# The Reception History of Esther

## A Genderqueer/Non-Binary Reading of the Ancient Texts and in Modern Scholarship

Holly Thompson

DPhil Thesis

Worcester College

University of Oxford

Hilary Term 2021

# Table of Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** **7**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** **8**

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS** **10**

**THESIS ABSTRACT – SHORT** **11**

**THESIS ABSTRACT - LONG** **13**

Dissertation Argument and Methodology 13

Significance and Originality 17

Thesis Structure 18

**CHAPTER 1 – THESIS INTRODUCTION** **22**

**CHAPTER 2 – THESIS METHODOLOGY** **31**

2.1 – Reception History 32

*2.1.1 - Introduction* *32*

*2.1.2 - The Origins of Reception History* *35*

*2.1.3 - Using Reception History to Challenge Dominant Biblical Interpretations* *44*

*2.1.4 - The Validity of Reading Esther in a Genderqueer/Non-Binary Way* *48*

*2.1.5 - Selecting Material for a Reception-Historical Study* *51*

*2.1.6 - Summary* *57*

2.2 – Gender Theory: Genderqueer and Non-Binary Identity 59

*2.2.1 - Introduction* *59*

*2.2.2 - Gender Theory* *59*

*2.2.3 - What is the Gender Binary?* *62*

*2.2.4 - Characteristics of the Gender Binary* *65*

*2.2.5 - Gender in Ancient Persia* *70*

*2.2.6 - What Does it Mean to be Genderqueer/Non-Binary?* *76*

*2.2.7 - Queer Theory and Biblical Interpretation* *82*

*2.2.8 - Esther and Non-Binary/Genderqueer Interpretation* *88*

*2.2.9 - Summary* *92*

**CHAPTER 3 – THE HISTORY OF ESTHER RECEPTION** **94**

3.1 – Introduction 94

3.2 - Jewish Textual Reception of Esther 95

3.3 - Christian Textual Reception of Esther 102

3.4 - Representation of Esther in Art, Music and Literature 106

3.5 - Summary 109

**PART I: RECEPTION OF ESTHER IN MODERN INTERPRETATION** **111**

**CHAPTER 4 - MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON ESTHER** **112**

Chapter 4.1 - Introduction 112

4.2 - Mordecai as the Hero or the Troublemaker 117

*4.2.1 - Mordecai as the Hero* *117*

*4.2.2 - Mordecai is not the hero of Esther* *125*

*4.2.3 - Moderate Interpretations of Mordecai's Behaviour* *127*

*4.2.4 - Conclusion* *131*

4.3 – Esther as Beauty/Brains 134

*4.3.1 - Esther as Pretty but Dumb* *135*

*4.3.2 - Esther as Moderately Pretty and Moderately Dumb* *146*

*4.3.3 - Positive Views of Esther* *149*

*4.3.4 - Feminist Division over Esther* *153*

*4.3.5 - Conclusion* *159*

4.4 – Vashti as Literary Trope/Feminist Icon 161

*4.4.1 - Vashti as a Literary Device* *162*

*4.4.2 - Vashti as an Icon* *166*

*4.4.3 - Conclusion* *170*

4.5 – Ahasuerus and Haman 172

*4.5.1 - Ahasuerus* *172*

*4.5.2 - Haman* *177*

*4.5.3 - Conclusion* *181*

4.6 – The Silence on Zeresh 184

*4.6.1 - Zeresh the Schemer* *184*

*4.6.2 - Zeresh as the Strong Female* *187*

*4.6.3 - The Presence of Zeresh's Absence* *189*

*4.6.4 - Conclusion* *191*

4.7 – Conclusions 193

**PART II: RECEPTION IN THE ANCIENT VERSIONS OF *ESTHER*** **196**

**CHAPTER 5 – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ANCIENT VERSIONS OF ESTHER** **197**

5.1 - Introduction 197

5.1.2 - The Hebrew Text 199

5.1.3 - The Septuagint 201

5.1.4 - The Alpha Text 204

5.1.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase of Esther 206

5.1.6 - The Vulgate 209

5.1.7 - Other Ancient Versions of Esther 211

5.1.8 - The Versions Selected for this Study 212

**CHAPTER 6 – AHASUERUS AND VASHTI 215**

6.1 – Introduction 215

6.2 - The Masoretic Text 216

6.3 - The Septuagint 225

6.4 - The Alpha Text 229

6.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase 236

6.6 - Jerome's Latin Vulgate 241

6.7 - Conclusion 243

**CHAPTER 7 – ESTHER AND MORDECAI 247**

7.1 - Introduction 247

