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Time in the Narrative of Esther

by

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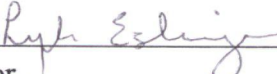
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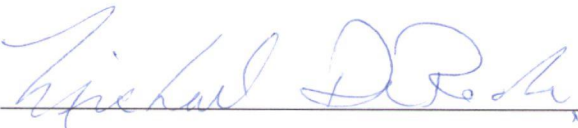
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "Time in the Narrative of Esther" submitted by E. Sue Campbell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

The temporal structure of Esther is comprised of four distinct narrative 'movements' in which three competing 'voices' are interplayed. Each of the three voices (royal or Persian, Jewish protagonists and Jews' antagonists) is introduced successively in the first narrative movement (chaps 1-3). The first voice, the time-frame of the Persian-Median king Ahasuerus (1:1-2:4), provides the chronology, style and rhythmical patterns on which the events and circumstances of the narrative unfold. The second and third voices, the Jewish protagonists' (2:5ff) and antagonists' time-frames (3:1ff) create harmonic, melodic and rhythmical contrast to the royal frame.

Each of the three voices exhibit a parallel pattern of an initial exposition that covers extensive periods of time and is followed by a double episode that occurs in a single time-span, usually on one day. The alternating summaries and scenes make use of successive, annual points in the king's chronology beginning in the third year (first voice, 1:1-3)), proceeding through the seventh year (second voice, 2:16), and becoming increasingly more specific until all three voices are aligned for the twelfth year crisis (introduced by the third voice, 3:1ff).

Because the narrative depends on the chronology of the king, time is usually unidirectional and oriented towards the future. However, narrative devices such as repetitions, retrogressions, anticipations and synchronic events accentuate and complicate the time-frame initiated by the king's voice. As well, a pattern of reversals underlies the structure and contributes further to the counter-point of the narrative. The diverse, linear days of the narrative (chaps 1-9:14) are transformed in the circular, annual commemoration of Purim (9:27-28).

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AB</u>	<u>Anchor Bible</u>
<u>AGGW</u>	<u>Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen</u>
<u>Akk.</u>	<u>Akkadian</u>
<u>APAT</u>	<u>Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des AT in Verbindung mit andern übersetzt u. herausgegeben.</u> Ed. E. F. Kautzsch. Tübingen, 1900.
<u>BDB</u>	<u>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.</u> Eds. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. Oxford University Press, 1907.
<u>BKAT</u>	<u>Biblicher Kommentar zum AT</u>
<u>BR</u>	<u>Biblical Research</u>
<u>CBQ</u>	<u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u>
<u>ExB</u>	<u>The Expositor's Bible</u>
<u>HTR</u>	<u>Harvard Theological Review</u>
<u>HUCA</u>	<u>Hebrew Union College Annual</u>
<u>IB</u>	<u>The Interpreter's Bible</u>
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>JPSV</u>	<u>Jewish Publication Society Version</u>
<u>JQR</u>	<u>Jewish Quarterly Review</u>
<u>JR</u>	<u>Journal of Religion</u>
<u>JSOT</u>	<u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u>
<u>JTS</u>	<u>Journal of Theological Studies</u>
<u>LB</u>	<u>Linguistica Biblica</u>
<u>LCL</u>	<u>Loeb Classical Library</u>
<u>NAB</u>	<u>New American Bible</u>
<u>NEB</u>	<u>New English Bible</u>

<u>PCB</u>	<u>Peake's Commentary on the Bible.</u> Ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley
<u>RB</u>	<u>Revue Biblique</u>
<u>RHA</u>	<u>Revue Hittite et Asianique</u>
<u>SBL</u>	<u>Society of Biblical Literature</u>
<u>SEA</u>	<u>Svensk exegetisk arsbok</u>
<u>SVT</u>	<u>Supplements to Vetus Testamentus.</u> Brill, Leiden.
<u>TAPA</u>	<u>Transactions of the American Philological Association</u>
<u>TEH</u>	<u>Theologische Existenz Heute</u>
<u>ThB</u>	<u>Theologische Blätter.</u> Hinrichs, Leipzig.
<u>TWOT</u>	<u>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</u>
<u>VT</u>	<u>Vetus Testamentum</u>
<u>VTs</u>	<u>Vetus Testamentum, Supplements</u>
<u>WZKM</u>	<u>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</u>
<u>ZAW</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>

CHAPTER ONE

TIME IN THE NARRATIVE OF ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

There is a preoccupation in the narrative of Esther with time. The plot and setting of the narrative depend on the chronology of the Persian king Ahasuerus and focus on events in the third (chap 1), through the seventh (chap 2), and especially the twelfth year of the king's reign (chaps 3-9). Characters' attitudes about time create dramatic tensions and ironies.¹

¹For example, Haman's obsession to destroy the Jews, and his determination to set the date for their extermination, casts his own fate instead (cf. 3:6-7, 12-15; 7:6-10). Mordecai, who provokes such genocidal fury, is not intimidated by the deadly time-frame (4:13-14), but is instrumental in the reversal of

There is even a select group of royal advisors who are called "the wise men who knew the times" (1:13). Other narrative devices such as repetitions, reversals and rhythmical patterns employ key words, motifs and themes about temporality. One example is the development of יום ("day"),² used over four dozen times literally and figuratively for the "days" of Ahasuerus (1:1-5), for the daily ministrations of Mordecai (2:11) and daily inquiries of the servants (3:3-4), for the date set to destroy the Jews on "one day," the thirteenth of Adar (3:13-14), for the three days Esther calls the community to fast (4:16), for days of banqueting (cf. 1:3-5; 5:4; 7:2) and for the remembrance of "these days of Purim," established as a perpetual commemoration in the liturgical summary of the narrative (9:15-32).

fortunes, rising himself to fill the position vacated by Haman's death (8:1-2; 10:2-3).

²Beside "day(s)" used both literally and figuratively, there are also occurrences of synonyms (e.g. evening to morning, 2:14) and antonyms (e.g. night, 6:1).

TEMPORAL STRUCTURE OF ESTHER

The purpose of this study is to examine how time functions in Esther;³ to understand how time is *represented* in the narrative.⁴ In this regard, this study maps out a structure of the narrative of Esther based on temporal notations given in the text. The structure is comprised of four distinct narrative 'movements' in which three competing 'voices' are interplayed.⁵

³This thesis deals only with the narrative of Esther as it appears in its Masoretic Hebrew form. The book of Esther also exists in two major ancient Greek versions, the Alpha or A-text (text and translation printed in Clines', The Esther Scroll, 1984) and the B-text normally printed as part of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (in the Jerusalem Bible for example).

⁴See Adele Berlin (1983:13-21) on the representation of reality in narrative. The importance of the treatment of time is suggested by Eleanor Hutchens' observation that narrative success depends on "the degree to which it is convincingly chronomorphic" (1977:61).

⁵The structure proposed in this thesis differs significantly from that outlined in recent major works. Although there are several presentations of the structure, or more correctly the

The analogy and use of musical terminology arises from the observation that the appearances of the Persian-Median king (chap 1), the Jewish protagonists (chap 2:5ff), and their antagonists (chap 3ff) are similar to the introduction and interrelation of voices in a musical score. In a fugue, for example, a single theme is played against itself by first introducing an original voice (king Ahasuerus), then (after a fixed time-delay) staggering a second (the Jewish protagonists) and third voice (the Jews' antagonists) that provides rhythmic, harmonic and melodic contrast to the subject.⁶

The four narrative movements in the temporal structure are divided as follows:

divisions in Esther, these are without consensus. A survey shows that these presentations vary from four divisions (Dorothy 1989), to six (Paton 1908), to thirteen (Moore 1971, Gerleman 1973, Clines 1984; but without agreement), eighteen (Murphy 1981), twenty-one (Bardtke 1963), and twenty-two (Dommershausen 1968).

⁶In a fugue, the original voice is copied through several techniques such as variations in time or pitch, or inversions (e.g. playing the notes down rather than up) or retrogressions

1. Chapters 1-3: The Introduction of Three Voices

The king's time-frame (1:1-2:4) begins in the "days of Ahasuerus . . . in the third year of his reign" and provides the chronology, style and rhythmical patterns (e.g. triple notations) for the narrative. The Jewish protagonists' time-frame (2:5ff) begins the monthly accountings with the lengthy preparations of the women (2:12) and the coronation of Esther in the tenth month Tebeth in the seventh year of the king's reign (v. 16). The Jewish antagonists' time-frame (chap 3) features the crisis between Haman and Mordecai that results in Haman's casting of the pur (lot) in the first month of the twelfth year (3:7). The date is then set for the destruction of the Jews on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month Adar (vv. 7, 12). Time tends to be calendrical and linear with frequent retrogressions (implicit or explicit), synchronic events,⁷ and

(e.g. playing the theme backwards) of the first pattern. In Esther the original or king's voice is copied by the other two voices in various ways: by repetition of the royal motifs (e.g. fullness of days, 1:5) and triple patterns, by augmentation (*tripling*) of these patterns, by inversions or retrogressions of these expressions and motifs.

⁷E.g. at 1:9 "also (וְ) queen Vashti made a feast . . ."

one notable anticipation, the date set for the pogrom, the thirteenth of Adar in the last month of the year. Temporal motifs include the fullness (שלמות) of days (1:5), the interconnection of knowledge and time (e.g. 1:13), and the remembrance (זכרון) of times and events (2:1).

2. Chapters 4-8:2: A Fantasia in Mid-Nisan (Twelfth Year)

Unlike the other three movements in which temporal notices are given primarily by the narrator, multiple characters contribute to the fantasia section. As well, unlike the large annual cycles of the first movement, the crises and reversals of the second movement occur within a few days and contrast the three day fast of Esther (4:16) with her two banquets (5:4; 7:2). Motifs developed include imminence and reversals,⁸ and a play on the concept of "hastening" (הסדר).⁹

⁸On the structure of Esther exhibiting the principle of reversals see: Berg 1979:103-113.

⁹The motif "to hasten" begins in the first movement with Hegai's rapid accommodation of Esther when she arrives at court (2:9; cf. Clines 1984:288). The motif is developed as the king, unwittingly, hastens Haman to each of Esther's banquets (5:5; 6:14) or causes Haman (ironically) to hasten to reward Mordecai

3. Chapters 8:3-9:14: Rewriting The End

In the third movement there is a return to the progressive, calendrical accounting of the first movement but with the emphasis still on short periods of time (similar to the fantasia section): (1) The counter-decree of Mordecai on Sivan twenty-third (chap 8) effectively redirects the outcome of (2) the thirteenth of Adar, narrated at 9:1-14. The motif of reversal is explicitly stated at 9:1 and a theme on the cessation of time is brought to a full crescendo with the mass slaughter of thousands of "enemies" (9:15-16).¹⁰

4. Chapters 9:15-10:3: A Liturgical Summary

"These days of Purim" are established in a liturgical

whom he has come to destroy (6:10). See also 3:15; 6:12; 8:14.

¹⁰The cessation of time has been suggested in earlier references dealing with the end of Vashti's reign, 1:19 and especially in reference to death, either literally (cf. 2:7, 23; 3:12; 4:11, 16; 7:10) or figuratively (cf. 2:6 on exile; 4:1, 16 regarding fasting; 6:12, 7:8 regarding the symbolic covering of Haman's head). On "the sense of an ending" in narrative see Frank Kermode (1967).

section, emphasizing only three days (Adar 13th, 14th, 15th) and explaining why Purim commemorates the latter two as the days of rest from their enemies. Time is now "appointed" (9:27, 31) as the linear, progressive days of the narrative are transformed into the circular, annual commemoration of Purim (9:27-28). The motif of remembrance that was initiated in the king's frame (2:1), is essential to the festival (e.g. 9:27-28).

SCOPE, AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THESIS

The scope and aim of this thesis is to examine how time functions in the first narrative movement of Esther (chaps 1-3) in which the three voices (royal or Persian, Jewish protagonists, and Jews' antagonists) are introduced. The study is divided into three sections: Chapter two of the thesis deals with the introduction of the original, royal time-frame of Ahasuerus (1:1-2:4); chapter three discusses the introduction of the Jewish protagonists' time-frame (2:5-23); and chapter four introduces the Jewish antagonists' time-frame (3:1-15).

This dissertation follows the leads of Werner Dommershausen (1968), Sandra Berg (1979), David Clines (1984) and Charles Dorothy (1989) in concentrating attention upon the literary and stylistic features of the narrative of Esther as the primary

locus for understanding the text.¹¹ The analysis of temporality in Esther relies on a close reading of the text, to know how linguistic patterns and usages, recurring devices and departures from these devices function in the literary composition.¹² This approach also seeks to understand the nature and potentialities of the narrative as "time-art" (Sternberg 1978:70). Therefore, attention is paid to the reading-*process*, or the way in which the narrative communicates successively (as opposed to simultaneously, as in visual art).¹³

¹¹Because the aim of the study is to analyze the function of temporality as a *narrative* device, the historical environment, sources or redactions from which the text has been shaped into its present Hebrew form are not of great concern to this thesis. See Clines' The Esther Scroll (1984) for an excellent discussion on the development of the Masoretic Hebrew Esther.

¹²Plot, character and narrative motifs (defined in this study as elements or ideas expressed in association with temporal notations) are also considered as important literary elements.

¹³As Genette says (1980:34), "the text demands linearity." By virtue of the successive nature of linguistic symbols, the narrative communicates successively. Esther, for example, cannot be read backwards, word by word, without abandoning the

Of course, the narrative text occupies only space, it has no temporality other than what it borrows, metonymically, from its own reading. Yet as readers, we take this metonymic displacement for granted for it is part of a narrative game with time.¹⁴ The sharp distinction between the reading time and the time in the narrated world is described succinctly by Christian Metz (1974:18):

Narrative is a . . . doubly temporal sequence . . . : There is the time of the thing told and the time of the narrative (the time of the signified and the time of the signifier). This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives (three years of the hero's life summed up in two sentences of a novel . . .). More basically, it invites us to consider that one of the functions of narrative is to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme.

The relations between the time of narrating (the reading time or Erzählzeit) and the narrated time, (the time in the story

text. The recognition of narrative as time-art not only seeks to understand the narrative as it *unfolds* but to avoid what Sternberg astutely calls "*hindsight misreading*" (1978:70).

¹⁴On games with time in narrative see: Genette 1980:34 and Ricouer 1984:61-99.

world or erzählte Zeit) figure significantly in *how* time is shaped.¹⁵ As well, the time-ratios between narrated and narrating time will assist in differentiating exposition and scenic sections in the narrative.¹⁶

¹⁵The distinction between Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit was introduced by Güther Müller (1948; reprinted in 1968) in the philosophical context of a "morphological poetics," inspired by Goethe's meditations on the morphology of plants and animals. The distinction is taken up by Gérard Genette (1972) but in his terminology the diegetic (Erzählzeit) and the utterance (erzählte Zeit) are derived from features contained only within the text itself.

¹⁶Sternberg points out that the variation of time-ratios throws "the contextual centrality of certain fictive periods into high relief against the background of other periods . . . that draws the reader's attention to some subperiods constituting "discriminated occasions" in the fullest sense of the word" (1978:19). On the use of time-ratios as quantitative indicators of represented time and representational time see: Sternberg 1978:14-19.

The shape of time in the narrative of Esther is first of all constructed from successive temporal notations.¹⁷ The time that originates, informs and frames the entire book is the chronology of the Persian-Median king Ahasuerus. Events are usually unidirectional, occurring in the third year (chap 1) through the seventh (chap 2) and especially twelfth years of the king's reign (chaps 3-9). Furthermore, events in the twelfth year centre on three particular periods: mid-Nisan, the first month (chap 3-8:2), the twenty-third of Sivan, the third month (8:3-17), and mid-Adar, the twelfth month (chap 9). The most compelling day is undoubtedly the thirteenth of Adar, the date set for the destruction of the Jews by Haman (3:12, 13), rewritten as a day of self-defense by Mordecai (8:11, 12), narrated (9:1-14) and then used to "establish" the following two days (the fourteenth and fifteenth, or the days of rest from the enemies) as the annual commemoration of Purim (9:15-32).

The transition of time in Esther is also marked by adverbial phrases (e.g.: "after these things," 2:1; 3:1) and by prepositional phrases accompanying temporal notations. In the first chapter, for example, the days, or reign of Ahasuerus, is

¹⁷E.g. "180 days," 1:4; "when these days were full," v. 5; "seven days," v. 5; "on the seventh day," v. 10.

qualified as the time "when king Ahasuerus was sitting on the throne of his kingdom" (בַּשְּׁבִטָה הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוּשׁ עַל הַסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ) (1:2); during this time Ahasuerus presides over a half-year celebration and "when these days are full" (וּבְמָלְאוֹת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה) (v. 5) conducts yet another banquet lasting seven days. On the seventh day, and in particular "when the king's heart is merry with wine" (בְּטוֹב לֵב-הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיַּיִךְ) (1:10), Ahasuerus calls for the queen.

Cohesion and continuity of the story line are ensured by the frequent use of conjunctives (**waw** and **waw** consecutives).¹⁸ In the first chapter, for example, the occurrence of consecutive **waws** highlights a series of circumstances and consequences around Vashti's refusal to participate in the king's wine banquet:

- 1:1: וַיְהִי, and it came to pass
- v.5 וּבְמָלְאוֹת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה, and when these days were fulfilled
- v.7 וַהֲשִׁקוּם, and they gave to drink
- v.8 וַהֲשִׁתִּיה בְּדָת, and the drinking was according to law
- v.12 וַתִּמְנָאן הַמֶּלֶכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא, and Q. Vashti refused to come
- v.12 וַיִּקְצַף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד, and the king became very angry
- v.12 וַתִּבְרַח בְּפִתּוֹ, and his anger burned within him
- v.13 וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יָדְעֵי הַצִּמֵּי, and the king said to the wise men who knew the times
- v.14 וַהֲקִרְבּוּ אֵלָיו, and those closest to him (were. . .)
- v.16 וַיֹּאמֶר מִמּוּכָן, and Memucan said:

¹⁸Bar-Efrat (1989:166) writes that the frequency of the **waw** consecutive gives the biblical narrative its characteristic flavour.

