woman in
To put this parable for Absalon?

206

208 **Joab.** Joab, my lord, did bid this woman speak,
And she hath said; and thou hast understood.

210 **David.** I have, and am content to do the thing.
Go fetch my son, that he may live with me.

212

214 **Joab.** [*Kneeling*]
Now God be blessèd for King David's life!
Thy servant Joab hath found grace with thee,
216 In that thou sparest Absalon thy child.

218 [Rises.]

220 A beautiful and fair young man is he,
In all his body is no blemish seen;
222 His hair is like the wire of David's harp,

That twines about his bright and ivory neck;
224 In Israel is not such a goodly man;
And here I bring him to entreat for grace.

226

228 *Joab brings in Absalon.*

David. Hast thou slain [Amnon] in the fields of Hazor –

230 Ah, Absalon, my son I ah, my son, Absalon!
But wherefore do I vex thy spirit so?
232 Live, and return from Gesur to thy house;
Return from Gesur to Jerusalem:
234 What boots it to be bitter to thy soul?
Amnon is dead, and Absalon survives.

236

238 **Abs.** Father, I have offended Israel,
I have offended David and his house;
For Thamar's wrong hath Absalon misdone:
240 But David's heart is free from sharp revenge,
And Joab hath got grace for Absalon.

242

244 **David.** Depart with me, you men of Israel,
You that have followed Rabbah with the sword,
And ransack Amnon's richest treasures. –
246 Live, Absalon, my son, live once in peace:
Peace [be] with thee, and with Jerusalem!

248

[*Exeunt all except Absalon.*]

= ask.

= interestingly, this is the first time in the play Joab addressed David in the second person; till now, he has always referred to David, even as he was addressing him, in the third person.

222-3: compare to line 10 of the Prologue, which refers to the "golden wires of his (David's) ravishing harp".

= white.

229: David, surprised at his son's sudden appearance, begins to reprimand Absalon for killing Amnon, but then, overcome with joy at seeing his son again, cuts off his reproach.

Amnon's name is added after *slain* by some editors to repair the short line.

= why. = torment.

= "use is it".

239: **For** = ie. "in return for" or "on account of".

misdone = acted badly or wrongly.¹

The Return of Absalon: in the Bible, Absalon was not waiting in the wings with Joab, as Peele portrays in this scene; once David was persuaded to recall Absalon from exile, Joab had to travel to retrieve him from Geshur.

Nor did Absalon get to see David right away after his

250

252 **Abs.** David is gone, and Absalon remains,
Flowering in pleasant spring-time of his youth:
 Why liveth Absalon and is not honoured

254 Of tribes and elders and the mightiest ones,
 That round about his temples he may wear
 256 Garlands and wreaths set on with reverence;
 That every one that hath a cause to plead
 258 Might come to Absalon and call for right?
 Then in the gates of Sion would I sit,
 260 And publish laws in great Jerusalem;
 And not a man should live in all the land
 262 But Absalon would do him reason's due:
 Therefore I shall address me, as I may,

264 To love the men and tribes of Israel.

266

SCENE X.

The Mount of Olives.

return, for even then, David refused to see his boy, nor even let him live in the Palace (Absalon, to his shame, had to live in his own home). Reconciliation with his father would have to wait.

Time passed; to indicate the passing of the years, the Bible digresses into a description of Absalon's beauty generally and his hair specifically (2 Sam. 14:25-27, which Peele incorporated into Joab's speech at lines 220-4 above), as well as a description of his wife and children.

Absalon had to wait two more humiliating years to meet his father. In a rather strange episode, Absalon repeatedly sent for Joab to ask him to speak to David about a reconciliation, but when Joab refused to come, Absalon had his servants set fire to Joab's fields, which got Joab's attention.

Joab went to David on Absalon's behalf, and the king finally agreed to meet his son; when Absalon appeared before David, he "*fell to the ground on his face before him, and the king kissed Absalon.*" (2 Sam. 14:33).

= blooming.

253-4: "why do I bother staying alive if I am not honoured by the greatest men in the land?"

= by.

= due respect.¹

257-8: Absalon longs for the power of a judge (2 Sam. 15:4).

= proclaim or promulgate.¹

263-4: Absalon will set about to gain the loyalty of the people of Israel.

[Exit.] **The Seeds of Absalon's Revolt:** Absalon begins the process of gaining power by setting himself up at the city gate and settling disputes for people who had come to Jerusalem to present their cases before David. Absalon particularly looks for opportunities to speak on behalf of those litigants who are members of the northern tribes, in order to build a power-base with the people of the northern part of the kingdom (2 Sam. 15:2-6).¹⁶

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene X: 2 Sam. 15:17-37.

The Setting: *the Mount of Olives* is a ridge of mountains east of Jerusalem; its name suggests it was once densely covered with olive trees.⁹

Absalon Openly Rebels: four more years have passed since Absalon and David reconciled. At 2 Sam 15:7-9, we learn that Absalon asked his father for permission to travel to Hebron to worship in order to keep a vow he had made in

*Enter David, Ithay, Sadoc, Ahimaas,
Jonathan, and others; David barefoot,
with some loose covering over his head;
and all mourning.*

1 **David.** Proud lust, the bloodiest traitor to our souls,

2 Whose greedy throat nor earth, air, sea, or Heaven,
Can glut or satisfy with any store,

4 Thou art the cause these torments suck my blood,
Piercing with venom of thy poisoned eyes
6 The strength and marrow of my tainted bones.
To punish Pharaoh and his cursèd host,

8 The waters shrunk at great Adonai's voice

10 And sandy bottom of the sea appeared,
Offering his service at his servant's feet;
And, to inflict a plague on David's sin,

12 He makes his bowels traitors to his breast,

the years when he was exile in Geshur. With David's assent, Absalon left Jerusalem, and immediately began to call for supporters for a rebellion against the king.

On hearing that the Israelites were joining Absalon's cause, his son's power rising steadily, David fled Jerusalem. At 2 Sam. 30f, David and his supporters reached the Mount of Olives, where he "*wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot.*" (2 Sam. 30).

David is accompanied by his family, all his officials, and his royal bodyguards (referred to in the *Bishop's Bible* as the *Phelthites* and *Gethites*).

Entering Characters: *David*, having fled Jerusalem, is accompanied by his supporters (2 Sam. 15:16). He has left behind ten concubines to keep watch over the Palace. David is barefoot, a typical sign of mourning.

Ithay is the commander of 600 soldiers from Gath; as David was leaving the capital city, he was surprised to see this body of soldiers following him; the king suggested to Ithay that, as a foreigner, he had no reason to stick by David, and that he and his men would be better served to remain in Jerusalem. Ithay, however, pledged his loyalty to David, who accepted his service (Peele places this conversation at line 80f of the present scene).

Sadoc was a priest who had, with the help of the Levites, carried along with him the Ark of the Covenant. The Bible mentions another of David's supporters who stayed with the king, a second priest named *Abiathar*.

Finally, Sadoc's son *Ahimaas* and Abiathar's son *Jonathan* have also chosen to remain with their king.

1-3: in this extended metaphor, David compares *lust* to an insatiable diner; *lust* probably refers to hunger for power, in which case the metaphor applies to Absalon, but it can also refer to sexual desire, in which case the metaphor applies to himself.

= neither. = nor.

= the sense is "no matter how much power (or how many women) the universe can provide him with".

store = abundance.¹

7-10: David describes the parting of the Red Sea (or the Sea of Reeds) for the Jews fleeing Egypt.

host = army.

8: *shrunk* = pulled back, ie. parted. The original quarto has *shrinke* here.

Adonai's = a Hebrew name for God, *Adonai* is the plural of *Adon*, which means "lord"; *Adonai* can be thought of as "an emphatic plural" or "plural of majesty".¹⁷

= God's. = ie. Moses'.

11: David believes he is still being punished for his own misdeeds.

12-13: David describes the physical manifestations of his suffering.

	Winding about his heart with <u>mortal gripes</u> . –	= deadly clutches.
14	Ah, Absalon, the wrath of Heaven inflames	14-17: David sees the hand of both God and Satan at work in setting Absalon on his ambitious path, again with an eye towards punishing David (hence the wrath of Heaven).
	Thy scorchèd bosom with <u>ambitious heat</u> ,	= ie. heat of ambition (Manly).
16	And Satan sets thee on a <u>lustly tower</u> ,	16-18: a complex metaphor: literally, in leading the willing Absalon to the top of the tower in order to throw him down to his death, Satan has metaphorically led Absalon to dangerous heights of ambition which he (Satan) will use as a means to destroy him.
18	Showing thy thoughts the pride of Israel, Of choice to cast thee on her ruthless stones! –	16-17: Blistein observes that these lines parallel Matthew 4:8 and Luke 4:5 (" <i>And the devil took him into an high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time</i> "). lustly tower (line 16) = ie. tower of lust. ²² thy (line 17) = "to thy".
	Weep with me, then, ye sons of Israel; Lie down with David, and with David mourn Before the Holy One that sees our hearts;	
22	[Lies down, and all the rest after him.]	
24	<u>Season</u> this <u>heavy</u> soil with showers of tears,	= infuse. = sorrowful.
26	And fill the face of every flower with <u>dew</u> ;	= ie. teardrops; note the fine alliteration in this line.
28	Weep, Israel, for David's soul <u>dissolves</u> ,	= common term for "melts into tears".
	<u>Lading</u> the fountains of his drownèd eyes,	= draining. ²
30	And pours <u>her substance</u> on the <u>senseless</u> earth.	29: her substance = ie. the liquid material into which his soul has dissolved. senseless = ie. without ability to physically feel.
32	Sadoc. Weep, Israel; O, weep for David's soul, Strewing the ground with hair and <u>garments torn</u> ,	= the tearing of garments was another expression of mourning. ⁹
34	For tragic witness of your <u>hearty woes</u> !	= ie. woes to which Israel gives unrestrained expression to. ¹
36	Ahim. O, <u>would</u> our eyes were <u>conduits</u> to our hearts, And that our hearts were seas of liquid blood, To pour in streams upon this holy mount, For witness we would die <u>for David's woes</u> !	= if only. = channels. = "in order to relieve David of his suffering."
40	Jon. Then <u>should</u> this Mount of Olives <u>seem</u> a plain Drowned with a sea, that with our sighs should roar, And, in the murmur of <u>his</u> mounting waves, Report our bleeding sorrows to the heavens, For witness we would die for David's woes.	= would. = look like. = its.
46	Ith. Earth cannot weep enough for David's woes: Then weep, you heavens, and, all you clouds, <u>dissolve</u> ,	= break up. ²
48	That piteous stars may see our miseries, And drop their golden tears upon the ground, For witness how they weep for David's woes.	44, 50: note how both Ithay here and Jonadab immediately above have concluded their laments by repeating the last line of Amihaas' speech (line 38).
52	Sadoc. Now let my sovereign raise his <u>prostrate bones</u> ,	= ie. body which is lying on the ground.

54 And mourn not as a faithless man would do;
 55 But be assured that Jacob's righteous God,
 56 That promised never to forsake your throne,
 57 Will still be just and pure in his vows.

58 **David.** Sadoc, high-priest, preserver of the ark,

Whose sacred virtue keeps the chosen crown,
 60 I know my God is spotless in his vows,
 61 And that these hairs shall greet my grave in peace:
 62 But that my son should wrong his tendered soul,
 63 And fight against his father's happiness,
 64 Turns all my hopes into despair of him,
 65 And that despair feeds all my veins with grief.

66

Ith. Think of it, David, as a fatal plague

68 Which grief preserveth, but preventeth not;
 69 And turn thy drooping eyes upon the troops
 70 That, of affection to thy worthiness,
 71 Do swarm about the person of the king:
 72 Cherish their valours and their zealous loves
 73 With pleasant looks and sweet encouragements.

74

David. Methinks the voice of Ithay fills mine ears.

76

Ith. Let not the voice of Ithay loathe thine ears,
 78 Whose heart would balm thy bosom with his tears.

80

David. But wherefore go'st thou to the wars with us?

Thou art a stranger here in Israel,

82 And son to Achis, mighty King of Gath;

Therefore return, and with thy father stay:
 84 Thou cam'st but yesterday; and should I now
 85 Let thee partake these troubles here with us?
 86 Keep both thyself and all thy soldiers safe:
 87 Let me abide the hazards of these arms,
 88 And God requite the friendship thou hast showed.

90

Ith. As sure as Israel's God gives David life,
 91 What place or peril shall contain the king,
 92 The same will Ithay share in life and death.

94

David. Then, gentle Ithay, be thou still with us,

= unconditional;¹ **pure** is disyllabic: *PU-er*.

58-65: David rises as he recites this speech; Blistein suggests the others should also rise, and surround and offer comfort to David as they do so (see line 71 below).

60: ie. God never reneges on his promises.

61: David expects not to die in battle.

= do injury to his own young soul.
tendered = immature or loved.^{1,5}

65: a common trope of the bloodstream as the conveyor or carrier of emotion.

67-68: Ithay recommends David recognize that his troubles, like a visitation of a plague, cannot be helped by grieving.

69-73: instead, Ithay continues, David should take solace in the knowledge of, and show gratitude for, the support he enjoys of so many soldiers (Ithay probably has his own men in mind).

= ie. be hateful to.

78: ie. Ithay would gladly soothe David's bosom with the tears of his own heart if he were able to do so.

80: David finally gets around to asking Ithay why (**wherefore**) he and his soldiers, who are all foreigners (from the Philistine city of Gath), are remaining loyal to him.
 = foreigners.

82: when the younger David was hiding from Saul all those years ago, he had been welcomed and given refuge by Ithay's father Achis, the king of Gath, who always treated him kindly; David stayed with Achis for over a year (1 Sam. 27).

= ie. risk.

= repay.

90: **sure** is monosyllabic, **Israel's** disyllabic.

91: "wherever David is, or wherever he faces danger".