7.2 - The Masoretic Text 248

7.3 - The Septuagint 262

7.4 - The Alpha Text 271

7.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase 279

7.6 - The Vulgate 286

7.7 - Conclusion 291

**CHAPTER 8 – AHASUERUS AND ESTHER 294**

8.1 - Introduction 294

8.2 - The Masoretic Text 295

8.3 - The Septuagint 308

8.4 - The Alpha Text 320

8.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase 327

8.6 - The Vulgate 333

8.7 - Conclusion 337

**CHAPTER 9 - HAMAN AND ZERESH 339**

9.1 - Introduction 339

9.2 - The Masoretic Text 339

9.3 - The Septuagint 345

9.4 - The Alpha Text 347

9.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase 351

9.6 - The Vulgate 352

9.7 - Conclusion 354

**CHAPTER 10 – CONCLUSIONS ON THE ANCIENT VERSIONS OF *ESTHER* 358**

**CHAPTER 11 – THESIS CONCLUSIONS 366**

11.1 - Introduction 366

11.2 - The Results of this Study 371

11.3 - Cognitive Bias in Esther Criticism 374

11.4 - The Impact of the Greek Versions on Esther Criticism 378

11.5 - Final Conclusion 382

**BIBLIOGRAPHY 386**

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Sue Gillingham for her guidance and support, both academic and pastoral, throughout the DPhil process. I would also like to thank the academic and administrative staff at Worcester College, who assisted me greatly during difficult times: Dr Peter Groves, Professor Donal Nolan and Alison Attwell. Additionally, members of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies: Dr John Jarick and Professor John Barton.

To the Arts and Humanities Research Council for granting me a Doctoral Training Partnership in 2015, and to my employer, Alfa Financial Software, for their support and encouragement since September 2018.

I would like to acknowledge Dr Yvonne Williams and the DPhil support group in Oxford, without whom I would not have been able to continue writing the thesis. Also to Joanna Morris, for her unwavering support.

# List of Abbreviations

ANF – *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*
NPNF – *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*
HWV – *Händel-Werke-Verzeichnis*
EBR – *The Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception*
TAD – *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, B. Porten and A. Yardeni (Jerusalem), 1986 (TAD A); 1989 (TAD B); 1993 (TAD C).*

## Lexica

BDB – *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
DCH – *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew edited by David J. Clines*
HOL – *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by William L Holladay*
L&S – *A Latin Dictionary by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short*
LS – *An Intermediate Greek – English Lexicon by Henry Liddell and Robert Scott*
LSJ – *A Greek-English Lexicon by Henry Liddell, Robert Scott and Henry Jones*
OED – *The Oxford English Dictionary*

## Critical Editions of the Hebrew Text

BHS – *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*
BHQ – *Biblica Hebraica Quinta*

## English Editions of the Bible

KJV – *King John's Version*
NIV – *New International Version*
NRSV – *New Revised Standard Version*
NETS – *New English Translation of the Septuagint*

## Biblical Books

Gen – *Genesis*
Ex – *Exodus*
Lev – *Leviticus*
Deut – *Deuteronomy*
Josh – *Joshua*
1 Sam – *1 Samuel*
2 Sam – *2 Samuel*
1 Kgs – *1 Kings*
1 Chr – *1 Chronicles*
2 Chr – *2 Chronicles*

Ezr – *Ezra*
Neh – *Nehemiah*
Est – *Esther*
Ecc – *Ecclesiastes*
Jon – *Jonah*
Isa – *Isaiah*
Jer – *Jeremiah*
Ezek – *Ezekiel*
Dan – *Daniel*
2 Macc – *2 Maccabees*

# Glossary of Terms

*Sources: Stonewall (https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms), The Queer Dictionary (http://queerdictionary.blogspot.com/)*. Both accessed 10 April 2020.

