

CHAPTER THREE

Models used in the analysis of the Esther narrative

Introduction

What follows is a discussion of some models which have been used in the analysis of the structure of Esther. From the discussion of the models of analysis it will become clear that chiasmic-reversal is not seen to apply to the Esther narrative in its entirety, which is contrary to our position.

We lay the foundation here for the analysis of the narrative in its entirety which we will attempt in chapter four. After each model has been discussed some evaluative comments will be made.

The starting point for this part of the investigation is the comment of Klein (1989:11), that: 'it [the book of Judges] is a structured entity in which elements are shaped to contribute to the integrity and significance of the whole....' As far as the Book of Esther is concerned the elements which 'contribute to the integrity and significance of the whole' are the *principle of chiasmic-reversal* and the narrative device of *characterisation*, underscoring Goldman's view (1990:26) that 'Esther can be read as a unified literary composition.' Berg (1979:106-107), for example, writes: '[t]he theme of reversal is so

important in the book of Esther that the narrator even structures his story according to this principle; [and continues] [t]he structure of the book of Esther is ordered according to the theme of reversal.' She also quotes Fox (1991:156-157) approvingly in this regard.

Radday (1973:9-10) also believes that Esther is composed according to a pattern of reversals. Similarly, Loader (1977:97) remarks: '[t]his great chiastic reversal from 4. to 12. [i.e. Chap 3:1-9:19] then confirms that we have a unit in this division of the novel.' Furthermore, Schutte (1989:33-38), in his study of the structure of Esther, also demonstrates the presence of this chiastic-reversal pattern. In this context Berlin (1983:18-19) remarks that chiasm has a 'compositional function.' Chiastic-reversal is therefore indisputably fundamental to the structure of the Esther narrative.

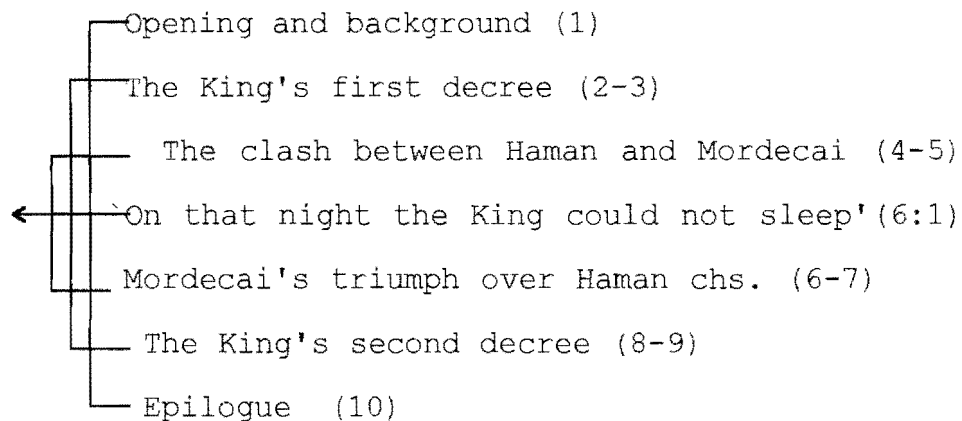
This acknowledgement, however, has not resulted in its *consistent application* in analyses of the compositional structure of Esther, as we hope to illustrate below. To do this we now examine two models which have been used in the analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative.

1. The Symmetrical Model

Among those using this model are Berg (1979:106-107), Fox (1991:156-162), Baldwin (1984:30), Bensusan

(1988:75-79), and Radday (1973:9).

Radday's analysis seems to be the starting point for the others so we will deal with his investigation of the structure of the narrative. According to him (Radday 1973:9) the narrative is based on a chiasmus pattern which provides the narrative with its symmetry as follows:



Radday seems to apply the idea of chiasm to the narrative as a whole, resulting in a number of concentric circles with 6:1 as the pivot of the concentric circles. This gives the structure symmetry. This symmetry indicates the presence of chiasmus in the narrative. On closer examination Radday's structuring, however, suggests that chapters 1, 2 and 10 are not arranged according to the chiastic principle. Chapter 1 is regarded as merely introductory, chapter 2 is linked to chapter 3 as the first decree of the king, but since each contains a

decree by the king (chapter 2 concerning Vashti and chapter 3 concerning the Jews) they should be treated as two separate units. Chapter 10 is merely seen as the epilogue of the story and is chiasmic to the extent that it is regarded as the opposite of the introductory chapter 1. Given this, the chiasmic principle is not applied to the whole of the narrative by Radday.

