

THE ROLE AND PORTRAYAL OF THE KING IN THE ESTHER NARRATIVE:

**A Narratological-Synchronic reading of the Masoretic text of
the Esther Narrative**

by

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE AND PORTRAYAL OF THE KING IN THE ESTHER NARRATIVE:

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of the Esther Narrative*

The question of the composition and unity of Esther continue to be a matter of debate as Esther studies of the last two decades show. This debate has, however, been conducted primarily from a historical and critical perspective.

The latter half of this century, and the last three decades in particular, has seen the emergence of newer approaches to the text of Scripture. These approaches, influenced by the developments in literary theory, have resulted in an emphasis on the text as a literary unity and have encouraged a synchronic reading of biblical texts. I believe the question of the composition and unity of Esther can be fruitfully approached using these newer literary approaches.

A literary reading of Esther, which demonstrates that it is a narrative unity, is done. The literary reading is

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synchronic in nature, and demonstrates that chiastic-reversal underlies the whole of the Esther narrative. Moreover, careful attention is given to the literary devices of chiasmus and characterisation, which make a significant contribution to the narrative unity of Esther because of the inseparable link, which exists, between these literary elements. This inseparable link derives from the fact that the chiasmus found in Esther is characterised by the reversal of the positions, fortunes, and destinies of the main characters. Furthermore, the role and portrayal of the king is germane to the narrative unity of Esther because intrinsic to the chiastic-reversal pattern in Esther is the role of the king in reversing the positions, fortunes and destinies of the main characters. Consequently his role will receive special attention. In addition, as a character, he can be seen as the glue of the narrative unity of Esther because of the pivotal role he plays in the story's chiastic-reversal pattern. It therefore follows that the way the narrative characterises him must receive attention. In this regard 'traditional' stereotypical descriptions of the king are discussed critically and a fresh perspective of his character is offered.

SAMEVATTING

DIE ROL EN BESKRYWING VAN DIE KONING IN DIE

ESTERVERHAAL:

'n Narratologies-sinchroniese lesing van die Masoretiese teks van die Esterverhaal.

Die vraag na die samestelling en eenheid van die Esterverhaal bly 'n besprekingspunt, soos blyk uit die navorsing oor die boek Esther gedurende die laaste twee dekades. Hierdie debat word egter gevoer vanuit 'n historiese en kritiese oogpunt, soos aangedui deur die bestaande navorsing wat die teologie van die verhaal, die godsdienstige agtergrond van die verhaal, die argeologiese vrae, inter-tekstuele verbande tussen Ester en ander tekste, en die herkoms en betekenis van die name van die hoofkarakters bespreek.

Die laaste drie dekades van hierdie eeu in besonder is gekenmerk deur nuwe benaderings tot die Skrif. Hierdie benaderings, onder die invloed van navorsing op die gebied van literêre teorie, het tot gevolg dat die teks as 'n eenheid beklemtoon is, en het ook die sinchroniese lesing van Bybeltekste bevorder. Ek glo dat die vraag na die

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samestelling en eenheid van die Esterverhaal vrugbaar ondersoek kan word deur gebruik te maak van die nuwe literêre benaderings .

Gevolgtik word 'n literêre lesing van die Esterverhaal gedoen. Dié lesing dui aan dat dit 'n narratiewe eenheid vorm. Die lesing van die teks is sinchronies van aard en demonstreer dat 'chiastiese-omkering' ten grondslag lê van die hele verhaal. Verder word noukeurige aandag gegee aan chiasmes en karakterisering. Dié elemente maak 'n baie belangrike bydrae tot die narratiewe eenheid van Ester vanweë die onskeidbare verband wat daar is tussen chiasmes en karakterisering. Hiedie verband vloei voort uit die feit dat die tipe chiasmes wat in Ester gevind word, gekenmerk word deur die ommekeer van die status (posisie), voorspoed en noodlot van die hoofkarakters.

Ook van belang vir die narratiewe eenheid van die verhaal is die rol en beskrywing van die koning aangesien hy verantwoordelik is vir die ommekeer in die status (posisie), voorspoed en noodlot van die hoofkarakters. Gevolgtik sal sy rol spesiale aandag geniet.

3.

As 'n karakter kan die koning ook beskou word as dié faktor wat die verhaal sy narratiewe eenheid verskaf vanweë sy sentrale rol in die chiasiese omkeringspatroon in Ester. Daarom word die beskrywing van die koning soos dit in die verhaal voorkom, bespreek. In dié verband word 'n kritiese gesprek gevoer met 'tradisionele' en stereotipe beskrywings wat in die Esternavorsing voorkom. 'n Alternatiewe perspektief op die karakter van die koning word in die ondersoek gegee.

CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem and Hypothesis.

The question of the integrity of the text of Esther remains unresolved, yet studies on the book of Esther in the last twenty years have not concentrated on issues of the composition of the book, but have focused on :

1. The theology of the narrative;
2. The historical and religious background of the book;
3. The archaeological concerns of the book;
4. Inter-textual approaches to the book; and
5. The meaning and derivation of the names of the main characters.

Concurring, Day (1995:10-11) remarks: '....during the last two or three decades it (i.e. Esther) has been the recipient of a wealth of scholarly attention. Discussion has focused around questions of historical accuracy of the events and characters, genre, original purpose, layers of composition, theological meaning (or lack thereof), thematic elements, literary style, and connection with other biblical materials.'

In addition, studies have concentrated on personae dramatis like Esther, Haman, Mordercai, and Vashti.

Furthermore, when the composition and integrity of

Esther have been addressed, it has been done, primarily, from a historical-critical point of view. From this perspective the composition of Esther has been viewed as consisting of early stories and traditions which have been transformed by the author so that chapters 1-8 now constitute a continuous narrative. The same cannot, however, be said for chapters 9-10. Critical investigation shows, it is believed, that these chapters are a later addition to the original story of chapters 1-8. Clines (1984:1-65; cf. also Bush 1996:280-294) is representative of this critical position. He gives the following reasons for regarding chapters 9-10 as a later addition:

1. In 9:1 the Jews overcome their enemies whereas 8:11 envisions the Jews being slaughtered by their enemies;
2. In 9:2 the Jews attack their enemies while chapters 1-8 depicts the Jews as defending themselves;
3. 9:13 extends Adar to two days and shows the Jews attacking their enemies rather than defending themselves;
4. 9:15, 17-19 introduces a discrepancy; it is not an improvement of 3:13 and 8:12-13. The former verses restrict the pogrom to one day;
5. 9:1-10:3 depicts a black and white situation of the Jews on one side and their enemies on the other.

It ignores those sympathetic to the Jews (3:15, 8:15);

6. Chapter 9 has a conflicting concept of 13 Adar, (cf.9:1-15 with 9:6);

7. 9:17-18 further complicates the conflicting conception of 13 Adar by making the day of killing a day of rest, thus down-playing the victory aspect, and so brings it into line with 9:10,15,16;

8. 9:1-10:3 is artistically inferior to 8:1-17;

9. 8:1-17 shows that the Jews have one enemy but in chapter 9 they have 75,000 enemies; and

10. 8:1-17 depicts the king very differently from chapters 9-10. In the latter chapters he is very generous, which is not the case in the former chapters.

But Lacocque (1999:301-321), who also approaches the story of Esther from a historical-critical perspective, and who discusses the reconstruction of the Esther narrative by Clines, comes to very different conclusions. This suggests that a fresh look at the question of the composition or narrative unity of Esther is valid.

The latter half of this century, however, and the last three decades in particular, have seen the emergence of literary approaches to the text of Scripture as a result of the influence of literary theory. This development is described by Thiselton (1992:471) in the following words: '[t]he turn

towards literary theory in biblical studies constitutes one of the three most significant developments for biblical hermeneutics over the last quarter of a century. It is comparable in importance for biblical interpretation with the impact of post-Gadamerian hermeneutics and the emergence of socio-critical theory and related liberation movements' (cf. also Goldingay 1990:191, Pratt 1990:103). Elsewhere in the same work Thiselton remarks that '[i]t provides the most radical challenge to traditional hermeneutical models which has yet arisen' (1992:473), because this development sees the plurality of textual meanings not merely as a contingency but as a hermeneutical axiom. The newer literary approaches make very useful contributions to biblical studies (cf. Thiselton 1992:475-479; Goldingay 1990:192-193), but they also have numerous problem areas, not least of which is the tendency to de-historise the text.

The terms commonly used to describe this shift are: diachronic vs. synchronic; historical vs. literary; objective vs. subjective; what the text meant vs. what the text means (Snyman 1996:540). These approaches treat the Bible more seriously as a literary product. Its literary features receive much more consideration than before. One result of this development has been the emphasis on the unity of the text, taking as a starting point the text as a whole

in its final form (cf. Longman III 1987:22-25; Alter 1992:63-64). Denis (1992:2-3), for example, writes that '[f]or many decades now [Old Testament scholarship] has been preoccupied with looking through the text to what may or may not lie behind it...[e]xciting things are happening, however. Since the mid-seventies, with a few trailblazers before that, many books have appeared which approach the text not as a window but as a picture. They have been concerned to look at the text, what it says, and how it says it. They have encouraged not a detachment from the text, but an engagement with it' (cf. also Jonker 1996:397-398). The outcome of this can be seen, for example, in the synchronic approaches which are used at present in the study of the biblical text (see Yee 1995; and also Jonker, et al 1995).

It is my belief that the literary approach referred to above can make a very useful contribution to the debate around the integrity of the text of Esther and therefore I state as my hypothesis that:

1. A literary reading of Esther will demonstrate that it is a narrative unity. This reading should be primarily synchronic in nature, based on a careful analysis of the structural composition of the story;
2. Careful attention to the literary devices of chiasmus and characterisation will be a very important part of such a literary reading because they are vital in making evident the narrative

integrity of Esther; and

3. The person of the king is germane to the narrative integrity of Esther and therefore his role and portrayal receive special attention.

Objectives of the research.

1. To affirm the narrative integrity of Esther.

The discussion on the structure of the Esther narrative, and in particular the place of the principle of chiasmic-reversal will greatly help in this attempt.

2. To demonstrate the pivotal nature of the role and portrayal of the king for the narrative unity of Esther. The discussion on the structure of the Esther narrative and the description of the king's role in each of the cycles of the narrative will go a long way to accomplish this objective.

3. To discuss the relation of characterisation to the narrative unity of Esther. The discussion on the characterisation of the king contributes significantly to meet this objective.

4. To discuss the portrayal of the king against the background of the 'traditional' approach used to characterise the king.

The Method of Research.

The reading of a narrative text requires a method appropriate for this purpose. According to Walsh

(1992:210) such a method reads the text paradigmatically (i.e. structuring the the deeper level of the text) and syntagmatically (i.e. analysing the surface structure of the text syntactically). A synchronic reading of Esther accords with this description of method.

Further, such a reading being literary in nature 'is committed to the integrity of the biblical text....[and] offers the possibility of appreciating a dimension of the text that transcends the history in which the text was composed' (Williams 1982:13), yet at the same time giving attention to aspects of history where the text demands it (see also Goldingay 1993:5, Marais 1993:643,646,647; Ryken & Longman III 1993:61). Commenting on the most important methodological point of departure in a text-theoretical approach to the interpretation of the New Testament, Botha (1990:27) says: '[d]ie belangrikste metodologiese uitgangspunt in die interpretasie van die Nuwe Testament is dat alle uitleg sy vertrekpunt vanuit die Bybelse teks sal neem. Alle uitleg moet bewustelik onder die dissipline en kontrole van die teks geplaas word....Historiese, persoonlike, teologiese en ander derglike gegewens kom ter sprake in soverre die teks dit aan die orde stel. Tog speel al hierdie sake noodwendig altyd ook 'n rol in alle teksinterpretasie....Die keuse van die teks as vertrekpunt is nie willekeurig nie. Die teks vorm die

knooppunt van die hele verstaansgebeure'. This statement is descriptive of the approach to be used in this investigation.

The synchronic reading done in this study will make use of the method commonly known as the Text Immanent method. It involves two procedural perspectives referred to by Loader (1977:96,97,99) in the following words: 'Synchronous perspectives form the framework within which diachronous work is done' (see also Claassens 1996:8-14; Eslinger, 1989:3 n3, 4 n4; Kunin, 1994:58-59, n5). The method consists of the following facets according to Viviers (1990:4):

1. Pericope division
2. Text-criticism
3. Form criticism
4. Gattung-criticism
5. Tradition-criticism
6. Redaction-criticism
7. Synthesis.'

Of the above procedures, pericope division, synthesis and text-criticism and general diachronic aspects are of immediate relevance for our purposes and will be used in this investigation.

Since we are reading a narrative, attention will also be given to narratological aspects of the story. For our purposes the most important will be the literary element of characterisation. In terms of Esther studies this last mentioned element has not received a lot of attention, thus contributing to the distortions, stereotyping and unfair character judgements about the king. In fact, not much has been

said about King Ahasuerus and his role in the narrative, and this in spite of the fact that there are some 250 references to him in 167 verses of the story. Such 'over use' (Klein 1989:71) must be significant. Instead, he is used as an argument against the integrity of the narrative (Clines 1984:47). But a close reading of the story shows that the king is portrayed consistently throughout the narrative, and that he is pivotal in each of the main reversals which forms the backbone of the narrative. In fact, each of the main reversals is dependent upon a decision of or action by the king.

His role is therefore crucial to the whole story and should receive more serious attention than has been the case to date.

This is precisely what we will seek to do.

Procedure

The narrative will be investigated in its entirety. Since structural analysis is basic to our understanding of a synchronic reading, as well as the method to be used in this study, various models which have been used in the analysis of Esther will be described and evaluated.

Our own structural analysis of Esther comes next. To do this the narrative will be divided into cycles. The presence of chiastic-reversal in each cycle will be demonstrated giving careful attention to syntactic

considerations. Concerning the literary device of chiasmus, which plays an important role in our investigation, Bensusan (1989:71) suggests that it has a particular focus, namely, 'individuals and groups of people.' If this concept of chiasmus is applied to Esther, it will become evident that the narrative consists of three main cycles:

1. The Vashti-Esther Cycle
2. The Mordecai-Haman Cycle
3. The Jews-Enemies Cycle

What is not evident from the diagram above and yet is critical is *how* the reversal of the fortunes of the main characters in the narrative happens. The diagram below takes this *how* into account:

1. Vashti ===== KING ===== Esther
2. Haman ===== KING ===== Mordecai
3. Enemies ===== KING ===== Jews

Following the detailed description and discussion of the structure of each cycle, the role of the king in each of the cycles will be discussed.

The results of this analysis and discussion will be used to deal with the characterisation of the king in the narrative as a whole, as well as the contribution this characterisation makes toward the integrity of the narrative.



The main conclusions of the research will be drawn together in a concluding summary.

CHAPTER TWO

Overview of the Literature.

The various solutions offered to the problem of the narrative integrity of Esther can be grouped into two broad categories: *those which affirm its unity* and *those which deny its unity*. These will now be discussed below.

Those which deny unity

Historical-critical approaches which start with the general premise that the book is based on various sources have generally concluded that Esther is not a unity (Loader 1988:114-115). Among those scholars who support this conclusion are:

Torrey (1944:1-40), who maintains that the book is an abridged version of an original Aramaic manuscript. But the story does not read like a translation from Aramaic; moreover, the units of the narrative are so well balanced and integrated that it is very difficult to identify the original version in the existing story.

Clines (1984:26-60) maintains that 8:1-17 is the original story. Later chapter 9:1-32 and chapter 10:1-3 were added by a different hand. But if this is the case, then the tension of the plot is not

relieved, making the story actually end in an anti-climax. Further, the additions 9:1-19 and 10:-1-3 are found in the A-text of the story as well suggesting 9:1-19 and 10:1-3 were part of the original story (cf. the critique of Lacocque 1999:308-322).

Bardtke (1963:248-252) maintains that there are three different sources for the book, namely, a Vashti, Mordecai, and Esther source.

Labram (1972:208-222) maintains that underlying the narrative are two different and separate traditions: an Esther story, which was later expanded by the addition of a Palestinian Mordecai tradition in order to explain the Purim feast. The narrator tries unsuccessfully to combine these two traditions resulting in 'contrived and secondary' references to Esther and Mordecai in the book.

In addition, references to Esther and Mordecai are 'awkward and loose, especially in 9:20-28' (cf. also Moore 1983:180).

Pfeiffer (1953:737)

The integrity of 9:20-10:3 and 9:1-19 is denied because:

1. The language and some of the details in the appendix differ from that in the rest of the book;
2. The decree about fasting and lamentation (9:31) is

contrary to the spirit of celebration characteristic of the earlier part of the book (9:17, 19);

3. The difference in the date of the festival in the city and the villages is disregarded in 9:20-22, 27f; and

4. The role Esther plays in the saving of the Jews is ignored by 9:24f; it also assumes that Haman and his sons were killed on the same day, against 7:9f, 9:13f.

Eissfeldt (1974:510-511)

The unity of the Esther narrative is disputed on the grounds that the *language* of the appendix 9:20-32 is different to that of the rest of the book. In addition, in 9:20-32 no distinction is made between the Jews in the town and the Jews in the city, therefore *content* argues against the unity of the book. Moreover, 10:1-3 is written in 'chronicle' style whereas the rest of the book is in 'fictional' style, a further reason for the belief that the narrative is not a unity.

Paton (1964:57-59)

The point Paton makes is that 9:20-10:3 is not part of the original narrative but was added by a different editor. The reasons for this view are:

1. Mention is made of 'the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia', which means 9:20-

10:3 is derived from this source. The latter is probably a traditional Jewish history of the Medo-Persian kings;

2. 9:24-26 duplicates chapters 3-7. If this is true it suggests a link between 9:24-26 and chapters 3-7, on the one hand, and these two sections of the story and the role of the king in particular. For 9:24-26 portrays him as pivotal to the reversal in the fortunes of the Jews, and depicts him as acting in a cool, rational and controlled manner. The picture we have of the king in 9:24-26 is mirrored also in many instances in chapters 3-8; this in fact contributes to the integrity of the story and does not count against it;

3. 9:19 and 9:21-23 indicate the existence of two different practices in two different areas; the author of 9:20-10:3 tries to smooth out these differences by presenting 9:21-23 as a modification of 9:19, which is a clear command by Mordecai;

4. 9:24 says the king was not aware of Haman's plan, but 3:8-11 shows that he knew about the plan, so 9:24 contradicts 3:8-11, and thus 9:24 cannot be part of the original text;

5. The 3 personal singular pronominal suffix $\bar{\eta}$ in 9:25 can only be translated as *it* and not as *she*; the phrase thus reads 'when it came before the king' and not 'when she came before the king', the latter being a reference probably to chapter 7;

6. 9:25 contradicts the details recorded in 7:8f;
7. The exchanging of gifts and crying and fasting are part of the feast days in 9:22,31 but not in 9:17-19; and
8. phrases common to the body of the text are absent from 9:20-10:3.

These facts mean the author of 9:20-10:3 made use of the 'book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia' and adapted its contents to provide a heading for the story as well as an account of the origin of the Purim feast.

Fohrer (1976:253:255)

He maintains that the book is not a unity because:

1. 10:1-3 'is an imitation of the source references in the Deuteronomistic books, and probably represents a later addition';
2. The narrator combines three separate traditions, namely, 'the story of Vashti....the story of Mordecai....and the story of Esther'.

Humphreys (1973:214, 223) says 'that there was once an independent Jewish tale of the adventures of Esther and Mordecai, which was not yet linked to Purim, and which had the form of a court tale. This court tale may itself be the product of the re-working and interweaving of several source tales of

both Jewish and Persian origin;' and that 9:20-32 'constitutes a supplement, distinguished from the rest of the book by its ponderous style and by its content, since it prescribes that all Jews are to celebrate the feast of Purim on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar, making no distinction between city and countryside.

Then there are those theories which look to the surrounding religious and cultic practices and traditions for an explanation of the origin and composition of Esther. For example:

Otto Kaiser (1984:198-205) maintains that the author skilfully weaved together three separate stories, namely, Vashti, Mordecai-Haman and Esther, into one. He also refers to the supposed mythical origins of the Esther story, as suggested by several scholars;

Lacocque (1990:301-322) maintains that Esther is a historisation, based on I Samuel 15, of the Persian New Year mythical festival of the combat between good and evil, and modelled after the Babylonian 'Akitu'.

From this brief overview a lack of consensus regarding the composition of Esther is evident. It is this very lack within the source approaches which calls for a re-examination of the question of the

integrity of the Esther narrative, as is implied by Gordis (1976:43,44) who says, regarding the source theory, that '[s]triking as this theory is, the many assumptions that it require are unnecessary or unconvincing....'

Those which affirm unity

Among those who affirm the unity of Esther are:

Lowenstamm (1971)

He has argued that Esther is a textual unity. This unity is described as an 'essential' unity as there is doubt about the authenticity of 9:29-32.

Jones (1978:36-43)

According to Jones, there are four basic reasons for regarding 9:20-10:3 as an original part of the Esther text:

1. The extensive inclusion in the narrative;
2. The linear progression of the narrative, culminating in 9:20-10:3. What is said by Loader (1977:96-97), namely, that on the surface level a chain-like arrangement knits the narrative into a unity, can be added here;
3. The synthesising and bringing together of a number of key words which appear throughout the text in 9:20-10:3; and
4. The relation between the so-called appendix of Esther and the rest of the book is described by Jones

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as a 'coda' or 'a funnel' leading Moore to comment that Jones's argument 'proves to me, decisively, that the so-called appendix was actually an original part of the book....' (1983:176-179).

Berg (1979:31-39, 95-106)

The arguments presented by Berg in favour of the unity of the Esther text are twofold. First, there is the motif of feasting, which Berg believes is the primary motif in the book. The motif is found throughout the book and strengthens its unity (cf. 1:5,9; 5:5; 7:1; 9:17-18,20-22).

Secondly, Berg identifies a) Power, b) Loyalty to God and Israel, c) Inviolability of the Jews, and d) Reversal, as the themes of the book. These themes demand the presence of the appendix, and 'makes Berg's arguments for the unity of the book rather persuasive' (Moore 1983:179-180).

Rendtorff (1983:270-272)

He supports the unity of Esther. Indicative of his support is the comment that '....the name Purim appears only in the conclusion and is explicitly introduced and explained in 9:26. The word פּוּר from which it is derived (9:24,26), already appears in the narrative (3:7) and is explained by the Hebrew word גּוּרל, lot. Moreover, the festival element is anchored in the narrative (9:17,19). So the regular

narrative could have developed from the narrative about a single occasion. It appears that the primary argument here is a linguistic one (cf. also Moore 1983:271).

Moreover, the literary studies which focus on style (Bensusan 1989), intertextuality (Schutte 1989), rhetoric (Berg 1979), whilst making useful contributions, have not fully explored the relevance and importance of characterisation for the composition of the book.

The state of affairs described above calls for a fresh look at the question of the integrity of the Esther narrative. We will address the issue using a narratological-synchronic approach. Such an approach involves a synchronic reading of Esther in which the idea of chiastic-reversal plays an important part; it also calls for a consideration of characterisation and its link to narrative integrity. We begin this fresh look with a discussion of models used in the analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative in Chapter Three. Our own analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative continues in Chapter Four. The basic issue in both chapters is demonstrating the presence of chiastic-reversal in the narrative in its entirety.

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.

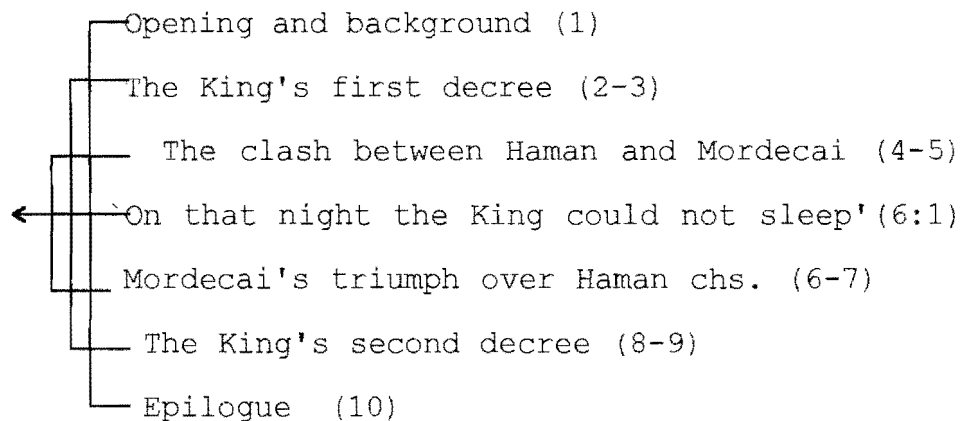
This acknowledgement, however, has not resulted in its *consistent application* in analyses of the compositional structure of Esther, as we hope to illustrate below. To do this we now examine two models which have been used in the analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative.

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

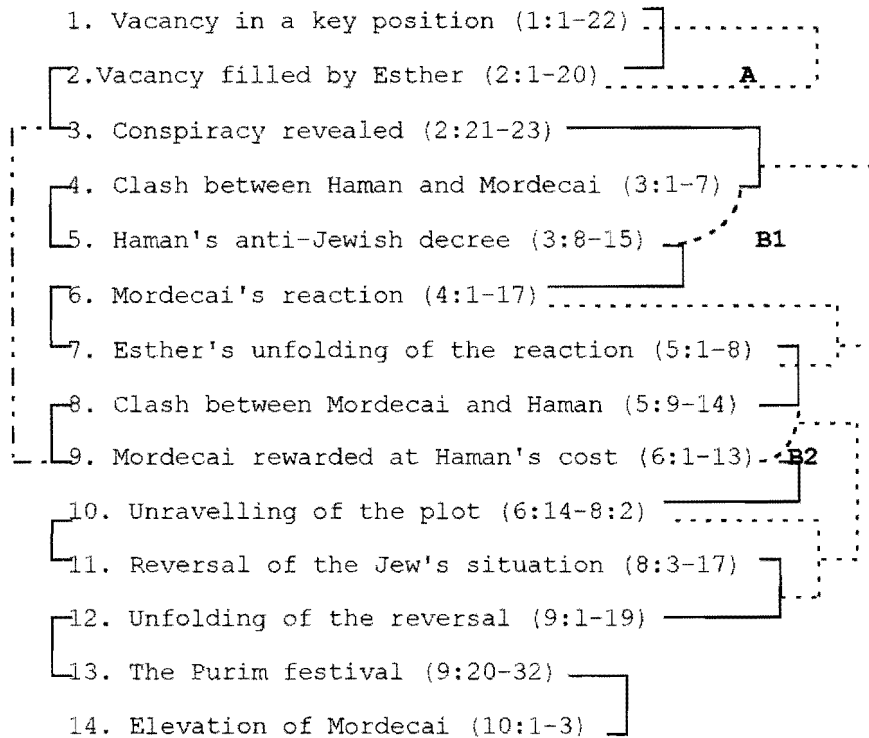
adequate for such analysis as this discussion of Radday, Berg, and Bensusan has shown.

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'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of the Esther Narrative: The Cyclical Model

Introduction

The models discussed in the previous chapter recognise that chiastic-reversal underlies the structural composition of the narrative of Esther. Nevertheless, the actual acknowledgement this structural principle receives is limited indeed (see also Fuerst 1975:72). In addition, the models do not take into account the important aspect of the link of character to chiastic-reversal.

Before we proceed with the analysis of the structure of the narrative we will define our understanding of the terms *chiasm*, *structure* and *chiastic-reversal* because these are key to a proper analysis of the structure of the Esther narrative.

Definition and Terms

Murphy's comment (1981:155) that '[a]nother feature is the *antithesis* (my emphasis) which extend throughout the work', points to the fact that chiasms in Esther can also be described as antitheses, and that the latter can be characteristic of a whole book.

Welch (Greinadus 1988:209) agrees, remarking that

chiasm is 'a significant ordering principle within, not only verses and sentences, but also within and throughout whole books.' Loader (1977:95) defines structure as 'the way in which the various pericopes within themselves are built up as well as the arrangements of these larger units in the composition of the book as a whole.'

Radday (1973:7) in discussing the structure of the Jonah narrative remarks: 'It must be admitted that the symmetry of the two parts is parallel and not in reverse, i.e. not chiasmic.' From this comment it can be inferred that important to the concept of chiasm is the element of *reversal*. According to Fox (1991:158) '[t]he most important structural theme in Esther, the one that organises much of the presentation and wording of eventsis peripety: the result of an action is actually the reverse of what was expected' (see also Goldman 1990:21). Hence our somewhat tautological term 'chiasmic-reversal' as the principle governing the structure of the Esther narrative. Earlier Radday remarks (1973:6) 'that the Biblical authors placed, according to the chiasmic structure in vogue at the time, the main idea of each work, its thesis or turning point at the centre of the work....'

With reference to the idea of chiasmic-**reversal**, in which the characters of a narrative are an important factor, Bensusan (1988:71) says it is: 'a stylistic

device expressing a contrast or reversal of a role or situation.' He continues to say that chiasmus is 'usually associated with individuals and groups of people. Whilst events can be contrasted or run parallel and can be concealed, *it is only people's roles which can be reversed* (emphasis mine). The Book of Esther includes many instances of chiasmus or contrast associated with individuals....' In discussing the structure of Ruth, Radday (1973:8) says that: '[t]he dramatis personae themselves are chiastically distributed.' This is especially true of Esther.

Berg (1979:119 n42) also confirms the critical importance of characters in the chiastic-reversal pattern when she remarks that '[Harbona] plays his small role in reversing the fortunes of the main characters' (cf. 1:10, 7:7).

A careful reading of the narrative, bearing in mind the definitions above, shows that the following characters are the subjects of the chiastic-reversal pattern:

Vashti	=====	Esther
Haman	=====	Mordecai
Enemies	=====	Jews

It will be noted, contrary to Schutte (1989:64-79, cf. also Bensusan 1988:72, Moore 1979:14) that the Jews and their enemies are identified as characters,

as Loader rightly points out when he says, '.... the whole story is framed on what I call a chiastic thought pattern. First Haman-Mordecai, Mordecai-Haman, and then extended to enemies-Jews and Jews-enemies' (1977:101).

The narrative consists of Three Cycles. Cycle One includes the introduction to the story as a whole and Cycle Three includes the conclusion to the story. These elements are incorporated in the aforementioned cycles because of the inseparable link between them. The division into cycles is based on the inter-relationship between the pattern of chiastic-reversal and the fortunes of the main characters in the story, namely, Esther, Mordecai, Haman, Jews and enemies. The resultant cycles are:

1. Vashti-Esther 1:1-2:20
2. Mordecai-Haman 2:21-8:17
3. Jews-Enemies 9:1-10:3

1. Structural analysis:the Vashti-Esther Cycle

(1:1-2:20).

The section 1:1-2:20 is usually treated as the introduction to the story. For example, in Loader's structure (1977:96), 1:1-2:20 serves as the introduction to the main action of the narrative which encompasses 2:21-9:19. In terms of this

arrangement chiastic-reversal is not present in 1:1-2:20. The reason for this, says Loader (1980:15), is the fact that this section of the story consists of two independent and complete wholes. Yet he gives 1:1-22 the title 'Vacancy in a key position' and 2:1-20 'Vacancy filled by Esther' (1977:96). A careful consideration of these titles suggests that they are mirror images of each other, that they counterbalance each other and are thus clues to the presence of chiasmus and reversal. This will become evident once the introductory formula of 2:1 is discussed in detail. We will do so below.

Here 1:1-2:20 is treated as the first main cycle of the narrative, and is called the Vashti-Esther Cycle, because it is organised on the basis of the twin ideas of a) the chiastic-reversal principle, and b) the reversal of the fortunes and destiny of two of the main characters. In addition, there are syntactic considerations which lead to the conclusion that 1:1-1:20 is a closely knit unit. We proceed now to discuss how the Vashti-Esther Cycle is built up.

1.1 1:1-9

1:2a is introduced by a temporal phrase **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם**, and verse 10a begins with a temporal phrase **הַשְּׁבִיעִי בַּיּוֹם**, which means one scene ends at verse 9. Concurring Bush (1996:342) says '[t]he ending of the episode is signalled by the shifts....in v9 to the



sentence order of subject plus verb.' Thus we have another scene starting at 1:10a. In addition, **משתה** v3, is repeated in v9 (**משתה**), binding the unit together. The unit 1:1-9 is, moreover, constructed as a inclusion (Davis 1995:106) giving the result below:

המלך	אחשורוש	v1
אחשורוש	למלך	v9

Two feasts are mentioned within this chiasm; the first in vv1-4 and the second in vv5-9. The first (vv1-4) is introductory and sets the scene for the narrative as a whole. The second (vv5-9) provides the setting for the start of the plot of the story (Fox 1991:16), for it is here that the first leg of the reversal takes place, in that Vashti is ordered to come before the king at the second banquet. The first main reversal of fortunes in the story begins at 1:5. Fox (1991:16) comments that 'the garden surrounding or before the royal pavilion [is] also the locale for the climax of Chapter 7.' The garden then becomes the site for reversals (cf. also Bush 1996:347).

The king is dominant in vv1-9. The focus is his power and greatness. This is clear from the descriptive details of the unit: a) the extent of his kingdom (v2); b) the officials in attendance at the feast (v3); c) the display of his wealth and glory for 180 days (v4); d) the making of a second feast (v5); e)

the splendour of the second feast (v5-7a); f) the royal generosity (v7a-8); g) the contrasting feast hosted by Vashti the queen (v9a); h) the identification of the locality of the queen's feast as **בית המלכות אשר למלך אחורוש** (v9b).

This unit serves to introduce two of the main characters, Ahasuerus and Vashti, who will be involved in the first main reversal of the story. It also introduces the readers to the site where the first main reversal will take place.

1:2 1:10-12

The next unit which starts at v10a is introduced by a temporal reference **ביום השביעי**, and describes the king as **כטוב לב-המלך**. In v12b, on the other hand, the king is described as **המלך מאד וחמתו בערה בו ויקצף**. Here it is the contrast of the moods of the king which binds the unit. In 10a he is merry (**כטוב**) but in 12b he burns with anger (**ויקצף**). The verses in between give the reason for this change in the mood of the king. The verses 1:10-12 are also the turning point of the section 1:1-22. The king sends his court officials to tell Vashti to appear before him and his guests with her royal regalia as a display of the splendour of his greatness. The exhibition of his greatness and splendour of 1:10-12 is a continuation of that depicted in 1:1-9. She refuses. The king gets very angry at her refusal.