*Cisgender or cis* – Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.
*Cisnormative* – The assumption that all human beings are, or should be, cisgender.
*Genderqueer* – A person for whom the terms 'male' or 'female' do not accurately represent their gender identity. Often used interchangeably with non-binary.
*Gender binary* – A classification system that comprises of two genders, male and female, and the ideal characteristics that are expected of each gender.
*Gender dysphoria* – Describes when someone experiences psychological or physical distress because their assigned sex and their gender do not align.
*Gender identity* – This term describes the way in which an individual understands their own gender, irrespective of their biological sex.
*Heteronormative* – the assumption that heterosexuality is the 'normal' state of being. This is similar to cisnormative but focuses specifically on sexuality.
*Intersex* – used to describe a person who may have the biological attributes of both the male and female sex, or whose biological attributes do not fit those assumed for either genders.
*LGBTQIA+* – An acronym used for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other non-cisnormative or non-heteronormative people, such as Pansexual or Demisexual people.
*Non-binary* – This term is used by people who do not feel comfortable identifying as either 'male' or 'female'. Often, non-binary people entirely reject the gender binary.
*Trans* – This describes a person whose sex as assigned at birth and their gender identity are not the same.

## Thesis Abstract – Short

The Book of Esther has been regarded by some critics as displaying unusual gender roles for a biblical text, particularly because there appear to be some gender role reversals or gender ambiguities occurring in the text. Modern reception of *Esther* can be broadly grouped into two categories: characters in the text are interpreted in a cisnormative manner, or some characters are interpreted as being subversive. Both groups of scholarship are problematic for non-binary/genderqueer readers in different ways, and this thesis aims to take a non-binary/genderqueer approach to *Esther* to assess if this text has the capacity to be read in a manner free from the gender binary.

It is the purpose of this thesis to work from the issues raised in contemporary reception and read the ancient versions of *Esther* that they often reference. The versions studied are the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, the Greek Alpha Text, Josephus's Paraphrase of Esther in the 'Judean Antiquities' and Jerome's Latin Vulgate. A reception-historical framework and a non-binary/genderqueer lens is used to assess characters' capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading in the ancient reception. I also discuss the similarities and differences between versions and their effect on how we can interpret characters' behaviour.

Subsequently, this thesis highlights which characters in which texts can be read as non-binary/genderqueer and which cannot. Then, it is discussed which of the ancient receptions appear to have had the greatest impact on the binary interpretations that are

prevalent today. It will be shown that the Masoretic Text has the greatest, consistent capacity for genderqueer/non-binary reading. Conversely, the Greek Additions do not allow for a genderqueer/non-binary interpretation. However, this material seems to have had the greatest impact on modern reception. I explore why this is by looking to the body of *Esther* scholarship and to cognitive bias theory.

## Thesis Abstract - Long

This thesis takes a non-binary/genderqueer approach to the text of *Esther*. My aim is to assess if the ancient versions of this text can be read in a manner free from the gender binary, so that *Esther* can be accessible for and resonate with non-binary/genderqueer readers. My first objective is to identify and then challenge cisnormative and androcentric modern interpretations of this text that are grounded in gender stereotypes, and to problematise the impact that these interpretations have had on the body of *Esther* scholarship and on students of this text. My second objective is to assess the ancient versions of *Esther* frequently cited in modern scholarship, to see if a non-binary/genderqueer reading is possible. Finally, I posit which of the ancient versions of this text may have been particularly impactful on modern reception and suggest reasons why this might have occurred.

### *Dissertation Argument and Methodology*

Some scholars have commented on the unusual gender roles espoused in the Masoretic Text of *Esther*. It appears that the female characters that feature in *Esther* – the eponymous heroine Esther, the first queen Vashti and the prime minister's wife Zeresh – are portrayed in an atypical way, sometimes described as 'subversive'. This term is often used of them because they do not behave in a manner expected of female characters. Similarly, the central male character, Esther's uncle Mordecai, is portrayed unusually, because he surprises readers' expectations, both positively and negatively. The unusual gender roles identified by feminist or gender-critical *Esther* scholars allow us to see non-normative

possibilities in this book. Their ideological readings serve to liberate *Esther* from heteronormativity, androcentrism and misogyny. Similarly, my work intends to liberate *Esther* from cisnormativity and offer an interpretation that allows non-binary/genderqueer identity and themes to resonate.