- v.18 וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה, and this day they will say
 v.19 וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּדָרְתֵי פָּרְסָא וּמֵדִי, and let it be written
 in the laws of Persia and Media
 וְלֹא יָשׁוּב, and not return (Vashti before the king)
 וְהַמַּלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן, and her royal position give (to another)
 v.20 וְכַשְׁמֹחַ פָּתְנָם הַמֶּלֶךְ, and when it is heard the king's edict
 וְכָל הַנְּשִׁים יִתְּבוּ יָקָר, and all the women will give
 respect (to their husbands)
 v.21 וַיִּיטֹב הַדָּבָר, and it was pleasing the matter (in the
 eyes of the king and the nobles)
 וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מִמְּוָקָן, and the king did according to
 the word of Memucan
 v.22 וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים, and he sent dispatches (to all people)

But the temporality of Esther is more dynamic than an asymmetrical (or, unidirectional) flow of time.¹⁹ Deviations

¹⁹The terminology needed to express time is weighted with philosophical associations. Speaking of the direction of time implies that time exists (McTaggart's Paradox, formulated in 1908, for example, purports to demonstrate the unreality of the existence of time); and assumes that time flows (if not, how is the sense of passing time to be explained; and if so, is the trajectory unidirectional or not?). This philosophical inquiry has preoccupied philosophers from at least Aristotle's analysis of fatalism (using the ahistorical prediction that "a sea battle will or will not be fought tomorrow," *De Interpretatione*, 18b, 19a). While these philosophical deliberations are beyond the scope of this thesis, the temporal terminology seeks to reflect the narrator's dynamic interplay of narrative devices which

in the chronological order reach into the past or the future to broaden the perspective and so create a multivalent picture, mimetic of reality.²⁰ These anachronies or departures from the chronological frame include retrogressions, anticipations, synchronic relationships, ellipses, plus various combinations of these elements:

1. Retrogressions, or analepses (narrating by moving back in time), can be explicit as in Esth 1:8 where commands to the household chiefs have been given previous to the narrated episode:

And the drinking was according to the law, none compelling
for thus the king had ordered (כִּי-כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ) to every
chief in the house to do according to the pleasure of each
man.

create a multivalent picture of time.

²⁰Berlin writes: "when we read narrative, especially biblical narrative, we are constantly tempted to mistake mimesis for reality - - to take as real that which is only a representation of reality. And, conversely, we may be blind to a piece of the narrative picture because we are unaware of how it is being represented" (1983:14). The study of narrative, or narratology, seeks to discover "how" literature works; what are the building blocks and the rules by which they are assembled. In other words, how reality is *represented* in a story.

Retrogressions can also be implicit. At 1:3 the 'third year' represents the initial time period but also points backwards, implicitly, to the beginning of royal accounting:

(Yr 1...)	days of these	Yr 3 of
(enthronement)	Ahasuerus days	reign
	1:1 v.2	v.3
←-----	-----→	
(implicit)	- forward trajectory of plot→	

Both examples are taken from the introductory section (1:1-9) and are prior (or, external) to the "first" occurrence in the narrative.²¹ These point to occasions that take place earlier than the drama opened by the king's enthronement in the third year, or the banquet served for seven days in the palace courtyard. Because these analepses are external, there is, as Genette points out "never at any moment risk of interfering with the first narrative, for their only function is to fill out the first narrative by enlightening the reader on one or another

²¹"First" narrative is used to refer to the actual finished product awaiting the reader ("sujet," Sternberg; "narrative," Genette) as opposed to the reconstruction of the "objective" order of occurrence ("fabula," Sternberg; "story," Genette). See Sternberg 1978:8; Genette 1980:27.

'antecedent'" (1972:49-50).²²

A second type of analepses are *internal* to the first narrative and consequently, there exists a potential risk of interference with the flow of the narrative. The skillful way in which the narrator of Esther handles this challenge, ensuring the swift flow of action, is to Robert Gordis the book's outstanding literary characteristic.²³

Two categories of internal analepses can be found in Esther. The first is what Genette terms as *completing analepses* or "returns" (1980:51). These are recountings or "returns" to earlier occasions that have, until this moment, not been shared

²²For a similar assessment of preliminary exposition see Sternberg 1978:41-55.

²³Gordis (1976:45) writes that "the outstanding literary characteristic of the author of Esther is his interest in the swift flow of action. He, therefore, strips the plot of all nonessentials, concentrating on events rather than on motivations, on incidents rather than on descriptions of character. . . . Because of the same over-riding consideration, the author does not concern himself with filling in the background against which the incidents take place. . . . these (details) are passed over in silence, so as not to impede the swift pace of the narrative."

in the narrative. One example from the king's frame is found in 1:13. Enraged by Vashti's refusal to attend his banquet, the king inquires of "the wise men who know the times" because as the narrator explains, this was characteristic of Ahasuerus: "for thus was the king's manner before all knowing law and judgment." A most poignant "return" is at 4:11 in Esther's response to Mordecai's urgent request to intercede for her people. Here, Esther supplies background material that includes laws affecting her ability to intercede for her people and information on her recent, inopportune separation from the king.

A second category of internal analepses are *repeating analepses* (Genette; "rückgriffe" Lämmert). These are allusions to the narrative's own past. The repetition of 1:12 in the king's question (v. 15) replays: "Vashti's refusal to perform the command of the king (given to her) by his eunuchs". The return to the first incident (1:12, 15), serves to minimize the retarding effects of the inserted completing repetition (vv.13, 14) and emphasizes the importance of the episode. As well, this type of repetition (also called resumptive repetition), can, according to Berlin (1983:126-28) indicate simultaneous events. By first returning to the original refusal scene (the resumptive repetition), the subsequent "bracketed" event (the consultation) is understood to occur at the same time.

2. Anticipations, or temporal prolepses (narrating ahead of events), are much less frequent than retrogressions.²⁴ Even though the biblical narrator may know future events, as a rule these are not divulged to the reader beforehand (Bar-Efrat 1989:179). However, the future can enter the character's present through expectations and intentions (Bar-Efrat, p. 184), or by the character's apprehension of the future: At 1:16-19 the fear of the consequences of Vashti's actions is reflected in Memucan's anticipation of a national uprising among the wives of the kingdom (1:17, 19):

For this matter of the queen **will go forth** (impf. יֵצֵא)
to all women to despise their husbands in their eyes
when it is reported (בִּשְׂמֵחָם), The king Ahasuerus

²⁴Gérard Genette rightly notes that this is a general trend in Western narrative tradition, with three notable exceptions: "(the) great early epics, the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid, begin with a sort of anticipatory summary that to a certain extent justifies the formula Todorov applied to Homeric narrative: "plot of predestination" (1980:67). Also, see Sternberg (1978:35-55) regarding the order of presentation in narrative (including *in medias res*, usually assigned to the Epics, and the straight chronological order, typical of biblical narrative).

commanded to bring Vashti the queen before him and she
came not. . . if pleasing to the king the royal word
will go forth (חַלַּף)²⁵ . . .

Memucan's suggestion to find a more suitable replacement (1:19) anticipates the administration of the ingathering of candidates (2:1-4), which in turn provides the rationale for bringing Esther, an exilic Jewess, to the Median-Persian court (2:7-8).²⁶ Anticipation enables characters to respond. The time allotted by Haman's decree (from 13 Nisan to 13 Adar) allows Mordecai and Esther to plan and execute a counter-decree and allows the Jews time to get organized²⁷ for most importantly, the foreknowledge

²⁵The phrases in 1:17 and 1:19 are nearly identical, playing on the verb חַלַּף (Qal imperfect, third masculine singular; cf. BDB 1951:423c) and the race between the dissemination of gossip about the matter of the queen and the edict issued by the word of the king.

²⁶Anticipation, according to Bar-Efrat also "ensures that the various events are not fortuitous but that there is a plan and a purpose" (1989:179).

²⁷The time allotted by Haman's decree (eleven months) is not an historical problem (so e.g. Paton 1908:209; and Hoschander 1923:180-81), but a literary convention to give "the author needed time for his story's dénouement" (Moore 1971:44).

of Haman's pogrom creates the possibility of its non-fulfillment.

3. Synchronicity deepens the linear perspective. The progression of the narrative is often supported by the use of the consecutive *waw* ("and"). When the narrator omits this construction, it usually, though not invariably, indicates simultaneous story lines (Bar-Efrat 1989:166). At 1:9 the absence of the *waw* consecutive (וַעֲשֶׂה חַגָּה, "made a feast"), that follows the adverbial marker (גַּם וַאֲשֶׁתִּי הָחֵלְכָהּ, "also Vashti the queen") clearly signifies the simultaneity of Ahasuerus and Vashti's banquets. Simultaneity can also be signified by resumptive repetitions (Berlin 1983:126-28).

4. Gaps, or temporal ellipses, are implied in phrases that bridge narrative events. At 2:1 and 3:1 the phrase "after these things" implies elapsed, but unspecified, periods of time. The chronological order of the narrative indicates that events begin in the third year and occur, often successively, until the mid-twelfth month of the twelfth year. But these events can usually be reconstructed only in relationship to each other.²⁸

²⁸See Sternberg (1978:8-19) on the relation of *fabula*, "the chronological or chronological-causal sequence into which the reader, progressively and retrospectively, reassembles (narrative motifs)" to *sujet*, "the actual disposition, and

Some ellipses are permanent. The gap between Vashti's dethronement (if in the third year, cf. 1:3, when?) and Esther's coronation (the tenth month of the seventh year, 2:16) is intriguing but inexplicable.²⁹ Other gaps are temporary, to be filled in by analepses, placed later in the narrative. Or, conversely, future ellipses are to be offset by anticipations.

DIFFERENTIATING EXPOSITION AND EPISODE

Temporal order in the narrative of Esther is complex, comprised of various elements in ever-changing patterns. Each word, expression, and motif has the potential to point beyond itself, backwards or forwards or simultaneously in time, and has

articulation of these narrative motifs in the particular finished product, as their order and interrelation, shaping and coloring, was finally decided on by the author."

²⁹If the dates preserve an historical remnant, Esther's coronation would be December-January of 479-478. Xerxes I (Ahasuerus?) would have just returned from an unsuccessful two year invasion of the Aegean. But, as Clines (1984:290) rightly notes, "The narrator cares nothing for that, and the **seventh year** and **tenth month** may well be symbolic notices of the successful completion of the search for a queen."

the potential to fill in past ellipses or offset future gaps. As well, these multiple temporal axes interact differently in exposition than in scene (or event).³⁰ The term "exposition" is used in this thesis to define summary or background material that is both preliminary and delayed, and is either concentrated or distributed throughout the narrative.³¹ Exposition is

³⁰The term "scenic" is one of four terms proposed by J. Licht to define modes of narration (the others are straight narrative, description, and comment), and is described by him as follows (1978:29):

In scenic narrative . . . the action is broken up into a sequence of scenes. Each scene presents the happenings of a particular place and time, concentrating the attention of the audience on the deeds and the words spoken. Conflicts, direct statements of single acts, and direct speech are preeminent.

Sternberg refers to the scenic as "discriminated occasions," those events that show quantifiably shorter time-ratios than the expositional segments *and* exhibit both specificity and concreteness (1978:14-34, 309, n44).

³¹See Sternberg (1978:1-34) for differentiation of exposition in the sujet ("the finished artifact before us") and exposition in the fabula ("essentially both an abstraction and a reconstitution") which is "always wholly concentrated at the beginning" (p. 33).

differentiated from scene by virtue of its tendency to *illustrate* rather than discriminate occasions.³² In Esther, summary material not only occurs at the beginning of the narrative, but is distributed throughout.³³ Exposition can be used, for example, to introduce a speaker or as a narratorial aside on the actions of a character. Both cases are seen in 1:13: "And the king said to the wise men who knew the times, for thus was the manner of the king before all who knew law and judgment . . ."

Because the initial exposition of the first voice (1:1-9) surveys the temporal and spatial parameters of Ahasuerus' extensive empire, events and circumstances are described in the most general terms. In contrast, the double scene at 1:10-2:4 focuses on queen Vashti's final day at court (1:10-22) and Ahasuerus' plans to replace her (2:1-4). Here, the details are discriminated: the characteristics of the king are internalized (e.g. his heart is merry with wine v. 10; anger burns within him, v. 12), eunuchs and advisors are catalogued by name, and

³²See Sternberg 1978:1-55.

³³See Sternberg (1978:56-89) for discussion on delayed and distributed exposition.

most importantly there is direct discourse.³⁴

According to Sternberg (1978:23-25) the "striking disparity" in represented time-sections offers a quantifiable measure by which to differentiate exposition from scenic: exposition requiring relatively little textual space in order to report long spans of time; and scenes taking much longer textual space to cover correspondingly shorter time-spans. In the narrative of Esther the initial exposition of the king's voice (1:1-9) alludes first to the whole epoch of Ahasuerus' reign (1:1, 2) then scans two lengthy banquets in the third year (180

³⁴The 'primacy of dialogue' in biblical narrative has been noted by L. Rost (1982:16-21) and is explored by Robert Alter who points out that dialogue is so predominant that "third-person narration is frequently only a bridge between much larger units of direct speech" (1981:65). But more important than the relative proportion of direct discourse to narration is the role that speech plays in specifying a situation. Adele Berlin states that "direct speech . . . is the most dramatic way of conveying the characters' internal psychological and ideological points of view" (1983:64) and Meir Sternberg locates speech within the scenic elements of an event as opposed to summary or exposition (1978:25). In other words, direct discourse, by its very nature, is an indicator of discriminated occasions.

days, v. 4; seven days, v. 5). Thus, the expository section telescopes a long fictive period (over 187 days) into only nine verses. In contrast, the first scene (1:10-2:4) concentrates mainly on one day: "On the seventh day" (בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי; 1:10) of the second feast, "when the heart of the king is merry with wine," and Ahasuerus orders Vashti to come to his banquet (v 11). When she refuses the king explodes with anger (v 12) and consults "the wise men who know the times" (v 13). They advise that Vashti should not come before the king ever again and that all the wives in the kingdom, by special decree, should obey their husbands (vv 16-22). "After these things," when the king's anger has subsided, Ahasuerus resumes discussions to find a replacement for the queen (2:1-4). The first scene (1:10-2:4), that covers the events of the last day of the banquet in seventeen verses (with a time-ratio of 1:17), is clearly in "striking disparity" to the time-ratio (187+:9) of the exposition.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The book of Esther is not usually accepted as a historical document yet its present form provides the "historical" basis for the Purim festival.³⁵ Until recently, studies in Esther concentrated on historical critical methods, especially pertaining to the dates "established" for Purim: Adar 14th and 15th (Esth 9:21-22).³⁶ The use of a foreign term to designate the name of the Jewish holiday of Purim (from pur and purum, 3:7; 9:26), along with the secular character of the celebration,³⁷ suggested pagan influences. To cite Berg (1979:3): "the general argument maintains that an independent

³⁵This material is limited, however. The textual evidence for the establishment of Purim is confined to Esth 9:20-32, a passage that "displays stylistic and linguistic differences from the rest of the narrative" (Berg 1979:28). See Clines 1984:256-268.

³⁶See Excursus: Research Regarding Purim, at the end of this chapter.

³⁷ For example, the traditional injunction for excessive drinking (Megillah 7b) and the absence of religious rituals, sacrifices or prayers in the text of Esther.

festival of extra-Israelite origin was adopted and popularized by non-Palestinian Jews during the exilic and post-exilic periods."

But the story of Esther is really more "history-like" than "historical."³⁸ While narrative details show a familiarity with the Persian period, we do not possess external sources about the events and situations posited in Esther. As Berg writes: "the primary clues to the narrator's purposes in telling his story rest with the narrative itself" (1979:15). Our incomplete knowledge of the Jewish diaspora during the Persian period, and the growing recognition of novelistic features in Esther,³⁹ is

³⁸To cite Berg: "Only in conjunction with evidence from external sources do the biblical narratives permit a reconstruction of any particular historical period. Unfortunately, we presently lack the type of external evidence necessary to reconstruct the historical event which several scholars believe gave rise to the Book of Esther" (1979:29). See Johannes Schildenberger (1964), James Barr (1976), and especially Hans Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative (1974) on the relationship between "history-like" and "historical" in biblical narrative.

³⁹Emmanuel Cosquin (1909:7-49, 161-197), David Goldstein (1980:166), and Jack Sasson (1987:335) find that the novelistic features in Esther resemble harem tales such as those found in

shifting attention away from the identification of specific persons and events to the literary characteristics of the book.⁴⁰

Although it has long been established that temporal sequence is of great importance to the development of Esther,⁴¹ there is little research specifically on aspects of temporality in the narrative. Thematic features that have received the most attention are the principles of reversal and repetition. Yehudah Radday (1973), Sandra Berg (1979) and Michael Fox (1983) all note an ordering principle in Esther around a pattern of reversals: a series of seemingly improbable coincidences that provide both tragic and comic circumstances that initiate and

"A Thousand and One Nights." The novelistic features in Esther have also been compared to other biblical narratives. See Gerleman's discussion in Esther (1970-1973); Humphreys (1973:211-223); Meinhold (1976:1976:79-93) and Sandra Berg (1979:123-165).

⁴⁰Herman Gunkel's (1916) study is the first major work to investigate the non-historical, "legendary" features of the book of Esther. Some representational studies in the language and syntax of Esther include Hans Striedl (1937), Ruth Stiehl (1956), and Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl (1963).

⁴¹See Hans Striedl 1937:73-108, especially 106ff.

then reverse the fate of the Jews and their enemies. While Radday's statistical analyses imply that the content of the book was artificially constructed, Berg argues for more complexities and subtleties in the plotting of the story. Berg suggests that the pattern of peripeteia, (which she defines as the frustration of expectations), lends itself to theological investigations of Esther, a book curiously devoid of explicit religious references (1979:111). Kaufmann, Cohen (1974), Loader (1978), as well as Berg (1979) find in the pervasive use of reversals a veiled yet persuasive indication that divine activity directs the outcome of events. David Clines comments "In my view, there is nothing *hidden* or *veiled* about the causality of the events of the Esther story: it is indeed *unexpressed* but it is unmistakable, given the context within which the story is set" (1984:156). Regarding repetitions, although commentators have referred incidently to the frequent repetitions in the book (e.g. Moore 1971:lvi), this aspect of time has not been explored as a separate literary or stylistic feature in Esther.

For analytical tools by which to examine the temporality of Esther, I have had to rely on sources outside the field of Esther studies. Sternberg's (1978) discussions on temporal ordering, differentiation of exposition and scene, and the understanding of the successive nature of the literary piece (as "time-art") are especially useful. So are Genette's (1972)

discussions on temporal ordering in narrative, from which I have borrowed concepts and terminologies for the system of chronology and anachrony in Esther. I have benefited greatly from Berlin's (1983) work on the representational aspects of biblical narrative and have used her studies on synchronic textual indicators and the poetics of point of view. I have borrowed heavily from Bar-Efrat's (1989) study on time in biblical narrative, especially his exploration of narrative devices used by the biblical narrator to shape and sequence time.

