

## The Eve-ing of Bathsheba in Twentieth Century Film

Johanna Stiebert, University of Leeds

Katie Edwards' important monograph *Admen and Eve* demonstrates that the biblical Eve appears prominently (sometimes even in strikingly similar poses) in both nineteenth and twentieth century fin-de-siècle visual representations (Edwards 2012, 35-63). And yet, neither in the biblical narrative, for all her (short-lived) narrative dominance, nor in the broodingly triumphant paintings of John Collier (1887) and Franz von Stuck (1893) (Edwards 2012, figures 2.6 and 2.12),<sup>1</sup> nor in the multitude of ostensibly liberated and sexually empowered depictions of contemporary advertising, is Eve truly a representation of either feminist achievement or even of any potency for women's equality. Instead, so Edwards' grim conclusion, Eve has been regurgitated again and again in response to the perception that feminism is either a significant social threat (in the case of nineteenth century fin-de-siècle art) or passé, because the battle is won and women's rights and opportunities are now equal with those of men (in the case of postfeminist twentieth century fin-de-siècle advertising). Yet while Eve in advertising images indeed outstrips (literally and figuratively!) Adam in terms of her allure, autonomy and apparent power,<sup>2</sup> the situation for actual women remains "same old": women continue to be disadvantaged vis-à-vis men – more likely to be in debt (Edwards 2012, 46), more likely to be paid considerably less for the same job (Edwards 2012, 48-50)<sup>3</sup>—and more likely to be judged on appearances rather than ability and to be targets of sexual forms of discrimination, harassment and violence.<sup>4</sup> Postfeminism has been a letdown. Just as Eve in Genesis fleetingly exhibits voice and agency, only to fade into obscurity, so the deluge of glitzy advertising images of Eve market no more than a superficial and "limited female empowerment within a patriarchal structure ... Postfeminism, in this package, is nothing new; in fact it is even older than the images it recycles" (Edwards 2012, 138).

<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, the former painting is of Lilith and the latter of Sin but the association (even identification) with Eve, given that both women are naked and entwined by a serpent, is only too clear.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards presents a catalogue of examples demonstrating that overwhelmingly in advertising Eve-figures are portrayed as dominant over Adam-figures. Adam is often entirely absent and, when present, either in the background, or in licensed withdrawal, or both. In a Versace crockery advertisement, for instance, Eve (Claudia Schiffer) is not only taller than Adam (Sylvester Stallone), she is also facing the viewer while his gaze is diverted. Eve holds up an apple, while Adam's arms are trailing by his side. The overall effect is of Eve's agency over against Adam's comparative passivity (Edwards 2012, 64-126 and figure 3.19).

<sup>3</sup> Edwards cites statistics that UK women are paid 13-14.9% less than men for equivalent jobs. At the time of writing a major pay-dispute test-case concerning workers employed by the supermarket chain ASDA was announced. Nearly 400 ASDA employees, most of them women, are challenging the discrepancy in pay for check-out staff (mostly female) vis-à-vis warehouse workers (mostly male), despite assigned tasks being comparable (Davies and Butler, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> The failure of postfeminism and persistence of sex-based injustice is laid out in depressing detail in Coppock, Haydon and Richter (1995), as well as Walter (2010).

This paper demonstrates that Eve is not the sole biblical female figure subverted for nefarious purposes. Bathsheba, like Eve, is a sexualized and objectified figure in her story: a woman seen, desired and taken for sex by a powerful man. Like Eve in advertising, Bathsheba in film has been reimagined as more active, colluding and liberated than she is in her narrative. But, as with the postfeminist Eve, Bathsheba in three twentieth century films derives her “power” solely from her sexual appeal, which renders a man powerless; like Eve, she exhibits no solidarity with but ousts other women. In the domain of popular culture neither Eve, nor Bathsheba, even where they are granted a higher degree of visibility than in the biblical text, offers new, positive, let alone liberating possibilities.