90-92: compare 2 Sam. 15:21: "*As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.*"

	A joy to David, and a grace to Israel. –	= Blistein observes that David's morale begins to improve here.
96	Go, Sadoc, now, and bear the ark of God Into the great Jerusalem again:	96-97: in the Bible, David actually sent the priests Sadoc and Abiathar and their sons back to Jerusalem with the Ark before David climbed the Mount of Olives.
98	If I find favour in his gracious eyes, Then will he lay his hand upon my heart	
100	Yet once again before I visit death; Giving it strength, and virtue to mine eyes,	
102	To taste the comforts and behold the form Of his fair ark and holy <u>tabernacle</u> :	103: the tent which served as the place of worship for the Israelites, before Solomon's Temple was constructed. ⁹ = accustomed. = ie. worn out.
104	But, if he say, "My <u>wonted</u> love is <u>worn</u> , And I have no delight in David now,"	= remain.
106	Here <u>lie</u> I armèd with an humble heart T' embrace the <u>pains</u> <u>that anger</u> shall impose,	107: <u>pains</u> = ie. punishment. <u>that anger</u> = ie. God's wrath.
108	And kiss the sword my lord shall kill me with.	98-108: compare David's speech at 2 Sam. 15:25-26: "25 ... Carry the Ark of God again into the city: If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and the tabernacle thereof. 26 But if he say, 'I have no lust unto thee': behold, here am I, let him do with me what seemeth good in his eyes."
	Then, Sadoc, take <u>Ahimaäs</u> thy son, With Jonathan son to <u>Abiathar</u> ;	= <u>Ahimaas</u> has four syllables: <i>ah-HI-ma-as</i> .
110		110: Abiathar, as noted earlier, is a second priest who has accompanied David on his escape from Jerusalem. <u>Abiathar</u> is stressed on its second syllable: <i>a-BI-a-thar</i> . = remain and rest; the Bishop's Bible says "tarry".
	And in these fields will I <u>repose myself</u> , Till they return from you some certain news.	
114	Sadoc. Thy servants will with joy obey the king, And hope to cheer his heart with happy news.	
116		
118	[<i>Exeunt Sadoc, Ahimaas, and Jonathan.</i>]	117: 2 Sam. 15:29: " <i>Sadoc therefore and Abiathar carried the Ark of God again to Jerusalem, and they tarried there.</i> "
	Itth. Now that it be no grief unto the king, Let me for good inform his majesty, That, with <u>unkind</u> and <u>graceless</u> Absalon,	121: <u>unkind</u> = a word used to describe one who possesses unnaturally hostile feelings towards one's own kin. <u>graceless</u> = wicked. ⁶
122	Achitophel your ancient counsellor Directs the state of this rebellion.	122-3: <u>Achitophel</u> had been one of David's counselor's, but he is now supporting Absalon in his revolt, and serves as the latter's senior advisor. The stress in <u>Achitophel</u> falls on the second syllable: <i>a-CHI-to-phel</i> .
124		125-131: David prays to God to cause Achitophel's expectedly good advice to Absalon to appear foolish. Bullen added the stage direction in the next line that David should kneel as he prays; Cusay will ask him to rise at line 159 below.
	David. Then doth it aim with danger at my crown. –	
126	[<u>Kneeling</u>] O thou, that hold'st <u>his raging bloody bound</u>	126-8: editors have found line 126 to be unintelligible, if not corrupt. The general sense of the three lines is to describe

128 Within the circle of the silver moon,
That girds earth's centre with his watery scarf,

130 Limit the counsel of Achitophel,
No bounds extending to my soul's distress,
But turn his wisdom into foolishness!

132
134 *Enter Cusay with his coat turned and head covered.*

136 **Cusay.** Happiness and honour to my lord the king!

138 **David.** What happiness or honour may betide
His state that toils in my extremities?

140 **Cusay.** O, let my gracious sovereign cease these griefs,
Unless he wish his servant Cusay's death,
142 Whose life depends upon my lord's relief!
Then let my presence with my sighs perfume
144 The pleasant closet of my sovereign's soul.

146 **David.** No, Cusay, no; thy presence unto me
Will be a burden, since I tender thee,
148 And cannot break thy sighs for David's sake:

But if thou turn to fair Jerusalem,
150 And say to Absalon, as thou hast been
A trusty friend unto his father's seat,
152 So thou wilt be to him, and call him king,
Achitophel's counsel may be brought to naught.
154 Then having Sadoc and Abiathar,
All three may learn the secrets of my son,
156 Sending the message by Ahimaäs,
And friendly Jonathan, who both are there.

158 **Cusay.** Then rise, referring the success to Heaven.

160 **David.** Cusay, I rise; though with unwieldy bones
162 I carry arms against my Absalon.

God as controller of the seas.

his raging bloody bound = completely unclear; suggestions have been made that this is a misprint for "his ranging body bound", or "his raging flood ybound".²²

= "who surrounds"; the line creates a lovely image of the oceans as a **scarf** wrapped around the earth.

130: David's distress is unlimited.

131: compare the last line of 2 Sam. 15:31: "*turn the counsel of Achitophel into foolishness.*" David's prayer concludes with a rhyming couplet which acts as a signal it has come to an end.

133: this stage direction, which appeared in the original edition, suggests that Cusay is in disguise, as if he had stayed behind in Jerusalem, and only later had to surreptitiously escape the city to join David; but Blistein persuasively argues that **turned** should be **torn**, observing that 2 Sam. 15:32, which describes David's reunion with his friend Husai - replaced in the play with Cusay - describes the former "*with his coat torn, and having earth upon his head.*"

137-8: "what happiness or honour can come to (**betide**) one who must suffer the hardships (**extremities**) of my condition?"

= repository, but **closet** could also refer to a monarch's private apartment.^{1,2}

= care for, love.^{2,5}

= some editors (probably rightly) correct **break** to **brook**, meaning to bear or tolerate.

= return.

153: **Achitophel's** = trisyllabic here: *a-CHI-t'phel's*.
naught = nothing.

149-157: in sum, Cusay, along with the priests Sadoc and Abiathar, can act as spies for David within Jerusalem; the priests' respective sons Ahimaas and Jonathan can then carry any important news and helpful information to David.

= ie. "and trust God with respect to what will be."

success = usually used to describe what will happen next or the result or outcome of a situation.

161: **I rise** = let us defer to Blistein: David is rising from his throne, on which he has been sitting since he rose from the ground around line 58; he has not been lying prostate on the

[Exeunt.]

SCENE XI.*The Palace in Jerusalem.*

*Absalon, Amasa, Achitophel,
with the Concubines of David, and others,
are discovered in great state;
Absalon crowned.*

- 1 **Abs.** Now you that were my father's concubines,
2 Liquor to his in chastity and lustful fire,
Have seen his honour shaken in his house,
4 Which I possess in sight of all the world;
I bring ye forth for foils to my renown,
- 6 And to eclipse the glory of your king,
Whose life is with his honour fast enclosed
- 8 Within the entrails of a jetty cloud,
Whose dissolution shall pour down in showers
10 The substance of his life and swelling pride:
Then shall the stars light earth with rich aspects,

ground for the entire scene!

unwieldy = weak or impotent.¹**David's Instructions to Cusay:** in the Bible, David's instructions to falsely befriend Absalon were given to his trusted friend Husai the Arachite (2 Sam. 15:33-34):³³...*If thou go with me, thou shalt be a burthen (ie. burden) unto me.*³⁴*But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, 'I will be thy servant, O king: as I have thus long been thy father's servant, so am I now thy servant', thou mayest for my sake destroy the counsel of Ahithophel."***Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XI:** 2 Sam. 16:15 - 17:21.**Entering Characters:** **Absalon** has entered Jerusalem and taken over the Palace. With him are David's former counselor **Achitophel**, and **Amasa**, the son of David's sister Abigail, and hence David's nephew; Absalon has appointed Amasa command of his army.

Also present are the ten concubines left behind by David to watch over the Palace.

A curtain is pulled back to reveal (**discover**) Absalon being crowned the new king of Israel.**great state** = high splendour; Absalon, true to his character, makes sure his coronation ceremony contains all the magnificence it can possibly muster.

1f: now that he is king, Absalon's first order of business is to address the concubines!

2: just as David would take liquid to satisfy a burning thirst, the concubines quench his lustful desires; a powerful metaphor.

5-6: Absalon officially takes possession of David's harem; this is a highly symbolic move, signaling an irreversible move towards hostility between Absalon and his father (Bergant, p. 291).¹⁶**ye** = plural form of "you".**foils** = a common metaphor from jewelry; a **foil** is a setting or background on which a gem is fixed to show it off to great advantage; likewise, possession of the concubines will help make more visible Absalon's glory and power.= cast a shadow over, or outshine or surpass.¹

7-10: in brief, David's life, along with any honour it possessed, will soon all be over.

with = ie. along with.

= ie. jet-black.

= liquification, ie. rain.

11-16: Absalon enhances his complicated atmospheric metaphor by joining it with astronomical phenomena, both of which will respond positively to his taking control of Israel.

Then = ie. once Absalon has fully displaced David.

12 And Heaven shall burn in love with Absalon,
Whose beauty will suffice to chase all mists,

14 And clothe the sun's sphere with a triple fire,
Sooner than his clear eyes should suffer stain,

16 Or be offended with a lowering day.

18 *1st Conc.* Thy father's honour, graceless Absalon,

And ours thus beaten with thy violent arms,
Will cry for vengeance to the host of Heaven,
Whose power is ever armed against the proud,
And will dart plagues at thy aspiring head
For doing this disgrace to David's throne.

24 *2nd Conc.* To David's throne, to David's holy throne,
Whose sceptre angels guard with swords of fire,
And sit as eagles on his conquering fist,

28 Ready to prey upon his enemies:
Then think not thou, the captain of his foes,

30 Wert thou much swifter than Azahell was,
That could outpace the nimble-footed roe,

32 To scape the fury of their thumping beaks
Or dreadful scope of their commanding wings.

34 *Achit.* Let not my lord the King of Israel

light = ie. light up, brighten.

aspects = countenances or appearance, though *aspect* could refer to the specific arrangement or relative positions of the stars at a given moment.¹

13: *chase* = the 1599 edition has *chast* (ie. chaste) here, which is usually emended to *chase*; *chaste* as a verb meant "to restrain", so it is not impossible that this is what Peele wrote, though the use of *chaste* as a verb was obsolete by the late 16th century.

mists = could mean mists or clouds.

14: *fire* likely refers to the light of the sun,¹ so that the meaning of the line is that Absalon expects his beauty to outshine the sun by a factor of three.

15: "sooner than Absalon's lustrous or bright (*clear*) eyes should suffer eclipse (*stain*)".

11-16: "once I (Absalon) have completely replaced David, the stars will shine brilliantly on earth, and Heaven will emphatically favour me (me, whose beauty can chase away the clouds and outshine the sun) before anybody can outshine my eyes, or burden their sight with a cloudy or ominous (*lowering*) day."

Note the unrelenting metaphoric use of light and brightness in Absalon's vain and swaggering speech.

18ff: *thy* = the concubines show their disdain for Absalon by addressing him with the disrespectful, even insulting, *thou*.

graceless = wicked, immoral.²

= *power* is a monosyllable here.

= shoot, like arrows.

27-33: an extended simile comparing David's guardian angels to trained birds of prey.

27: the angels will wait on David as trained hawks would rest on a falconer's wrist.

= ie. military commander.

30-31: the concubines refer to the death of the famously fast-running *Azahell*, the brother of Joab, whose death is described in the note at Scene IX.28, and whom the Bible describes at 2 Sam. 2:18 as "*light of foot as a wild roe*."

Wert thou = "even if you were".

That = who.

outpace = outrun.

= striking or pounding,¹ or heavy, great.⁵

= reach; we may note here that the concubines do not actually speak in the Bible.

36	Be angry with a <u>silly</u> woman's threats;	= worthless, lowly or foolish. ^{1,2}
	But, with the pleasure he hath <u>erst</u> enjoyed,	= "previously", ie. "before"; Achitophel is basically recommending to Absalon to sleep with the women of the harem, so that " <i>all Israel shall hear, that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee, be strong.</i> " (2 Sam. 16:21).
38	Turn them into their <u>cabinets</u> again,	38: "send them back to their private chambers (<i>cabinets</i>)".
	Till David's conquest be their <u>overthrow</u> .	= ruin.
40	<i>Abs.</i> Into your <u>bowers</u> , <u>ye</u> daughters of disdain,	= ladies' chambers. ² = plural form of <i>you</i> .
42	Gotten by fury of unbridled lust,	42: ie. born from uncontrolled lust.
	And wash your couches with your mourning tears,	
44	For grief that David's kingdom is <u>decayed</u> .	= ruined, failed. ²
46	<i>I^s Conc.</i> No, Absalon, his kingdom is <u>enchained</u>	= bound.
	<u>Fast</u> to the finger of great Jacob's God,	= tightly.
48	Which will not loose it for a rebel's love.	48: ie. God will not release David's kingdom for Absalon's gain.
50	[<i>Exeunt Concubines.</i>]	
52	<i>Amasa.</i> If I might give advice unto the king,	52: Absalon's military commander suggests executing the impudent ladies.
	These concubines should buy their taunts with blood.	
54	<i>Abs.</i> Amasa, no; but let thy martial sword	55-58: showing at least a touch of honour, Absalon will leave the concubines unpunished for their rudeness; he does this as a way to compensate them for the shame they had to suffer for having served as lowly members of David's harem (but see the note at the end of this speech at line 77).
56	Empty the <u>veins</u> of David's armèd men,	= I accept Dyce's emendation of <i>paines</i> , the original word here, to <i>veins</i> ; in a different edition, Dyce suggests <i>plains</i> , which also works nicely.
	And let these foolish women <u>scape</u> our hands	= escape.
58	To recompense the shame they have sustained.	
	First, Absalon was by the trumpet's sound	
60	Proclaimed through Hebron King of Israel;	
	And now is set in fair Jerusalem	
62	With <u>complete</u> state and glory of a crown:	63: compare 2 Sam. 15:1: " <i>Absalon prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him</i> "; Elizabethan drama refers frequently to the servants known as <i>footmen</i> , whose job it was to run alongside the carriages of wealthy individuals as they moved about, and whose employment was an obvious signal of status!
	Fifty fair <u>footmen</u> by my chariot run,	
64	And to the air whose rupture rings my fame,	64-65: <i>And to...ride</i> = a poetical description of Absalon's reputation being proclaimed wherever he goes.
	Where'er I ride, they offer <u>reverence</u> .	= veneration or obeisance. ¹
66	Why should not Absalon, that in his face	
	Carries the final purpose of his God,	
68	That is, to <u>work him grace</u> in Israel,	= ie. bestow favour on Absalon.
	Endeavour to achieve with all his strength	
70	The <u>state</u> that most may satisfy his joy,	= magnificence.
	Keeping his statutes and his covenants pure?	
72	His thunder is entangled in my hair,	72: Absalon vaguely but ignorantly foreshadows his own death.