EXCURSUS: RESEARCH REGARDING "PURIM"

The "origin" of Purim is often cited as the raison d'être of the book of Esther (Moore 1982:xxx).⁴² P. de Lagarde (1877) traced pūrum from the term phoudaia (in the Alpha or A-text of Esther) or phourai (in the Septuagint) as corrupt transliterations of farvardīgān, the Zoroastrian Festival of the Dead that is celebrated during the last ten days of the Persian year. Unfortunately, de Lagarde made no attempts to show that farvardīgān had ever been celebrated on the 14th of Adar (Purim). Julius Lewy (1939) points out that correlations of some dates appearing in Darius' Bīsutūn inscription and some characteristics of the Avestan calendar would have supported de Lagarde's thesis.

Based on another linguistic theory and correlations of rituals, H. Zimmern (1891) argued that Purim was a transformation of Babylonian celebrations at the beginning of the year. Zimmern's etymology for purim derived from the Assyrian word puḥru meaning "assembly." But as Carey Moore comments: "that Aramaic and Hebrew would both have lost without a trace such a strong guttural as Akk. h is, from a linguistic

⁴²See Clines 1984:39-49 regarding the integrity of the ending of the Esther Scroll (9:1-19) and his argument against an original Purim connection with the Esther-Mordecai stories.

point of view, highly improbable" (1982:lxvii). Whether or not Zimmern's etymology is correct, he does rightly identify numerous parallels between the Babylonian New Year celebrations and the book of Esther. In the month of Nisan, the Babylonian Zagmuku or Akîtu (New Year festival) pageantry utilized motifs from the creation myth, Enuma Elish. Zimmern noted similarities between Marduk, the tutelary god of Babylon and the Jewish hero Mordecai. Marduk is honoured for his titanic victory over Tiamat, the creation of the cosmos from her body, and for defining the year by the twelve signs of the zodiac. Each New Year, in the month of Nisan, the gods were to assemble in Marduk's puhru-room in the E-Sagila temple to determine the fates of the king and the nation. Zimmern surmised that because Passover was also celebrated by the Jews during the month of Nisan, the Purim celebration was eventually moved back to the previous month Adar. Other scholars such as P. Jensen (1892) expanded Zimmern's comparison of Marduk and Mordecai to correlate Elamite gods and goddesses with the characters in Esther.

Various other eclectic unions of rites, customs, seasons and New Years have been posited as sources for the dates on which Purim is celebrated (Adar 14th and 15th). T.H. Gaster (1950) found parallels among festivals in many parts of the world. K.V.H. Ringgren (1956) threaded several festivals together to

make Purim a composite of Farvardigan, Mithragan, Magophonia, Nauruz and Bartoubaria. J.C.H. Lebram (1972) distinguished between an older Persian and newer Palestinian tradition. Lebram's theory was developed by H. Cazelles (1961) as the two sources ('Esther' and 'Mordecai') for the Masoretic text of Esther. This direction has recently been refined by David Clines as part of a five stage development of the Esther tale (1984).

Julius Lewy (1939) suggested that Purim reflects the historical coup by the Mardukians, the Babylonian worshipers of Marduk in Shushan during the reign of Artaxerxes II, Mnemon (404-358 BCE). Lewy is attributed, not with solving the origin of Purim, but with settling the interpretation of pur as a Hebrew plural of the Babylonian word for "lot" or "fate." Abraham Cohen, Y. Kaufmann and David Clines are among recent scholars who concur that the pur is a foreign equivalent of the lot (לֹטְרִי), an explanation given in the text itself (Esth 3:7). Clines notes that even though the day fixed by the pur, the 13th of Adar, was intended for the destruction of the Jews, it became instead a day for the massacre of the Jews' enemies. Also that the festival of Purim commemorates the *fourteenth* and the *fifteenth* of Adar, the days when there was 'rest' and no killing (1984:164). Clines departs from earlier investigations by suggesting that there is another emphasis in the story apart from the issue of the **date** on which Purim is to be observed

(1984:164):

Pur has been defined in v.24 as *goral*, 'lot', which has there been understood as the 'lot' cast by (or, for) Haman at 3:7. But the festival is called Purim, 'lots' in the plural. Regardless of the historical origins of the festival or of the meaning of the name, should we not see here a statement about the *meaning* of the festival that is made by the use of the plural? 'They called these days Purim, after the term *Pur*' (v.26). One lot is cast by Haman, but there is another 'lot' for the Jews - cast by God. There are *two*, contradictory fates or 'lots' cast for the Jews in the days of Esther; and the first was overturned by the second, itself a set of 'lots' or chances cast by divine providence.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST NARRATIVE MOVEMENT: INTRODUCTION OF THREE 'VOICES' (CHAPS 1-3)

PART I: THE ROYAL TIME-FRAME OF KING AHASUERUS

We do not find in the Scroll of Esther the scent of Israelite soil that pervades the other narratives of the Bible. Here the milieu is entirely alien. The concerns that are described are foreign. The axis on which everything turns is the king (Goitein 1957:66).

INTRODUCTION 1:1-2:4

And it was in the days of Ahasuerus, who is Ahasuerus ruling from India even to Cush, one hundred twenty seven provinces . . . (1:1)

Like an overture to a royal musical, the first voice of the narrative opens with great fanfare: King Ahasuerus, who rules the vast Persian-Median empire, makes extravagant, successive banquets in order to display his riches and honour before the nobility of the empire (1:3-4) and the entire populace of his

capital Shushan (vv. 5-15). The king's introduction is divided between two segments: an exposition at 1:1-9⁴³ that surveys the temporal and spatial parameters of the empire and illustrates the manners of the king at court; and a double episode that focuses on queen Vashti's final day at court (1:10-22) and Ahasuerus' subsequent plans to replace her (2:1-4).

⁴³Paton (1908), Bardtke (1963), Dommershausen (1968), and Murphy (1981) also identify 1:1-9 as expositional. Dorothy (1989:264-279) argues that 1:1-4, in conjunction with 10:1-3, provides a frame prologue and epilogue, so identifies 1:5-2:23 as the exposition. Clines' (1984:9-11) suggests the exposition includes 1:1-2:23 which he subdivides into seven "scenes:" 1:1-4 (a royal banquet for the officials) is designated as the first scene, and 1:5-9 (a royal banquet for the citizens of Susa) as the second. Because this thesis differentiates between exposition and scene (see chapter one), I argue that chaps 1-2 should be designated: first exposition (1:1-9) and double scene (1:10-22, 2:1-4), second exposition (2:5-14) and double scene (2:15-18, 19-23). See the following section (pages 37-48) for my arguments on the expositional role of 1:1-9, including the seemingly detailed unit at 1:5-8 that is *illustrative* of the grandeur and manners of the court.

INTRODUCTION OF FIRST VOICE: TEMPORAL STRUCTURE

EXPOSITION:

Ahasuerus' kingdom and extravagant entertainments (1:1-9)

1:1	וַיְהִי בִּימֵי	and it was in days of (Ahasuerus)
v.2	בִּימֵי הָהֵם	in those days
v.3	בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁת	in third year (he made a banquet)
v.4	יָמִים רַבִּים	many days
	שְׁמֹנֶטֶס יָמִים וְחֹמֶת יוֹם	180 days
v.5	(וּבְמָלְאוֹתָהּ) הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה	(and when full) these days
	שָׁבַע יָמִים	(he made a banquet) seven days
v.9	גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה	also queen Vashti (made a banquet)

DOUBLE EPISODE:

Seventh day of the second banquet / Vashti's final day

1:10	בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי	on the seventh day
	כַּטּוֹב לִב-הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיּוֹם	when the heart of the king was good with wine (he called for Vashti)
v.18	וַהֲיֹם הַזֶּה	and this day

Subsequent plans to replace the queen

2:1	אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה	after these things
	כַּשֶּׁן חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ זָכַר	when the anger of king Ahasuerus subsided he remembered (Vashti)

EXPOSITION 1:1-9

As if inscribed for performance: *vivace con moto*, the exposition sets a lively pace and spirited mood for the courtly tale. The introduction (וַיְהִי, "and it came to pass") evokes a

fabled era "once upon a time," that is reminiscent of folk literature.⁴⁴ Esther's stylized elements have been likened to a fairy-tale⁴⁵ or to the Arabian Nights (Goldstein 1980:166; Sasson 1987:335). According to Gunkel (1916:50), the lavish opening is

⁴⁴Susan Niditch (1985:450) suggests that the folklorist's approach helps to explain supposed weaknesses in the style of Esther.

⁴⁵To cite Gunkel (1916:50): "We are dealing in the first instance with *fairy-tale motifs*. Primitive narrative . . . more childlike than the stricter "history", that arose only in later cultural development" (1916:50). Unfortunately, Gunkel does not explain his use of the terms "history" and "later cultural development" but he does expand on "primitive narrative" (1916:50):

. . . primitive narrative arranges life according to its poetic needs, and with uninhibited credulity considers many things possible that certainly do not occur in prosaic reality. Hence it is in keeping with the oldest narrative style that the queen's banquet takes place three times . . . And how appealing is the idea of an unknown young girl's being raised to the throne and in that way being able to become a rescuing angel for her people, although real kings do not usually marry unknown maidens. And likewise, Mordecai must immediately become "the second" in the realm: In folkloristic style the hero finally becomes king (how many fairy tales end in this way!); but, to be sure, in the Persian realm this will not do at all for a Jew, and so one probably has to be satisfied with his having the position of first minister.

typical of a series of "exaggerations that the book contains," that are inspired by the "grandeur and might of the empire."

Undoubtedly the grandiosity of the king and his empire are central to this courtly tale.⁴⁶ In 167 verses the root מלך, "king, to rule" occurs over 250 times.⁴⁷ Every circumstance and activity is connected to the king, everything in the empire belongs to the king and all decisions are enacted by his irreversible decree. As Shlomo Dov Goitein writes: "the king is the axis on which everything turns" (1957:66-72).

"And it came to pass" (וַיְהִי; 1:1)⁴⁸ is a familiar opening

⁴⁶See Sandra Berg (1979:59-72) on the motif of kingship in the book of Esther. Berg notes especially the primary emphasis on the power and greatness of Ahasuerus (beginning at Esther 1:1-4) and the parallel terms used to describe Mordecai (e.g. 9:4, 10:2-3).

⁴⁷So Moore (1971:liv) who says the Hebrew vocabulary is scarcely "rich" (p. liv) but senses "a poetic prose account" despite the "poverty" of vocabulary (p. lv). Cf. Paton 1908:62-63; Streidl 1937:73-108.

⁴⁸The waw consecutive, וַיְהִי is usually translated: "and it came to pass" (cf. BDB 224c). The use of this construction is almost always followed by a substantive clause and modifying temporal

device in biblical narrative (1:1),⁴⁹ implying ("and . . .") here a continuation of events into the third year of the king's reign (1:1-3). The chronological order reflects a methodological presentation often associated with "historical" works.⁵⁰ But the

clause or phrase. The phrase also recurs six times in Esther (1:1; 2:7,8; 3:4; 5:1,2), each time marking transitional passages of time.

⁴⁹Six biblical books begin with וַיְהִי. Sometimes, as in Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel the opening phrase connects the narrative with a preceding book. Ezekiel, Jonah, and Ruth, like Esther, do not explicitly link with a preceding historical book. Regarding Esther, Streidl (1937:73) suggests this opening construct is part of the author's attempt to archaize, thus authenticating the account of Purim.

⁵⁰See H.T. Swedenberg (1944), also Meir Sternberg's (1978:35-55) excellent discussion of the traditional view that chronological order is considered "natural" or "historical" as opposed to "poetic" or "artificial"; a view reflected in the very terms chosen to denote the different orders. As Sternberg rightly notes, the historian is concerned with reconstructing events in the order of their occurrence and for the historian this reconstruction of chronological order "is indeed 'natural,'

narrative of Esther is really more "history-like" than "historical," for as Sandra Berg observes: "any historical core embedded in Esther⁵¹ has been overlaid with novelistic style" (1979:123).⁵²

particularly since it is the one most compatible with the scientific progression from cause to effect, which necessarily subsumes this temporal dimension" (1978:43).

⁵¹See Berg (1979:167-194) for relevant arguments for and against the historicity of Esther. Scholars who consider that the story of Esther is factual include Jacob Hoschander (1923), Johannes Schildenberger (1941), and Andre Barucq (1959). Others like P. Haupt (1906), R. H. Pfeiffer (1948), and T. H. Gaster (1950) view Esther as essentially fiction. Julius Lewy (1939), K. V. H. Ringgren (1958), and Hans Bardtke (1963) support a combination theory.

⁵²For example, the reader will be encouraged to confirm the narrator's account in the "official records" of the kings of Media and Persia (10:2; cf. 2:23 and 6:1, Clines 1984:333). The reference to royal chronicles is a standard formula in biblical narrative for citing historical sources (cf. 1 Kings 14:19, 29; 2 Chronicles 25:26, 32:32). Hoschander (1923:294-95) insists it is highly unlikely that the royal chronicles of Media and Persia

The sequential accounting, beginning with the incomplete sentence וַיַּעַשׂ (1:1), runs on until the preterite וַיַּעַשׂ, ("he made") in verse three. As well, many commentators allow that the following clause, beginning with בַּחֹדֶשׁ (v. 4), is also dependent on the preterite in verse three.⁵³ Thus the first expository unit highlights a lavish half-year banquet, the only activity that interests the narrator in the first three years of the king's reign:⁵⁴

and it was in the days of Ahasuerus . . . in those days . . . in the third year of his reign he made (וַיַּעַשׂ) a banquet for all the princes and servants, power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces before him . . . many days, one hundred eighty days.

would give an "exact account" (Esth 10:2) of a Jewish prime minister. Carey Moore (1971:99) suggests the chronicles may refer to a "popular historical account of the Persian kings, possibly written from a Jewish point of view, something like the midrashic source cited by the Chronicler in II Chron xxiv '27."

⁵³E.g. Paton (1908), Dommershausen (1968), Moore (1971), Murphy (1981), Clines (1984), and Dorothy (1989).

⁵⁴See Berg (1979:31-57) regarding the primacy of the banquet motif in Esther.

Without wasting a word, the narrator immediately adds a subsequent festivity, shorter but with an equally impressive guest list (1:5):

And when these days were full (וּבְכָל־יְמֵי הָאֵלֶּה) the king made, to all the people present in Shushan the citadel, from the greatest to the least, a banquet seven days in the court of the garden of the king's house.

There is no reason to suppose that these extravagant affairs were an assembly of military officials gathered to plan the Aegean attack (Herodotus 8.8),⁵⁵ or a coronation (Megillah 11b),⁵⁶

⁵⁵The third year of Ahasuerus' reign coincides with the third year of Xerxes' reign (483-2 BCE) in which he quelled a Babylonian revolt and planned his Athenian campaign, returning to Susa in the winter of 479 BCE. In 2:16 the tenth month Tebeth (December-January) in the seventh year, coincides with Xerxes' return (479 BCE). The narrator, however, makes no mention of these details but centres the tale on the romance and intrigue of the court.

⁵⁶Bernhard Anderson writes : "The verb פָּשַׁח "occasions some difficulty because the verb has the force of a preterit, and does not express duration" (1954:835). Thus, the Talmud (Megillah 11b) connects the phrase "when king Ahasuerus sat" with the temporal notice "in the third year of his reign" as an

or a wedding feast (Brockington).⁵⁷ First of all, the narrator cares nothing for these possibilities. Rather, the impressive scale of depicting royal entertainments (1:1-5), the extravagant surroundings (v. 6) and the liberality in drinking (v. 7) effectively convey the excessive wealth and glory that were reported of Persian courts.⁵⁸ This generalized depiction fits Sternberg's (1978:21-29) reading of expository texture in biblical narrative.

The king's frame also reflects the narrator's fondness for order. A distinctive triple rhythm is initiated in the first verses by successive temporal notices that are, in turn

allusion to the postponement of the king's accession until he could establish himself securely against all rivals.

⁵⁷Brockington (1969:224) draws parallels between the seven day feast in Esther and the wedding feasts in Genesis 29:21-28 and Judges 14:17. To the phrase "these days" (v. 5) the LXX adds "of the marriage" (*tou gamou*) which, according to Moore (1971:7) represents a corruption of *tou potou*, "of the drinking."

⁵⁸The incredulous extravagance of the Persian wine feasts, with upwards of 15,000 guests said to have been entertained at one time, made a deep impression upon the imagination of ancient writers (Olmstead 1948:182-83).

qualified with respect to the position of the king (1:1-3):⁵⁹

בימי אחשורוש, (and it was) in the days of Ahasuerus
who is Ahasuerus ruling from India to Cush
one hundred twenty-seven provinces

בימים ההם, in those days
when king Ahasuerus was sitting on the throne
of his kingdom in Shushan the citadel

בשנת שלוש לחיכו, in the third year of his reign
he made a banquet . . .
nobles and princes of provinces before him

The triplicate rhythm is repeated in the notations of the first banquet of the third year (1:4-5): "many days, one hundred eighty days" (v. 4), "these days" (v. 5). The rhythm is repeated in the description of the object of the celebration (v. 4): the glorious riches of his kingdom and the excellent honour of his greatness.⁶⁰

⁵⁹See Sandra Berg (1979:110) regarding triplicate patterns in Esther. David Clines observes a **triple** temporal movement (in the days of 1:1, in those days 1:2, in the third year 1:3) towards the crucial (**double**) feast in chap 1 (1984:275); a phenomenon that I find augmented (or **tripled**) in the Jewish protagonists' voice and echoed in the antagonists'.

⁶⁰These triple phrases are exactly parallel in the Hebrew (Clines 1984:276).