The unit 1:10-12 keeps the focus on the two characters Ahasuerus and Vashti, introduced in 1:1-9, with this difference, they are depicted as involved in a power struggle. This unit also provides the reason for the first main reversal of the story, namely, Vashti's refusal to obey the command of the king.

1.3 1:13-22

The next unit begins at v13. וַיֹּאמֶר signals the start of the unit. It consists mainly of two direct speeches. The first is the quoted speech of the king. It begins in v13 and ends in v15. Here we have a report of the discussion between the king and his advisors concerning the appropriate action to be taken against Vashti.

The second speech, which is a reply to the king, begins in v16 and ends at v20. This speech by Memuchan starts with וַיֹּאמֶר.

Since v21 begins with waw-consecutive and v20 with a waw-conjunction, it points to the discontinuity between v20 and v21. Verses 21-22 are therefore the epilogue of the section 1:13-22. It is narrative discourse which reports that the king agreed with the decision of the royal court to depose Vashti. These factors show that 1:13-22 is a self-contained unit.

We have, then, a very long section of direct discourse, v13-v20. It deals with the outcome of the struggle between two of the main characters of the first main reversal, i.e. Ahasuerus and Vashti. The outcome is the dethronement of Vashti.

It will be noted that no specific mention is made of Vashti's dethronement. In fact, she is not mentioned again until 2:1. But implicit in the king's command and the execution of that command is her dethronement. The whole of this section 1:1-22 is directed at the dethronement of Vashti.

The king's dethronement of Vashti creates a vacancy in the royal palace which sets the scene for the second leg of the first main reversal of the story.

1.4 2:1-4

It is generally agreed that 2:1 begins a new section. The expression **אחר הדברים האלה** marks the start of this new section. In addition, v2 introduces the direct discourse of the **נערי־המלך**, which ends at v4a. Furthermore, in a study on the word order of clauses in Hebrew and its relationship to emphasis, Bandstra (1992:116) points out that the phrase **אחר הדברים האלה** can also indicate continuity. Commenting on the phrase **ויהי אחר הדברים האלה** in Genesis 22:1, he says: 'While this is a verb-first pattern, it is not

typical of V-S-O or V-O functions. The WP of *hyh* is a special case. While it does not narrate action, *it still functions to maintain continuity with the preceding textual unit* (emphasis mine). This is further indicated by *hdbrym h'lh* "these things", vaguely referring to the preceding events' (Bandstra 1992:116). If *hyh* 'does not narrate action', even though it is a verb, it follows that Genesis 22:1 and Esther 2:1 can both be regarded as verbless clauses. Consequently, the introductory formula in 2:1, as is the case in Genesis 22:1, has a twofold function. It indicates the beginning of a new section, and maintains continuity with the previous section of the narrative. Murphy (1981:160) comments that '[t]he triple use of the particle "et" (the grammatical object marker) in 2:1 is quite effective in making the connection with the events in ch. 1.'

Verse 1b, starting with **וְכִי**, also links to 2a. Since verse 5 introduces a new character, Mordecai, it begins a new section; v4b links back to v2 because both are narrative discourse. In addition, v2a mentions Vashti being remembered and v4a mentions Vashti being replaced; the repeated reference to Vashti binds 1:2-4.

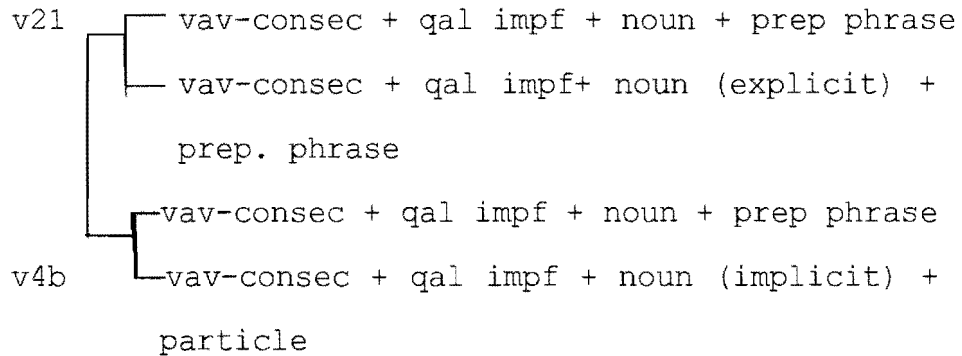
We also have chiasm in 2:1-4 around literary elements:

A. Narrative discourse 2:1

B. Direct discourse 2:2-4a

A. Narrative discourse 2:4b

It should be noted too that there is a syntactical similarity between 1:21 and 2:4b, so that although 2:1-4 is a closely knit unit, there is still a link between 1:1-22 and 2:1-4 as shown below:



On the basis of the indicators discussed above we conclude that 2:1-4 is a unit with a twofold function: a) it serves as the hinge between 1:1-22 and 2:5-20; and b) it keeps the focus on one of the main characters of the first main reversals, namely, Ahasuerus. A detailed discussion of the next leg of the first main reversal follows.

1.5 2:5-20

As mentioned above, v5 begins a new section in the story because it introduces a new character, Mordecai. It will be noted that vv5-20 is written as

social (personal) circumstances and appearance of Esther underscore this fact (v7b).

1.5.2 2:8b- 15

Esther's physical appearance obtains for her preferential treatment from Hegai (v8b-9). Mordecai struts impatiently in front of the house of the women to see if she has obeyed him and kept her identity a secret (v10-11). Both these happenings help to keep the focus on Esther.

The detailed description of the process of preparation is aimed at Esther. Her situation is in sharp contrast to that of the other women for:

1.5.2.1 She requires a shorter period of treatment because of her natural intrinsic beauty. This is clear from the repeated reference by the narrator to Esther's physical appearance; the fact that Hegai could speed up her preparation and treatment (v9), and the admiration of all who saw her (v15b); and

1.5.2.2 She does not take with her all the things the women normally took when they went to the king, (v15a). Why? Because of her physical beauty.

Moreover, the detail description of the preparation process and the entry of the women to the king, as well as the contrast drawn by the narrator between Esther and the other women, slows the narrative down (Thiselton 1992:480; Gräbe 1986:270) so that the attention of the reader is focused on Esther. Herein

lies the function of the otherwise out of place detailed description of the preparation process. Esther is thus the focus of 2:8b-15.

In addition, the slowing down of the narrative prepares the reader for the transition in Esther's role from one of obscurity to prominence; from this point on she is one of the dominant characters. Further, it prepares the reader for the transition in the relationship between Esther and Mordecai, namely, she becomes queen and he remains a subject.

1.5.3 2:6-20

The narrator continues to keep the focus on Esther by his description of the king's actions toward her:

- a) He loves Esther more than the other women v17a;
- b) He enthrones Esther in place of Vashti v17b; and
- c) He makes a feast for Esther v18.

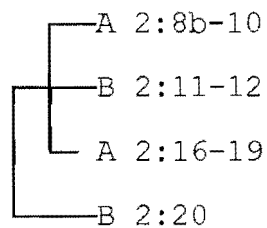
Moreover, whereas Esther remains in the palace the other women are returned to the harem. Here **שנית**, a second time, has the meaning of 'again'. It is used to contrast Esther with the other women, cf. v17a, **מכל-הנשים**, and **מכל-הבתולה**. Verses 17-19a form an inclusion:

a) **מכל-הבתולה**

b) **ובקבץ בתולה שנית**. The point of this inclusion is to contrast what happened to Esther with what happened to the other contenders. This redundancy also keeps the focus on Esther. In

addition, the section ends with Mordecai at the gate, concerned for Esther's welfare. Although it is Mordecai whom the narrator describes in these verses, the purpose is to focus attention on Esther.

It is interesting to note that 2:8b-10 parallels 2:16-19 and that 2:11-12 parallels 2:20. Both units end with a description of Mordecai's concern for Esther, giving the following structure:



The ABAB pattern means that 2:8b-20 is a closely bound passage. Furthermore, 2:5-8a is linked to 2:8a-20 via a common subject, namely, Esther. In addition, Moore (1972:22) points out that the phrase **ואחד-עמה מולדתה** (2:20) is reversed in 2:10, suggesting inclusion and so makes 2:10-20 one unit. For this reason 2:19-20 are included here rather than linked to 2:21-23. It brings the passage to a close by focusing the attention on Esther in a twofold way:

a) The gathering of the virgins for a second time (see Gordis 1973:47) functions as a contrast to what happened to Esther, that is, she remained at the palace as queen. In this indirect way the narrator

keeps the focus on Esther's enthronement.

b) The attempt by Mordecai to obtain news about Esther keeps the focus on her.

Consequently the whole of 2:5-20 is held together by its focus on Esther, culminating in *her enthronement by the king* (2:17a-19).

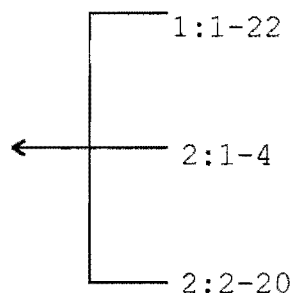
So, in the section 2:5-20 we are introduced to the third character involved in the first main reversal of the story, i.e., Esther. Throughout 2:5-20 the spotlight is on her.

I pointed out that 2:1-4 is a separate unit with its own chiastic structure, but that it also links with 1:1-22 via syntactical parallelism (see above). Similarly, although 2:5-20 is a separate unit, it also links to 2:1-4 via the repetition of the phrase:

v4a תמלך תחת ושהי

v17b וימליכה תחת ושהי, resulting in

the following overall structure:



Thus 1:1-22 and 2:1-20 are not two independent parts of the narrative but two parts linked by the introductory formula of 2:1. It also provides the

counterbalance between the vacancy in the position of the queen (1:1-22) with the filling of this vacancy (2:1-20). McBride (1991:219) says that Esther 'is crowned Xerxes' queen, completing the book's *first manifest crossing/reversal*' (my emphasis). Agreeing, McCarthy and Riley (1986:89) state "[Q]ueen Vashti's downfall is Esther's opportunity". Esther holds in reserve her identity and is rewarded with crowning; Vashti holds in reserve her beauty and is rewarded with de-crowning.

It is also clear from this diagram that the king plays a pivotal role in the first main reversal of the narrative. For he reverses the roles and fortunes of Vashti and Esther, dethroning the one and enthroning the other. It can be summarised as follows:

A The king dethrones Vashti: Vacancy results

1:1-22

B The king initiates the filling of the vacancy

2:1-4

A The king enthrones Esther: Vacancy filled

2:5-20

Summary

Our analysis and discussion shows that 1:1-2:20 is the first Cycle of the story and that it deals with

the first major reversal of the narrative. It involves the dethronement of Vashti and the enthronement of Esther by Ahasuerus the king and also constitutes the first example of the chiastic-reversal principle, which is evident throughout the entire narrative. This is unlike Loader (1977:96), among others, who treat 1:1-2:20 as the introduction to the main section of the narrative which encompasses 2:21-9:19. It is evident from his structural analysis and discussion that Chapter 1:1-2:20 does not share in the chiastic-reversal pattern because it is held that it consists of two independent and complete wholes (1980:15). Yet he gives 1:1-22 the title 'Vacancy in a key position' and 2:1-20 'Vacancy filled by Esther' (1977:96). These titles, however, are mirror-images of each other; they counterbalance each other and are clues to the presence of chiasmus and reversal.

Thus the vacancy occasioned by the dethronement of Vashti is reversed and filled by the enthronement of Esther. An unknown Jewish maiden occupies the second highest position in a foreign kingdom, while a well known and secure queen is banished into obscurity. The tables have been turned, the reversal of the fortunes and destinies of two of the main characters of the story has been completed.

The chiastic nature of 1:1-2:20 is also evident from the following:

In v10 the king is said to be **כטוב לב** and in v12 he is **ויקצי**, which demarcates vv10-12 as a second unit.

The reasons for this mood change are given in vv10b-12a. This unit also marks the turning point in this part of the story.

In vv13-22, the third unit, we have two passages of direct speech. The first is from vv13-15, which is the King's speech, and is introduced by **ויאמר**. In this unit is quoted the speech of the king regarding the action to be taken in response to Vashti's refusal. The second speech, vv16-20, is that of Memuchan, which constitutes a reply to the speech of the king. Since v21 begins with waw-consecutive plus a verb, indicating the start of a new unit, Memuchan's reply ends at v20. The result of Memuchan's speech is the demise of Vashti.

Thus we have two units of direct speech (vv13-20) followed by narrative discourse in v21-22, recording the implementation of the king's decision. These verses provide the epilogue to the unit v13-20.

Integral to and implicit in the king's decision and its implementation is the dethronement of Vashti as queen. It is clear then that the development of the plot in 1:2-22 is directed at the demise of Vashti.

Chapter 2:1 sees the start of a new part of the narrative as is indicated by the formula **הדברים האלה** **אחר**. But according to Bandstra (1992:116) this formula can also indicate **continuity**. Commenting on the phrase **ויהי אחר הדברים האלה** in Genesis 22:1, he says: 'While this is a verb-first pattern, it is not typical of V-S-O or V-O functions. The WP of *hyh* is a special case. While it does not narrate action, it still functions to maintain **continuity with the preceding textual unit** (emphasis mine). This is further indicated by *hdbrym h'lh* "these things", vaguely referring to the preceding events.' If **היה** 'does not narrate action', even though it is a verb, it follows that Genesis 22:1 and Esther 2:1 can both be regarded as verbless clauses.

Consequently, the introductory formula in 2:1, as is the case in Genesis 22:1, has a twofold function. It indicates the *beginning* of a new section, and *maintains continuity* with the previous section of the narrative (cf. also Murphy 1981:160). Thus 1:1-22 and 2:1-20 are *not two independent parts* of the narrative but two contrasting parts of the narrative linked by the introductory formula of 2:1. It provides the



counterbalance between the vacancy in the position of the queen (1:1-22), with the filling of this vacancy (2:1-20).

Chapter 2:1 and the function it serves in linking chapter 1 and 2 also points to the presence of chiastic-reversal in the cycle 1:1-2:20.

The chiastic nature of 1:1-2:20 is evident from another perspective. Chapter 2:5 introduces a new character, Mordecai, indicating the beginning of a new section. It marks 2:1-4 off as a separate unit. This is further shown by the chiasm of 2:1-4:

2:1 discourse
2:2-4a direct speech
2:4b discourse.

The thought flow in v1-4 is as follows: the king remembers, this leads to the speech of the servants, which in turn results in the narrated action of the king. The focus and center of this unit therefore is the king. His action stated in 2:4b ultimately moves the plot from a situation of a vacancy in the palace to one of a vacancy filled in the palace reversing the previous situation.

Moreover, 2:5-20 is narrative discourse. It describes the beginning, mid-point and conclusion of the

process of filling the vacancy occasioned by Vashti's dethronement in 1:1-22. In 2:5-20 the spotlight falls on Esther, who is portrayed as passive and is characterised as reacting rather than responding, yet she is the focus of the passage as follows:

- a) 2:5-8a describes Mordecai who is the foil for the introduction of Esther.

- b) 2:8b-15 focus on the appearance of Esther and the action of Hegai, motivated by her appearance. Hegai's response to Esther's appearance, and Mordecai's anxious strutting in front of the palace-gate keeps the spotlight on Esther.

- c) 2:16-20 records the actions of the king in relation to Esther. The essence of this action is the enthronement of Esther as queen in the place of Vashti, thus filling a vacancy caused by the dethronement of Vashti. Using Loader's concept of vacancy (1977:96), the discussion above can be represented as follows:

A. Vashti dethroned: Vacancy results 1:1-22

B. King initiates Filling of the Vacancy
2:1-4

A. Esther enthroned : Vacancy canceled 2:5-20

The preceding analysis and discussion show that 1:1-2:20 has a chiasmic structure. It is not merely a general introduction to the narrative, as Kaiser (1984:204-205) recognises when he remarks that '[t]he characters are strongly stylized. The rejected *Vashti* is contrasted with the wise and fortunate *Esther*, the overbearing, self-seeking and cruel *Haman* is contrasted with the faithful and successful *Mordecai*' (my emphasis).

We conclude, then, on the basis of the preceding discussion that the section 1:1-2:20 is structured and organised by the narrator in accordance with:

- a) The principle of **chiasmic-reversal**; and
- b) The idea of the reversal of the destiny and fortunes of **characters** in the story.

Chapter 1:1-2:20 constitutes the Vashti-Esther Cycle which is also the *first main reversal* of the narrative.

2. Structural analysis:the Haman-Mordecai Cycle (2:21-8:17).

This cycle is the longest. It is also the main cycle since the main reversal of roles, fortunes and destinies, namely that of Haman and Mordecai, takes place in this cycle. It is made up of four sections: the Bigthan/Teresh Incident, 2:21-23; Haman's plot

7:10; and the Rise of Mordecai, 8:1-17.

2.1 The Bigthan/Teresh- Ahasuerus Scene (2:21-23)

Opinions among scholars on the link of this unit to the rest of the narrative as well as its function in the story varies. Murphy (1981:160) sees it as an independent unit; Bensusan (1988:75-80) does not feature it in his analysis of the structure, and neither does Berg (1979:106-107). Radday (1973:9) and Fox (1991:157) see a very loose link between this pericope and chapters 8-9. Loader (1977:97) and Schutte (1989:27-32) see an indirect link between 2:21-23 and 3:1-9:19; it serves as an introduction to the main section 3:1-9:19. It is my view, however, that 2:21-23 is:

- a) A unity;
- b) That it is directly linked to 3:1-8:17 and only secondarily to 9:1-19; and
- c) That it is structured according to the chiasmic-reversal principle, as the following considerations will amply demonstrate.

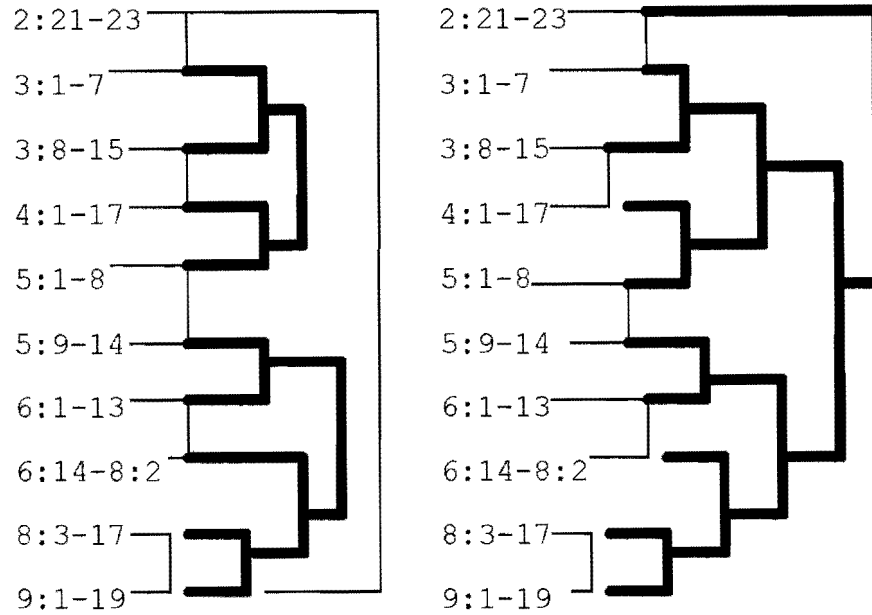
The unity of 2:21-23 is evident from: firstly, the temporal phrase **בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם** with which v21 opens. This phrase points to the beginning of a new unit. The placing of the grammatical subject, Mordecai, in a pre-verbal position further identifies it as a new

unit. In addition, we also have a shift in geography; from inside the palace to outside the palace, viz. the gate of the palace. Secondly, chapter 3 opens with **אחר הדברים האלה** indicating the start of a new section in the story. Thirdly, v21a is the introduction and situates the story. Verse 21b and c introduce the characters Bigthan and Teresh, their anger and the plot against the king. We are not given the reason for the anger. Fourthly, v22 is the turning point because Mordecai gets to know about the plot and reports it to Esther. We are not told how Mordecai came to know about it, nor how he communicated it to Esther. She in turn informed the king **בשם מרדכי**. The expression is significant in the light of the fact that the king did not honour Mordecai. It would appear that the king's failure to honour Mordecai is used to enhance the tension in the plot development, for in the next scene Haman is introduced as the one being honoured. In this way the plot action is introduced via a reversal. Fifthly, v23 brings the story to an end. The matter is investigated, it is found to be true and Bigthan and Teresh are found guilty and are executed (hanged) on orders from the king.

That 2:21-23 is linked directly to 3:1-8:17 is evident from the following factors. Chapter 2:21-23

appears to be a story within a story in which the author anticipates the outcome of the macro story. The audience is shown the final resolution of the crisis of the main plot before its narratological resolution, because the characters responsible for the resolution of the tension in the mini-drama (2:21-23), also play a major role in the resolution of the tension and crisis in the main story.

Loader (1977:97) identifies chapter 3:1-9:19 as the section in which the main action of the narrative happens, and 'in which pericope 3 [i.e. 2:21-23] is of course included.' He sees the relation of 2:21-23 to chapters 3:1-9:19 as indirect rather than direct; and describes the function of 2:21-23 as heightening the tension of the Haman-Mordecai conflict. But this is not all it does. Given the chiastic nature of the pericope it really functions as the introduction to the main section of the narrative, namely, 3:1-8:17. The narrator, by prefixing 2:21-23 to 3:1-8:17, gives the audience the outcome of the main drama through the mini-drama, and in this way maintains interest without giving away too much of the plot development. So, instead of just having a link to 9:1-19 at the level of the surface and deep structure, 2:21-23 is linked to 3:1-9:19 as a whole. Diagrammatically the differences can be represented as follows:



Moreover, the similarities between the mini-drama of 2:21-23 and the main drama indicate a direct link between the two, for:

- * As in the main episode, we have a plot as well, (i.e. by Haman);
- * As in the main episode, the plot is reported to the king and by the same character, viz. Esther;
- * As in the main episode, the antagonists Bigthan and Teresh are hanged;
- * In addition, as in the main story, the death of those who threatened the life of the Jews ends that story, just like the

death of those who threatened the life of
the king ends the story; and

* As in the main story, the events take
place in the palace and its environs.

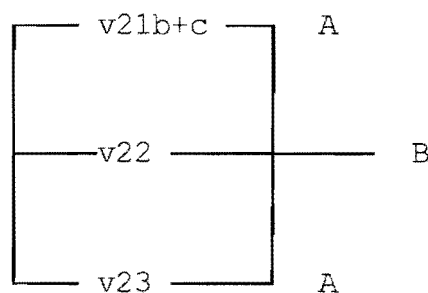
The main difference is while Esther and Mordecai are pivotally instrumental in the reversal of the king's situation, in the macro reversal, it is the king who is pivotally instrumental in the reversal of the situation of Esther and Mordecai and the Jewish nation. There are overwhelming similarities between the two stories such that one can be seen as a miniature mirror image of the other.

It is noteworthy that Bal (1989:89, 99n24) defines 2:21-23 as a *mise en abyme* (her emphasis) and then goes on to explain the latter phrase as follows: 'A sign that *represents the work as a whole* (my emphasis) in which it is incorporated....' I believe similarly that 2:21-23 is the micro-mirror image of the macro-plot and story and therefore it links directly to 3:1ff. This view finds resonance in the comment of Claassens (1996:70) who says '[d]ie verwysing na die oorwinning oor die Ammoniete is 'n *vooruitgryping* (my emphasis) na wat verder gaan gebeur in die storie. Dit is tipies van Hebreeuse verhaalkuns dat daar nie eintlik sprake is van 'n spanningslyn nie. Die aap word eers uit die mou gelaat en dan word die storie verder vertel' (see

also Witherington III 1998:290). What was said concerning the syntactic function of 2:1a holds true for the syntactic function of 3:1a, which shows that there is a direct link between 2:21-23 and 3:1. This is not only true syntagmatically, but also paradigmatically, for one can replace the role of Bigthan and Teresh with that of Haman and the enemies of the Jews; Esther and Mordecai with the king, and the king with that of Esther, Mordecai and the Jewish nation.

The presence of chiastic-reversal in 2:21-23 cannot be disputed for according to Loader (1977:101) 'It is significant that we find a miniature of the chiastic thought pattern in a stylistic chiasmus when Mordecai confronts Esther with her responsibility to her people....', an idea he appears to overlook in 2:21-23. The representation which follows draws attention to the chiastic nature of 2:21--23:

- A. The king's life in danger 2:21b and c
- B. Mordecai and Esther reveal the plot v22
- A. The king's enemies are executed v23



We conclude that 2:21-23 is a unified pericope which:

- a) serves as the introduction to the main drama, 3:1-8:17
- b) is structured in terms of chiasmic-reversal
- c) is a closely knit unit
- d) is directly linked to 3:1-8:17.

2.2 Haman's plot against the Jews 3:1-4:17

This sections divides into several sub units, as follows:

2.2.1 The clash between Haman and Mordecai 3:1-7

Haman's promotion by the king sparked off a clash between him and Mordecai. The result of the clash was the plot by Haman to destroy Mordecai and the Jews. When we come to the end of the scene it would appear that Haman had succeeded.

Haman's promotion by the king is recorded in v1b.

There is parallelism between v1b, בן-המדהא האגגי, גדל המלך אחשורוש את-המן, and v2a, כן צוה-לו המלך, כי, that is, v2a ends in the same way v1b starts. Furthermore, the pronominal suffix לו in 2a points back to את-המן in v1b. We are not told why Haman got this promotion. Since 2:21-23 is so closely linked to 3:1ff, it would seem that the king made this appointment for reasons of security, given the fact that he had just survived an assassination plot (cf. Dan. 6:1-5). It was thus primarily a political

decision. In this regard Edwards (1989:35) says that the command of the king that officials were to bow to Haman 'was a political command to all the king's subjects....' In acknowledgement of his promotion, the officials of the king were to bow and prostrate themselves in the presence of Haman (v2a). Hyman's attempt (1989:153-158) to argue that the bowing had religious significance is not convincing. Why Haman and not another of the leaders got the promotion, we are not told either.

Verse 2b contrasts the behaviour of Mordecai to that of the king's officials, so the conjunction is adversative.

Verse 3-4 sees the behaviour of Mordecai first questioned and then challenged. So, vv1-4(a) set the scene for the clash between Mordecai and Haman which takes place in v4b-5.

Verse 5 suggests that Haman investigated and established for himself that what the officials reported, was indeed true. The narrator, however, sees the clash not only as something between two individuals. The clash is a national issue because 3:4a implies that Mordecai must have told the officials that the king's command did not apply to him since he was a Jew. They in turn wanted to test this claim (3:4b), so they informed Haman. The issue therefore is not about bowing or not bowing to Haman *but about the validity of the king's law forthe*

Jews. Are the Jews subject to the law of the land and the king (3:22a, 3b)? So, a personal clash is elevated to one of national proportions by the narrator (Humphreys 1973:215 concurring). It is in the light of this nationalisation of the personal that Memuchan's interpretation of Vashti's behaviour (1:16-22, and especially v16) should also be viewed.

Verse 6 shows the nationalisation (or the ethnisation) of the clash (cf. I Samuel 15, Deut. 25:17-19), and Haman's determination to destroy the Jewish nation. The clash ends with the intention of Haman to put an end to the Jews. The first step towards that goal was to determine (v7) the exact date for the destruction of the Jews (Mordecai).

Verse 7 is disjunctive in relation to v6 as the prepositional phrase with which the verse begins, indicates. Continuity with what precedes is maintained via content, as v7 signals the beginning of the **ויבקש** of v6b. The plot begins with the fixing of the time for implementing Haman's intention. This is done by the casting of the lot (**פור**). The narrator explains that **פור** is a synonym for **גורל**. The outcome of the lot is that the twelfth month, the month of Adar, was to be the time to implement the plot. This is 11 months into the future, quite a long delay in the implementation of the decree. The delay creates hope for there would still be time for the situation to change (cf. Fox 1989:185). On the other hand, the

casting of the lot means that the execution of the plan was determined by divine means. If the plan fails, it would be, in the view of the narrator, a victory for the God of the Jews over the god of their enemies. In the end Haman's promotion becomes a threat to the existence of the Jewish nation.

2.2.2 Haman persuades the king to issue a decree

3:8-15

Destroying Mordecai was a straightforward matter, and Haman could have done that given his authority as vizier. He needed royal permission, however, to exterminate the whole Jewish nation. In this section he goes about obtaining that permission. Haman's strategy in obtaining the royal decree is recorded in 3:8-11. He needed to persuade the king to authorise his plot, which he does from vv8-11. We have, from v8-v9, a number of waw-conjunction clauses detailing what Haman did to persuade the king to give him the authority he needed to exterminate the Jews:

a) He depicts the Jews as comprising a great number of people(v8a). Even though the Jews are said to be עם-אחד, yet they are described as מלכותך מדינות מלכותך (v8a), they are מפרד בין העמים בכל (v8a). The impression created is of a people who pose a danger and threat to the stability of the kingdom. Note here too how supposed

national interests are used to persuade the king to act. Later, Esther will use the same strategy (cf. also Memunach 1:16);

b) In v8b he uses the laws and customs of the Jews (cf. Dn.6:1-6). These are said to be different, **שְׁנוּה**, from all the peoples in the kingdom. Note here how people and king are unified, i.e. what is a threat to the people is a threat to the king and vice versa (**מלכותך** v8a and **מכל-עם** v8b);

c) Haman says (v8c) they refuse to obey the laws of the king. This is of course a reference to Mordecai's refusal to give obeisance to Haman, 3:2b. In this way the clash between two individuals is made a national issue and Mordecai becomes the symbol of the Jewish people. This nationalisation of a personal issue is carried out both by Haman and the narrator, each for his own end;

d) He appeals to 'self-interest' (v8d); but in the light of the unity between king and people it is really an appeal to national interest. They have become a threat to national stability and to leave them alone is not the appropriate thing to do for the king. Haman is suggesting to the king that he will be seen to act against national interests if he failed to act against the Jews;

e) He appeals next to the prerogative of royal power (v9a), for Haman may have overplayed his hand a little by suggesting it is not fitting for the king

to tolerate this situation; almost accusing the king of acting against national interest (v8d). So he requests (יִכְחֹב is a jussive) that the king exercise the royal prerogative and issue a written royal decree that the Jews be destroyed; and

f) Finally (v9b) the economic benefit of the destruction of the Jews for the kingdom is pointed out. Haman guarantees the king that he will ensure that ten thousand talents of silver is paid into the national treasury. The silver obviously will come from the looting of the property of the Jews who would be destroyed (cf. v11).

In this way, in the words of Humphreys (1973:215), 'he presents (with a certain skill) his plan for the destruction of Mordecai and all the Jews in terms of the king's own benefit and interest.'

These are the elements of Haman's strategy to obtain royal approval and legitimisation for his plot.

Verses 10-11 conclude this section. It shows that Haman's strategy was successful. He obtained the royal authority which enabled him to implement his plot to exterminate the Jewish people.

The next act was the publication and distribution of the decree, 3:12-15. A new section begins at v12, signified by the introduction of the scribes of the king. They are summoned and write down the decree authorising the extermination of the Jews. The

documents are sealed with the king's signet ring and despatched with the runners to the governors, satraps and leaders of the people of all the provinces of the kingdom in their own script and language. Thus, the decree to destroy the Jews is disseminated throughout the empire.

Three features mark the narrator's description of events in this pericope: firstly, the speed with which things happen. There is this rush to spread the news. The staccato-like manner of writing indicates this element of haste by means of the waw-conjunction and non-conjunction clauses we have from v12b-v14 as follows: in v12b a preposition begins the clause; v13a has a waw-conjunction; v13b a waw-conjunction; v14a a noun; and v14b an infinitive construct. The result is that the clauses of v15 are independent of each other, each one describing a new and separate happening which is loosely connected to the preceding one. The cola parallel each other syntactically since they have the same syntactic structure, that is, S-V-O/M (Bandstra 1992:109). This kind of structure according to Bandstra (1992:116-117) '....signals that new or unexpected information is being introduced.' Consequently, the narrative reads staccato-like and one event is made to follow swiftly upon another event.

Things happen with such speed that it would appear that the destruction of the Jews is inevitable and

irreversible; nothing can stop it; there is no time to stop the decree from being carried out. Haman has succeeded.

Secondly, contrasting the different attitudes displayed by role players. We are told that the runners went out in haste (רחופים); the law was promulgated (immediately) in Susa the capital. In contrast to this, the king and Haman sat down to drink, while the capital Susa was in consternation (the waw of וְהָעִיר is adversative).

How are we to understand the drinking of the king and Haman? The narrator draws attention to this by concluding with the contrasting description of the behaviour of the king and Haman over against that of the city. What are we to make of it? Is this feasting by the king and Haman? Is it a celebration of the eminent extermination of the Jews? Is it just a casual drink, or a combination of the aforesaid?

To answer these questions a number of factors need to be remembered. In 3:10 the king gives his signet ring to Haman to lend royal authority to and so legalise the decree he was about to send out. The scribes are called (3:12) and write down the decree which was sealed with the signet ring of the king (3:12b). After this the written decree was sent out to all the provinces of the kingdom. Next we are told that the king and Haman sat down to drink. Given this sequence

of events it follows that after the decree was sealed, Haman returned the king's signet ring (cf. 8:2). At this point he is invited by the king for a drink. The king is mentioned first in the clause since, even though Haman occupied this senior political position, he could not invite himself for a drink. Strict rank of order was to be maintained at all times. For the king this is a casual social drink; for Haman, however, it is the crowning of his plot; it is a celebration of the victory he has just obtained against Mordecai and the Jews (5:13).

The overall effect of the drinking event is to underline the inevitability and irreversibility of the destruction of the Jews.

Moreover, the mention of the drinking incident creates a sense of crisis and urgency, as well as a sense of uncertainty in the audience (and the reader). What is going to be the outcome? Does the drinking by Haman and the king mean he has won? Was there no way to stop the destruction of the Jews?

So then, the function of the depiction of the role players in v15 is to intensify the existing situation of crisis.

