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JUDAIC PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT ISRAEL

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A JEWISH READING OF ESTHER

Many factors influence our responses to a story. High among these rank our expectations of what it is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do. Is the story, for example, a comedy at which we should laugh, or is it a tragedy at which we should cry? What we understand to be the literary genre of a particular work will color our reading by setting up the initial and perhaps even the ensuing expectations against which we will measure our reactions. We will assess a "true" story differently from a fictitious one, even if the two appear virtually identical. We bring to our reading a varied array of presuppositions and interpretive strategies, and these affect the way we make sense of a text before so much as a letter of print meets the eye.[1]

The Book of Esther occupies a different position in the Jewish and Christian Bibles, and its significance differs in Jewish and Christian life. Thus, we are hardly surprised that, as many have observed, Jews have tended to love Esther while Christians, particularly since Martin Luther harshly rejected it, have tended either to dismiss it or merely to tolerate it.[2]

In the part of the Christian Bible denigrated as the Old Testament—the antiquated, superseded covenant—Esther takes its place in the chronological "history" of Israel. It immediately tails Ezra and Nehemiah, for were Esther a historical narrative, its events would be contemporaneous with theirs. Yet taken as a historical narrative, Esther, in Hermann Gunkel's words, "cannot be read by a Christian or a non-Jew without great distaste," for it fires up intense Jewish nationalism, celebrates anti-Gentile Jewish vengeance, and promulgates Purim, a festival that means nothing to the church.[3] Many Christian theologians and even certain Reform Jewish biblicists would drop the book from the scriptural canon.[4] Whatever else may lie behind such attitudes, there exists a patent assumption that the narrative of Esther constitutes serious

history or is at least a secular tale. The ear that hears the story with such offense belongs to a deadpan face; no tongue in cheek there.

In the Jewish Scriptures, on the other hand, Esther's position is determined by its function in Jewish liturgy. The "scroll" of Esther was gathered with the other four scrolls that were ordained to be chanted in the synagogue in the course of the liturgical calendar. Arranged in their liturgical sequence, the five scrolls comprise a unit in the *Ketuvim*, the "Writings." Esther comprises the text read aloud in the synagogue at the Feast of Purim. In the Jewish canon, then, Esther counts not so much for its real or imagined place in history, as for its function as the proof text and publicity for Purim. Esther belongs to Purim. It is in the context of Purim that Jews hear the book, and it is the atmosphere of Purim that pervades its Jewish reception. Even more importantly, Jews have read in the story of Esther and Mordecai a paradigm of their people's vulnerability to racist hatred.[5] No Jew can fail to be affected on hearing the Esther Scroll's catalogue of the people's catastrophes and close calls. When, in a recent article in the *New York Times,* Isaac Bashevis Singer nonchalantly referred to the threat of Haman in the scroll as a near "Holocaust," he displayed such a paradigmatic reading.[6] So in Esther's Jewish triumph, Jews celebrate their own survival.

Scholars have long debated whether the Book of Esther might have existed in some form prior to its adoption as the Purim text, or whether it was connected "from the outset" with the festival whose observance it prescribes as Otto Eissfeldt and others have held.[7] But even if that question remains unresolved, this much is clear: the scroll was not canonized and read in the synagogue except as the Purim text. Whatever its inception, the biblical story of Esther was never heard except in the context of Jewish communal festivity. Accordingly, there was virtually no circumstance wherein a Jew might hear the scroll's words without simultaneously experiencing the strong influence of the surrounding carnival-like Purim scene.

The constant *Sitz im Leben* of the Esther Scroll, that of a festive celebration, has always determined the seriousness—or rather lack of seriousness—with which it has been taken. In fact, such a Jewish reading of Esther makes perfectly good sense of the scroll and its alleged anomalies. Therefore, with tongue nestled in cheek, let us review the nature and themes of the Esther narrative. We shall find a specific homology between text and context—between that which takes place on stage, so to speak, and that which, in act and in fantasy, takes place in the audience.

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In recent centuries, Jews have customarily observed Purim by spinning satirical playlets out of the Esther tale or another tradition.[8] Indeed, some historians have imagined that the biblical story itself originated in this way.[9] According to this view, various components of the narrative reflect ritual dramas of a pagan spring/new year festival.[10] The conflicts and movements of

the story would then mirror the ritual combats and processions of the celebrants. This reconstruction of the Purim text's, Esther's, historical background is certainly plausible. But whether the Esther narrative began in ritual drama or not, historical Jewish celebration of Purim would readily find in Esther a reflex of its own activities.

Before penetrating further this match of text and context, we may mention some of the literary reasons behind the supposition that the Esther story grew not from history but from invention. Of course, there are historical reasons for questioning the narrative's authenticity.[11] Assuming that *'Aḥashverosh* refers to Xerxes I, who reigned in the fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus was his contemporary. Thus, Herodotus records that Amestris was queen, and that Persian kings could only marry with the seven noble families of Persia. This alone rules out the historicity of the tale. The lengths to which certain scholars will go to try to defend the narrative as historical proves the weakness of their claim.[12]

But the scroll even gives itself away in 2:6. There it says that Mordecai was exiled by Nebuchadnezzar with the Judean king Jeconiah (Jehoiachin). This implies the date 598 B.C.E.—more than a century before Xerxes I began to rule. I emphasize the peculiarly literary cues to the story's nonhistoricity because it is these to which an ordinary Jewish audience would respond. One need not have read Herodotus to pick up on them—even the Talmud shows its alertness in this regard (*b. Megilla* 7a). In the midst of a passage which challenges the sanctity of Esther, various tannaitic views are adduced to support its inclusion in the Bible. The arguments are: (1) Esther is inspired (*beruaḥ haqqodesh ne'emra*) because it knows the private thoughts of its characters (6:6: "Haman said in his heart"); (2) Esther is inspired because it is uncanny (2:15: "Esther bore grace in the eyes of all who saw her"); (3) Esther is inspired because God revealed crucial information to Mordecai (2:22: "The matter become known to Mordecai"—somehow!); (4) Esther is inspired because it is incredible otherwise (9:16: although Mordecai permitted the Jews to loot their victims' property, they did not!). All these observations a literary critic, such as Robert Alter, would regard as signs of fiction.[13]

More obvious signs of fiction lie in the comedic hyperbole that permeates the text.[14] For instance, the king rules 127 provinces (while Herodotus attributes to Xerxes only 20 satrapies); he throws a banquet for 180 days; the beauty contestants spend 12 months preparing (the ancient Syriac translation incredulously read "days" for "months" here); Haman offers Ahasueras 100,000 talents of silver to exterminate the Jews; to impale Mordecai, he erects a pole 50 cubits tall.