In the exposition of the first voice temporal motifs are also introduced. The *fullness* of days at 1:5 suggests a unity and a completion of the first "showing" of riches and glory (v. 4) before beginning the next festivity.⁶¹ The primary motif of the bright, extravagant "days of Ahasuerus" sets the tenor of the piece, initiates the chronological frame on which all events will occur, and by virtue of content and intent, provides an

⁶¹The motif of fullness or completion (מלוא) resurfaces in the time required for the preparation of the next queen (2:12); in the measure of Haman's rage that threatens the survival of queen Esther's people (3:5; 5:9; 7:5); and in the measure of queen Esther's authority (9:29) and Mordecai's greatness (10:2). On relevant discussions of time in the Hebrew Bible see: Kurt Gallig (1939:171) who cites Paul Tillich's philosophical concept of "kairos" for his development of "fulfilled time" in the OT; and Massao Sekine (1963:67-74) who discusses the notion of "filled" time from a psychological standpoint that combines "inner" and "outer" time. For example, the references of "at that time" in Deut 1-10 demonstrate for Sekine that the period from the Exodus to the entrance into Canaan was seen as a unity (pp. 75-80).

inclusio that brackets the entire book.⁶²

While the chronology of the king projects the story forwards, the opening phrases, "and it was in the days of Ahasuerus . . . in the third year of his reign" (1:1, 3) point backwards, implicitly, to the commencement of royal accounting, to Ahasuerus' accession to the Persian throne:⁶³

⁶²B.W. Jones notes that the empire of Ahasuerus, referred to as Persia and Media in Esth 1:3 and as Media and Persia in 10:2, forms a 'chiastic inclusio' (by the inversion of the names) for the entire book (1978:36-43). The **days** also form an inclusio: initiating the temporal frame (1:1); recurring about 50 times and enclosing the narrative by recording "the matters of the "days" of the king" (usually translated "chronicles"; occurring three times: 2:23; 6:1; 10:2). Dorothy (1989:268-9) correlates the greatness of the kingdom, the purpose of the 180 day banquet (to show king's power), and the presence of chief counselors in 1:1-4 with the content and intent of 10:1-3 (the counselors of the prologue being replaced by Mordecai in the epilogue), thus forming a parallel frame prologue and epilogue.

⁶³Beginning the story "in the third year of the king's reign" (1:3) assumes that the enthronement of Ahasuerus initiates the epoch. It is an ancient intention as de Grazia explains: "Whenever an emperor decided that time began with his rule, the

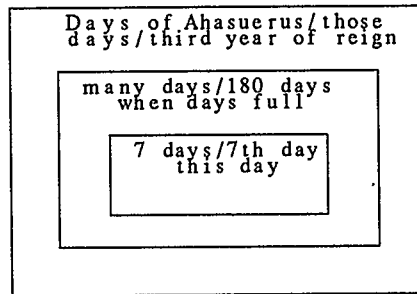
Implied Time	Ellipses	Temporal Notations
prior to 1:1	←..... (indeterminate).....	and it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus in those days
Year One (accession)←.....().....	in the third year of his reign.....

Thus, the trajectory of time in the king's exposition is usually unidirectional and forward, but with implicit retrogressions. The temporal notations in the exposition are ordered but general and the ratio of time in the story to narrated time supports the classification of 1:1-9 as expositional (cf. Sternberg 1978:19-23), demonstrating that a long fictive period is covered in relatively short textual space (187+ days in nine verses).

linear conception was there: year One began with Alexander, Seleucus, Augustus and Diocletian" (1962:303). According to Martin Nilsson (1920:105) the only trace of denoting an era in Babylonian accounting was through the king's accession to the throne. Mircea Eliade suggests that the royal time of origin "is considered a 'strong' time precisely because it was in some sort of 'receptacle' for a new creation" (1963:34).

DOUBLE EPISODE (1:10-22; 2:1-4)

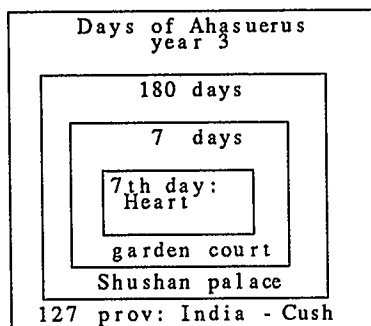
Typical of preliminary exposition, ⁶⁴there is a tendency in the royal frame for time to flow from general to specific, coinciding with the transition from exposition to discriminated episodes. The general introduction of the third year of Ahasuerus' reign (1:1-3) is narrowed to illustrate a banquet of one hundred eighty days (vv. 4-5a), followed by a week long banquet (vv. 5b-9) that is narrowed further to feature the last day, the seventh day of the the second banquet (vv. 10-22):



The narrowing temporal perspective is supported by continual refinements in spatial descriptions. From the expansive margins of the empire (1:1), action collapses inwards to the capital of Shushan (v.2), to nobility gathering before

⁶⁴See Sternberg 1978:41-55.

the king's throne (v.3), to elaborate entertainments in the palace garden courtyard (v.4-8). There action is arrested in the heart of the king at first "merry with wine" (v.10), then erupting with anger (v.12), and eventually appeased (2:1):



In contrast to the lengthy entertainments, general guest lists, and *characteristic* orders of the king⁶⁵ in the exposition, events and descriptions in the double episode (1:10-22; 2:1-4) are both specific and concrete. The king is no longer merely a figurehead, endlessly presiding over the affairs of state

⁶⁵E.g. in 1:8 "for thus (כִּי-כֵן) the king ordered to all the chiefs of his house" indicates a manner that is *characteristic* of the king. Even the seemingly detailed descriptions of the palace garden (v. 6) and the drinking vessels (v. 7) are used illustratively, to emphasize the king's lavish style. Cf. Sternberg's differentiation between exposition and scenic in Job 1:1-12 (1978:23-26).

(1:1-9), but is now actively participating on the seventh day of the banquet (v. 10), and his condition internalized: His heart is "merry with wine" (1:10). Anger "burns within him" (v. 12). And Ahasuerus speaks (vv. 13, 15).⁶⁶ Then in contrast to the general roster for the banquets (1:3, 5), the king's eunuchs and chief advisors are conscientiously catalogued by name (vv. 10, 14), and Memucan replies to the king's inquiry (1:16-19). There is also a disparity between the time-ratios of the exposition and the discriminated episodes. The exposition (1:1-9) telescopes a long fictive period (over 187 days) into nine verses. In contrast, the discriminated episode at 1:10-2:4 concentrates mainly on one day for seventeen verses, demonstrating a marked disparity between the exposition (187+:9) and episode (1:17).

The shape of time in the original voice is first of all

⁶⁶See page 25, note 34 regarding "primacy of dialogue" in biblical narrative. Robert Alter (1981:70) further suggests that articulated language reveals each person's distinctive nature and that "the Hebrew tendency to transpose what is preverbal or nonverbal into speech is finally a technique for getting at the essence of things, for obtruding their substratum."

dependant on the chronology of the king and on the successive temporal notations, such as: "in the third year" (1:3), "one hundred eighty days" (v. 4), "when these days were full . . . seven days" (v. 5), "on the seventh day" (v. 10). Prepositional phrases accompanying temporal notices also advance the narrative.⁶⁷ Then the frequent use of conjunctives (**waw** and **waw** consecutives) ensures the cohesion and continuity of the story line.⁶⁸ It is notable that numerous explicit temporal markers and prepositional phrases combine to progress the opening, festive days in the exposition but that on the seventh day, when time and festivities are arrested, these temporal phrases are overtaken by compound sentences, piled together, magnifying the sudden and irreversible downfall of the queen:

EXPOSITION

1:1: וַיְהִי, and it came to pass

v.5 וַיְבַחֲלוּ אֶת הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה, and when these days were fulfilled

v.7 וַיִּשְׁקוּ, and they gave to drink

v.8 וַיִּשְׁתִּי כַדֹּחַ, and the drinking was according to law

⁶⁷E.g. "in those days, when Ahasuerus was sitting on the throne," v. 2; "when these days were full," v. 5; "on the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine," v.10.

⁶⁸See Bar-Efrat (1989:166) for discussion on the use of **waw** consecutives as indicators of continuity and conversely, by their absence, of simultaneity.

FIRST EPISODE

- v.12 וְהַמֶּלֶךְ הָמַלְכָּה וְשָׁתִי לְבֹא, and Q. Vashti refused to come
וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד, and the king became very angry
וְהַחֲמָתוֹ בָּצְרָה בּוֹ, and his anger burned within him
- v.13 וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יְדְעֵי הַצִּמִּים, and the king said to
the wise men who knew the times
- v.14 וְהַקְרִיב אֵלָיו, and those closest to him (were. . .)
- v.16 וַיֹּאמֶר מִמּוּכָן, and Memucan said:
- v.18 וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמְרָה, and this day they will say
- v.19 וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּדִרְתֵּי פֶרַס וּמֵדִי, and let it be written in the laws
of Persia and Media
וְלֹא יָשׁוּב, and not return (Vashti before the king)
וְהַמַּלְכוּתָּהּ יִתֵּן, and her royal position give (to another)
- v.20 וְכִשְׁמֹעַ פֶּתֶחַ הַמֶּלֶךְ, and when it is heard the king's edict
וְכָל הַנְּשִׂאִים יִתְּנוּ יָקָר, and all the women will give
respect (to their husbands)
- v.21 וַיִּיטֹב הַדָּבָר, and it was pleasing the matter (in the
eyes of the king and the nobles)
וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מִמּוּכָן, and the king did according to
the word of Memucan
- v.22 וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים, and he sent dispatches (to all people)

On the seventh day (1:10) of the seven day banquet (cf. v. 5) the king sends his seven eunuchs to bring queen Vashti before him (vv. 10-11). On hearing of Vashti's refusal (v. 12) the king consults with the wise men, the seven chief princes in the kingdom (v. 13-14). According to Paton (1908:148) the number seven was a sacred number to both the Persians and Hebrews. The reiteration of divisions and units of seven corresponds with the narrator's fondness for ordered repetitions (e.g. triple rhythms) and associates the number with queen Vashti's final day at court.⁶⁹

⁶⁹The repetition of seven's on Vashti's final day at court may be

While the collapse of time and space centres in the heart of the king, it is the unseen and unmovable queen who is the focus of attention. With great pomp and details the stage has been set for the appearance of the king's most prized possession, the beautiful queen Vashti.⁷⁰ All of Shushan waits (cf. 1:5). Characteristically, the narrator's observation is both terse and impartial: "Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's word by the hand of the eunuchs" (1:12). It is the first (in a series) of reversals of expectations in the narrative.⁷¹

The bright, melodious days outlined in the exposition become suddenly frenetic. To cite Clines: "Vashti's simple and unelaborated refusal forms an amusing contrast to the histrionic reaction of the king and his counselors" (1984:280). So

a symbolic number associated with the queen's crown, repeated in the year of Esther's accession (2:16). Cf. Clines 1984:290.

⁷⁰Cf. Anderson 1954:837. Clines writes (1984:279): "(Vashti) is indeed the chief treasure (Ahasuerus) possesses and has been saved up for the seventh and final day of the second banquet.

⁷¹See Radday (1973:6-13); Fox (1982:291-304); and Berg (1979:103-113) regarding the construction of the book of Esther "according to a precise pattern that manifests the theme of reversal" (Berg, p. 109).

powerful is the sudden turn of events that it ignites the king's wine-fueled heart and sets the legal machinery of the greatest empire in the world into frantic motion (vv. 12-14). The king appeals to "the wise men who knew the times," his seven chief advisors (vv. 13-14), whose spokesman waxes eloquently out of apprehension of a national uprising - - by the women (vv. 16-20)! Clines calls the pointed reference to the legal experts of Persia, essentially satirical.⁷² But within the temporal structure, "the wise men who knew the times" (לְחַכְמַיִם יָדְעֵי הַצִּמְתִּים) (v. 13) also serve to explicitly interconnect the concepts of time and knowledge.⁷³

⁷²Clines (1984:280) writes: "The wise men who knew the times . . . sound like astrologers such as those of Dan. 2:27; 5:15; etc. (cf. Herodotus 1.107; 7,19, for the consultation of magi by Astyages and Xerxes). (But) their reply (vv. 16-20) does not hang on technical lore (nor even upon any expertise with law and precedent) . . . The point is essentially a satirical one: it takes the legal experts and flower of Persia's aristocracy to formulate a response which any self-respecting male chauvinist could easily dream up for himself."

⁷³The knowledge of the times may be a satirical point about the seven advisors (Clines 1984:280) but emerges seriously regarding Mordecai, in his habitual walks, *day by day* before the court of

The king's inquiry, implicitly connects time with knowing. Of the time-frame for the king's consultation with the wise men, Clines writes (1984:280):

At some unspecified time -- though the text suggests a deliberation while the participants are still in their cups (cf. 'next to him', v. 14; 'this very day', v. 18) - - the king consults **the wise men who knew the times**.

According to Adele Berlin this kind of repetition of the queen's actions in 1:13, 15 (in slightly different form),⁷⁴ known as resumptive repetition, would indicate that the *report* by the eunuchs (of Vashti's refusal to come to the banquet) is followed immediately by the king's consultation (with the wise men who

women to *know* about the welfare of Esther (2:11), and in the duet between Mordecai and Esther in chapter four: appointed . . . to know what it was (4:5), all the king's servants . . . know (v. 11), who knows if you have come to royalty for such a time as this? (v. 14).

⁷⁴The disobedience of the queen is related by the eunuchs in 1:13 and repeated by the king who asks (the wise men who knew the times): "according to the law what must be done with queen Vashti for not doing the word of king Ahasuerus by the hand of the eunuchs" (v. 15).

knew the times).⁷⁵

Acting as spokesman for the seven advisors, Memucan's reply (1:16-20) is cleverly constructed with parallel passages that play on the verb $\times\text{צ}'$ and the urgent matter of which royal word

⁷⁵Resumptive repetitions have been taken by form critics as an indication of where new material has been inserted into the narrative. Cf. Seeligmann (1962), Wilcoxon (1974:91-98), and Talmon (1978:12-26). Berlin (1983:126-9) argues that resumptive repetitions are integral to the narrative and can function to show simultaneity, by returning the reader to the original point and bracketing the intervening events: "Now (the reader) returns to his original point, to see what was happening there at the same time as the intervening events. For example, in 2 Sam 13:34 אבשלום ויבר 'And Absalom fled' - Absalom flees but the reader remains with David and Jonadab and sees their view of Absalom's leaving. Then in 13:37 (and 38) ואבשלום ברח gives the same information from the side of Absalom: where did he go, how long did he stay there. The intervening scene is thus to be understood as having occurred at the same time as Absalom's flight (cf. Talmon, *Scripta*, 20)" (Berlin 1983:127). F. B. Huey (1988:802) also understands Esther 1:15 to be resumptive, after the parenthetical expression of vv. 13b-14.

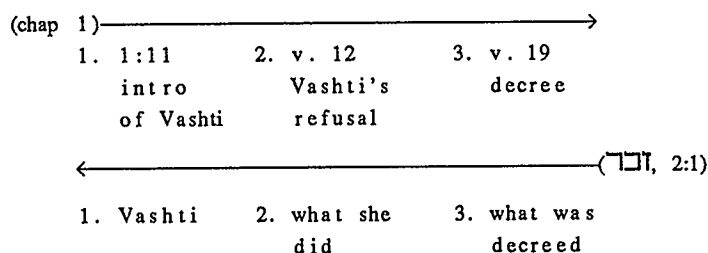
will be heard, the queen's or the king's.⁷⁶ And by his apprehension, Memucan directs the fictive present towards the future, imagining a moment when the matter of the queen will be heard by all the women, who will then despise their husbands, "and this day" there will be no end to strife and discord in the kingdom (vv. 16-18).⁷⁷ The prospect of wives revolting is of course purely speculative, but it affords the king a satisfactory scenario by which to justify his irreversible decree against Vashti (cf. vv. 19, 21). There is frantic activity to disseminate the king's decree across the vast empire (1:22), but the curtain rises again on a pensive king, awakening to his solitude (2:1):

After these things when the anger of king Ahasuerus subsided he remembered Vashti and what she did and what was decreed against her.

⁷⁶Cf. "and it will go out" 1:17; "let him issue" v. 19; "the word of the queen" (twice) vv. 17-18; "word of royalty," and "edict of king" vv. 19-20.

⁷⁷See Bar-Efrat 1989:179-184 on the use of anticipation in biblical narrative. Bar-Efrat lists apprehension among the various ways in which the future enters the character's present (p. 184).

In 2:1 the general designation of time, "after these things" and the triple use of the particle -אִם (the definite object marker) effectively separates the double episode (1:10-22; 2:1-4) into parallel accounts "before" and "after" Vashti's dethronement.⁷⁸ With exquisite restraint,⁷⁹ the triple remembrance⁸⁰ of the king recalls and retraces the original occasion:



The cessation of the king's anger and his remembrances (2:1) stand over against his earlier eruption of anger (1:12) and

⁷⁸Cf. Murphy 1981:160.

⁷⁹See Goitein 1957:66-72 for discussion on the technique of restraint in the narrative of Esther.

⁸⁰The act of remembrance, introduced in the king's frame, becomes a central motif in the establishment of the Jewish festival, where Mordecai adjures succeeding generations to not only "remember" ("without fail"), but also "keep" these days of Purim (9:27, 28).

command to forget Vashti (cf. 1:19).⁸¹ The counter-point of eruption/cessation, forgetting/remembering conjoins the past with the present,⁸² and is mimetic of reality, of memory.

In summary, time in the royal theme begins with extravagant periods of leisure that collapse into one explosive moment when

⁸¹On the motif of anger in Esther see: Talmon 1963:442-44; Clines 1984:16; Segal 1989:247-256.

⁸²This notion of the temporality of memory is influenced by the concepts of Bergson and Proust ("contemporary literature is saturated with a sense of Bergson's *durée* and of Proust's *mémoire involontaire*," Margaret Church, 1949:5). Proust especially experiments with how the sudden remembrance of things past can resurrect more than a singular moment from bygone days to produce a union of past and present. See The Past Recaptured, translated by F. A. Blossom, 1932:192-198. Bar-Efrat makes a similar observation about the role of flashbacks in the speech of biblical characters: "Glimpses into the past within the speech of the characters combine the actual facts with their interpretation, often showing how an individual's present actions are determined by past experiences. Facts from the past 'exist' in the present, operating actively to mould the future, and thus the various times become interrelated and to a certain extent unified" (1989:180).

the queen refuses to obey the king's order. His anger is appeased on the wake of another summons, to find a suitable replacement for her crown. The flow of time is usually oriented towards the future but anachronies such as retrogressions, anticipations, ellipses, and synchronic episodes create diversity in the temporal perspective. The narrator's penchant for order is reflected in a distinctive triple arrangement of temporal notations that centres, in this first chapter, on the **days** of the king's reign, especially on two lavish banquets. Four important temporal motifs are introduced: the extravagant and bright "days" (יָמִים) of Ahasuerus (1:1),⁸³ the fullness (מָלֵא) of days (1:5), the knowing of times (יָדָעַי הַמָּוֶלֶתִּים; 1:13), and the remembrance (זָכוֹר) of times and events.

