

READING ESTHER IN THE LEVANTINE LITERARY TRADITION*

Scholars have noted a host of potential intertexts for Esther. The story of Joseph in Genesis 37–50 may provide some language, literary features, and themes in Esther¹. Links with the account of Saul and Agag in 1 Samuel 15, as well as that story’s background in the Hebrews’ encounter with the Amalekites in Exodus 17 and God’s response in Deut 25,17-19, place Esther at the end of a longstanding conflict well known in the Hebrew Bible². Esther also has overlaps with the book of Daniel³, *Enuma Elish*⁴, and further potential intertexts⁵. Though the creator(s) of Esther was likely steeped in the language and stories of the Joseph Story and Samuel-Kings⁶, and though some intentional use of other texts remains possible, I suggest that ~~many~~ more plausibly stem from a common literary tradition. In this study, I explore ways the text of Esther parallels the Baal Cycle; 1 Samuel 25; 2 Samuel 14; and 1 Kings 1–2. Rather than suggest Esther interacts

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¹ See L.A. ROSENTHAL, “Die Josephgeschichte mit den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen”, ZAW 15 (1895) 278-284; J.D. LEVENSON, *Esther*. A Commentary (OTL; Louisville, KY 1997) throughout; A. BERLIN, *Esther* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia, PA 2001) xxxvii; J. GROSSMAN, “‘Dynamic Analogies’ in the Book of Esther”, VT 59 (2009) 394-414, here 397-399; A. KOLLER, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge 2014) 39, 81-85; B. EGO, *Ester* (BKAT 21; Göttingen 2017) 24.

² Cf. BERLIN, *Esther*, xxxviii-xxxix, 85; M. FOX, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI 2001) 115; LEVENSON, *Esther*, 122; C.A. MOORE, *Esther* (AB 7B; Garden City, N.Y. 1971) 87-88; KOLLER, *Esther*, 49-53, 86-89; EGO, *Ester*, 24-25. However, in the Alpha Text of Esther, Haman is not descended from Agag, and the Jews plunder the spoil in ch. 9 (and therefore they do not finish Saul’s unfinished business in 1 Samuel 15). On the Alpha Text, see footnote 45.

³ GROSSMAN, “Dynamic Analogies”, 397-399; cf. BERLIN, *Esther*, xl; KOLLER, *Esther*, 40-41.

⁴ A. SILVERSTEIN, “The Book of Esther and the *Enūma Elish*”, BSOAS 69 (2006) 209-223; KOLLER, *Esther*, 36-37.

⁵ For four others, see GROSSMAN, “Dynamic Analogies”, 399-413; and EGO, *Ester*, 25-30.

⁶ For the Joseph story, see footnote 1; for Samuel-Kings, compare, for example, Esth 2,23 (in MT’s version); 6,1; and 10,2 with 1 Kgs 14,19.29; 15,7.23.31; 16,5.14.20.27; 22,39.46; 2 Kgs 1,18; 8,23; 10,34; 12,20; 13,8.12; 14,15.18.28; 15,6.11.15.21.26.31.36; 16,19; 20,20; 21,17.25; 23,28; 24,5. Cf. A. FRISCH, “בין מגילת אסתר לספר מלכים” (“Between the Book of Esther and the Book of Kings”), *Mehkerei Hag* 3 (1992) 29-30; J. VAN SETERS, “Creative Imitation in the Hebrew Bible”, *Studies in Religion* 29 (2000) 395-409, here 400.

directly with these texts ⁷, I argue that they all use similar narrative structures and motifs belonging to the Levantine literary tradition. Esther, the Baal Cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and 1 Kings 1–2 employ the plot-type of the female intermediary. Moreover, Esther, the Baal Cycle, and 1 Kings 1–2 share a number of further motifs suggesting a larger narrative structure, one that employs the female intermediary plot-type within a story of struggle for power.

I. THE LEVANTINE LITERARY TRADITION

In his study of the Ugaritic stories *Kirtu* and *Aqhat*, Simon Parker highlights the manifold similarities between Ugaritic narrative and the stories found in the Hebrew Bible ⁸. He argues there was “a rich narrative tradition spread throughout the Northwest Semitic-speaking settlements of the Eastern Mediterranean”, extending from at least the second millennium into the period when the Hebrew Bible’s stories were told and eventually written ⁹. Most of the products of this tradition are no longer extant, but some survive at Ugarit and in the stories of the Hebrew Bible. Parker’s focus falls on narratives, often neglected in favor of another area where Israel’s literature partakes in the stylistics of a broader tradition: poetry ¹⁰. The Levantine literary tradition made regular use of numerous literary elements, ranging from small tropes to entire ~~story structures~~. Rather than arguing for direct dependence in the many cases where the Hebrew Bible parallels Ugaritic literature, Parker posits that both bodies of literature participate in the same literary tradition. After his analysis of many features shared by Ugaritic and biblical literature, he concludes that when “the

⁷ Compare, for example, SILVERSTEIN, “Esther and the *Enūma Elish*”, 223: “the person who recorded these events (or created the story [of Esther] *ex nihilo*) was closely acquainted with Babylonian literature in general and the *Enūma Elish* in particular”; and GROSSMAN, “Dynamic Analogies”, 395: “[Making allusions to many texts] should be regarded as an intentional literary phenomenon [meant to] present an obstacle to the reader in maintaining a steady reading of the analogies between the narratives”.

⁸ S.B. PARKER, *The Pre-Biblical Narrative Tradition* (SBLRBS 24; Atlanta, GA 1989); see also “Ugaritic Literature and the Bible”, *NEA* 63 (2000) 228–231.

⁹ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 4. See similarly J. GREENFIELD, “The Hebrew Bible and Canaanite Literature”, *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (eds. R. ALTER – F. KERMODE) (Cambridge, MA 1987) 545–560; R. HENDEL, *The Epic of the Patriarch. The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel* (HSM 42; Atlanta, GA 1987); and see M. SMITH, “Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature: Part I: Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible: Consideration of Comparative Research”, *RB* 114 (2007) 5–29, for a survey of other similar approaches (including Smith’s own).