The tersely told story of David and Bathsheba has (like Genesis 2-3) been read in a variety of ways: from attributing to Bathsheba calculated political acumen, to recognizing her as a powerless victim of rape. Most memorable about Bathsheba (certainly judging by the preoccupation of popular depiction) is her physical allure.<sup>5</sup> While little is said in the biblical text about the sexual magnetism of either Eve or Bathsheba, in popular culture both have become temptresses – beautiful, enticing, sexually irresistible. While I agree with Edwards that advertising “is arguably the most influential cultural reflector and shaper of attitudes and beliefs about gender, sexuality and race” (Edwards 2012, 2), I will be discussing three film versions, because—perhaps surprisingly—Bathsheba is not prominent in advertising. The films are Henry King’s *David and Bathsheba*, starring Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward (1951),<sup>6</sup> Bruce Beresford’s *King David*, starring Richard Gere and Alice Krige (1985) and Robert Markowitz’s *David*, starring Nathaniel Parker and Sheryl Lee (1997).<sup>7</sup> By comparing the three filmic depictions from separate decades, focusing on the encounter between David and Bathsheba, I hope to show, in Edwards’ words, that “popular culture is dense with biblical iconography exploited by the producers of popular culture as vehicles for implicit meanings, qualities and values to be communicated to the consumer” (Edwards 2012, ix). What all three films demonstrate is the sustained and seemingly entrenched notion that women are empowered (only) by their sexual desirability and, furthermore, that men cannot help themselves in the proximity of this. In a sinister twist, what is possibly rape in the biblical account becomes romance in film.

In 2 Samuel 11 Bathsheba is peripheral, serving above all to precipitate the downfall of David (just another man, like Adam and Samson before him, to be brought low by a woman). The story begins as David’s armies are making conquests, while the king remains in Jerusalem (v.1). Late one day David rises

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<sup>5</sup> The bathing Bathsheba has been a popular artist’s motif, particularly in late Renaissance painting. In film Bathsheba is consistently played by great beauties, including, at the height of their fame, models Susan Hayward (see below) and Jane Seymour (in the two-part television drama *The Story of David* of 1976, three years after starring as a Bond-girl in *Live and Let Die*).

<sup>6</sup> King’s film has already been analyzed fully by biblical scholars. See especially the full discussion by Kelso (2002). I have discussed all three films from a different perspective elsewhere, see Stiebert (2014).

<sup>7</sup> There are other film versions of the David story but these three serve well to illustrate a wider pattern. The announcement was made recently that Ridley Scott (director of *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, due for release in December 2014) is considering another grand-scale Bible-inspired project – on David (Kroll 2014).

from his couch and walks about on the roof of his palace when he apprehends a woman bathing. The woman is of very pleasing appearance (v.2). David makes enquiries about her and is informed she is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite. The woman now has a personal name, and has been identified with males—both a father and a husband—thereby staking out her status in characteristically patriarchal terms. Both the woman’s father and husband may be very privileged men indeed, numbering among David’s “Thirty” (actually comprising thirty-seven), an elite royal corps (2 Sam 23:24-39).<sup>8</sup> Next, David sends messengers to take and bring her to him, and lies with her – then she is returned to her house. All this happens in a single verse (v.4).<sup>9</sup> It seems difficult – without considerable imagination and embellishment—to construe a great romance here. In the next verse the woman (*’ishshâ*, not a personal name) conceives and sends notification to David: *hārâ ’ānōkî*, “pregnant I am,” a taciturn, direct, unambiguous message in the first person (v.5). Now David sends word to Joab to have Uriah sent to him – and Joab sends Uriah: the Hebrew verb *shālach*, “to send” punctuates the story insistently. After some chit-chat, David tells Uriah to go to his house and wash his feet (v.8)—a pretty clear invitation to have sex, possibly a jocular expression between men. But Uriah does not go to his house, explaining that he cannot do so while the ark, Israel and Judah remain in tents (or at Succoth) and while Joab and David’s men are at war. When David’s second attempt to soften Uriah’s resolve also fails (v.13), he sends Uriah with his death sentence back to Joab. Joab arranges for Uriah’s death, and some other men (collateral damage?) die alongside him (v.17). In his message back to David it is made very clear that women cause trouble: hence, Joab alludes to the story of Abimelech, famously and humiliatingly killed by a woman throwing a millstone (v.21, cf. Judges 9:50-57). Joab implies that women in affairs of men bring trouble. David exonerates Joab from any blame in the death of Uriah (v.25). Once “the wife of Uriah” has completed her period of mourning, David sends for her and has her brought to his house. Again, romance is not suggested here but procreative sex is: the woman “bears for him”<sup>10</sup> a son (v.27).