⁸³In the introduction of the first voice, temporal notations are given (predominantly) by an external narrator who is primarily concerned with the **days** (sg. יוֹם; pl. יָמִים) of the king's third year: "in the days of Ahasuerus," 1:1; "in those days," v. 2; "many days, one hundred eighty days," v. 4; "when these days are full . . . seven days," v. 5; "on the seventh day," v. 10; "and this day," v. 18.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FIRST NARRATIVE MOVEMENT: INTRODUCTION OF THREE 'VOICES' (CHAPS 1-3)

PART II: THE JEWISH PROTAGONISTS' TIME-FRAME

Mordecai is played like a theme in a Sibelius symphony, with fragments of his personality occurring scattered in the early chapters; only after Haman's fall are they integrated into a full version to represent the writer's perfect image of a partisan Jew in a position of mastery (10:3; Jack Sasson 1987:338).

INTRODUCTION 2:5-23

Like the second voice of an intricately constructed fugue, the Jewish protagonists' time-frame creates both counter-point and harmony with the original, royal voice. Like the king's time-frame, the introduction of the Jewish protagonists' voice is divided into an initial exposition (2:5-14) and double episode (vv. 15-20; vv. 21-23).

INTRODUCTION OF SECOND VOICE: TEMPORAL STRUCTURE

DOUBLE EXPOSITION:

Biographical record: Mordecai and Esther (2:5-7)

Resumption of King's story,
Preparing for a queen (vv. 8-14)

2:8	ויהי בהשמע	and it was/when heard word
		of king (gathered virgins)
v.9	ויבהל	and he hastened (Hegai)
v.11	ובכל-יום ויום	& every day (Mordecai walks)
v.12	חר	turn (of each girl)
	מקץ היות לה	when completion being to her
	שנים צשר חדש	twelve months
	ימלאו	fulfilled
	ימי מרוקיהך	days of purification
	ששה חדשים	six months (oil myrrh)
	וששה חדשים	and six months
		(perfume/cosmetics)
v.14	בצרב	in evening (she went)
	ובבקר	and in morning (she returned)

DOUBLE EPISODE:

Esther's turn and coronation (vv. 15-20)		
v.15	תר-אסתר	turn of Esther
v.16	בחדש הצשירי	(taken to king) in 10th month
	הוא-חדש טבת	Month of Tebeth
	בשנת-שבצ למלכותו	in 7th year reign
v.19	שנית	second time (virgins gathered)
Mordecai interrupts regicide (vv. 21-23)		
v.21	בימים ההם	in those days
v.23	בספר דברי הימים	(recorded) in book of matter
		of days

EXPOSITION 2:5-14

A man, a Jew there was in Shushan the citadel and his name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish a Benjamite man

who was exiled from Jerusalem with the exiles who were exiled with Jeconiah the king of Judah who Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babel exiled.

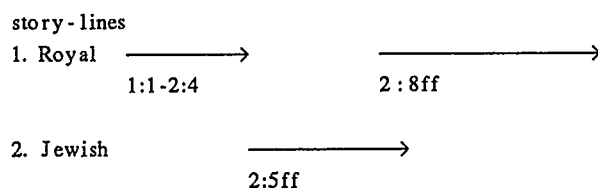
And he was bringing up Hadassah, who is Esther, the daughter of his uncle because she did not have a father or mother, and the girl was lovely of form and pleasing of features, and on the death of her father and her mother Mordecai took her to him as a daughter. (2:5-7)

The Jewish protagonists' time-frame "interrupts" (Clines 1984:286) the king's story (2:5-7), and introduces new characters into the swift flow of the plot without regressing in time and noticeably, without employing the usual **waw** consecutive that would continue the previous episode.⁸⁴ Bar-Efrat (1989:166) writes that the frequency of the consecutive **waw** "gives biblical narrative its characteristic flavour" and when this form of the verb is omitted it often indicates that actions do not follow chronologically. This device (the departure from the usual

⁸⁴The copious use of the consecutive **waw** in the narrative of Esther was discussed in the introduction to the first voice (p. 20). And as Bar-Efrat (1989:166) demonstrates, the biblical narrator generally ensures that the narrative flows in one direction, from past to future, and that sequential order is often indicated by the consecutive **waw** (translated 'and').

consecutive **waw**) allows the biblical narrator to indicate concurrent story lines "without regressing in time to a previous point, simply continuing in a straight chronological line while jumping from one parallel strand to another" (Bar-Efrat 1989:168).

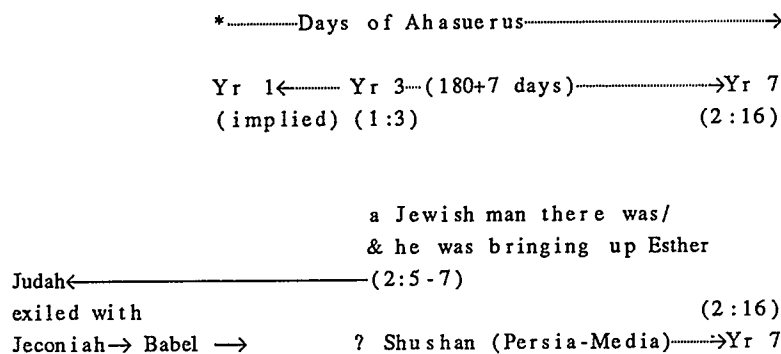
In the exposition of the king's frame, the absence of the **waw** consecutive at 1:9 (וַעֲשֶׂהָ, "she made a feast"), following the adverb marker כֵּן ("also"), clearly signified the simultaneity of Ahasuerus' and Vashti's feasts. Similarly, the context and construction of the phrase, "a Jewish man there was in Shushan" (2:5) signals a synchronic relationship between Ahasuerus' and Mordecai's stories.



As well, the doubled וַיְהִי (2:7, 8) in Esther's entrance into the king's story, suggests a synchronic reading. The repetition of the phrase וַיְהִי ("and it was") returns the narrative to the opening phrase (1:1), brackets the stories of the king's and Vashti's third year banquets, and begins again in Shushan (cf.

1:2, 9; 2:5-7) with the stories of Mordecai and Esther.⁸⁵

While the trajectories of the stories of Mordecai and Esther line up with the forward chronology of the king, Mordecai's genealogy and exilic history (2:5-6), extend the protagonists' time-frame backwards, even beyond the implied accession year of Ahasuerus (1:1-3):



According to Carey Moore (1971:26), Mordecai's genealogy "is of no little concern to the author" who has deliberately vested his

⁸⁵Cf. Koch 1969:116. Berlin (1983:125) writes that formulaic beginnings such as "וְהָיָה" serve to introduce a new section (even a subsection) of the present narrative and/or connect it to the preceding section. Also, resumptive repetitions that bracket intervening material, allow the reader to return to the original point to see what was happening there at the same time as the intervening (bracketed) events (p. 126).

protagonist (Mordecai) and antagonist (Haman) with rival lineages.⁸⁶ Despite apparent problems with the identity and relationship of Jair, Shimei and Kish,⁸⁷ most commentators allow that a Saulide and Amalekite connection are implicit in Mordecai and Haman's genealogies.⁸⁸ Bickerman (1967:209) suggests further

⁸⁶Moore writes (1971:26): "(the author) wishes to establish that Mordecai is a descendant of Kish, whose son, Saul, conducted an inconclusive campaign to exterminate all the Amalekites (See I Sam xv). Haman, the villain of the story, is of course a descendant of the Amalekites and therein lay the basis for the antipathy between the two."

⁸⁷Although Jair, Shimei and Kish are familiar biblical names there is no extraneous list that would exactly support this lineage. Goldman (1946:202), Moore (1971:26), and Berg (1979:64-67) hold that the genealogy contains gaps. Cf. Robert Wilson (1975:169-189) who argues that multiple or conflicting genealogies often result from an intent to express more than biological ties. Moore (1971:19) states that the genealogy argues for the historicity of Mordecai; a totally fictitious character could have been given a direct descendancy from Saul.

⁸⁸E.g. Bickerman (1967:197), Brockington (1969:228, 231), Fuerst (1975:52), Berg (1979:59-72), Clines (1984:287), and Huey

that it was "desirable" for Mordecai to be exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah (597 BCE), because this captivity included the nobility of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:12) while the later deportation (586 BCE) concerned commoners (2 Kings 25:11). But at this point in the narrative (2:5-8), the reader has no idea that a crisis is brewing between Mordecai the Jew and Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite (3:1-6). Rather, the portrayal of Mordecai at 2:5-7 is over against the earlier depiction of king Ahasuerus.⁸⁹

Mordecai's introduction seems humble, at first, compared to the lavish overture accorded the king. Ahasuerus rules over a vast empire from his throne in the citadel (1:1-2). Mordecai, on the other hand, is an exiled citizen in Shushan (2:5).⁹⁰ Yet

(1988:805, 811). Anderson (1954:847) writes that Esther "may be regarded as the inexorable working out of the divine curse against Amalek."

⁸⁹Berg (1979:64) draws numerous parallels between the Persian king and Mordecai in order to demonstrate Mordecai's "royal status," which she sees implied in his royal apparel, lineage and attributes (such as greatness).

⁹⁰Mordecai is actually *twice* exiled. First from his homeland in Judah to Babylon, ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, and now to the capital of the Persian-Median empire, ruled by Ahasuerus

even though Mordecai is a commoner and in exile, he is given cultural, racial (Jewish, Benjamite) and familial ties⁹¹ that root him firmly within the ongoing history of his people. This history and genealogy provides a continuity for Mordecai that is totally lacking in the portrayal of the king.

While Mordecai and Esther are held in the courtly tale by threads to their past (2:5-7), their present temporal location is not yet specified.⁹² Unlike the king's frame (1:1-2:4), we do not know what year or how many days or on what day Esther is taken to the king's house, for example, only that when the word of the king is heard (2:8) their two story lines converge, and Esther is gathered, along with all the other beautiful young virgins, to the palace (1:8). What interests the narrator, in the exposition of the second voice, is not the replication of the king's chronology but the *pace* and *repetition* of actions accompanying Esther's entrance to the palace (2:8-9):

(2:5-6).

⁹¹Mordecai is linked to the past through Jair, Shimei and Kish and to the future through his foster daughter Esther.

⁹²Narrative devices such as the lack of *waw* consecutive and the double occurrence of *וַיְהִי* support the notion of simultaneity of Ahasuerus', Mordecai's and Esther's stories, but do not indicate at what point the stories are parallel.

And it came to pass (וַיְהִי) when the word of the king and his law was heard and when many young girls were gathered to Shushan the citadel unto the hand of Hegai, Esther was taken to the house of the king unto the hand of Hegai the keeper of women

and the girl was pleasing in his eyes and she won favor before him and he hastened to give to her (her) beauty treatments and portions and gave to her seven maids selected from the king's house and moved her and her maids to the best (place) in the women's house.

Esther is doubly favoured. She is not only pleasing in the eyes of the keeper of women, but wins his "favour,"⁹³ so that Hegai *hastens* (וַיַּבְהִי) to provide her with beauty treatments and portions and gives her seven maids and moves them to the best place in the house (2:9). There is in Hegai's double response and piling up of favors, the impression that Hegai is overwhelmed by the girl and cannot do enough for her. Both Moore (1971:22) and Clines (1984:288) point out that Hegai could not do anything to shorten Esther's obligatory twelve month regime (2:12), but he could, and did, affect its commencement. However, these "days of purification," the full year beauty preparation required by the law of women (2:12) has not yet been introduced. At verse nine the narrator cares only that Esther is greeted effusively and speedily accommodated. In other

⁹³Hebrew, חַסֵּד, "favor" or "steadfast love." On the meaning of חַסֵּד in the Hebrew Bible see Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (1978).

words, that Esther is the sole centre of attention.

Mordecai's inquiries (2:11) also perpetuate the repetitive, piling up of actions: *every day* (literally, and in every day and day, וְכָל-יוֹם וְיוֹם) Mordecai walks before the women's courtyard, asking after the welfare of Esther. Mordecai's daily ministrations of domestic affairs are mimetic of reality and contrast him again with the king's seemingly endless "days" (of the exposition), that evoke a fabled, fairy-tale existence.

The preliminary exposition of the second voice, like that of the king's time-frame, begins with a sweeping geographical view (India to Ethiopia to Shushan, 1:1-2; Shushan to Jerusalem to Babel, 2:5-6) that narrows to the palace of the king (1:2; 2:8) and then to a particular place within the king's house, the "best place of the house" (2:9) where Esther waits for her turn to go to the king. And here Esther keeps her secret (v. 10).

Is Esther deliberately concealing her royal descendency (Rashi), or following her religious obligations secretly so as not to have to renounce them (Ibn Ezra)? Is she reflecting Mordecai's modesty (against revealing their royal lineage, Goldman 1945:205), or avoiding provoking anti-Jewish feeling (Clines 1984:288)? Murphy (1981:155) calls the motif of concealment "a hallmark of the author's style" noting that the ignorance of Esther's Jewish identity and relationship with Mordecai enables Haman to conceive his pogrom (chap 3), attempt

to hang Mordecai (chap 5), and misinterpret the queen's invitations (chap 5, 7). The concealment of her Jewish name (Hadassah, (2:7) is never again mentioned) and kindred, in apposition with her meteoric rise in the harem (v. 8-9), surely creates a suspenseful ellipsis. But the narrator, typically, is not concerned with explicating the "whys" of the plot, only indicating that the concealment of Esther's ancestry warrants special attention. It is the first duty Esther herself performs in the narrative (2:10). It is twice mentioned (2:10, 20), enshrouding her preparation and coronation scene (vv. 12-18).

The preparation of the candidates for the crown, as prescribed in the "law of the women" (v. 12), is "a ludicrously extended period" (Clines 1984:289) of twelve months.⁹⁴ The

⁹⁴The period of time is even more fabulous given the investment in each girl of 360+:1 ratio of days, (based on Babylonian accounting of thirty day months; cf. TWOT 1980:266). See Huey 1988:809. Langdon (1980:21) writes that the Jews in exile knew the calendars of the temples in Babylonia and the myths of the months, the names of which they adopted after exile (replacing the Canaanite names). In his article on the enigma of time, John Boslough (1990:111) writes: "Drawn like most ancient people to the movements of the heavens and the changing seasons, the Babylonians developed a year of 360 days, then divided it into

beauty treatments are described as a three-part programme that outlines the preparation, procedure and requirements for the next queen.⁹⁵ But the carefully constructed account of the preparation of the women is categorized here as expositional because, like the garden decor or drinking regulations in chapter one, it is illustrative of the king's extravagance at

12 lunar months of 30 days each. This was not a simple feat, since the sun and moon do not dance in step, the moon's cycles occurring approximately every 29 1/2 days and the earth's every 365 1/2 days. Babylonian astronomers knew the true number of days in a year, but kept it at 360 because their priests insisted the number - - in a circle - - possessed magical properties."

⁹⁵The three-part programme of 2:12-14:

When the turn of each girl came to go in to king Ahasuerus

1. when she had completed, as the law of women
twelve months (for this completed days of purification)
 - a. six months oil of myrrh
 - b. six months perfumes and cosmetics of women
2. when (it is) this girl's turn to go to king
 - a. anything that she asked was given to her
to take with her from the house of women
to the house of the king
 - b. in the evening she went
in the morning she returned to second house...
3. she came not again to the king unless
 - a. if he (the king) was pleased with her
 - b. she was (re)called by name

court.⁹⁶ The preparation of women (vv. 12-14) is a summary account of what every girl undertakes and is neither concrete (e.g. no dates are indicated for anyone's particular period of preparation) nor specific (e.g. nothing indicates a particular treatment, gift or name).

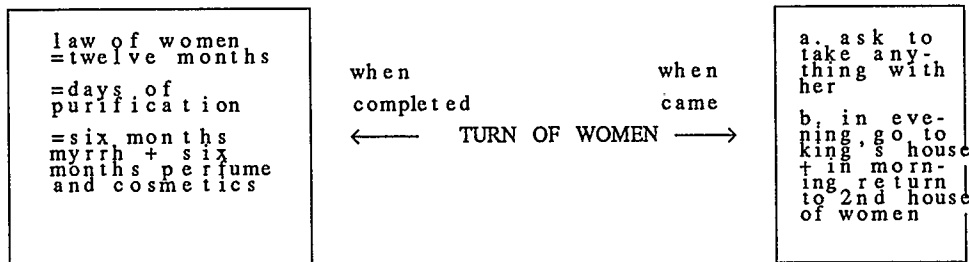
The time prescribed by the law of women reduplicates the motif of the "fullness" or completion of the one hundred eighty days in 1:5. The twelve months preparation (2:12) are subdivided into two equal portions of six months which is double the time allotted for the first "showing" of royal riches and glories (1:4). The motif, "and when these days are full (וַיִּבְּרֹאֲלֵאֵם)" from 1:5 is also doubled in 2:12:

1. "the laws of women of twelve months must be in completion (בְּתֵּינָן) to each girl"

⁹⁶The extraordinary lengths of time, the extravagant treatments and triplicate patterns call to mind the pace, style and rhythm established by the king's time-frame. According to Clines (1984:289) the "ludicrously extended (beautification) period" functions to heighten "the extravagance and artificiality of the court." Dommershausen (1968:146) suggests the illustrations (e.g. at 1:5-7 and 2:12) are an attempt to reflect the exotic Persian court as recorded in other ancient writings. Cf. Herodotus 1.133, 9.80; Xenophon Cyropaedia 8.8, 10; and Strabo 15.3, 19.

2."they were fulfilled (יָמֵיהֶם) the days of purification to equal six months of myrrh and six months of perfume and cosmetics."

The girl's "turn" (תָּוֶן) or "opportune time"⁹⁷ is given pre-eminence in the cyclical schema of this period. Prior to her turn, each girl completed twelve months treatments or "days of purification" and when her turn arrived, each girl went to the king's house in the evening and returned to the second house of concubines in the morning (2:12-14.).