The scroll also parodies Persian authority. (This, we shall later see, is highly pertinent to its theme.)[15] The king decrees first that the rule of his banquet is no restrictions on drinking (1:8)![16] And when his queen refuses to show off her beauty before his guests, the king exploits the full protocol of Persia to cir-

culate an edict "to every province in its own script, and to every nationality in its own language, that every man is prince in his house and may speak in the language of his own nationality" (1:22).[17] While the decree's logic may be small-minded, it nonetheless characterizes the story. Here, one wife disobeys one order from the king, so the king commands all wives to obey all husbands. Later, one Jew, Mordecai, will similarly trespass one law—to bow to Haman—and Haman will seek to execute all Jews. It is not very different when Esther fears for her one life at the expense of all Jewish lives (4:11). She overcomes her reluctance only when Mordecai points out that if all Jews are threatened, so is she (4:13).

The story as a whole gives a marked appearance of being contrived. As S. R. Driver noted, "the incidents at each stage seem laid so as to prepare for the next, which duly follows without hitch or interruption."[18] Furthermore, irony abounds, usually at Haman's expense. Haman seeks to harm (3:6: *shalaḥ yad,* to "extend a hand" against) the man who has saved the king from those who wished to harm him (2:21: *shalaḥ yad*).[19] He cast lots to fix the date for killing the Jews on the eve of the Jewish holiday of redemption, *Pesaḥ* (3:7).[20] When the king asks to see him in order to consult on the best way to honor Mordecai, Haman is already waiting at the court, seeking permission to hang that same Mordecai! Haman is thus doubly confounded when the man the king desires to honor turns out to be his nemesis and when he himself must parade the Jew through the capital. Then, when the queen invites Haman to her banquet as a first step in bringing his downfall, he believes he is to be feted. And when, in the scroll's most ludicrous scene, an exposed Haman falls on the queen to beg her compassion, the king interprets his conduct as an advance on his wife! The end of the irony is that the king's famous counselor Harbona proposes to impale Haman on the pole he built for Mordecai (7:9). Indeed, this reversal is rather gleefully underscored as follows: "They impaled Haman on the pole that he had set up for Mordecai" (7:10).

Humor and plot contrivances lend the story an air of fiction. Indeed, an audience could hardly fail to associate the Esther tale with many other familiar fictions and legends. For instance, resemblances between Esther and the court intrigues of the *Arabian Nights* have been widely noted.[21] Comparable too are the ancient tale of Ahiqar, of which the Jews in Elephantine possessed an Aramaic copy in the fifth century B.C.E.,[22] the story of Candaules and his queen narrated in Herodotus's *Histories,*[23] the miracle tales of Daniel 1—6 and 3 Esdras 3—4,[24] and the episode of Holofernes' killing in Judith 12, to mention but a few. Esther shares with folk tales these common features: the heroine, poor Esther, is an orphan; she is elevated to royalty, like Cinderella; the king offers this beloved queen up to half his kingdom; the display of his wealth is calculated to impress.[25]

This last item contrasts sharply with the norm in other biblical narratives. There, extensive visual description is highly unusual. Even the *mishkan,* the

tabernacle in the wilderness, which absorbs most of Exodus 25—40, is never described. Its building instructions are related and the actual construction is narrated, but once it is erected it is not visualized. In the Esther Scroll, however, description can become lavish. Esther not only dilates on the palace's elegance, it mimes its luxury by employing uncharacteristically expansive language.

> In those days, as the king Ahasueras sat on his throne of kingship, which is in Shushan, the citadel, in the year three of his kingship he made a drink-fest for all his ministers and servants, the elite of Persia and Media, the nobles and administrators of the provinces before him; displaying the wealth of glory of his kingship and the prestige of the grandeur of his greatness, many days, eighty and one hundred days; and at the completion of these days the king made for all the people found in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, a drink-fest of seven days, in the court of the garden of the domicile of the king (1:2-5).[26]

And so it continues.

A careful listener who is well versed in Scripture might also perceive that the Esther text draws upon themes, motifs, and phrases from earlier Hebrew literature. Full studies have been devoted to the many parallels in topoi and language between Esther and the Joseph story, another tale of a Hebrew rising to high position in a foreign court.[27] Scholars have also attempted to read parallels between Esther and the primary myth of Hebrew redemption, the exodus.[28] But even if these comparisons fail to convince, similarities such as the following do exist:

> It was, when they said to him each day and he did not hearken to them. (Esth. 3:4)
> It was, when she spoke to Joseph each day and he did not hearken to her. (Gen. 39:10)

Or:

> The king removed his signet-ring from his hand, and he gave it to Haman. (Esth. 3:10)
> Pharaoh removed his signet-ring from his hand, and he gave it to the hand of Joseph. (Gen. 41:42)

Indeed, there exist many such apparent parallels. The report in Esth. 2:6 that Mordecai was exiled with Jeconiah by Nebuchadnezzar seems lifted from Jer. 29:1, the prophet's letter to the Babylonian Diaspora. Ahasueras's edict to all husbands (Esth. 1:22), in which each is ordered to speak in the language of his own nationality, appears to adapt Neh. 13:23-24. Sending food parcels to neighbors (Esth. 9:22) probably derives from Nehemiah also (Neh. 8:10-12), and the "words of well-being and faithfulness" embodied in Esther's epistle (Esth. 9:30) recall Zech. 8:19, where the prophet admonishes the Judeans to "love well-being and faithfulness" while they fast.[29]

Even the protagonists depend on biblical prototypes. King Ahasueras,

whose name is transcribed in the scroll as *'aḥashverosh*, is certainly the Artaxerxes whose name is spelled identically in Dan. 9:1 and Ezra 4:6. Indeed, the character of the royal buffoon in Esther seems to constitute the antithesis of Israel's wise king, Solomon. Like Solomon, the king enjoys an extensive domain, reigning "from India to Nubia" (Esth. 1:1), while Solomon governed "in all the kingdoms from . . . the west-bank of the (Euphrates) River . . . to Gaza . . ." (1 Kings 5:1, 4). But whereas Solomon sought wisdom (*ḥokhma*) rather than glory (*kavod*) and wealth (*'osher;* 1 Kings 3:13), Ahasueras notably lacks the former but boasts of his glorious wealth (*'osher kevod* . . . ; Esth. 1:4).[30]

As for Mordecai, the court Jew, surely he is modeled on Nehemiah, whose career—not coincidentally—began "in Shushan the citadel," at the Persian palace (Neh. 1:1). Just as Nehemiah knew his Bible when more or less quoting Deuteronomy in his prayer (Deut. 30:4 in Neh. 1:9), so the narrator in Esther makes good use of the Hebrew classics.