Thirdly, the narrator creates hope against the background of crisis and urgency. A comparison of v12a and v13b is very revealing. According to v12a the decree is sent out by Haman בשלושה עשר יום בו בחדש הראשון, that is on the 13th day of the *first*

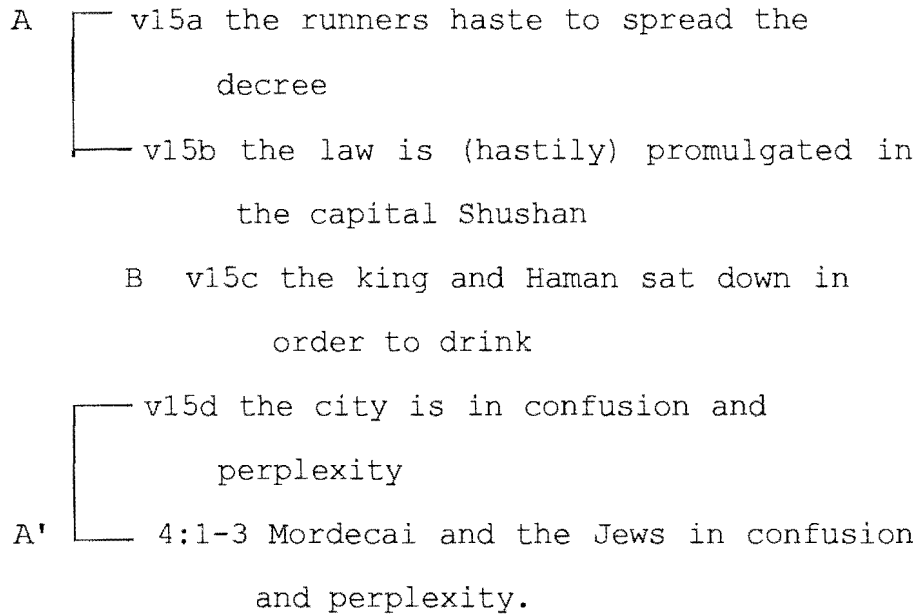
month. But v13a indicates that the killings will take place only עשר לחדש שנים-עשר הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה, that is, the 13th day of the *twelfth month*, which is the month Adar. There are then another ten months before the killings actually begin. Therefore there is also hope that things might still turn out differently (cf. also 4:14a). With this time gap the narrator might be suggesting that Haman's celebration in 3:15 is premature, for the time gap creates the space for the events which are to follow. These events result in the reversal of Haman's decree. So the creation of a sense of hope is another feature of this pericope, but this hope is a very tiny ray of light which shines in the darkness of the apparent victory of Haman over Mordecai and the Jews. For it is Haman's success in persuading the king to issue the decree which dominates 3:1-15.

When we come to the end of this section of the narrative, it is clear that Haman dominates events from 3:1 onwards. The whole section from 3:1 to 3:15 is held together by Haman in the same way as Esther held together 2:5-20.

2.2.3 Mordecai's response to Haman's decree 4:1-17

Chapter 3:15, which I suggested symbolises Haman's premature victory celebration, forms a very close link with chapter 4 in general and 4:1-3 in particular (contra Davis 1995:220). The latter verses

describe Mordecai's reaction when he came to hear about Haman's plan. The link is set out below:



In this chiasmus A and A' symbolise urgency and crisis. In stark contrast to this is the king and Haman who sat down to drink. Furthermore, 3:15-16 and 4:1-7 have a literary link as the narrator contrasts king+Haman (drinking) with city (perplexed) in 3:15-16 and king+Haman (drinking) with the Jews (fasting/mourning) in 4:1-7. Mordecai dominates this part (4-17) of the narrative. Esther is present to the extent that she responds to Mordecai's reports and instructions. Her reply to Mordecai in 4:10-12 forms the pivot of the section. Its main idea is that the situation of the Jews is irredeemable. The crisis is portrayed by Mordecai's

behaviour, 4:1-9, Esther's personal circumstances,

4:10--12, the action of the Jews, 4:13, and the desperate measures taken by both Esther and Mordecai 4:13-15. We have then depicted in 4:1-17 a deepening of the crisis which began in 3:1--15. In this situation the request of Esther recorded in 4:16 is significant. The fast she asked for began on the evening of the celebration and commemoration of the Passover (Bush 1996:398). This is reminiscent of the Exodus event.

Mordecai's first task was to bring to Esther's attention the precarious situation facing the nation (Bush 1996:394; Fox 1991:57-58). In Judaism the custom of lamenting and dressing in sackcloth and ashes was used whenever the nation faced a national crisis. The present crisis is a national one, as the actions of Mordecai make clear:

v1b He tore his clothes;

v1c He clothed himself in sackcloth and
ashes;

v1d He goes into the centre of the city;
and

v1e He cries out in a loud and bitter cry.

In addition he goes to the king's gate dressed in sackcloth, something which was forbidden (v2). Moreover, the Jews in the provinces also drew attention to their critical situation by mourning,

lamenting and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes (v3). Thus there is a national outcry concerning the decree. It is interesting to notice, once again, how the personal and the national (v3) are intertwined, for otherwise v3 would be out of place in the flow of events in chapter 4. This fluidity between individual and nation is used by the narrator to portray the crisis as much more than a personal matter: it is something which affects the nation as a whole.

Esther is informed about Mordecai's actions. She sends clothes to Mordecai. This was an act of compassion and concern for him (but cf. Bush 1996:394) since he faced the danger of being executed (cf. v2b). He refuses to put them on (4:4) and risks being killed, thus underlining the fact that a national crisis is being faced. In such circumstances personal sacrifices must be made and considerations of personal safety are of least importance. This act on his part justifies Mordecai's instruction to Esther which is to follow shortly (4:8b), and his response, 4:13-14, to her reply, 4:10-12. He would thus be seen as not asking her to do anything he himself was not prepared to do. He is prepared to sacrifice his life for the nation; she should be prepared to do likewise.

Following her failed attempt to intervene, Esther sends a court-official to Mordecai to find out what is going on and the reason for his behaviour.

Mordecai, through Hatach, provides Esther with a fourfold reply: first, a verbal report, v7a (קרהו) should at this point be translated as 'what he came to know' in line with 4:1 [ע''] and 4:7b, and not translated as 'happened to him'; secondly, he singles out the aspect of the price put on the lives of the Jews by Haman, v7b; thirdly, he gives written information so that Esther can read for herself the desperate crisis facing the nation, v8a; and fourthly, he commands her to take action by going to the king knowing that this action involves risking her own life, v8b and v11a. All this is done to impress upon Esther the urgency of the situation. Hatach carries Mordecai's reply back to Esther (4:9). Esther's reply to Mordecai is recounted in 4:10-12. These verses form an inclusion. She informs Mordecai of the impossibility of carrying out his command to go to the king. Now if she cannot go to the king the position of the nation is perilous indeed. They are going to be destroyed and Haman will have won. The positioning of these verses at the centre of the structure of the passage 4:1-17 heightens the irreversibility of the situation of the Jews, for there is no access to the one person, the king, who is able to turn around what appears to be the inevitable fate of the Jewish nation. Everything Mordecai does must then be viewed in the light of this pericope. A desperate situation calls for

desperate measures, even the sacrifice of one's own life as Esther is instructed to do by Mordecai.

Mordecai's strategy of persuasion changes in 4:13-14. He uses a different route. He points out that her own destruction is inevitable in the event that the Jews are exterminated, for she is a Jew for good or ill. In addition, her father's house will also be destroyed. He therefore appeals to her ethnicity: she is a Jew; and also to her personal (social) links: her own family too will be destroyed. Put differently, by sacrificing her life in going to the king, she will save the nation and also her own family. Furthermore, there is the fact of her becoming the queen. It was not just an accident of history, it happened for a purpose. The time of that purpose may have arrived now, namely, the salvation of the nation. Here (v14b; cf. also v14a), we have an allusion to the general idea of the presence of the divine in human affairs. She is reminded that her becoming queen was not just a decision and choice of the king, or the result of her own beauty but that it was driven by a bigger purpose which is now ready to be revealed and to fail to go to the king is to be disobedient to this bigger purpose. It is to try to resist providence. In this way Mordecai impresses upon Esther the extremely critical position facing the nation, including herself.

Mordecai prevails upon Esther as 4:15-16

demonstrates. She agrees to go to the king although it is against the law (v16b). Mordecai's strategy of persuasion was successful in the same way Haman succeeded in his strategy of persuasion (3:12-14) in regard to the king. The section concludes (4:17) with Mordecai doing what Esther requested. This conclusion is open-ended though. The threat to the Jews still hangs over their heads; there is no knowing whether Esther's mission will be successful. We will have to wait and see. This open-endedness sustains the suspense and maintains the interest of the audience (and the reader).

The conclusion of this pericope parallels that of 3:15; in fact 3:1-15 and 4:1-17 are parallel sections of the narrative :

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. 3:1-7 | 1. 4:1a |
| Haman's plan to destroy the Jews. | Mordecai learns of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews. |
| 2. 3:8-11 | 2. 4:1b-14 |
| Haman's strategy in persuading the king to issue the royal decree. | Mordecai's strategy to persuade Esther to go to the king. |
| 3. 3:9-14 the decree is issued. | 3. 4:15-16 |
| | Esther agrees |

to go to the king.

4. 3:15 Haman celebrates. 4. 4:17 Mordecai
did as instructed.

It was pointed out above that the main idea in 4:1-17 is Mordecai's attempt to make Esther aware of the desperate position of the Jews, thus motivating her to go to the king. Mordecai's persuasion strategy is the main means for accomplishing this. The pivotal role of 4:10-12 in helping to determine the main idea of this section can now be seen from the representation below. It is organised around the repetition of the names of Mordecai and Esther, as follows:

- a *Mordecai's* reaction 4:1-3
- b *Esther* responds to news about *Mordecai* 4:4-6
- c *Mordecai* informs *Esther* 4:7-9
 - d *Esther* replies to *Mordecai* 4:10-12
- c' *Mordecai's* reply to *Esther* 4:13-14
- b' *Esther's* reply to *Mordecai* 4:15-16
- a' *Mordecai's* obedience 4:17

When we come to the end of the pericope Esther is ready to go to the king. Mordecai has succeeded in persuading Esther but Haman still has the upper-hand because the royal decree is still in force (Fox 1991:66-67).

2.3 The fall of Haman the Agatite 5:1-7:10

This section of the narrative is a unit because it deals with the fall of Haman (cf. Fuerst 1975:69; McCarthy and Riley 1986:95). In this regard Bush (1996:420-421) comments: '[t]he conclusion to scene three skilfully resumes the previous act, dramatically broken off in mid-course, as Esther's invitation to Haman and the king to "come tomorrow to the banquet which I shall prepare" (5:8) becomes "the king's eunuchs brought Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared" (6:14). It makes a smooth transition to the next act, for the prediction of Haman's wife and his friends that his downfall is utterly certain is still hanging in the air....' Concurring Davis (1995:248,254) writes: 'for the author organises the passages to highlight what is the beginning of the end of Haman.' His fall takes place in four stages: 5:1-8; 5:9-14, 6:1-12 and 6:13-7:10 (cf. also Haupt 1907-8:145; Bush 1996:412; Fox 1991:73-82, and the occurrence of אָנָה in 5:14 and 7:9-10).

We now give an overview of the four stages before a detailed discussion of each.

The tide turns for the Jews in 5:1-8, when Esther decides to act. She ventures into the vicinity of the king's throne-room, a very dangerous act (Fox 1991:62). Ahasuerus, who is seated on his throne at the time, notices her, holds out the golden sceptre and Esther enters the inner court. Esther survives

the traditional law of the king (cf.4:11). This incident begins the process of the fall of Haman. It sets in motion a series of events which brings about the end of Haman.

In 5:9-14 he loses the battle against the internal struggle with his obsessive hatred of Mordecai and the Jews. For a while it looks as if he would be able to control himself, 5:9-10a; but when he arrives home he loses the self-control he achieved earlier, as can be seen from his acceptance of the advice given by his wife and friends, viz. hang Mordecai, a continuation of his fall.

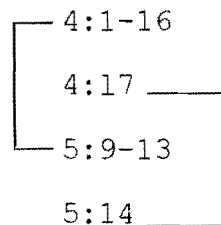
In 6:1-12 he suffers public humiliation since he is instructed to dress his arch-enemy in royal regalia, and parade him in the town square, declaring: this is what is done to the man the king desires to honour. It must be noted that 6:1-12 is not the promotion of Mordecai. If it had been the case it would have been a great tragedy for the Jews as Mordecai is returned to the gate, 6:12, leaving the Jews in no better position, since the decree authorising their destruction still hung over their heads. No, the main point of this passage is not the promotion of Mordecai but the humiliation of Haman. The victory this gives Mordecai over Haman is of secondary importance. Implicit in this humiliation of Haman is the reversal of Mordecai's position from one

of a threat of death (5:14) to one of honour (6:10-11). Haman's humiliation symbolises his fall.

In 6:13-7:10, Haman suffers ultimate defeat as he is hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai. This is the culmination of his fall. Again implicit in this final fall is the reversal of positions, Haman dies and Mordecai, who was supposed to have died, lives. Haman is hanged on his own gallows, the gallows he prepared for Mordecai. Each phase of the fall of Haman will now be described.

2.3.1 The first phase of the fall of Haman 5:1-8

The ending of 5:9-14 is rather interesting. It is very similar to that of 4:17. In the latter Mordecai did what he was told by Esther and in the former Haman does what he is told by his wife and friends. Below we set out this similarity:



The structure illustrates the similarity between 4:17 and 5:14 and so conjoins 4:1-17 and 5:1-14. Presented slightly differently it points to the fall of Haman by contrasting the leaving of Haman with the entry of Esther. It would appear that whenever

Haman leaves the king's presence, he is on the downward road:

- | | | |
|----|--------|-----------------------------------|
| A | 4:17 | conclusion |
| B | 5:1-8 | Esther enters the king's presence |
| B' | 5:9-13 | Haman leaves the king's presence |
| A' | 5:14 | conclusion |

This arrangement suggests that Esther's entry into the king's throne-room (5:1-2) results in life. On the other hand, Haman leaves the palace (5:9) to return to his house and this departure, in contrast, is the beginning of his 'departure' which ultimately takes place in 7:10 when he is hanged (Fox 1991:74). Chapter 5:9-14 therefore links closely to chapter 4:1-17.

Against this background 5:1-8, which is the first phase of Haman's fall, is a pivotal passage. It begins with Esther preparing herself to go to the king, 5:1. Her preparation is deliberate. She was tasked by Mordecai to :

a) להתחנך-לו

b) ולבקש מלפניו על-עמה (4:8b).

Before she can do this she must first get into the inner court of the royal house where the king' throne

is located. Once there she will have to win him over. She must gain a sympathetic ear for her case. An account is now given of how she did both these things.

The ויהי at the beginning of v1 marks the start of a new scene in the narrative. But ביום השלישי (5:1) links back to ובכן and שלשת ימים לילה ויום of 4:16, thus connecting chapter 5 to chapter 4. A further link between the two chapters is the contrast in the dress of Mordecai and Esther. According to 4:1 Mordecai וילבש שק ואפר but in 5:1 it is said מלכותה אסתר, suggesting the fasting of chapter 4 is over.

Furthermore, 5:1 parallels 4:1-2 in that Esther, like Mordecai before her, takes her life into her own hands (cf. 4:16b). He did it by going to the king's gate clothed in sackcloth and ashes, she by going into the king's presence when not summoned.

Chapter 5:1-2 is, therefore, introductory and sketches the background for the events which are to follow.

In the next scene, which starts with ויהי, the tension and suspense are somewhat relieved for the king holds out the sceptre to her. Her life is saved. And since the fate of the Jewish nation is predicated on the fate of Esther we also have here the beginning of the resolution of the main plot. The first pointer of the

change to come is in 5:2a, נשאה חן בעיניו, i.e. literally, 'she lifted up favour in his eyes'. He was pleased to see her. At this point the audience sighs a sigh of relief. But the crisis is long from over. The narrator draws out the suspense, and by so doing the crisis, by giving unnecessary details in his account of Esther's entry into the king's presence. For example, in v1 which has a detailed description of where the king was seated, the phrase בבית המלכות מלכותו is not necessary. Further, Esther's entry to the king's presence is given in minute detail: first, she finds favour with him, secondly, he holds out the sceptre to her, the wording הזהב אשר בידו being unnecessary, then she comes near, and finally she touches the head of the sceptre. With this Esther is now in the king's presence, but it has taken a long time in terms of the narrative to get there.

Esther's entry to the king's presence is followed by a dialogue initiated by the king, in contrast to 5:1-2 which was discourse. We have two dialogues between Esther and the king comprising 5:3-8. The syntax of the first part of v3 is very interesting. The prepositional phrase is in the primary post-verbal position, according to Bandstra (1992:117), 'to effect contrast with' what precedes, in this case 4:10-11a. So, in contrast to the inability of everyone else to gain unsummoned access to the king's

presence, Esther has obtained it. Here already we find the seed of the ultimate reversal of the position of the Jewish nation. A law which applies to all is reversed and is not applied to Esther (Jews?). Next follows the two questions of the king which are prompted by Esther's non-traditional entry into his presence. Since he had not sent for her, it follows that she was there because she had some request, hence his invitation to her to request whatever she wants, up to half the kingdom. This generosity on the part of the king is not so surprising in the light of 5:2 and 2:17. Esther's answer to the questions of the king is an invitation to a banquet which she has caused to be arranged (this is the force of the *hiphil*). For the second banquet is one which she will arrange personally (5:8b, note the verbs **אעשה** twice). **עשתה אסתר** (5:5) must also be understood in this sense even though the verb is perfect. The dialogue ends with the king and Haman going to Esther's banquet. She has won round number one. She entered the presence of the king unsummoned and lived, a symbol of what was to happen to her people.

The first banquet (5:6-8) is dominated by the same questions the king asked before the banquet. Esther's reply is the same as before with some slight word changes, namely, an invitation to a second banquet, this time prepared by her personally. The persistence

of the king with his questions indicates that he is aware that Esther has more in mind than an invitation for him and Haman to come to a banquet.

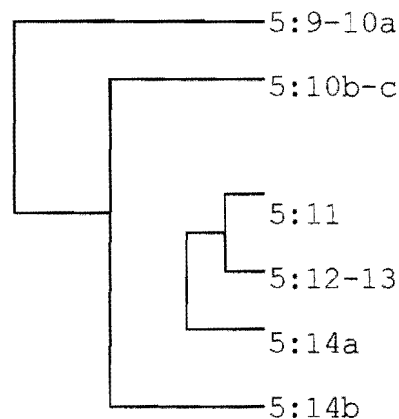
In the second dialogue Esther softens up the king. She knows that she has found favour with the king. The very fact that she is alive and that he is at the banquet testifies to that. Yet she prefaces her reply with the words **אם-מצאתי חן בעיני המלך**. The king had already stated his willingness to grant her request, even up to half the kingdom, yet she says **ואם-על-המלך טוב לחת את-שאלתי ולעשות אתבקשתי**. She is ingratiating herself to the king. The second dialogue and the first banquet end with Esther's invitation to the king and Haman to the second banquet, which the king accepts.

The narrator, in his detailed account of Esther's entry into the king's presence, as well as the description of her invitation to the banquets, is slowing down the narrative significantly, perhaps to the point of exasperation on the part of the audience (and the reader). The nation is facing a major crisis. Esther has taken the risk of going to the king, not knowing whether she will get access. Now that she has the access, she seems to dilly-dally in the king's presence instead of coming to the point and make her request so that the nation can be saved. She not only invites the king to one banquet, but two (Fox 1991:70-71)! One can sense the impatience of the

audience (and the reader) with Esther; some may even be angry with her for wasting such a golden opportunity to save the nation. But by the delay the narrator increases the tension in the hearers and so sustains their interest in the story and its final outcome (Davis 1995:251). Bush (1996:405-406), however, maintains that 'the delay is a deliberate part of Esther's plan, which is to get the decree against the Jews cancelled.' But the Esther of 4:16 hardly has a plan, as indicated by her words 'If I perish, I perish.'

2.3.2 The second phase of the fall of Haman 5:9-14

Sandwiched between the two banquets is what Loader calls the second clash between Haman and Mordecai (1977:97). They have contact for a second time. The passage is undoubtedly dominated by Haman to whom Mordecai refuses to make obeisance. The passage is a close-knit unit according to the arrangement below:



We have a new scene as the waw-consecutive of v9a and the waw-conjunction of v8b show. The scene changes to the road on the way to Haman's house. He has just left the banquet and is in high spirits (v9a). But then things change. He sees Mordecai sitting at the gate of the king. Mordecai refuses to **קם** and **זע**. At this Haman gets intensely angry.

Chapter 5:9 and 10a forms a close-knit unit since they have the same syntax, V-S-M (Bandstra 1992:109). They also form an inclusion, as follows:

ויצא המן
וכראות המן את-מרדכי
וימלא המן על-מרדכי
ויחאפק המן

The Haman portrayed here is one who is in control of himself and his emotions. He did not allow Mordecai to get the upper hand over him. He might have recalled at this point the decree authorising the extermination of the Jews.

From v10b the focus shifts to Haman's behaviour. The scene also moves from the road leading to his house to inside his house. In fact, v10c-14 forms one unit as the chiasm shows:



- A את־אהביו
B את־זרש אשתו
B זרש אשתו
A וכל־ אהביו

He is now at home and sends for his wife and friends, who are brought to him. Their arrival is followed by two speeches by Haman. The first, i.e. v11, is a description of Haman's personal possessions, wealth, honour and status. The second speech concerns his greatness and glory evidenced by his promotion to viziership, the invitation to attend the first and second banquets of the queen, a privilege not afforded the highest ranked noble of the king. With the exception of the information about the invitation to the second banquet, everything else is known news.

The narrator recounts it for the purpose of the contrast which comes in v13. He contrasts his wealth, honour, prestige, status and glory with the unfulfilled desire to see Mordecai and the Jews destroyed. The destruction of the Jews is incomparably more worthwhile to him than all his wealth and prestige. That Haman could make this comparison is an indication of the intense hatred he has for the Jews.

The speech of Haman is followed by that of his wife and friends (v14a). The לו is post-verbal in order to maintain continuity (Bandstra 1992:119). They advise him to make a gallows (v14a), get permission from the king the next day and hang Mordecai. This was their solution to Haman's problem, which was: **בשער המלך** ראה את-מרדכי היהודי יושב. Haman accepts their advice and has the gallows made. But by having the gallows built Haman shows that he has been defeated by Mordecai. He was beginning to fall, as his friends would predict in 6:13. So, Haman's fall did not start in chapter 6 but it continues in chapter 6.

Summarising then: 5:10b-14 is contrasted with 5:9-10a. In 5:9-10a Haman is in control, whilst in the former verses he is being controlled by his hatred for Mordecai and the Jews. Because he is controlled by his hatred he loses the battle against Mordecai and the Jews. This loss culminates in his fall.

The section, as such, is not so much a depiction of a second clash between Haman and Mordecai, a la Loader (1977:96-97), but a clash of Haman with himself. Mordecai merely serves as the foil for this clash of Haman with his inner self. It shows how Haman loses this battle which in turn leads to the loss of his life.

There is another perspective to 5:9-14. It shows the intense hatred of Haman for Mordecai and the Jews.

But this hatred serves to intensify the crisis which Mordecai and the Jews face. They are up against a determined enemy, who is prepared to go to any length to destroy them. Against this background 5:9-14 functions to dampen any optimism on the part of the Jews or the audience based on the events of 5:1-8, which show the progress Esther has made. Its message to the audience (and the reader) could be that they must not be too hopeful too soon for the enemy is a formidable one. It serves to bring them back to reality, the reality of the deep crisis facing the Jews, rather than a situation which is improving. Thus it delays the resolution of the situation and puts the brakes on too early a celebration in the same way that the writer points out that Haman's celebration (3:15) was premature.

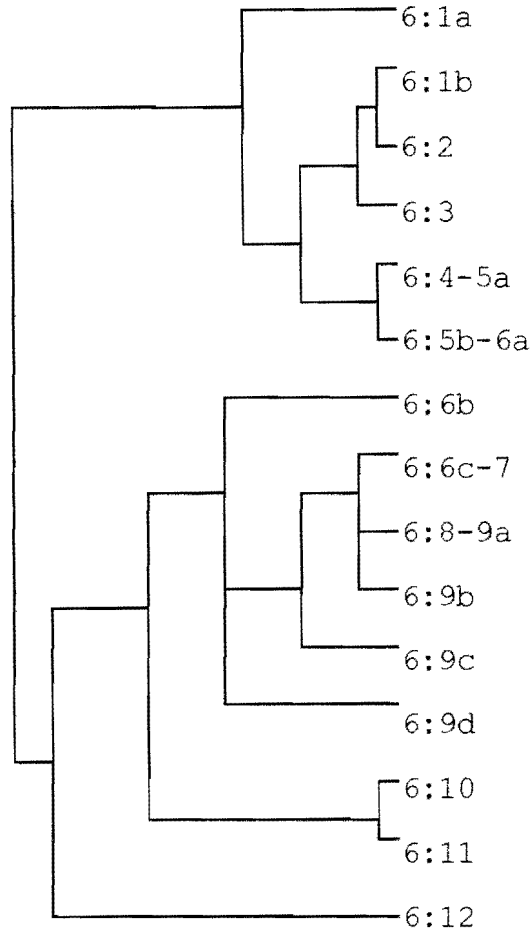
2.3.3 The third phase of the fall of Haman 6:1-12

The humiliation of Haman

This section of the narrative is usually seen as the belated rewarding of Mordecai for saving the life of the king in 2:21-23. Even if this is the case, it serves a function more important than just narrating the belated rewarding of Mordecai. Thiselton (1992:480) underscores this view when he remarks, '[t]he purpose of such a re-ordering is not to deceive the reader, who is usually aware that conventions allow for such re-ordering.'

It is to facilitate movement, direction, suspense, surprise, imagination, or reader-engagement in the plot.' That Mordecai is not the main focus here is also borne out by the fact that reference to him is made only eight times in the chapter, whereas the events of the chapter are dominated by the king and Haman. In addition, the conclusion (6:12) undoubtedly focuses on the *humiliation* of Haman because he is instructed by the king to honour Mordecai. Therefore it is more appropriate to see this episode as part of the continuum of the fall of Haman. Bal (1991:78-79), referring to Rembrandt van Rijn's 1665 painting of Haman's honouring of Mordecai, says that it 'represents the next episode, the downfall of the plotter. Haman is strangely represented as almost literally falling, moving forward, falling into the viewer's lap when quitting the scene....'

The structure for the next phase in the fall of Haman is given below:



We have here the beginning of a new scene in the story. Indicators are the *geographical*, i.e. the story moves from Haman's house (5:10) to the palace; *grammatical*: we have the fronting (i.e. placing it in a pre-verbal position) of the temporal prepositional phrase בלילה ההוא which also shows that a new scene begins at this point. The LXX at this point reads, 'and the Lord he sent away the sleep from the king.' Since God has not been mentioned before as directly intervening in the narrative, it

is unnatural to introduce him here, therefore, the Masoretic Text is accepted.

וַיֹּאמֶר, v1b, marks the beginning of direct speech and means there is no direct link between v1a and v1b. They are, however, joined on the basis of sharing a common subject, namely, הַמֶּלֶךְ.

Apart from the waw-consecutive, the elliptical אֶת־סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרֹנוֹת links v2a to v1b. Chapter 6:2b is connected to v2a via the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, which continues the description of Teresh and Bigthan which was started in the previous verse. Here, they are said to be the ones who sought to kill the king. In this verse the servants of the king read to him from the chronicles of the kings. When he hears the content of what was read, he asks what had been done (i.e. deeds/acts of honour and dignity) for Mordecai. The וַיֹּאמֶר signals the continuity of v3a with v1b, since it is still the king who is speaking. עַל־זֶה points back to v2, thus providing a link between vv2-3. The answer of the servants to the king's question is given in v3b, which is very closely tied to v2b by the following: the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular יוֹ, the niphal 3 masculine singular verbs נַעֲשָׂה,

and the fact that v3b is the answer to the **מה** of v3b. The servants who are implicit in v2 are now made explicit. Their answer is that nothing has been done for Mordecai; he has not been rewarded at all. So the king decides to reward Mordecai, but desires some advice on the matter. This results in the question of the king in v4a. He asks after the availability of his court officials since it is now morning, as indicated by the presence of Haman (5:14a, 6:4b).

Chapter 6:4b is a comment by the narrator to the effect that Haman has just entered the outer court of the palace. Haman is there to seek the king's permission to hang Mordecai, in keeping with the advice his wife and friends gave him in 5:14a. Although the **ו** of v4b is disjunctive in relation to v4a the repetition of **הצַר**, ensures continuity between v4a and b. The irony of this situation is that whereas Haman comes to seek the death of Mordecai, the king seeks to reward him. The timing of Haman's entry at this point is a device of the narrator, for Haman's presence is needed for what is to follow, the honouring of Mordecai. The timing parallels the

incident in 2:21-23 where Mordecai happened to be at the right place at the right time to hear Bigthan and Teresh plotting to kill the king. In 2:21-23 the timing meant saving the life of the king; here it means saving the life of Mordecai. So in both cases the timing relates to the reversal of the destiny of a character. In 2:21-23 it is that of the king, now it is that of Mordecai. In addition, in 2:21-23 Mordecai saves the life of the king; now the king saves the life of Mordecai, illustrating the important link between characters and the principle of chiastic-reversal, as well as the direct link between 2:21-23 and 3:1-8:17, as argued before.

Chapter 6:12a, together with 6:3a, 6a, and 7a strongly suggest that the promotion of Haman in 3:1 was not a reward for the saving of the life of the king. It is not the case that Haman is rewarded in 3:1 for the outcome of 2:21-23 and that now Mordecai, the real hero of 2:21-23 is rewarded. The decision to appoint Haman was simply a good political decision by the king to increase or improve the security around him. The delay of Mordecai's reward follows the chiastic pattern characteristic of the narrative and is used as a means to foil the plan of Haman to hang him.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ, v5a, continues the narrative giving the reply of the servants to the question of the king in v4a, which has the forward pointing מִי. The pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular, יוֹ, refers back to הַמֶּלֶךְ in v4a, providing a direct link between v4a and v5a in the form of a chiasm as follows:

A וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִי בַחֲצַר
B וְהַמֶּן בָּא לַחֲצַר
A וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ... הַמֶּן עֹמֵד בַּחֲצַר

The term עֹמֵד in v5a means 'standing and waiting'. The king has someone with whom he can discuss the rewarding of Mordecai.

In v5b Haman is summoned into the inner court. He obeys in v6a. So v6a is linked to v5b as it contains the fulfilment of the king's command issued in v5b. Haman is in the presence of the king. He is there with his own agenda, unbeknown to the king of course, and the king likewise has his agenda unbeknown to Haman, illustrating the narrative device of concealment so characteristic of the story. Haman's entrance brings to a close the dialogue between the king and his servants.

The ויאמר of v6a marks the beginning of the dialogue between the king and Haman. The 3 masculine singular pronominal suffix ם provides a link with v6a, as it refers to המן. The dialogue is started with a question from the king to Haman. Note here again the use of concealment, for the king does not reveal the name of the person he wishes to honour.

Haman's reply begins in v6c, in which Haman conducts an internal dialogue. He interprets the king's non-disclosure as meaning the king desires to honour him. This is not such an incredible idea, given 3:1-5.

This is the second occurrence of self-talk or inner self-encounter recorded of Haman, the first being 5:9-10a, thus effecting a link between the second and third phases of the fall of Haman. Chapter 6:6b and 6c have parallel syntactic structures joining them, viz.:

ויאמר לו המלך v6c

ויאמר המן בלבו v6b.

There is a further link between v6c and b since v6b ends with מה-לעשות...המלך חפץ, while v6c begins with למי יחפץ המלך לעשות. The actual reply of Haman starts in v7 and ends in v9. Haman replies in a very interesting manner (v7b). He

quotes the question of the king first and then gives his reply. He in fact repeats the question verbatim. Haman does this 'since he is so sure that this refers to him (Bush 1996:415).' The first thing to be done for the person the king desires to honour concerns clothing the person in royal regalia. He is to be clothed in the very clothes of the king (v8a). The verb **יָבִיא** is hiphil imperfect 3 masculine plural while the explicit subject **לבוש מלכות** is singular. The plurality of the verb points to the royal dignity symbolised by the clothes, and could thus be understood as a plurality of royal dignity. Verse 8b is joined to v8a by the waw-conjunction for this half verse is a continuation of Haman's speech. The link is enhanced by the syntax of the verse in that both v8a and v8b have a nominal phrase followed by a relative clause:

לבוש מלכות אשר לבוש-בו המלך
וסוס אשר רכב עליו המלך

The verb **יָבִיא** governs both the clauses, therefore its suffix is plural. To really emphasise the honour, the dressing of the person, the bringing of the king's horse and the setting of the person upon the horse, must all be done by one of the most noble of the king's princes (v9a). The waw-conjunction of v9a signals the continuation of this clause with 6:8b.



Further, vv8a, 8b, and v9a are held together by the terms **סוס** and **לבוש** for the discussion in vv7b-9a focuses on the clothes and crown the person will be dressed in, and the horse on which he will be led through the city, and this requires the plural verb **והלבישו**. Moreover, the verses form an inclusion as follows:

איש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו v7b

האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו v9b

The inclusion brings to a close the first part of what must be done to the person the king desires to honour.

The second part of the honouring process is detailed in v9b. The waw-conjunction at the beginning of the clause marks the continuation of Haman's speech, which started in v7a. Two actions are described here: firstly, the person must be taken around the city square on the king's horse; secondly, as this is done, the following must be announced: 'this is what is done to the person whom the king desires to honour'. With this clause the speech of Haman comes to an end, and also completes his description of what is to be done to the person the king desires to honour.

We have a very detailed and extravagant recommendation as a reward for the person the king wishes to honour. Such detailed description would probably not have been the case were the identity of the person known and emphasises the wisdom of the king in concealing the person's identity.

Chapter 6:10 constitutes the king's reply to Haman. It is introduced by ויאמר, which marks the beginning of the king's second speech. Grammatically, it links back to vv7a-9 as is shown below:

ויאמר המן אל המלך v7a

ויאמר המלך להמן v10

The verse consists of three imperatives, two in the first clause and one in the second. The imperative constructions end with a prepositional phrase. They are the king's instructions to Haman to do exactly what he told the king should be done. At this point the identity of the person is revealed. The chiasmic structure of v10 reveals that it is Mordecai the Jew who is to be honoured in this way by Haman:

קח...כאשר דברת

ועשה-כן למרדכי היהודי

אל-תפל...מכל אשר דברת

It is interesting that the narrator does not describe what Haman felt or thought on hearing this news. The least that could be said is that he must have been in shock and utter disbelief. The very person whose death he planned, he now has to honour.

Chapter 6:11 details Haman's obedience to the commands of the king. He carries them out exactly as he told the king. To be noted in v11 is the lack of any reference to the crown, therefore it is argued that v8c is a scribal gloss derived from 8:15; v11, moreover, stands in contrast to that of 4:1-3. There Mordecai was clothed (לבוש) in sackcloth and ashes; here he is clothed in royal regalia, a situation of transformation and reversal.