Next, the text makes very clear that David has done a great wrong and that he is fully responsible. The thing that David did is wicked in the eyes of YHWH (11:27) and this is spelled out in dramatic terms in chapter 12. In Nathan’s famous parable the role of Bathsheba (and Uriah) is played by a small ewe lamb (12:2) – an image of utmost vulnerability. This lamb, moreover, is to the poor man *kēbat*, “like a daughter.” The expression on the one hand refers to one deserving of paternal protection but it also contains an element of Bathsheba’s personal name

<sup>8</sup> Bathsheba is called Bath-shua in 1 Chron 3:5 and is here called the daughter of Ammiel, with no allusion to any husband prior to David. Chronicles, strikingly, does not provide any retelling of the famous story of 2 Sam 11.

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the verse squeezes in an aside that she (Bathsheba) had purified herself from impurity, widely taken to mean that Bathsheba’s bathing was on account of the cessation of menstruation. The expression for the consummation of sexual intercourse (*wayyishkab ’immah*, “and he lay with her”), is a standard term that could but need not indicate rape. Clear is, however, male (namely David’s) agency: he is the active subject; she is the object.

<sup>10</sup> Bathsheba is not referred to by name but by marital status. She is again passive – David sends to gather her up (from *’sap*) into his household and *wa’ēhî-lô k’ishshâ watēled lô bēn*, “and he took her to himself for a wife and she bore him a son.”

(*bat*). When David incriminates himself by expressing anger at the rich man of the parable, he is forced to accept that his actions have been exploitative, selfish, pitiless and murderous. Nathan expounds: God gave to David in abundance (12:7-8) but he despised the word of YHWH and did evil, striking down Uriah and taking his wife (v.9). The consequences will be profound and far-reaching (vv10-12).

As Edwards discusses, significant efforts have been made by biblical interpreters to “reclaim, redeem, re-establish or deconstruct Genesis 2-3 for womanly readers,” with second-wave feminist biblical scholars in particular seeking to refute interpretations of Eve that emphasize sex or sexual relations (2012, 9), and attempting instead egalitarian readings.<sup>11</sup> But Edwards insists that “(i)t is difficult to maintain that there is no sex in this text or that centuries of misogynist readings alone are to blame for Eve’s bad reputation and the sexist treatment meted out to generations of women” (2012, 19). As she points out, the awareness of nakedness and resulting affect-response of shame point to knowledge of sexual difference. Edwards further proposes that not only is the account of Genesis not egalitarian but popular culture, in recognition of the imbalance of power, “turn(s) the table on traditional male dominance in the story and re-read(s) it as female dominance, the subjugation of the male through irresistible female sexuality” (2012, 20).