74 And with my beauty is his lightning quenched:
I am the man he made to glory in,
When by the errors of my father's sin
76 He lost the path that led into the land
Wherewith our chosen ancestors were blessed.

78

Enter Cusay.

80 **Cusay.** Long may the beauteous King of Israel live,
82 To whom the people do by thousands swarm!

84 **Abs.** What meaneth Cusay so to greet his foe?
Is this the love thou shewdst to David's soul,
86 To whose assistance thou hast vowed thy life?
Why leav'st thou him in this extremity?

88 **Cusay.** Because the Lord and Israel chooseth thee;
90 And as before I served thy father's turn
With counsel acceptable in his sight,
92 So likewise will I now obey his son.

94 **Abs.** Then welcome, Cusay, to King Absalon. –

96 And now, my lords and loving counsellors,
I think it time to exercise our arms
Against forsaken David and his host.
98 Give counsel first, my good Achitophel,

100 What times and orders we may best observe
For prosperous manage of these high exploits.

102 **Achit.** Let me choose out twelve thousand valiant men:
And, while the night hides with her sable mists
104 The close endeavours cunning soldiers use,

I will assault thy discontented sire;

106 And, while with weakness of their weary arms,

108 Surcharged with toil, to shun thy sudden power,
The people fly in huge disordered troops

110 To save their lives, and leave the king alone,
Then will I smite him with his latest wound,

73: the new king's vanity is a good indicator that his fate will not be fortuitous.

= ie. David.
= with which.¹

Absalon and the Concubines: in the Bible, Absalon actually follows his senior counselor's advice and sleeps with the girls of the harem: "*And so they spread a tent upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*" (2 Sam. 16:22).

= beautiful; Cusay knows how to flatter Absalon!

= ie. show'st.

= extreme or dire situation.

= served David's purposes.

94: just as in the Bible, in which Absalon eagerly and naively accepts David's friend Husai's easy explanation for unexpectedly abandoning the old king, here Cusay (taking Husai's place) is accepted with equal speed; more oddly, the gullible Absalon even asks for Cusay's military advice (just as he did Husai's).

= army.

= as mentioned earlier, the stress in the counselor's name falls on the second syllable.

= ie. disposition of the army for battle.

= handling or directing; **manage** was frequently used as a noun at the time.¹

= black mist or clouds.

= the secret (**close**) enterprises (ie. tactics or stratagems) used by clever soldiers.

= father.

106-111: Achitophel predicts that David's soldiers will be too tired and discouraged to put up a fight, and will flee the counselor's attack; he wants to kill David only, and, by not massacring his army (as would have been normal practice), bring them back into Absalon's fold.

Note the exceptional alliteration in line 106.

107-8: "overburdened (**Surcharged**) with their work or task, to seek safety from (**shun**) the sudden attack of your army (**power**), the soldiers will flee in disorder".

= final.

112	And bring the people to thy feet in peace.	
114	Abs. Well hath Achitophel given his advice. Yet let us hear what Cusay counsels us, Whose great <u>experience</u> is well worth the ear.	= a trisyllable: <i>ex-PER-ience</i> .
116	Cusay. Though wise Achitophel be much more <u>meet</u>	117-9: Cusay flatteringly acknowledges that Achitophel's advice is more worthy to be heeded than his own. <i>meet</i> = fitting.
118	To purchase hearing with my lord the king, <u>For all his former counsels</u> , than myself,	= ie. in recognition of all the good advice Achitophel has always given in the past.
120	Yet, not offending Absalon or him, This time it is not good nor worth pursuit;	
122	For, well thou know'st, thy father's men are strong,	122-148: Peele closely paraphrases Husai's speech to Absalon at 2 Sam. 17:7-13.
	<u>Chafing</u> as she-bears robbèd of their whelps:	= angry, enraged; this simile of lines 122-3 appears in 2 Sam. 17:8: " <i>Thou knowest thy father and his men how that they be strong men, and they be chafed in their numbers and are even as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field</i> ".
124	Besides, the king himself a valiant man, Trained up in feats and stratagems of war;	
126	And will not, for prevention of the worst, Lodge with the common soldiers in the field;	126-7: in order to prevent the worst thing that can happen - sudden capture by Absalon's men - David does not camp with his soldiers; but perhaps Cusay is also a hinting that the old king has reason to fear his own men too.
128	But now, I know, his <u>wonted</u> policies Have taught him lurk within some secret cave,	= accustomed, normal.
130	Guarded with all his <u>stoutest</u> soldiers;	129: David spends his days in hiding. = bravest.
132	Which, if the forefront of his battle faint, Will yet give out that Absalon doth fly, And so thy soldiers be discouragèd:	131-3: even if the sudden attack of Absalon's army sends those of David's soldiers whom they come across first to flight, the reputation for fierceness that David and his men possess is such that those people who hear of this event will report that it is Absalon's men who are running away, discouraging Absalon's soldiers even as it inspires David's to fight more vigorously. It is worth noting the ambiguity of the relevant line in 2 Sam. 17:9: " <i>And though some of his men be overthrown at the first brunt...</i> " As in much of Elizabethan drama, the abundance of pronouns leads, as here, to uncertainty as to who is being referred to; as a consequence, a number of Bible commentators, such as the famous John Gill, interpret the line to mean that it is David's soldiers who will surprise and rout Absalon's men, perhaps by ambush, and not the other way around.
134	David himself <u>withal</u> , whose angry heart Is as a lion's <u>letted of</u> his walk,	= moreover. = hindered or obstructed in. Compare the line to 2 Sam. 17:10: " <i>And he also that is valiant, whole heart is as the heart of a lion</i> ".
136	Will fight himself, and all his men <u>to one</u> ,	136: David himself will enter battle, as will all of his men, who will fight alongside him, ie. not flee. <i>to one</i> = to a man.
138	Before a few shall vanquish him by fear. My counsel therefore is, with trumpets sound	137: "rather than flee from any of Absalon's soldiers."

<p>To gather men from Dan to Bersabe,</p> <p>140 That they may march in number like sea-sands, That nestle close in [one] another's neck:</p> <p>142 So shall we come upon him in our strength, Like to the dew that falls in showers from Heaven,</p> <p>144 And leave him not a man to march <u>withal</u>. Besides, if any city <u>succour him</u>,</p> <p>146 The numbers of our men shall fetch us ropes, And we will pull <u>it</u> down the river's stream,</p> <p>148 That not a stone be left to keep us out.</p> <p>150 <i>Abs.</i> What says my lord to Cusay's counsel now?</p> <p>152 <i>Amasa.</i> I fancy Cusay's counsel better far Than that is <u>given</u> us from Achitophel; 154 And so, I think, doth every soldier here.</p> <p>156 <i>All.</i> Cusay's counsel is better than Achitophel's.</p> <p>158 <i>Abs.</i> Then march we after Cusay's counsel all: Sound trumpets through the <u>bounds</u> of Israel, 160 And muster all the men will serve the king, That Absalon may <u>glut</u> his longing soul 162 With sole <u>fruition</u> of his father's crown.</p> <p>164 <i>Achit.</i> [<i>Aside</i>] Ill shall they fare that follow thy attempts, 166 That scorns the counsel of Achitophel.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">168 [<i>Exeunt all except Cusay.</i>]</p> <p>170 <i>Cusay.</i> Thus hath the power of Jacob's <u>jealous God</u></p> <p>Fulfilled his servant David's <u>drifts by</u> me, 172 And brought Achitophel's advice to scorn.</p> <p>174 <i>Enter Sadoc, Abiathar, Ahimaas, and Jonathan.</i></p> <p>176 <i>Sadoc.</i> God save Lord Cusay, and direct his zeal To <u>purchase</u> David's conquest 'gainst his son!</p> <p>178 <i>Abi.</i> What secrets hast thou gleaned from Absalon?</p> <p>180 <i>Cusay.</i> These, sacred priests that bear the ark of God: – 182 Achitophel advised him in the night To let him choose twelve thousand fighting men, 184 And he would come on <u>David</u> at unwares,</p>	<p>139: compare 2 Sam. 17:11: "<i>That all Israel be gathered unto thee from Dan to Beersaba</i>".</p> <p>Dan = the most northerly settlement of the Israelites.⁸</p> <p>Bersabe = ie. Beersheba, a well or town located 27 miles south-west of Hebron.^{8,9}</p> <p>The phrase from Dan to Beersheba was proverbially used to describe the full extent of Israel, appearing a number of times in the Old Testament, including in Husai's speech to Absalon at 2 Sam. 17:11.</p> <p>= with.</p> <p>= help David, militarily or otherwise.¹</p> <p>= ie. any such city that assists David.</p> <p>= a monosyllable, as usual: <i>gi'en</i>.</p> <p>= boundaries.</p> <p>= satisfy, satiate.</p> <p>= possession.¹</p> <p>= God is frequently described in the Bible as jealous, because He will tolerate no competition from false gods and idols.</p> <p>= purpose. = via, through.</p> <p>Entering Characters: David's close allies, the two priests and their respective sons, enter the stage; we remember that David had asked them to return to Jerusalem to act as his spies.</p> <p>= work for, obtain.²</p> <p>= uniquely, David is pronounced in a single syllable here: <i>Da'id</i>.</p>
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186 While he was weary with his violent toil:
But I advised to get a greater host,
And gather men from Dan to Bersabe,
188 To come upon him strongly in the fields.
Then send Ahimaäs and Jonathan
190 To signify these secrets to the king,
And will him not to stay this night abroad;

192 But get him over Jordan presently,

194 Lest he and all his people kiss the sword.

196 **Sadoc.** Then go, Ahimaäs and Jonathan,
And straight convey this message to the king.

198 **Ahim.** Father, we will, if Absalon's chief spies
Prevent not this device, and stay us here.

200

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XII.

The Road Near the Village of Bahurim.

Enter Semei.

1 **Semei.** The man of Israel that hath ruled as king,
2 Or rather as the tyrant of the land,
Bolstering his hateful head upon the throne
4 That God unworthily hath blessed him with,
Shall now, I hope, lay it as low as hell,
6 And be deposed from his detested chair.
O, that my bosom could by nature bear
8 A sea of poison, to be poured upon

= ie. David.

= army.

= report, inform.¹

191: ie. "and desire him not to wander away from his troops."

will = entreat, ie. recommend or encourage.¹

abroad = "away from his tent", or "out in the open".

192-3: Cusay recommends David and his army cross to a safer position over the river Jordan, which lies to the east of their present position and hence further away from Jerusalem and Absalon's army.

= euphemism (sort of) for "are killed".

Cusay's Report: compare lines 191-3 to Husai's instruction to Sadoc and Abiathar at 2 Sam. 17:16: "*Now therefore send quickly, and show David, saying: 'Tarry not this night in the fields of the wilderness, but get thee over, lest the king be devoured, and all the people that are with him.'*"

= scheme. = ie. "keep us from leaving."

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XII: all the indicated verses are from 2 Samuel: (1) lines 1-99, 16:5-13; (2) lines 101-132, 17:21-22; and (3) 134-174, 18:1-5.

The Scene: David and his party, continuing to move east and away from Jerusalem, have reached the village of **Bahurim**, located east of the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 16:5). Bahurim appears to be the home of some of former King Saul's distant relatives.

Entering Character: Semei is a distant relative of Saul's; he still bears a terrible grudge against David for the latter's having displaced Saul and his descendants as kings of Israel, and for the role Semei feels David played in the deaths of Saul and his sons.⁹

= ie. detestable.

= throne.

<p>His cursèd head that sacred balm hath graced</p> <p>10 And consecrated King of Israel! Or <u>would</u> my breath were made the smoke of hell,</p> <p>12 Infected with the sighs of damnèd souls, Or with the <u>reeking</u> of that serpent's <u>gorge</u></p> <p>14 That feeds on adders, toads, and <u>venomous</u> roots, That, as I opened my revenging lips</p> <p>16 To curse <u>the shepherd</u> for his tyranny, My words might cast rank poison to his pores,</p> <p>18 And make his <u>swoln and rankling sinews</u> crack,</p> <p>Like to the combat-blows that break the clouds</p> <p>20 When <u>Jove's stout champions</u> fight with fire.</p> <p>See <u>where</u> he cometh <u>that</u> my soul abhors! I have prepared my pocket full of stones To cast at him, mingled with earth and dust, 24 Which, bursting with disdain, I greet him with. –</p> <p>26 <i>Enter David, Joab, Abisai, Ithay, and others.</i></p>	<p>9-10: Semei refers to the oil used by the prophet Samuel to anoint David king at 1 Sam. 16:13. = if only.</p> <p>13-14: uncertain allusion. <i>reeking</i> = ie. that which is given off or exhaled, like breath or smoke.¹ <i>gorge</i> = throat.¹ = <i>venomous</i> is disyllabic here: <i>VEN'-mous</i>. = abusive name for David. = swollen and festering tendons or muscles.^{1,2}</p> <p>19-20: ie. like the blows given in battle by God's (<i>Jove's</i>) angels (<i>stout champions</i>) fighting with their fiery swords; line 20 is slightly short. <i>stout</i> = brave or fierce.</p> <p>= there. = ie. "he whom".</p>
<p>28 Come forth, thou <u>murtherer</u> and wicked man: The lord hath brought upon thy cursèd head 30 The <u>guiltless</u> blood of Saul and all his sons, Whose royal throne thy baseness hath usurped;</p> <p>32 And, to revenge it deeply on thy soul, The Lord hath <u>given</u> the kingdom to thy son, 34 And he shall <u>wreak</u> the traitorous wrongs of Saul: Even as thy sin hath still <u>importuned Heaven</u>,</p> <p>36 So shall thy murthers and adultery Be punished in the sight of Israel, 38 As thou deserv'st, with blood, with death, and hell. <u>Hence</u>, murtherer, hence!</p>	<p>= common alternative for <i>murderer</i>. = innocent. = a monosyllable: <i>gi'en</i>. = avenge. = "begged Heaven (for forgiveness)". = begone!"</p>
<p>40 <i>[Throws stones and earth at David.]</i></p> <p>42 <i>Abis.</i> Why doth [t]his dead dog curse my lord the king? 44 Let me alone to take away his head.</p>	<p>43-44: compare 2 Sam. 16:9: "<i>Then said Abisai the son of Zaruia unto the king: Why doth this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go now, and take off the head of him.</i>" Blistein suggests Abisai draws his sword as he speaks here.</p>
<p>46 <i>David.</i> Why meddleth thus <u>the son of Zeruia</u> To interrupt the action of our God? 48 <u>Semei useth me with</u> this reproach</p> <p>Because the Lord hath sent him to reprove 50 The sins of David, printed in <u>his</u> brows With blood, that blusheth for his conscience' guilt;</p>	<p>= see 2 Sam. 16:9 in the note immediately above.</p> <p>48: <i>Semei</i> = Semei's name is trisyllabic here (<i>SE-me-i</i>), but disyllabic at line 60 below. <i>useth me with</i> = "treats me with", ie. "accosts me with". = ie. David's own.</p>

52 Who dares, then, ask him why he curseth me?
54 *Semei.* If, then, thy conscience tell thee thou hast sinned,
And that thy life is odious to the world,
56 Command thy followers to shun thy face;
And by thyself here make away thy soul,
58 That I may stand and glory in thy shame.