But more important than such parallels between individuals is that, as nearly everyone has noted, the scroll construes the contest between Haman and Mordecai as the paradigmatic war between Israel and Amalek (cf. Exod. 17:8–16; Deut. 25:17–19). This war is represented more personally in 1 Samuel 15 as that between Israel's king, Saul son of Kish the Benjaminite, and the Amalekite king, Agag. In Esther, Mordecai son of Ya'ir son of Shim'i son of Kish a Benjaminite, plays the role of Saul (Esth. 2:5; Ya'ir and Shim'i are both common biblical names),[31] while Haman "the Agagite" (Esth. 3:1) stands in for his eponymous ancestor. In a more subtle variation, David slays the Amalekite who abetted the death of Saul (2 Sam. 4:10). What worked subtly will certainly play out in this showcased clash. Clearly, the Jewish audience knows who the biblical pattern implies will win.

The mythic lines along which the contest is drawn are underscored by the text's regular reference to the antagonists by epithets.[32] Mordecai is "the Jew"; Haman, "the evil" (7:6), is "the adversary of the Jews" (*ṣorer hayyehudim*). This latter epithet the narrative puts to comical and ironic effect by incorporating it into the following matter-of-fact description: "The king removed his signet-ring from his hand, and he gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of the Jews" (3:10). The king, of course, has not yet learned the identity of Haman's enemies.

Similarly, Ahasueras, Vashti and Esther, and even Shushan are represented by epithets ("king," "queen," and "city/citadel," respectively). In fact, not only are the protagonists' identities generalized, as several readers have observed, these characters stand for virtually universal types.[33] For instance, there is the stupid king who must always seek advice from his ordinary servants (2:4) as well as from his professional counselors. The first move this king makes on his own, following the story's opening feast, is to love Esther (2:17). Such a plot line was surely to please the Jewish audience. Beyond this single act, the king

is used as a lever for obtaining their goals by the major antagonists, Haman and Mordecai-Esther. Of course, he is an easy mark, for he cannot even remember from 1:21 to 2:1 that he has banished Queen Vashti. Esther comprises not just the stupid king. The stubborn queen, the lovely and modest queen, the wise and loyal courtier, the cruel, hapless villain—all these personae find their places in the Esther narrative. Indeed, there is not much to the plot at all beyond the fulfilling of predictable functions by these typological characters.

So with its uncomplicated plot, black-and-white portrayal of conflict between the evil Haman and the fair Esther and upright Mordecai, and flat, cardboard caricatures of the actors, the story of Esther is a skit, not a drama.[34] It is a cartoon, and thus precisely the sort of show one would expect to see on Purim.

As already indicated, the Purim play, the story of the scroll, is the very image of the Jewish celebration. "A man is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know 'Cursed is Haman' from 'Blessed is Mordecai'"—thus the tradition in the Babylonian Talmud (*Megilla* 7b). To this, the Palestinian Talmud adds: "Cursed is Zeresh, Blessed is Esther, Cursed are all the Wicked, Blessed are all the Jews."[35] Indeed, the model or mirror for the Purim drinking is provided by the Purim text itself.[36] There, the king and queen each host a drink-fest to honor the king's reign (*mishte,* lit., "place of drinking," chap. 1), the king celebrates Esther's crowning with a drink-fest (chap. 2), Ahasueras and Haman sit down to drink when the word of doom for the Jews goes out (chap. 3), Esther throws two drink-fests to expose Haman and his plot (chap. 5), the two banquets take place (chap. 7), and the Jews rejoice in their triumph with "a drink-fest and holiday" (8:17) and "a day of drinking and merry-making" (9:17, 18). Mordecai institutionalized the drinking by making it an integral part of Purim's annual observance (9:22).

From a historical perspective, the practice of dressing in costume on Purim is best documented from the later Middle Ages onward. It is very possible, however, that this custom of masquerading also "belonged to Purim from the very start," or constituted part of the Jewish festival's probably pagan precursor.[37] One certainly sees the form of the masquerade in the scroll, where both Esther (5:1) and Mordecai (6:8) don regal apparel, dressing up as Gentile royalty. Indeed, the Jew Mordecai is paraded around in his borrowed outfit (6:9).

Yet another longstanding custom of Purim, which is already documented in antiquity, hearkens back to the Esther text. This is the burning or hanging of Haman in effigy.[38] If scholars who trace Purim back to a pagan mock combat are right, again, the practice and the story are but reflexes of one another.

Finally, on Purim, as Jewish tradition has it, anything goes. Consequently, it has been customary for Purim celebrants to flaunt and parody Jewish practice and teaching.[39] In Esther, both Esther and the Jews similarly transgress or ignore Jewish law. For instance, like Joseph in Egypt but significantly unlike

Daniel and his friends in the court of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:8–16), Esther does not keep the dietary laws. Realizing this, the Talmud makes her vegetarian (*Megilla* 13a). Again like Joseph, Esther marries a Gentile. Moreover, in apparent oblivion of the Festival of Pesaḥ, she seems to have her people forego the matzah, bitter herbs, and lamb of the holiday, in order to fast on her behalf (4:16; cf. 3:12).[40] The *Targum Sheni* to 9:4 picked up this additional violation of the Torah: the hanged bodies of Haman and his sons were left out overnight, in neglect of Deut. 21:22–23. Now these trespasses of Jewish law may reflect a certain laxness in Jewish Diaspora observance, or they may evince the same playfulness that has characterized Purim from as far back as we can trace it. Such a reading corresponds to the lighthearted tone of the story, the carnival milieu of the Purim text, and the most frequently noted peculiarity of the scroll, the omission of God's name.