I am suggesting that something similar takes place in the encounter of David and Bathsheba in the three films under discussion. While some have suggested that Bathsheba is calculating, displaying her beauty strategically with the express purpose of seducing David<sup>12</sup> and thereby catapulting herself into the first family of the realm, this seems—on the basis of the biblical text—unlikely. Even George Nicol, who argues that Bathsheba cleverly and resourcefully manipulates the men around her for her own long-term benefit, comments that she “does not play a major role in the narratives” (1988, 360)—something of an understatement! Not only this, Bathsheba may be from an upper-class family but David is the king and it seems unlikely that she was in any position to resist or refuse him.<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, it is David who does the sending, taking and lying with. Significantly, too, the text is quite clear that it is David—not Bathsheba—who is found to be wicked and responsible. While Nicol is correct in pointing to

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<sup>11</sup> The best-known example remains Trible (1992; first published in 1978). Trible argues that the woman is active and exercises initiative, whereas the man is passive and easily led. The woman is not a temptress: the man is with her all along and requires no tempting. In the ideal state, the woman and man are equal; gender-imbalance is a lamentable consequence of the eviction. Not the text itself but its interpretation through the ages is what has been damaging for women. Edwards discusses other examples (2012, 12-34).

<sup>12</sup> Whybray characterizes Bathsheba as naïve, and easily duped but innocent (1968, 40). Nicol considers her “resourceful” (1988, 363) and “calculating and clever” (1988, 360). Nicol states that “(i)t cannot be doubted that Bathsheba’s action in bathing so close to the king’s residence was provocative, nor can the possibility that the provocation was deliberate be discounted” (1988, 360). He adds that there is “no evidence that David placed her under any duress” (1988, 360). In other words, Bathsheba sets up the seduction and David cannot help himself. Nicol is not alone (e.g. Bailey 1990, 86).

<sup>13</sup> A stronger case can be made for Bathsheba’s political influence in later life, e.g. in 1 Kgs 1:11-31, where she assists in securing the succession of her son Solomon. There is no indication in 2 Sam 11 that Bathsheba has any choice, or consent in terms of what befalls her. The opposite seems more likely.



ambiguities (1997, 43-54)<sup>14</sup>—there is no ambiguity as to the allocation of guilt. Instead, as James Afoakwah points out “Bathsheba is neither accused with David nor punished for adultery.” As he goes on to ask, “which woman could have resisted the power of the king who had sent messengers to bring her to the palace?” (2012-13, 183, n.407). Indeed, the more likely scenario is that Bathsheba has no choice in the matter. This would explain why she is not regarded as co-responsible and why the parable casts her in the role of innocent victim at the hands of an abusive, pitiless man. The idea that David rapes Bathsheba is certainly plausible.<sup>15</sup>

Yet in all three films the depiction is rather different and in all three Bathsheba is a major agent. The scope of each film is distinct: Beresford’s *King David* covers all of David’s life, from boyhood to deathbed; Markowitz’s *David* extends from boyhood to the election of a young Solomon; King’s *David and Bathsheba* (as the title suggests) focuses almost entirely on the passion between the eponymous characters.

All three films make significant changes to the biblical account and this is to some extent entirely legitimate: the film genre, after all, imposes certain restrictions and requirements and it seems entirely reasonable to adapt for visual and dramatic effect. Still, as I will argue, the nature of the changes, with particular focus on the interaction between David and Bathsheba, is ideologically in line with some of Edwards’ findings with reference to the sexualized depiction of Eve in advertising.

Clear in all film versions is that David is no rapist: he is drawn to Bathsheba, but not just physically (Gere’s David is actually physically restrained), but romantically, emotionally, and even spiritually (particularly in the case of Parker’s portrayal). Moreover, Bathsheba in all three films is eagerly responsive to David, even (cf. Nicol’s unpersuasive interpretation of the biblical text) colluding. Let me summarize briefly: Peck’s David in King’s version tells Bathsheba (portrayed by Hayward) in their first conversation in his chamber that “it’s been a kind of pride never to force [him]self on anyone,” adding that everything—women, the Israelites’ loyalty, the kingship—has been given him, not taken by force. This David does not see, send for and help himself to sex—he is a sensitive romancer.