¹⁰ See, e.g., W.G.E. WATSON, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (JSOTSup 170; Sheffield 1994).

narrative structure [used is] common to [Ugaritic narrative and other narrative, the similarity stems from] the structure of a common traditional tale, episode or motif taken up and adapted in different ways”¹¹.

To be sure, parallels to the Hebrew Bible can be found in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and there must have been shared traditions and literary modes in the entire ancient Near East and beyond¹². K.C. Hanson, for example, argues that “Royal Deviance Narratives” recur in ancient Israel, Hattusa, and Greece¹³. This should not surprise us, as there was plenty of interaction between civilizations in Syria, such as Ugarit, and those in Anatolia, whose nations in turn were engaged with Mycenaean culture, both in the bronze age and later¹⁴. Because Ugaritic language and literature represent “the antecedents of the language and literature of ancient Israel” better than other ancient Near Eastern languages and literatures, Parker posits tighter “cultural continuities between the second and first millennium literatures of the Levant” than can be found in the rest of the ancient Near East¹⁵. In *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions*, Parker demonstrates that similar parallels appear between Canaanite literature and the Hebrew Bible. This is an important confirmation of his earlier argument based on the Ugaritic literature¹⁶. Epigraphic materials in Hebrew (Mesad Hashavyahu), Moabite (the Mesha Stele), Phoenician and Samalian (Zinjirli), and Aramaic (Tel Dan, Sefire, the Stele of Zakkur) preserve stories that share literary structures and motifs with biblical literature.

There is also, of course, a more narrowly defined literary tradition belonging to the people of Israel and early Judaism, a tradition entwined with cultural traditions and religious identity. Andrew Teeter argues brilliantly that *Jubilees* 11 draws on such a tradition rather than a single source text, weaving together narrative forms, motifs, and traditions of

¹¹ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 220.

¹² See SMITH, “Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature”, 10-11.

¹³ K.C. HANSON, “When the King Crosses the Line: Royal Deviance and Restitution in Levantine Ideologies”, *BTB* 26 (1996) 11-25. Against the idea that these stories are similar due to “literary dependence” or “some common source”, Hanson argues that “shared cultural assumptions and social structures” result in the common story-type (23).

¹⁴ See, for example, C. LAMBROU-PHILIPPSON, *Hellenorientalia*. The Near Eastern Presence in the Bronze Age Aegean, ca. 3000-1100 B.C. (Göteborg 1990), on periods leading up to the Bronze Age collapse; and see W. BURKERT, *The Orientalizing Revolution*. Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age (trans. M.E. PINDER – W. BURKERT) (Cambridge, MA 1992), for interaction from the 8th century BCE onward.

¹⁵ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 225; cf. SMITH, “Biblical Narrative between Ugaritic and Akkadian Literature”, 9.

¹⁶ S.B. PARKER, *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions*. Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible (Oxford 1997).

interpretation associated with exemplary characters from Israel's past ¹⁷. The tradition in play for *Jubilees* involves literary elements, but it is more than just literary. The elements of Esther that I focus on here do not stem from a tradition particular to Israel or ancient Judaism, but to the broader Levantine literary tradition.

The two literary elements I identify here are not simply tropes or motifs, though they include some motifs. They are also more than type scenes, since each involves more than one scene. These are large narrative forms or structures with generally set features, which for convenience I call "plot-types" because of how they appear in the texts I discuss. These plot-types are flexible, however, and can be used according to the storyteller's needs; they may be filled out, paired down to their basic frameworks, or even referred to very briefly, as motifs. Parker, using both the term "structure" and "motif" (reflecting the flexibility of these literary features) notes the pluriform ways in which plot-types can be used:

[T]he basic narrative structure or motif is a traditional given. The poets [=authors of narratives] may use it in its simplest form to initiate another action; or they may use it as a framework on which to develop a lengthy and elaborate version, or as one strand in a complex interwoven narrative, or (more rarely) as the recurrent motif of stories within stories ¹⁸.

Such "telescoping and expansion" was characteristic of the Levantine narrative tradition ¹⁹. As alluded to in the quote above, an additional aspect of flexibility in the use of plot-types was the storyteller's ability to combine and weave together various plot-types in various ways. In *Kirta*, for example, the "expedition for a spouse" plot-type was "subordinated" to the "dream theophany", and both were "framed by the loss and recovery of family" plot-type ²⁰. *Jubilees* 11, according to Teeter's analysis, is another example where multiple literary features and structures are combined for a new purpose in a text ²¹. Esther employs several literary structures and plot-types, including those I discuss below as well as others ²². In short, the storyteller was not bound or restricted by the plot-type; he or she was free to modify any and all of its aspects, and to combine and

¹⁷ D.A. TEETER, "On 'Exegetical Function' in Rewritten Scripture: Inner-Biblical Exegesis and the Abram/Ravens Narrative in *Jubilees*", *HTR* 106 (2013) 373-402.

¹⁸ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 224.

¹⁹ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 224.

²⁰ PARKER, *Narrative Tradition*, 223.

²¹ Cf. TEETER, "On 'Exegetical Function' in Rewritten Scripture", 374: "[The interests, motives, and aims of authors] determine the structure or literary shape of their work, including such basic elements as character, plot, scope, and narrative voice".

²² E.g., the "court tale"; cf. L. WILLS, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*. Ancient Jewish Court Legends (Minneapolis, MN 1990) esp. 153-191.

draw on multiple plot-types, besides other elements from the literary tradition. In none of the texts I treat here is a plot-type reduced to a mere motif²³; however, the female intermediary plot-type takes a different shape in each story. In the Baal cycle, the nature of Ugaritic epic with its lengthy repetitions reduces the plot-type's role to a general framework. And in the two stories in 1 Kings 1–2, the intermediary's actions and character are not as full, or characterized in the same way, as 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and Esther. In several of the stories the intermediary is the queen or queen-mother (the Baal cycle, 1 Kings 2, and Esther, reflecting the social background of KTU 2.14), while in other cases she is characterized as wise (1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and Esther); these are perhaps two features that were typical of the female intermediary trope, but not required.

II. FEMALE INTERMEDIARIES

In the Baal cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, 1 Kings 1–2²⁴, and Esther, female intermediaries make requests to the king on behalf of supplicants.