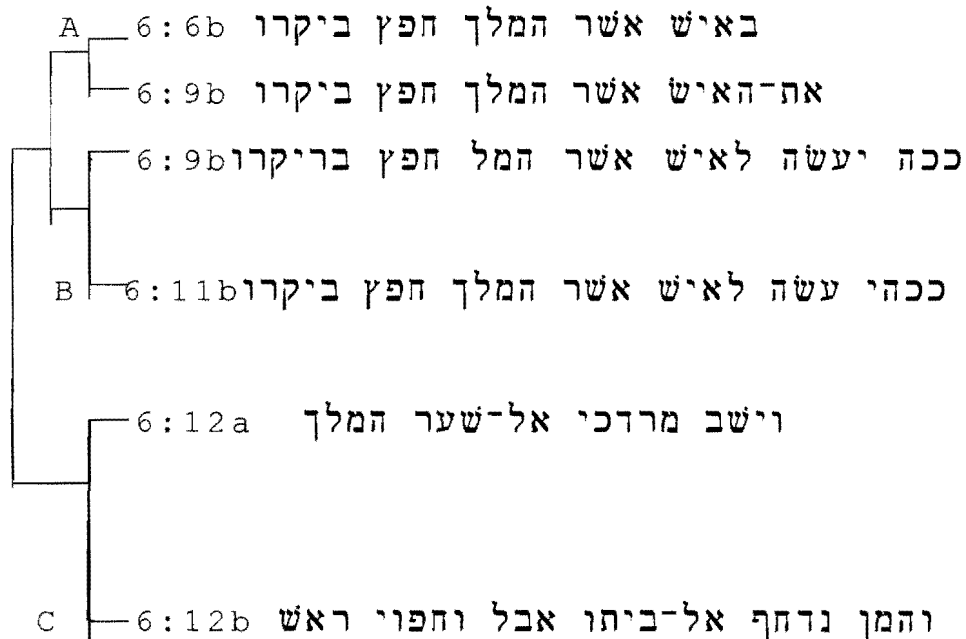
The conclusion to the scene is v12. The waw-consecutive of v12 is disjunctive in relation to v11b. The conjunction in v12b links the two clauses. The result for each person is given in this verse. For Mordecai it was a return to the king's gate (v12a). But this return means victory for Mordecai in that Haman's plot to kill him had been reversed by the king's decision to honour him. Instead of being hanged he was rewarded, instead of being lifted-up on a gallows he was lifted up onto the king's

horse and paraded in the public square by his arch-enemy; instead of public shame there is public acclaim and honour. This reversal of shame and honor is very obvious culturally given the role reversal of rider and leader of a riding animal we have in this incident. As Sider (1995:110) remarks: '[t]he social distinction between riders and leaders of riding animals is crucial in middle Eastern society. Much to his surprise and humiliation, Haman (who expects to be the rider) finds himself leading the horse on which his enemy Mordecai is riding (Est. 6:7-11).' Being back at the king's gate means that 5:13-14 has been overturned by the king's decision to honour him and the king's instructions that Haman does the honouring.

But the return to the king's gate has another significance. It means the conflict continues, the threat of Haman to the Jews is not over yet. There has been a temporary set-back, there has been a temporary reversal (cf. Davis 1995:274,275,n24).

As for Haman, he returns home, in a hurry, compelled by the events of the day to make a quick getaway. He hurries home with his head covered (**אבל וחפוי**). When

compared with 4:1-3 we see the rich symbolism of v12b. The roles are reversed. What Mordecai did then as result of Haman's decree, Haman now does because of the king's rewarding of Mordecai. Haman is utterly *humiliated*. The humiliation takes place publicly (cf. 3:1-2). Haman is on his way down. Therefore, this section depicts the third stage in the fall of Haman. The overall structure makes it clear that Mordecai is incidental to this part of the narrative. The main characters are the king and Haman, with the real focus on Haman and his humiliation as he continues on the downward slope (Bush 1996:417; Fox 1991:82; Davis 195:274). We see this below:



A is the first dialogue between the king and Haman and B the second. The dialogues are the focus of the

passage 6:6b-11b. The outcome of the dialogues is C, i.e. v12a and v12b. Both the outcomes concern Haman, because Mordecai's return to the king's gate and Haman's hurried return home, speak of his humiliation. The striking thing is that this humiliation of Haman comes at the hands of the very king who was responsible for his promotion in 3:1-5. So chapter 6 is primarily about the humiliation of Haman; the rewarding of Mordecai is secondary. This humiliation takes Haman another step closer to the final act of his downfall, namely, his execution, which is the main idea in the next section.

2.3.4 The fourth phase in the fall of Haman

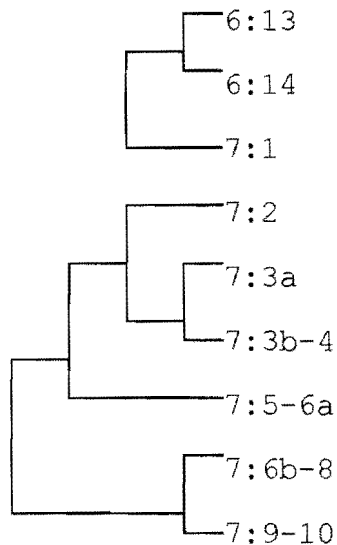
6:13-7:10

We reach now the fourth and final stage of Haman's fall. It culminates in his execution and exit from the narrative, though he continues to exercise an influence through the decree he issued for the destruction of the Jews. The close connection between the third and fourth stages in the fall of Haman is illustrated by the diagram below:

- a. Haman returns home 6:12b-13a
- b. Prediction of Haman's fall 6:13b
- a. Haman leaves home 6:14

The unit 6:12b-6:14 functions as an introduction to the next section of the story because pivotal to it is the prediction of Haman's fall. In addition, Haman's departure from home for the banquet (6:14) is symbolic of his permanent departure from this life, because he does not return home from the banquet. He is hanged on his own gallows. The occurrence of **העץ** (gallows) in 5:14 and then again in 7:9-10, underscores this symbolism, it being interrupted by the honouring of Mordecai by Haman (6:1-12) at the command of the king.

The full structure of the passage is given below:



Chapter 6:13a moves the story back to the house of Haman (cf.5:10). Haman **ספר** (5:11), that is, tells his friends and wife what has happened to him. The

same word (**קרהי** 4:7, 6:13) is used by Haman and Mordecai to recall their experiences, but the contexts are now reversed. In chapter 4 Mordecai changes from resistance to mourning, and now Haman changes from certainty (5:14) to shame. The king's decision to honour Mordecai in exactly the manner recommended by Haman, overturned his own plot and made a public spectacle of him. This overturning of events re-inforces Mordecai's claim made in 3:3-4, namely, that he is a Jew, and therefore that the law does not apply to him, which is affirmed by the prediction of the wife and friends of Haman which follows in 6:13b. Verse 13b is joined to v13a by the 3 masculine singular pronominal suffixes **ו, ו, ו**, and **ו**. In addition, the repetition of the terms **חכמיו** and **אהביו** and the phrase **זרש אשתו** provides a link between v13 a and b. The clause details the response of Haman's wife and counsellors (wise men). The content of their speech is the prediction of his ultimate fall given the fact that he has already started (**החלוח**) to fall before Mordecai. They are here referring to the humiliation suffered by Haman when he has to honour Mordecai at the command of the king.

What is noteworthy is their reasoning ,namely, that Mordecai's Jewishness will result in the final fall of Haman; for they say **היהודים מרדכי...לא-תוכל לו**

אם מורע. The fall of Haman is regarded by his wife and advisors as inevitable, which prepares for v14a. The discussion between Haman, his wife and advisors is interrupted by the eunuchs of the king who came to take him to the second banquet, as indicated by the expression עורם מדברים. With this interruption the scene moves from Haman's house back to the palace. The two pronominal suffixes ם' and ם as well as the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular ך joins v14a to v13b.

The purpose of the eunuchs is given in v14b, which is linked to v14a via the 3 masculine plural pronominal suffix ך, and which refers to those who came to fetch Haman. This scene in which Haman is hurriedly fetched to be taken to the feast prepared by the queen, reminds one of chapter 1:10 where Vashti is sent for. This is also in the context of a feast, and which results in her downfall.

The prediction of Haman's advisors and his wife, coupled with the arrival of the eunuchs to take him to the feast, confirms that this feast will result in his fall. This is a reminder, too, that the significance of the feasts is predicated upon the events happening at them.

Chapter 7:1 brings the preparations for the second feast to a close with the arrival of Haman and the king. The waw-consecutive marks the continuity between v1 and the preceding verses; the vocabulary of v14b and v1 joins the two clauses as well, for example, Haman and Esther are mentioned in both clauses. The clauses have a parallel syntactic arrangement of W-PC + Prep Phrase + Infinitive Construct. The verb is singular because it has a composite subject **המלך והמן**. Chapter 6:13a to 7:1 set the scene for the events which take place during the second feast. The temporal expression **ביום השני** in v2a means the start of a new scene. It is now the second day of the feast. The link with the preceding clause is maintained by the prepositional phrases **לשהח** (v1) and **במשחה היין** (v2a). The king addresses Esther repeating his previous questions (cf. 5:3,6). His persistence shows his real concern for the well-being of his queen. The 3 masculine singular suffix **ו** of v2b links back to v2a. The king's second question is recorded in this clause. A further link is provided by the 2 feminine singular suffix **ך**, which refers to Esther in the preceding clause, as well as the elliptical **לך** which is the indirect object of the verb **והעש** at the end of the clause. With this clause the first speech of the king (i.e. v2) at the second banquet comes to an end.

Esther's reply to the king starts in v3a. The fact that v3a is the answer to the twice repeated **וְכִי** of v2 forms the link between these clauses. This part of the reply is in the form of two conditional clauses introduced by the particle **כִּי**. The conditions cited by Esther are real fulfillable conditions, for she has found favour with the king and, given his previous offer of half the kingdom, it is safe to assume her request will be regarded by him as acceptable. So both conditions are real. These conditions are the same ones Esther named in 5:7-8a, and one is left wondering if she is not being manipulative, projecting too humble an attitude, for she uses exactly the same approach in chapter 8 when she requests the reversal of the written decree issued by Haman. This may be a revelation of the not too savoury side of Esther's character. On the other hand, it could be seen as a mark of the cleverness of Esther. She uses her knowledge of the king's care for her to good effect. She exploits his love for her to achieve her goal, namely, the deliverance of herself and her people. Since this is a life and death situation

one should not be too harsh in one's judgement of Esther.

We reach the substance of Esther's answer in v3b. The 1 common singular suffix occurs five times in this clause linking it with v3a, since the suffix points back to the phrase 'Esther the queen' of v3a. Her reply functions at two levels. She wants her life and the lives of her people spared. Her answer has a personal and national dimension. This is another instance of how closely the personal and the national are intertwined. The king now knows the motivation behind the risky approach to his throne room (5:1-8), as well as the two banquets. The causal particle 'כ' gives the reason for Esther's request and so joins v3b to v4a. The reason is that she and her people have been sold to complete annihilation, a reference to the decree issued by Haman. It is noteworthy that both Mordecai in 4:7b and now Esther place the emphasis on the monetary aspect of the decree authorising the total destruction of the Jews, yet v4b makes it clear that selling people into slavery was an accepted practice of the day. It may be the killing plus the financial gain to be had from it

that are regarded by Mordecai and Esther as despicable. The verb **מכר** is passive, i.e. Esther does not reveal the name of the 'seller'. We encounter again the use of concealment to good effect. She conceals the person's identity until the king is worked-up and then in a dramatic manner and with dramatic effect she makes his identity known in v6. The king employs the same device of concealment in 6:6-10 with the rewarding of Mordecai. We may see in this again the cleverness of Esther; she obviously knows the king and how to handle him to achieve her purposes. As before, we have in this clause three words for the destruction of the Jews. This heaping up of terms by the narrator (cf. 3:3) is of course to stress the desperate situation facing Esther and the Jews.

The waw-conjunction of 7:4b is adversative, contrasting the two clauses. The verbal form, which is the same in both clauses, joins them. **אלו** is a composite particle of **לו** + **אם** translated 'if'. In this clause Esther explains that her objection is not that they were merely sold as male and female slaves. In fact if that were the case she would have remained silent (**חחרשתי**).

Since it is not the case she cannot keep silent (cf. 4:14 where the same verb **חָרַשׁ** is used). And the reason why she would have kept quiet, if they were merely sold into slavery (cf. Davis 1995:259, 288-289 for an opposing view), is introduced by **כִּי**. BHS proposes that **הַצְלָה שׁוּה** be read for the M.T. **הַצָּר שׁוּה**, but Bush (1996:428-429) argues convincingly for the retention of the M.T. reading (Gordis 1973:56, cf. also Haupt 1907-8:50-51). Her point is that the enemy is of so little consequence that had he merely sold them into slavery she would have kept silent and not bothered the king. Her contempt for Haman is evident when we compare the use of the word **שׁוּה** by Haman in 3:8 and Esther's use of it here. In 3:8 Haman argues that the Jews are of no gain, worth and value to the king, and that their presence in the kingdom can only mean trouble for the king. Here, Esther counters that Haman is not worth the annoyance of the king, thus expressing her utter disgust with him. In essence, therefore, Esther cannot keep silent for it is not **מַכְרָנוּ** **לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהָרוּג וּלְאָבֵד** (v4b) but **נִמְכְּרָנוּ** (v4a).

Verse 5 continues the dialogue between the king and Esther as indicated by **וַיֹּאמֶר**. BHS proposes that the second **וַיֹּאמֶר** in v5 be replaced with **וַיִּמְהַר** or that it be deleted. The first suggestion, it seems to me, is based on an *a priori* concept of the king's character, which is not sufficient grounds for the change. The second, which is suggested on the grounds of simple expansion by a scribe, is more reasonable. There is a third possibility, that is, to leave the text as it is and to translate the two occurrences of **וַיֹּאמֶר** as 'and the king answered' for the first, 'and the king said' for the second (cf. Bush 1996:428-429). Since the acceptance of anyone of the suggestions does not make a significant difference to the meaning of the clause, the existing reading is retained. The form of the content of the king's speech is rhetorical. He asks a double question: **זֶה מִי הוּא**, who is this?; **וְאֵי זֶה הוּא** (Bush 1996:426), and where is he? We have here an inclusion **הוּא זֶה זֶה הוּא**, pointing to the king's interest in the identity of the person. The relative clause introduced by **אֲשֶׁר**, is translated by Haupt (1907-8:149) as

'who has filled his heart, i.e. who has the audacity'. The implication of the king's remark is that the person who decided to do such a thing has gone too far, has become arrogant and has arrogated to himself powers belonging to the king alone. This depiction of the king further underscores the interpretation of 3:15, especially the idea that the signet ring of the king, symbol of his royal authority, is returned to him by Haman on the occasion of their social drink. There might be a suggestion here by the king that such a person is trying to usurp his throne. So we perhaps have an allusion to 2:21-23? The king's response is also a reference to the fact that he alone has the authority to decide the destiny of persons and nations in his kingdom. If there is going to be any change in the destiny of people he is the one who would give effect to it. This confirms his pivotal role in the reversal of the position and situation of the characters in the story.

Finally, in v6a the identity of the person to whom Esther was referring is made known by her. This is done in dramatic form. The connection between v6a and v5a is

syntactic, for as Haupt (1907-8:150) points out **אִישׁ צַר וְאוֹיֵב** of v6a answer the **מִי־זֶה** of v5b; the **וְאִי־זֶה** of v6a answer the **הֵמֶן רָעָה הַזֶּה** of v5b. Moreover, the **הַזֶּה** of v6a points back to the **זֶה...זֶה** of v5b. With this revelation Esther accomplishes her purpose in inviting the king and Haman to the banquet. She wants to show the king that the man he promoted is a very evil person. Esther's revelation of the identity of the arch-enemy of the Jews is also the turning point in this part of the story. From now on the consequences of her revelation are played out.

The first result is the effect it has on Haman, v6b. The pre-verbal position of the subject prefixed by a waw-conjunction (**וְהֵמֶן**) indicates the beginning of a new phase in the story. According to Haupt (1907-8:150) the verb **בָּעַתָּה**, given its Arabic cognate, does not mean terrified but 'to happen unexpectedly, to come or fall upon a person suddenly and unexpectedly'. The reason is that Haman is overtaken by surprise at the fact that the queen identifies him as the person she is talking about all the time. Haupt implies that Haman thinks Esther is unaware of his plot to kill the Jews, which

is impossible given 4:1-17. It is more likely that he is surprised to find out that Esther is a Jew as well. Given this new knowledge, the true nature of his deed dawns upon him so that he is not only overtaken by surprise, but is also terrified. The expression in v6b **המלך והמלכה מלפני** would also suggest that Haman is filled with terror. This expression also argues against the view of Haupt (1907-8:50) who comments: '....he collapsed, not because he had tried to exterminate all the Jews, but because he knew that the King was aware of the fact that Mordecai, and not Haman, had saved the King's life, and that Haman's hatred of the Jews was chiefly due to his apprehension lest the trick to which he owed his sudden elevation became known to the King'. Haupt's argument is that Haman hated the Jews because he was worried that if he was to kill Mordecai the real reason for his unexpected promotion would become known, therefore he plotted the general extermination of the Jews and in this way would get rid of Mordecai and protect his secret. But this flies in the face of 5:14 where Haman decides to go ahead and have Mordecai killed, something which would be extremely foolish even for

the fool Haman to do. Moreover, I argued above that Haman's promotion happens, not at the expense of Mordecai, but as a simple, straightforward yet necessary *political decision* on the king's part, given the events of 2:21-23. For this reason 2:21-23 is linked directly to 3:1-5. Furthermore, both Haman and the servants at the king's gate saw Mordecai's refusal to bow as a violation of the command of the king (3:3-6). Consequently, Haupt's view is untenable. Finally, Holladay (1971:45) gives the meaning of **בעה** as 'be overtaken by sudden terror, Dan 8:17'. We conclude, therefore, that the first result of Esther's revelation of the identity of the person she is talking about is that it terrifies Haman.

The second consequence comes in v7a. Again we have the subject of the clause in a pre-verbal position prefixed with a *waw*-conjunction (**והמלך**). This points to its independent status as a clause, but linked to the preceding clause as a consequence of it. The king rises in anger from his seat and goes into the palace garden. This is the second account of the king's anger

(cf.1:12). He goes into the garden obviously to think about what action to take but also because he himself must have been surprised by the revelation of Esther. We have syntactic parallelism between v7b and v7a in that it too has the subject Haman in pre-verbal position with the prefixed waw-conjunction. This construction provides the connection between the two clauses. As the king exits, Haman remains (standing). This is the meaning of עמד here. He seeks the intervention of the queen in order to save his life. Previously, Esther pleaded for her life and that of her people on account of Haman, but now the tables are turned and he seeks his life from the person he sought to destroy. This scene illustrates how the fall of Haman is gaining momentum and how the prediction of 6:13b continues to be realised. The כִּי introduces the reason for Haman's plea. He senses that the king has already determined his fate. This is how he interprets the exit of the king from the banquet. ראה cannot mean 'seeing', but must refer to Haman's knowledge of the practice of the day. He realises that given what he has done, only one sentence is possible: death.

It must, therefore, be understood as 'knowing'. Haman's case is thus similar to that of Vashti in 1:13-15.

Verse 8a has the same syntactic arrangement as the other clauses, only this time the subject is the king. He returns to the banquet. On entering the banqueting room (אל־בית משחה היין) Haman is seen falling on the couch on which the queen was sitting. Given Haman's knowledge of Persian law and practice he could not have attempted to rape (לכבוש) the queen, as the king perceived it. Haman is credited with being a fool, but one has to attribute some measure of common-sense even to a fool. Why then does the king interpret the scene he encounters upon his re-entry to the banquet as an attempt to rape the queen? According to Haupt (1907-8:151) the king's remark is a '....cruel jest. It showed how the king was disposed toward Haman', something he already perceived (cf. 7:7b). Fox (1991:87) sees this as the king extricating himself from a difficult situation by making Haman the guilty party in a plot in which he was an accomplice. It seems more probable to attribute the king's interpretation of the scene to what he has just heard. The revelation shocks and angers him and so clouds his perception. This remark of the king contains Haman's death sentence. It serves to accelerate the momentum of Haman's fall. Verse 8b has the same syntactic arrangement as the previous clause, i.e. a pre-verbal subject without

the conjunction. **הַרְבֵּר** refers to the remark of the king in v8a; it went out from the mouth of the king. BHS proposes two alternative readings for **הַפּוּ**, namely, **הַפּוּ** which means 'to be, feel ashamed, or behave shamefully' (Holladay 1971:98, 112-113); and **הוֹרֵר**, which means to 'grow pale [white]'. Haupt (1907-8:152) supports the first alternative on the grounds of haplography of the **ר**, and gives Psalm 34:6 as support for this suggestion. But given the nature of Haman's situation portrayed in 7:6b-8a, shame is hardly an adequate rendering; he is facing death after all. The second reading suggested by BHS has more to commend itself for it fits the context well. But if we take **הַפּוּ** figuratively as meaning that Haman's face was veiled, (covered) in fear (cf. Holladay 1971:98), the reading of the text can be retained, especially since in v8a the king announces Haman's death sentence (but see Gordis 1973:56 for an opposing view). The expression on Haman's face shows that the end has come. According to BDB (1975:341) **הַפּוּ** is used 'in token of sentence of death'. This further underscores the probability of retaining the existing reading. What is expressed figuratively will next take place literally.

Verse 9a sees the beginning of the actualisation of the word of the king. It is initiated by the appearance of Harbona on the scene. He gives more condemnatory testimony against Haman by bringing to

the king's attention the intended hanging of Mordecai, who only spoke well of the king. His knowledge of Mordecai must have been gained from doing duty at the king's gate where Mordecai was stationed, or else he could be referring to the Bigthan-Teresh incident (cf. 2:21-23). His words confirm everything the king has heard from the queen, for as Haupt (1907-8:152) comments: 'Harbona thinks Haman is a **בן מוֹת**; he ought to be impaled, and we have not only a malefactor worthy of impalement, behold! There is also (**גַּם**) the pole which Haman set up for Moredecai'. Harbona, with his remarks, encourages the king to put Haman to death. His appearance on the scene seals the fate of Haman. It reverses the destiny of Haman already determined by the king. He seems to play the same role Memuchan played in the dethronement of Vashti. Verse 9b links up with v9a through the pronominal suffix 3 masculine singular **ו** and the 3 masculine singular suffixes **וֹ** and **וֹ**. They make reference to the servants and Haman respectively in v9a. The clause contains the command of the king that Haman be hanged, bringing to a tragic end the life and career of Haman.

This is the end-result of his obsessive hatred of the Jews and his plot against them. Haman has fallen; the prediction of 6:14b has been fulfilled. It is left to the king who promoted Haman to put the final nail in the coffin of his fall by giving the command for his

execution.

In 7:10a the command of the king which forms the link between v9b and v10a is carried out. It brings to an end the events of the second banquet. Moreover, vv9-10a is held together by the phrase **הָעֵץ** which is found in v9a and v10a making it a close-knit unit. The conclusion to the second banquet is v10b, for it is at this banquet that the king's anger is provoked (v7). Thus the repetition of the phrases **בַּחֲמָתוֹ** (v7) and **וַחֲמָתוֹ** (v10b) binds together vv7-10 into a unit. With the anger of the king pacified, things have been restored to normality; there is order again in the kingdom. Moreover, the hanging of Haman brings to an end the consternation, anxiety and perplexity of chapter 3:15a and 4:1-3. As the news spreads through the capital there is a sigh of relief but not of release.

Summary

The threat faced by the Jews at the end of chapter 3 is reversed through a process which led to the ultimate demise of Haman. It started with Esther's successful but unaccustomed entry into the presence of the king (5:1-8), followed by the loss of the battle for self-control by Haman (5:9-14); next was the humiliation of Haman (6:1-12), and finally the execution of Haman (7:1-10). But the crisis is not

over yet, because the written decree, issued by Haman, still hung over the heads of the Jewish nation (Bush 1996:474). How this threat was overturned, is our concern in the next section, namely, chapter 8:1-17.

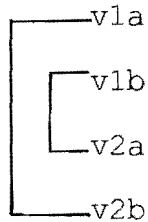
2.4 The promotion of Mordecai the Jew 8:1-17

The previous main section concluded with the hanging of Haman. Interestingly though, we may have a parallel with the Vashti episode (1:19-21). In the latter episode a vacancy is created with the dethronement of Vashti which is filled by Esther. Now as a result of the hanging of Haman a vacancy exists in the position of vizier of the kingdom, a position which is shortly to be filled by Moredcai.

Haman's promotion was to increase the security around the palace. Mordecai's promotion, from the viewpoint of the narrator, serves to reverse the decree of Haman (8:7-8). By promoting Mordecai the king might be making a straightforward administrative decision, replacing one vizier with another. The narrator, however, sees in this the key to the reversal of Haman's decree.

The section divides into several units. And, as was the case with Haman, we also have several phases to the promotion of Mordecai.

The first phase of Mordecai's promotion is recorded in 8:1-2. Given below is the arrangement of 8:1-2:



This passage serves as an introduction to what follows, for the reversal depicted in this paragraph will be worked out in detail in the following verses (see our discussion of 2:21-23).

At v1a we encounter a 'new stage in the action' of the king as shown by the fronting of the prepositional phrase, as well as the absence of a prefixed conjunction to the prepositional phrase (Bandstra 1992:117). Yet there is continuity with what precedes via the phrase **ביום ההוא**. The king is still the actant and in control. He controls Haman's property (**ביתו**) despite the fact that his sons are still alive (cf. 9:7-10). This act on the part of the king affirms the fall of Haman. It also carries within it symbolism in terms of the decree of Haman, for according to it (3:13) the property of the Jews was to be taken as loot. The situation is reversed as Esther the Jew takes possession of the property of Haman the arch-enemy of the Jews.

The characterisation of Haman as one who hates the Jews again raises the issue from the personal to the national level (cf. 3:8-9).

The ׀ of v1b is disjunctive indicating a separate action. The fronting of the subject **מרדכי** confirms this. In this clause Mordecai appears before the king (cf. 6:4b). This is the first face to face meeting between himself and the king. It was Esther's explanation of his relationship to her (**מה-הווא-לה**) which resulted in his appearance before the king. We should note, however, that Mordecai is made to meet the king when it matters most, at the point that the reversal of the decree of Haman is to be arranged.

Chapter 8:2a continues the narrative via the ׀ consecutive. The link between v1b and v2a is via anacrusis in that v1b begins with **מרדכי** and v2a ends with **מרדכי**. The 3 masculine singular suffix ׀ further links v1b to v2a since it refers back to **המלך** in v1b. Mordecai is installed by the king as the new vizier. It is done presumably because of his relationship to Esther (cf. 6:1-12, 7:9, 8:1b). Mordecai's promotion is not the result of something he has done, unless one wants to contend that the king remembered what he heard about Mordecai in 7:9 and was influenced by this in the promotion of Mordecai. But such a suggestion would run counter to the close

structural link between 8:1b and 8:2a. It would seem rather that Mordecai is promoted because of his relationship to Esther (8:1b) and also because a vacancy exists in the position of viziership. Given this background it is now even more clear that Haman's promotion was not based on something he did, namely, falsely claiming to have saved the king's life, as maintained by Haupt (1907-8:150). There is a clear parallel between the promotion of Haman and Mordecai in this respect. Both promotions are not the result of anything done by the characters. It also strengthens the argument presented above that the motivation for 3:1-5 must be sought in 2:21-23, making the link between these passages direct.

The ׀ consecutive in v2b joins v2a and v2b. In addition, both clauses have מרדכי as the object of a verb. Yet something new is happening, as indicated by the new subject, Esther. She places Mordecai over the property of Haman, which shows she has considerable power, as Day (1995:139,142) confirms saying 'Esther still appears more the authority figure'. This action differs from 8:1a in that the king נתן the property to Esther as a possession, while she makes

Mordecai the administrator of it by putting him in charge of it (Fox 1991:90; but cf. Clines 1984:104 for a opposing view).

This clause brings to a conclusion the first phase of Mordecai's promotion. The next phase will take place in 8:15-16 as the parallel below points out:

8:1b מרדכי בא לפני המלך

8:15a מרדכי יצא מלפני המלך. This

syntactic parallel also marks off the section 8:1-17 as a unit on its own (Bush 1996:438,442; Fox 1991:106). The section 8:1-2 forms an inclusion as follows:

8:1a אח-בית המן

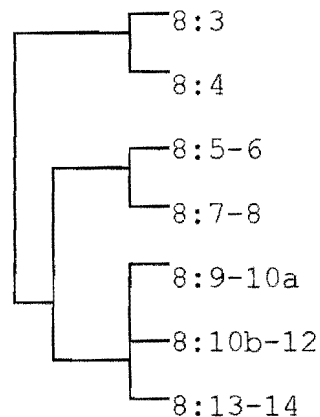
8:2b על-בית המן.

It is dominated by Mordecai since we have three direct, and one indirect, references to him. Its focus is his promotion. At a secondary level it also summarises the fall of Haman because apart from the fact that his life was taken away (7:1-10), we see here that his property and his position are also taken away and given to his arch-enemy Mordecai, thus completing the first phase of the promotion of Mordecai.

Mordecai's promotion has several effects. One is the reversal of Haman's decree, 8:3-14. Although Haman is dead he continues to threaten the existence of the

Jews from the grave through the decree he issued authorising their total destruction. Esther, Mordecai and the Jews have won the fight, but the battle for national survival is far from over. It is to this battle that we turn our attention now.

I mentioned previously that Mordecai's promotion came at a time when it mattered most: when it could do the most for the nation. For if 6:1-14 had been the final reward of Mordecai the nation would have lost the battle for national survival. But Mordecai is promoted at this point so that with his position and power the remaining threat, that is, the decree of Haman, can be dealt with. The structure of the effect of Mordecai's promotion is set out below:



The link between v2b and v3a is provided by the verb $\eta\delta'$ as well as the \imath consecutive. Esther continues

(Holladay 1971:137) by pleading for the lives of her people (cf. 5:4, 8; 7:3f). She abandons herself to the mercy of the king just as she did before; this time it is done more dramatically: she falls down at the feet of the king.

Verse 3b is joined to v3a by the 3 masculine singular pronominal suffix ך which points back to מלך in v3a. Esther is also the common subject of v3a and b. Moreover, all the verbs in v3a and b are imperfect verbs. What Esther does here can be seen as a continuation of 7:3-4, where she started to plead for the life of her people. At that point, however, it was interrupted by the final fall of Haman. She is continuing then from where she ended in 7:3-4. The link between verses 4 and 3 takes the form of an act-response formula, for v3 describes the acts of Esther in the presence of the king. The king responds with acts too: he holds out the golden sceptre and Esther rises to her feet (v4). Nothing is being said, everything is acted out. We have in vv3-4 an inclusion based on syntactic parallelism and focused on the falling down and standing up of Esther:

v3 ותוסף אסתר... וחפל לפני רגליו

v4 וחקם אסתר וחעמד לפני המלך

Now, according to 8:1-2, Esther is already in the presence of the king. In addition, the verb **סָפַד** indicates that what follows in verse 8:3f is continuous with v2b and that what happens in 8:3f, takes place in the presence of the king (Bush 1996:440, Fox 1991:91-92;). Since the holding out of the sceptre gives access to the presence of the king, and since Esther is already in the presence of the king, what is the significance of v4a, in which the king holds out the golden sceptre? It means that Esther's plea is granted, that not only her life but also the lives of her people will be spared (Davis 1995:304; Fox 1991:92). The acts of Esther and the king are also symbolic of what is shortly to happen to the nation. Esther, humiliated in v3 is elevated in v4; likewise the nation, humiliated at present, will be exalted soon. The reversal of Esther's physical position (**עמד/נפל**), through the intervention of the king, symbolises the impending reversal of the position of the nation through the intervention of the king (see 9:24-25). This is in keeping with the intertwining of the personal and national in the narrative. At a secondary level the dramatisation of the nation's plight by Esther parallels that of Mordecai in 4:1-2, stressing that both of them were equal in their concern for the plight of the nation.

Verse 5 introduces a new section, as the direct speech marker **וַיֹּאמֶר** indicates. Esther's speech comprises vv5-6 and is in the form of a conditional clause with the protasis in v5a and the apodosis in v5b. The protasis has four conditions introduced by the particle **אם**, the last two being elliptical. The conditions focus on the king's view of the matter (5a), the king's view of Esther (v5b+d), and the king's view of the intrinsic value of the matter (v5c). These conditions are real ones since they can all be fulfilled by the king. The apodosis comes in v5b making the link between v5a and b syntactical. It is introduced by a niphal imperfect 3 masculine singular verb which is jussive. Esther's request is that the decree of Haman be **שׁוּב**, that is, the king must cause the previous decree to be turned around. In this request she recognises that the king alone is able to reverse the existing threat hanging over the heads of the Jews (9:24-26 cf. also 4:8). The pivotal role of the king in the reversal of fortunes in the narrative is therefore affirmed once again.

The **כִּי** of v6a links it to v5 since it continues the speech of Esther. It gives the reason motivating her request to the king. The clause is in the form of an interrogative, **אֵיכָנָה**, how? The question is rhetorical. Her point is that she cannot be expected to see evil about to engulf her people and do nothing about it. Her request must be heeded because this is

what any human person would do in the same circumstances: even the king, is the implication. ן conjunction connects v6b to v6a. Verse 6b continues Esther's speech and contains the second rhetorical question. It repeats v6a with this difference: עמי is replaced with מולדתי. Esther bases her appeal on nationalism, yet another example of how intertwined the personal and national are in the story. This brings Esther's speech to a close.

ויאמר, v7a, introduces the speech of the king. It points to the beginning of a new unit, but since it constitutes the king's reply to Esther, it is a continuation of the former. The king addresses both Esther and Mordecai. The suffix ך common singular provides the link between v7b and v7a as it refers to המלך in v7a. In this clause the king states what he has already done for Esther and the Jewish people and, by implication, that he is unable to do any more. This inability is made explicit in v8b. He cannot do literally what Esther requested. He does however give them some help, as v8a makes clear. The ן conjunction links v7b and v8a. The fronting of the personal pronoun אהם seems to suggest that the king is stressing that the time has now arrived for them to act; he has done what he could. He then gives to them the authority to issue another decree המלך בשם to counter the previous one.