We will show in the next chapter, however, that chapters 1 and 10 are more than just the introduction and conclusion respectively, because each one is part of a cycle which is structured chiasmatically. Further, chapter 2 should be linked to chapter 1 because together they form a chiasmatically structured unit. Radday fails, therefore, to apply the principle of chiasm consistently in his analysis and structuring of the narrative.

Of interest is the fact that concentric circles 3 and 5 contains the reversal of the fortunes of two (a pair) of the main characters of the story, even though Radday does not make this explicit. This points to a very important idea, namely, the link of chiasm to characterisation which is crucial for a proper structural analysis of the Esther narrative. A further point to be noted is the role the king plays in each of the main sections of Radday's structure, as can be seen from concentric circles 2,3 and 6 in the structure above. He is key to the outcome of the

events and the destiny and fortunes of the characters. This fact has significance for the structural analysis of the Esther narrative, as will be illustrated in the next chapter.

Berg (1979:106-107,119,n42) appears to take Radday's analysis and structure a step further by arguing that the pattern of reversal in the form of thesis-antithesis *applies to the whole narrative in detail*. In this she follows Fox (1991:156-162) when she writes: '[t]he following comparison of passages from the Book of Esther basically follows that suggested by Fox.' She works with the basic idea of motifs, for according to her (1979:95) '[t]he dominant motifs [i.e. power, kinship, obedience/disobedience] helps to unify the book of Esther by potently anticipating or recalling their other occurrences through conscious uses of parallelism and contrast.' Moreover, the motif which is central for Berg is the idea of the *feasts* (my emphasis) (1979:59). The narrative opens and closes with a feast; the turning points in the story always happen in the context of a feast, for example, Vashti's dethronement, Esther's enthronement, Haman's demise, Mordecai's promotion, and the defence of the Jews against their enemies. It must be noted firstly, however, that the feasts derive their significance from the event(s) that happens at the feast, namely, the *reversal of the*

destiny of the characters. Without the reversal of the destiny of the characters the feast is just another feast, as Fox (1991:156) so fittingly indicates: '....banquets...are the sites of important events and....signals shifts of power....' *Chiastic-reversal*, therefore, rather than *the motif of the feasts* dominates the compositional structure of the narrative. Consequently, Berg's relativising of the reversal principle by referring to it as merely a theme, and the feasts as the dominant motif, is questionable. Further, Berg's own frequent reference to reversal suggests its critical role in the compositional structure of the narrative (cf. 1979:97 par.3, 98 par.1,2, 99 par.1); add to this the statement that: 'the *theme* (my emphasis) of reversal is so important in the book of Esther that the narrator even structures his story according to this *principle* (my emphasis)' (1979:106). If the narrator 'structures' his story according to this 'principle', then reversal must surely be more important than just a theme in the narrative. In addition, Berg (1979:95) remarks that the dominant motifs recall 'their other occurrences through conscious uses of parallelism and contrast.' Now this description of how the dominant motifs function in the story points to the presence of an underlying principle on which the motifs in the structure are dependent. In addition, the comment that '[a]n analysis of these motifs thus provides a

starting point for our attempts to understand the *method* (my emphasis) and message of the book' (1979:18), suggests that the motifs serve a function other than self-reference. They point to the structural principle basic to the composition of the narrative, as stated previously. To make the motifs central to the structure of the narrative, given this comment, is to make them an end in themselves, contrary to what she herself claims.

Although Berg's analysis supports the contention that chiastic-reversal is basic to the structure of Esther, two factors belie this support, namely, a) the failure to apply the principle of chiastic-reversal to chapters 1-2, and b) the fact that the motif of feasts is incorrectly identified as central to the structure of the narrative. In this regard Fox (1991:158,n12) writes: '[t]he most important *structural* (my emphasis) theme in Esther, one that organises much of the presentation and wording of events,....is the theme of peripety....'

Although Berg, seemingly, goes beyond Radday, she does not go far enough in the recognition given to the principle of chiastic-reversal in the structure of Esther.