The hoary prohibition against vocalizing the divine tetragrammaton and the fact that many Dead Sea Scrolls write YHWH in a distinctly archaic script (old Hebrew/Phoenician rather than square Aramaic) demonstrate the ancient Jews' sensitivity to the use of the holy name of God. They would not pronounce it in an inappropriate context. Now no one denies that God's role in the Esther narrative is assumed to lie behind the series of remarkable coincidences that enable Esther to rescue her people. It is generally understood to be implied in 4:14, where Mordecai prods a diffident Esther thus: "For if you keep-silent, silent, at this time, succor and saving will rise for the Jews from *another place,* and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows if for a time like this you have reached the kingship."[41] Still, the utter omission of the divine name calls for explanation—and it has been variously explained. Drawing on the facts that not only is God not named, but the pervasive biblical historiographic theme that God punishes covenant infractions and then forgives and saves is absent, Shemaryahu Talmon has proposed that Esther belongs to the genre of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.[42] That literature typically avoids theologizing in a specific way and tends toward the pragmatic. M. Z. Segal and Robert Gordis have even gone so far as to suggest that the author of Esther eliminated Jewish religious references as part of a plan to disguise the text as a non-Jewish Persian chronicle.[43] Both these explanations fail to convince me. First, in Talmon's interpretation, the scroll's ethnocentrism and its farcical fun remain problematic. Considering these, it is hardly a vehicle for serious wisdom instruction as he implies. As for the interpretation proposed by Segal and Gordis, it suffers from our lack of an actual Persian chronicle to compare with Esther and from the implicit thorough Jewishness of the book.

Others, who find the absence of the divine name to point to the story's secular origins are, I believe, nearer the mark.[44] As certain scholars have seen, the best explanation is that Purim was, and has always been a frivolous festival, a time for jesting and revelry.[45] As the Esther scroll would be read only at such

a celebration, it was no time to pronounce the sacred divine name. The omission of God's name was, then, a necessary precaution, consonant with the text's presumed *Sitz im Leben*.

It is significant that it is only the Jewish canonical version of Esther (the Masoretic) that lacks the divine name. Ancient Greek and Aramaic versions, some of which it has been argued may derive from precanonical prototypes, all employ God's name and develop God's explicit role in the narrative to greater and lesser—mostly greater—extents.[46] It would seem likely that in omitting God's name, the singular canonical version was singularly appropriate for use at Purim. Indeed, how but in jest could a Jewish story name its two heroes after the Babylonian god and goddess, Marduk and Ishtar? This is clearly no place for the tetragrammaton. In other words, the scroll was custom-made for the feast.

Given the basic assumption that the Esther story is mock serious, and thus homologous with Purim observance, we may then address the question of what the scroll says, beyond its obvious promulgation of the holiday. To my way of understanding, to ask what a text says is the same as asking what that text does, or even what we do with that text.[47]

If we attend to Esther's recurrent motifs and its patterns of arrangement and style, we see that they conduce to this one theme: to mitigate the real anxieties of Jews living as a minority in a largely non-Jewish society, Jews fantasize that it is they who dominate, not they who are victimized. As we have seen, it is all done in good fun, and temporarily each year it relieves some of the burden of being Jewish in a hostile or potentially hostile environment.[48]

In order to justify his official request, which he is prepared to back up with an extraordinary fund of money, Haman says this about the Jews: "There is one people spread and scattered among the peoples in all provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are different from every people, and the laws of the king they do not do" (3:8). The first half of Haman's statement is uncontroversial and morally neutral, but the second half is threatening to the king and, if it were believed, to the Jews. Haman's evidence for the second claim, so far as we know, is slight; the Jew Mordecai has stubbornly refused to bow down to Haman, which he is obliged to do by order of the king (3:2). Haman may have been wrong to hate all Jews on account of only one, but he was not wrong about Mordecai. Mordecai did transgress the royal law. This the text underscores by its elaborate wording:

> And all the king's servants who were in the king's gate would go-down-on-knees and prostrate-themselves to Haman, for so had the king commanded for him; but Mordecai would not go-down-on-knees and would not prostrate-himself. (3:2)

The exact repetition of both verbs and the unnecessary use of the second negative ("would *not* prostrate-himself") highlight Mordecai's disobedience.

Esther, too, deliberately breaks the royal law when she visits the king uninvited: "And so, I shall enter before the king which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish" (4:16).

Jews living in a Gentile society do have a problem of dual loyalty. There are the laws of the covenant on the one hand and the laws of the king on the other. At times the Jew may be torn between the two. This conflict exercised the first half of the Book of Daniel (especially chaps. 1, 3, and 6), and it would seem to trouble Esther. This inner Jewish tension is outwardly signified by the mark of dual identity. To the Jews, the scroll's heroine is Hadassah, but in Persian society she is Esther (2:7).[49] Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah must appear in the court of Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed Nego, that is, as Babylonians (Dan. 1:7). Esther's true allegiances are exposed in 2:20, where it is made clear that "what Mordecai says Esther does."

The command-and-obedience motif surfaces at a number of points in the narrative.[50] For example, it forms the hub of the episode involving the rebellious queen Vashti in chapter 1. It ends with the king's proclamation that all wives must obey their husbands. Mordecai's instruction to Esther in chapter 2 to conceal her Jewish identity (for it will be necessary for the development of the tale) similarly turns on command-obedience. Esther's complicity constitutes the obedience segment of the motif. This she repeats when she implicitly listens to Mordecai and reveals the plot against the king. As we have already noted, the issue of obedience continues through chapter 3. There, Haman, incensed at Mordecai's disrespect, seeks to destroy all Jews. To his mind, they do not obey the king's law. In chapter 4, Esther again hearkens to Mordecai and approaches the king. Note that here Esther specifically chooses Mordecai's instruction over Ahasueras's law, and in turn, Mordecai listens to Esther and proclaims a Jewish fast (thus anticipating his proclamation of a Jewish feast later on). Haman also follows advice, however. In chapter 5, he listens to his wife and friends and builds a pole for hanging Mordecai. Yet in the next chapter, to his terrible chagrin, Haman must obey the king's order to honor Mordecai. On the other hand, in chapter 8 the king cannot obey Esther and rescind the decree to exterminate the Jews, but this is because such complicity would ruin the story's reversal. This is clear since, in chapter 9, he will accede to Esther's request to hang Haman's ten sons. Finally, Jews all over obey the edict of Mordecai to observe the Feast of Purim (9:23). But while the prominent theme of obedience does serve to reinforce the ostensible function of the scroll, to promote the widespread observance of Purim, on a deeper level, it manifests the problem of the Diaspora Jew, who, like Esther, must choose between Jewish tradition and the temporal authority.