	<i>Supplicant</i>	<i>Intermediary</i>	<i>King</i>
Baal cycle	Ba'lu	Anatu and Athiratu	Ilu
1 Samuel 25	Nabal (unwittingly)	Abigail	David ²⁵
2 Samuel 14	Joab on behalf of Absalom	A wise woman from Tekoa	David
1 Kings 1	Nathan on behalf of Solomon	Bathsheba	David
1 Kings 2	Adonijah	Bathsheba	Solomon
Esther	Mordecai on behalf of the Jews in Persia	Esther	Ahashverosh

²³ Judg 1,12–15 might be an instance where the female intermediary plot-type is “telescoped” and used as a motif. Caleb uses typical language to invite his daughter's request (מה לך; cf. 1 Kgs 1,16 and Esth 5,3), and she begins her response with a politeness (הבה לי ברכה, “give me a blessing”) before asking Caleb for a field.

²⁴ Though 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and 1 Kings 1–2 are all passages within a wider context, they reflect distinct stories, whose history goes back beyond the texts we have today; Parker thus takes such stories to be better indicators of the Levantine literary tradition. Though the smaller stories have “substantive links with the larger context”, their “resistant integrity” entails that they can be analyzed on their own; PARKER, *Stories in Scripture*, 7.

²⁵ Though David was not yet reigning in place of Saul, he was a powerful person, and readers know that he has been chosen to replace Saul and will become king.

In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail decides to intercede for Nabal without his consent ²⁶. The story breaks in some ways from the pattern found in other stories: Nabal never asks his wife to intercede on his behalf, and David is not the king at this point in his life. David, however, is a powerful local leader whom the readers know will become king of the nation. Nabal, though he does not realize it, clearly needs something (peace) from David; moreover, in several other of these stories the person who truly benefits from the mediation is not the one who requests it (Absalom, Solomon, and the Jewish people in Persia). Abigail's acting without the prompting of a man may in fact heighten one feature characteristic of the female intermediary plot-type: the intermediary's boldness and wisdom (cf. 2 Samuel 14 and Esther). The story revolves, in large part, around the foolishness of Nabal and the wisdom of Abigail ²⁷. At the start of the story (1 Sam 25,3), the reader is told that Nabal's wife was clever (טובת שכל) but he was foolish:

ושם האיש נבל ושם אשתו אביגיל והאשה טובת שכל ויפת תאר והאיש קשה ורע מעלים

The man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was exceptional in her prudence/insight and beautiful in form, but the man was difficult/severe and evil in deeds.

Nabal's foolishness is manifested early in the story, when he refuses to show hospitality to David and his men (vv. 9-11). He asks, rhetorically, "Who is David?" (מי דוד), insinuating that David is not of enough importance to receive this kindness ²⁸. Readers, however, understand David's importance and, moreover, his power. The fact that Nabal does not realize his need to cultivate a good relationship with David only furthers the impression of his foolishness. Abigail (and others; cf. v. 17) understands the folly of Nabal's action and steps in (vv. 18-31) to rectify the breach, and to save her husband and his household (cf. v. 34). She sees in herself the best diplomatic solution to the situation — she understands the potential of a female intermediary — and approaches David ²⁹. To unilaterally overturn her husband's decision is a bold action. Her boldness is manifest in her appeal to David when she calls Nabal a "man of worthlessness"

²⁶ R.W. KLEIN, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco, TX 1983) 249.

²⁷ R.S. HANCOCK, "Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: An Investigation of Public and Private Spaces in Relationship to Possibilities for Female Royal Counselors" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012) 78; also see her *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation*. Private and Public Spaces and the Figure of the Female Royal Counselor (Emerging Scholars; Minneapolis, MN 2013), to which I unfortunately do not have access.

²⁸ KLEIN, *1 Samuel*, 248-249.

²⁹ Cf. KLEIN, *1 Samuel*, 249.

(אִישׁ הַבְּלִיעַל) and pronounces the story's overall characterization of Nabal via etymology — נָבִלָה עִמּוֹ, “folly is with him” (v. 25). At the same time, Abigail is careful to act with decorum, prostrating herself, asking for permission to speak (v. 24), apologizing for the situation her husband has created (v. 28)³⁰, and blessing David (vv. 28-31). David praises Abigail's “judgment” (טֶעֱמָה; v. 33) and grants her request (v. 35). When Abigail returns to her husband, Nabal is drunk and does not have enough sense to understand what Abigail has done for him (v. 36). Like Adonijah and Haman, Nabal ends up dead at the end of the affair (1 Sam 25,38).

The general pattern of the female-intermediary trope, then, is present in 1 Samuel 25. The differences derive from the unique emphases of the narrative and the ways the narrative's composer(s) wanted to shape the material. If David were already king, Nabal might have kept his foolishness in check; and if Nabal had asked for Abigail's help, her courage would be obscured. Abigail's action is not a desperate, last moment attempt to do something — anything — to turn away David's anger. She acts quickly, but it is a wise and thoughtful course of action; it is the right way to handle the situation, fitting the pattern we see in other Levantine literature and possibly in the customs of the royal court of Ugarit. Knowing the plot-type, readers view Abigail's action as perfectly appropriate, which fits her characterization as a wise and discerning woman. In the larger context of 1 Samuel 24–26, David's refraining from violence in 1 Samuel 25 figures more prominently³¹; when 1 Samuel 25 is read as a distinct tale, however, Abigail is clearly the protagonist.

In 2 Samuel 14, Joab employs a female intermediary to secure Absalom's safe return to Israel. All that is said about this woman is that she is from Tekoa and that she is “wise” (חֲכָמָה). She is, above all else, a skillful actress who delivers a concocted story about her family situation that, as David will later discover, illustrates his situation with Absalom (vv. 5-9)³². She then proceeds to carefully and decorously guide their conversation (see esp. vv. 12, 18) to the desired outcome, and David allows Absalom to return to Israel without guilt (v. 21)³³. Parker discusses elements of this

³⁰ Or perhaps her statement “forgive the transgression of your maidservant” (שָׂא נָא לִפְשַׁע אִמְתְּךָ) is another act of decorum within the conversation, with the sense “forgive me for speaking further”; P.K. McCARTER, Jr., *I Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, NY 1980) 398.