The ו of v8b gives the reason for the instruction to them in v8a. Any writing in the name of the king and sealed with his signet ring is irrevocable. With this the king not only points out his own limitations but also points out to them the power they already have since the signet ring was given to Mordecai in 8:2 (cf. 3:10-11). The main point made by the king is that there are limitations to what he is able to do and that Mordecai and Esther should now act as, Fox (1991:95) remarks: ' I have done my part, now you go and finish the job'. Contrary to Davis (1995:309) and Bush (1996:445) this is not an irritable dismissal of Esther and Mordecai by the king, but simply an admission that he has done what he is able to do. With all he has given them, especially the signet ring, they should now act.

2.4.1 Mordecai's decree counters the decree of

Haman 8:9-14

Verse 9 (3:12f) starts a new scene with the appearance of the scribes of the king. The link with v8 is the fact that v9 is the response to the imperative of the king, כהוב, recorded in v8a.

The assembling of the scribes happened on the twenty third day of the third month, Sivan. A detailed account follows on how the decree was written: a) it was written in accordance with everything commanded

by Mordecai; b) it was written to the whole kingdom, including the Jews; c) it was written in the script and language of all the peoples of the kingdom. The **ו** consecutive of v10 continues the description of how the decree was written and so links back to v9. The verb **ויכתב** mentioned in v9a is repeated at the beginning of v10a, thus strengthening the link between v9 and v10a. In v9 the verb is niph'al with Mordecai as the subject of the verb, emphasising the fact that Mordecai was writing on the authority of the king, but in v10a it is a qal. Finally, the document was sealed with the king's signet ring. It is now ready to be distributed. Verse 10b narrates the dispatching of the decree by means of the traditional manner of communication, namely animals.

The relative pronoun **אשר** of v11a has **ספרים** of v10b as its antecedent. In this way v11a links directly to v10b. Verse 11a further details the empowerment of the Jews through the decree. It gives to them power to: a) **על-נגשם** **ולעמד** **להקהל**; b) **ולהרג** **ולאבד** **להשמיר**, all the people and provinces which attempt to attack them. The Jews are given permission to organise and defend themselves; they are not given permission to attack anyone they suspect of being against them (Fox 1991:103).

Verse 11b contains the last aspect of their empowerment by the king, that is, they can plunder

their enemies. The expression **ושללם לבוז** (v11b) links backward to **אשר נהן המלך ליהודים** of v11a. The 3 masculine plural suffix **ם** of **שלל** points back to "the people of power" and "every province" mentioned in v11a. The decree empowers the Jews to counter the content of the previous decree.

Verse 12a is a verbless clause and therefore disjunctive in relation to v11. Continuity with the previous clause is maintained by the prepositional phrase at the beginning of v12a. In addition, v11b ends and v12a starts with a prepositional phrase, thus making for a close link between the clauses.

Verse 12b is also a temporal clause like v12a, this makes for the close connection of the two clauses. Chapter 8:12 links 8:11 and gives the time and place for the acts of v11. These are to be carried out on one day and in the whole kingdom.

The pre-verbal position of **פתשגן** in v13a means the start of a new unit. On the basis of **הכתב**, however, a link is maintained with the previous verses. A copy of the decree is made available to every province and it is announced to all the peoples of the kingdom. The **ו** of v13b joins it to v13a. In v13b the same announcement is made to the Jews so that they ready themselves for the thirteenth of Adar, to avenge themselves on anyone who seeks to harm them. BHS suggests the deletion of the **ו**. This would make v13b a purpose clause which would state that the

announcement was to be made to all the peoples so that the Jews would hear it and ready themselves for that day. The same result could be obtained if we regard the waw as a waw explicative, and so the verbal form in the text is retained.

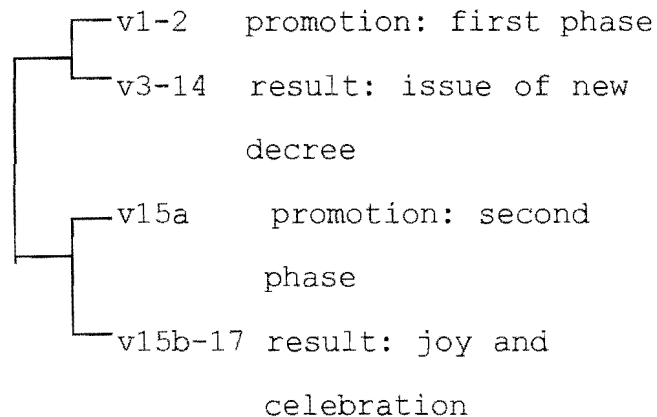
Chapter 8:14 concludes the process of issuing the new decree which would counter Haman's decree, and so remove the threat which was hanging over the heads of the Jews. The pre-verbal subject-phrase indicates that we have an independent unit. In v10b it is stated *that* the messengers and riders were sent out by Mordecai to deliver the decree. Here we are told *how* they went out, that is, with real urgency. The ׀ of v14b is conjunctive, linking v14a and v14b. The two clauses also have a similar syntactic structure, namely, S-V-M, and both end in prepositional phrases beginning with ך. The two clauses describe the kingdom-wide announcement of the new decree, which empowers the Jews to defend and avenge themselves against their enemies.

The section 8:9-14 is a unity. It is held together by terminology about writing and laws: ספרי (v9) ויכתב (v9) ויכתב (v10) ספרים (v10) הכתב (v13) דה (v13) דה (v14). The first four terms form an inclusion. The section can, broadly speaking, be divided into three units:

- 6:9-10a deals with the writing of the decree;
 6:10b-12 deals with the distribution of the
 decree;
 6:13-14 deals with the proclamation of the
 decree.

2.4.2 The second phase of Mordecai's promotion 8:15a

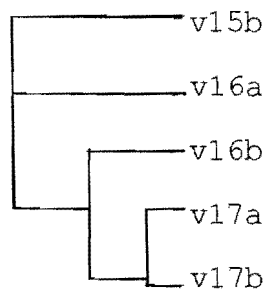
Viewed from a structural perspective, the second phase, which completes the promotion of Mordecai, dominates the section 8:1-17 as follows:



Chapter 8:15a begins with a ׀ conjunction which links what follows to the preceding verses, but the pre-verbal position of the subject indicates that we have a new unit starting at this point as well. It also seems to take up the story about Mordecai's promotion recorded in 8:1-2, and can be seen as the second stage in that promotion. In 8:1-2 he received the signet ring of the king. Here the process is completed when he receives the garments symbolising

his new position of power as vizier. Chapter 8:15a parallels chapter 6, except that whereas in chapter 6 the crown is missing, here no mention is made about the horse. With 8:15a the promotion of Mordecai is complete, and the threat which hung over the heads of the Jews has potentially been averted. It must still be actualised, but that comes in the next section of the narrative.

The decree issued by Mordecai had several results (8:5b-17). Below is set out the arrangement of this part of the narrative:



In 8:15a-17 is a number of waw-conjunction clauses which describe the result of the decree. They are all independent of each other. The point of this is to show that the results are not caused by the promotion of Mordecai but by the news that a new decree had been announced counterbalancing the effects of the previous decree (cf.3:15-4:3). News of the new decree results in:

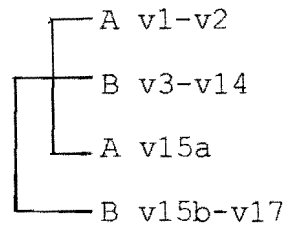
v15b joy and rejoicing in Shushan the capital;
v16 light, gladness, joy and honour for the Jews;
v17a joy and gladness in the whole kingdom;
v17b feasting and a good day for the Jews;
v17c mass 'conversion' to the Jewish faith, or
more probably, many people becoming
sympathetic to the Jews.

We have thus in 8:15-17 the reversal of 3:15-4:3. Moreover, the parallelism between 8:14-17 and 3:15 gives support to the suggestion that 3:15 is a celebration by Haman of his victory over the Jews, however premature that celebration was. The whole of 8:1-17 can be summarised as follows:

1. Mordecai is promoted, phase one v1-2;
2. The decree of Haman is potentially reversed vv3-14;
3. Mordecai is promoted, phase two v15a;
4. The results of the potential reversal of the decree v15b-17.

Haupt (1907-8:161) believes that the resultant joy and rejoicing was not because of the new decree but because of the fall of Haman. But this view flies in the face of the obvious parallel between 8:3-17 and 3:1-15. Moreover, Haman was publicly hanged before this event, in 7:10. The question that arises, if we follow Haupt, would be why the narrative delays the

rejoicing of the people till now. Haupt gives no explanation for this. Further, the sequence of events in 3:15 makes it clear that the perplexity of Shushan was directly linked to the publication of the decree, and since 8:3-17 parallels 3:1-15, the cause for joy in 8:3-17 should parallel the cause of the perplexity in 3:1-15. Finally, the structure of 8:1-17 argues against Haupt's position:



Summary of 2:21-8:17

It has already been stated that this is the longest cycle. It is also the pivotal cycle since it contains the main reversal of the narrative, namely, that of the fortune and destiny of Haman and Mordecai.

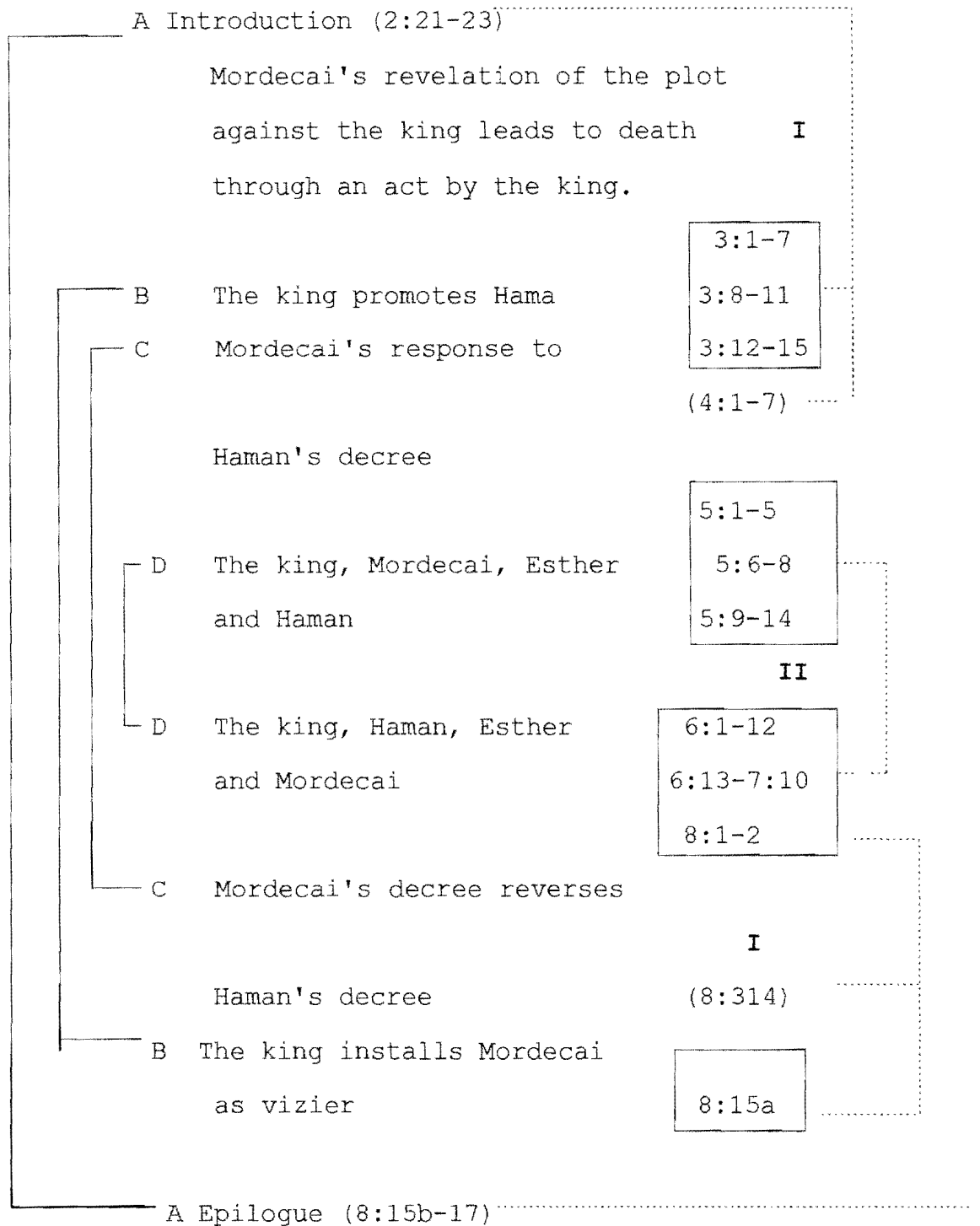
The plot development of the section is as follows: the king's life is threatened, but through Mordecai's revelation of the assassination plot it is saved (2:21-23); the result is the king's attempt to improve palace security by promoting Haman (3:1-7); this leads to a clash between Haman and Mordecai resulting in a plot by Haman, authorised by the king, to exterminate the Jews (3:8-11); Haman prematurely celebrates his supposed victory over Mordecai and the

Jews (3:12-15).

Mordecai's response to Haman's decree follows in 4:1-17. The essence of this response is to make Esther aware of the crisis facing the nation and challenging her to go to the king to seek his help. He succeeds in that Esther agrees to go to the king (5:1). But Esther's entry to the king's throne-room, contrary to custom (5:1-8), sets in motion the process which leads to the fall of Haman; this process includes the loss, by Haman, of the battle with his inner-self (5:9-14), his humiliation (6:1-12) and his final demise (7:1-10).

With the demise of Haman, Mordecai comes face to face with the king, resulting in his promotion (8:1-2), the reversal of Haman's decree (8:3-14), Mordecai's installation as vizier (8:15a), and concludes with the rejoicing in the city at the news that the former decree has been reversed (8:15b-17). Thus the attempted assassination and death at the beginning of the cycle (2:21-23) is reversed by joy, rejoicing and gladness (8:15b-17) at the end of the cycle.

The cycle has symmetry, as the diagram below shows. It is also organised around a pivotal event, namely, the demise of Haman and the rise of Moredecai, structurally presented in the following manner:



The king's coronation of Mordecai as vizier leads to rejoicing and gladness.

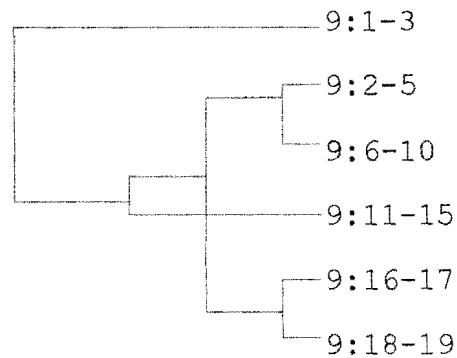
3. Structural analysis: the Enemies-Jews

Cycle (9:1-10:3)

When we come to the end of this cycle the clash between Haman and Mordecai on the individual (personal) level is resolved. But the individual and the national are closely linked in the narrative. Consequently, the reversal of fortunes and destinies played out on the individual level, also plays itself out on the national level.

Many scholars (Bensusan 1988:52-53; Haupt 1907-8:124, Loader 1977:103, 1980:61,146; Schutte 1989:66) have referred to the fact that the clash between Haman the Agite and Mordecai the Jew has a national flavour, reflecting the clash between Israel and the Amalakites. In addition, I have on numerous occasions referred to the intertwining of the personal and the national. In this cycle it finds its fullest expression.

Loader (1977:96) heads this section as 'Unfolding of reversal', for in 3:1-15 the decree of Haman is promulgated, as is the decree of Mordecai in 8:3-4. Both these decrees take effect in this cycle. Fox (1991:158, n12) states that peripety is an important structural principle in Esther, including 9:1-10:3. Consequently, the arrangement of this cycle is set out below in the following manner:



3.1 The structure of 9:1-28

We have at the beginning of v1a a temporal expression in the form of a prepositional phrase: **עשר יום בו** **ובשנים עשר הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה**. This indicates the start of a new section in the narrative. The time for the events contained in the two decrees has arrived, as the phrase **הגיע דבר-המלך ודחו להעשות** shows (cf. also Holladay 1971:227). Verse 1a therefore announces the theme for section 9:1-19 and provides the immediate link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19. **ביום** of v1b refers to **הוא-חדש אדר בשלושה עשר יום בו** of v1a and joins these clauses. It further identifies the 13th Adar as the day on which the enemies of the Jews had hoped (**שברו**) to gain the upper-hand over them. But, in contrast to this expectation, (ו) 'it was changed' (Haupt 1907-8:162). The day was transformed into one in which the Jews gained power over

those who hated them. So 9:1 presents the reversal as an accomplished fact '[b]y stating the scene's outcome at its beginning....' (Fox 1991:108), the remainder of the passage describes how it was accomplished (cf. Bush 1996:456-457). Verse 1 is also separated from the rest of the passage by the vocabulary (city, provinces, feast day, joy, rest), which dominates the remainder of the section. But its character as an introduction is evident from the fact that 9:1d and 9:5c end with the same phrase **בשנאיהם** (Bush 1996:451).

Chapter 9:2a, which begins the unit 9:2-5, has a perfect verb, niph'al 3 masculine plural, indicating the start of a new pericope. In addition, the pronominal suffixes **ו** and **הם** make reference to the Jews in v1b, thus linking v2a to v1. The first successes of the Jews over their enemies were gained in the provinces [cf. **בעריהם בכל-מדינות** (v2a), **-וכל** (v3), **בכל-המדינות** (4a)]. They accomplished this as they **נפהלו** themselves. The verb **פהל** means not merely to assemble on the 13th Adar, but to organise themselves in preparation for the 13th Adar, so that they are able to defend themselves and offer effective resistance against their enemies (Haupt 1907-8:158). It is important to note that the Jews were given power to defend themselves, even if that

defence took a violent form, but they were not given authority to go on the offensive, seek out those whom they believed hated them and then destroy them. They could act only against those who sought to harm them. The waw-conjunction of v2b expresses continuity with v2a. This clause reports the result of the organising activity of the Jews. The conjunction functions as a causal particle, namely, 'with the result that or so that'. The Jews in the provinces struck fear into their enemies and thus were able to over-power them easily. Here, their victory is attributed to what they themselves did. Verse 3a, via the waw-conjunction, gives the second way in which success was accomplished in the provinces. We are told that the various leaders of the provinces **אֲחֵי הַיְהוּדִים מִנְּשָׂאִים**, that is, they helped the Jews. We are not told how they were helped but it would seem best to understand this as non-interference on the part of the various leaders rather than direct support.

The reason for the behaviour of the leaders of the provinces is given in v3b-v4. We have three causal clauses (Bush 1996:457), each one introduced by **כִּי**. The first attributes the co-operation of the leaders of provinces to their fear of Mordecai. The remaining two reasons motivate the fear: firstly, the position of Mordecai: he is grand vizier; and

secondly, the news of his increasing greatness within the kingdom. Alternatively, the third כִּי can be taken as a particle introducing a substantive clause translated 'that', meaning the news which was spreading throughout the kingdom was that Mordecai was increasingly becoming greater and greater. Whichever way one understands the final causal particle, the net result is the same.

There are two interesting things to note here. We have the same causal clause repeated in 8:17b, 9:2b and 9:3b, suggesting a close link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19:

- A כִּי־נפל פחד היהודים על־הם 8:17b
 B כִּי־נפל־פחדם על־כל־העמים 9:2b
 C כי נפל פחד־מרדכי עליהם 9:3b

We also have the same intertwining of the individual and the national referred to so often in that the success of the Jews in the provinces is attributed both to their own efforts as well as to the influence of Mordecai (see Bush 1996:456 for a contra view). The outcome of the organised resistance by the Jews in the provinces is recorded in v5a. The waw-consecutive indicates continuity with the preceding

vv2-4. As a result the Jews struck down their enemies with the sword and killed and destroyed them.

The pronominal suffixes ך and ם join v5b to v5a. This clause is not a separate result but expresses the previous result in a different way. The phrase **כרצובם** does not mean the Jews had *carte blanche*, for their behaviour was regulated by the decree issued in the name of the king. It means rather that they had gained the upper-hand over their enemies, and in this they were not hindered (Haupt 1907-8:163).

So, the decree of the king was carried out on 13 Adar, but the day was reversed from possible destruction of the Jews to one of victory for the Jews over their enemies. This happened first in the provinces.

Shushan the capital was the next place in which the Jews gained victory over their enemies according to the discourse starting at v6. The Jews mentioned in v5 are still under discussion as the ך suffix indicates. The same terminology for destroying their enemies, **הרג** and **אבד**, is used in v5 and v6, linking the verses. In addition, these terms are the same as those used in the decree itself, strengthening the link between 8:1-17 and 9:1-19. Haupt (1907-8:163) points out that **הבירה** is an addition 'due to scribal expansion'; the fight between the Jews and their assailants did not take place in the Acropolis, but

in the city of Shushan (cf. 1,2; 4,16; 9,12-15). But the term can also be regarded as a merismus, the part being used for the whole, so that in the context of Esther it refers to the capital city. This use of הבירה with and sometimes without שושן is very similar to the style of the narrator in the description of personal names, e.g. the king and King Ahasuerus, Esther and Esther the Queen, Mordecai and Mordecai the Jew, Haman and Haman the Agite (Bush 1996:474). Five hundred people are said to have been killed in the capital, Shushan. According to Fox (1991:110), the figure is a hyperbole but Alter (1992:85-106) believes the figure of five hundred is a real figure. The other event which took place in the capital is the death of the ten sons of Haman, 9:7-9. There have been various attempts to reconstruct the original forms of these names because it is believed that the existing forms have been corrupted. Concerning these attempts Haupt (1907-8:166) rightly remarks: 'All these explanations are, of course, entirely conjectural', since it is now impossible to reconstruct the original forms of the names (cf. also Davis 1995:327 n15). Moreover, in the context of the narrative, the original forms of the names are not significant anyway.

The verbal suffix ך joins 9:10a to 9:7-9; v10a is also epexegetical in relation to 9:7-9, giving the identity of the list of names in 9:7-9. This clause describes the fate of Haman's sons. Why does the

narrator specifically mention the names of Haman's sons? I think it is to stress the complete and utter fall of Haman (Bush 1996:475; Fox 1991:110). The terms used in the decree were of the total, complete and utter destruction of the Jews. Instead of this happening to the Jews, it now happens to Haman. This is another example of how 13 Adar was reversed (אָדָר וְנֶהְפֹּךְ, 9:1b) for the Jews. With the death of his sons Haman has no posterity and therefore also no memory and future, emphasising his utter destruction. The waw-conjunction in 9:10b is the bridge between it and v10a. The verbal suffix ך means the Jews. It is now said of them that they did not take the spoils. The spoils are that of the five hundred people killed in Shushan because, according to 8:1-2, Mordecai has already taken control of Haman's property. The fact that the Jews did not take the spoils confirms the qualification expressed in regard to the understanding of the term כְּרִצּוֹנָם in v5. They acted within the law and went even further by not doing all the law entitled them to do. They are portrayed as law-abiding citizens (cf. also 9:15b,17a). The success the Jews had in the provinces is repeated in the capital city, as the passage 9:6-10 demonstrates.

We have, for the first time (9:11-15), the direct involvement of the king since the carrying out of the **דבר-המלך ודחו** (9:1). The direct speech which depicts this intervention takes the form of a dialogue between the king and the queen. **ביום הוא**, v11 is a pre-verbal prepositional phrase starting a new part of the story. The discourse informs the king of the number of people killed in the capital, Shushan. Why the king was interested in the number of people killed, and by whom he was informed, we are not told. The king seems to show a lack of interest in fact that 'his own people' were being killed. But one has to remember that this was a war situation in which leaders tended to be less emotional about casualties. It also appears that the king had taken sides with the people of the queen. The king responds to this news in direct speech as the **ויאמר** of v12 shows. The nature of his speech takes the form of three questions (reminiscent of 5:3,6;7:2,5) introduced by the particle **מה**. The import of the last two questions is an offer of help by the king. For the first time the king takes sides. By this offer he declares his support for the queen and by implication for the Jews as well.

Esther responds with a twofold request (v13): a) She wants the king to issue an additional decree enabling

the Jews in Shushan to defend themselves for another day; and b) She wants the dead sons of Haman gibbeted.

Noteworthy in the response of Esther is that she ignores the king's question about the numbers killed in the provinces. She apparently was not as concerned as the king about the numbers. The first request might be motivated by the fact that the enemy's threat was greatest in the city; the second request was to expose Haman's family to humiliation. Regarding the possible motivation of Esther, Haupt (1907-8:160) says: '....the gibbeting of Haman's ten sons and the massacre in Shushan may have been necessary in order to prevent further anti-Jewish outbreaks. The personal safety of the Queen and the Grand Vizier made it necessary in Shusan to teach the enemies of the Jews a lesson' (cf. 2:21-23; Fox 1991:112; Davis 1995:330,331).

Chapter 9:14a, beginning with the direct speech marker **וַיֹּאמֶר**, records the reply of the king. He gives instructions that Esther's request be carried out. Verse 14b-c reports that what the king commanded, was carried out. The decree, making provision for an additional day for the Jews in the capital to defend themselves, was issued, and Haman's ten sons were gibbeted. Verse 15 forms the conclusion to this passage. In v14a it is said that **דַּת בְּשׁוּשָׁן** **וַתִּנְהַן**. What was decreed in v14b is now carried out.

In 9:12a the king asks the queen **מדנרת המלך מה עשו** **בשאר**. I pointed out that the queen ignores this question and does not answer it. Now, however, the answer to that question is given by the report to the palace (Fox 1991:113). The pre-verbal noun clause of v16a indicates that we have the start of a new unit. The focus of attention is the Jews in the remainder of the king's provinces. The first part of v16a is old information for we have already been told this in 9:2-5. The attention shifts from reporting the killing of their enemies to the celebration of the victory of the Jews in the provinces over their enemies. The difference between 9:2-5 and v16a is the mention of the number of Jews killed, namely, 75,000. BHS suggests that **נרה** be deleted. This makes for a much smoother reading of the verse. However, if **וחרג** is given the sense of 'having killed', namely, being understood as having the meaning of a participle, which meaning can be justified contextually, then **נרה** makes perfect sense as it now stands. The verse would then read: 'and to defend their lives and to rest from their enemies having killed seventy five thousand'. Verse 16b comments on the restraint shown by the Jews as they defend their lives. BHS also suggests that v16b and v17a be transposed. It is clear that v16b interrupts the flow of thought from v16-v17. We follow BHS at this point. Further, v17a states that the victory of the Jews in

the provinces was accomplished on 13th Adar, thus giving the time context for v16a-b.

Verse 17b contains the real point of 9:16-17, namely, that the Jews in the provinces celebrated on the 14th Adar. The rest took the form of feasting (מִשְׁחָה) and joy (שְׂמֵחָה). Chapter 9:16-17, which is discourse material, makes the point that in the provinces they celebrated the 14th Adar as the day on which to remember the victory of the Jews over their enemies. The geographical shift from the provinces to Shusan and the pre-verbal subject וְיְהוּדִים introduce a fresh unit of discourse in this section of the story. The information in v18a is old (cf. 9:6-10,13-15), and maintains a link with what has gone before (cf. Bandstra 1992:113-114). The clause states that the Jews in the city fought their enemies on the 13th and 14th Adar. This is in contrast to their fellows in the provinces who fought only on the 13th Adar. The waw-conjunction of v18b joins v18a and b. In contrast, the Jews in the city celebrated the 15th Adar as a day to remember the victory over their enemies. What we have then are two different feast days celebrating the same event. The main point of v18 is to highlight the day on which the Jews in the city celebrated the victory of Jewry over its enemies. Verse 19a starts with the causal particle עַל-כֵּן. It gives the reason for v18 grammatically, and for 9:16-17 contextually. Old information is

again given first to maintain continuity with 9:2-5, and 9:16-17. The Jews in the provinces are described as the Jews of **הפרוזים הישבים בערי הפרוזות**. The only difference with v17b is the addition of the expression 'and a good day'. It would appear, based on the discussion above that the purpose of vv16-19 is to provide the rationale for the celebration by the Jews in the provinces on the 14th Adar instead of the 15th Adar as their city counterparts did (Fox 1991:115).

Loader (1977:97-98) says that 'the principal events of division B are repeated summarily in pericope 13'.

This provides a link between pericopes 12 and 13. He continues: 'In the last place nexus also exists between pericopes 13 and 14. In this last pericope a chronicle-like conclusion formula is given. Balance is effected between Esther's prominence in section 13 and the prominence given to Mordecai in the last one [i.e. section14]'.

These remarks indicate the presence of chiasmus in pericopes 12-14 of the structure of Loader. It further makes for a link between the surface and deep structures of these pericopes.

The discussion of 9:20-10:3 which follows will make explicit the presence of chiastic-reversal in this part of the narrative as well.

The intervention of the king (9:12-14) brought about the situation in which Jewry celebrated her victory

over her enemies. This took place at two different times. It is obvious that such a situation would be untenable and would create major problems, confusion and disunity in the nation. Mordecai rectified this anomaly according to 9:20-28. The pericope narrates the authorised regularisation of the celebration of the Purim Feast as well as its origin and commemoration. The origin of the Purim Feast, according to this passage, does not come from Mordecai or any instruction given by him. It originates in the historical experience of the Jewish nation (9:26), an experience in which King Ahasuerus plays a pivotal role (9:25). Firstly, Mordecai in 9:20a sends instructions to the Jews dwelling in the provinces of the empire regarding the celebration of the Feast of Purim. The expression **אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים לַאֲלֹהֵי** points forward to 9:21-22 and not backwards to the preceding passage. This, plus the waw-consecutive, indicate the start of a new unit at 9:20. The Jews in the provinces do not celebrate Adar 15 like those in Shushan, the capital. According to 9:1-13 and 16-17a, the Jews in the capital, Shusan, and those in the provinces start to defend themselves against their enemies on the 13th day of Adar. But as a result of Esther's request, the Jews in Shusan, the capital, continue their defence on the 14th of Adar as well (9:15,18a). In contrast to this the Jews in the provinces celebrate their victory over their enemies

on the 14th day of Adar (9:17b,19). The Jews in Shushan on the other hand, celebrate the 15th day of Adar (9:18b). Mordecai writes to the Jews in the provinces (9:20-23) in order to rectify this anomaly, so that Jewry at the time, and in the future, will celebrate the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar in memory of their victory over their enemies (we can also cf. Lacocque 1999:314, without accepting all he says). This is contra Fox (1991:117-119) who maintains that Mordecai's purpose in writing was 'that each locality should observe a single day....'. But there are several objections to this view: a) The text itself says that Mordecai wrote to encourage the Jews in the provinces 'to confirm upon themselves the celebration of the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day thereof....' (ibid 1991:116); b) The writing of Mordecai is addressed specifically to the Jews in the provinces, indicating where the problem lies; c) Fox (1991:117) says that Mordecai 'seeks to make it [the celebration] a regular institution', that is, regular in the sense of a two day celebration and regular in the sense of an unbroken national celebration. According to Fox (1991:121-123) 'The duty of celebrating the holiday on two days is stated so emphatically as to sound polemic, as if a contrary view or practice is being repudiated'. I think that this is indeed the case, and the contrary view is the celebration in the provinces of Purim on the 14th only. So Mordecai's

letters (9:20) are sent to establish uniformity in the celebration of the Feast of Purim. Chapter 9:21 records the content of Mordecai's instruction, namely, that they continue to keep the 14th of Adar but now also celebrate the 15th of Adar as a feast day.

We have in 9:22 a description of the symbolism of 14 and 15 Adar, i.e. their rest from their enemies, while the month itself reminds them of the reversal of their situation (Fox 1991:118; Davis 1995:340). These days are to be days of feasting, rejoicing, sharing of gifts with each other and caring for the poor. Verse 23 forms the conclusion. It points to the obedience of the Jews in the provinces to the instructions of Mordecai. The waw-conjunction at the beginning of v23 is disjunctive in relation to v22 and v23a and b is linked via two parallel syntactic structures:

v23a אשר-החלו לעשות

v23b אשר-כתב מרדכי אליהם

In addition, the pronominal suffix ך in v23a and the pronominal suffix ם in v23b link them with each other. Furthermore, symmetry is provided by the parallelism between 9:20a and 9:23b as follows:

9:20a ויכתב מרדכי

9:23b כתב מרדכי

We therefore have in 9:20-23 the *celebration* of Purim as the dominant idea. Day (1995:160,161) states that Mordecai 'establish....the precise times Purim is to be celebrated and the feasting and the acts of benevolence to be performed'. The celebratory emphasis comes to the fore also in the vocabulary of these verses: **מיגון לשמחה, נהפך להם, נחו בהם, ומאכל ליום טוב** (v22a), and all of v22b. Mordecai's instruction seeks to ensure that there is *uniformity in the celebration* of the Feast of Purim in the capital, Shusan, and the provinces. The celebration motif and the syntax bind 9:20-23 into a close-knit unit.

The next unit deals with the key role played by the king in the origin of the Purim Feast. The unity of 9:24-26a and its centrality in the passage 9:20-28 are evident from the following: firstly, the causal particle 'for' (כִּי) links v24 to 9:20-23 and not just to 9:23. It gives the reason for the celebration authorised and regularised by Mordecai's instruction contained in his letters (9:20). But the fronting of the subject 'Haman son of Hammadat the Hagite' separates v24a from v20-23, making the latter the start of a new unit; secondly, v24b describes the plotting of Haman and v24c tells how he is to carry

out his plot. The waw-conjunction of v24c links v24c to v24a and b. The phrase **הוא הגורל** defines the antecedent **פור** and explains that **פור** means 'that which decides the fate of a person or a thing'. The use of the phrase **להמם ולאבדם** points to the complete, utter and entire destruction of the Jews, since both verbs are semantically parallel. This phrase parallels **כל-היהודים** in 9:24a. The placement of the object **פור** immediately after **והפיל** (v24c) means that the subject of v24a is implicit in v24c, namely, Haman. By means of the latter two elements symmetry is given to v24a,b, and c; thirdly, v25 is contrasted with v24 as the 'but' indicates. The temporal prepositional phrase means that at v25a we have the start of a new unit. **המלך** is the subject of the clause confirming the start of a separate unit. The king issues a decree, (**אמר עם-הספר**) which reverses (**ישוב...ראשו**) the situation of the Jews. Haman (reaching back to 7:9-10) and his sons (9:13-14) are hanged in the capital, v25b. The latter links back to v25a as the carrying out of the imperative (**ישוב**). The king's command is done. The waw-conjunction of v25b conjoins v25a and b. The written decree of the king is at the heart of the reversal of the fortunes of the Jewish nation. It is evident from this clause that the role of the king in the reversal of the Jews' circumstances is pivotal for the narrator (Davis 1995:342). Finally, 9:26a concludes



the unit with the conclusionary particle על-כן (therefore). It states that the 14th and 15th days of Adar derive their names linguistically from the word 'Pur' (על-שם הפור), but also historically from the life-situation of the Jews, a situation reversed by the decisive action of the king. As a result of the king's action the danger facing the Jews is averted. For through the action of the king, Haman's scheme is turned on his own head. According to this half-verse then the *origin* of the Feast of Purim has both linguistic as well as historical roots. Pur which normally carries the meaning of 'that which decides the fate of a thing or a person' is given a new meaning through a historical experience as Fox (1991:121) confirms by stating that '[t]he Jews take the obligations of Purim upon themselves and their descendants for two reasons: Mordecai's epistle and *their own awareness of recent events...[t]he Purim grows out of their suffering and their joy*' (my emphasis; see also Cohen 1974:87-94).