This thesis is methodologically grounded in contemporary gender theory and work that takes an interdisciplinary approach to gender, sex and the biblical texts. Studies on queer theory and the trans experience are of particular interest (Alsop 2002; Nestle 2002; Boyarin 2003; Guest 2005; Drinkwater 2009; Hornsby and Stone 2011; Cornwall 2015; Hornsby and Guest 2016; Dembroff 2019; Greenough 2020). The terms 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' are relatively new forms of identification (Richards et al. 2016). Therefore, taking a non-binary approach to the biblical text is a new field of inquiry in biblical studies, and there are very few studies focused on this subject.

Reception History also forms part of the methodological basis of this thesis. I use reception theorists' work on the emancipatory potential of texts and reading 'against the grain' (Jauss 1975; Breed 2014). This enables me to engage with modern critical interpretation of *Esther* as well as the ancient versions, and undertake an ideological reading. Furthermore, I use the theory of 'aesthetic distance' (Jauss 1970: 9, 14-15) to underpin my assessment of modern critics' approaches to the ancient texts. Using a sharpening 'lens' of non-binary/genderqueer theory, I can read ancient and modern reception of *Esther* to identify cisnormative bias and where non-binary/genderqueer reading is possible.

To study *Esther* reception history with respect to the gender binary, this thesis requires working through four sequential stages. I start by outlining the large body of *Esther* reception, in many different media forms, that has often been overlooked in modern *Esther* criticism. Using key examples, I show how gendered interpretations exist in the many different stages of *Esther* reception that are contemporaneous with or follow the ancient textual versions.

The second step of my research examines gender portrayal in modern *Esther* criticism. When studying a biblical text, students will often use modern, academic interpretation alongside the text. Biblical commentaries, introductions or thematic studies enhance a student's understanding of a text by outlining its history, genre and common themes, and by clarifying any translation issues. Because of this common practice, biblical criticism holds a position of privilege with students and readers, and it informs their exegesis and interpretation. However, any work of biblical criticism is not free from the cognitive bias of its author. Given that the majority of traditional *Esther* scholarship is written by men, it may be the case that latent gender bias is present in their commentaries or thematic assessments of this text. This bias could be accepted by the student or reader without question. Indeed, one might assume that this gender bias exists in the biblical text itself. I approach this material with the intent of highlighting where gender bias is present. To do this, I assess how twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have interpreted each character's gender. I show that, often, the characters in *Esther* are portrayed by modern critics in a cisnormative way, or they are thought to behave subversively. Subsequently, I

show where critics seem to display gender bias in their interpretation of the characters in *Esther*.

Third, I turn to the ancient versions of *Esther*, to which many contemporary scholars refer when making their arguments. These versions are those found in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, the Greek Alpha Text, Josephus's paraphrase in Chapter Eleven of his 'Judean Antiquities' and Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Using a non-binary/genderqueer lens, I assess the characters' capacity to be non-binary/genderqueer; that is, that they can be read as not conforming to a normative male or female depiction but can be interpreted in a fluid, gender-free way. I show that, overall, the Hebrew Masoretic Text consistently has the greatest capacity for this reading. I illustrate that readers can also engage with the main text of the Septuagint, Alpha Text and Vulgate to produce non-binary/genderqueer readings for some, but not all, of the characters. The Greek Additions, in contrast, cannot be read in this way.

Finally, my thesis conclusions bring together the analyses of Parts One and Two. I show how the modern impact of *Esther* scholarship with respect to gender either complements or contradicts a non-binary/genderqueer reading of the ancient versions of *Esther*. Using the analysis of modern reception, I suggest that gender bias is present in many critics' work on this text, and I show that the influence of the Greek Additions has been significant. I then discuss the gender-normative impact of the Greek Additions on contemporary reception.