60 *David.* I am not desperate, Semei, like thyself ,
But trust unto the covenant of my God,
62 Founded on mercy, with repentance built,
And finished with the glory of my soul.

64 *Semei.* A murtherer, and hope for mercy in thy end!

66 Hate and destruction sit upon thy brows
To watch the issue of thy damnèd ghost,
68 Which with thy latest gasp they'll take and tear,
Hurling in every pane of hell a piece.
70 Hence, murtherer, thou shame to Israel,
Foul lecher, drunkard, plague to Heaven and earth!

72
74 [Throws again at David.]

76 *Joab.* What, is it piety in David's thoughts,
So to abhor from laws of policy
78 In this extremity of his distress,
To give his subjects cause of carelessness?

Send hence the dog with sorrow to his grave.

80 *David.* Why should the sons of Zeruia seek to check
82 His spirit, which the Lord hath thus inspired?
Behold, my son which issued from my flesh,

84 With equal fury seeks to take my life:
How much more then the son of Jemini,

86 Chiefly since he doth naught but God's command?

It may be, he will look on me this day
88 With gracious eyes, and for his cursing bless
The heart of David in his bitterness.

90 *Semei.* What, dost thou fret my soul with sufferance?

92 O, that the souls of Isboseth and Abner,

57: Semei suggests David kill himself.

60f: David never actually addresses Semei in the Bible.
= pronounced with two syllables: *COV'-nant*.

65: a seeming *alexandrine*, or line with an extra sixth iamb,
ie. 12 syllables.

hope = ie. "with an expectation".

= "exit (from your body)". = soul.

= last. = *they* refers to *hate and destruction*.

= part, section.^{1,6}

75-78: "does David think this is a legitimate demonstration
of his mercy (*piety*), to ignore the necessary principles
of self-interest (*policy*) in these our most dire of times,
to permit his subjects to speak to him with such reckless-
ness (*carelessness*)?"

abhor (line 76) = shrink.⁵

79: Joab, like his brother, calls Semei a dog, and advises
slaying David's abuser.

= ie. Joab and Abisai. = curb.

= Semei's.

83-85: ie. if David's own son is seeking his life, then why
should they be surprised that this man of Saul's family
would desire the same?

= Semei is described as the son of Gera, who in turn was the
son of *Jemini* of Behurim; Peele no doubt uses the latter's
name because it better fits the meter.

86: "primarily because he is only doing what God told him
to do?"

naught but = nothing but, ie. only.

= ie. God.

87-89: compare 2 Sam. 16:12: "*It may be that the Lord will
look on mine affliction and do me good for the cursing
of this day.*"

91: ie. "do you dare vex (*fret*) my soul by tolerating my
behaviour?" Semei is really looking for a fight!

92-93: Semei refers to the conflicts between David and

Which thou sent'st swimming to their graves in blood,

94 With wounds fresh bleeding, gasping for revenge,
 Were here to execute my burning hate!

96 But I will hunt thy foot with curses still:
 Hence, monster, murtherer, mirror of contempt!

98
 [Throws again at David.]

100
Enter Ahimaas and Jonathan.

102
Ahim. Long life to David, to his enemies death!

104
David. Welcome, Ahimaas and Jonathan:
 106 What news sends Cusay to thy lord the king?

108 **Ahim.** Cusay would wish my lord the king
 To pass the river Jordan presently,
 110 Lest he and all his people perish here;

For wise Achitophel hath counselled Absalon
 112 To take advantage of your weary arms,
 And come this night upon you in the fields.
 114 But yet the Lord hath made his counsel scorn,

And Cusay's policy with praise preferred;
 116 Which was to number every Israelite,
 And so assault you in their pride of strength.

118
Jon. Abiathar besides entreats the king
 120 To send his men of war against his son,
 And hazard not his person in the field.

122
David. Thanks to Abiathar, and to you both,
 124 And to my Cusay, whom the Lord requite;
 But ten times treble thanks to his soft hand
 126 Whose pleasant touch hath made my heart to dance,
 And play him praises in my zealous breast,

128 That turned the counsel of Achitophel
After the prayers of his servant's lips.
 130 Now will we pass the river all this night,
 And in the morning sound the voice of war,
 132 The voice of bloody and unkindly war.

134 **Joab.** Then tell us how thou wilt divide thy men,

Saul's son and purported successor Isboseth which took place after Saul's death; Abner had been the commander-in-chief of Isboseth's army.

Isboseth and Abner fell out when the latter took one of Isboseth's concubines, leading Abner to switch his allegiance to David in the struggle for the throne after Saul's death. Unfortunately, David's commander Joab took the opportunity to slay Abner for the latter's killing of Joab's brother Azahell after the battle of Gibeon (see the note at Scene IX.28).

The discouraged Isboseth was soon thereafter assassinated by two members of his own guard.

= ie. "dog your steps".
 = **murtherer** is disyllabic: *MUR-th'rer*; note also the nifty alliteration in the line.

108-110: we remember that Cusay has recommended that David and his men move further east, over the Jordan River, to keep a safe distance from Absalon.
 Line 108 is short.

114: God has answered David's prayers, and caused Absalon to disregard Achitophel's wise advice.

116-7: Cusay, we remember, proposed to Absalon that he should delay attacking David till he has gathered a large enough army to guarantee him victory over David.

= ie. "asks you".
 120-1: David himself should not risk his own life by participating in the anticipated battle against Absalon.

= reward.
 = ie. thirty. = ie. God's hand.

= ie. sing. = eager; **zeal** was usually used to describe a religious fervor.

= ie. into alignment with. = ie. David's own.

= this expression became common in 17th century literature.
 = ie. as it is an unnatural war between father and son.

136	And who shall have the special charge herein.	
138	<i>David.</i> Joab, thyself shall for thy <u>charge</u> conduct The first <u>third part</u> of all my valiant men;	= command. = ie. one-third.
140	The second shall Abisai's valour lead; The third fair Ithay, <u>which</u> I most should grace	= whom.
142	For comfort he hath done to David's woes; And I myself will follow in the midst.	137-142: the division of David's army into three legions is described in 2 Sam. 18:1-2; David means he will follow the three major divisions of the army with his guard.
144	<i>Ithay.</i> <u>That let not David</u> ; for, <u>though we should fly</u> ,	144: <i>That let not David</i> = ie. "this you should not do." <i>though we should fly</i> = ie. "even if we are all forced to run away from the field of battle".
146	Ten thousand of us were not half so much Esteemed with David's <u>enemies</u> as himself:	145-6: "from our enemy's viewpoint, 10,000 of us do not have the same value as you do alone". <i>enemies</i> = disyllabic here: <i>EN-'mies</i> .
	Thy people, loving thee, deny thee this.	147: "because we all love you, we will not permit you to participate in the battle." The sentiments ascribed here to Ithay are, in the Bible, spoken to David by " <i>the people</i> " (meaning the soldiers) at 2 Sam. 18:3: " <i>Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us, neither shall they regard us, though half of us were slain: but thou art now worth ten thousand of us, wherefore it is that thou succour us out of the city.</i> "
148	<i>David.</i> <u>What seems them best</u> , then, that will David do.	= "what they think is best".
150	But now, my lords and captains, <u>hear his voice</u>	= "listen closely to what I say".
152	<u>That</u> never yet pierced <u>piteous</u> Heaven in vain; Then let it not slip lightly through your ears; –	151: ie. "I, who (<i>that</i>) have never prayed to merciful (<i>piteous</i>) God without His listening to me."
154	For my sake spare the young man Absalon. Joab, thyself didst once use friendly words	154-5: David reminds Joab of his role in reconciling Absalon to him.
156	To reconcile my heart incensed to him; If, then, thy love be to thy kinsman <u>sound</u> ,	= unimpaired, ie. still present. ¹ = old variation of "perfect". ⁴
158	And thou wilt prove a <u>perfit</u> Israelite, <u>Friend him with deeds</u> , and touch no hair of him, –	= "befriend him with your actions"; we note that <i>friend</i> is used here as a transitive verb; thus the expression "to friend someone" predates its modern use in social media by many centuries!
	Not that fair hair with which the <u>wanton</u> winds	159-165: David's extensive digression, in which he lovingly describes Absalon's famously fabulous hair, makes for slightly creepy reading. <i>wanton</i> = playful.
160	Delight to play, and love to make it curl, <u>Wherein</u> the nightingales would build their nests,	= in which.
162	And make sweet <u>bowers</u> in every golden <u>tress</u> To sing their lover every night <u>asleep</u> :	= homes, retreats. = lock. = ie. to sleep.
164	O, spoil not, Joab, <u>Jove's fair ornaments</u> ,	= "God's beautiful embellishment or adornment", still talking about Absalon's hair.
166	Which he hath sent to solace David's soul! The best, ye see, my lords, are swift to sin;	166: David starts to moralize: "you have seen how even the greatest of men is quick to sin."

168 To sin our feet are washed with milk of roes,
And dried again with coals of lightening.

O Lord, thou see'st the proudest sin's poor slave,

170 And with his bridle pull'st him to the grave!
For my sake, then, spare lovely Absalon.

172

Ithay. We will, my lord, for thy sake favour him.

174

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE XIII.

The House of Achitophel.

Enter Achitophel with a halter.

1 *Achit.* Now hath Achitophel ordered his house,
2 And taken leave of every pleasure there:
Hereon depends Achitophel's delights,

4 And in this circle must his life be closed.

6 The wise Achitophel, whose counsel proved
Ever as sound for fortunate success
As if men asked the oracle of God,

8 Is now used like the fool of Israel:

10 Then set thy angry soul upon her wings,
And let her fly into the shade of death;

12 And for my death let Heaven for ever weep,
Making huge floods upon the land I leave,
To ravish them and all their fairest fruits.

14 Let all the sighs I breathed for this disgrace,
Hang on my hedges like eternal mists,

167-8: an unclear passage; an early commentator called this a "strange passage". Blistein interprets as so: "sin is as attractive and pleasant as having one's feet washed with the cooling and soothing of milk of roes. Yet the punishment for sin is as drastic and violent as (red hot lightning or fire)" (p. 274).⁶

lightening = ie. lightning, pronounced as a trisyllable: *LIGHT-en-ing*.

169-171: David beseeches God to spare Absalon in the upcoming battle.

170: depending on who or what *his* refers to, either God or Sin is described as using a bridle to direct sinners towards death; if the latter, then we have a reversal of the metaphor of Sin as a steed being ridden by the sinner straight to hell used earlier (see Chorus I.2-3); most early editors agree that Sin is the rider.

David's Retreat: David will take Cusay's advice and retreat to safety across the Jordan River; when we next meet the king in Scene XVII, he will be at his headquarters at Mahanaim, an ancient town east of the Jordan.⁹

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XIII: 2 Sam. 17:23.

= rope for hanging, noose.

= settled his affairs.

3: **Hereon** = herein, meaning on this (thing).¹

depends = a likely pun, meaning (1) is contingent, and (2) (literally) suspends or hangs.⁶

delights = presumably ironic.

= ended.

5-7: Achitophel compares the wisdom of his advice, which previously had always been followed, to that of a prophet.

Compare 2 Sam. 16:23: "*And the counsel of Ahithophel which he counseled in those days, was as a man had asked counsel at the oracle of God.*"

8: treated; the rejection of his advice has been humiliating for Achitophel.

9: meaning his own.

= ie. "the shadow of death", a common phrase in the Bible, referring to the deepest darkness of death.

= ie. from all the tears.

13: to destroy the agricultural produce of the land.

14-16: clothes and animals were frequently referred to as being hung on hedges; some religious literature of the time

16 As mourning garments for their master's death.

18 Ope, earth, and take thy miserable son
Into the bowels of thy cursèd womb:
Once in a surfeit thou didst spew him forth;

20 Now for fell hunger suck him in again,

And be his body poison to thy veins.

22 And now, thou hellish instrument of Heaven,
24 Once execute th' arrest of Jove's just doom,
And stop his breast that curseth Israel.

26 [Exit.]

SCENE XIV.

The Wood of Ephraim.

Enter Absalon, with Amasa and the rest of his train.

also refers to the soul hanging on hedges: the sense of these difficult lines may be that Achitophel wants his sorrow to cloak his soul as a reminder to others of his shame, just as mourning clothes are worn by servants as a visible reminder of their master's death.

17-19: a dramatic and graphic metaphor of Achitophel as something earth had once vomited out (*spew forth* = vomit), as if he had been an article food, after over-eating (*a surfeit*).

This is an interesting example of a figure of speech known as an *apostrophe*, in which one speaks to another who is not present, or to some non-living or abstract entity).

Ope (line 17) = open.

bowels...womb (line 18) = intestines or stomach.

thou (line 19) = ie. referring to earth.

20: Achitophel asks earth basically to re-eat him!

for = to prevent.

fell = cruel.

= "let his body be".

22-24: Achitophel seems to be talking to his noose, instructing it to go ahead and perform its duty.

The exact meaning of line 23, however, is uncertain; if we take *Jove's just doom* (*doom* = decision) to refer to God's decision to make him Absalon's fool, then perhaps the idea is that by killing himself, the counselor will frustrate this particular design of God's.

Note the wordplay in using the oxymoronic *hellish* and *Heaven* together in line 22.

execute the arrest = more wordplay; the expression has a legal meaning, referring to the apprehension of a criminal, but also simply meaning "to put into effect the cessation (of something)".