³¹ D.T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI 2007) 575.

³² P.K. McCARTER, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, NY 1984) 351. See Nathan's use of the same technique in 2 Samuel 12.

³³ As Hancock notes, “it is the persuasive power of the individual ... that causes the message to be heard”; HANCOCK, “Esther and the Politics of Negotiation”, 73, cf. 72-74. McCarter argues similarly: “It is high testimony to the Tekoite woman's craft that she is

story in light of other petitionary narratives in Samuel-Kings and Mešad Hashavyahu, but does not focus on the use of a female intermediary or connect the story to Baʿlu literature, 1 Samuel 25, 1 Kings 1–2, or Esther ³⁴. Like Abigail, the woman of Tekoa is bold — in her conversation with the king, she does most of the talking, addressing many issues sensitive to the king — yet careful and wise, asking for David’s permission to proceed at crucial points ³⁵.

The stories of Abigail and the wise woman of Tekoa show the value of wisdom, propriety, and courage — elements that also come to the fore in Esther and 1 Kings 1–2 ³⁶. It therefore seems reasonable to consider the woman in the prototypical female intermediary plot-type to be characterized by wisdom, decorum, and courage. These women act freely; although in 2 Samuel 14 and Esther it is men (Joab and Mordecai) who put them up to the task, after each woman agrees to the proposal she controls the entire process ³⁷. These women are true agents, not instruments in the hands of others.

In the Ugaritic Baal cycle, Baʿlu sends Anatu and Athiratu to ask his father Ilu that he be allowed to build a palace. At the start of the story, Ilu ~~has~~ granted Yammu’s request to become king, and proclaimed that Baʿlu should serve him. Baʿlu explains his plight to Anatu (KTU 1.2 IV 84 and onward), and she either decides on her own (like Abigail) or is asked by Baʿlu (the text there is not extant) to speak with Ilu (column V). Whether or not she was asked to be an intermediary, she is convinced that Baʿlu is right, proclaiming, “[I will ma]ke his (=Ilu’s) grey hair [run] with blood” ³⁸. Unlike the wise and patient women we find in the other female intermediary stories, when Anatu first approaches Ilu she is very angry, telling him, “I will smash your head ... I will make your beard run with blood” ³⁹.

able so effectively to command royal sympathy for herself and her son over against the legitimate claims of the clan. More remarkable still is the facility with which she is able to elicit a parallel to the case of Abishalom.” MCCARTER, *II Samuel*, 351.

³⁴ PARKER, *Stories in Scripture*, 26–30.

³⁵ Note also the portrayal of Amnon as foolish (2 Sam 13,13) and the role of drunkenness (2 Sam 13,28) in the story leading up to 2 Samuel 14. Absalom and Esther both use strong drink to accomplish their purposes.

³⁶ J.A. LOADER, “Jedidiah or: Amadeus. Thoughts on the Succession Narrative and Wisdom”, *Studies in the Succession Narrative* (ed. W.C. VAN WYK) (Pretoria, South Africa 1986) 167–201; on the female intermediary trope and wisdom in 2 Samuel 14, 1 Kings 1–2, and Esther, see especially p. 177.

³⁷ Similarly, in 1 Kings 1 Bathsheba is prompted by Nathan to approach David, but she executes the plan using her own judgment; FRISCH, “Between Esther and Kings”, 28.

³⁸ KTU 1.3 V 2; translation from M.S. SMITH – W.T. PITARD, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Volume II. Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3–4* (VTSup 114; Leiden 2009) 324.

³⁹ SMITH – PITARD, *Baal Cycle*, 326.

Ilu responds not with wrath, but placatingly (and almost feebly). He asks his daughter, “What is [your] request?” This either assuages Anatu’s anger, or shows Anatu that Ilu is now an ally — earlier in the story ~~he was not an ally (he made Yammu king)~~. This response allows Anatu to use more tact in her approach, and she begins her appeal by praising Ilu’s wisdom (KTU 1.3 V 30-31). She then describes Ba’lu’s situation: he has defeated Yammu and become king, but has no house, unlike other gods in the pantheon (32-44; cf. the repetition in broken context in KTU 1.4 I 4-19). The acquisition of a house is prerequisite for kingship in this story (Yammu builds a house in KTU 1.2 III before demanding the throne from Ilu in column IV). The tablet then breaks off.

This first mediation apparently does not work: when we are able to pick the story up again (after long lacunae), we find Ba’lu and Anatu scheming a way to get their mother, Athiratu, to join them in appealing to Ilu (KTU 1.4 I-III). Athiratu is convinced ~~because they brought her good gifts~~, and she ~~now~~ goes to supplicate Ilu on Ba’lu’s behalf. Instead of starting her encounter with Ilu with an angry tirade — like Anatu — Athiratu wisely bows down and “honors” Ilu (*tšthwy w tkbdh*; KTU 1.4 IV 26). Perhaps this reflects proper court etiquette; letters to superiors found at Ugarit often include the line “I have bowed down at your feet” in one form or another ⁴⁰. This pleases the king, and his words of response are longer and more pleasant than the brief response he gave to Anatu before — *where have you been*, he says, and *come in and banquet with me* (IV 31-39). Athiratu then makes her request in the same words that Anatu used in the previous episode: after praising Ilu’s wisdom (41-43), she explains that Ba’lu is king but does not have a house. This time, we can read the end of the appeal and see Ilu’s response. Athiratu never explicitly asks (“please build Ba’lu a house”) or even suggests (“let Ilu build Ba’lu a house”) to Ilu, but instead leaves the request implied. This may stem from the propriety of the court scene, and/or it may be a tactic to encourage Ilu to accede to the implied request — *you are very wise, what do you make of this: Ba’lu, our king, has no palace!* Athiratu’s intercession works: Ilu agrees to build Ba’lu a house (KTU 1.4 IV 62 – V 1). Athiratu responds by praising Ilu, with words that seem to echo Anatu’s earlier tirade: *rbt . ilm . l hkm t // šbt . dqnk . l tsrk*, “You are great, Ilu, indeed you are wise, the grey of your beard indeed instructs you” (KTU 1.4 VI 3-4).