*Significance and Originality*

We are currently experiencing a paradigm shift concerning gender identity in the public and private spheres. At the time of writing, trans rights are the subject of fervent public debate. Non-binary/genderqueer identity is becoming a common identity term and, as of September 2020, non-binary people are protected by the Equality Act in the UK. Previously, this form of identity was not recognised as a gender reassignment category and thus non-binary people were not afforded any legal recognition or protections.

The identity terms 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' are very new, and have emerged only within the last decade. As such, use of these terms is still in its infancy, and they can mean slightly different things to different people. What is common is that non-binary and genderqueer people feel that they do not want to participate in the gender binary and consequently they reject it. This means that they eschew the social and cultural gender expectations for men and women. If one were to access the text as presented by twentieth and twenty-first century scholars, non-binary/genderqueer readers would find *Esther* rather inaccessible, as I show in Part One. This is because the gender binary features in much of *Esther* criticism. Therefore, this study aims to address if the ancient texts themselves can be welcoming to these readers or not. This thesis adds a detailed study on genderqueer/non-binary biblical interpretation to the body of *Esther* scholarship.

The model that this thesis employs can be used to undertake further research on other biblical texts, for example the Book of Ruth, which displays unusual gender characterisations. Furthermore, this study will establish a dialogue on genderqueer/non-

binary research into biblical texts, and how the gender roles espoused in modern scholarship of a biblical text can be influenced by the text's history of reception, often to a greater degree than the ancient version being commented on.

The tabular appendices which arrange key verses from the ancient translations of *Esther* side-by-side will be a useful tool for exegetes and reception historians to refer to the ancient versions of this book.

*Thesis Structure*

The thesis is split into two main sections of study, which is preceded by chapters on background and methodology. The first section assesses modern scholarship, and the second section examines the ancient versions of Esther.

Chapter One introduces the topic and methods used in this thesis, providing the motivation for and background of this investigation. Chapter Two details the methodology employed – reception history and gender and non-binary theory – detailing the emergence of these disciplines, the theorists who have formulated them, and how they will be practically used in this study. I also introduce the topic of cognitive bias in biblical studies and highlight forms or modes of bias I will look out for in my study. The third chapter outlines the large body of Esther reception from which I have drawn the material analysed in this study. Using key examples that illustrate the gender binary in interpretation, this chapter forms a bridge between the ancient versions of *Esther* and its modern academic reception.

Part One, Chapter Four begins the analysis proper. This chapter looks at twentieth and twenty-first century *Esther* scholarship, to identify how modern scholars have portrayed the gender roles in *Esther*. It begins with an introduction to modern scholarship on *Esther*, including the key themes, the most influential scholars and the progression of academic research on this text. The sections then assess the characters of Mordecai, Esther, Vashti, Ahasuerus and Haman, and Zeresh. Each section looks at the way in which these characters have been realised in modern scholarship, pertaining to the gender binary. Part One concludes by highlighting the commonalities and key themes, demonstrating that scholars have often depicted the characters in *Esther* in a cisnormative fashion, or they have been interpreted as subversive. Ahasuerus and Haman are notable exceptions. I also highlight where latent gender bias may be present in modern interpretation.

Part Two of the thesis focuses on the ancient versions of *Esther*. Chapter Five outlines the history of the ancient versions and their relationship to one another. Using the analysis undertaken in Part One, Chapters Six to Ten examine the texts of the MT, LXX, AT, Josephus's paraphrase and the Vulgate through a genderqueer/non-binary lens. This is to ascertain if these texts have the capacity for the characters to be read as genderqueer/non-binary. *Esther* is predominantly made up of a series of dialogues between characters. For this reason, each character is studied alongside another character that they interact with in the text. Rather than study these characters in isolation, I study two together to measure the interactions between characters and how this contributes to their capacity to be interpreted in a genderqueer/non-binary way. The cameo sections studied are Vashti and

Ahasuerus; Esther and Mordecai; Ahasuerus and Esther; and Haman and Zeresh. The scenes included the analyses are only those that feature male and female characters in conversation with one another. This was a deliberate choice. The male characters in *Esther* – Mordecai, Ahasuerus and Haman – have been subject to much discussion and interest in modern scholarship. The focus on these characters has centred on their ethnicity and their political roles in Persia. However, this focus is not particular to modern reception. The targumim to *Esther* and the talmudic, rabbinic and midrashic reception of this text evinces the same concern. As a result, there is much less scope for an analysis of gender roles.