Bensusan (1988:75-80) also believes that the feasts are the fundamental idea around which the story is

structured. This view he sets out in the diagram below (1988:77-78, cf. also Fox 1991:157):

A. **2 FEASTS-XERXES'** at the start (including one simultaneously for the women), Est. 1;3,5,9.

B **FEAST AND TAX REMISSION** - following Esther's appointment (Coronation), Est.2:18.

C 2 FEASTS - ESTHER'S

B **FEAST AND HOLIDAY CONCESSION**-following Mordecai's appointment (New Edict), Est. 8:17.

A **2 FEASTS-PURIM** at the conclusion (came to be permanent festival) Est. 9:17,19; 9:18.

He goes on to say (Bensusan 1988:76) that the feasts 'centre around a core feature of reversal of fortunes....', and continues (1988:71) by quoting Loader (1978:418) to the effect that reversal is 'the backbone of the whole plot.' On the grounds of his own statement and his quotation of Loader it is difficult to see how Bensusan can conclude that the feasts and not chiasmic-reversal are the basis for the structure of the Esther narrative.

The Symmetrical Model, though useful for an analysis of the compositional structure of Esther, is not

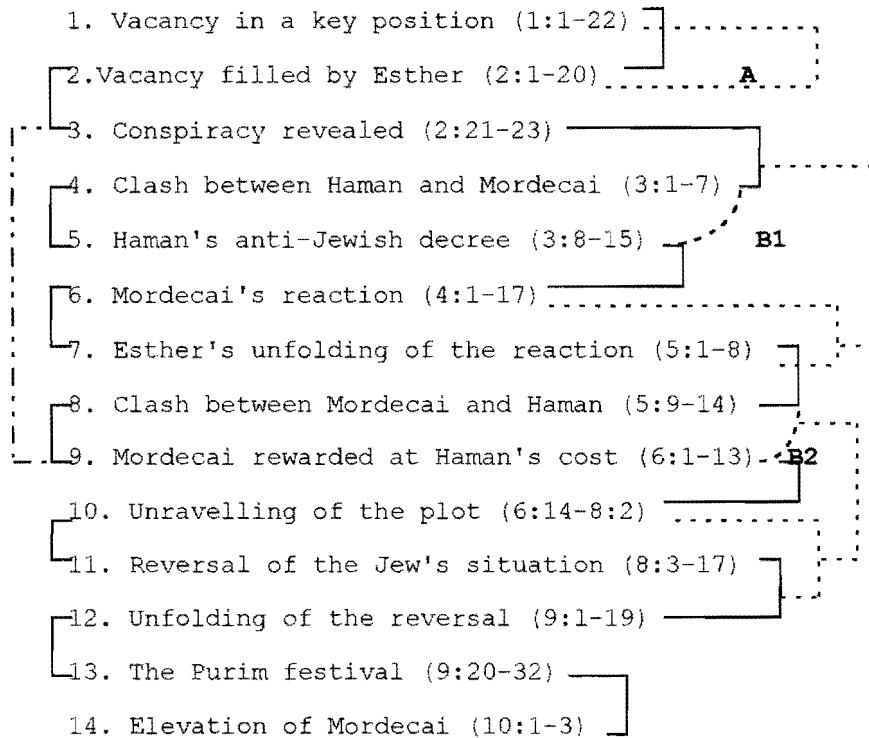
adequate for such analysis as this discussion of Radday, Berg, and Bensusan has shown.

2. The Chain Model

The approach which I have called the 'chain model' divides the narrative into pericopes. The pericopes are then linked to each other and the manner of and basis for the linkages described in detail. In this way the structure of the story becomes clear.

This method is followed, among others, by Murphy (1981:153), Loader (1977:95-109, 1980:146) and Schutte (1989:29-42). Since Loader takes the analysis of Murphy a step further, and since Schutte's own pericope division (1989:27-33) shows only a minor departure from that of Loader's, we will use Loader's pericope division and structuring for the purpose of discussing this model.

Loader defines structure as 'the way in which the various pericopes in themselves are built up as well as the arrangement of these larger units in the composition of the book as a whole' (1977:95). Accordingly, Loader (1977:96) divides the narrative into the following pericopes:



The narrative is divided into 14 pericopes according to this structure. The pericopes are linked to each other as shown on the left side of the diagram and represent the unity of the narrative on the surface level. The linkages between pericopes on the right side of the diagram represent the deep structure of the narrative. Thus surface and deep structure are inter-related, giving the narrative its compact unity. The integration of surface and deep structures also suggests that underlying this chain-like arrangement is a chiasmic pattern.