Jove's just doom refers to God's promoting of Absalon's cause.

Achitophel's Suicide: the counselor does not actually say anything in the Bible at the time of his self-murder:

"And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose and gate him (ie. rode the animal) home to his own house, and to his own city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulcher of his father." (2 Sam. 17:23).

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XIV: Absalon does not make a pre-battle speech to his troops in the Bible, hence there is neither verse nor chapter corresponding to this scene; however, it was normal to portray such pre-battle pep talks in Elizabethan drama, as well as in ancient historical literature.

Entering Characters: *Absalon* has gathered his large army, and is now on the hunt to catch up to and defeat David's forces. *Amasa*, we remember, is a nephew of the David's,

1 **Abs.** Now for the crown and throne of Israel,
 2 To be confirmed with virtue of my sword,
 And writ with David's blood upon the blade.
 4 Now, Jove, let forth the golden firmament,
 And look on him, with all thy fiery eyes,
 6 Which thou hast made to give their glories light:

To show thou lov'st the virtue of thy hand,
 8 Let fall a wreath of stars upon my head,

Whose influence may govern Israel

10 With state exceeding all her other kings.
 Fight, lords and captains, that your sovereign's face
 12 May shine in honour brighter than the sun;

And with the virtue of my beauteous rays

14 Make this fair land as fruitful as the fields
 That with sweet milk and honey overflowed.

16 God, in the whissing of a pleasant wind,
 Shall march upon the tops of mulberry-trees,

18 To cool all breasts that burn with any griefs,
 As whilom he was good to Moyses' men.

20 By day the Lord shall sit within a cloud,
 To guide your footsteps to the fields of joy;
 22 And in the night a pillar, bright as fire,
 Shall go before you, like a second sun,
 24 Wherein the essence of his godhead is;
 That day and night you may be brought to peace,
 26 And never swarve from that delightsome path
 That leads your souls to perfect happiness.

and commander of Absalon's soldiers.

The Setting: the army of David, followed by that of Absalon, has reached the **Wood of Ephraim**, or Ephraim Forest, located about 50 miles north-east of Jerusalem, and to the east of the River Jordan.

= power.¹

= written.

4: "now God, release (**let forth**)¹ the stars of Heaven".

5-6: Absalon asks God to let the all the stars shine down on him.

7: "to indicate you value the power you have given me, your servant".

8-10: Absalon asks for a **wreath of stars** which will help him to govern Israel with a magnificence greater than that possessed by any other king anywhere.

= an astrological term for an imagined ethereal fluid which flows down to earth from the stars and influences or governs a person's life.

= so that.

12-13: Absalon returns to the imagery of astronomical brightness he had previously used with such power at Scene XI.11f.

13: whereas in lines 11-12 Absalon only compared himself to the sun, in this line he metaphorically actually takes on an attribute of the sun.

virtue = power.

14-15: Absalon adopts the Bible's ubiquitous imagery describing Israel as a **land** that **flows** with **milk and honey**.

16-17: a reference to 1 Chronicles 14:15, in which God responds to David's request for advice about whether he should attack the nearby Philistines:

"And when thou hearest the noise of one going in the tops of the mulberry trees, then go out to battle: for God is gone forth before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines." (the quote is from the *Geneva Bible*; all the other contemporary Bibles, including the *Bishop's Bible*, refer in this verse to a pear tree rather than a mulberry tree).

whissing = a buzzing or hissing sound.¹

= ie. once in the past. = old form of **Moses**.⁴

20-24: clouds were symbolic of God's presence. At Exodus 13:21-22, "*a pillar of a cloud*" led the Israelites in the wilderness, and at Numbers 12:5 and Deuteronomy 31:15, God employs "*the pillar of the cloud*" to reveal Himself to his people.⁹

= old form of **swerve**.⁴ = alternate form of **delightful**, both in use at the time.

28 This shall he do for joy when I am king.
Then fight, brave captains, that these joys may fly
30 Into your bosoms with sweet victory.

32 [Exeunt.]

SCENE XV.

The Wood of Ephraim.

The battle; and then Absalon hangs by the hair.

1 **Abs.** What angry angel, sitting in these shades,
2 Hath laid his cruèl hands upon my hair,
And holds my body thus 'twixt Heaven and earth?
4 Hath Absalon no soldier near his hand
That may untwine me this unpleasant curl,
6 Or wound this tree that ravisheth his lord?
O God, behold the glory of thy hand,
8 And choicest fruit of nature's workmanship,
Hang, like a rotten branch, upon this tree,
10 Fit for the axe and ready for the fire!
Since thou withhold'st all ordinary help
12 To loose my body from this bond of death,
O, let my beauty fill these senseless plants
14 With sense and power to loose me from this plague,
And work some wonder to prevent his death
16 Whose life thou mad'st a special miracle!

18 *Enter Joab with a Soldier.*

20 **Sold.** My lord, I saw the young Prince Absalon
Hang by the hair upon a shady oak,

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XV: 2 Sam. 18:6-17.

The Battle: a director may choose the extent to which he or she presents the battle between the forces of David and Absalon. Regarding the fight itself, the Bible itself simply states as follows (2 Sam. 18:6-8):

"⁶ And so the people went out into the field against Israel, (and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim)

⁷ Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David: and there was a great slaughter that day, even of twenty thousand men.

⁸ For the battle was scattered over all the country: And the wood devoured much mo (ie. more) people that day, than did the sword."

With regard to verse 8, commentators have suggested that in the woods, numerous soldiers were lost falling into pits and swamps, or being killed by wild animals.

After the Battle: Absalon, knowing the day had been lost, attempted to ride away on a mule. Passing underneath "*the thick boughs of a great oak...his head caught of* (ie. on or in) *the oak, and he was lift up between the heaven and the earth: and the mule that was under him, went away.*" (2 Sam. 18:9).

Note that the Bible itself does not say Absalon was specifically hanging or caught by his hair.

= shadows.

= untangle. = "this ringlet of hair which is causing me such discomfort".

= ie. cut down. = hides or seizes.¹

7-8: **the glory...workmanship** = the vain Absalon means himself.

= ready.

= ie. human assistance.

= free. = ie. these bonds.

= without possession of the physical senses.

= with the physical senses. = **power** is a monosyllable here.

22 And could by no means get himself unloosed.

24 **Joab.** Why slew'st thou not the wicked Absalon,
 26 That rebel to his father and to Heaven,
 That so I might have given thee for thy pains

28 Ten silver sickles and a golden waist?

30 **Sold.** Not for a thousand shekels would I slay
 The son of David, whom his father charged
 32 Nor thou, Abisai, nor the son of Gath,
 Should touch with stroke of deadly violence.
 The charge was given in hearing of us all;
 34 And, had I done it, then, I know, thyself,
 Before thou wouldst abide the king's rebuke,
 36 Wouldst have accused me as a man of death.

38 **Joab.** I must not now stand trifling here with thee.

40 **Abs.** Help, Joab, help, O, help thy Absalon!
 Let not thy angry thoughts be laid in blood,
 42 In blood of him that sometimes nourished thee,
 And softened thy sweet heart with friendly love:
 44 O, give me once again my father's sight,
 My dearest father and my princely sovereign!
 46 That, shedding tears of blood before his face,
 The ground may witness, and the heavens record,
 48 My last submission sound and full of ruth.

50 **Joab.** Rebel to nature, hate to Heaven and earth!
 Shall I give help to him that thirsts the soul
 52 Of his dear father and my sovereign lord?
 Now see, the Lord hath tangled in a tree
 54 The health and glory of thy stubborn heart,
 And made thy pride curbed with a senseless plant:
 56 Now, Absalon, how doth the Lord regard
 The beauty whereupon thy hope was built,
 58 And which thou thought'st his grace did glory in?
 Find'st thou not now, with fear of instant death,
 60 That God affects not any painted shape

= freed; **unloosed** seems redundant, as **loosed** by itself means "untied", but **unloosed**, a common alternative, fits the meter nicely.

24-27: Joab upbraids the soldier who saw Absalon caught in the oak tree for not instantly killing him.
slew'st = slew, ie. killed.
given = ie. rewarded.
pains = efforts.

27: **sickles** = alternate spelling of **shekels**, the primary currency of the Hebrews.¹
waist = belt or girdle.²
 Compare Joab's speech to 2 Sam. 18:11: "*If thou diddest see him, why diddest not thou there smite him to the ground, and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle?*"

= commanded.

31: ie. "that neither you, nor Abisai, nor Ithay".
son of Gath = native of Gath, ie. Ithay.

35-36: rather than suffer the king's condemnation - or worse - for having endorsed the Soldier's killing of Absalon, the Soldier knows that when it came time to actually face David, Joab would accuse him (the Soldier) of disobeying the king's orders, which would certainly result in his immediate execution.
 The soldier's speech closely follows 2 Sam. 18:12-13.

= ie. wasting time; the soldier likely exits as Joab turns his attention to Absalon.⁶
 Compare the line to 2 Sam. 18:14: "*I may not stand thus tarrying with thee.*"

= "who in former times cherished you".¹

= ie. from a wounded heart.¹

= perfect.⁵ = sorrow.⁵
 We may note here that Absalon is given no such opportunity to plead for his life in the Bible.

= ie. for having turned against his own father.
 = ie. "who thirsts for".

= ie. an unfeeling.
 56-58: Joab viciously taunts Absalon for his vanity.

= impending.¹
 60-61: **That God...personage** = "that God doesn't love

	a person for his or her superficial form or beautiful appearance".
62 Is <u>stuffed</u> with <u>naught</u> but pride and stubbornness? But, preach I to thee, while I should revenge	= satiated, packed or stifled. ¹ = nothing. 63: "but why am I (wasting time) preaching to thee, when I should be avenging".
64 Thy cursèd sin that staineth Israel, And makes her fields <u>blush with her children's blood</u> ?	65: ie. turn red with blood, but also with a sense of turning red in the face from shame.
66 Take that as part of thy deservèd plague, Which worthily no torment can inflict.	66-67: the wounding which Joab now inflicts on Absalon is only a fraction of the punishment he deserves".
68	
70	69: compare 2 Sam. 18:14: " <i>And he took three darts (ie. spears) in his hand, and thrust them through Absalom while he was yet alive in the middes (ie. midst) of the oak.</i> "
72 <i>Abs.</i> O Joab, Joab, cruèl, ruthless Joab! Herewith thou wound'st thy kingly sovereign's heart, Whose heavenly temper hates his children's blood,	72-73: "you have wounded the heart of David, whose divine disposition would not want to see the blood of his children spilled".
74 And will be sick, I know, for Absalon. – O, my dear father, that thy <u>melting</u> eyes Might pierce this thicket to behold thy son, Thy dearest son, gored with a <u>mortal dart</u> ! 78 Yet, Joab, pity me: pity my father, Joab; Pity <u>his soul's</u> distress that mourns my life, 80 And will <u>be dead</u> , I know, to hear my death.	= ie. dissolving (into tears). = death-dealing spear. 78: this line contains extra syllables. = ie. David's. = ie. die.
82 <i>Joab.</i> If he were so <u>remorseful</u> of thy <u>state</u> , Why sent he me against thee with the sword?	82-83: Joab is fibbing here, suggesting to Absalon that David instructed him to kill his wayward son. <i>remorseful</i> = compassionate. ³ <i>state</i> = condition.
84 All Joab means to pleasure thee <u>withal</u> Is to despatch thee quickly of thy pain:	84-85: "the only way I intend to gratify you is by immediately relieving you of your pain." <i>withal</i> = with.
86 <u>Hold</u> , <u>Absalon</u> , Joab's pity is in this; In this, proud Absalon, is Joab's love.	86: <i>Hold</i> = perhaps Absalon is struggling against Joab. <i>Absalon</i> = disyllabic here: <i>AB-s'lon</i> .
88	
90	[Stabs him again; and then exit with Soldier.]
92 <i>Abs.</i> Such love, such pity Israel's God send thee, And for his love to David pity me! Ah, my dear father, see thy bowels bleed; 94 See death assault thy dearest Absalon; See, pity, pardon, pray for Absalon!	
96	<i>Enter five or six Soldiers.</i>
98	
100 <i>Ist Sold.</i> See where the rebel in his glory hangs. – Where is the <u>virtue</u> of thy beauty, Absalon? Will any of us here now fear thy looks, 102 Or be in love with that thy golden hair Wherein was wrapt rebellion 'gainst thy <u>sire</u> ,	= power. = father.

104	And <u>cords</u> prepared to stop thy father's breath?	= apparently referring to Absalon's hair as metaphorical ropes, for strangling or hanging. ¹
	Our captain Joab hath <u>begun to us</u> ;	105: the expression <i>to begin to (someone)</i> meant "to propose or drink a toast" to someone, so the sense of this line may be something like, "our commander Joab has, by stabbing thee, pledged to our healths".
106	And <u>here's an end</u> to thee and all thy sins.	= a pun with <i>begun</i> in the previous line.
108	[<i>They stab Absalon; who dies.</i>]	Absalon's Murder: the Bible contains no final conversation between Joab and Absalon; immediately after Joab pierced Absalon with three spears, we read, " <i>And ten servants that bare Joab's weapons, turned and smote Absalom, and slew him.</i> " (2 Sam. 18:15).
110	Come, let us take the <u>beauteous</u> rebel down,	= gorgeous.
112	And in some ditch, amidst this darksome wood, Bury his <u>bulk</u> beneath a heap of stones,	= variation of <i>bouk</i> , meaning body. ^{1,3}
	Whose stony heart did hunt his father's death.	111-3: compare 2 Sam. 18:17: " <i>And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the woods, and laid a mighty great heap of stones upon him.</i> " Note how the soldier puns on <i>stones</i> and <i>stony</i> .
114	<i>Re-enter, in triumph with <u>drum and ensign</u>, Joab;</i>	= drummer and standard-bearer.
116	<i>Abisai and Soldiers.</i>	
118	Joab. Well done, <u>tall</u> soldiers! take the traitor down,	= brave.
120	And in this miry ditch inter his bones, Covering his hateful breast with heaps of stones. This shady thicket of <u>dark Ephrami</u>	= the forest is <i>dark</i> because it is so densely wooded; <i>Ephrami</i> , a variation of <i>Ephraim</i> , fits the meter nicely, though the reversal of the last two letters may be a misprint.
122	Shall ever <u>lower</u> on his cursèd grave;	= ie. lour, scowl.
	Night- <u>ravens</u> and owls shall ring his <u>fatal knell</u> ,	123: the squawkings of ravens and owls were considered bad omens. <i>ravens</i> = here a monosyllable: <i>ra'ens</i> . <i>fatal knell</i> = bell rung at one's funeral.
124	And sit <u>exclaiming on</u> his damnèd soul;	= denouncing.
126	There shall they heap their preys of carrion, Till all his grave be <u>clad</u> with stinking bones, That it may <u>loathe</u> the <u>sense</u> of every man:	= covered. ¹ = ie. causing loathing in. = ie. physical senses, especially perhaps the sense of smell.
128	So shall his end breed horror to his <u>name</u> ,	= reputation.
130	And to his traitorous <u>fact</u> eternal shame.	128-9: note the rhyming couplet used to end the scene. <i>fact</i> = deed.
	[<i>Exeunt.</i>]	
	<u>CHORUS II.</u>	
	<i>Enter Chorus.</i>	Entering Character: the <i>Chorus</i> makes its second and final appearance.