The Jews in the provinces can celebrate since Haman, the arch-enemy of the Jews, is dead because the king ensured that the plot of the arch-enemy of the Jews came to naught by acting decisively. Symmetry is given to 9:24-26a by the repetition of the causal particles כִּי in v24, and the על-כן of 26a, making v24 and v26a a closely knitted unit, with the dominant idea of the origin of the Purim Feast and the pivotal role played by the king in its origin.

In section 9:26b-28 the Purim Feast is instituted as part of the cultus of the nation. The waw-conjunction (ו) of v26c does not join v26c to v26a and b but rather joins v26c to v26b. The causal particle כִּי־עַל, moreover, points forward (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:345). A twofold rationale is now provided for what follows in vv27-28. In these verses the *cultic commemoration* of the Feast of Purim is described since '[t]he days will be commemorated everywhere for forever' (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:342,346; Fox 1991:142). Verse 26b and c gives the reason for such commemoration. According to it the reasons are: a) 9:26b the decree of the king received through Mordecai (cf. v20b,25); b) 9:26c their own personal experience (Bush 1996:484; Davis 1995:345).

A new unit starts at 9:27. The explicit subject הִיהוּדִים in post-verbal position indicates this. The verse describes the commitment made by the Jews for themselves, their descendants and all those joined to them. It is stated negatively in v27, repeated positively in v28a, and stated negatively again in v28b. Verse v27-28 more importantly describes the commemoration of the Purim feast, the celebration of which the Jews committed themselves to. It becomes a national event in the cultic calendar and faith of the Jewish nation. The vocabulary of 9:27-28 also points to the commemoration of the Purim Feast, for example: 'custom' v27, 'descendants' v27,

'celebrate... according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually' v27; 'remembered' v28, 'celebrated throughout every generation, family' v28, 'Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants' v28. Structurally, the passage can be represented as follows:

A v27b ולא יעבור להיות עשים את שני הימים האלה (n)

B v28a והימים האלה נזכרים ונעשי (p)

A v28b וימי הפורים האלה לא יעברו (n)

The structure places the remembrance and the keeping of these days centrally, thus putting the focus on the commemoration of the Purim Feast (Day 1995:162). Verses 26b-28 is a unity with the dominant idea that Purim should be perpetually remembered. On the basis of this discussion, 9:20-28 can be structured as follows:

A 9:20-23 Regularised celebration of Purim

B 9:24-26a Ahasuerus's role in the origin of
Purim

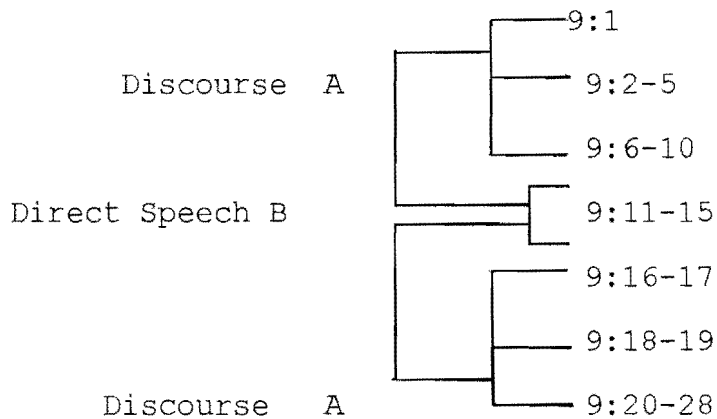
A' 9:26b-28 Commemoration of Purim

A and A' are *cultic* in nature, whereas B is *historical* in nature. The religious and the

historical are intertwined in the narrator's explanation of the origin of the Purim Feast (cf. Murphy 1981:169).

Summary

The discussion above shows clearly that chiasmic-reversal is also present in 9:20-28. Moreover, given the type of material found in this section (Fox 1991:122), its structure can be set out as follows:



The events of 9:1-10 lead to 9:1-15 and the events of 9:16-28 flow from 9:11-15.

3.2 The Power relations: Ahasuerus, Esther and Mordecai 9:29-10:3

In this part of the story (9:29-10:3) we have a repeat of the instructions regarding the keeping of the Purim Feast. This time around, however, the sending of the instructions serves a different function since it is placed in a different context

by the narrator, namely, the context of the exercise of power and authority. The passage narrates the relationship of Ahasuerus, Mordecai and Esther to each other. The concept of power is used as the key to the discussion of this relationship. The issue is the authorisation of certain activities by Ahasuerus on the one hand, and Mordecai and Esther on the other. In commenting on 8:8, in which verse the king commands both Esther and Mordecai, Day (1995:144-145,150,163-164) says '[h]e appears more authoritarian and she more under his control....the king allows Esther and Mordecai to give orders just about the Jews ("write concerning the Jews" **היהודים' על**)'. The idea of authority is present in 8:1-2, 8:7-8 and 9:28-10:3, providing a link between chapter 8 and chapter 9:28-10:3. It will further be seen that the principle of chiastic-reversal is present in this passage also.

Chapter 9:29 begins a new section. **ויאמר**, is in the initial position in the clause and the explicit subject **מרדכי היהודי...אסתר המלכה**, follows the verb. Verse 29b is linked to v29a by the fronting of a verbal complement, i.e. **ל** + Qal infinitive construct, which gives the purpose for the writing of Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew in v29a. We have a singular verb governing a composite subject, Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew, thus placing Esther and Mordecai on the same level as far as power is concerned. They act together yet individually as



the qualification **בת-אביחיל** indicates. The post-verbal position of the object **ספרים** marks v30a off as independent, but **וישלה** marks the continuation of v30a with v29.

The verb is singular, making a direct link with Mordecai the Jew of v29b. This clause (v30a) states that it was Mordecai who sent the letter, but it was written by both him and Esther (v29) to the Jews of the empire. Verse 30b is a construct plural phrase which qualifies **ספרים** in v30a, and so links v30a and b. Notice here that the adjectival phrase which qualifies **ספרים** is displaced from its normal position, that is, following the noun it qualifies, to a final position, thus drawing attention to the nature and character of the letters. Given this, it can be concluded that v30 describes Mordecai as acting independently, and that the **ספרים** sent by him was different from the 'writing' referred to in v29a. For the content of his writing is **דברי שלום ואמה** (v30b), whereas the writing of v29a concerns the **דברי הפרים האלה** (v32a). The parallelism between v29b and v31a points in the direction of the separateness of v30 and thus the independent action of Mordecai. Verse 31a repeats the purpose of the letter sent by Mordecai and Esther as the **ל** + Qal infinitive construction shows. It was to confirm the keeping of the days of Purim at their set times.

This confirmation is in keeping with the **קימו** (v31a), or the enjoining upon them by Mordecai the Jew and Esther the Queen (v29a). It is also in keeping with their previous decision to undertake to enjoin themselves and their descendants **וועקתם** **דברי הצמות** (cf. 9:27-28). The **ו** of v31a points back to v27-28, i.e. the Jews. Moreover, the nominal clause of v31b is the direct object of **קימו** of v31a. In this way v31a and b are linked. The initial position of the nominal clause describing the subject marks v32a off as the beginning a new unit. Yet it is continuous with v31 since both share the same subject, viz. Esther. The focus of v31 is the command (decree) of Esther confirming the **הפורים האלה** **דברי**, which is then recorded as a permanent record. Here we see that '[h]er writing and establishing regulations is an act of authority, for she does so in total power and strength. Esther is commanding in this narrative. And the effects of her directive extend the greatest distance, over the Jews throughout the entire kingdom' (Day 1995:163). In matters royal she is senior to Mordecai. On this issue Fuerst (1975:66), commenting on 4:17 says '[a] slight, but important touch in the narrative comes with the inversion of roles; heretofore the advisor and guide, Mordecai leaves to follow Esther's order. Did the author deliberately place together the compliance of someone powerful and dominant....?' The answer is yes (cf. Day 1995:51; also Fox 1991:91;

8:1-2).

The power relationship between Esther and Mordecai is illustrated by the diagram below:

A Esther the Queen 9:29a
 B Mordecai the Jew
 B he (Mordecai the Jew) 9:29b-31b
 B Mordecai the Jew
 A Esther the Queen
 A Esther (the Queen) 9:31c-32

Noteworthy about this diagram is the manner in which reference is made to Esther and Mordecai. She is referred to by her royal title, and he by his ethnic and national title (Bush 1996:474; Clines 1990:50).

As an inclusion it also points to Esther's dominance. The section 9:29-9:32 is dominated by decrees and letters as the various words for 'written document' demonstrate: **וּתְכַתֵּב** (v29), **אִגְרָת** (v29b), **סְפָרִים** (v30a), **וּמְאָמַר** (v32a), **וּנְכַתֵּב** (v32b). The purpose of this is to focus the attention on the power and authority of the written documents (cf. Bal 1989:77-102), or even better, the power and authority of those who stand *behind* the written documents. This is evident from the phrase **אֶת-כָּל-תְּהִלָּתָךְ** (v29a). The expression **תְּהִלָּתָךְ** is found again in 10:2a, the only two places that it appears in the narrative. The issue seems to be the *authority and power of Esther and Mordecai*, in that Esther is more powerful than Mordecai in matters royal (Bush 1996:492; Fox

1991:124-128).

Chapter 10:1 is discontinuous in relation to v32b. The post-verbal explicit subject **המלך אחשורוש** indicates the start of a new unit. Yet the **וישם** points to the continuity of this unit with the preceding section of the narrative. It describes the taxing of the 'earth' and the 'islands' by Ahasuerus. The scope of the taxation points to Ahasuerus's power and greatness (Bush 1996:495; Fox 1991:130). It also links this Chapter to Chapter One which also mentions the vast territory ruled by Ahasuerus. According to Daube (1946-47:139-147; Fox 1991:129) the tax of Chapter 10 is declared to make up for the tax the king refused from Haman in Chapter 3, thus providing a link between Chapters 10 and 3. Verse 2a commences with a waw-conjunction making it disjunctive in relation to v1. The clause discusses the deeds which express his power, strength, and might. One illustration is the act by which Ahasuerus made Mordecai great (8:15). Verse 2b is linked to 2a by the masculine plural pronominal suffix **הם**, which points back to **מעשה** and **ופרשת** of v2a. The latter is recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. Chapter 10:1 and 2 are also linked by the parallel expressions, **על-הארץ ואיי הים** (v1a) and **למלכי מדי ופרס** (v2b). This gives symmetry and 10:1 and 2 form an inclusion. The theme of 10:1 and 2 is, therefore, the power, authority and greatness of the

king.

A new unit starts at 10:3 because it has a new subject, Mordecai the Jew. The ם can be translated 'and' at this point.

Noticeable is the absence of the expression 'Esther the Queen', because previous to this the phrases 'Mordecai the Jew' and 'Esther the Queen' occurred together. This absence means that the spotlight falls on Mordecai alone. It is his standing in the Jewish nation which is discussed here. In the kingdom he may rank second (10:3a), but among the Jews he is the greatest, greater even than Esther (Day 1995:151). For although in matters of the kingdom they may share equal power, she as queen and he as premier (vizier); in matters relating to the Jews per se, Mordecai is on his own, more powerful than Esther, but not more powerful than the king, for Day (1995:150) rightly states that '[s]he, along with Mordecai, controls orders written for Jews only, not for the entire population of the kingdom' (cf. also Fox 1991:130). The terms אֲחִיו and זָרְעוֹ are not biological but ethnic terms referring to the Jews. They are synonyms for לְעַמּוֹ (v3b). Whereas Esther appears to be superior in power and authority to Mordecai in 9:29-32, here in 10:3 he is on his own; *Mordecai has unequalled power and authority* in relation to those matters affecting the Jews as a nation (Fox 1991:117).

Thus we have in 9:29-10:3 a chiastic *comparison* of the power and authority of Esther and Mordecai in relation to the king as Davis (1995:352) correctly suggests saying, '[t]he author of the book of Esther makes a contrasting interposition in 10:3 to highlight the different natures of two powerful leaders'. This comparison is expressed by means of actions they are able to take. Whereas Esther and Mordecai have relative authority, the king can act authoritatively in respect of the whole kingdom, inclusive of the Jewish nation which is of course part of the kingdom. He has absolute authority (Day 1995:352). This comparison is reflected in the arrangement of the passage set out below:

- A 9:29-32 The Power of Esther the Queen
- B 10:1-2 The Absolute Power of Ahasuerus
- A 10:3 The Power of Mordecai the Jew

Based on what was said above it is evident that 9:29-10:3 is also organised according to chiastic-reversal which dominates the story of Esther; a fact not usually noted as exemplified by Davis (1995) who finds chiasmus in the whole narrative, except 9:20-10:3.

Concluding Summary

Analysis seeks to unfold the development of the plot of a story. The models discussed in the previous and

present chapters are ample evidence of this. These models show that chiastic-reversal is a key structural principle in the Esther narrative. This chapter in particular demonstrates that chiastic-reversal is present in 1:1-2:20, 2:21-8:17, and 9:1-10:3. In these cycles of the narrative we also encounter the three main reversals in the narrative, namely, Vashti-Esther, Haman-Mordecai, and Jews-Enemies. This in turn points to the very close link between plot and narrative characters. It is not surprising therefore to find that characters are intrinsic to each of the macro-reversals which describe the turn-about of the fortunes and destiny of the main characters. Adequate attention has not, however, been given to the link of character and chiastic-reversal in Esther. Mention of it is virtually non-existent. In fact, I know of only one reference to it, that is, the comment by Berg (1979:119, note 42), who says: 'Finally, note the ironical role of Harbona, who appears in 1:10 and 7:9. [In 1:10 he] was among those sent to bring Vashti, thus beginning the series of events that led to Esther's rise. [In 7:9 he] re-appears in the narrative to suggest the means to Haman's demise. *He thereby plays his own small role in reversing the fortunes of the main characters*' (my emphasis).

Our analysis and discussion of the structure of Esther, using the Cyclical Model, demonstrate that



chiastic-reversal is intrinsic to the Esther narrative from chapter 1:1 to chapter 10:3. It further shows that a critical aspect of chiasmus in the Esther narrative is the reversal of the fortunes and destiny of the main characters, namely, Vashti-Esther, Haman-Mordecai and Jews-Enemies. Characterisation is therefore a very important part of chiastic-reversal in Esther.

This analysis and discussion support the claim of Radday (1973:6) 'that the narrative parts of Scripture are chiastically constructed; and that this claim holds....for single books'. We have a fine example of this in the Esther narrative.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF THE KING

Introduction

Literary integrity is closely bound up with characterisation. This chapter seeks to develop and examine this concept by looking at the very close link which exists between chiasmic-reversal and character in the Esther narrative.

In the previous chapter our aim was to demonstrate that chiasmic-reversal is present in the entire Esther narrative. It is the structural principle on which the whole narrative is based. In our view this has substantially been accomplished based on the synchronic reading of the narrative done in that chapter.

In this chapter we focus on the second aspect of this inseparable link, namely, character. More particularly though, we will focus on the element of character and characterisation called the **role** of the character in a story. In terms of this investigation that character is **the king**. In so focusing on the one character we attempt to address the *HOW* of chiasmic-reversal in the Esther narrative. For by means of the structural analysis we showed *that* chiasmic-reversal is basic to the whole Esther narrative. Now our focus is on *how* the chiasmic-reversal basic to the Esther

narrative takes place in the story.

Further, the how of chiastic-reversal in Esther is the result of the particular type of chiasmus we find in the narrative. The nature of this type of chiasmus is discussed below.

If there is this inseparable link between chiastic-reversal and character, and if chiastic-reversal tipifies the structure of Esther, it follows that character should be viewed against the background of the narrative as a whole. In this regard Fox (1991:153,n1) remarks, that the '[s]tudy of character, then, cannot confine itself entirely to an analysis of individual figures, but must consider the text's overall shape.' In the case of Esther, the 'overall shape' of the text is represented by the following schema:

Vashti ----- reversal ----- Esther
Haman ----- reversal ----- Mordecai
Enemies ---- reversal ----- Jews

The important feature of the shape of the Esther text is the element of reversal, as can be seen from the above diagram. But what is the nature of reversal here? We suggest it is the reversal of the position, fortune and destiny of the main characters in the story.

Following from the above, the question arises: Who

reverses the position, role, fortune and destiny of the main characters in Esther?

1. Chiasmus in the Esther narrative

To answer the question posed above, Bensusan's remarks regarding chiasmus are helpful as a starting point. He says (1988:71): '[c]hiasmus is a stylistic device expressing a contrast or a reversal of a role or a situation. It can sometimes be associated with a form of concealment which may be of a temporary nature, or delay. However the concealment technique is, almost invariably, used by authors in relation to actual events or sets of circumstances, *but a cross-over technique, known as chiasmus, is one which is usually associated with individuals or groups of people*' (my emphasis). According to Bensusan, then, chiasmus functions as reversal in the case of individuals or groups of people, that is, characters. This description of chiasmus could serve as the background for the comment of Loader (1977:102), who says: '[n]ow this same *deus ex machina* pattern, so typical of the great tradition strata of the Old Testament, is also found in the Book of Esther - but without the *deus*' (my emphasis). This pattern may be schematized:



x	y
	?
y	x

The reason for the question mark is the fact that God, who is associated with the changing of events and circumstances, is absent in the narrative. In this schema chiasmus functions as a demonstration of the absence of God. Given the theological perspective from which chiasmus is viewed by Loader, this is understandable.

I want to suggest, though, that viewed from a narrative (rather than a theological) perspective the question mark in the schema of Loader should be replaced by a narrative character. In this way the narrative character becomes the heart of the plot development in Esther (cf. Phelan 1989:9). This means that, from a narrative perspective, chiasmus is associated with people, individuals and groups, namely, with characters. This is contrary to the view of Fox (1991:159-163) who sees chiasmus and reversal primarily in terms of 'distinctive repetition of vocabulary' (my emphasis). And Boda (1996:55-70) argues that chiasm based purely on word repetition cannot be regarded as genuine chiasmus. When the passages that Fox (1991:157-162) lists are examined, however, they appear not merely to have repetitive vocabulary but are, in fact, mirroring images of each

other. On the basis of this mirroring pattern they are defined as reversals/chiasmus.

From a narrative perspective then, we suggest that chiasmus in Esther has the following schema:

x	y	
		King
y	x	

The schema makes the king the pivot of the chiastic-reversal pattern in Esther. He is the critical factor in the reversal of the roles of the main characters in the story, as McBride (1991:222, cf. also 212-213) emphasises with his remark: '....our kingpin Xerxes occupies the characterological center of the chiastic cluster Vashti-Esther / Haman-Mordecai....' Similarly, McCarty and Riley (1986:99) comment that '....the king completes the reversal when he hands over Haman's house and possessions to Esther, and bestow his signet ring, which he recovered from Haman, on Mordecai (8:1-2).'

Goldman (1990:15-31), in a section entitled 'Irony of Characterisation' refers to the ironic reversal in the characterisation of main characters like Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and even a minor character like Zeresh but nothing is said of Ahasuerus. Is this because nowhere in the narrative do we have the ironic reversal in the characterisation of Ahasuerus?

Is this not because he himself is responsible for the ironic reversal in the characterisation of the main and minor characters in the story? This is contrary to the view of Clines (1990:36) who says '[a] structural analysis, then, dealing solely with the evidence of the text, registers the text's lack of identification of a sender as a crucial distinctive of the story.' He refers of course to the use of the actant model. In our view, however, the king would be the sender in the actant model when it is applied to Esther. So, then, the role of the king in the chiasm of the narrative is that he reverses the positions, roles, destiny and fortunes of the main characters.

2. Reading from right to left: the key to chiasmus in Esther

To see the role of the king in this reversal, the narrative must be read in true Hebraic fashion, that is, from *right to left*.

By this I mean that chapters 1-8 of the story should be read from the perspective of 9:20-28. Put differently, the role of king should be viewed in the light of 9:20-28. In this regard Lacocque (1999:314) remarks: 'If, therefore, the ending in the MT is to be taken seriously, it becomes not only possible but even probable that we must reverse Clines' linear reading of Esther and start with the narrative end (Esth 9-10)....' What Okorie (1995:277) says regarding characterisation applies here as well,

namely, that '[c]haracterisation should be described in a spiral rather than a linear model, because characterisation as a process in the reader's mind does not occur linearly. New information does not always build on previous information....characterisation comes with the style of repetition. Through repetition, personages and events are caught in a finer web of reiteration. Redundancy in biblical characterisation is therefore a conscious literary device which aids in developing memory, expectation and reinforcing the thematic words and phrases' (cf. also, Alter 1982, Rhoads and Michie 1982).

It is commonly believed that 9:20-28 generally, and 9:24-26a in particular, is a summary of chapters 1-8 (Bardte 1963:390-397; Bush 1996:480; Day 1995:158; Lebram 1972:212; Lacocque 1990:312,321; Murphy 1981:169; cf. 2:18 with 9:20-22). Such a reading is therefore possible. It requires, however, a careful look at 9:20-28, which we will now undertake.

Esther 9:20-28 divides as follows (cf. Bush 1996:476-484, Murphy 1981:169):

9:20-23	Purim Regularised
9:24-26a	Origin of Purim
9:26b-28	Purim Commemorated

In 9:20-23 Mordecai instructs the Jews in the provinces, who were celebrating only 14th Adar as a feast day, to celebrate both days, that is, 14 and 15 Adar with feasting, rejoicing and sharing of gifts. In 9:26b-28 the Jews obey Mordecai and commit themselves to keeping the days as a perpetual memorial.

What is very important is the reason Mordecai gives for the celebration of Purim. This is recorded in 9:24-26a: first, a change has come about in the meaning of the word פֹּר. פֹּר which usually means 'that which decides the fate of a thing or a person', has been given a new meaning which originated in their own historical experience (cf. Fox 1991:121). פֹּר now means the reversal of the fate (destiny) which is intended for a person or thing; secondly, in this whole process which resulted in the Feast of Purim, the king played a pivotal and critical role. He foiled Haman's plot; he had Haman executed when he became aware of his plot to exterminate the Jews, so that Haman's plot recoiled upon his own head. His decree, which Mordecai merged with his own, served as a counter-decree (Bush 1996:481). These details of 9:24 indisputably point to the central role of the king. Now Bush comments that in this passage '[t]he king, then, is *made to appear* (my emphasis) as virtually the sole agent in the Jews' deliverance' (1996:481), and that by Mordecai. The question is:

Why would Mordecai find it necessary to depict the king in this way if he had, in fact, not played such a vital role in the reversal of the fate of the Jews? What motivated Mordecai to 'skillfully transform' the role of the king? The truth is, in terms of the concept of chiasmus used in the whole Esther narrative, the king does not merely appear, or is not merely made to appear by Mordecai, but is in fact the primary, pivotal and determinative agent of the deliverance of the Jews. Bensusan (1988:76-77) sees a typological significance in the seating arrangement at the second banquet and comments that 'the typological significance is that the King is seated between Esther who represents the Jewish interests and Haman who represents the anti-Semitic interests.' The king is seated in the centre as the pivotal person of the story who reverses the positions, fortunes and destiny of the characters. Concurring Bal (1991:77) points out that in the Rembrandt van Rijn portrait of 1660 the king is also seated in the middle of the two characters.

The primacy of the role of the king is also evident from the syntax of 9:25a especially. It reads **המלך** **ובבאה לפני**. The 3rd person singular feminine suffix has been variously interpreted as referring either to Esther or Haman. Bush (1996:481-482) has argued convincingly that the 3rd person singular feminine pronominal suffix refers to the plot of Haman which the king became aware of, resulting in his action to

reverse it. This understanding of the pronominal suffix depicts the king as the one who reverses the positions, fortunes and destiny of the main characters of the story. It is also affirmed by 9:25b which reads **אמר עם הספר ישוב מחשבתו הרעה**.

The type of *chiasmus* used in Esther also supports the pivotal role of the king, as argued above. McBride (1991:212-213) states that scholars make mention of two types of *chiasmus*, a symmetrical (ABBA) and a dissymmetrical (ABC-D-CBA) kind of *chiasmus*. Regarding the ABC-D-CBA type of *chiasmus*, he says that '....[a] number of critics have each in their own way pointed out that this "D" member - this dividing element, center, plane, axis - although valueless and substanceless with regard to the exchange, acts nonetheless as the "general space" of that transaction's possibility; that is to say, it acts as its "ground" (1991:212). McBride (1991:213) now concludes from this dissymmetrical concept of *chiasmus*, also found in Esther, that '[i]n the Book of Esther, King Xerxes inhabits the characterological "center" of the book's chiasm, acting as a kind of Postmaster General in absentia, presiding over the mechanical sorting and shifting of subjects and scrolls, mediating between Haman and Mordecai, Vashti and Esther [Jews and Enemies]. He mediates, however, without neutralising' (cf. also Bensusan 1988:71). We would aver, though, that in Esther the 'dividing

element, center, plane, axis' is neither valueless nor substanceless. Thus, the structure, language, syntax and the literary device of chiasmus, as shown above, demonstrate that in 9:20-28 the king has the pivotal role of reverser of the positions, fortunes and destiny of the main characters of the Esther story. He is depicted as virtually the sole deliverer of the Jews in 9:20-28.

This view is strengthened further by the fact that in the Esther narrative the king is powerless to reverse events and circumstances. For example, in 2:1 the king remembered Vashti and her dethronement but he could not reverse that event, so the search started for a replacement for Vashti; in 3:1-15 the decree for the extermination of the Jews is promulgated. Esther requesting the reversal of this is told by the king that he could not do this (8:1-8). What the king however is able to do is to reverse the position, role, fortunes and destiny of the various main characters in the narrative. Therefore, to the question: Who reverses the position, role, fortune and destiny of the characters in the Esther narrative? (cf p196), the answer is *AHASUERUS the king*.

We have established, then, the vital role of the king in the chiasmus underlying the Esther narrative on the basis of the analysis of 9:20-28. Next we look at the role of the king in each of the main cycles identified in the previous chapter.

2. The role of the king in 1:1-2:20

The backdrop for the discussion of the role of the king in 1:1-2:20 is 1:1-9. This backdrop paints a picture of the king as powerful, acting directly, and acting indirectly. To help us focus on *the role* of the king, we approach this topic from the perspective of crises in Esther, of which there is a number. We will pay careful attention to the resolution of the crises. Further, the approach is going to be descriptive and summary in nature rather than syntactic-analytical.

The cycle 1:1-2:20 divides into a number of units:

3.1 Chapter 1:1-9

The importance of this section for this cycle is summed up in the words of Claassens (1996:55) who writes: 'Die volgende drie verse word gewy aan 'n beskrywing van Jefta. Op hierdie wyse word 'n prentjie van Jefta geteken wat tersake is vir die plot van die verhaal.' It is demarcated by an inclusion as follows:

1:1b (המלך) אחשורוש; and

1:9b אחשורוש (המלך)

What is the picture of the king in this unit? The unit is an introduction, the introduction of the main

character of the story, in my view. It is not a historical introduction with the focus on chronology but it is a description of the main character in terms of a specific quality, namely, power. The power is now depicted in terms of:

- a) Geography: Ahasuerus reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces (1:1b);
- b) Position: King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Shusan the capital. The specific indication here that his throne is in the capital (that is, the center of the kingdom) is a symbol for his power (1:2b);
- c) Social power: he gave a banquet for ALL....(1:3a);
- d) Personal glory: he displayed the riches of his royal glory....the splendour of his great majesty (1:4a);
- e) Duration of the banquet: for....180 days (1:4b);
- f) The scope of the banquet: the king gave a banquet for all the people lasting seven days (1:5a);
- g) Garden description: the picture painted of the garden speaks of the power of the king (1:5b-6);
- h) Golden vessels: the fact that they were of different kinds and varieties speaks of the wealth/power of the king (1:7a);
- i) The wine: this was in plentiful supply according the hand (כִּיד) of the king (1:7b);
- j) Changing a tradition: none should be forced to drink (1:8); and

k) Feast of the women: the location of this feast is described as the palace belonging to the king (1:9).

When we put all of this together we have a picture of a very powerful king.

Another indication of the concept of power in 1:1-2:22 is the feasts, for the feasts turn out to be the setting for the interaction of power. They are the sites of power struggles.

We also have, in these verses, a picture of the king which is important for the plot of the story. We see that the king acts directly:

- a) He made (1:3);
- b) He caused the riches of his splendour to be displayed (1:4); and
- c) He made (1:5).

From these verses it is clear that he acts actively (1:3,5) and non-actively (1:4); directly and indirectly. In 1:4a we have the verb **בְּהִרְאִתּוֹ**, which is hiphil, i.e. causative, meaning he caused. Thus he acts indirectly in 1:4a as opposed to verses 1:3,5, **עָשָׂה**. So we have in 1:1-9 three pictures of the king crucial to the story: a powerful king, a king who acts directly, and a king who acts indirectly.

Another important aspect of the actions of the king, which will be a key throughout the story, is that the



king acts **כדה** (1:8a) and not **איך אנס** (1:8a). This description of how the king acts is also very important for our understanding of the first crisis, which is 1:1-2:22. The reason given in 1:8b for the statement in 1:8a is interesting. We can see, for example, in 1:2b-15 how the king acts in terms of 1:8a (**כדה**). Moreover, this little phrase is critical for understanding 1:12a and the king's handling of the incident which happens in 1:12a.

3.2 Chapter 1:10-22

The role of the king must be viewed in the light of the plot of the story. The basic plot line of the story is the reversal of the threat of death and extermination, as is reflected in the case of the king himself (2:21-23); the Jewish nation (3:1-4:17, 8:3-14); Esther (4:11, 5:1-2); and Mordecai (5:14-6:14).

In the pericope, 1:10-22, the king deals with a potential national crisis. Queen Vashti refused to obey a command issued by the king. The refusal takes place publicly in the presence of the king's provincial leaders, so creating a national crisis. The result is that Vashti is dethroned by the king. Here we encounter the first act of reversal by the king. The position, fortune and destiny of Vashti the Queen is reversed by the king via a decree, 1:21-22. The state of the throne in the kingdom has been

reversed. Previously it was filled, now it has a vacancy.

The reversing activity of the king is alluded to by Fox (1991:21-23), who writes: '[i]n order to counteract the danger presented by debar hammalkah, "the word of the queen" (v17), a debar malkut, literally, "a word of kingship", should be issued (v19).'

3.3 Chapter 2:1-4: The picture of the king.

We have in 2:1-20 a more subdued king. He is still powerful and he still acts, but now it is first indirectly and then directly, which is a reversal of the picture of him in 1:1-20, where he first acts directly, and then indirectly. Even the feast, which is described as the feast of Esther, is characterised with far less pomp and ceremony. We do not have word pictures of the king's power. The spotlight falls not on the power of the king but on the need of the kingdom: a queen must be found. So, although power and action is present, it is so in a less dramatic form. This naturally flows from the existence of a new situation, a situation in which there is no challenge to his power.

The change in the circumstances is indicated by the temporal phrase of 2:1 'after these things.' In addition there is the description of the emotional state of the king: 'the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided.' The king is further depicted in a

contemplative mood, 'he remembered.' We are allowed to see as it were what he thinks, namely, about the events of the recent past, about Vashti, what she did and what happened to her as a result. And what happened to her? She was banished, her position, fortune and destiny were reversed. But what happens to Vashti impacts on Ahasuerus as well, for now he has an empty throne. It seems to me that here in 2:1-4, as was the case in 1:9, Vashti is used as a foil to keep the spotlight on Ahasuerus. His inner contemplative and emotional state must have been reflected in his physical appearance, thus the response of the servants in 2:2-4a. In 2:4b we note that the king acted, but this was indirectly as **כִּן** **וַיַּעַשׂ** states. The king agreed to what the servants suggested and what they suggested was implemented.

So we have the picture of a less dramatically active Ahasuerus in contrast to 1:1-9. The reason for this is the considerable change in the circumstances.

3.4 Chapter 2:5-20 The role of the king

From 2:5-16 we have a detailed description of the implementation of the servants' idea to which the king agreed. In all this the king is not mentioned once as acting directly. He is acting in-directly through the servants in keeping with the picture painted of him in 2:1-4. Here we have an instance of role reversal of the king. He is a spectator until the right moment

arrives.

We have in 2:16-18 a parallel to the 1:10-12 situation:

1. Vashti was to be taken to the king 1:11;
2. Esther is now taken to the king 2:16;
3. Vashti was to come with royal regalia 1:11; and
4. Esther comes with what Hegai gave 2:15.

The scene of inaction is changed into one in which we have several direct actions (2:17-18) by the king:

1. He loved Esther more than the other women 2:17a;
2. He favoured her more than the other women
2:17a;
3. He placed the royal crown on her head 2:17b;
4. He crowned Esther in the place of Vashti 2:17b;
5. He made a great feast for all his leaders and
servants 2:18a;
6. He declared a holiday in all the provinces
2:18b; and
7. He gave gifts to all in the provinces 2:18b.

By means of these actions Ahasuerus reversed the destiny, fortune, and position of Esther. This is clear from the name of the feast, for it is called Esther's feast. She moves from virgin-Jewish maiden to Queen of the Medio-Persian Empire; from submissive daughter of her uncle Mordecai to powerful ruler with subjects under her; from unknown Jewish maiden

to important role player in the ultimate reversal of the destiny of her people.

The mood in the empire changed as well. From queenless it now has a queen; from sombre depression to joy and festivity. The mood of the kingdom has been reversed now that it has a queen again. The role reversing activity of the king is also alluded to by Bush (1996:336) who says: 'the second scene [2:5-18], continues the exposition of the story....by relating the events and circumstances by which Esther replaces Vashti....'. What Bush fails to mention of course is that Ahasuerus replaces Vashti with Esther, highlighting the role of king in the scene. The reversing activity of the king is also alluded to by Fox (1991:21-23) who writes: '[i]n order to counteract the danger presented by debar hammalkah, 'the word of the queen' (v17), a debar malkut, literally,"a word of kingship', should be issued (v19).' In this way Xerxes reverses Vashti's debar with his own debar, pointing to his characteristic role in the narrative.