The conclusions drawn at the end of Part Two highlight the key trends and themes that have emerged from the analysis. Part Two demonstrates that the Hebrew MT has the greatest capacity for genderqueer/non-binary readings of the character cameos. Conversely, the LXX, the AT and Josephus's version tend to have the least capacity for such reading, one reason for which is because the Greek Additions have had a profoundly cisnormative impact on the texts.

Given the analyses undertaken in Parts One and Two of this thesis, the thesis conclusions in Chapter Eleven discuss the findings of this study. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of modern scholarship are compared with the conclusions drawn from the ancient versions of *Esther* and their capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading. I show how the Greek Additions change the LXX's capacity for reading Esther and Mordecai as queer characters, in contrast to the AT and Josephus's depiction of them. Furthermore, it appears that many modern commentators' interpretations have been significantly influenced by the Greek

Additions, as well as other features found in the three Greek versions. Subsequently, I explore how critics' cognitive bias may have influenced how they realise gender in their work, and their approach to the Greek Additions. I posit that the silences and gaps in the narrative have been filled with references to or influences from the Greek versions of this tale.

The purpose of highlighting this bias is to show how cisnormativity and binary concepts of gender have deeply permeated the means through which students and scholars access the text of *Esther*. I argue that by returning to the texts themselves to undertake an ideological reading, one can engage with this text, to liberate it for non-binary/genderqueer readers. By doing so, the Hebrew text of *Esther* becomes a useful tool to challenge gender portrayals in modern *Esther* scholarship, the Hebrew Bible more broadly, and problematise the use of comparative ancient versions when interpreting the Hebrew Bible.

# Chapter 1 – Thesis Introduction

> …if you think like a Westerner… you have been culturally trained (indoctrinated) to be something of a structuralist: everything is (should be) in its proper place; everything can be divided into two parts, with one being better than the other; and those things that do not fit neatly are not kosher, they are not holy, they are not aligned with good; they are liminal, they are other, they are queer.
>
> Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone 2011: xi

> …coming as it does from that time prior to the emergence of modern systems of sex, gender, sexuality, and kinship, the Bible does not always cohere with heteronormative assumptions. By using queer theory to, in the words of Stuart Macwilliam, "subject" biblical texts and biblical interpretation "to queer scrutiny," queer criticism calls attention to unexpected configurations of sex, gender, and kinship in the Bible and its history of reception… Or, drawing on recent interest in reception histories of the Bible, queer criticism can illustrate some of the unexpectedly queer ways in which biblical texts have been read in the past, juxtaposing traditional heteronormative readings with queer possibilities.
>
> Ken Stone 2013: 163-164

We are currently situated in a cultural epoch where gender roles and the gender binary are being actively questioned. Presently, trans rights are frequently discussed and debated at a popular and political level in the UK.[1] There is a huge rise in children reported as having

[1] For example, the Pride in London 2018 and the Manchester Pride 2019 parades were hijacked by a TERF activist group. This action was widely condemned by many (https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/07/07/mayor-of-london-sadiq-khan-pride-transgender/). There is currently division between radical feminists who argue that women and lesbianism is under threat by trans women, and those who argue against this. At the time of writing (22 April 2020), the Conservative MP and Women and Equalities Minister, Liz Truss, announced reform of the Gender Recognition Act which threatens to change or restrict trans people's use of single-sex services and making sure that people under the age of 18 are 'protected from decisions that they could make, that are irreversible in the future.'

gender dysphoria[2] and there has been a widening of the gender and non-gender spectrum by many popular figures in the mainstream media.[3] For Millennials and Generation Z,[4] social media has done much to encourage exploration of and discussion about the spectrum of gender and sexuality.[5] In recent years, the number of terms available to identify one's sexuality and gender identity has significantly increased. The conventional terms, 'straight', 'gay' and 'bisexual' indicate that there is a sexuality binary that one was on either side or in the middle of. Now, the discourse has expanded to include terms which express many more forms of sexuality, for example, 'asexual' and 'pansexual'. There are also many more expressions available to describe one's gender identity, including 'cis', 'intersex', 'trans', 'queer', 'genderfluid', 'genderqueer', and 'non-binary'.[6] These are becoming more widely accepted in western society. Indeed, as of September 2020, a landmark employment tribunal ruled that non-binary and gender-fluid people are protected under the 2010 Equality Act in the UK.[7] Not only are people discussing their own gender and sexuality, but people are questioning gender bias in literature, film and music. In the field of Hebrew