In the Baal cycle’s version of the female intermediary trope, much of the language is formulaic, and as a result the story and its characters are

⁴⁰ E.g., KTU 2.89, a letter to the queen from an official, begins with the typical address and then the formulaic *l . p’n . ʾdty . qlt*, “at the feet of my lady I have fallen”.

not as well-rounded as they are in 1 Samuel 25 or 2 Samuel 14. We see, for example, that Athiratu has more patience and tact than Anatu, but most of their words to Ilu are identical. As Parker notes, plot-types are flexible, and can be used, as here, as general frameworks.

In 1 Kings 1–2, two distinct female intermediary scenarios occur as part of the larger plot-type discussion in section 3. In 1 Kings 1, Nathan and Bathsheba plan Bathsheba's encounter with King David (vv. 11–14): Bathsheba will remind David of an earlier promise⁴¹ to make Solomon king and inform David of Adonijah's actions, and then Nathan will arrive, as if by coincidence, and confirm her words. In the encounter itself, Bathsheba begins by bowing before David (v. 16; she bows again in v. 31). After he asks for her request, Bathsheba does not state it explicitly, instead ~~only~~ implying that Solomon ought to be king (vv. 17–21). She does not tell the king directly what to do; instead, she guides him into thinking it for himself. Nathan arrives as planned, confirming that Adonijah has made himself king (vv. 22–27). The statements in combination put David over the edge — if both Nathan and Bathsheba have independently realized this as a problem, he thinks, it must be a significant problem indeed⁴². Perhaps David would have come to the same conclusion if Nathan had come alone and explained, very objectively, the situation; the rhetorical effect of Bathsheba's and Nathan's combined effort, however, ensures the right response from David.

In her first intermediary mission with the king, Bathsheba takes a careful course of action and makes sure to show deference to the king. In her second mission in 1 Kings 2 on behalf of Adonijah, she does not take the same care. Adonijah asks Bathsheba to act on his behalf in seeking Abishag as his wife. This request to marry the former king's concubine is easily interpreted as a play for power⁴³, though Adonijah must have thought the goal was possible — otherwise, he would not have asked. The difference between success and failure, then, arguably comes down to the skill employed by his intermediary, Bathsheba. The contrast between the first and second episodes is instructive. Instead of Bathsheba bowing to the king, Solomon bows to Bathsheba, and she is seated at his right hand before they converse (1 Kgs 2,19). Instead of carefully broaching the subject and leaving Solomon to infer the request, Bathsheba simply

⁴¹ Whether or not such a promise was actually made is unimportant for my discussion; cf. W. DIETRICH, "Das Ende der Thronfolgegeschichte", *Die sogenannte Thronfolgegeschichte Davids*. Neue Einsichten und Anfragen (eds. A. DE PURY – T. RÖMER) (OBO 176; Göttingen 2000) 38–69, here 46.

⁴² Cf. M. SWEENEY, *I & II Kings* (OTL; Louisville, KY 2013) 57.

⁴³ DIETRICH, "Das Ende der Thronfolgegeschichte", 42.

states, without delay, **לֹאדִנְיָהּ אֶחִיךָ לְאִשָּׁה**, “let Abishag be given to Adonijah your brother as a wife” (v. 21). As a result of her lack of deference and tact, the mission is essentially doomed to fail, and Adonijah pays dearly (vv. 24-25). One might suspect Bathsheba’s lack of deference is due to the fact the new king is her son; but in 1 Kings 1 David is a feeble old man, whom she could have disregarded just as easily. Bathsheba acts with deference and tact before David because she wants to secure the right outcome, but in the second episode she is indifferent — her actions show that she is not sympathetic to Adonijah in the way she was to Solomon ⁴⁴.

In the book of Esther, much of the plot revolves around and depends on Esther approaching the king on Mordecai’s behalf. Though she may not, in the end, be safe (Esth 4,13), in the short term it is the Jewish people as a whole who are in danger ⁴⁵. Mordecai’s command to Esther that she plead with the king (Esth 4,8) comes straight from the female intermediary plot-type.

וְאֵת פִּתְשָׁנָן כָּתַב הַדָּת נָתַן לוֹ ... לְצוּרֹת עֲלֶיהָ לְבוֹא אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַתְחַנֵּן לוֹ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלְפָּנָיו
עַל עַמָּהּ

[Mordecai] gave [Hathach] a copy of the writing of the law [to kill the Jews], in order to command [Esther] to go to the king to make supplication to him and to seek from him on behalf of her people.

The use of the verb **בָּקַשׁ** (Piel) without a complement — typically one seeks *something* — might reflect the fact that this is a known action that

⁴⁴ *Contra* Mordechai Cogan, who reads Bathsheba’s actions in both chs. 1 and 2 as “artfully ambiguous”: *1 Kings* (AB 10; New Haven, CT 2008) 176. Bathsheba’s initial responses to *Adonijah* in 1 Kings 2 are indeed ambiguous — she says only **דָּבַר**, “speak” (i.e., continue with the conversation; vv. 14 and 16), and finally responds in the affirmative that she will speak to Solomon for Adonijah (v. 18). But her way of handling the conversation with Solomon shows the readers that she does not support Adonijah in the same way she supported her own son. The subtle differences in her actions in these two episodes indicate that Bathsheba in 1 Kings 1–2 is not “a passive and naïve personality”, *contra* I. KALIMI, “The Rise of Solomon in the Ancient Israelite Historiography”, *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition*. King, Sage and Architect (ed. J. VERHEYDEN) (Leiden 2013) 7-44, here 16.

⁴⁵ The important features of the text focused on here are found in both the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Greek Alpha Text of Esther. Where the Alpha Text does not contain the feature under discussion, I note this in footnotes. Where Hebrew is quoted it is plausibly represented by Greek in the Alpha Text unless I state otherwise. For a brief introduction to the Alpha Text and an English translation aligned to the other Greek version (by which one can align the Alpha Text to the Hebrew), see K. JOBES, “Esther”, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (eds. A. PIETERSMA – B.G. WRIGHT) (New York 2007) 424-440. See also the recent summary of EGO, *Ester*, 4-10; and cf. D.J.A. CLINES, *The Esther Scroll. The Story of the Story* (JSOTSupp 30; Sheffield 1984); and K.H. JOBES, *The Alpha-Text of Esther. Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text* (Atlanta, GA 1996).