Conclusion

In chapter 1:1-2:20 center stage is taken up by Ahasuerus. This center stage position is depicted via the metaphor of power. He is a powerful, central figure here and also in terms of the plot of the story too. He is the central power for he plays the role of the role-reverser. The position, fortune and

destiny of the first two main characters are permanently reversed as a result of the actions of the king.

4. The role of the king in 2:21-8:17

In this section Ahasuerus plays a number of secondary roles which all build up to his main role. These secondary roles relate to some of the characters and the plot line of the story. His main role is that of resolving the crisis in this cycle, namely, the threatened extermination decreed for the Jewish nation. We now look at these secondary roles:

4.1 Chapter 2:21-23

The role of Ahasuerus in this incident is depicted in a twofold manner:

a) He gives instructions that the alleged assassination plot be investigated, as the phrase **ויבקש הדבר** in 2:23 makes clear. The subject is not mentioned explicitly, but from the context it can be inferred that Ahasuerus ordered the investigation; and

b) He orders the hanging of Bigthan and Teresh: **על-עץ ויתלו שניהם**. Again the subject is not mentioned explicitly but the context makes it clear that the king orders both the execution and its inscription in the royal annals.

In this incident he reverses the *position* and *destiny* of Bigthan and Teresh from life to death. They fall into the hole they have dug for the king, namely, death. And from a *position of standing*, as keepers of the king's door, they now are *hanging* from a tree. The king, who was to die, now brings about the death of those who planned to kill him. His intended death is turned into life and the life is turned into death.

4.2 Chapter 3:1-6

The opening phrase of chapter 3 points to a new pericope, 'after these things'. It links directly to 2:21-23. The phrase "these things" refers to the attempt on the life of the king by Bigthan and Teresh. The promotion of Haman can be seen as an effort on the part of Ahasuerus to tighten palace security. In promoting Haman, Ahasuerus reverses two situations:

- a) A situation of inadequate security was reversed into one of tighter security; and

- b) Haman's position is reversed from that of a mere official to vizier in the kingdom. He becomes the second most powerful person in the administrative machinery of the kingdom. On another level the king's

action also moves the plot forward, and sustains the suspense in the narrative since the promotion of Haman leads to the conflict between him and Mordecai. His main action, however, remains the reversing of Haman's administrative position and of the security situation in the palace.

4.3 Chapter 3:7-4:3

The king plays a reversal role in this section. Up to this point the city of Shushan and its people have known peace and tranquility, but it is suddenly thrown into trouble, perplexity, crisis, and uncertainty (3:15, 4:1-3). The king, by his actions, has reversed a stable, quiet and peaceful situation into one of lamenting, crying, perplexity and trouble. In this way he sustains the plot line of the narrative and underscores the close link between plot and character.

Moreover, a people who have up to now lived in safety, peace, and security suddenly have their situation changed to one of insecurity and a threatened existence, all due to a decree sanctioned by the king.

4.4 Chapter 4:4-5:6

The key verses for understanding the gist of this passage are 4:8,11,16 and 5:2. The decree mandating the extermination of the Jews hangs over their heads.

Only Ahasuerus can avert the disaster about to befall them, as Mordecai makes clear to Esther. She must therefore go to him and seek his help. There is a problem, however, for no one is allowed to enter the king's throne-room without being summoned, not even the queen. So a crisis exists for the Jews. The only person able to help them is inaccessible to them. Persuaded by Mordecai, Esther decides to go to Ahasuerus despite the risk involved.

With one 'simple' action Ahasuerus reverses the crisis of inaccessibility into a hope-giving opportunity. By holding out his sceptre to Esther, Ahasuerus reverses a situation of imminent death into one of continued life. For the audience, a hopeless situation is turned into one of hope, as Esther's access to the king brings hope that the disaster facing the Jewish nation might still be averted. In addition, Ahasuerus' acceptance of Esther's invitation to the banquet adds to the hope the audience now has for the situation of the Jews. So, *inaccessibility is reversed into hopeful opportunity by Ahasuerus as he holds out the golden sceptre to Esther.*

4.5 Chapter 5:7-6:14

The first banquet ends in Haman's plan to execute Mordecai (5:14). In this way a new mini-crisis is introduced into the story. A decree of extermination hangs over the heads of the nation; Haman's death-

plan hangs over Mordecai's head. And once again the action of Ahasuerus reverses a life-threatening situation into a life-continuing situation.

The groundwork done, Haman is off to the palace to obtain royal permission to hang Mordecai. His arrival coincides with the king's question to his servants 'who is in the court'? The king is looking for someone with whom he can discuss the honouring of Mordecai. Haman is asked what is to be done to the person the king desires to honour. After giving his view, Haman is ordered to carry out in detail all that he said, but to do it to/for Mordecai the Jew. The reversing action of Ahasuerus is recorded in 6:10. In ordering Haman to carry out exactly and completely everything he has said should be done, Ahasuerus reverses:

a) Haman's plan, for instead of hanging Mordecai on his gallows, he causes him to be lifted up onto the king's horse;

b) The consequences of Haman's plan, for instead of hanging on a gallows exposed to public shame, Mordecai is paraded in the public square in honour; and

c) Mordecai's destiny, for instead of his life

being ended, Mordecai's life is preserved by

Ahasuerus.

There is another interesting reversal happening here. In 2:21-23 Mordecai saves Ahasuerus's life. Now, in 6:1-10, the situation is reversed as Ahasuerus saves Mordecai's life. Further, we have role reversals between Mordecai and Haman as well. In 4:1-3 Mordecai goes about in the city in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting the fate of his people. Now Haman runs home 'mourning and his head covered' (6:12b) as a result of Ahasuerus' decision to honour Mordecai. From the perspective of the audience the honouring of Mordecai by Haman, the archenemy of the Jews, must engender hope for a positive outcome of the crisis. The honouring of Mordecai may also be a proleptic depiction on the part of the narrator, presaging the outcome of the story on the macro-level, in which the king reverses the destiny of the Jews and their enemies. This reversal is seen in the clothing of Mordecai. He exchanges his civilian clothes for royal regalia, which shows the reversal of his position, however temporary it was.

4.6 Chapter 7:1-8:2

The next major reversing action of Ahasuerus is alluded to in 6:14. Verse 14 remarks that while Haman's counsellors and wife were still predicting his fall (6:13b), the king's servants arrive to hurry him to Esther's banquet, the banquet which turns out to be the final nail in his coffin. For in hurrying

Haman to the banquet they were hurrying him to his death, since he does not return again to his home but is hanged on the very gallows he prepared for Mordecai. Several important things are done by Ahasuerus in this incident of reversal:

- a) He sets the stage by renewing his questions / offer 7:2;
- b) He expresses his horror at what he hears 7:5;
- c) He becomes extremely angry 7:7-8a;
- d) He speaks the word, i.e. the death sentence 7:8b-10, which is the real turning point of the incident. Fox (1991:86) says that the clause translated 'the king was bent on his ruin' (7:7b) is actually passive; literally, 'the evil was completed for him from the king....This formulation suggests an impersonal working-out of Haman's fate, *with the king as the device of this process*' (my emphasis). The narrative shows the king is indeed the pivotal 'device' for the working out of the fate of all the main dramatis personae, but not in the passive manner suggested by Fox; and
- e) At this point Haman's destiny is reversed, his position is changed, **הדבר יצא מפי...חלהו עליו**. Haman's fate was sealed, Haman has finally fallen. The command of Ahasuerus completes one leg of the reversal, as the representation below indicates:

a The king's anger provoked	7:7a
b Haman's plea	7:7b
c The king returns from the garden	7:8a
d Haman falls on the couch	7:8b
e The king's reaction	7:8c
d' Haman's fate	7:8d-9a
c' The king's decree	7:9b
b' Haman is hanged	7:10a
a' The king's anger subsides	7:10b

The pivotal role of the king is highlighted by this chiastic arrangement (cf. McCarthy and Riley 1986:99; also, Fox 1991:89). With his anger pacified things are restored to normality; there is order in the kingdom again. Moreover, the hanging of Haman by the command of the king reverses the consternation, anxiety, and perplexity of chapter 3:15a and 4:1-3.

In the next unit, 8:1-2, he completes *the other leg* of the reversal by promoting Mordecai. This is recorded in 8:1b-2a. Once Mordecai is in the presence of the king because of his relationship to Esther, the king takes his signet ring **ויתנה למרדכי**. We find in this section two actions by Ahasuerus, actions by which he reverses the positions, fortunes, and destiny of Haman and Mordecai:

a) הדבר יצא מפי... תלהו עליו, and

b) ויתנה למרדכי

Fox (1991:90) describes this action as follows:
'Xerxes, reversing his action of 3:10, transfers the royal signet ring to Mordecai.' With this comment Fox acknowledges the reversing role of the king in the narrative.

In the incident of the second banquet we see Ahasuerus in his role as the one who reverses the fortunes, destiny and position of the main characters, par excellence, since this incident is the climax of the narrative.

Furthermore, the promotion of Mordecai which happens in 8:1-2, points to another twofold reversing activity of the king, characterising his role in the story. Haman's death brings about a vacancy in the premiership, similar to the vacancy brought about by Vashti's dethroning. The king fills the vacancy with his promotion of Mordecai to the position of vizier; implicit also is the change in geography for Mordecai, from the gate of the palace to the inner throne-room of the palace, from the outside to the inside. Further, when he promoted Haman in 3:1-5 it was for reasons of security in the palace, while his promotion of Mordecai will lead to a sense of security for the Jews even though the threat still hangs over their heads.

4.7 Chapter 8:3-17

At the beginning of this chapter (1:1-9) we pointed out that the king acts directly (1:3,5) and indirectly (1:4); and we saw how this happened in the de-thronement of Vashti and the enthronement of Esther. In the present section we have the same phenomenon. In 7:1-8:2 Ahasuerus acts directly as he gives orders for Haman to be hanged, hands over his property to Esther, and gives Mordecai authority as vizier in Haman's place.

Now, however, he acts indirectly (8:3-8:14) in causing a counter decree to be published which empowers the Jews to defend themselves. The involvement of Ahasuerus in the production of the decree is interestingly recorded by the narrator:

a) 8:8 'You write', he tells Esther and Mordecai (i.e. use the authority I have already given to you). Authority was given to Esther when the king handed Haman's property to her, apart from the fact that she is queen; and to Mordecai, since he has the king's signet ring;

b) 8:10 and he wrote in the name of the king and sealed it with the king's ring. The narrator is at pains to point out that the king stands behind the decree; and

c) 8:11 'the king granted the Jews....', suggesting

that the power of the king stood behind the acts of defence by the Jews. In this way we see Ahasuerus 'reversing' the first decree published in his name by a second one also published in his name. In doing this, he potentially reversed a disastrous situation for the Jews, fulfilling his role as the reverser of the position, destiny, and fortunes of a nations in this case.

At the beginning of the narrative (chapters 3-4), Ahasuerus, via his promotion of Haman, reverses a situation of peace, safety and security into one of anxiety, perplexity and national crisis for the Jews. Now, because of his promotion of Mordecai (8:2,15-17), he brings about a situation of joy, gladness, and feasting in the capital and the provinces. Verse 15 indicates that Ahasuerus installed Mordecai officially as the new vizier of the empire. So we see that even in the outworking of his actions and decisions, Ahasuerus plays the role of the reverser of the position, fortune, and destiny of the characters of the narrative.

The reversing activity of Ahasuerus is evident in chapter 8 from a different perspective. In 8:3-4, just as in 5:1-4, the king holds out the sceptre to Esther. In 8:3-4, however, Esther lies at the feet of the king when he holds out the sceptre. The holding out of the sceptre results in her rising from her



fallen position to an upright position before the king. In this way the narrator symbolises the impending reversal of the position of the Jews through the intervention of the king (cf. 8:5b,10,11).

Although the king is in the background throughout 8:1-17, he comes to the fore at key moments; and nothing happens without his permission and involvement, affirming once again his pivotal role in the reversal of the fortunes of the characters.

5. The Role of the king in 9:1-10:3

5.1 Chapter 9:1-4

The picture we have of the king in vv 1-4 is one in which he acts indirectly. Several statements point to this:

9:1c 'when the king's command and his order came to be done';

9:2 'in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus';

9:3b 'the business which was to the king'; and

9:4a 'Mordecai was great in the king's house.' Behind the activities of the kingdom stands the king. He is described here as acting indirectly, as was the case in 1:4. This indirect presence is the result of the nature of these verses, namely, it is a report and not discourse.

We have in verse 1 a parenthesis from 9:1b-d, since 9:1a links logically and directly to 9:1e to read

thus: 'And in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day in it (i.e. the month of Adar),they ruled the Jews over the ones hating them.' The parenthesis has this important phrase 'and was overthrown / turned around it', the it referring to the day. The day was reversed from one in which the enemies of the Jews were to overpower them to one in which they overpowered their enemies. The verse does not say how the day was turned around. But 9:22-26 will make this clear, namely, that it was the king. So we have here an indirect reference to the reversing role of the king.

5.2 Chapter 9:11-14

The nature of this section is in the form of a dialogue between Esther and the king. The dialogue is introduced by a report, 9:11. The king's speech is recorded in 9:12, and Esther's reply in 9:13, and the action of the king is recorded in 9:14a. The conclusion is 9:14b-15. This can be represented as follows:

A descriptive introduction	9:11
B king's speech	9:12
C Esther's reply	9:13
B king's action	9:14a
A descriptive epilogue	9:14b-15.

The king acts directly for or on behalf of the Jews; for the first time he is taking sides. The king has

Haman's sons gibbeted in the same way he gibbeted Haman. This may be an attempt by the narrator to emphasise the fact that it was the king who was responsible for the demise of Haman. The king reversed Haman's situation from one with a future: having 10 sons (children), to one without a future: having no children. The situation of Haman's wife is also reversed from one of security: she has a husband, sons, family, to one of insecurity, vulnerability and no future. Herein we have perhaps the answer to the question: Why gibbet the dead sons of Haman? The answer: to show the utter destruction of Haman.

5.3 Chapter 9:22b-25

In this pericope we have the most definitive description of the role of the king in Esther. It is a historical note which describes the reversing action of the king.

The first reference to the reversing activity of the king is the syntax of 9:22b. It reads: 'and the month which was turned to them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day'. The verb נהפך is passive, i.e. niph'al stem. The subject of the verb as is clear from the context is the decree of the king. Consequently, it was the king who turned their sorrow into joy and their mourning into a good day. He reverses their sorrow to joy, their mourning to feasting.

The second reference to the reversing activity of the king in this pericope comes from 9:24-25, which constitute the reason for vv22-23. It gives the reason for the change of their sorrow to joy, and their mourning to gladness. The 3 person feminine pronominal suffix of **וּבָאָהּ** refers to the decree of Haman as we showed in chapter 4. The result is the counter-decree of the king in which Haman's plot is reversed, as 9:25b states.

Once again we see that the role of the king in Esther is one of reversing the position, fortune and destiny of the main characters of the narrative.

5.4 Chapter 10:1-2a + 3

We have, as it were, a self-characterisation by Ahasuerus in 10:1-2, by virtue of two acts ascribed to him: 10:1 he taxes land and sea; 10:2 he, by his promotion of Mordecai to vizier, makes Mordecai great. The acts recorded in 10:2a are described as 'all the acts of his authority and of his might.' We have a picture in these verses of Ahasuerus as a powerful king, just as he is pictured in 1:1-9.

The other aspect of the picture of the king is in verse 3, which reads, 'For Mordecai the Jew was next to the king....' (my emphasis). This is a characterisation of the powerful position and status of the king. First Ahasuerus and next Mordecai. Thus the powerful depiction of Ahasuerus we have in 1:1-9

the powerful depiction of Ahasuerus we have in 1:1-9 is continued here in 10:1-3, providing symmetry to the narrative as a whole. Below, we now see the purpose of this depiction of the king as a powerful figure.

5.5 Chapter 10:2b-3

Chapter 10:2 has the following statement regarding Mordecai: 'Mordecai whom he made great the king'. The statement is an allusion to 8:1-2,15 as well as 3:1. It further contrasts the action of the king in 3:1, which action of the king leads to the threat of annihilation of the Jews. The statement of 10:2 therefore records, in an indirect manner, the king's reversal of the previous action and situation. In this way the statement of 10:2 is more than just a reference to the power of the king. It directs attention to his pivotal role in the Esther narrative, namely, reversing the positions, fortunes and destinies of the main characters of Esther.

CONCLUSION

Characterisation plays an important part in narrative integrity. We have sought to show this by taking one element of characterisation, namely, the role of a character, as this is developed in the narrative as a



of the king in Esther on the basis of the chiasmic-reversal which underlies Esther, we have been able to affirm that narrative integrity and characterisation are closely linked to each other. This means narrative coherence can be traced back to a single character in a story, which is the case in Esther. Henry James is well known for the dictum 'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' (Brown 1996:5). This dictum is nowhere truer than in Esther as this discussion of the role of king Ahasuerus has shown.

CHAPTER SIX

The Portrayal of the King

Introduction

Characterisation per se has received little attention in Esther studies, presumably because the author is not interested in characterisation. Moore(1983:Iiii), for example, maintains that the narrator's 'emphasis was not on plot and action, not character or personality. Thus, more often than not he simply states what was said or done....without saying why or how....' (see also Anderson 1984:831; Gordis 1973:45).

Now the fact that the narrator does not deal with the 'why or how....' of the actions of characters, hardly means he is not emphasising character, only that he does not make clear the motives and other psychological details of the character. This is not the main part of characterisation in O T literature anyway, as is pointed out by Jonker (1995:130) who says: 'one will have to be forewarned, however, that biblical narratives show far less interest in the psychological aspects of characters than their modern narratives do. In biblical narratives the characters serve the plot/story line; they are seldom employed in the narrative for the purpose of fixing the attention on the characters themselves.' About the

Barkhuizen (1988:56) says: 'die figure ontstaan en [word] opgebou uit 'n wisselwerking tussen vertelsituasie and vertelde situasie.' Concurring, Bowman (1995:290) comments: 'A character cannot be portrayed apart from events involving that character, and the events that involve a character cannot be separated from a depiction of the character' (cf. also Day 1995:19). It also belies the numerous studies in recent years on characterisation in Esther of which Day (1995) is but one example.

We contend that characterisation is vital in the discussion of the integrity of Esther since there is a very close *link between characterisation and narrative integrity*. In fact, it is one of my main contentions that narrative integrity can be accounted for in terms of characterisation.

In the present chapter we give attention to this literary device. Character can be a key to the integrity of a narrative, and Speiser (1981:203) reminds us about this when he remarks concerning the Isaac stories that: '[t]he section groups together several episodes in the life of Isaac, a *further unifying factor being the presence of Abimelech of Gerar*' (my emphasis), (cf. also Brown 1996:60,115; Okorie 1975:274;). Whybray (1991:67,138; cf. also Brown 1996:21) similarly comments with respect to the Pentateuch and the Exodus story that, '[f]rom the literary point of view it is clear that it is *the*

and gives it a focus....[t]he *figure of Moses* which dominates the whole work from Exodus on and *gives these books their literary and religious unity....'* (my emphasis). These remarks affirm the close link between characterisation and narrative integrity. We believe such to be the case also in Esther, as the following example makes clear. We have only two places in Esther in which the name AHASUERUS appears without any addition or modification, i.e. 1:1 and 9:30. The construction of the clauses is also similar:

1:1 אהשורוש הוא אהשורוש
המלך מהרו ועד-כוש שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה
9:30 אל-שבע ועשרים ומאה מדינה
מלכות אהשורוש

We have here symmetry as a result of the inclusion of 1:1 and 9:30, showing the inseparable link between character and narrative integrity.

Of equal interest are 3:1 and 10:2b, in which are recorded the promotion of Haman and Mordecai respectively, by the king. Again we have a very similar construction:

3:1 גדל המלך אחשורוש

אח־המן

10:2a מרדכי

אשר גדלו המלך

Once again the inclusion indicates the link between character and narrative integrity. Consequently, attention is given to the characterisation of the king, who holds the main cycles together and provides the integrity of the narrative.

1. Characterisation in Narratology

There is a great deal of disagreement about characterisation as the comment above by Moore shows. But what is characterisation? A M Okorie defines it as 'the technique by which the author fashions a convincing portrait of a person within a more or less unified piece of writing' (1995:274), and the author does this in several ways:

a) by investing the character 'with an attribute or set of attributes, [the latter are] traits which correspond to verbal and non-verbal actions' (1995:275). Concurring, Bowman (1995:30) states that '[in] biblical literature character is revealed in four ways:

1. through the character's own actions and his/her interaction with other characters;
2. through the character's own speeches;

3. through the speeches of other characters about a specific character; and
4. through the narrator's specific comments about the a character.'

The fourth way is the most authoritative assessment of a character (see also Schutte 1989:63).

According to Grabe (Schutte 1989:63) 'Sodra spesifieke karaktereienskappe aan akteurs toegeken word, promoveer hulle van karakters in die storie na personasies of karakters in die verhaal. In artistieke verhale word die hoof karakter of karakters gewoonlik as redelik volledige en gekompliseerde mense uitgebeeld met 'n vermening van slegte en goeie eienskappe.' Characters are shaped, therefore, through the attribution of traits to personages in the story by the author.

b) by showing and telling. 'In showing the author presents the character of his characters in actantial function while leaving the reader to infer the various motives or dispositions that are behind the characters' roles. In telling characterisation the author personally intervenes to expound the motives and dispositions of the actants' (Okorie 1995:275).

c) by depicting the character as either flat or round. 'Flat characters, also known as type or two-

single idea or quality and are presented in outline without much individualising detail. A round character, by contrast, is complex in temperament and motivation (and thus difficult to describe) and capable of surprising the readers' (Okorie 1995:275). Since all characters do not function in exactly the same way in a narrative, different *types of characters* need to be identified and for this purpose the following methods are used:

1. simple method: flat and round characters.
2. static and dynamic characters.
3. fully fledged characters, types and agents.
4. actant model (see Schutte, 1989).

d) by the 'process of naming' (Okorie 1995:276). With round characters, characterisation takes on the process of naming. According to Okorie this means: 'the reader is led to name the character with more precision' (1995:276). This process of naming is dependent on whether the character is 'dynamic, [i. e. the] character is developed because he changes and grows while the reader watches'; [on the other hand] 'a static round character is revealed by the author. The character never changes, but the reader's

him gradually. The process of naming a static, round character is, as it were, a revelation of a name whose meaning the reader already knows. The process of naming a developing, round character, has the note of mystery for the reader can only name him provisionally step by step until the end' (Okorie 1995:276). Given this rather broad, diverse and complex description of characterisation, it is rather strange how the one dimensional description of, especially Ahasuerus, has dominated Esther studies.

2. Evaluating past characterisations of the king

We have pointed to the very close link which exists between characterisation and narrative integrity. Because the portrayal of the king has an important bearing on the narrative unity of Esther, traditional descriptions of the character of the king are also surveyed here.

2.1 Wisdom Tradition and Characterisation in Esther

When we come to the matter of characterisation in the Esther narrative, one meets with a surprising consensus, a consensus which revolves around the idea of characterising the dramatis personae of Esther on the basis of the Wisdom Tradition. So Loader (1977:103, cf. also Talmon 1963:440-452), for example, finds the following wisdom themes in Esther: a) 'the power of the king is dangerous'; b) 'the

time'; c) 'the folly of loquacity, anger and hatred....found in Haman'; d) 'the reversal motif'; e) 'the king drinking with his courtiers'; f) the 'hubris' displayed by Haman. For these themes references are given in both Proverbs and Qoheleth resulting in the conclusion that '....many similarities can be demonstrated....between the Book of Esther and general wisdom literature.' Because of these similarities the dramatis personae in Esther have been characterised in terms of the Wisdom Tradition. Thus, we are told, the king represents the dumb fool of Proverbs because:

- a) he does not know what is going on,
 - b) he is slow in getting to know what is going on.
- Esther and Mordecai, on the other hand, are the sages of Proverbs who act wisely.

In the same vein Schutte (1989:64-79) contends that the king is 'die personifikasie van die tradisionele "dwase koning" soos wat dit in die wysheidsliteratuur, en veral in die boek van Spreuke, bekend staan. Regdeur die verhaal vertoon hy 'n ongelooflike domheid [because]: a) [d]ie koning word maklik deur sy onderdane gemanipuleer (1:15); b) Hy is maklik beïnvloedbaar; c) Hy word maklik omgekoop (3:10)...; d) hy neem omtrent almal se raad (1:21; 2:4; 6:10); e) sy daad is onnadenkend en impulsief....; f) Hy word ook gou kwaad (1:12; 7:7); g) Hy tree voortvarend op (5:5); h) hy veroordeel 'n

nie (7:9). Die hele vertelling is daarop ingestel om hom te teken as die dwase koning' (cf. also Berg 1977:59-63,70,73,74,78).

This consensus, in my view, is the result of the undue influence accorded the Wisdom Tradition over the last three decades.

The main reason for the dominating influence of the Wisdom Tradition on characterisation in Esther has been the work of Talmon (1963:419-455). He characterised the story of Esther as a 'historicized wisdom tale' (cf. also Loader 1977:102). By doing this he hoped to provide a solution to the historical critical difficulties identified by scholars regarding the composition of Esther as well as the short-comings of certain literary solutions proposed to overcome the difficulties (Talmon 1963:419-428).

He says in fact '[t]he proposed recognition of a wisdom-nucleus in the Esther narrative may help us better to understand some salient features of the canonical book which scholars often view with perplexity, even with consternation' (ibid. 1963:427). He points to the following as indications of the wisdom-nucleus in Esther:

1. The lack of Jewish religiosity in the book;
2. The idea of a remote deity who lacks an individual personality;
3. Absence of any mention of Jewish history in the

Failure to mention a link between Jewry in Susa with Jewry outside Persia, or more specifically outside Susa;

5. The lack of a social setting and the preoccupation of the author with the characters as individuals;

6. The typological approach of the author;

7. The one-dimensional depiction of the main characters; and

8. The link between Esther and comparable literature (ibid. 1963:427-453).

Now Crenshaw (1969:129-142) develops a methodology for determining wisdom influence on non-chokmatic literature. The method comprises five principles:

1. The matter of definition. First there should be a definition of the movement, that is Wisdom School Tradition and then the definition should not be too inclusive so that everything is wisdom, nor should it be too narrow so that it excludes salient traits of wisdom. Talmon errs in the latter respect (cf. Brown 1996:4; Crenshaw 1969:130-131; Talmon 1963:426);

2. Wisdom themes must be ideologically and stylistically particular to wisdom literature and not part of the common stock of the society (1969:132);

3. Differences in the nuance of words and phrases must be explained (1969:133). Though Talmon gives numerous references from Proverbs and Qoheleth, he

in meaning between the words and phrases as used in Esther and the quoted wisdom literature. For Murphy (1981:138, cf. also Crenshaw 1969:130,) remarks that 'wisdom language does not constitute wisdom';

4. Account for the negative attitude to wisdom in the Old Testament (1969:134). For example, although Mordecai is characterised as the paragon of wisdom by Talmon (1963:447-448), yet because of his obstinate refusal to obey a command of the king (3:1-6) he endangers the existence of the whole nation. So Edwards (1989:34-35) comments 'I maintain very strongly that this refusal [of a *political* command], by a king's subject, placed not only *that* subject at risk....but that this act...also endangered the lives of Mordecai's fellow Jews and risked the possible future proscription of the Jewish faith' (emphasis original); and

5. Take into account the history of wisdom (1969:135; cf. also Brown 1996:151). The point here is that one must consider the stage in the development of wisdom into which the wisdom one deals with, falls. Commenting on the concepts of the wise and the fool, Spangenberg (1992:25) states that this typology of fool and wise fits the phase of the wisdom movement called the phase of 'inflexibility, [a phase which] no longer describes deeds, but types of people and....[h]ere it is no longer *what* you do and *when* you do it, but *who* you are. When you compare only a

Ecclesiastes....it is clear that the writers of these books protest against these oversimplified and rigid views' (emphasis his).

Talmon's effort in determining the wisdom-nucleus in Esther fails in respect of all five principles above, making his description of Esther as a historised wisdom tale, debatable to say the least.

Loader also claims that the dramatis personae in Esther can be characterised in terms of the 'one-dimensional depiction of character types typical of wisdom literature' (Loader 1977:103, Talmon 1963:440). This view is, however, problematical. It is to be questioned that wisdom literature in general depicts characters in a one dimensional manner, for if there is no 'continuing wisdom tradition', and no 'common definition of the term wisdom' which the wisdom writers are presumed to have had in common (Whybray 1991:227-228), on what grounds can it then be said that wisdom literature in general depicts characters one dimensionally as fools or as wise? The most one could say is that this holds true for Proverbs and to a limited extent for Qoheleth, but that this is true for the wisdom literature as a whole, is debatable. Furthermore, a close reading of the narrative shows that the single trait description of the king is too simplistic. While some of the behaviours of the king accords with that of the fool, others fit the description of the

simplistic fool-wise categorisation (cf. Buzzell 1995:333-338; Hogland 1995:339-352; Ogden 1994:331-340; Woodcock 1995:111-124).

The problem of this genre approach to characterisation is also evident from Schutte's (1989:78) comment regarding Bigthan and Teresh, namely, 'Hulle twee verskyn net vir 'n oomblik op die toneel, vervul hulle funksie en verdwyn dan weer.'

Yet in terms of the genre approach, to which Schutte subscribes, Bigthan and Teresh should be classified as fools on the basis of Proverbs 10:20 (see Ogden 1994:340), but he does not do this. Why not?

Also, this wisdom reading of character in Esther fails to see the link between reversal and character, resulting in the stereotyped treatment of the Esther characters generally and Ahasuerus specifically.

The inadequacy of characterisation solely in terms of the Wisdom Tradition is indicated by Humphreys (1973:215) who says, regarding Haman, that: '[t]here is a degree of complexity in the characterisation of Haman. A *cool control and cleverness* is displayed in the careful presentation of his plot. However, these qualities are overshadowed and destroyed by his *blind hatred* of Mordecai....' (my emphasis).

About Talmon's attempt (1963:419-455) to apply wisdom categories to Esther Murphy (1981:154) remarks: 'His analysis incorporates new insights, but whether this evidence really determines the genre [i.e. that

implication is that wisdomised characterisation is also questionable.

Crenshaw's verdict (1969:141) that 'it is difficult to conceive of a book more alien to wisdom literature than Esther', which is a response to Talmon's attempt to find a wisdom-nucleus in Esther might be too negative. For Brown (1996:20-21), in a groundbreaking study, states that '[a]lthough biblical wisdom is not narrative by nature, it must be acknowledged that the corpus is not without its narrational dimensions....[w]ith the exception of Job, the wisdom corpus does not exhibit the standard features that are constitutive of the *genre* of narrative. Yet their narrational dimensions cohere with the language of the developing self and the formation of character [so that] the idea of character constitutes the unifying theme and center of the wisdom literature, whose *raison d'etre* is to profile ethical character.'

Now, Brown and Crenshaw work with similar definitions of wisdom. Crenshaw (1969:132) states that '[w]isdom, then, may be defined as the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator.' Brown does not give a definition of wisdom per se, but at least two of the comments he makes can be taken to constitute a definition of wisdom. He writes (1996:3,4), '[w]isdom begins and ends with the self, in recognition that

knowledge....[T]he goal of biblical wisdom lies in the literature's focus on the developing self in relation to the perceived world....'. Given this similarity Brown's study opens the possibility for a less negative view of the influence of wisdom in a non-chromatic book like Esther. The matter of procedure, however, must receive adequate attention. On the basis of the work done by Brown it is clear that the first step is to determine the profile of character(s) in the specific wisdom literature and thereafter the attempt to draw lines and conclusions regarding the chromatic nature of non-chromatic literature in question. Only then will the problem alluded to by Brown (1996:18-19) be avoided, when he remarks '[i]t is a reductive mistake to identify that which shapes character as a specific genre, let alone the only genre [because] there are countless factors and diverse "genres" that can make moral conduct intelligible and shape the capacity for intentional action: legal codes, sermons, moral principles, liturgical traditions, words of insight, and predictions of social consequences.' In other words a variety of genre shapes and have an influence on character and a genre approach ought to take this into account.

2.2 Irony and Satire and Characterisation in Esther

The other major approach to the characterisation of

the literary devices of satire and irony. This is particularly notable in interpretations of Esther in the last ten years.

When we discussed characterisation in terms of wisdom traits we noted Crenshaw's five methodological principles for determining a wisdom-nucleus in Esther. The first was that of definition, and it is this criterion we will use to discuss attempt at satiric and ironic characterisation in Esther. The focus will be on the literary definition and understanding of 'satire' and 'irony'.

Satiric and ironic descriptions of the characters in Esther are obviously literary descriptions. It follows consequently, that the concepts of satire and irony should be literarily informed. So we look at the literary description of the terms satire and irony.

The first thing to note is that satire and irony assume a relationship between literature and society. The relationship is one in which both the satirist and ironist seek to bring about or facilitate *change* in the society. The change can happen in the society generally, within individuals themselves, or both.

In addition, both literary devices deal with the concrete world, i.e. with humans in relation to themselves, others, deities, and things, as well as facts and opinions (Johl 1988:51, van Zyl 1990:116, Weisberger 1970:170).

from that of the ironist. The satirist attacks the concrete situation and exposes it as something opposed to an ideal or the ideal, norm or standard which should obtain and in this way seeks to motivate/mobilise people to restore the absolute standard or norm.

The ironist, on the other hand, seeks to create doubt in the mind of the audience. He is a skeptic and questions the status quo, insinuating that the way things are is not the way they should be; he does not say how things ought to be either, thus leaving it up to the individual or the society to search and find out what is supposed to be and to change the existent reality to reflect the way things ought to be. Irony therefore mobilises people to go on a search for the truth in order to find the truth which is best for them.

Another aspect is the sharing of some common values between satirist, ironist and the society as well as the possession of some intellectual sophistication on the part of the society to grasp, understand, and engage both satire and irony.

We now look at some definitions of satire and irony.