King’s David is also sympathetic because he is a lonely figure. Driven to his rooftop after escaping the jibes of a bitter Michal, he sees Bathsheba bathing and is entranced. One strong implication is that David is driven into the arms of another woman by Michal’s barbs and nagging. The camera lingers long on Peck’s face watching Bathsheba, as it dissolves into magnetized awe and yearning. Even in his first conversation with Bathsheba David tells her that he is alone and cannot trust anyone, not even his own sons. He says, “I am only a man—I need someone to understand that ... I need someone to share my heart.” It is difficult not to feel for

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<sup>14</sup> Harding, too, citing Umberto Eco, characterizes the narrative of David as an open work, of clearly composite nature and with inbuilt ambiguities that pose an “invitation to *make the work* together with the author” (2013, 129).

<sup>15</sup> Exum argues that Bathsheba is raped not just by David but also by the narrator’s depiction (1993, 170-176.) Similarly, Clines shows that David is “casual about women, and that women are so marginal” in his life. He points out that “(e)ven in the Bathsheba episode, the sex is essentially an expression of royal power, and it is much more like rape than love” (1995, 225-226).

this man! What unfolds next (and very rapidly) is a great passion, depicted as impossible to resist, even wrong to resist.

Both parties waste little time expressing their strong feelings for each other and Bathsheba readily admits to bathing in David's eyeshot, in the hope that he would see her. This is explicitly a romance. Peck's David only takes his courtship to the next level after – albeit rather promptly after—he has heard from both Uriah and Bathsheba that their marriage is loveless. Although the two have been married for seven months, they have spent only six days together. David erupts with, "Uriah is a fool. I knew that every future moment spent away from you is a moment lost. He's only found six days for you in seven months! Has he no blood, no heart?" Bathsheba reciprocates, confessing to having observed David and to desiring to be the woman to please him. For this she is willing to break the Law of Moses.

In King's film the relationship between David and Bathsheba is depicted as not only mutually, consensually passionate but also as fated. These are two lonely, passionate hearts, which have found and cleave to each other. This David is a good king, who strives for virtue but he is a loner and is overcome by Bathsheba, the one person who can bring him loving companionship. Bathsheba, meanwhile, is unhappily married but completely devoted to David, motivated by a longing to fulfill him. Both are willing to break the law for what is depicted as a greater good, compelled and propelled by fate and depth of love.

In King's film there is acknowledgement that both have committed a wrong. Hence, fierce sandstorms and a drought signify divine disapproval. For all this, their love prevails—David tells Bathsheba to "take my love on faith—it is yours and will always be yours." In the film's closing shot, after David has prayed at the ark and been forgiven, he is seen kneeling alongside and holding Bathsheba, as they together watch the pouring rain. The message here is not particularly subtle: God has forgiven David, and gives his seal of approval to the relationship with Bathsheba.

In Beresford's film, too, Bathsheba is contrasted with Michal. Whereas in King's version Michal is bitter and goading, in Beresford's she is cold, frostily telling David that her true husband is Paltiel. Again, David is sensitive, wounded by Michal. Whereas in King's film David admits that the marriage to Michal had been one of political convenience, Gere's David whispers heartbroken, "I have never loved another woman as I once loved you." Just as in King's film a rejected David is next seen watching Bathsheba bathing: spurned by one woman, he is thus driven to another. What is not feasible in the 1950s (where Hayward is concealed behind a screen) is depicted candidly in the 1980s: here there is a view of Krige's naked breasts.