Esther is taking. She is *seeking from the king*, that is, serving as an intermediary on behalf of someone else (עַל־עַמָּהּ, “on behalf of her people”).

This is the last time Mordecai will “command” Esther in the book — cf. earlier in 2,10.20 where Esther is characterized as obedient to Mordecai. At the end of this episode, Mordecai obeys Esther’s command (4,17), and from this point onward she is in control of the process ⁴⁶. Like Abigail and the wise woman of Tekoa, Esther is the protagonist. In a departure from the typical female intermediary story, Esther does not supplicate the king in her first encounter with him, but defers several times (see section 4). When Esther finally makes her request (7,3 and 8,5 in MT), the king grants it (8,8), and the Jewish people are saved. In section 4, I explore how recognizing the female intermediary plot-type in Esther leads to a fuller reading.

These stories share literary elements beyond the employment of women as intermediaries. While men also appear in intermediary roles in Levantine literature, I am unaware of any stories with male intermediaries that follow the same general outline of the plot-type found in the Baal Cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, 1 Kings 1–2, and Esther. It seems probable that the woman’s role in this plot-type is rooted in realities from the ancient world. Clues in the Hebrew Bible and evidence from the ancient Near East suggest that women in the ancient world were often advisers and mediators, endowed with authority appropriate to such roles ⁴⁷. These roles may have been an extension of a woman’s role within her family, where skillful household management was connected to wisdom and where motherhood made a woman an important authority and counselor for her children ⁴⁸. Indeed, the mother of the king is often portrayed as an important advisor ⁴⁹. A letter found at Ugarit suggests that the female intermediary trope was rooted in real practice. In one letter found at Ugarit (KTU 2.14), Iwridenu requests that Thariyelli — who was either the queen or the queen-mother at that time — speak to the king on his behalf ⁵⁰. Perhaps this letter and the female intermediary plot-type reflect a standardized “protocol” for

⁴⁶ The language of “command” (צוה) is not present in the Alpha Text of Esther at this point.

⁴⁷ For an overview of the evidence and its interpretation, see HANCOCK, “Esther and the Politics of Negotiation”, 72-87. As part of this overview, Hancock treats the stories under review here; her analysis of potential sociohistorical realities reflected in the stories is compatible with my literary analysis.

⁴⁸ HANCOCK, “Esther and the Politics of Negotiation”, 75-76.

⁴⁹ HANCOCK, “Esther and the Politics of Negotiation”, 79-81.

⁵⁰ KTU 2.14 lines 11-13; M. DIETRICH – O. LORETZ – J. SANMARTÍN, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places* (3d ed, KTU³; Münster 2013) 177.

behavior within the king's court ⁵¹, or perhaps the letter simply reflects the easiest way for Iwridenu to court favor with the king. A story contained in Papyrus Amherst 63 recounts that Ashurbanipal sent his sister Sheru'a-Etirat ~~to try~~ to make peace with his brother Shamash-Shum-ukin ⁵². Though this text is at some remove — temporally, geographically, and culturally — from the events it purports to relate, it is not impossible that Sheru'a-Etirat really served as a diplomatic envoy for Ashurbanipal. In light of this contextual evidence from the ancient world, together with hints from the stories themselves, a good explanation for the appearance of women in intermediary roles in the stories treated here is that women served in such roles in the ~~ancient~~ world ⁵³. Women like Esther, Abigail, and Bathsheba are not supposed to be aberrations to the norm in these stories; rather, their position as mediator is understood and expected.

III. STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND FEMALE INTERMEDIARIES

1 Kings 1–2 reflects a somewhat typical real-life setting for royal succession, and the Baal cycle — though it is applied to divine beings — is similar. Two rivals (Ba'lu and Yammu; Solomon and Adonijah) struggle to see who will ascend to the throne in place of the aging king (Ilu, David) — or alongside the aging king, as in the Baal cycle ⁵⁴. Esther does not reflect royal succession in the same way; however, it involves a similar struggle for power. In the book of Esther, Haman and Mordecai struggle ~~for power~~, not ~~in order~~ to succeed the king — who is not aged — but to serve as his second in command. Mordecai's triumph occurs when he takes ~~Haman's~~ position (Esth 8,1-2).

At the start of each of these stories (the exposition), the antagonist is in a stronger position than the protagonist; this is a crucial ingredient in the plot, engendering sympathy for the protagonist, and laying the groundwork for struggle and reversal of position ⁵⁵. “Yamm is El's first choice,

⁵¹ Cf. SMITH – PITARD, *Baal Cycle*, 214.

⁵² R. STEINER – C. NIMS, “Ashurbanipal and Shamash-Shum-Ukin: A Tale of Two Brothers from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script”, *RB* 92 (1985) 60-81, here 63-64.

⁵³ Cf. also the arguments for female authors for some of these texts; e.g., F. AHUIS, *Das “Großreich” Davids und die Rolle der Frauen. Eine Untersuchung zur Erzählung von der Nachfolge auf dem Thron Davids* (2. Sam 10-20; 1. Kön 1+2) und ihrer Trägerinnengruppe (BThSt 83; Neukirchen-Vluyn 2007).

⁵⁴ SMITH – PITARD, *Baal Cycle*, 17. For some similar observations in a comparison of Esther and 1 Kings 1 (without reference to the Baal cycle and 1 Kings 2), see FRISCH, “Between Esther and Kings”, 26-31.