1 **Chor.** O dreadful president of his just doom,

2 Whose holy heart is never touched with ruth
Of fickle beauty or of glorious shapes,

4 But with the virtue of an upright soul,
Humble and zealous in his inward thoughts,
6 Though in his person loathsome and deformed!

8 Now, since this story lends us other store,
To make a third discourse of David's life,

10 Adding thereto his most renownèd death,
And all their deaths that at his death he judged,

12 Here end we this, and what here wants to please,
We will supply with treble willingness.

14 [Exit.]

SCENE XVI.

Near the Battlefield

Trumpets sound.
Enter Joab, Ahimaas, Cusay;
Amasa, with all the other followers of Absalon.

1: **dreadful** = causing dread.
president = presiding god, referring to God.¹
his just doom = the just judgment against Absalon.

2-3: an individual cannot obtain God's mercy or compassion (**ruth**) solely because he or she is beautiful or has a magnificent body.
Beauty is fickle because it is mutable, ie. it quickly fades.

= ie. "but God's mercy is accessible only by possessing".

6: even if the person is physically horribly deformed and hence repulsive to others.

7: "now, since our story has more to it".

8: the Chorus prepares the audience for the final third of the play.

= famous.

9-10: we may observe that the surviving quarto of our play does not actually depict David's death, nor do any other characters die from this point forward.
their deaths that = ie. "and the deaths of all those who".

11-12: **what here...willingness** = "if anything in our presentation fails to please you, we would with triple-willingness provide it."

End of the Chorus: fascinatingly, in the original edition, after the end of the second Chorus, the first few lines of a new scene are printed at the bottom of the page; but this new scene is not continued on the next page; in fact, it appears nowhere in the play, suggesting there may have been an additional scene which the printer accidentally left out.

The phantom lines are as follows:

"[Enter] *Absalon with three or foure of his servants or gentlemen.*

Abs. What boots it Absalon, unhappie Absalon,
Sighing I say what boots it Absalon,
To have disclos'd a farre more worthy wombe"

[and that is all!]

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XVI: there are no scenes of reconciliation between the rebels and Joab in the Bible.

Entering Characters: the victors of the Battle of Ephraim Woods enter with their defeated foe; **Joab** is David's commander in chief, and **Ahimaas** is the son of David's ally, the priest Sadoc; David's nephew **Amasa** had been up till now the commander of the rebel army.

<p>1 Joab. Soldiers of Israel, and ye sons of Judah,</p> <p>2 That have <u>contended</u> in these <u>irksome broils</u>,</p> <p>3 And <u>ript</u> old Israel's bowels with your swords;</p> <p>4 The <u>godless general</u> of your stubborn arms</p> <p>5 Is brought by <u>Israel's helper</u> to the grave,</p> <p>6 A grave of shame, and scorn of all the tribes:</p> <p>7 Now, then, to save your honours from the dust,</p> <p>8 And <u>keep your bloods in temper</u> by your bones,</p> <p>Let Joab's ensign <u>shroud</u> your manly heads,</p> <p>10 Direct your eyes, your weapons, and your hearts,</p> <p>11 To guard the life of David from his foes.</p> <p>12 Error hath masked your <u>much-too-forward</u> minds,</p> <p>13 And you have sinned against <u>the chosen state</u>,</p> <p>14 Against his life, for whom your lives are blessed,</p> <p>15 And followed an usurper to the field;</p> <p>16 In whose just death your deaths are threatenèd;</p> <p>But Joab pities your <u>disordered</u> souls,</p> <p>18 And therefore offers pardon, peace, and love,</p> <p>19 To all that will be friendly reconciled</p> <p>20 To Israel's <u>weal</u>, to David, and to Heaven. –</p> <p>21 Amasa, thou art leader of the <u>host</u></p> <p>22 That under Absalon have raised their arms;</p> <p>23 Then be a <u>captain</u> wise and <u>politic</u>,</p> <p>24 Careful and loving for thy soldiers' lives,</p> <p>25 And lead them to this honourable <u>league</u>.</p> <p>26</p> <p>Amasa. I will; at least, I'll do my best:</p> <p>28 And for the gracious offer thou hast made</p> <p>I give thee thanks, as much as for my head. –</p> <p>30 Then, you deceived poor souls of Israel,</p> <p>31 Since now ye see the errors you incurred,</p> <p>32 With thanks and due submission be appeased;</p> <p>33 And as ye see your captain's <u>president</u>,</p> <p>34 Here cast we, then, our swords at Joab's feet,</p> <p>35 Submitting with all zeal and reverence</p> <p>36 Our goods and bodies to his gracious hands.</p> <p>38</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[<i>Kneels with others.</i>]</p> <p>40 Joab. Stand up, and take ye all your swords again:</p> <p>42</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[<i>All stand up.</i>]</p> <p>44 David and Joab shall be blessed herein.</p> <p>46 Ahim. Now let me go inform my lord the king</p> <p>47 How God hath freed him from his enemies.</p> <p>48</p> <p>Joab. Another time, Ahimaäs, not now. –</p>	<p>1: Joab distinguishes between the Jews of the northern region known as Israel who were followers of Absalon, and the those of the south (Judah) who were generally loyal to David.</p> <p>= fought. = loathsome or hateful battles.</p> <p>= ripped, torn apart.</p> <p>= ie. Absalon, who was literally without the support of God.</p> <p>= meaning God, who is on David's side.</p> <p>= "keep your emotions or fighting spirit in check or moderation".</p> <p>9f: Joab encourages Amasa and the other rebels to return to David' fold.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">shroud = shelter, applied figuratively.¹</p> <p>= spirited or bold.¹</p> <p>ie. David, who is God's chosen one.</p> <p>16: Absalon's death leaves the rebels leaderless, and thus more vulnerable to execution.</p> <p>= confused.</p> <p>= welfare.</p> <p>= army.</p> <p>= commander. = prudent.²</p> <p>= compact, bond of friendship.^{1,2}</p> <p>27: noting the short line, Dyce wonders if Joab should be inserted as the first word of the speech; but as discussed earlier, there is no necessity for this.</p> <p>30f: Amasa turns to address his fellow soldiers.</p> <p>33: "and as you can see by your commander's example".</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">president = as Blistein observes, an alternate spelling of precedent.</p> <p>38: the stage direction here and at line 42 are Dyce's.</p>
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50 But, Cusay, go thyself, and tell the king
 The happy message of our good success.
 52

54 **Cusay.** I will, my lord, and thank thee for thy grace.
 [Exit.]

56 **Ahim.** What if thy servant should go too, my lord?
 58 **Joab.** What news hast thou to bring since he is gone?
 60 **Ahim.** Yet do Ahimaäs so much content,
 62 That he may run about so sweet a charge.
 64 **Joab.** Run, if thou wilt; and peace be with thy steps. –
 66 [Exit Ahimaas.]

68 Now follow, that you may salute the king
 With humble hearts and reconcilèd souls.
 70 **Amasa.** We follow, Joab, to our gracious king;
 72 And him our swords shall honour to our deaths.
 74 [Exeunt.]

SCENE XVII.

David's Headquarters at Manahaim.

49-51: Joab's decision to prevent Ahimaas from being the one to deliver the news to David of the army's victory is a subtly wise and solicitous one: likely remembering the fate of the Amalekite who had brought David word that Saul had died in a battle with the Philistines (2 Sam. 1:13-15) - David had had the messenger executed - Joab wants to protect Ahimaas by letting someone else report to David that his son Absalon is dead.

55: in the Bible, an individual named **Chusi** is instructed to deliver the twin news of the army's victory and the death of Absalon to David (2 Sam. 18:21).

Chusi is called **Cushi** in the *Geneva Bible*, which suggests:

(1) he is likely a Cushite, meaning he is an African from the land of Cush, which was located at modern Ethiopia, and thus a slave⁹ (the *Bishop's Bible* has a note in the margin next to verse 29 which identifies Cushi as an Ethiopian); and

(2) his name was the inspiration for Peele's naming David's closest retainer **Cusay**.

= Ahimaas means himself; he really wants to deliver the news of the victory to David!

= ie. Cusay is already on his way to tell David everything.

61: ie. "yet do me this one favour"; Ahimaas refers to himself in the third person.

62: "that I may go running on such an agreeable mission."

64: Joab gives in; he has no interest in arguing over the matter with Ahimaas.

66: at 2 Sam. 18:23, we are told that Ahimaas runs by way of the plains to reach David; Chusi (or, in our play, Cusay) had likely taken the road through the hills, which was a slower but more direct road to Mahanaim (where David was headquartered); the plains road was longer but faster, which will allow Ahimaas to reach the king first.²¹

68-69: Joab returns to addressing the defeated warriors.

Bible Verses Depicted in Scene XVII: there are no verses in the Bible corresponding to lines 1-151; lines 153 to the end of the scene match up with 2 Sam. 18:24 - 19:8.

The Setting: the exact location of Manahaim is unknown; scholars assume it is somewhere in the vicinity of the Woods of Ephraim, some placing it near the Jabbok (modern Zarqa)

*Enter David, Bethsabe, Salomon, Chileab, Adonia,
and Nathan, with their train.*

1 **Beth.** What means my lord, the lamp of Israel,
2 From whose bright eyes all eyes receive their light,
3 To dim the glory of his sweet aspects,
4 And paint his countenance with his heart's distress?

5 Why should his thoughts retain a sad conceit,
6 When every pleasure kneels before his throne,
7 And sues for sweet acceptance with his grace?

8 Take but your lute, and make the mountains dance,
9 Retrieve the sun's sphere, and restrain the clouds,

10 Give ears to trees, make savage lions tame,

11 Impose still silence to the loudest winds,
12 And fill the fairest day with foulest storms:

13 Then why should passions of much meaner power
14 Bear head against the heart of Israel?

15 **David.** Fair Bethsabe, thou mightst increase the strength
16 Of these thy arguments, drawn from my skill,
17 By urging thy sweet sight to my conceits,
18

River.

Scene XVII: the first part of this scene (lines 1-151) offers an oddly drawn out tableau of David mourning deeply over the rebellion of Absalon, and then giving his curious son Salomon advice, who waxes philosophically with his father. The scene drags on slowly, crudely and jarringly halting the increasingly dramatic movement of the play dead in its tracks.

Entering Characters: it has been a while since we have seen **Bethsabe**; present also is **King David**; **Salomon**, David's second and surviving son with Bethsabe (but sixth son overall); David's second son **Chileab**, by Abigail; his fourth son **Adonia**, by Haggith; and finally the prophet **Nathan**.

We may note that Peele chose not to call Bethsabe's second son **Solomon**, which is how his name is spelled in the *Bishop's Bible*, as well as being the name by which he is known today; all the other contemporary Bibles spell his name **Salomon**.

train = followers and attendants.

= face, expression.

4: "and wear his heart's distress so obviously on his face?" (**paint** was normally used to describe the application of cosmetics).

5-7: why should David remain so downcast when he has everything that can give him joy at his immediate disposal, begging to be utilized?

conceit = conception, thought.⁵

8-12: Bethsabe reminds David of the magical quality of his musicianship, trying to flatter him out of his depression.

9: ie. "recall the sun, and hold back the clouds" - a meteorological metaphor for the sunny side of David's disposition bursting through the darkness.
= an early version of the common sentiment that music can soothe wild beasts.

12: note how Bethsabe has ascribed to David's music the power to both bring on storms (line 12) and bring out the sun (line 9).

13-14: ie. "then why should such base emotions - melancholia specifically - prevail in your heart?"

Bear head against = a variation of the expression "to keep head against", which meant "to maintain headway against" or "to hold one's own in the face of (difficulty or opposition)" (quoting the OED directly).

There is also a bit of wordplay with **head** and **heart** in line 14.

16-20: David seems to be suggesting that Bethsabe might do better to help his mood by simply letting him look upon her.

20 Whose virtue ever served for sacred balm
 To cheer my pinings past all earthly joys:
 But, Bethsabe, the daughter of the Highest,
 22 Whose beauty builds the towers of Israel,
 She that in chains of pearl and unicorn
 24 Leads at her train the ancient golden world.
 The world that Adam held in paradise,
 26 Whose breath refineth all infectious airs,
 And makes the meadows smile at her repair, –
 28 She, she, my dearest Bethsabe,
 Fair Peace, the goddess of our graces here,
 30 Is fled the streets of fair Jerusalem,
 The fields of Israel, and the heart of David,
 32 Leading my comforts in her golden chains,
 Linked to the life and soul of Absalon.
 34

Beth. Then is the pleasure of my sovereign's heart
 36 So wrapt within the bosom of that son,
 That Salomon, whom Israel's God affects,
 38 And gave the name unto him for his love,
 Should be no salve to comfort David's soul?

40

David. Salomon, my love, is David's lord;
 42 Our God hath named him lord of Israel:
 In him (for that, and since he is thy son,)
 44 Must David needs be pleasèd at the heart;
 And he shall surely sit upon my throne.

46 But Absalon, the beauty of my bones,
 Fair Absalon, the counterfeit of love,
 48 Sweet Absalon, the image of content,
 Must claim a portion in his father's care,
 50 And be in life and death King David's son.