DOUBLE EPISODE: ESTHER'S TURN AND MORDECAI'S RETURN 2:15-23

Esther's turn to go to the king (2:15-16) retraces and particularizes the preparation programme that was set for the

⁹⁷Cf. Moore (1971:23) who concurs with the LXX usage of the Greek *kairos*, preserving the meaning of the Hebrew תָּוֶן as "the opportune time." This is opposed to "turn" as understood by Herodotus (3.69) where the wives of the False Smerdis took turns sleeping with the king.

crown candidates (vv. 12-14; see footnote 95). (1) The turn of each girl came after the completion of twelve months preparation (v. 12). "And when came" (וַיָּבֹאוּ) the turn of Esther implies that she has completed the prerequisite time. (2) Regarding the items that each girl could choose to take with her from the house of women to the house of the king (v. 13), the narrator says that Esther sought for nothing except what Hegai suggested (v.15). A wise move, given her favorable relationship already established (vv. 8-9) and the reaction of all who saw her (v. 15). (3) Regarding the double ruling on being recalled (v. 14), Esther obviously pleases the king (vv. 17-18). Ahasuerus seems even more flustered with her than Hegai was initially. The narrator not only reiterates that she found favor (חֶסֶד) in the king's eyes,⁹⁸ but that he loved her, crowned her, made a great feast in her name: "Esther's banquet,"⁹⁹ as well as gave gifts

⁹⁸This is a repetition of the reaction of Hegai. חֶסֶד is translated favor or "steadfast love." See page 71.

⁹⁹The irony of this situation is that Esther is concealing her identity. Her "name" does not reveal to the king the same thing it reveals to Mordecai, the narrator, or the readers. Also, as Clines notes (1984:290) "the banquet given by the king for Esther is undoubtedly meant to contrast with the banquet given

and tax releases to the provinces.

The auspicious date for Esther's turn is the first calendrical accounting in the narrative and echoes the formula used in the king's introduction, "in the third year of his reign" at 1:3 (2:16):

And Esther was taken to king Ahasuerus unto his royal house in the tenth month, that is the month of Tebeth in the seventh year of his reign.

Because the month Tebeth is given in conjunction with other points of time, conjecture can be made about Esther's "days of purification." Counting back twelve months from Tebeth (the most conservative period allowed for beginning her programme)¹⁰⁰ Hegai would be hastening to give Esther her beauty portions in the tenth month, the month Tebeth in the sixth year of the king's reign.¹⁰¹

by Vashti (1:9)."

¹⁰⁰If we are meant to understand Esther went immediately to the king upon completing her twelve month preparation. See Clines 1984:290.

¹⁰¹The only occurrence of Tebeth in the Hebrew Bible is in Esth 2:16. BDB (372) derives Tebeth from tbt: "to sink in" or the muddy month. In The Seven Tablets of Creation (translated by Landsberger) the tenth month Tebeth (Dec-Jan) is recorded as the

Of what significance is the tenth month, the seventh year, the twelve month cycle of preparation, or the time lapse between Vashti's dethronement in the third year and Esther's coronation in the seventh year? If read historically, the period corresponds to Xerxes' absence due to his military campaign in Greece. His return in the winter of 479 BCE aligns with Esther's visit in the month of Tebeth (Dec-Jan).¹⁰² But as Clines rightly says, "the narrator cares nothing for that, and the **seventh year** and **tenth month** may well be symbolic notices of the successful completion of the search for a queen"¹⁰³ By the specification of the tenth month Tebeth (2:16) Esther's accession to the throne is more prominent than either the implied accession (Year one) of Ahasuerus (1:1-3) or the dethronement of Vashti (the seventh day of the banquet is given, but as an undefined period within the third year, chap 1). The

time Tiamat (dragon of Chaos) rules the constellation Capricorn, the sign in the zodiac governing rituals against demons in the dark days of January when ghosts rose from hell and when men were put to the ordeal to test their guilt (cited from Langdon 1980:12).

¹⁰²See appendix: Correspondence of Chronologies: Xerxes I and Ahasuerus.

¹⁰³Clines 1984:290; also Schildenberger 1941:66.

temporal ellipsis between the reigns of the two queens points to the narrator's propensity for ever increasing episodes,¹⁰⁴ and Esther's accession year echoes the narrator's fondness for order, here for divisions of seven.¹⁰⁵ As well, the return to the

¹⁰⁴E.g. one hundred eighty days, (1:4); twelve months, six plus six months (twice 180 days, 2:12). As well, the introduction of the royal time-frame was presented only generally in annual cycles (the banquets are presumably in the third year but unspecified except for length) while the introduction to the Jewish protagonists' time-frame is delineated annually (the seventh year) and monthly (the tenth month Tebeth (v. 16); also twelve months equaling six plus six months of beauty treatments (v. 12)).

¹⁰⁵As noted in chapter two (p. 21), the repetition of seven's on Vashti's final day at court may be a symbolic number associated with the queen's crown: e.g. the seven day feast (v. 5) with action centred on the seventh day (vv. 10-22), seven eunuchs sent to bring Vashti (v. 10), seven princes consulted about her refusal to come (v. 14). In chapter two, besides the designation of the seventh year for Esther's turn (2:16), a seven fold list details Esther's coronation, each phrase preceded by the conjunctive *ו*: "and" (2:17-18).

chronology of the king underscores the documentary style of the narrative.

According to Moore (1971:29), 2:19 is one of the most difficult verses in all of Esther, primarily because of the word **שְׁבִיט** (translated "a second time"). Source critical analyses usually views v. 19 as a remnant from an earlier tradition, or an indication of a redactional seam in the text, from an earlier source such as "the Esther source" (Cazelles, 1961:17-29), "the Mordecai source" (Clines, 1984:126-130), or an incomplete fusion of a Haman-Mordecai story (Ringgren, 1955:5-24).¹⁰⁶ However, other scholars such as Sandra Berg (1979:168) hold that the narrative of Esther (MT) is a unified work, and consider 2:19 as

¹⁰⁶ Paton's (1908:186-87) summaries of dozens of commentators illustrates the lack of consensus. According to Clines (1984:291), only two suggestions in recent studies that are plausible: (1) that **שְׁבִיט** is a misplaced marginal note to verse 20 (W. Rudolph, 1954:89-90); (2) that **שְׁבִיט** means 'further' or 'secondly' (as in 2 Samuel 16:19), introducing a second event that occurred at the time of the gathering of the virgins (Gerleman, 1966:1-48). The difficulty with (2) is that the information could only be passed on after Esther was queen (v. 22). The NAB (also Paton) suggests **שְׁבִיט** means "to resume."

one of the unaccountable, but minor problems of the text.¹⁰⁷ The temporal structure of Esther appears to support Berg's position and the "second gathering" of 2:19 can be understood as a narrative device that serves several literary functions.

The events recorded in the king's chronicles (2:21-23) are undoubtedly a foreshadowing device (Clines 1984:291) that will have great significance for the development of the story, and the reversal of Mordecai and Haman's positions (e.g. chap 6). However, the only crisis encountered so far in the story has been resolved. The crown of Vashti now belongs to Esther (2:17). Reading successively, the "second gathering" in 2:19 recalls a previous gathering, when the king's edict was heard to find a replacement for Vashti (2:8; cf. vv. 3-4). Striedl suggests that the phrase "a second time," can be understood as a stylistic "repetition of a situation in order to introduce something new" (1937:99).¹⁰⁸ Berlin's (1983:125-28) work on

¹⁰⁷Berg (1979:168) admits that a few passages like 2:19 "continue to cloud the question of Esther's composition", but that "the version of the narrative preserved in the MT appears to be a unified whole. The book's dominant motifs and themes point to a unified piece whose beginning, middle and end are in parallel with, and balance, each other."

¹⁰⁸Striedl (1937:99) also compares 2:19 with 8:3 and 9:29.

resumptive repetitions also supports this notion that לְשִׁבִּיר (2:19) serves a synchronic function, to return the reader to the scene in which the first phrase occurred.

The return to the first gathering of the women (young women or virgins; cf. vv. 3, 8, 19) is a return to Esther's enthusiastic reception into the palace (vv. 8-9), that is followed by the narrator's cryptic comment that she has not revealed her people or her family (v. 10), that is in turn followed by the illustration of Mordecai's daily inquiries after Esther's well-being (v. 12). Now, at the second gathering of the virgins,¹⁰⁹ we find a repetition of these circumstances: women

¹⁰⁹The point is not the spatial "gathering" but the temporal location, in other words "the second *time* the virgins gathered." It is also irrelevant why or how the virgins are gathered (a point vehemently argued for decades; see: Paton 1908:186-87; Anderson 1954:845; Ehrlich 1955:69-74; Moore 1971:29; Clines 1984:291). As Keil (1975,ed:341; citing Lapidé) writes, the only explanation of the term לְשִׁבִּיר is that a second gathering took place. For as Gordis (1976:47) points out, "the reason for (the second gathering) is not set forth in the text, in accordance with the author's terse narrative style throughout the book." That the potentate of the extensive Persian empire should have *continually* collected virgins does not seem

gathered, protagonist at the king's house (Esther taken to the house and given the 'best place' in the house, (v. 8-9); Mordecai before the house (at the king's gate, (vv. 11, 19),¹¹⁰ and Esther still not revealing her 'people or kindred' (vv.10, 20). And at 2:20 there is a chiasm formed by the inversion of the names: 'people or kindred' (v. 10) and 'kindred or people', (v. 20) that is both typical of the narrative style and signals the completion of this section.¹¹¹

The narrator uses a temporal transition, "in those days" (2:21), to continue onto the assassination plot. Unlike many recent divisions of Esther, the temporal structure of the

uncharacteristic. When Esther's group was "gathered" the harem was already in place and there was a second house for the concubines (cf. 2:8, 14)

¹¹⁰According to Xenophon (Cyropaedia 7.1, 6) and Herodotus (3.120), officials were required to stay at the gate of the royal palace. Clines (1984:291) and most modern scholars suggest the "king's gate" indicates some kind of palace office.

¹¹¹Radday (1973:6-13) argued that the whole of the book of Esther was constructed according to a chiastic principle which he thought to be a conscious attempt to archaize. Berg (1979:106-113) and Fox (1982:291-304) also find that a pattern of reversals governs the structure of the book.

narrative dictates this subdivision for the ending episode, at verse twenty-one.¹¹² The format ("in those days," 1:2; 2:21) continues the echoing tendency of the second voice to "copy" patterns and phrases initiated by the first voice.¹¹³ As well, the inquiry and the recording of Mordecai's deeds in the royal chronicles (literally, "the book of the matter of the days," v. 23) reiterates the thoroughness of the king's court and keeps in the foreground the importance of the "days" and matters of the king. Clines points out that this refocusing of protagonists, after the coronation, "allows Mordecai, who has been introduced along with Esther in vv. 5-7, to step forward

¹¹²Moore (1971:29), Clines (1984:291) and many commentators suggest Esther chapter two concludes with a final unit at 2:19-23. Fuerst (1975:56-57) and Murphy (1981:160) designate 2:21-23 as the final unit.

¹¹³The tendency is also typical of canons and fugues, where the original melody is copied in various ways (straight forward, inverted, reversed) by the other voices. Examples of patterns and phrases copied from the first voice include the doubled half-year period (180 days, 1:4; six months plus six months, 2:12), triplicate patterns and divisions of seven, and the motifs such as the fullness of time (1:5; 2:12).

for a moment in his own right" (1984:291). Also, as Gerleman (1966:1-48) noted, the time-setting and the names of the conspirators, preserves the documentary character of the narrative.¹¹⁴ The episodes at 2:21-23 also balance the first and second voices by ending both chapters with the official business of writing documents.

¹¹⁴The daily records of Persian kings are well noted in other sources. For example, Ezra 4:15 (of Artaxerxes), Diodorus Siculus (2.32), and Herodotus (7.100, 8.85, 90) who tells of Xerxes' records of benefactors' deeds. On the view of history in the book of Esther see Berg 1979:182-84.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FIRST NARRATIVE MOVEMENT: INTRODUCTION OF THREE 'VOICES' (CHAPS 1-3)

PART III: THE JEWISH ANTAGONISTS' TIME-FRAME

Let us note first of all the principal narrative tension in the plot, that of Haman's genocidal intrigue against the Jews of the Persian empire, is attributed in Esther to his uncontrollable anger against Mordecai's refusal to bow down before him (3:5) . . . In the end, what actually seals Haman's doom is the successful directing of the king's fury against him (Eliezer Segal 1989:248-49).

INTRODUCTION 3:1-15

Like the third voice in a royal fugue,¹¹⁵ the Jewish antagonists' time-frame introduces the last of the four principal characters by emulating the style and rhythms of the

¹¹⁵The fugue begins with a single voice (king Ahasuerus' time-frame), then a second (Jewish protagonists) and third voice (Jewish antagonists) enter in turn, to provide rhythmic, harmonic and melodic contrast to the subject.

original voice, the king's time-frame (1:1-2:4). Similar to the first two voices, the temporal structure of the Jewish antagonists' time-frame forms an initial exposition that is followed by a double episode: The exposition at 3:1-6¹¹⁶ tells the background of a crisis between Haman and Mordecai; and the double episode deals with Haman's angry, retaliatory plans (v.

¹¹⁶Bardtke (1963), Dommershausen (1968:58), and Murphy (1981:161-62) subdivide the third chapter between v. 7 and v. 8 (1-7 and 8-15). Because C.V. Dorothy (1989:280-82) views the development of the chapter according to its "complication" ("king promotes Haman (who provokes crisis) and approves pogrom, empire-wide"), his outline reads: exposition vv. 1-2a, complication vv. 2b-5, and plan of Haman (with further sub units) vv. 6-15a. On the basis of the differentiation between background and discriminated material I have chosen a division at verse six (1-6 and 7-15). This expository unit is also distinguished by Anderson (1954:847-48), Würthwein (1969:165-96) and Huey (1988:811-12). I have included the seemingly detailed account of the servants' inquiries at 1:3-4 in the expository section because (1) it provides the *background* for Haman's impulse to actually design the pogrom, and (2) the questions of the servants are understood to continue day by day, an indeterminate period of inquiry that is *representative* of the mounting tension between protagonist and antagonists.

7) and his subsequent conference with the king (vv. 8-15).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷Haman's anger, retaliatory plan and consultation with the king are a distortion of chapter one where the king inquires about Vashti's disobedience (1:13-15) and resumes a planning conference for her replacement after his anger subsides (2:1). In 3:7 Haman makes good his intentions to devise a plan to destroy not only Mordecai but all of the people of Mordecai (the Jews); he then meets with the king (3:8-15), exchanges direct dialogue (vv. 8-11), creates and posts the specific decree against the Jews (12-14), and concludes the conference with drinks (v. 15).

INTRODUCTION OF THIRD VOICE: TEMPORAL STRUCTURE

EXPOSITION:

Mordecai's disobedience/Haman's reaction (3:1-6)

3:1	אחר הדברים האלה	after these things
v.4	ויהי יום ויום	and it was day by day

DOUBLE EPISODE:

Haman's plot (V. 7)

v.7	בחדש הראשון	in first month
	חוא-חדש ניסן	month Nisan
	בשנת שנים עשרה	in 12th year...
	מיום ליום	(cast pur) from day to day
	ומחדש	and from month
	לחדש שנים-עשר	to 12th month
	חוא-חדש אדר	that is the month Adar

Haman and Ahasuerus' agreement (vv. 8 - 15)

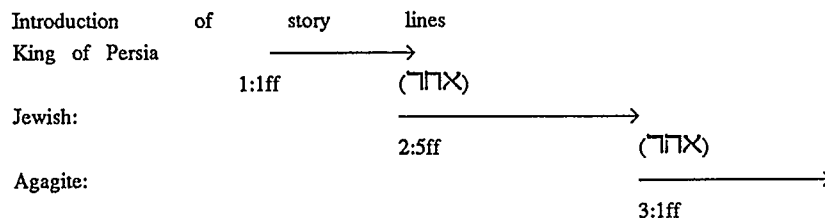
v.12	בחדש הראשון	in first month
	בשלושה עשר יום בו	on 13th day of it
v.13	ביום אחד	on One Day
	בשלושה עשר	on 13th of
	לחדש שנים-עשר	the 12th month
	חוא-חדש אדר	month Adar
v.14	ליום הזה	(to be ready) for that day

EXPOSITION (3:1-6)

After these things king Ahasuerus honoured Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite and raised him and set his throne above all the princes who were with him

and all the king's servants who were at the king's gate were kneeling and bowing down to Haman for thus the king commanded for him, and Mordecai did not kneel and did not bow down (3:1-2).

Like the introduction to the Jewish protagonists' time-frame (2:5-23), the third voice enters the ongoing narrative without regressing in time to a previous point (cf. Bar-Efrat 1989:168-69), duplicates the lead-in temporal phrase ("after these things," cf. 2:1; 3:1), and disburses biographical material (cf. 2:5-6; 3:1-2):



According to Moore (1971:35) the transitional phrase, "after these things" (3:1), provides only "a vague indication of a . . . date which may have been any time from the seventh (2:16) to the twelfth year of the king (3:7)." Yet at this point in the narrative, the pur has not yet been cast (v. 7), nor is there

any indication of a specific temporal setting. The promotion of Haman could, therefore, have occurred at any time from the tenth month of the seventh year (2:16).

"Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite" is used twice in the third chapter (3:1, 10).¹¹⁸ Most scholars agree that the names "Haman" and "Hammedatha" are Persian.¹¹⁹ (As Moore (1982:xxxviii) says, "A priori, one would expect that the great majority of personal names of minor figures in the Achaemenian court of Xerxes would be Iranian.") As well, "the Agagite" (חַאגִּי) is generally considered to be a reference to Agag, king of the Amalekites, who was defeated by Saul son of Kish (1 Sam

¹¹⁸The familial epithet is not used again until after his death (e.g. 8:5; 9:24). The context and content of the repetition recalls the heights from which he has fallen (3:1, 8:5, 7) and how his intended destruction of Mordecai's people has returned upon himself (3:6; 9:24).

¹¹⁹E.g. Gehman 1924:321-28; Mayer 1961:127-35. Clines (1984:293) states there is "no doubt" that Haman and Hammedatha are Persian although the meanings are debated. Jensen 1892:10 (also Haupt 1907-08:123 regarding Hammedatha) proposed that "Haman" was a derivation of Humman or Humban, an Elamite deity, but this association cannot be verified.