⁵⁵ SMITH – PITARD make these points of comparison between the Baal cycle and 1 Kings 1–2; *Baal Cycle*, 17-18. Here I point out Esther's affinity to the same points. See

and he apparently enjoys the support of most of the divine council. Baal, on the other hand, is overlooked by El”⁵⁶. Similarly, Adonijah has the upper-hand early on in 1 Kings 1 — he declares himself king, which is tacitly approved by David’s apparent silence⁵⁷, and many people support him, including Joab and Abiathar (1 Kgs 1,5 – 7.9). After the pre-story of Esther 1–2, the exposition of the plot starts with Haman in the powerful position of second-in-command (Esth 3,1-2). By the end of each story, we see Ba’lu and Solomon reigning over their defeated enemies, and Mordecai in Haman’s position. The defeat of Yammu happens much earlier in the Baal cycle than the downfall of Adonijah and Haman; before Ba’lu goes to Ilu requesting a house, he has already defeated Yammu (KTU 1.2 IV)⁵⁸. In 1 Kings 1–2, Solomon has prevailed by the end of ch. 1, but Adonijah continues to be a problem. 1 Kings 2 reverses the roles of ch. 1, with Solomon in the stronger position (he reigns as king in 2,12), and Adonijah relying on a female intermediary (again Bathsheba) to gain power (1 Kgs 2,13-22)⁵⁹. However, Adonijah remains the antagonist: Solomon denies the request and kills Adonijah (1 Kgs 2,24-25). Esther involves a similar two-step downfall for the antagonist. First, Haman’s pride and confidence are destroyed in Esther 6 — the scene and its aftermath palpably communicate Haman’s utter humiliation — and then in Esther 7 Haman’s life itself is extinguished after Mordecai’s rise to power. A few other points of similarity include: Esther and Anatu are both “virgins” (Hebrew בְּתוּלָה, Ugaritic *batulatu*)⁶⁰; feasting and banqueting feature in all three stories⁶¹; the antagonist is portrayed as arrogant in all three stories⁶².

FRISCH, “Between Esther and Kings”, 28, on the exalted position of the antagonist at the start of 1 Kings 1 and Esther.

⁵⁶ SMITH – PITARD, *Baal Cycle*, 17; see KTU 1.2 I.

⁵⁷ ~~We might read 1 Kgs 1,6 as stating that David did not ask him, “Why have you acted thus?” (מִדּוּעַ כִּכָּה עָשִׂיתָ) with reference specifically to Adonijah declaring himself king.~~ Bathsheba states in v. 18 that David did not know Adonijah had declared himself king, but this may be part of her strategy to persuade David to make Solomon king instead.

⁵⁸ For this reason, Anatu and Athiratu can say to Ilu, “Ba’lu is our king”, in their appeal for Ilu to grant Ba’lu a house (KTU 1.3 V 32; 1.4 IV 43). Yet, there is the clear sense that Ba’lu’s succession is not really complete, because he has no palace.

⁵⁹ Ba’lu’s request to have a house and Adonijah’s request to marry Abishag (1 Kgs 2,17.22) both amount to asking for power or even kingship; SMITH – PITARD, *Baal Cycle*, 214-215.

⁶⁰ Often in the Baal cycle, e.g., KTU 1.3 V 29; Esther is never specifically called a בְּתוּלָה, but her description in Esth 2 implies that she is — she fits the criteria for beauty (in language echoing Vashti and Esth 2,2) and she was among the virgins gathered to Susa in Esther 2.

⁶¹ E.g., KTU 1.4 III and IV; 1 Kgs 1,9.25; Esth 1; 2,18; 3,15 (MT); 5,8; etc.

⁶² Cf. LOADER, “Thoughts on the Succession Narrative and Wisdom”, 177-178.

There are a number of further specific similarities between Esther and 1 Kings 1–2, which may reflect the wider Levantine tradition or may stem from a closer literary and/or textual relationship between Esther and Samuel-Kings⁶³. Given Esther's many links to other texts, I find it unlikely that Esther is interacting directly with 1 Kings 1–2. Frisch, Berlin, and Koller each argue that Esther deliberately refers to 1 Kings or has some direct literary connection⁶⁴. Koller, for example, argues that Ahashverosh is “being compared to David in his senility” through allusions to 1 Kings 1 in the book of Esther⁶⁵.

It seems implausible ... that the author would really claim that David and [Ahashverosh] were fundamentally comparable; David was still a cultural hero in Israel. Instead, the point appears to be that [Ahashverosh], *even in his prime*, is akin to David in his teetering old age⁶⁶.

One of Koller's two allusions, however, is Esther's approaching the king to seek his favor (paralleling Bathsheba's approaching David). This piece of the story of Esther is central to the plot and gives shape to the entire story; as such, it can hardly originate in an effort to allude to David in 1 Kings 1.

Many of Esther's overlaps with 1 Kings 1–2 are also present in the Baal cycle, and several of these are also found in 1 Samuel 25 and 2 Samuel 14. The commonalities, therefore, are more likely the product of a shared literary tradition. There are also many differences between the stories in 1 Kings 1–2 and Esther. The similarities derive from the use of the struggle for power plot-type, entailing the subordinated use of the female intermediary plot-type. The differences naturally arise given the different aims and preferences of the authors and the different subject matter of the texts.

⁶³ See esp. the exploration of parallels in FRISCH, “Between Esther and Kings”. Many scholars have noted the verbal parallel between Esth 2,2 and 1 Kgs 1,2; FOX, *Character and Ideology*, 28; LEVENSON, *Esther*, 54; FRISCH, “Between Esther and Kings,” 27–28; KOLLER, *Esther*, 63. Further verbal parallels include: the intermediary's task is described in the language of “going to” (בוא אל) the king (1 Kgs 1,13; Esth 4,8); the king responds using the phrase מה-לך (“What is the matter?”; 1 Kgs 1,16; Esth 5,3); the language of שאל, “to request,” and שאלה, “request,” is used seven times in 1 Kings 2 (vv. 16, 20, and 22) and five times in Esther (5,6–8; 7,2–3; and cf. the reprisal of the request scene in Esth 9,12–13); in response to the intermediary, the king offers his kingdom in some way — whether sarcastically (Solomon in 1 Kgs 2,22) or half the kingdom (Ahashverosh in Esth 5,3,6; 7,2).

⁶⁴ Frisch entertains the possibility of a common genre and/or historical settings for Esther and 1 Kings 1, but ultimately prefers intentional literary dependence (זיקה ספרותית) as an explanation; “Between Esther and Kings”, 31. Berlin argues that “the author is trying to make his story sound more biblical” and authoritative by “imitating the framework of the Books of Kings”; BERLIN, *Esther*, xxxix.

⁶⁵ KOLLER, *Esther*, 62–64.

⁶⁶ KOLLER, *Esther*, 63.