Gere's David is more restrained than either the David of the biblical text, or Peck's depiction. In Beresford's version it is Bathsheba who seeks out David. They have a rather stilted meeting in David's palace where David confides that he has observed Bathsheba before. She is fully cognizant of this (again, she has set up the encounter): "I know—my Lord, I am married." Next, it emerges that Bathsheba has been married for five years but has no child. At this point there is a clear sense of attraction—presumably, the penny has dropped for David that he is being asked to father a child by Bathsheba. Gere's David, apparently, is motivated by a combination of pity and protectiveness. He promises Bathsheba she shall have a child but she protests, "no, not while my husband lives." And so, David sends a

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sealed document to Joab via Uriah, Uriah dies, and David and Bathsheba marry. In this version the biblical text has been modified rather drastically. As in King's film Gere's David is no rapist. Here, however, Bathsheba is the primary director of the action: not only does she bathe where David can see her, she also seeks him out actively and throws herself at his mercy, highlighting her desire for a child but refusing herself to David until such time as she is widowed. Completely at odds with the biblical text, there is no adultery here. Uriah, once more, is an impediment to romance and unlikeable—so best disposed of. In both films the matter of Uriah's killing is trivialized: in King's film, David and Bathsheba's love is profound (and eventually divinely approved) while Uriah, in the face of this passion, is a pitiless bore; in Beresford's film he is a brute, with Bathsheba confessing that he only touches her with beatings.

Finally, in Markowitz's, as in King's film, the romance is fated and of acute profundity. Parker's David first sees Bathsheba bathing and is immediately struck. The first conversation between the two soon after is gasping and decidedly flirtatious. Here Bathsheba tells David that she felt him watching her and she is quickly seduced. In this first encounter David also asks her a rather peculiar question: "Does he (Uriah) live in your heart as one unique spirit that speaks to you?"

Once more Uriah is not a man to like—not a bloodless rule-abider (as in King's film), or wife-beater (as in Beresford's): this Uriah is a dolt who is incapable of either exciting or understanding Bathsheba. No sooner has he been disposed of than we see Bathsheba and David locking eyes across a courtyard. Shortly after, David tells a tear-stained Bathsheba, still mourning for Uriah, "you are the unique spirit," and that seems to have made everything—adultery and murder—morally justified. The murder of the inadequate Uriah, by implication, is for a greater good: David *is* able to fulfill Bathsheba; *their* love, after all, is one of unique spirituality.

In all three films David is very much a "good guy." In none of the three films is he a rapist – or even much of a wrongdoer. Instead, he loves Bathsheba: in King's film Bathsheba is the one person who can alleviate his solitude and, eventually, their love finds divine approval; in Beresford's film David is propositioned by Bathsheba and she invokes in him great protectiveness and pity; in Markowitz's film we have a meeting of spiritual soul-mates. In all three films Bathsheba is not just consenting but utterly enraptured by David. Hayward's Bathsheba wants to be the woman to please and devotedly love David, even in violation of the Law of Moses; Krige's Bathsheba actively seeks out David, and Lee's Bathsheba is unable to resist what is depicted as her destiny, to serve and love this king. In King's and Beresford's films Michal's cold rejection of David acts as the catalyst for kindling the passion between David and Bathsheba. In all three films Uriah is not the pious man of the biblical text but either a lackluster stickler for the law (King), a sadistic brute who beats his wife and withholds sex and the possibility of motherhood (Beresford), or an impervious and expendable dolt who blocks the path of destiny (Markowitz). Adultery is rendered understandable and excusable given the passion of the relationship and the distastefulness of the legitimate spouse (Uriah); in Beresford's film adultery does not even take place. Whereas the biblical text casts

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no aspersions on Uriah<sup>16</sup> and his murder is emphatically declared wrongful by Nathan, as is adultery (possibly rape), attributing all blame squarely to David (2 Sam 12:9-10), the films tell it rather differently.

As Edwards points out, film, among other modern media, “teach(es) women and men how to see each other and themselves, how to treat each other and themselves and how to become their culturally dictated dream” (2012, viii). And Bathsheba in all three films, much like the images of Eve in Edwards’ investigation, is selling an ideological concept of female empowerment and sexual autonomy that is becoming disturbingly familiar: an ideology that “portray(s) female sexuality as irresistible to the rather docile ... man and portray(s) the ... woman as knowing how to make her body work in her favour. The sexually attractive woman can have it all: money, power in gender relations and social superiority among her peers” (Edwards 2012, 6). Just as Edwards demonstrates that the power of Eve in advertising is nothing more than “the traditional power of women to attract a mate rather than female autonomy,” so it is with Bathsheba. Both Eve in advertising and Bathsheba in film over the decades, are “simply rehashed old, misogynistic images. Even in the context of a new postfeminist ideology where women are equal and even sexually dominant, these images still view women as sex objects whose worth and social status lie in their ability to be sexually attractive” (2012, 52). As Edwards has shown, while Eve’s depiction in advertising could be said to celebrate Eve’s daring transgression and her powerful sexuality,