15:7-9).¹²⁰ Thus the conflict between Haman the Agagite and Mordecai the Jew is seen by many to be "a renewal of the old and unconsummated battle between Saul and Agag" (Fuerst 1975:60).¹²¹ Anderson (1954:847) goes so far to say that "the book of Esther may be regarded as the inexorable working out of the divine curse against Amalek, remnants of which persisted even after

¹²⁰So Anderson 1954:847, Bardtke 1963:525-26, Bickerman 1967:197, Moore 1971:35, Fuerst 1975:59-60, Berg 1979:64-72, Murphy 1981:161, Clines 1984: 293), Huey 1988:811. Clines (1984:293) writes that "the Agagite . . . was probably in its original form a Persian title or gentilic . . . obviously shaped by our narrator to appear as the name of a race descended from Agag, the Amalekite foe of Saul (1 Sam 15:8-33)" (1984:293). This interpretation dates back at least to the Antiquities (9.6.5) of Josephus where Haman's Agagite ancestry is given as "Amalekite," a descendant of the Amalekite king, the only Agag mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in the story of Saul's reign (cf. 1 Sam 15:7-33). According to the records in Exodus 17:14,16 the feud began when the Israelites were unjustly attacked by the Amalekites in the wilderness incurring a divine declaration of eternal war until the memory of Amalek is blotted out. For the curse on Amalek see Deut 25:17-19.

¹²¹Also see McKane 1961:260-61 and Berg 1979:66.

their alleged total destruction in the days of Hezekiah (1 Chron 4:43)."¹²²

The problem with the equation is, quite simply, its lack of proof. While it is certainly possible to connect Mordecai and Haman with the ancient dynasties of Saul and Agag, (and this tradition is venerable),¹²³ Keil rightly points out (1975,ed:343), that there is nothing recorded of Haman and his father apart from the Esther story.¹²⁴ Similarly, neither can a Saulide

¹²²Agag was slain by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:33) but several Jewish sources say that Agag had time to beget a child: Megillah 13a; Targum Sheni on Esther 4:13; the Siddûr (ed. Singer, p. 277).

¹²³The tradition dates at least to Josephus (Antiquities 11.209) who equated Agag (3:1) with amalekiten, the Amalekites. See Bickerman 1967:196-199; Moore 1971:35; Berg 1979:66-67; and Huey 1988:811.

¹²⁴To cite Keil (1975,ed:343): "The Agag is not sufficient for the purpose (i.e. of establishing Haman's lineage), as many individuals might at different times have borne the name אגג, i.e. the fiery. In 1 Sam. xv., too, Agag is not the *nomen propr.* of the conquered king, but a general *nomen dignitatis* of the kings of Amalek, as Pharaoh and Abimelech were of the kings of Egypt and Gerar. See on (sic) Num. xxiv. 7."

lineage be confirmed for Mordecai.¹²⁵ Regardless of the historicity of the protagonist and antagonist of Esther, the epithet: "Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite" maintains the "history-like" or documentary style of the narrative. And as a literary counterpart of Mordecai, Haman is given past associations beyond the fictive kingdom of Ahasuerus (cf. 2:5; 3:1). Further, like Esther, Haman is raised to the highest position above his peers (cf. 2:17; 3:1-2).

According to Clines (1984:293), the promotion of Haman "above all the princes of 1:14" is as unaccountable as the overlooking of Mordecai's reward in the previous scene (2:23). Clines concludes that both passages serve primarily foreshadowing purposes (p. 291), and that the unprecedented recording of Mordecai's deeds (that are unrewarded, 2:23) "is a dramatic necessity . . . to be postponed to chap 6" (p. 293). Clines also states that the promotion of Haman (3:1) "is of no consequence for the story" except that it "contrasts nicely"

¹²⁵Although the historicity of Mordecai has long been debated, there is only consensus that Mordecai is a Hebrew form of "Marduk," the titular city-god of Babylon and a known name of a subordinate satrap of Babylon (from Persian Treasury records, Cameron 1948:84). Also see: Ungnad 1940-41:240-44; Horn 1964:14-25; Moore 1971:xliv; Gordis 1981:384; Clines 1984:286.

with the previous scene (p. 293).¹²⁶ However, keeping in mind the successive nature of the text, the introductions of Mordecai (2:5-23) and Haman (3:1-6) are carefully constructed to emulate and parallel the original, royal voice.¹²⁷ The transition between the interruption of the regicide by Mordecai (2:21-23) and the promotion of Haman (3:1) is a prime example.

The temporal bridge at 3:1: "after these things" is a repetition of the transitional phrase between the double episode in the king's voice (at 2:1). There, the first unit of the

¹²⁶To cite Clines (1984:293): "it is without parallel that such a deed should go unrewarded at the time; Herodotus several times mentions Persian kings' rewards for services rendered (3.139-41; 5.11; 9.107)." Numerous ancient sources report that Persian kings recorded the meritorious deeds of subjects in order to reward them (e.g. Ezra 4:15, Herodotus 7.100, 8.85, 90, and Diodorus Siculus 2.32). Anderson (1954:846), Moore (1971:31), and Murphy (1981:160) also view Mordecai's unrewarded efforts as a foil for the elevation and ultimate humiliation of Haman.

¹²⁷The "copying" of the original voice (Ahasuerus') in the Jewish protagonists' and antagonists' frames is similar to the function of variant voices in fugues and provides melodic, harmonic and rhythmical diversity.

episode (1:10-22) tells of Vashti's refusal to come to the king's banquet (v. 12). Infuriated, Ahasuerus consults his advisors regarding the wrong done by the queen (vv. 13-15) and Vashti is permanently dismissed by an irreversible, written decree (vv. 19-21). The second episode begins: "after these things" when the anger of the king subsided¹²⁸ Ahasuerus remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what was decreed against her (2:1). Clearly the transitional phrase "after these things" bridges *interrelated* episodes (1:10-22; 2:1). Now, in the transition from the second to the third voice (2:19-3:1) the narrator tells of a wrong planned against the king, this time by two door keepers (v. 21), whom Mordecai intercepts and subsequently relays the plot to queen Esther, who tells the king, in Mordecai's name (v. 22). After an inquiry, Bigthan and Teresh are hung and the incident is recorded in the royal

¹²⁸The temporal shift from the episode regarding the decree against Vashti (1:10-22) and the king's remembrance of the affair (2:1) is qualified by the absence of the king's anger, "when subsided the anger of king Ahasuerus" (2:1). The anger of the king thus brackets the king's consultation, decree and remembrance (1:12; 2:1). And, as Segal (1989:249) points out, the reversal of the king's anger actually allows Ahasuerus to begin the search for Vashti's replacement, an event he might logically have chosen to avoid.

chronicles (literally, "the book of the matter of the days," v. 23). Again, the narrator begins: "after these things . . ." (3:1).

Because of the parallel structure with the first voice (e.g. king wronged, inquiry, matter recorded, transitional phrase "after these things"), and because of the prior circumstances at 2:23 (e.g. Mordecai saving the king's life), the reader can expect that at 3:1, Mordecai's name would follow: "after these things the king honoured (לָדַד) . . ." ¹²⁹ Instead a totally new character is introduced: "after these things the king honoured Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite." This is a significant deviation from the first passage and a reversal of expectations that creates suspense. ¹³⁰

¹²⁹Cf. 10:2 where this same formula is used *with* Mordecai's name and the root לָדַד reiterated three times with reference to Mordecai.

¹³⁰See Sternberg 1978:65 regarding suspense as a narrative technique "sustained by the clash of our intermittently aroused hopes and fears . . . about the outcome of the future confrontation." The earlier episode (2:19-23) also serves to arouse suspense, not only prompted by Mordecai's unrewarded deeds which may or may not have been known to the king (cf. Haupt 1907-8:122 on the interpretation of the phrase "before the

Parallelism of 1:10-2:1 and 2:19-3:1

	First voice	Second and third voice
King wronged	Vashti refuses banquet 1:12	Doorkeepers seek king's life 2:21
Enquiry	1:13	2:23
Recorded	decree 1:19-22	Chronicles 2:23
Transition		
after these things	2:1	3:1
King's next (triple) action	remembers Vashti what she did what decreed 2:1	promotes Haman elevates him sets seat above other princes 3:1

The circumstances of Haman's rise to power (3:1), the law attending his position (that Mordecai disregards, v. 2), the servants' inquiry (vv. 3-4)¹³¹ and subsequent reaction of Haman

king," (לפני הַמֶּלֶךְ), but also through the reiteration of Esther's need to remain silent and the recurrence of death around Esther (cf. 2:7).

¹³¹Like the procedural details in 1:7-8 and 2:12-14 the servants' inquiries (3:3-4) are *illustrative* of the carefulness or thoroughness of the king's court. The servants' question (v. 3) is repeated "day by day" (יָמָם וָלַיְלָה, v. 4) and, coupled with the indeterminate temporal period in v. 1, the continual inquiries underscore the expository nature of this section, summarizing the impetus that drives Haman to actuate his plans (v. 7ff).

(vv. 5-6) are described in the most general manner by the narrator. Explanatory notes,¹³² repetitive actions (day after day, v. 4), and the lack of specific or concrete material all attest to the expositional format of this section.¹³³ As well, like the first and second voices, the continuity and cohesion of the exposition (3:1-6) is ensured by a series of consecutive waws. Here, in the antagonists' frame, the series highlights Haman's prestigious position and the precariousness of Mordecai's:

- 3:1 After these things the king promoted Haman
and elevated him
and set his throne above all the princes
- v. 2 and all the servants of the king
(kneeling and bowing to Haman)
and Mordecai did not kneel and did not bow
- v. 3 and the king's servants asked
- v. 4 and it was (וַיְהִי) when they spoke to him day by day
and he did not obey them
and they told Haman
- v. 5 and Haman saw that Mordecai
(did not kneel and bow)
and Haman was filled (וַיִּחַלֵּץ) with rage
- v. 6 and he scorned in his eyes (to kill Mordecai alone)
and Haman sought to destroy all the Jews

¹³²E.g. "for thus" (כִּי-כֵן) he commanded, (3:2); "because" (כִּי), (vv.4, 5, 6); "and it was," (v. 4).

¹³³See Sternberg 1978:14-34 regarding exposition as both nonspecific and nonconcrete.

The temporal location is noticeably more concrete at 3:7 where numerous points of time are clustered around the casting of the pur before Haman:

בחדש הראשון	in first month
חוא-חדש ניסן	month Nisan
בשנת שתים עשרה	in 12th year...
מיום ליום	(cast pur) from day to day
ונחודש	and from month
לחדש עשר-עשר	to 12th month
חוא-חדש אדר	that is the month Adar

Undoubtedly, the thirteenth of the twelfth month Adar, the day set for the destruction of the Jews, (3:7, 12-13), will become the most compelling date in the story and will shape all of the subsequent circumstances and actions (chaps 4-9:14). But in 3:7, the high density of temporal expressions used for the manner and frequency of casting the pur, effectively arrests the onward progression of the plot.¹³⁴ Haman's casting of the pur, according to Abraham Cohen, is central to the meaning of the

¹³⁴The clustering of temporal notices (for Haman's preparation to meet with the king, 3:7; cf. vv. 8-12), echoes the density of notations used in 2:12 for the women's preparation before their turns to see the king. As well, each passage is set up by the rhythmical, *daily* enquires involving Mordecai (2:11; 3:4), each passage intercalates the daily and monthly rhythms of one full year. In the law of women (2:12) the days of purification are

book (1974:89-91):¹³⁵

The 'pur' is nothing less than the intentional symbol of chance-fate. . . this interpretation proceeds from the only accurate reading which Esther allows, viz., that God acts behind the veil of causality and chance, on behalf of the people of Israel. . . In casting the lots in Nisan, and then announcing the results of the

equal to the completion of twelve months before each girl's turn comes to go to the king. Likewise, the casting of the pur is from day to day and month to month until the twelfth month (3:7), the completion of the annual cycle coinciding with the date chosen to petition the king (cf. vv. 8, 12). Mordecai's behavior also mirrors Vashti's. In both stories the king issues a command (to bring Vashti to the banquet 1:10,11; to bow before Haman 3:2); the command is disobeyed (1:12; 3:2); an inquiry is made (1:13-15; 3:3-4); the consequences of the 'offender's' actions affect enormous 'innocent' groups (all the wives in the empire 1:18-20; all the Jews in the kingdom 3:6); and a royal decree is issued into every province (1:20-22; 3:12-15).

¹³⁵Advancing Cohen's thesis, David Clines sees in the name of Purim, the plurality of pur, the *meaning* of the festival (1984:164):

Regardless of the historical origins of the festival or of the name, should we not see here a statement about the *meaning* of the festival that is made by the use of the plural? . . . One lot is cast by Haman, but there is another 'lot' for the Jews - - cast by God.

lottery on the 13th of the month, Haman sought to demonstrate to the Jews, **immediately before** their celebration of Passover, his denial of God's providential relationship towards them.

Of the first month Nisan (March-April), the time for the casting of the pur, Langdon (1920:230) explains that the original Sumerian myth was associated with the New Year, and pertained to the divine installation of kings.¹³⁶ As well, in

¹³⁶In the later biblical books, including Esther, Babylonian month names are incorporated into the Hebrew (TWOT 1980:266). The Babylonians in turn developed their festivals from Sumerian myths of the months (Langdon 1920:230). A Babylonian commentary on Nisan reads: Nisan is the month of the constellation Iku (Aries) which is the throne-room of Anu. The king is lifted up, the king is installed. The blessed springing forth of vegetation of (by) Anu and Enlil. Month of the Moon-god, first born of Enlil" (Langdon 1933:68). A Mishnah tractate regarding the beginning of the year notes four different New Year's Days, "On the first day of Nisan is the beginning of the year for the kings and for the festivals. On the first day of Elul is the beginning for the tithing of cattle. On the first day of Tishri is the beginning for the years (i.e. the civil calendar) and for the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee years, for the plants and the vegetables. On the first day of the month Shebat is the beginning for the tree-fruit" (quoted in Nilsson, 1920:274).

Babylonian thought . at least, the first month Nisan was associated with the cosmic convocation of the gods (under the presidency of Marduk at Babylon) when men's destinies were determined for the coming year (Langdon 1980:65-66). An oracle obtained in the first month would therefore be especially significant (so Gunkel).

Of the day associated with the casting of the pur (cf. 3:7, 12), Clines writes that the number thirteen was unlucky among Babylonians and Persians, and that the following day, the fourteenth of Nisan, held special significance for the Hebrews (1984:297):

. . . here the day has the added significance that the **fourteenth** of the **first month** was the day of deliverance from Egypt, the Passover. The narrator is teasing us: will the thirteenth or the fourteenth be the truly significant day for the Jews? (1984:297)

The decree is made even more ominous by its royal "seal" (3:12), recalling that a law of the Persians and Medes cannot be revoked once sealed by the king's ring (1:19).¹³⁷ The passive verbs, summoned, written, sealed, convey the impersonality and cold precision of the proceedings (Gerleman). The piling up of

¹³⁷Whether or not the irrevocability of the Persian law is actual, (e.g. there is no extra-biblical attestation for the irrevocability of the Persian law, Clines 1984:282) the "fact" has already been established (in 1:19). Cf. Daniel 6:8, 12,

orders emphasizes the thoroughness of the extermination intended by Haman (vv. 12-13):¹³⁸

Haman ordered:
to :the kings' satraps and
to: the governors over each province and
to: the princes of each people in their language
in :the name of king Ahasuerus
written and sealed with the signet ring of the king

and writings to be sent by the hand of couriers
to: all the king's provinces
to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate
all the Jews, from the youngest to the old
little children and women
on one day, on the thirteenth of the twelfth month
that is the month Adar
and the goods of them, plunder

It seems inexplicable to Clines (1984:298), why there should

¹³⁸The decree of Haman emphasizes the cessation of time, deftly developing the motif implied in the dismissal of Vashti (1:19), the death of Esther's parents (2:7), and the execution of the door keepers (2:23). Conversely, the emphasis on the cessation of times contrasts with commencement of times, at first implied in the "third year" of the "days" of Ahasuerus (1:1-3; his accession to the Median-Persian throne or Year One), then specified in the coronation of Esther, in the tenth month of the seventh year (2:16). The motif is also suggested in Haman's promotion (3:1).

be an interval, of eleven months, between the proclamation and execution of the decree. There is no thought, as Paton (1908) suggested, of time to escape or to prolong the suffering of the Jews. Where would they flee to in the Persian empire that is "coterminus with the known world" (Clines, p. 298)? Rather, the eleven month ellipsis is another multi-faceted temporal notice. The far projection of the pogrom adds the aspect of anticipation, or temporal prolepsis, into the counter-point of the triple-voiced fugue. The gap between the intention (Nisan thirteen) and the action (Adar thirteen) creates suspense for the reader¹³⁹ while permitting sufficient time for the narrator (and characters) to create diversions, delays and hopefully, reversals of fortunes.¹⁴⁰

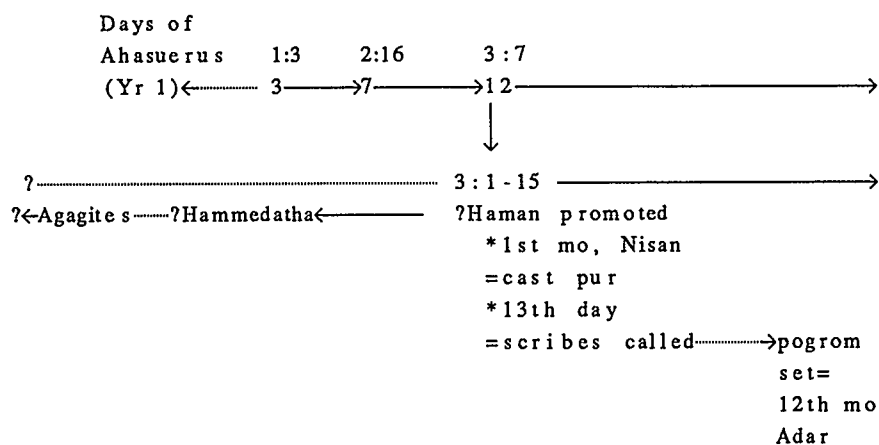
SUMMARY

Like all circumstances and events in the narrative, the shape of time in the third voice is dependant on the chronology of king Ahasuerus. Sometime from the tenth month of the seventh year of the king's reign (cf. 2:16-3:1) Haman is promoted to the

¹³⁹See Sternberg 1978:65, 163-64 on suspense as a literary device, defined in terms of chronological displacement.

¹⁴⁰See Bar-Efrat 1989:179 regarding the function of anticipation in biblical narrative.

throne of first prince (3:1) or grand vizier of the empire. His ancestry (son of Hammedatha the Agagite, 3:1)) points backwards to a time preceding the days of Ahasuerus' reign, possibly as far back as the dynasty of Agag (1 Sam 15) but this is inconclusive.¹⁴¹ The first specific date in Haman's time-frame is the first month Nisan in the king's twelfth year when the pur is cast (3:7). Also "the thirteenth day of it", the scribes are called to record Haman's decree against the Jews (v. 12) that is set for "one day" the thirteenth of the twelfth month Adar (vv. 7, 13-14).