2.2.1 Weiserger (1970:170-171) says that '[t]he satirist attacks the reverse of the norm he wishes to impart....Satirists say that p is false, from which the reader is to conclude that not p is

the reality attacked.' This means that satire operates with black and white categories and wants to change the world so the black is replaced by white, as it were. On the other hand, '[t]he ironist states something different from his intended message....irony states that p (surface meaning) is pretendedly true but is qualified or contradicted by q (hidden meaning). So what is actually true? [I]rony....casts doubt on everything. [In irony] the deal is different from the the reality being questioned; besides it requires further knowledge of the context as well as a greater sophistication.'

2.2.2 van Zyl (1990:115) maintains that there is much confusion regarding the term irony and therefore, despite the seeming presumptuousness of outlining the essential nature of irony, it must be attempted. Irony, according to van Zyl '....is die evaluerende enigsins skeptiese, maar tog versoenende en aanvarende reaksie van die gevoelige mense op die waarneming van menslike beperktheid en van die onoplosbare meestal tragikomediesel ewensteinstrydighede.' Rather, a distinction is drawn between primary (as above) and secondary irony. The latter is an external verbalisation of primary irony. Vital to the concept irony is the presence of a 'basiese, onoplosbare kontradiksie....'(1990:116).

Johl (1988:44) describes literary irony as '....'n dualiteit waarvolgens dit wat op een vlak

in 'n proses waartydens die oëskynlike op 'n ander vlak genegativeer word tot die dialektiese teengestelde daarvan....'. This corresponds to van Zyl's concept of primary irony.

We will now use this background to look at attempts to interpret Esther satirically and ironically.

Goldman (1990:15-31), in *Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther*, maintains that the Scroll of Esther has been read to date primarily as 'a story of plot reversal' (1990:15). The "ironic reversals" [however] go beyond plot movement' (1990:15). They serve:

- 1.'as a tenable model for survival in the Diaspora;
2. [To] offer insight into how irony function as a narrative device; and
3. [And] how irony functions as ethical value in the story' (1990:16).

Goldman utilizes Good's definition of irony which conceives of irony as 'an incongruity between what is and what ought to be that is transmitted via either *overstatement or understatement....*' (Goldman 1990:29 n12, but cf. van Zyl 1990:116 who describes this as secondary irony) (my emphasis).

Irony, as defined above, Goldman believes, helps resolve the problem of assimilation and maintenance of identity in the Diaspora, as well as the vexed ethical problem of the Jews' slaughter of defenceless

conception of irony is subject to two weaknesses:

1. Irony as described here is in fact secondary irony and not of the essence of irony, as van Zyl (1990:115) says: '[v]erder word ook nie altyd onderskei tussen die letterkundige of ander geverbaliseerde uitings wat as ironies of ironies gekleurd beskou kan word en die wat bloot berus op stylfigure soos onderbeklemtoning of antifrase....'. Thus according to van Zyl the idea of irony here is not literary. The weakness then of Goldman's attempt is that a fundamentally non-literary concept of irony is used to read a literary work. Again van Zyl (1990:116, cf. also Johl 1988:44) says of secondary irony that it 'berus op 'n oënskynlike diskrepansie tussen twee elemente....Daar is dus in hierdie soort uiting 'n kontras of teenstelling teenwoordig, maar geen basiese, onoplosbare kontradiksie soos by die primêre ironie nie'; and

2. It actually does what irony is not able to do, that is, provide solutions to the incongruity /contradictions in the narrative as the comment of Goldman (1990:27) intimates: 'The reader passes judgement, however, by being forced to question, to criticize, and finally, to formulate a recomprehension of Jewish survival in the Diaspora in its inhumanity and its humanity.' But in true irony

Zyl (1990:116) says, '[v]ir die onoplosbare teenstrydighede van die menslike bestaan-waarop die ironie 'n reaksie is - is daar geen korrektief nie'; which is different from the way Goldman use irony in his reading of Esther. Concurring, Johl (1990:53) states that '[b]y ironie geld geen *voorskrif* (my emphasis) nie....'. The main point to be noted here is that irony as defined by Good and used by Goldman is secondary irony and not genuine literary irony. Thus one can only speak of *traits* of irony in Esther and that Esther is not genuine irony. As a genre approach to characterisation in Esther this ironic approach suffers from the same weakness identified by Crenshaw (1969:129-142) regarding the determining of a wisdom-nucleus in Esther.

James Williams (1982:81) describes Esther as 'a satiric nationalistic fiction with comic elements.' Consequently he reads the narrative satirically and ironically and says: '[i]n the events that lead *ironically* (my emphasis) to the rewarding of Mordecai, [and] the hanging of the malicious intriguer Haman....'. Again (1990:80) '[p]ermission is granted, and thus begins the heart of the *satire* (my emphasis) in which Haman is finally hanged on the gallows that he erected for Mordecai.' Now apart from the fact that Williams suffers from the same weaknesses as Goldman and is also subject to the

satire and irony here, precisely the problem identified by van Zyl who remarks '[d]ie ironie en die satire word dikwels verwar, waarskynlik omdat lg. dikwels gebruik maak van indirekte taalmiddele, wat verkeerdelik as ironie bestempel word. Meuke (1980:5) wys daarop dat daar geen essensiële verband tussen die twee bestaan nie....'. Thus Williams's attempt suffers the same fate as that of Goldman. Further, Williams' concept of satire and irony does not differ much from the wisdom genre given his seeing satire and irony in terms of reversal primarily.

Brenner (1994:38-55) does a satiric-ironic reading of Ahasuerus among other foreign rulers found in the Hebrew Bible. He does this under the umbrella concept of *humour*. According to him this satiric-ironic/humourist reading in the final analysis 'serves endurance and acceptance, that is, passive resistance; but it also facilitates rebellion against its unworthy subverted object, that is, active resistance to an oppressive Other' (Brenner 1994:51). Brenner (1994:38,41,43) says of humour that it '....is primarily associated with playfulness, joy, and lightheartedness...[i]n short, humour and wit are tools for *shaping opinion* and for *changing attitudes*.' More specifically he writes: 'Biblical humour....consists less of joyous or non-tendentious, unconscious joking and more of wilful and angry

other disparaging sentiments....Hence biblical *humour* mostly assumes the literary forms of satire, parody, irony, (which is not always humorous), grotesque presentations, burlesque and dark comedy....biblical humour....is of a contentious/subversive kind. It undermines convention and authority....It is born of anger and frustration, and it carries a sting...Humour consists in the way that *incongruity* is suddenly recognised, and the recognition will extend to the cultural or physical norms that are breached' (my emphasis).

The relevant terms in this description of humour are the words and phrases, shaping opinions, changing attitudes, literary forms of satire and irony, and incongruity. It is this terminology that gives humour a literary orientation, and therefore the possibility of applying it to biblical literature as well. But from a *literary* point of view humour as applied to the Esther story by Brenner has some weaknesses, as follows:

1. Confusion of terms and categories. Humour is described as an umbrella term for satire and irony, in that it 'assumes the forms of satire and irony.' Then it is placed on the same plane as secondary irony when Brenner says 'humour consists in the way that incongruity is suddenly recognised.' In fact, at one point there seems to be an identification of



this satiric configuration is a double-edged sword....'. This lack of clarity weakens the humoristic reading of Esther by Brenner as a truly literary reading (cf. van Zyl 1990:115-117);

2. Brenner believes humour to be a literary device, but fails to define it literarily. He offers a Freudian psychoanalytical description as is clear from the statement that '[o]ne would do well, I think, to consult Freud on the function of such humour, which is the release of social aggression that, simultaneously, exposes this same aggression.' This compounds the lack of clarity referred to above. And it is to be questioned that a psychoanalytical understanding of humour is adequate for a literary reading of Esther; and

3. Brenner (1994:51) sees the purpose of humour as serving 'endurance and acceptance, that is, passive resistance; but also it facilitates rebellion against its unworthy subverted object, that is, active resistance to an oppressive Other' This gives to humour a very aggressive and active shape. But van Zyl (1990:117) says Johl gives a more cold, objective slant to irony 'waardeur hy dit [ironie] onderskei van die humour wat "meer verdraagsaam as korrektief ingestel (is)" (my emphasis).'

is conceived of by Brenner, and this is the result of starting with a psychoanalytical definition of humour instead of a literary description of humour.

We have briefly surveyed attempts at profiling the characters of Esther on the basis of the literary devices of satire and irony. Although they provide very interesting insights and present rather different results they fail not only on the basis of literary considerations but also because the important inseparable link of character and chiasmic-reversal is not given attention in this attempt to find a satiric-ironic nucleus in the Esther story. It is also subject to the same criticism that Crenshaw (1969:141) leveled against the attempt to find a wisdom-nucleus in the Esther narrative.

Further, the readings discussed here appear to be primarily left to right readings, i.e. from the context of the interpreter to the text, which results in simple appropriations and transplanting of meanings to the present situations, ignoring the differences between biblical history and literature and the sensibilities of our modern and western world.

In addition, satirical interpretations of Esther are not successful since satire seeks to encourage the *transformation* of reality based on a ideal, as Weiserger (1970:160) remarks, '[h]is [i.e. the satirists'] is typically a view from above....he

Applied to the Jewish nation it means resistance to subjugation by foreigners, something which true for Jews neither in the story world of Esther nor in the history of the world of the Esther narrative.

Irony requires scepticism on the part of the audience/reader, in which the present reality is questioned. Where it would fall down in respect of the Jewish community is the other aspect vital to irony, namely, that of doubting irony itself, which means uncertainty about that which should replace the present reality. But in the case of the Jewish community, however, this is not true. They certainly know with what the present reality ought to be replaced. In this respect then a satiric reading fails.

This brief exploration suggests that wisdom, satiric and ironic readings of the characters in Esther are problematic and partial to say the least.

3. Characterisation of King Ahasuerus in Esther

Alter(1981:151-152) depicts Saul in the following words: 'inept, foolishly impulsive, self-doubting, pathetically unfit for kingship, and also a heroic and poignant figure, equally victimised by Samuel and by circumstances, sustained by a kind of lumbering integrity even as he entangles himself in a net of falsehood and self-destructive acts. The greatness of

opposition in the characterisation....'. What Alter calls 'this rich tension of internal opposition in the characterisation' is what we will see as we turn to the characterisation of King Ahasuerus in the next section. Humphreys (1973:22n33) bears this out when he writes that the 'figure of *the king undergoes a remarkable development* in both the tales of Esther and Mordecai....[h]e becomes a stock figure. Respected and feared...., he is yet a malleable figure, and at times foolish,....[t]he ruler becomes a plastic, well intentioned, easily misled figure, but one, however, who is able to recognise and desire what is right when the proper moment arrives' (my emphasis). The complexity of the character of the king in Esther is something our discussion in the next section will seek to demonstrate. Our approach in this and every other cycle will be to critically engage the portrayal of King Ahasuerus by other scholars. In the process our own portrayal of the king will become clear.

3.1 The portrayal of Ahasuerus in 1:1-2:20

We have, tucked away in 1:8, a phrase which gives a very interesting perspective to the character of the king. He told his servants that the drinking of wine was to be כדה אין אנס. Drinking was therefore to be according to the tradition and custom of people and no one was to be forced. Here we have a picture of

traditions and customs of Persian society and yet allowing those who wanted to abstain to do so. It shows sensitivity on the part of the king to the taboos of the culture and religion of some sections in the society, especially in the light of the fact that the second banquet was a 'people's banquet'. **So we have a flexible and sensitive Ahasuerus in charge of the feast.**

We have a major crisis (1:10-22) in the first cycle of the story. The crisis is the result of the king commanding the queen to appear in her royal regalia before his guests; the queen refuses, thus our crisis situation. There are some interesting aspects of the king's character revealed in this incident.

In 1:13-15 we have a dialogue between the king and his advisors. One way in which a character is portrayed is through dialogue with other characters as is the case here. This dialogue follows on from Vashti's refusal to obey the command of the king, but more specifically it follows the comment by the narrator that 'the king was very angry, and his anger burned within him' (1:12). Verse 13 begins with the adverb 'then'. We ask the question: When did the king have this dialogue with his counsellors? Immediately after Vashti's refusal was reported to him or was it soon after he received the report?

We suggest that there is a pause between 1:12 and

is calm and has a reasoned approach in his dealing with this crisis. Instead of responding hastily and rashly, he calls the council together and the matter is discussed. A rash, despotic and unpredictable monarch would have acted impulsively, and immediately ended the life of the queen, but not so Ahasuerus. **Thus we have here a portrayal of a rational Ahasuerus in control of his emotions.**

The picture of the king in 1:13-15, we are told, is that of an irrational *drunk*, a point which Portnoy (1989:188-89) seems bent on making. This is clear from several expressions he uses: '[t]his happy *drunk* turns angry....[t]he story illustrates the essential character of the king - moody, *fond of drink*, utterly dependent;....he makes her queen, and guess what? - has a *drink*;....[a] decade of drink has obviously made it impossible for him to govern....the king after so many years of *drinking* and womanising....he and Haman- guess what?- have a *drink*.'

But the person we encounter in the first cycle of the story is hardly the irrational drunk Portnoy makes him out to be. Two behaviours on the part of Ahasuerus gainsay Portnoy's description, actions Portnoy notes but the significance of which he prefers to ignore. He notes that this happy drunk seeks advice from his advisors on what to do regarding Vashti's refusal. What drunk normally



unusual drunk. Furthermore, Portnoy notes (1989:189) in the incident of the reported attempt on the king's life, that the matter was investigated. Portnoy seeks to make light of this fact, ignoring its significance, because it does not fit his one dimensional characterisation. He also finds that the story 'reports no direct act on the part of the king against Bigthan and Teresh' (ibid.). If by this Portnoy means taking Bigthan and Teresh and hanging them himself, the criticism is misguided, for nowhere else in the story does the king act directly against anybody. His behaviour in this incident is consistent with what we see of him throughout the story. In any case, a command issued by the king is the king acting directly. Portnoy's characterisation has very little foundation in the narrative itself. It is based on what he would have liked the king to be. What we get from Portnoy is a caricature, a straw man, which he conveniently demolishes. It might be interesting and entertaining but it fails to take the text seriously. He also ignores the pause in the text between 1:12 and 1:13. For a careful reading will show that 1:13-15 could not follow on directly from 1:12. The mood of the two scenes is too different for this. The drunk Ahasuerus of 1:12 is very different from the cool, composed, rational Ahasuerus of 1:13. We have a similar mood change in 2:1-4 regarding Vashti. The characterisation of Ahasuerus as the uncontrollable

It is usually held, in regard to the crisis in the first cycle, that the conflict between the king and Vashti is a *domestic* problem which the king turns into a national issue. It reveals, so we are led to believe, the despotic and unpredictable traits of the king. Brenner (1994:48) is but one example. He says 'Ahasuerus....has woman trouble. He is portrayed as a husband first and a ruler later.'

The first thing to note, particularly in regard to Brenner's comments, is the false dichotomy between personal and public, domestic and national. It is a fact that these aspects of the life of public figures are intertwined and the one has a bearing on the other. So Berlin (1983:33) in discussing the character of king David remarks '....the David stories alternate between a presentation of the private man and the public figure, so that in the end family affairs and affairs of the state are intermingled, each having an effect upon the other....'. It is invalid for Brenner to contend that Ahasuerus is 'husband first and ruler later', whatever 'later' might mean. This is simply not true. Ahasuerus is both husband and ruler all of the time, therefore the incident can be regarded as a national, public incident.

Further, Gordis (1973:45-46) has shown on grammatical and syntactical grounds that this argument, which

hold and therefore the description of the king derived from it is suspect as well. Key to his interpretation of 1:18 is the principle: 'When an all-inclusive term is in juxta-position to a more limited one, the general term includes the entire category, *except those in the specific term*' (his emphasis). This principle is now applied with the following result: in vs. 17, the generic term *kol hannasim* occurs; in vs. 18, the specific terms *sarot, paras, and umaday*. Hence the former means 'all the women (except the ladies of the court)', i.e. the generality of women, while the latter phrase means 'the ladies of the aristocracy.' In this context it is worth remembering that Persian class-distinctions were evidently strictly observed, being referred to twice in the chapter. The king gives two banquets, first for the nobility (1:3,4), followed by one for the masses of the people (1:5-8). The sequence in vss. 17,18 of the ordinary women followed by the noble women is in chiastic relationship to the order of the banquets (vss. 3-4, 5-8). This structure is not merely literary. Vashti's defiance of the king had taken place during the second feast 'for all the people (*kol-ha'am*, vs. 5). Their wives (*kol-hannasim*, vs. 17), would, therefore, be the first to know of it; the women of the nobility would hear of it a little later (vs. 18).' On this reading of the grammar, syntax and semantics of vss. 17, 18 one is

reading we are dealing with more than just a domestic dispute but with a national incident which should be dealt with from a national point of view.

From a cultural perspective Vashti's behaviour dishonors the king and 'just as honor is personal or individual as well as collective or corporate (for instance, family honor, ethnic group honor, and the like)', the action taken by the king and his advisors are thus not so extraordinary (Malina 1993:44). The usual ridicule and contempt with which the king is regarded is unfounded and to be rejected. Day (1995:212-213), in comparing the characters of Vashti and Esther as depicted by the M text, states that 'Vashti in this narrative, is feared to have the potential for affecting the people to a larger degree', and so it is valid to see her actions in a national context.

A further pointer to the possible national nature of the crisis in 1:18 is the comment of Fox (1991:22) that in 1:18 'Memuchan predicts literally, "enough" contempt and anger, apparently a facetious understatement.' I wonder whether this is not a 'facetious understatement'. Memuchan might be expressing the exasperation of the court with the persistent rebellious attitude of Vashti?

Regarding 1:18, Bush (1996:341) remarks that 'The Hebrew is cryptic and unclear, reading literally 'according to sufficiency (will be) contempt and

as consisting of ך + כ + ן, and then adding the meanings of the various elements together to give the overall meaning. But וכרי is a compound form (see BDB 1975:191, Gesenius 1910:130.1, Lev.25:26, Deut.25:2, Neh 5:8, Jer 51:58, Hab.2:13). And we do not translate each element of a compound to determine its meaning. For example כרי נאלהו means 'enough for its redemption.' Moreover, the expression וכרי in verse 18 is in a construct chain which is translated: 'enough of the contempt and of the strife.' The subject of the construct chain is Vashti, as the context makes clear, so that we can translate it, 'enough of the contempt and of the strife of Vashti.' Therefore, this is not the first time such a thing has happened. Enough is enough, she must be dealt with since her behaviour could have national consequences in that there could be 'an outburst of contempt and anger since all the [women] will do what Vashti did' (Fox 1991:19). Fox restricts the outburst to the wives of the nobles; I have broadened it in the light of the comments of Gordis (1973:45-46).

The behaviour of the king in 1:13-22 is also clarified when we put it against the background of 5:1-2. Here Esther also appears to 'disobey' the king and he acts quite differently. The answer seems to be that the context is quite different, namely, the queen and king are alone in the inner palace. This is not a public meeting. In fact Day (1995:104) states

rational and calm person.' This is a turn up for the books indeed.

We conclude then that we have an incident with a national dimension in 1:10-22. The king is thus portrayed as acting in the national interest as he de-thrones Vashti. We have therefore a king for whom the kingdom comes first before his personal needs and desires; **he puts the interests of the nation first**, as can be seen in the pathos with which 2:1-4 portrays the king.

There is still another perspective on the behaviour of the king and his advisors in dealing with the crisis of 1:10-22. This perspective is a cultural one. And in this the study of Bruce Malina (1993), *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, is helpful (see also Claassens 1996:8-14, 1997:397-407 who argues for this perspective). The section in Malina's work that is relevant for our study can be summarised as follows (1993:28-62):

1. Ancient societies were organised on the basis of the basic values of **honour** and **shame**. These building blocks make for stability and harmony in the society.
2. It follows from the above that the relationships between people in society are governed by the values of honour and shame. So the relationship between male-female, equals, superior-inferior, individual-community, child-parent, etc. are all controlled in

3. The values of honour and shame are 'likely to persist, in some cases, for thousands of years' (1993:54; cf. also, Claassens 1996:27,2.3.1).

4. Honour refers to a person's 'social standing....rightful place in society' (Malina 1993:54), which forms the basis for the manner in which one interacts with others in the society. It determines how one relates to various persons in society, i.e. as equals, superiors, subordinates, and so on. It refers to a person's feeling of selfworth and the public and social acknowledgement of the worth (1993:50), and applies to both male and female. Shame, on the other hand, refers to a person's sensitivity to what others think of them; it indicates acceptance of the rules of human interaction, the socially recognised boundaries which make human relationships and interactions possible and workable. This implies that the shameless person does not accept the general rules and boundaries of the society.

5. In these societies honour is symbolised by the head of the group, for honour has both an individual and corporate dimension (1993:40-41), and '[t]he heads of both natural and elective groupings set the tone and embody the honour rating of the group, so to say' (1993:55).

6. The collective or corporate honour mentioned above

city, village, with their collective honour, are examples.

With this background we now return to the crisis of 1:10-22. We have all the ingredients of a honour-shame scenario: power, gender status and 'religion' in the sense of behaviour towards controller of one's existence. The narrative shows that the king is the head of a natural grouping, cf. 1:1-2, 10:1-2a; 3:1-2a, 6:3, 6-11; 10:2b. He is thus a person to be honoured. Since honour emerges where the 'three defining features called power, gender status and "religion" come together' (1993:30), we have a situation of honour in 1:10-22. And a socially recognised boundary in the world of the text is that of implicit obedience to the head of the group, in our case the king as is evidenced by 4:11, 6:11, 3:2. Disobedience would spurn the honour of the king. This is exactly what Vashti did. She acted shamelessly in terms of the accepted social boundaries of the society, showing no sensitivity to what the guests of the king would think of her and consequently of the king, for after all this was a public gathering (banquet). Her behaviour not only dishonoured the king but also the society as a whole (1:20-22). Because this was shameless behaviour against the group it was regarded as outrageous, inexcusable and irredeemable and hence the action taken against

Thus, from a cultural anthropological viewpoint the crisis was a group (national) one and not just a domestic dispute, and the actions of the king and his advisors quite appropriate in the circumstances.

These were actions to restore the national honour violated by the behaviour of Vashti. **So we have a king who acts honourably.**

Further, given the cultural perspective, the behaviour of Esther (5:1-2, 4:11) is then adjudged honourable, for she accepts the socially recognised boundaries of the society and she is sensitive to what others will think of her behaviour. Esther acts honourably, Vashti acts shamelessly.

The king is usually ridiculed as dependent, and *relying on others* to make decisions since he is always 'consulting' with others before deciding, 1:13-15 being an example of this. But Gordis convincingly show that wayyo' mer hammelek cannot mean 'and the king consulted.' It must be understood as, 'and the king said', i.e. the words of the king are quoted.

Moreover, the fact that he does bring in the advisors is positive. He could decide the fate of Vashti on his own, but gets the input of others for he faces a major decision. It is his wife, after all, who is



encounter a person here, who acts sensibly, tempered with some emotion.

Throughout the narrative Ahasuerus is either named *the king*, or *Ahasuerus the King*. There are only two instances in which we find Ahasuerus without any qualification, i.e. 1:1 and 9:30. Ahasuerus is depicted predominantly in his role as king, as national ruler. Thus in 1:10-1:22 Vashti is not refusing a domestic request, or a request from her husband, but a command of the ruler, making it a national issue. Vashti is both wife and citizen, and therefore subject to the laws of the ruler (cf. in this respect, Esther's reason for not going to the king on the instruction of Mordecai, 4:10-11; also 3:3).

Vashti is not the innocent victim of the blousted ego of a rash, insecure, despotic king as is sometimes maintained, so that it is common to argue that the king and his advisors overreact to Vashti's refusal. For we note that in 1:9 Vashti gives her own banquet. Now the tension between Ahasuerus and Vashti is clear from the verse. It begins 'also', i.e. in addition to the banquet Ahasuerus made. Next the location of the banquet is described as 'the royal house which was to the king' (cf. also 9:4). So we have a separate banquet organised by Vashti in the house belonging to the king when he has arranged another banquet.



We have here the makings of a confrontational situation. Since banquets were the sites in the story where major events happen, (cf. Fox 1991:156-157), Vashti's banquet might not be as innocent as it seems. It could be seen as an act in which she challenges the power of the king, and the banquet is thus a figure for the power struggle between king and Vashti (cf. Fox 1991:158). Therefore, the exasperation expressed in 1:18. Further, why does it take seven eunuchs to convey the king's command to Vashti? Is this also perhaps an indication of the struggle between her and Ahasuerus? When the servants are sent to bring Haman, it is interesting that no number is mentioned.

Instead of overreacting, Ahasuerus acts reasonably in his handling of the crisis described in the first cycle of the narrative.

The first leg of the first main reversal of the story which results in the banishment of Vashti, portrays a king who is **flexible and sensitive; who acts rationally and is in control of his emotions**. We also have portrayed to us a king for whom the kingdom comes first before his personal needs and desires; **he puts the interests of the nation first**, as can be seen in the pathos with which 2:1-4 portrays him. Furthermore, **we encounter a person who behaves sensibly, tempered with some emotion**.

contemporary descriptions in Esther studies.

4. The portrayal of Ahasuerus in 2:21-8:17

The portrayal of Ahasuerus in this cycle begins with the incident in which Bigthan and Teresh plot to assassinate him, 2:21-23. Mordecai comes to hear of it and informs Esther who in turn informs the king. How is Ahasuerus going to respond to this information? His normal rash, despotic, hasty self as some would have us believe? No. We are told **וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַדָּבָר**. The verb is Pual PC 3 person singular masculine. Since the Pual is passive of Piel the subject is not mentioned, but it can be none other than Ahasuerus. He has the matter investigated. The Piel stem, which is intensive, indicates that the matter was investigated *thoroughly*. Far from making an impulsive, reactionary decision, the king makes an effort to establish the facts before acting, and so does not condemn Bigthan and Teresh on mere hearsay, however reliable the hearsay might have been. **Ahasuerus is concerned about the facts of the case as the basis for decision making.**

The second leg of the first main reversal which results in the enthronement of Esther begins with the king in a very pensive mood, 2:1-4. There is a pathos about his portrayal in this pivotal passage. We are told that Ahasuerus **זָכַר אֶת־וְשֵׁתִי**. He specifically

happened to her. The text gives the impression that he recalls the events of the recent past with a tinge of sadness. He felt for Vashti, after all she was his wife. **We have then the portrayal of Ahasuerus as person of deep emotion.**

In 5:3-8 is recorded the dialogue between Esther and Ahasuerus. Verse 3 contains Ahasuerus's question to Esther, which asks what it is she wants, and that she could ask up to half the kingdom, meaning he is willing to give up to half the kingdom. Instead of half the kingdom, Esther requests that he and Haman attend her banquet. At the banquet Ahasuerus repeats the question he asked in the throne-room. We were told in 2:17 that the king loved Esther, so what we have here, is the expression of loving concern on the part of Ahasuerus. No price can be placed on his care for her, and even if a price was to be mentioned, up to half the kingdom is what he is willing to give to her. **Ahahsuerus is portrayed as a person with a capacity for love, care and concern for others, especially those whom he loves.** In this regard Day comments 'Ahasuerus also shows a greater concern to know what Esther wants.'

The honouring of Mordecai by Haman is preceded by the dialogue between the king and his servants, 6:3-6a. The main point of the dialogue is the attempt by Ahasuerus to establish whether Mordecai has been

the king. He is not just going to overlook this, even though some time has elapsed since it happened. He is concerned for fairness, and wants to express his appreciation for what Mordecai has done. He is grateful to Mordecai and the reward is an expression of this. **Here we meet a king who is concerned for fairplay and is capable of appreciation.**

When Ahasuerus asks Haman for his view on what is to be done for the person the king wants to honour, 6:5-10, he does not mention the name of the person he has in mind. This concealment of the person's name by the king, especially since this person is Mordecai the Jew, may suggest that he is aware of the conflict between Mordecai and Haman. And if this is true, it shows that **the king is a shrewd judge of human nature**, for he knows that if the person he desires to honour was known, the most insignificant act of honour and dignity will be recommended.

The third dialogue in this cycle takes place at the second banquet, 7:2-10. Of importance firstly is the speech of the king, 7:5. The expression **אשר-מלאו לבו** means 'who has taken it upon himself' to do this deed. The implication could be that Ahasuerus expected consultation before important decisions such

attributed to him so often. He is not the impulsive lone-ranger decision maker, as the narrative consistently demonstrates. **He respects the views of others.**

Then there is the portrayal of the manner in which the king handles the revelation that Haman was the culprit. He gets up from the banquet **בהמתרו**. But instead of acting in his state of anger we are told that he goes into the garden. He is in control of himself and his emotions and he is not going to act in haste. He goes to the garden to reflect, to cool down as it were, so that he can deal with this situation in a calm manner which is his normal disposition.

The second banquet is the turning point in the narrative. And at the climax of the narrative **we have Ahasuerus portrayed as a person who takes seriously the views of others and who is in control of himself and his emotions.** So that, just as the first reversal is done by the king calmly, sensibly and yet with a measure of emotion, likewise the second main reversal is effected in the same manner.

We have an incident in which Mordecai is rewarded rather belatedly, in 6:1-10. It would seem that Ahasuerus suffers from a very poor memory, which is at times used as a basis for depicting him negatively. About this lack of memory Bal writes as

hastily ridiculed --- for ridicule is so often connected with contempt for the lack of psychological depth and of realistic plausibility that it cannot escape that charge of anachronism, if not arrogant evolutionism. Rather it should be seen as a representation of the inevitable but ambivalent development toward the predominance of writing which the text stages.' This means the fact that the king forgets is a literary convention, namely the development towards writing results in this apparent forgetfulness.

It has been common cause amongst commentators to depict Ahasuerus as weak, dependent and unreliable. But in 8:1-8 Ahasuerus is depicted as one who is in control, exercising his royal authority as Day (1995:151) fittingly says: 'Ahasuerus himself also acts this time more in his own office as king. And later, when allowing Esther and Mordecai permission to make legislation, he proposes more official obligations which their orders must meet.' **So he does act directly and independently.**

The second cycle of the narrative which records the second and pivotal, climatic reversal reveals an **Ahasuerus who is concerned about the facts of the case as the basis for decision making. We have then the portrayal of Ahasuerus as a person of deep emotion. Ahasuerus is portrayed as a person with a**



especially those whom he loves. Here we meet a king who is concerned for *fairplay* and is capable of *appreciation*. The king is a shrewd judge of human nature. He respects the views of others. We have Ahasuerus portrayed as person who takes seriously the views of others and who is in control of himself and his emotions. He also acts directly and independently.

5. *The portrayal of Ahasuerus in 9:1-10:3*

The third cycle, which is also the third main reversal of the narrative, has as its focus the turning around of events. The tables are turned on the enemies of the Jews. Instead of their enemies having 'power over them' (9:1), the Jews gain the upper hand over their enemies. This result is the outcome of the 'direct action' of the king, so that Day (1995:158) could say that in 9:11-15 '**Ahasuerus instead is the one who acts authoritatively....**'. This is against the prevailing view that Mordecai and Esther, rather than Ahasuerus, act in a way which determines the outcome of the story. The verses (i.e. 9:11-15) are distinct in the sense that they record **the direct intervention of the king** as well as reveal his support for the Jews (Davis 1995:112). This makes them pivotal in the section 9:1-19.

The historical summary in 9:24-25 depicts the king according to Fox (1991:119), '**as a clear thinking,**

puttylike Xerxes of the tale can scarcely be recognised in this picture'. See 2:21 for a similar portrayal of the king). The 'bumbling, puttylike Xerxes' is not found in the historical summary nor in the rest of the story. He is discovered in the narrative by Fox and others as a result of the undue influence allowed to the supposed wisdom-nucleus in Esther. The outworking of this is the one dimensional characterisation of Ahasuerus, which has lent itself to the traditional stereotyping of Ahasuerus one encounters in much of Esther studies.

The authoritative figure of 9:24-25 is present in the rest of the narrative, as we have shown above. Thus there is no conflict in the narrative portrayal of Ahasuerus in 1-8 and 9-10.

The depiction of **the king as an authoritative figure** is continued in 10:1. The king declares a tax on the whole territory ruled by him. Thus we have a description of Ahasuerus acting authoritatively and directly, just as the historical summary and the rest of the story depicts him.

We have already referred to the other authoritative act of the king, namely his promotion of Mordecai. The greatness of Mordecai is attributed to the king for 'the king made him great' (10:2).

The Ahasuerus depicted in the final cycle of the narrative is a character who acts authoritatively and directly. He is clear in his thinking and is a proponent of justice (cf. 2:21 for a similar portrayal of the king as clear thinking, and an exemplary proponent of justice).

Conclusion and Summary

Characterisation is the golden thread which provides the integrity of a story. In this chapter we have sought to develop this idea by focussing on the characterisation of Ahasuerus in the three main cycles of Esther. In doing this we have critically engaged traditional, stereotypical, genre dominated depictions of the king and found them to be wanting from the perspective of a synchronic reading of the text. We have also shown that throughout the narrative the character traits descriptive of Ahasuerus are flexible, sensitive, rational, emotionally controlled, selfless, tempered by feeling; concerned for the facts instead of rashly making decisions; having a capacity for love and deep emotion, a concern for fairplay and justice, appreciating others; acting directly, indirectly and authoritatively, and clearly in his thinking. This is not the picture one finds of Ahasuerus in Esther studies as a norm. The reason? The belief that a

the genre dominated characterisation of the dramatis personae, which has been standard practice in much of Esther studies to date.

Apart from our interest in the character depiction of Ahasuerus discussed above, there is also another interest. It would appear, from the point of view of the chiasmic-reversals and his role in them, that he also has a symbolic role to play in the story. He could be conceived of as representing YHWH in the narrative. In him the incognito YHWH of Jewish faith makes his presence felt. For just as Ahasuerus is pivotal in the reversal of the destiny, fortunes and positions of the main characters in the story, so YHWH is pivotal in the reversal of the fortune, destiny, and position of his covenant people. If this suggestion is valid, it follows that YHWH is very present and involved in the survival and future of his people in the Esther narrative. Put differently, the king functions as a means by which Jahweh presence himself to his people. God is with his people even in exile, thereby emphasising his sovereignty. Baldwin (1984:38) affirms this when he remarks: '....it was the king who, in response to the information given by Harbona, said 'Hang him' [Haman]....(7:10), and who promoted Mordecai to power. *Human agents were the unwitting instruments of one who was the unseen Ruler of events'* (my



events is how Ahasuerus is portrayed in the narrative of Esther through his role as the reverser of the destiny, fortune, and position of the main characters of the Esther story. In this way chiasmic-reversal and characterisation are shown to be inseparably linked, affirming our basic contention that characterisation makes for narrative integrity.

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