Schutte (1989:31) differs from Loader in that he combines two of Loader's pericopes, no 4 (3:1-7) and no. 5 (3:8-15) without providing an explanation for the change. Now, chapter 3:1-7 (pericope 4) describes

(pericope 5) describes the victory of Haman. The counterpart to this situation is to be found in 5:9-14 (pericope 8) and 6:1-13 (pericope 9) respectively. Schutte retains pericopes 8 and 9 of Loader's structure as separate pericopes and does not combine them. Since pericopes 8 and 9 are mirror images of pericopes 4 and 5, it seems to me that Schutte must be consistent and retain Loader's division, that is, keep pericopes 4 and 5 as separate pericopes.

In the diagram pericope 3 (2:21-23) is linked, on the level of the surface structure, to pericope 4 (3:1-7) but on the level of the deep structure to pericope 12 (9:1-19). According to Loader the reason for this is the fact that the first clash between Haman and Mordecai (pericopes 4 and 5) ends in a victory for Haman. This clash is described in pericopes 6 and 7. The second clash (pericope 8) results in victory for Mordecai (pericope 9). The second clash is developed further in pericopes 10-12 in that it is now extended to the clash between the Jews and their enemies. At the point of the second clash the victory of Mordecai prefigures the victory of the Jews over their enemies and, in the light of this prefiguring, the function of pericope 3 becomes clear. It shows that Mordecai should have been rewarded but he was not. The reward is delayed until pericope 9. In this way pericope 3 contributes to the mounting tension between 'Mordecai's merit and Haman's temporary victory over

him' (Loader, 1977:97).

Pericopes 1 and 12 evidence chiasmus because we have a double feast in both, i.e. 1:3-5 and 9:16-19. Finally, pericopes 12 and 13 are linked in that the whole of pericopes 1-12 are directed towards the Purim Feast of pericope 13. Pericope 13 and 14 are connected on the surface structure since the prominence of Esther in 13 is counterbalanced by the prominence of Mordecai in 14.

Now the analysis of Loader points convincingly to the fact that chiasmus is fundamental to the structural composition of the Esther narrative. It further shows that reversal and chiasm are inseparable structural principles, and that they are principles the author consciously employed in his writing of the story as Radday (1973:9) affirms: 'Esther's author adheres to "the chiastic tradition which he had inherited from his predecessors"' (cf. also Berg, 1979:108; Schutte 1989:33-42, Fox 1991:158, especially note 12).

In evaluating this analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative, we agree that the whole narrative evidences the chiastic-reversal principle. Loader, however, does not carry this principle far enough in his analysis. For, although he says (1977:101) 'that the use of the chiasmus in our novel is of a high frequency....,' chiasmus, as far as the diagram shows, is not present in 1:1-2:20, 2:21-23, and 9:20-10:3. Our detailed discussion of these sections of

the story in the next chapter will prove the contrary. Because of this, the chain model is an inadequate model for the analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed two models used for analysing the structure of the Esther narrative. Both models work with the idea that chiasmus and reversal are fundamental to the compositional structure of the story. These models, to the matter differently, affirms *THAT* chiastic-reversal is basic to the Esther narrative, that is, that chiastic-reversal takes place in Esther.

But we have also seen, however, that both models fail to account for chiastic-reversal in chapters 1-2, (Berg and Radday), and in 1:1-2:20, 2:21-23, and 9:20-10:3, (Loader, Murphy and Schutte). That is, chiastic -reversal is not seen as present in the entire narrative.

Furthermore, in so far as the discussed models fail to give adequate attention to the salient feature of character(isation) as it relates to chiastic-reversal, they are inadequate for analysing the compositional structure of Esther, in which the reversal of the characters are central. Put differently, the models do not address the question of *HOW* chiastic-reversal happens in Esther, and *WHAT*

the nature of the chiastic-reversal in Esther is.

In the next chapter we will use a model for analysing the structure of the Esther narrative which takes seriously the two issues raised above, that is:

1. That the whole of the narrative is structured around the chiastic-reversal principle; and
2. That the reversals we encounter in Esther are inseparably linked to the main characters of the narrative.

We turn our attention now to an analysis of the Esther narrative on the basis of what I have termed the 'Cyclical Model'.