¹⁴¹Cf. Keil 1975, ed:342-43.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FIRST NARRATIVE MOVEMENT

Each of the three voices introduced in the first narrative movement (royal or Persian, Jewish protagonists, and Jewish antagonists) show a parallel structure of an initial exposition that is followed by a double episode:

VOICE	EXPOSITION	EPISODE
FIRST	1:1-9 days of Ahasuerus 3rd year/180 + 7 days	1:10-22 7th day/"this day"* 2:1-4 after these things/ remembered...
SECOND	2:5-7 2:8-14 'חלל/hasten/ day by day/v. 12 = each girls' turn, 12 mos/days of purif./ 6 mos + 6 mos/eve-morn	2:15-20 Esther's turn (cf.v.14 = eve-morn)/10th mo Tebeth/7th year/2nd time 2:21-23 in those days recorded: book of days
THIRD	3:1-6 after these things/'חלל/ day by day	3:7 1st mo Nisan/12th year (anticipates: 12th mo Adar) 3:8-15 1st mo/13th day (anticipates 12th mo/13th day)

* All temporal expressions are given by the narrator except for the speech of Memucan (1:16-20) in which he says "this day" (v. 18) referring both to the 7th day of the banquet and the day the women will hear the matter of the queen's refusal to come to the king's banquet.

Typical of summary material,¹⁴² the initial exposition in each voice shows expansive periods of time within a short textual space. Two lengthy banquets in the third year of Ahasuerus' reign illustrate the extravagance of the royal court (1:1-9), elide the first three years of the king's reign in three verses (vv. 1-3), then scan one hundred eighty seven days in the next six verses (for a time-ratio of 187 days:6 verses). These banquet days are doubled in the exposition of the second voice (2:5-14) that begins with the biographical and exilic background of the Jewish protagonists (vv. 5-7). The time-span suggests a ratio of more than one hundred years in three verses (100+ years:3 verses).¹⁴³ However, the narrator is more interested in the subsequent expository unit where temporal notations are densely clustered to illustrate a twelve month preparation period required by the women who will go to the king (v. 12-14).

¹⁴²Cf. Sternberg 1978:1-34.

¹⁴³This ratio uses the dates for the reign of Xerxes I (486-465 BCE) and Nebuchadnezzar's captivity of Jerusalem in 597 BCE (so NEB). However, the correlation of Xerxes and Ahasuerus is inconclusive, and the narrator may have been confused or unconcerned about the gap between these two reigns (cf. Clines 1984:275, 287).

The days of beautification use a time-ratio of more than twelve months for seven verses (vv. 8-14).¹⁴⁴ The introduction of Haman in 3:1-6 covers an indeterminate period, some time after the tenth month of the seventh year (2:16) and before the first month of the twelfth year (3:7). The narrator does indicate that the king's servants inquire day after day (3:4), a passage of time mimetic of Mordecai's daily inquiries about Esther (2:11) and the "many days" of the king's displays in 1:4. The expository time-frame underscores the thoroughness of the court's inquiries¹⁴⁵ and implies that numerous days pass from the time of the queen's coronation (2:16) and the interrogation of

¹⁴⁴The time-span is twelve months or 360+ days:7 verses (converting for "days of purification" v. 12) and using the Babylonian accounting of thirty day months (see page 72, footnote 90; cf. TWOT 1980:266). The number of "twelve month preparation" periods depends, of course, on the number of women in the harem (a detail that is not given). But the narrator is only concerned with showing the beautification process as characteristic of the royal court and as background for Esther's turn, that is yet to come (2:15-20).

¹⁴⁵Cf. 1:13-15; 2:23.

Mordecai.¹⁴⁶

In each voice the expository time-period gives way to a correspondingly short, discriminated occasion. The double episode in the first voice (1:10-2:4) features the events of the seventh day of the second banquet, so that the time-frame covers one day in seventeen verses (1 day:17 verses). In the second voice, "Esther's turn" (2:15) deals with one period in the tenth month of the seventh year (cf. 2:14, 16).¹⁴⁷ The connecting phrase in Mordecai's scene ("in those days," 2:21), suggests that the regicide is interrupted in the same time-frame as the

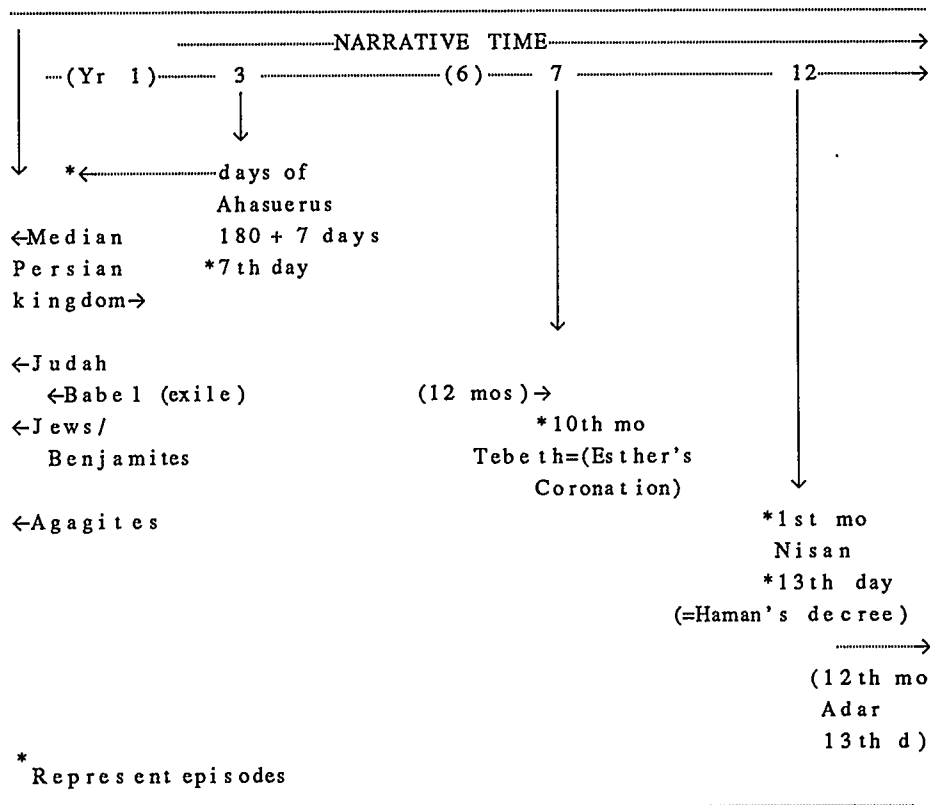
¹⁴⁶Cf. "after these things" 3:1, and "day by day" v. 4. The many days (day by day) required for the servants' inquiries (3:4) are in contrast to the one day assigned for Haman's writing of the decree (3:7, 12) and the one day set to destroy all the Jews (v. 13).

¹⁴⁷When each girl's turn (חור) came to go to the king, she went in the evening to the king's house and returned in the morning to the second house of women (2:14). The repetition of חור (2:15) for Esther's "turn" suggests that she also followed this procedure. Even if Esther was retained in the king's house, her "turn" would technically be counted from evening to morning, or half a day.

tenth month coronation. The time-ratio, then, ranges from one day (or less than one day; implied in Esther's "turn"), to a possible month-long span (the tenth month Tebeth) in nine verses (1 day/ 1 month:9 verses). In the third voice, the pur is cast in the first month Nisan, in the twelfth year (3:7) and the decree is written on the thirteenth day of the month (v. 12). The time-ratio, therefore, covers a maximum of thirteen days in nine verses, but the emphasis is mainly on the one day in mid-Nisan (1-13 days/ 1 day:9 verses).

Thus the introduction of the three voices (chaps 1-3) establishes a pattern of alternating summaries that show lengthy periods of time with episodes that tell of specific incidents, often occurring on one day. This method of distributing short expository material throughout the first movement of the narrative allows the plot to progress swiftly while harmonizing the order of the three voices. As well, each voice makes use of a successive annual point in the king's chronology that becomes increasingly more specific until all three voices are aligned to enter the twelfth year crisis (chaps 4-9).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸The first voice is set in the third year of the king's reign (1:3) with two banquets of one hundred eighty-seven days, but without specification of the day or month. The second voice features the coronation of Esther in the tenth month Tebeth of



Because the setting and plot in the narrative are dependant on the royal chronology, the trajectory of time tends to be

the seventh year (2:16), the first calendrical accounting of the narrative. The third voice incorporates three temporal points in the decree of Haman and, by extension, in the date set for the destruction of the Jews: the thirteenth day of the first month Nisan, in the twelfth year (3:7, 12); and the thirteenth day of the twelfth month Adar (of that same year; cf. 3:7, 13).

unidirectionally oriented towards the future. The continuity and cohesion of the narrative is supported by successive temporal notices,¹⁴⁹ prepositional¹⁵⁰ and adverbial phrases,¹⁵¹ and series of consecutive waws.¹⁵² Temporal perspective is deepened

¹⁴⁹E.g. "in the third year" 1:3; "in the tenth month . . . in the seventh year" 2:16; "in the first month . . . in the twelfth year" 3:7; "on the thirteenth day of the first month" 3:12; "on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month" 3:13.

¹⁵⁰Prepositional phrases that accompany temporal notices help to qualify and progress the time-frame. One example is the development in the first voice of the third year banquets leading to the seventh day crisis: "in the days of Ahasuerus" (1:1), "in those days *when the king is sitting on the throne of his kingdom*" (v. 2), "in the third year of his reign" (v. 3), "*when his exhibiting . . . many days, 180 days*" (v. 4), "*and when these days were full . . . (the king made) a banquet seven days*" (v. 5), "on the seventh day *when the heart of the king was merry with wine*" (v.10) he calls for the queen, who subsequently refuses to come to the banquet (v. 12).

¹⁵¹Passages of time are elided by the repetition of the phrase, "after these things" at 2:1 and 3:1.

¹⁵²For example, in the first voice a series of compound sentences

by simultaneous events. One example is Vashti's banquet for the women (1:9). This event is made synchronic with the king's entertainment (vv. 5-8) by the connecting adverbial phrase: "*also* queen Vashti made a banquet" (גם ושרי המלכה צעצה כושצח). The remembrances of the king at 2:1 that retraces Vashti's refusal (1:12) and the decree against her (1:19, 21), and brings again to the foreground her absence and the need to replace her, is a narrative device mimetic of the duality of memory that conjoins the past with the present.¹⁵³

Repetitions in the form of identical or synonymous words,

(1:12-22) highlights the downfall and decree against queen Vashti. See chapter two page 52-53.

¹⁵³According to Church (writing on Proust), this is especially true of involuntary remembrance that is: "not just a single moment from the past but . . . the union of past and present" (1949:15). See chapter two: page 61, note 82.

phrases and sentences,¹⁵⁴ doublets,¹⁵⁵ triple rhythms¹⁵⁶ and other ordering devices create diversity in the temporal structure. These cumulative patterns can function to restrain the usual

¹⁵⁴Moore (1971:lv-lvi) writes that repetition is *the* characteristic literary weakness and strength of the book of Esther. A survey of the text shows over four dozen repetitions of "day," as well as copious repetitions of other temporal words and expressions. Phrases are repeated concerning Vashti's refusal (cf. 1:12, 15, 19) and whole sentences are duplicated in Mordecai's rewriting of Haman's decree (cf. 3:10-15; 8:8-14).

¹⁵⁵E.g. the two banquets (1:3, 5), the two lists of seven names (1:10, 14), and so on (see also Schedl 1964:90). Talmon (1963: 440-43) sees three couples exemplifying a traditional wisdom-triangle: the powerful, but witless dupe (Ahasuerus and Vashti), the righteous wise (Mordecai and Esther), and the conniving schemer (Haman and Vashti). Cazelles (1961:28) and Lebram (1972:214-16) take source-critical approaches for the doublets and repetitions (and seeming inconsistencies in Esther).

¹⁵⁶For example, the triple temporal movement ("in the days of" 1:1, "in those days" 1:2, "in the third year" 1:3) towards the crucial (double) feast in chap 1 (Clines 1984:275).

rapid progression of the narrative, focusing and intensifying events and circumstances of interest to the narrator.¹⁵⁷ And the reiterative accounting of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of Purim, at the end of the book (9:15-32), is mimetic of ritual utterances.¹⁵⁸

Other narrative elements redirect the usual, successive projection of time. Retrospections are implied in the king's "third" year (1:3; pointing backwards to year One) and are explicit in the exilic background of Mordecai (2:6) and the genealogical lines that connect Mordecai, Esther (2:5, 7) and Haman (3:1) to the past. As well, the future is anticipated by the apprehensions of Memucan (1:16-20), the plans to replace Vashti (1:19; 2:2-4), the preparation of the virgins for their turn with the king (2:12), the continual casting of the pur in the first month, in order to determine a date for the destruction of the Jews (3:7) and especially the projection of the pogrom to the mid-twelfth month Adar (3:7, 13).

¹⁵⁷Niditch (1985:448-450) suggests that the repetitions in Esther may best be described as characteristic of a traditional style of narrative, and in particular, of the folklorist's approach.

¹⁵⁸On the use of repetition as a literary device see: Alter 1981:50-53, 91; Berlin 1983:71-79, 126-28, 136-39.

Another aspect of temporality, the prominence of reversals in the narrative of Esther, has prompted considerable research.¹⁵⁹ C. A. Smith (1919:60) likened the narrative's pattern of reversals to Shakespeare's Macbeth where "fair is foul and foul is fair." The series of reversals of expectations is initiated by Vashti's refusal to come to the king's banquet in chapter one (v. 12) and escalates until the second narrative movement (chaps 4-8:2).¹⁶⁰ The accounting of the king's sleepless night (6:1),

¹⁵⁹According to Radday (1973:6-13) the entire book of Esther is strictly structured on a chiasmic principle, that is a deliberate attempt to archaize a feature commonly found in literature of the early periods of Israelite history. Fox (1983) also argues that Esther exhibits a pattern of reversals. But unlike Radday, Fox suggests the reversals begin at chapter three and are of a general nature (not precisely structured), depending on both context and content. Berg analyzes narrative motifs to show that Esther is a literary unity "constructed according to a precise pattern that manifests the theme of reversals" (1979:109). See also: Robertson 1944:473-74; Moore 1971:lv-lvi; Murphy 1981:155; Lacocque 1987:207.

¹⁶⁰Radday (1973), Berg (1979), and Fox (1983) all locate the turning point of the narrative within the parameters of the

the multi-voices that give temporal notices, the reversal of Haman's expectations (5:14; 6:10) all exemplify the dissonance conveyed in this movement.¹⁶¹ Moore (1971:lv-lvi) equates the element of reversals with the principle of irony: Vashti is deposed for not obeying the king (1:17-19) but Esther disobeys

second movement. Radday (p. 9) designates 6:1 as the turning point from his statistical analysis. Berg (p. 110) prefers 4:13-14 as the transition where "Mordecai obeys Esther, reversing our images of the protagonists."

¹⁶¹In contrast to the other three movements, temporal notices in the second movement are given by characters as well as the narrator and begin to *sound* as if they are reversed (e.g. "on the third day" 5:1, Esther invites the king and Haman to the first banquet; "on the second day" 7:1-2, they attend the second banquet). The multi-voiced movement is packed with reversals of phrases, concepts (e.g. the king's sleepless night, 6:1), and situations. For example, in chap 6 Haman's expectations to hang Mordecai are met with the king's command to reward Mordecai, and further (ironically), without the king's knowledge of Haman's plans to execute Mordecai or without the king and Haman knowing that the queen is related to the people of Mordecai, condemned to extinction by Haman's irreversible decree.

and is rewarded (5:1-2, 8); Haman obeys the king's command and is humiliated (6:11-12) while Mordecai deliberately disobeys the king's command, yet is rewarded (3:2, 8:1-2). The disparity between Jewish protagonists and antagonists is explicitly reversed in the narration of the thirteenth day of Adar when, against all odds, "the opposite happened" (9:1) and the Jews have rule over their enemies. The tendency to reversal is ritualized in the transformation of the narrative's linear, progressive days into the circular, annual days of Purim (9:27-28). And the development of the motif of remembrance (2:1; 9:27-28) ensures that each generation will return to the ancient tale. According to Fox (1983: 291-304) the principle of reversal becomes a veritable, although implicit, theology.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The temporal structure of Esther is complex, utilizing the foreign milieu (Goitein) to create its exotic interwoven tapestry of fabled and "history-like" time. The chronology of the king, that initiates and progresses the narrative, is inset by numerous accentuating rhythms, retrogressions and anticipations, that combine to represent a diverse, temporal reality and evolve into the circular, annual festival of Purim. Motifs initiated in the first movement: knowledge and time, hastening and restraining (or, concealing), and past remembrances, are essential to this transformation from linear, narrative time to ritual commemoration.

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APPENDIX

CORRESPONDENCE OF CHRONOLOGIES
XERXES I (486-465 BCE) and AHASUERUS (BOOK OF ESTHER)

XERXES I (486-465 BCE)
Son of Darius Hystaspes (522-486)

AHASUERUS (BOOK OF ESTHER)
no lineage denoted in text

498-486: satrapy of Babylon

Dec 1, 486: accession to Median-
Persian throne

485: puts down Egyptian revolt

484 Summer: subdues Bel-shimanni
revolt, Babylon

483-2 = 3rd year of reign
(Esth 1) Vashti deposed

482: puts down final revolt Babylon;
planning campaign regarding
Athenian expedition

481: New Year: Babylon loses status
as kingdom, statue of Marduk from
Esagila taken to Shushan;
marches against Greece
Macedon and Thessaly fall

480 Spring: leaves for Hellespont;
at Thermopylae; sacks Athens;
Salamis defeat of Xerxes' fleet

(Esth 2: 12 month preparation
of Esther)

479: Battle of Plataea and Mt. Mykale
Winter: return to Shushan

479-8 = 7th year of reign
(Esth 2: Tebeth, Dec-Jan
Esther chosen)

477: Athenians take over leadership
of allied forces against Persia

474-3 = 12th year of reign
(Esth 3-9)

469: sea and land defeat of Persians
by Kimon; at River Eurymedon
and Caria

465 August: Xerxes murdered by one of
his eunuchs and Artabanos