52 **Nath.** Yet, as my lord hath said, let Salomon reign,
 Whom God in naming hath anointed king.
 54 Now is he apt to learn th' eternal laws,
 Whose knowledge being rooted in his youth
 56 Will beautify his age with glorious fruits;

While Absalon, incensed with graceless pride,
 58 Usurps and stains the kingdom with his sin:

= torments.

23: the horns of unicorns (which are surprisingly mentioned a number of times in the Bible).

= ie. in her wake.

= purifies, cleanses.¹

= arrival.

29: another short line.

29-33: David expresses his feelings of dislocation over the war raging nearby and his worry about Absalon.

16-33: an oddity of David's speech is that he uses the imagery of something being led in chains in two completely distinct metaphors.

=loves; see the note at line 39 immediately below.

= soothing balm.

35-39: for the first time in the play, Salomon is discussed; we remember that after Bethsabe's first baby died, David went in to comfort and sleep with her, which resulted in the birth of their second child, also a boy, whom David named Salomon. We are told in 2 Sam. 12:24 that the "*the Lord loved*" Salomon.

41: another short and likely mutilated line, whose meaning as written, say the old editors, makes no sense; Bullen suggests changing *lord* to *lovèd son*.

45: God had promised David, "*I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy body, and will establish his kingdom.*" (2 Sam. 7:12)

= very portrait or image of love.

= *Salomon* is disyllabic in this line: *SAL'-mon*.

54-56: the lessons which Salomon can be taught now while he is young, and therefore more open to learning, will bear fruit when he is older and ruling Israel; note the garden metaphor with *rooted* and *fruits*.

= ie. spurred on.

= ie. taints; Blistein notes the men are discussing Absalon in the present tense because they do not yet know he is dead.

Let Salomon be made thy staff of age,
 60 Fair Israel's rest, and honour of thy race.
 62 **David.** Tell me, my Salomon, wilt thou embrace
 Thy father's precepts gravèd in thy heart,
 64 And satisfy my zeal to thy renown
 With practice of such sacred principles
 66 As shall concern the state of Israel?
 68 **Sal.** My royal father, if the heavenly zeal,
 Which for my welfare feeds upon your soul,
 70 Were not sustained with virtue of mine own;

If the sweet accents of your cheerful voice
 72 Should not each hour beat upon mine ears
 As sweetly as the breath of Heaven to him
 74 That gaspeth scorched with the summer's sun;
 I should be guilty of unpardoned sin,
 76 Fearing the plague of Heaven and shame of earth:
 But since I vow myself to learn the skill
 78 And holy secrets of his mighty hand
 Whose cunning tunes the music of my soul,

80 It would content me, father, first to learn
 How the Eternal framed the firmament;

82 Which bodies lead their influence by fire,

And which are filled with hoary winter's ice;

84 What sign is rainy, and what star is fair;

Why by the rules of true proportiön

= a common metaphor, of a younger man acting as a walking stick on which an elderly individual may "lean on" for support and assistance.
 = respite (from war).

= instructions.² = engraved.
 = devotion.² = honour or fame.

68-76: typically long Elizabethan sentence; in the original edition of *David*, only commas were used to separate the clauses, but modern editors insert semi-colons to facilitate reading. The sentence comprises first two long conditional clauses (*if* this, *if* that), followed eventually by the conclusion.

68-70: "if the sacred devotion you have for my well-being were not complemented by the power of my own devotion to the same;"

71-74: "if the sound of your voice did not give me as much pleasure as a cool breeze does to one standing under a scorching sun."

= ie. God's hand.

79: a neat musical metaphor of God, with His expertise or discernment, keeping Salomon on a righteous path.

81: "how God created the heavens".

82-83: Salomon may have the stars in mind here: a late 17th century book on philosophy records how those in ancient times, for example, believed "the Heaven to be Fire, and that the Stars were so many flaming Torches placed in it."¹⁸

It is worth observing further that the zodiac's 12 signs were divided into four groups of three; one of the three, comprised of Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, was known as the **Fiery Trigon** (the other three Trignons were Airy, Earthy and Watery, corresponding to the four "elements" which were thought to comprise all matter in the universe).

lead = some editors change this to **lend**.

influence = an astrological term for an imagined ethereal fluid flowing down to earth from the stars and influencing or governing a person's life.

83: Salomon may be referring here to comets, whose appearances were thought to be inauspicious; the same treatise referred to in the previous note describes comets as "little Icy Bodies", or "Mock Suns" with "long tails".¹⁸

= the constellation Orion, which appeared in the late autumn, was considered to be the signal for the arrival of bad weather.

= a very common phrase, meaning something like "correct

86 The year is still divided into months,
The months to days, the days to certain hours;
88 What fruitful race shall fill the future world;
Or for what time shall this round building stand;

90 What magistrates, what kings shall keep in awe
Men's minds with bridles of th' eternal law.

92

David. Wade not too far, my boy, in waves too deep:

94 The feeble eyes of our aspiring thoughts
Behold things present, and record things past;
96 But things to come exceed our human reach,
And are not painted yet in angels' eyes:
98 For those, submit thy sense, and say – "Thou power,

100 That now art framing of the future world,
Know'st all to come, not by the course of Heaven,
By frail conjectures of inferior signs,

102 By monstrous floods, by flights and flocks of birds,

By bowels of a sacrificèd beast,

104 Or by the figures of some hidden art;
But by a true and natural presage,

106 Laying the ground and perfect architect

Of all our actions now before thine eyes,

ratios" or "proper measures".¹

= ie. how long. = perhaps meaning earth.

90-91: "how government officials and monarchs keep rein on their subjects' behaviour by recourse to God's law." Note the interesting metaphor of a king riding the minds of men and curbing their natural appetites with a bridle, as if those minds were horses.

th' eternal law = the concept of describing God's laws as the *eternal law* dates back to the 1530's.

80-91: **Salomon's Inquiry:** Interestingly, Salomon, rather than asking David for advice on how to rule a kingdom, seeks to know the secrets of the universe.

This train of thought is reminiscent of the questions the curious Dr. Faustus puts to the demon Mephistophilis (to whom he has just traded his soul) in Christopher Marlowe's play, e.g. "Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?...Are all celestial bodies but one globe, / As is the substance of this centric earth?...How many heavens or spheres are there? etc."

93: a very neat metaphor for one trying to learn about something that is beyond understanding.

94-96: "while we can understand the past and present, the future is beyond human vision."

= depicted, ie. they are unknowable.

98-108: in short, "if you want to learn about the future, pray to God, and forego those types of superstitions used by humans and seers to predict the future."

Thou power = "oh Lord".

99: "who even now is molding future events".

= ie. the movement of the stars.

101: "(nor) by guessing wildly about what will happen by interpreting worthless signs".

102: *By monstrous floods* = unusual natural phenomena were thought to presage calamities.

by flights and flocks of birds = the idea of predicting success or failure of an enterprise by watching the direction that birds flew dates back to ancient times.

103: ancient priests might examine the condition of the organs of a slaughtered animal to determine the will of the gods.

104: "or by interpreting secret symbols."

= ie. "indication of what will happen".

= the use of *architect* here makes little sense; Dyce wonders if the word should be *archetype*, meaning "example" or "model"; Bullen suggests *architire*, a word which had appeared in a contemporary poem, and seems to be a poetic word for *architecture*.¹

<p>108 From Adam to <u>the end of Adam's seed</u>: O Heaven, protect my weakness with thy strength! 110 So look on me that I may view thy face, And see these secrets written in thy brows. 112 O sun, come <u>dart</u> thy rays upon my moon!</p> <p>That now mine eyes, eclipsèd to the earth, 114 May brightly be <u>refined</u> and shine to Heaven; Transform me from this flesh, that I may live, 116 Before my death, <u>regenerate</u> with thee. O thou great God, <u>ravish</u> my earthly <u>sprite</u>! 118 That for the time <u>a more than human skill</u> May feed the <u>organons</u> of all my sense; 120 That, when I think, thy thoughts may be my guide, And, when I speak, I may be made by choice 122 The perfect echo of thy heavenly voice." Thus say, my son, and thou shalt learn them all.</p> <p>124 Sal. A secret <u>fury ravisheth my soul</u>,</p> <p>126 Lifting my mind above her human bounds; And, as the eagle, <u>rouse</u>d from her <u>stand</u></p> <p>128 With violent hunger, <u>towering</u> in the air, Seizeth her feathered prey, and <u>thinks to feed</u>, 130 But seeing then a cloud beneath her feet, Lets fall the fowl, and is emboldened 132 With eyes intente to <u>bedare</u> the sun, And <u>styeth</u> close unto his stately sphere;</p> <p>134 So Salomon, mounted on the burning wings Of <u>zeal divine</u>, lets fall his mortal food, 136 And cheers his senses with <u>celestial air</u>, <u>Treads</u> in the golden starry labyrinth, 138 And holds his eyes fixed on <u>Jehovah's brows</u>. Good father, teach me further what to do.</p> <p>140 Nath. See, David, how his <u>haughty spirit mounts</u>, 142 Even now of height to wield a diadem: Then make him promise that he may succeed, 144 And rest old Israel's bones from <u>broils</u> of war.</p> <p>146 David. Nathan, thou prophet, sprung from <u>Jesse's root</u>, I promise thee and lovely Bethsabe, 148 My Salomon shall govern after me.</p>	<p>= ie. the last man on earth.</p> <p>112: another fine metaphor: Salomon should ask God to allow the sun (representing enlightenment) to shine on the (otherwise dark) moon (which represents his ignorance). <u>dart</u> = shoot.</p> <p>= cleared, so as to be able to see better.</p> <p>= spiritually reborn.¹ = bring rapture to. = common alternative form of <i>spirit</i>. = a supernatural level of discernment. = ie. bodily organs, usually applied to the faculty of the mind.¹</p> <p>122: ie. "to speak as if thou were speaking through me." Note that the last two lines (121-2) of the speech David wants Salomon to make to God comprise a rhyming couplet; the rhyme signals the end of David's quote.</p> <p>125: <i>fury</i> = inspired frenzy, enthusiasm.^{1,5} <u>ravisheth my soul</u> = "enraptures my soul".</p> <p>127: <i>roused</i> = rising, ie. flying.¹ <u>stand</u> = place to rest (for a bird of prey) or await to ambush.¹</p> <p>= climbing (in the air) in preparation to swoop down on its prey.¹ = ie. plans to eat it.</p> <p>= defy.¹ 133: "and soareth (<i>styeth</i>)³ closer to the sun;" <i>sty</i> was an ancient word, meaning to rise up or mount, that finally died out in the 17th century.¹</p> <p>= religious fervour. = divine or heavenly air. = walks. = ie. God's countenance (<i>brows</i> usually specifically referred to the forehead).¹</p> <p>= aspiring. = climbs. 142: "even now high enough to wear a crown." 143-4: "promise Salomon that he will succeed you as king, so that Israel may finally know peace." <u>broils</u> = turmoil.¹</p> <p>= ie. the family of Jesse (as ancestor), who was David's father, and from whom the Messiah was expected to be descended (Isaiah 11:10 and Revelations 5:5 use the phrase <i>root of Jesse</i>); David applies the expression figuratively to Nathan.</p>
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150	Beth. He that hath touched thee with this righteous thought Preserve the harbour of thy thoughts in peace!	
152		
154	<i>Enter Messenger.</i>	153: we now return to the main action of the play.
156	Mess. My lord, thy servants of the watch have seen <u>One</u> running <u>hitherward</u> from forth the wars,	155-6: the men standing watch on the city walls see Cusay running towards them. = someone. = in this direction.
158	David. If he be come alone, he bringeth news.	158: compare 2 Sam. 18:25: " <i>If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth.</i> "
160	Mess. Another hath thy servant seen, my lord, Whose running much resembles Sadoc's son.	161: the watchman recognizes a second runner they see as Ahimaas.
162	David. He is a good man, and good tidings brings.	163: compare 2 Sam. 18:26: " <i>he is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.</i> "
164		
166	<i>Enter Ahimaas.</i>	165: Ahimaas, running on the longer but faster plains road, arrives before Cusay.
168	Ahim. Peace and content be with my lord the king, Whom Israel's God hath blessed with victory.	
170	David. Tell me, <u>Ahimaas</u> , lives my Absalon?	= Ahimaas is uniquely pronounced with three syllables in this line: <i>a-HI-mas</i> .
172	Ahim. I saw a troop of soldiers gatherèd, But know not what the tumult might import.	172-3: Ahimaas has shrewdly realized he better not mention Absalon's death to David.
174	David. Stand by, until some other may inform The heart of David with a happy truth.	175-6: the Bible quotes David at 2 Sam. 18:30 as saying simply, " <i>Turn aside, and stand here.</i> "
178	<i>Enter Cusay.</i>	
180	Cusay. Happiness and honour live with David's soul, Whom God hath blessed with conquest of his foes	
182	David. But, Cusay, lives the young man Absalon?	
184	Cusay. The stubborn enemies to David's peace, And all that cast their <u>darts</u> against his crown, Fare ever like the young man Absalon!	185-192: Cusay naïvely thinks that David will be overjoyed to hear of Absalon's death, and reports the news with unwelcome enthusiasm. 185-7: in brief, "may all of David's rebellious enemies suffer the same fate as did Absalon!" darts = spears or arrows.
188	For as he <u>rid</u> the woods of <u>Ephraim</u> , Which fought for thee as much as all thy men,	= rode through. = Ephraim has three syllables: <i>EPH-rai-im</i> .
190	His hair was tangled in a shady oak; And hanging there, by Joab and his men	189: ie. the trees of the forest proved as much of a detriment to Absalon's forces as did David's own army; the line is suggested by 2 Sam. 18:8, which observes that " <i>the wood(s) devoured mo (ie. more) people that day, then did the sword.</i> " See the note entitled The Battle at the beginning of Scene XV.
192	Sustained the stroke of well-deservèd death.	185-192: Cusay's Unexpectedly Poor Judgment: because

194 **David.** Hath Absalon sustained the stroke of death?
 Die, David, for the death of Absalon,
 196 And make these cursèd news the bloody darts
 That through his bowels rip thy wretched breast.
 198 Hence, David, walk the solitary woods,
 And in some cedar's shade the thunder slew,
 200 And fire from Heaven hath made his branches black,
 Sit mourning the decease of Absalon:
 202 Against the body of that blasted plant
 In thousand shivers break thy ivory lute,
 204 Hanging thy stringless harp upon his boughs;
 And through the hollow sapless sounding trunk
 206 Bellow the torments that perplex thy soul.
 There let the winds sit sighing till they burst;
 208 Let tempest, muffled with a cloud of pitch,
 Threaten the forests with her hellish face,
 210 And, mounted fiercely on her iron wings,
Rend up the wretched engine by the roots
 212 That held my dearest Absalon to death.
 Then let them toss my broken lute to Heaven,
 214 Even to his hands that beats me with the strings,
 To show how sadly his poor shepherd sings.