IV. READING ESTHER IN THE LEVANTINE LITERARY TRADITION

Parker argues for the role of historical criticism, alongside literary criticism, in the careful reading of texts ⁶⁷: attention to composition history and the “larger narrative tradition” allows a reading to proceed along both the diachronic and synchronic axes ⁶⁸. None of the stories explored in this study are “cookie cutter” instantiations of the female intermediary plot-type; the particulars of each story shape its plot, events, characters, etc. However, the female-intermediary plot-type and the struggle for power plot-type provide some of the main building blocks for Esther’s narrative. Awareness of these literary structures assist in the close reading of the text. Here, I describe a few brief examples.

The men in each story — excepting Adonijah — benefit from the employment of a female intermediary. The ~~tact~~ of the intermediary — her wisdom in independently negotiating the process — ~~and her courage~~ are of the utmost importance in accomplishing the task. When we read the actions of Abigail and the wise woman of Tekoa, we almost ~~expect the outcome to go their way~~, as ~~it does~~ in both cases. Esther’s wisdom and boldness lie below the surface of the text, but are there in abundance when we look for them. The ancient audience, knowing other female intermediary stories (whether including or not including those described here), were alert to the possibility that Esther was wise. The use of court tale literary features (and/or echoes of the Joseph story) aid in this sort of reading. Esther boldly approaches the king, a potentially fatal action in her context. Yet, when she is asked what she wants, and is promised the king’s favor in very generous terms (5,3), she does not go for Haman’s throat. Instead, she delays (5,4); and then at the next opportunity, she delays again (5,7). This is necessary, on the one hand, for the complex plot of Esther to unravel — what follows from 5,4 to 7,3. On the other hand, in the world of the text, the delays show Esther to be cautious and extremely wise; though she could not know all the events that would transpire to lay the groundwork for Haman’s demise, she knew that patience was the right course of action ⁶⁹. This entails, too, that Esther was confident she would recognize the right time to ~~pounce~~. Like Abigail, the wise woman of Tekoa, and Bathsheba (in 1 Kings 1, not ch. 2), her intercession is careful, deliberate, and takes time to develop. It is often said that the fortuitous “coincidences” in Esther ~~must give~~ the reader the impression that God controls history; whether or not this is the case, they do suggest that **Esther** is in

⁶⁷ PARKER, *Stories in Scripture*, 3-6.

⁶⁸ PARKER, *Stories in Scripture*, 5.

⁶⁹ Cf. LOADER, “Thoughts on the Succession Narrative and Wisdom”, 178.

control of the situation. She waits to accuse Haman until several coincidental turns of events have made him weak and vulnerable.

Propriety (or lack thereof) is a crucial aspect of the female intermediary plot-type. The female intermediary succeeds because of her conduct before the king — Abigail and the wise woman of Tekoa direct the conversation judiciously, and Athiratu and Bathsheba bow (Št-stem ḤWY) before Ilu and David. Nabal, on the other hand, is doomed from the start because of his impropriety. When audiences encountered Mordecai's refusal to bow (Št-stem ḤWY) before Haman (Esth 3,2), they would have felt the impropriety. The audience understands that it should cheer for Mordecai, but senses trouble around the corner because of his actions.

Along the same lines, I think the role of drunkenness in 1 Samuel 25 illuminates Ahashverosh's character. When we read Esther, bearing in mind the potential for drunkenness to accompany foolishness, a number of subtle points stand out. Like Nabal the fool, Ahashverosh is drunk at a feast, and his "heart" is "good" with wine (1 Sam 25,36; Esth 1,10). The book opens with back-to-back feasts in ch. 1; the noun מִשְׁתֶּה means "feast" or "banquet", but in Esther the meaning of the root שתה ("to drink") seems to connote drinking in a festival atmosphere. When the king finds a new queen, he throws another party (Esth 2,18). When his and Haman's ⁷⁰ actions are contrasted negatively with the [appropriate] actions of the rest of Susa, we find him drinking (Esth 3,15) ⁷¹. Esther's plan, which works so brilliantly, hinges on the king (and Haman) attending several private parties. In short, the king enjoys imbibing. We are perhaps warranted to reconstruct the advice of Hegai hinted at in Esth 2,15 ⁷² — *if you are going to bring something to your date with the king, make it alcohol*. Perhaps this is why she knows, in Esther 5, to play the king using a series of parties. On the other hand, the Jews also feast after their victory (Esth 9,19,22), and we are not meant to read them as fools.

V. CONCLUSION

Esther shares many notable features with the Baal cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and 1 Kings 1–2. A model in which these stories belong to a Levantine literary tradition explains the commonalities better than

⁷⁰ Haman is clearly a fool in Esther: he falls into the snare he devises for another — both in the metaphorical sense of his overall scheme, and the actual implement of death (Esth 5,14; 7,9-10); cf. Proverbs throughout, e.g., Prov 1,18.

⁷¹ This mention of Ahashverosh and Haman drinking is not included in the Alpha Text, and overall the prominence of alcohol in the MT is muted in the Alpha Text.

⁷² This phrasing, too, is not present in the Alpha Text.

positing direct relationships between the texts. Though some direct textual dependence and/or intentional allusions may still exist in this ~~account~~, the numerous similarities can be explained without the need to postulate literary functions for this or that allusion. The Baal cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and 1 Kings 1–2 all make use of the **female intermediary** plot-type, and the Baal cycle, 1 Kings 1–2, and Esther also make use of a particular **struggle for power** plot-type. In this model, other stories that made use of the same literary elements probably circulated in the Levant, though they are no longer extant. As such, readers were familiar with the contours and motifs of these plot-types. Comparison of these stories leads to a fuller understanding of each, ~~without postulating direct connection between any of them.~~

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SUMMARY

Esther shares a number of features with the Baal cycle, 1 Samuel 25, 2 Samuel 14, and 1 Kings 1–2. The similarities between these texts are not necessarily the result of direct literary influence or intentional allusion. I argue that these similarities instead stem from a common Levantine literary tradition. All five texts make use of a literary element I term the **female intermediary** plot-type. Moreover, the Baal cycle, 1 Kings 1–2, and Esther also make use of a particular **struggle for power** plot-type.