In one way, the scroll laughs off the conflict by lampooning the Persian king and his silly, irreversible laws.[51] But while laughter may bring temporary relief, it does not remove the problem. Thus, no sooner does the issue of dual loyalty emerge in the scroll—when Esther is said to do what she is told by

Mordecai (2:20)—than the exemplary citizenship of Mordecai finds a sharp illustration. The Jew brings to the king's attention a plot to assassinate him—and the criminals are the most trusted of Persians, the king's guards. The importance of Jewish aid to the throne is appreciated when the king flamboyantly rewards good citizen Mordecai.

The Jews, so the scroll would have it, are not a threat to the king. *Au contraire,* they benefit him. Moreover, since the king unwittingly favored a Jewish girl to be his queen, there is nothing intrinsically inimical about the Jew. Indeed, it was the palace that wanted Esther, she "was taken," *vattillaqaḥ* (2:9, 16), there. Like Esther, then, the Jews are okay, and like her, they should not have to perform any extraordinary acts to win public acceptance and approval. Aware of the reasons Jews might be perceived as noxious, the scroll insists they have intrinsic worth.

The scroll's representation of Jewish life in the Diaspora is fraught with anxiety. At any moment and for no apparent cause, the king might bring to power an anti-Semite—and the king would likely not take pains to challenge an arbitrary request from his powerful second-in-command. This world allows powerful men to buy rights by which they may carry out personal vendettas, operating under the pretense of serving the public.

Living in such a precarious position, vulnerable to the suspicion and enmity of the majority population, a people would need at some time to give vent to its repressed tensions. Purim fills this need, as does the Esther Scroll. Together they imagine a complete reversal of positions:

> On the day on which the enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them, *it became reversed* when it was the Jews who overpowered those who hated them. (9:1).

(As Loader has noted, even the terms in this verse are reversed: "enemies" . . . "Jews" becomes "Jews" . . . "those who hated them.")[52] Purim would be celebrated in commemoration of the Jewish triumph, of "the month in which [the Jews'] anxiety was *reversed* to gladness, and their grieving-period to a holiday" (9:22).

The theme of reversal in the Esther Scroll has been widely treated. Following Gunkel's lead, Hans Streidl called the entire narrative "a big *nahafokh*" (reversal).[53] Without rehearsing all the oft-noted particulars, we ought to observe that reversals take place in two major relationships. On the individual level, they occur between Haman and Mordecai, and on the collective level, between the Jew-hating Persians and the Jews. In anticipation of the collective Jewish victory, Mordecai supplants Haman. Haman is actually impaled on the edifice he had built for Mordecai (7:10), and the king takes the royal signet-ring he had given to Haman and presents it to the Jew (8:2). Esther then places Haman's household under Mordecai's charge (8:2), and the story ends by telling us that Mordecai the Jew was made the king's second-in-command in Haman's place (10:3).

The tight link between the contest of Haman and Mordecai on the one hand, and that of the Jew-haters and the Jews on the other, comes into sharp focus in the parallel decrees promulgated by Haman and Mordecai. In 3:12–15, Haman has his proclamation "to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, infants and women . . . and to loot their spoil" circulated around the empire "to all the provinces of the king." After Haman's downfall and his own rise to power, Mordecai reverses Haman's proclamation by substituting Jews for Persians (8:9–14). The Jews will play the part of the persecutors. Mordecai's version of the edict, however, diverges from the language of Haman's by stressing that the Jewish action will be defensive in purpose. The Jews "in every city" are "to assemble and stand for their life" in order "to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all (armed) *forces* of any people or province *who were adverse to them*" so that they can "take vengeance on their enemies."

Up to this point, Mordecai still controls the reversal of Jews and Jew-haters. He can tell the Jews what they ought to do. But once the edict has issued from Mordecai, the contest passes from his control to that of the Jews. As a people, the Jews now decide the nature of their reversal. A true reversal will place the Jews precisely where their enemies wanted to be, and had their enemies followed Haman's decree, they would have exterminated the defenseless Jews. The revenge the Jews finally exact repels many commentators. As Bernhard W. Anderson has put it, the Jews' "unblushing vindictiveness stand[s] in glaring contradiction to the Sermon on the Mount."[54] While theoretically the Jews might have contented themselves with self-defense, as Gunkel and others have recognized, a proper reversal would require that the Jews do to their enemies what those Jew-haters would have done to them.[55] And the text repeatedly describes the Jews' victims as "the enemies of the Jews" (9:1), "[Jew-]haters" (9:1), "those seeking [the Jews'] calamity" (9:2), and the like. From the summary in 9:16 it must be assumed that even the unidentified "people" (*'ish*) that the Jews killed on the second day of their action in Shushan (9:15) were "their enemies" and "those who hated them" (9:16).

Other evidence suggests that the Jews' killing of their enemies forms the appropriate reversal. The so-called Greek A-Text of Esther relates the following dialogue between Esther and Ahasueras:

> Moreover Esther said to the king, "Grant me permission to punish my enemies with slaughter." And Esther the queen took counsel with the king also against the sons of Haman, that they also should die together with their father. And the king said, "So be it." And she smote the enemies in great numbers . . .[56]

As (most recently) David J. A. Clines has noted, the Jewish revenge amounts to poetic justice—and in the Hebrew Bible that serves as a well-known code for the workings of God.[57] But the revenge is more; it is the necessary reversal that can satisfy the Jewish fantasy of being on top.