216
 218 [Goes to his pavilion and sits close a while.]

Beth. Die, Bethsabe, to see thy David mourn,
 220 To hear his tunes of anguish and of hell.
 O, help, my David, help thy Bethsabe,
 222

She kneels down.

224 Whose heart is piercèd with thy breathy swords,
 226 And bursts with burden of ten thousand griefs!
 Now sit thy sorrows sucking of my blood:
 228 O, that it might be poison to their powers,
 And that their lips might draw my bosom dry,

Cusay is so close to the king, it is actually not credible that Cusay would fail to realize how unwise it is of him to describe the demise of Absalon in such a cheerful way to David; but in the Bible, the deliverer of the news is not a close friend, but, as mentioned earlier, one Chusi, a possible slave, with whom David has no known relationship; Peele simply gives the Cushite's speech to Cusay, basically unconcerned that Cusay is speaking out of character.

= *news* was commonly considered a plural word. = spears.

199-200: "and in the shade of a cedar tree which burnt to black upon being struck by lightning."

= ruined, withered.

= splinters, pieces.

= its.

= ie. because the tree had been killed by a lightning strike.

= afflict.¹

= "let a wind-storm". = black cloud.

= severe, harsh.¹

= tear. = agent or means, referring to the oak tree which ensnared Absalon.

= ie. God's. = the sense seems to be "whips".

= ie. meaning David himself.

214-5: David's speech of mourning ends with a rhyming couplet.

217F: David Mourns: compare 2 Sam. 18:33: "*And the king was moved (ie. deeply affected emotionally), and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said 'O, my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for (ie. instead of) thee, O Absalom my son, my son.'*"

Our stage-David enters his large tent (*pavilion*) to shed his tears.

223: this stage direction is in the original; Dyce changes the direction to "Lies down", to agree with Joab's observation in line 246 below that Bethsabe is *prostrate*.

= David's anguished cries and sighs, like swords, metaphorically stab Bethsabe in the heart, such is the pain they cause her.

= ie. "the burden".

227-230: a disturbing and graphic (and alliterative!) metaphor of David's sorrows sucking from Bethsabe's body her blood, which she wishes was poisonous so it would

230	So David's love might ease him, though she die!	kill off the king's sorrows, even if it kills her by bleeding her dry.
232	<i>Nath.</i> These violent passions come not from above;	232-4: Nathan remonstrates with both David and Bethsabe: the royal couple's exaggerated emotions are not sanctioned by God; the undesirability of allowing one's emotions to get the better of one is a frequent theme in Elizabethan drama.
234	David and Bethsabe offend the Highest, To mourn in this immeasurable sort.	
236	<i>David.</i> [<i>Looking forth.</i>] O Absalon, Absalon! O my son, my son!	236: David pokes his head out of the tent.
238	<u>Would God</u> that I had died <u>for</u> Absalon!	= "I wish to God". = ie. instead of.
240	But he is dead; ah, dead! Absalon is dead: And David lives to die for Absalon.	219-240: we may mention here that there is no mention in the Bible of Bethsabe mourning with nor Nathan reproaching David.
242	[<i>Sits close again.</i>]	242: David withdraws into his tent again.
244	<i>Enter Joab, Abisai, Ithay, and their train.</i>	244: the leaders of David's army arrive.
246	<i>Joab.</i> Why lies the queen so prostrate on the ground?	
248	Why is this company so <u>tragic-hued</u> ?	= ie. tainted with the colours of sorrow or tragedy; an exceptional and unique compound word invented by Peele.
250	Why is the king now absent from his men, And marcheth not in triumph through the gates?	
252	[<i>Unfolds the pavilion.</i>]	251: Joab opens the flaps of David's tent so he can look in and see the king.
254	David, <u>awake</u> ; if sleep have shut thine eyes, <u>Sleep of affection</u> , that thou canst not see	= "wake up!" = sleep brought on by either disease or emotion (Blistein, p. 280).
256	The honour offered to the victor's head: Joab brings conquest piercèd on his spear, And joy from all the tribes of Israel.	244-257: The Arrival of the Victorious Army: David's mourning has cast disappointment over the exultant mood of the army; see 2 Sam. 19:2.
258	<i>David.</i> Thou man of blood, thou sepulchre of death,	
260	Whose marble breast intomb[s] my bowels <u>quick</u> ,	259-260: another dramatic metaphor: the blood-thirsty Joab is like a tomb in which David's guts are buried alive (<u>quick</u>).
262	Did I not <u>charge</u> thee, nay, <u>entreat thy hand</u> , Even for my sake, to spare my Absalon?	= command. = ie. "beg or beseech thee".
264	And hast thou now, <u>in spite of</u> David's health, And scorn to do my heart some happiness, Given him the sword and spilt his <u>purple</u> soul?	= "in defiance of", with the sense being, "notwithstanding how detrimental such an act would be to". = <u>purple</u> was used to describe the colour of both blood and royalty.
266	<i>Joab.</i> What, <u>irks it David</u> , that he victor breathes,	= "does it distress David".
268	That Judah and the fields of Israel Should cleanse their faces from their children's blood?	
270	What, art thou weary of thy royal rule? Is Israel's throne a serpent in thine eyes,	
272	And <u>he</u> that set thee there so <u>far from</u> thanks, That thou must curse <u>his servant</u> for his sake?	= ie. God. = undeserving of. = Joab means himself.
274	Hast thou not said that, as the morning light, The cloudless morning, so should be thine house,	274-7: ie. "didn't you say that your family should resemble a perfect cloudless dawn in its eternal purity and righteousness, rather than be stained by error and so die out like a
276	And not as flowers by the brightest rain	

Which grow up quickly and as quickly fade?

278 Hast thou not said, the wicked are as thorns,
That cannot be preservèd with the hand,
280 And that the man shall touch them must be armed
With coats of iron and garments made of steel,
282 Or with the shaft of a defencèd spear?

And art thou angry he is now cut off
284 That led the guiltless swarming to their deaths,
And was more wicked than an host of men?
286 Advance thee from thy melancholy den,
And deck thy body with thy blissful robes,
288 Or, by the Lord that sways the Heaven I swear,
I'll lead thine armies to another king
290 Shall cheer them for their princely chivalry,

And not sit daunted, frowning in the dark,
292 When his fair looks, with oil and wine refreshed,

Should dart into their bosoms gladsome beams,

flower that has quickly bloomed and then faded after a rainstorm?"

Peele has adopted the language of 2 Sam. 23:4, which, being part of series of verses identified as David's "*last words*", has been interpreted to be either a prescription of how a righteous king should rule, or a prediction of what Jesus' empire will look like:¹⁹

"*Euen as the morning light when the sunne riseth, the morning, I say, without clouds, so shall mine house be, and not as the grass of the earth is by the bright rain.*" (*Geneva Bible*).

278-282: here Peele has adopted 2 Sam. 23:6-7 from the *Geneva Bible*:

"⁶ *But the wicked shall be every one as thorns thrust away, because they can not be taken with hands:*

⁷ *But the man that shall touch them, must be defended with iron, or with the shaft of a spear, and they shall be burnt with fire in the same place.*"

The meaning here is that wicked men in general, and evil rulers in particular, should be disposed of like thorns, which must be dealt with by violence and tough or hard-to-break instruments.

The 18th century Bible commentator Adam Clarke has a particularly useful gloss on the metaphor of "removing thorns":

"*As thorns thrust away* - A metaphor taken from hedging; the workman thrusts the thorns aside either with his bill (*ed. - a garden tool for cutting*) or hand, protected by his impenetrable mitten or glove, till, getting a fair blow at the roots, he cuts them all down. The man is fenced with iron, and the handle of his bill is like the staff of a spear. This is a good representation of the dubbing-bill (*ed. - a cutting or pruning instrument, something like a scythe*¹), with which they slash the thorn hedge on each side before they level the tops by the pruning-shears. The handle is five or six feet long. This is a perfectly natural and intelligible image."²⁰

preserved (line 279) = taken or grasped.⁵

defenced (line 282) = protected.

= meaning Absalon.

= ie. "he who". = ie. so many innocent people.

= army.

= ie. "come out". = place of retreat.¹

= adorn, dress.

290: "who shall buoy the spirits of those soldiers who have served him with such military distinction"; the reference to *chivalry* is of course anachronistic.

292: compare this line to Scene VII.122-3 (which borrows from 2 Sam. 12:20), in which David, his mourning for his first child with Bethsabe ended, asks for water to wash, oil to "clear (his) looks", and wine to drink.

fair looks = David's handsome face or attractive features.

= shoot or send forth. = cheering, pleasant.

294	And fill their stomachs with triumphant feasts; That when elsewhere stern war shall sound <u>his trump</u> ,	= ie. its war-trumpet. = army. ⁵
296	And call another <u>battle</u> to the field, Fame still may bring thy valiant soldiers home,	
298	And for their service happily confess She wanted worthy trumps to sound their prowess:	299: personified Fame lacks the ability to proclaim the magnificence of David's soldiers with sufficient magnitude or effect.
300	Take thou this course and live; refuse and die.	Joab Reprimands David: the speech's many lines (lines 267-300) dedicated to Joab's reproach of David parallel the several long verses (2 Sam. 19:5-7) dedicated to Joab's criticism of the king in the Bible.
302	Abis. Come, brother, let him sit there till he sink; Some other shall <u>advance</u> the name of Joab.	302-3: Abisai picks up on Joab's threat of line 289 above and suggests they leave right away to find another, more appreciative, monarch to serve. = promote.
304	<u>[Offers to go out with Joab.]</u>	= begins.
306		
308	Beth. <i>[Rising]</i> O, stay, my lords, stay! David mourns no more, But riseth to give honour to your acts.	
310	David. <i>[Rising, and coming from his pavilion]</i>	312-7: David tries to rouse himself from his dark mood by convincing himself that Absalon, in leaving earth, is now in a better place.
312	Then happy art thou, David's fairest son, That, freed from the yoke of earthly <u>toils</u> ,	= labours or snares. ¹
314	And séquestered from sense of human sins, Thy soul shall <u>joy</u> the sacred <u>cabinet</u> Of those divine <u>ideas</u> that present Thy <u>changèd</u> spirit with a Heaven of bliss.	314: ie. "and separated or secluded so that he no longer has to perceive man's wicked behaviour". ⁵ = enjoy. = receptacle. ¹ = ideas has three syllables here: <i>i-DE-as</i> . = altered.
318	Then thou art gone; ah, thou art gone, my son! To Heaven, I hope, my Absalon is gone:	
320	Thy soul there placed in honour of the saints, Or angels clad with immortality,	
322	Shall reap a <u>sevenfold</u> grace for all thy griefs; Thy eyes, now no more eyes but shining stars, Shall <u>deck</u> the flaming heavens with <u>novel lamps</u> ;	= sevenfold (meaning a seven-fold return) is disyllabic: <i>SE'EN-fold</i> . = adorn. = new. = a common term for stars.
324	There shalt thou taste the drink of <u>seraphins</u> ,	= the seraphins (ie. <i>seraphim</i>) are the angels of the first choir of the first hierarchy (the <i>counsellors</i>); see the note at line 8 of the Prologue. The job of the counsellors is to surround and eternally adore God. ⁷
326	And cheer thy feelings with <u>archangels'</u> food; Thy day of rest, thy holy sabbath-day, Shall be eternal; and, <u>the curtain drawn</u> ,	= archangels comprise the second class of the third hierarchy of angels (the <i>messengers</i>); the messengers' function is to intervene in the affairs of humanity. ⁷ = ie. "when the curtain draws open to reveal God in all his splendour"; a self-referential allusion to a stage curtain which may be opened to reveal a scene.
328		

Thou shalt behold thy sovereign face to face,
330 With wonder, knit in triple unity,
Unity infinite and innumerable –
332 Courage, brave captains! Joab's tale hath stirred,
And made the suit of Israel preferred.
334
336 **Joab.** Bravely resolved, and spoken like a king:
Now may old Israel and his daughters sing.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

338

FINIS.

= ie. God.

= an apparently anachronistic and decidedly Christian reference to the triune nature, or trinity, of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

= "moved my soul", or "raised me from my depression".
333: "and convinced me that my concern for Israel's well-being must supersede my anxiety over my own."

= its; the play ends with a rhyming couplet.

David's Response to Joab: in the Bible, David does not respond to Joab's admonition; instead, when Joab has finished his speech, we simply read, "*Then the king arose, and sat in the gate.*"

George Peele's Invented Words

Like all of the writers of the era, George Peele made up words when he felt like it, usually by adding prefixes and suffixes to known words, combining words, or using a word in a way not yet used before. The following is a list of words from *David and Bethsabe* that are indicated by the OED as being either the first or only use of a given word, or, as noted, the first use with a given meaning:

almond flower

bedare

fever-sick

the phrase **bear head against**

kindless (meaning devoid of natural affection or love)

loving-knot (instead of the older expression *love-knot*)

retrieve (meaning to cause something to return to its former state or place)

rupture (applied to an abstract or immaterial thing)

sun-proof

On the other hand, research suggests that Peele's use of the following words antedates the earliest citations found in the OED (as of December 2018), and so Peele may be credited with being the first to use these terms in print:

all-amazed (this appeared in one other 1599 publication too)

praise-notes

sheep-feast

sinewed (verb, meaning strengthened, as by sinews).

tragic-hued

Finally, research confirms that the following terms, for which Peele is given credit by the OED for their first appearance in the written record, actually did appear in earlier publications, and thus should *not* be assigned to Peele as original usages:

cloudless

inchaste

pocket full / pocketful

waveless

wing (as a verb, meaning to figuratively give wings to something)

NOTES on the ANNOTATIONS

Mention of Dyce, Bullen, Keltie, Blistein and Manly in the annotations refers to the notes provided by each of these editors in their respective editions of this play, each cited fully below.

The most commonly cited sources are listed in the footnotes immediately below. The complete list of footnotes appears at the end of this play.

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