it also, insidiously, controls women by defining for them a particular role. It tells women that their most important attribute is their sexuality. In order to have status and acquire wealth and power, a woman must be both attractive to men and more attractive than other women. Advertising purports to be empowering women with a female-defined sexuality but in reality male interests are so deeply embedded in culture that it would [be] difficult for women to create subjective representations of their sexuality without seeing themselves through male eyes. (Edwards 2012, 67)

And so it is with Bathsheba. In these films we have a subversion of the biblical text, too: hence, a woman appears to take active steps against what convention might dictate (namely, to remain in a loveless marriage). She, too, uses her irresistible attractiveness to change her destiny and obtain what she wants. But again, this woman is “same old”—yet another woman getting her way by attracting a man and, moreover doing so, as Edwards has shown of Eve, by ousting, or doing-down, other women. Consequently, in all three films all other wives of David are side-lined, or ignored<sup>17</sup> and in King’s and Beresford’s films

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<sup>16</sup> If Clines’ criteria for masculinity are correct, as explored with reference to the characterization of David as masculine ideal (1995, 216-227) then Uriah in 2 Sam 11 is a manlier man than David. Clines identifies the ideal male as (among other traits not discernible here) a fighting male and a male who bonds with other males and spurns women. Uriah is one of the Thirty and is in battle even while David remains in Jerusalem, lolling on his couch (vv1-2). Moreover, Uriah will not lie with his wife while his comrades are in battle, whereas David has committed adultery. Uriah is juxtaposed with David in such a way that it is quite clear who is the good and who is the bad guy. All three films subvert and upend the text.

<sup>17</sup> According to the biblical text, meanwhile, David actually has eight principal and no fewer than ten secondary wives.



Bathsheba's triumph is in some part also a triumph over Michal who "has it coming," because she fails to please David as Bathsheba does. As Edwards points out,

When a woman's sexuality becomes her ultimate tool for the achievement of power and social status, women are dissuaded from forming collective groups – the groups that really can achieve power shifts and increase women's social status – to challenge the socio-political conditions that make male/female child-care responsibilities still heavily imbalanced for women, that allow a pay-structure in which women consistently earn a lower salary than men for the same job and that maintain that women's best chance of achieving power and increasing social status is through exploiting the market value of their own sexuality. (Edwards 2012, 79-80)

It seems, therefore, that the idea that this "just makes for a better film" is too simplistic: there seems, indeed, to be something more insidious and sinister afoot—and the ideology perpetuated is well-trodden.

The Bathshebas in the films—quite unlike the marginal, blameless victim of the biblical text—are using sexual desirability, guile and inventiveness to get what they want and move out of one marriage into another, more desirable one with a richer, more appealing and highly-ranked man. And, yet again, as with the celebrity-casting advertisements of Eve, what is marketed here, as Edwards puts it, is "a form of limited female empowerment within a patriarchal structure." She continues,

(f)ar from returning to female power after the achievement of equality, women who subscribe to postfeminist ideology that promotes the empowerment of the individual by whatever means she needs to employ are actually using the same skills and wiles attributed to "cunning" or "devious" women who have attempted to subvert patriarchy throughout the ages. (Edwards 2012, 138)

Hence, what Edwards identifies of Eve in the medium of advertising in the postfeminist era is also present in the forerunner of the filmic Bathsheba throughout much of the twentieth century.

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