The transposition of the Jews and the dominant Persians in the narrative is consummated when many Gentiles within the Persian Empire "become Jews" or "act Jewish" (*mityahadim;* 8:17) owing to their "fear of the Jews."[58] This unexpected and perhaps even preposterous turn of events inverts the historically much more common situation in which Jews, being in the minority in the Diaspora, assimilated to the majority. Our heroine Esther, in fact, had once to hide her Jewishness (2:20). While on one level, this deception was a crucial preparation for sabotaging Haman, on another it represents the smoothest course for Jewish survival in the Diaspora, as perceived by the scroll. Jews must mix in with society and not make waves. What "justified" the anti-Jewish program of Haman was the Jews' strange law and their insistence on being different. Thus, the easy way to avert anti-Jewish hostility would be to act Persian. On Purim, however, the Jew imagines a circumstance in which a Persian would want to act Jewish.

This motif of reversal reaches its apogee and completes the circle of the story's plot when the Jews imitate the Persian manner of celebration. They too enjoy days of merriment and drinking.

There are, then, two main themes conveyed through Esther. First, Diaspora Jews suffer a problem of dual loyalty, torn between being good Jews and good citizens of the empire; second, the scroll imagines a reversal of Jewish and Persian positions at least on Purim, the occasion on which the scroll is given its annual reading. Both these themes revolve around the concept of duality, and it is part of the narrative's art that twoness characterizes the style in which the story is related. In Esther, theme and style interpenetrate. The recurrent "doubleness" in the narrative reinforces both the theme of dual loyalty and that of reversal. This twoness manifests itself primarily in the following two ways: scenes and language are both "doubled."

Typically, doubled scenes have been explained by scholars as the result of the author's composing the text from two or more precursors, one about Mordecai and one about Esther.[59] Although reconstructions do vary somewhat, in general one plot has Mordecai best Haman, his rival at the royal court, while the other has the queen (Esther) accomplish a prestigious courtier's downfall. This way of dealing with Esther's doubled scenes has some merit, enabling us to interpret certain perplexing details of the narrative. For instance, the story suggests jealousy as Mordecai's motive for not bowing to Haman. Also, the two stories taken together explain the two Jewish edicts (one by Mordecai and one by Esther), the two days of Purim (one from one story, one from the other), and the anomalous appearance of Mordecai's name in 9:29.[60] There, the text introduces Esther's epistle with the feminine singular verb *vattikhtov,* "she wrote," mentions Esther as the subject of the verb, and then adds as a second subject "and Mordecai the Jew." It appears that Mordecai was interpolated into the verse. Nevertheless, according to Cazelles, who elaborately divides the scroll into two sources, the most peculiar doubling does

not arise from two sources. Cazelles believes that the two parties Esther holds for Haman and the king, and at the first of which she merely asks her guests to attend the second, belong to the same source.[61] But while the question of whether the doubled scenes were all present from the outset may remain open, the fact of numerous twice-seen scenes in the canonical Esther is not at issue. Let us list these scenes. In the opening chapter, both Ahasueras and Vashti host feasts (the one for men, the other for women). Vashti's disobedience in chapter 1 is doubled by that of Mordecai in chapter 3, and in each case, as we have said above, the group to which the intransigent individual belongs must pay the price. Then, Ahasueras's royal decree to destroy the Jews in chapter 3 is revised and reversed in chapter 8, when Mordecai issues his own proclamation. In chapter 4, by informing Esther of Haman's plan, Mordecai echoes his own behavior in chapter 2 where through Esther he communicated the assassination plot to the king. Twice in chapter 5 Ahasueras asks Esther what bothers her, and twice Esther invites him and Haman to banquets. When, in chapter 6, Haman stands in the outer court waiting to see the king, we recall the preceding chapter in which Esther awaits the king in the inner court. And when in chapter 6 Haman shares with family and friends his bad news that Mordecai is to be honored, the scene parallels his earlier complaint of how Mordecai has upset him. Moving on to chapter 7, Esther's drink-fest follows upon the preparatory one in chapter 5. Then, when in chapter 8 Esther approaches the king and receives the nod of the royal scepter, we remember her more tremulous visit in chapter 5. Still in chapter 8, where doublings seem to concentrate, Mordecai replaces Haman as vizier and again dresses up in noble garb, thus doubling the parade of chapter 6 and contrasting with his appearance in sackcloth from chapter 4. If repetition seems prevalent in chapter 8, chapter 9 is nearly all twice-told. Here, the two heroes send two edicts to the Jews after the Jews have perpetrated two days of massacre on their enemies; they call for two days' holiday for two populations (urban and rural); the language even doubles the doubled acts in what seems an exaggerated and consequently parodic—perhaps even self-mocking—form:

> The Jews upheld and accepted, for themselves and for their descendants, and for all those joining them, irreversibly [i.e., for now and forever], to observe these two days, as they are written and at their time, each and every year (*bekhol shana veshana*); and these days are commemorated and observed in each and every generation (*bekhol dor vador*), (by) each and every clan (*mishpaḥa umishpaḥa*), (by) each and every province (*medina umedina*), and by each and every city (*ve'ir va'ir*). And these days of Purim will not pass from the Jews, and their commemoration shall not end among their descendants. (9:27–28)

Even within this brief passage the following terms appear twice: "the Jews," "their descendants," "not to be reversed/pass" (*velo' ya'avor*), "to observe," "to commemorate," "these days (of Purim)."

Indeed, as we noted above, the entire text of Esther abounds in verbal

doublets or dyads. These lend a profound effect of duality to the tale. Streidl and others have noted this stylistic feature already, so we shall content ourselves by citing examples from chapter 1 only.[62] There, these doublets appear: "Ahasueras, he is the Ahasueras" (v. 1); "from India to Nubia" (v. 1); "his ministers and his servants" (v. 3); "Persia and Media" (v. 3 and passim); "the nobles and administrators" (v. 3); "the wealth of the glory of his kingship and the prestige of the grandeur of his greatness" (v. 4); "many days, eighty and one hundred days" (v. 4); "from great to small" (v. 5); "each and every man" (v. 8); "eunuchs, serving the king . . ." (v. 10); "to show the peoples and the ministers" (v. 11); "the king grew very angry, and his wrath burned" (v. 12); "the sages, the astrologers" (v. 13); "law and ruling" (v. 13); "ministers . . . , attendants of the king (*ro'ei penei hammelekh;* v. 14); "the king and the ministers" (v. 16); "against all the ministers and against all the peoples" (v. 16); "derision and insult" (v. 18); "her fellow-woman, her better" (v. 19); "the king and the ministers" (v. 21); "to each and every province in its own script, and to each and every nationality in its own language; that every man should dominate in his house and speak in the language of his own nationality" (v. 22).

Ultimately, the number of words conjoined in a string takes on symbolic significance in the Esther Scroll. While the problem of dual loyalty and the relief of imagining a reversal both align themselves across one axis, in a text where two thus constitutes the pervasive number, emphasis can be achieved through using a limited number of dramatic strings comprising three or four terms.[63] For instance, in Esther, violence or its threat is betokened by triads (three terms). Thus, Haman plans "to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate" the Jews (3:13; 7:4), and the Jews responded in kind by destroying, killing, and annihilating their enemies (8:11) with a strike of "sword, killing, and annihilation" (9:5). On the other hand, Jewish relief from this threat, which is what Purim is about, is expressed in fours. On the day when they return attack for attack, the Jews enjoy "light, and merriment, and jubilation, and prestige" (8:16). And the Jews in the countryside celebrate "merriment, and drink-fest, and a holiday, and sending parcels every man to his neighbor" (9:19; see also 9:22). As four surpasses three, merriment overcomes conflict. Consequently, by observing Purim and hearing the comedy of the scroll, Jews may drown their routine anxieties in imagination and joy.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).

2. Luther's various comments are referred to and discussed in Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther and the Old Testament*, trans. Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 188–89. Luther's remark that the Jews "love the Book of Esther which so befits their bloodthirsty, vengeful, murderous greed and hope" clearly betrays the anti-Semitism behind his attitude.

3. Hermann Gunkel, *What Remains of the Old Testament, and Other Essays,* trans. A. K. Dallas (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928), 16.

4. Among the Christian responses, see Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 747; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction,* trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 511–12. Many of the first millennium church fathers also rejected Esther. Bernhard W. Anderson deals with this subject in "The Place of the Book of Esther in the Christian Bible," *JR* 30 (1950): 33 (reprinted in *Studies in the Book of Esther,* ed. Carey A. Moore [New York: Ktav, 1982], 131). Moore's "Prolegomenon" to the volume is also worth attention.

Among the Reform Jewish biblicists, see Abraham Geiger, as cited in Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 217; Samuel Sandmel, *The Enjoyment of Scripture* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 44.

5. For example, Hayyim Schauss, *The Jewish Festivals: History and Observance,* trans. Samuel Jaffe (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 254–55.

6. Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Yiddish Theater Lives, Despite the Past," *New York Times,* 20 Jan. 1985, sec. 2, 22.

7. See Eissfeldt, *Old Testament,* 508, and, for example, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 599: "There is general agreement that the major purpose of the book of Esther is to provide historical grounds for the celebration of the feast of Purim."

8. See N. S. Doniach, *Purim or the Feast of Esther* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), 138ff.

9. For example, Werner Dommerhausen, *Die Estherrolle* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), 128–33; compare H. L. Ginsberg, "Introduction [to Esther]," in *The Five Megilloth and Jonah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 82–88.

10. See, for example, Bickerman, *Four Strange Books,* 199–202, and Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 832–34.

11. For a summary, see Carey A. Moore, *Esther* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1971), xlvff.

12. For example, Robert Gordis, "Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther—A New Solution to an Ancient Crux," *JBL* 100 (1981): 358–88. After a strenuous attempt to find some historical validity in the narrative, Gordis must admit "Clearly the Book of Esther is not a historical work in the modern sense of the term. It represents a traditional reworking of what may well have been a historical incident" (p. 386).

13. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 23–46. Alter perceives Esther as "a comic fantasy utilizing pseudo-historical materials" (p. 34).

14. See, e.g., W. Ernest Beet, "The Humorist Element in the Old Testament," *The Expositor* 22 (1921): 59–68. Cf. also, e.g., D. Harvey, "Esther, Book of," *IDB* 2:151a; Bruce William Jones, "Two Misconceptions about the Book of Esther," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 173 (in Moore, *Studies,* 437).

15. For example, Abraham D. Cohen, "'Hu Ha-goral': The Religious Significance of Esther," *Judaism* 23 (1974): esp. 93 (in Moore, *Studies,* 128); David J. A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 31–33.

16. Following the New Jewish Version (Jewish Publication Society of America). Contrast the 1917 JPS rendering "none did compel"; compare the RSV, etc.

17. See Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom,* 836.

18. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 482.

19. On the idiom *shalaḥ yad* in the sense of harming, see Paul Humbert, "Etendre la main," *VT* 12 (1962): 383–95. For the idiom bearing this sense in Phoenician, see my article, "Trans-Semitic Idiomatic Equivalency and the Derivation of Hebrew *ml'kh,*" in *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1979): 335, with n. 48.

20. For example, Moore, *Esther,* 43, and Sandra Beth Berg, *The Book of Esther* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 182.

21. By, for instance, Duncan Black Macdonald, in *The Hebrew Literary Genius* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1933), 139–40; Bickerman, *Four Strange Books,* 177-78; Gaster, *Myths, Legend, and Custom,* 830; Moore, *Esther,* 1.

22. For bibliography and translation, see H. L. Ginsberg in *ANET,* 427–30. On the comparison, see Shemaryahu Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," *VT* 13 (1963): esp. 426–27, 438–43.

23. Herodotus, *Histories* Book I, 8–13; see Hermann Gunkel, *Esther* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1916), 5, and idem, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1921), 143.

24. Eissfeldt, *Old Testament,* 508.

25. Gunkel, *Das Märchen,* 141–43.

26. For a detailed stylistic discussion of this passage, see Dommerhausen, *Die Estherrolle,* 17–21. For further illustration of the text's expansive style, see M. Z. Segal, *Mevo' hammiqra'* (Jerusalem: Kiriath Sepher, 1967), 726–27.

27. For example, L. A. Rosenthal, "Die Josephgeschichte mit den Büchern Esther und Daniel verglichen," *ZAW* 15 (1895): 278–84; M. Gan, "The Book of Esther in the Light of the Story of Joseph in Egypt," *Tarbiz* 31 (1962): 144–49 (in Hebrew); Berg, *Book of Esther,* 123–65. On the relationship between Esther and Daniel and Judith see, too, Ruth Stiehl, "Das Buch Esther," *WZKM* 53 (1956): 4-22 (in Moore, *Studies,* 249–67).

28. Especially Gillis Gerleman, *Studien zu Esther: Stoff, Struktur, Stil, Sinn* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966); idem, *Esther* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970–73).

29. Ginsberg, "Introduction," 88.

30. Talmon relates Ahasueras to Solomon differently. See "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," 433–34.

31. For *Ya'ir,* see Num. 32:41; Judges 10:3–5; 2 Sam. 20:26. For *Shim'i,* see Exod. 6:17; Num. 3:13; 2 Sam. 16:5; 21:21. It is noteworthy that both names are associated with David.

32. Hans Streidl, "Untersuchung zur Syntax und Stilistik des hebräischen Buches Esther," *ZAW* 55 (1937): 94–95.

33. For example, Gunkel, *Esther,* 77–78; Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther"; Segal, *Mevo' hammiqra',* 2:720–21.

34. For example, Charles C. Torrey, "The Older Book of Esther," *HTR* 37 (1944): 21–22 (in Moore, *Studies,* 468–69); Moore, *Esther,* liii–liv.

35. See *Tosafot* to *b. Megilla* 7b.

36. See Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), 238. For the banquet motif in Esther see Berg, *Book of Esther,* 31–57.

37. Schauss, in *Jewish Festivals,* 268, inclines to the former view, while Theodor H. Gaster (*Festivals of the Jewish Year* [New York: William Sloane Associates, 1953], 221–29) prefers the latter.

38. Doniach, *Purim,* 72–75, 172.

39. Ibid., 138ff.
40. See Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 36–37.
41. For example, Dommerhausen, *Die Estherrolle*, 73–74, and Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 153–55.
42. Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther."
43. Segal, *Mevo' hammiqra'*, 2:721; Gordis, "Religion, Wisdom, and History in the Book of Esther."
44. For example, Driver, *Introduction*, 486; Eissfeldt, *Old Testament*, 511. Clines (*Esther Scroll*, 154) maintains that the narrator omitted God's name in order to convey the theological message that although divine providence will protect the Jews, they, too, must take some initiative in resolving their difficulties. Such an earnest interpretation strikes me as dissonant with the burlesque tone of the scroll.
45. For instance, Torrey, "Older Book of Esther," 11 (in Moore, ed., *Studies*, 458); Anderson, "Place of the Book of Esther," 35b (in Moore, *Studies*, 133b).
46. Torrey, "Older Book of Esther," and Clines, *Esther Scroll*. See also Moore, "Prolegomenon," xxiv.
47. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*
48. Gaster, *Festivals*, 230; Jones, "Two Misconceptions," 171 (in Moore, *Studies*, 437); W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973): 211–23; Berg, *Book of Esther*, 34–35; John Craghan, *Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982), 9. Contrast Bickerman, who fails in *Four Strange Books* to see a "Jewish problem" in Esther (p. 188).
49. This should resolve the difficulty Berg finds in trying to explain why Esther is first introduced in the scroll as Hadassah (*Book of Esther*, 168).
50. See, for example, ibid., 72–93.
51. Cohen, "'Hu Ha-goral'," esp. 93 (in Moore, *Studies*, 128); Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 16ff., esp. 31–33.
52. J. A. Loader, "Esther as a Novel with Different Levels of Meaning," *ZAW* 90 (1978): 417–21, esp. 419.
53. Streidl, "Untersuchung," 105; Gunkel, *Esther*, 76–77. See, more recently, Berg, *Book of Esther*, 103–21; Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 155ff.
54. Anderson, "Place of the Book of Esther," 32b (in Moore, *Studies*, 130b).
55. In *Esther*, 76, Gunkel observes that the "strongest opposition" the narrator contrives is that "on the very same day on which the Jews were to be murdered, they themselves murder their enemies." See also Streidl, "Untersuchung," 105; Loader, "Esther as a Novel," esp. 419; Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 159.
56. Trans. in Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 241.
57. Ibid., 153.
58. In order to support his own thesis about the various literary strata in the scroll, Clines interprets the *paḥad* of the Jews felt by the Persians who became Jewish as "awe" rather than "fear" or "dread" (*Esther Scroll*, 65, 97). Such an interpretation lacks any foundation. The phrase *nafal paḥad hayyehudim 'aleihem* in Esth. 8:17, like the nearly identical phrases in 9:2 (which refers to "dread of the Jews") and 9:3 (which refers to "dread of Mordecai"), means only "the dread of the Jews fell upon them." It is a reference to sheer fear of the avenging Jews. The sense of "awe" attaches itself to *paḥad* only when it is used of God. The phrase in Esther has the sense of *śamaḥ miṣrayim beṣeitam ki nafal paḥdam 'aleihem* in Ps. 105:38: "Egypt was glad when they [viz., the Israelites] went out, for their [i.e., the Israelites'] dread had fallen upon them." See, further, Moore, *Esther*, 82.
59. Cazelles, Bickerman, Dommerhausen, Lebram, Humphreys, and Clines all give such an explanation: Henri Cazelles, "Note sur la composition du rouleau d'Esther," in H. Gross and F. Mussner, ed., *Lex tua veritas: Festschrift für Hubert Junker* (Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1961), 17–29 (in Moore, *Studies*, 424–36); Bickerman, *Four Strange Books*, 171–88; Dommerhausen, *Die Estherrolle*, 26; J. C. H. Lebram, "Purimfest und Estherbuch," *VT* 22 (1972): 208–22 (in Moore, *Studies*, 205–19); Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora," 214; Clines, *Esther Scroll*, esp. 115–74.
60. See Moore, *Esther*, 95; Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 56.
61. See the critique in Clines, *Esther Scroll*, 116, 120–21.
62. Streidl, "Untersuchung," esp. 74, 84–85. See also Segal, *Mevo' hammiqra'*, 2:726; Dommerhausen, *Die Estherrolle*, 144; Moore, *Esther*, l–li; Berg, *Book of Esther*, 79–80.
63. See Streidl, "Untersuchung," 85.