---

https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-for-women-and-equalities-liz-truss-sets-out-priorities-to-women-and-equalities-select-committee

[2] The Gender Identity Development Service, part of The Tavistock and Portman NHS trust, has reported a 25% increase in referrals from young people from 2016/17 to 2017/18, from 2,016 referrals to 2,519 (https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/news/stories/gids-referrals-increase-201718/).

[3] A notable recent example is US music artist Janelle Monáe revealing that she is pansexual (Rolling Stone, Issue 1313/1314, May 17-30 2018).

[4] The US think tank the Pew Research Center defined Millennials as those born between 1981 and 1996, Generation Z are defined as those born after 1996 (https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/millennial-how-old-is-generation-y-cutoff-date-pew-research-center-a8235731.html)

[5] For example, Facebook now has over 50 different options for defining one's gender and sexuality. It has been commented on in numerous articles in news media that social media is broadening access to queer conversation (https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/how-social-media-is-changing-perceptions-around-gender_uk_57c57f99e4b0cc2b92b177dd).

[6] See the Glossary of Terms for definitions, p.9.

[7] Source: Forbes, 16 September 2020 (https://www.forbes.com/sites/jamiewareham/2020/09/16/non-binary-people-protected-by-equality-act-in-landmark-ruling-against-jaguar-land-rover/#43aa60c779be)

Bible studies, challenging hegemonic gender bias in modern research is a relatively new concept.

Because of the trans rights debate currently occurring in the UK, gendered spaces are becoming politicised as people attempt to define what constitutes 'male' and 'female', usually by looking to biological features. This attempts to restrict the rights and freedoms of trans and non-binary people. As such, affording spaces for those who are not cisgender, that is, they do not identify as their assigned birth gender, has never been more important. This is not limited to physical spaces. It is also important that all spaces, including academic spaces, meet this need. This thesis aims to take a non-binary/genderqueer approach to the Book of Esther, to create this space in relation to this unusual biblical text.

The Book of Esther fascinates, delights and repulses critics and readers, almost in equal measure. This book manages to be dramatic, funny, shocking and violent in ten short chapters, and it is one of only two biblical books named after a woman. Notably, female characters play important roles in this text. Queen Vashti creates chaos in the royal court, her successor, Esther, controls the king and undermines his edicts to save her people, and Zeresh foretells her husband's imminent demise. In contrast, the three central male characters either create significant problems or do the female characters' bidding.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Esther* has been the subject of much criticism and debate at many different stages of its reception. This book is the only text in the Hebrew Bible that has two different extant Greek 'translations' – the Septuagint version and the Alpha Text – which

tell alternate versions of the *Esther* story. The multitude of textual receptions continued with a long and rich history of talmudic and midrashic interpretations of this text, medieval Jewish versions, comments and criticism from the Church Fathers, and from other Christian and Jewish scholars up to the present day.[8] The interpretations of this text throughout the ages are varied and diverse, particularly concerning how Esther, Mordecai, Vashti and Zeresh are portrayed.[9] Today, there is still much diversity in scholarly opinions of Esther, Mordecai, Vashti and Zeresh.

Popularised from the 1970s onwards, feminist scholarship in the field of theology brought the topic of gender into discussions of biblical texts. In particular, feminist theorists did a great deal to highlight the treatment of women in biblical texts and show how scholars imposed gendered assumptions on their assessments of texts. Feminist scholars have also done much to show how the texts can be read in a way which allows them to resonate for women, in the absence of female voices and protagonists. The complex gender roles displayed in *Esther* stimulated a large body of feminist and gender-critical scholarly literature regarding the characters' behaviour.[10] Many critics have highlighted the unusual male and female gender roles in this text, and argued for gender subversion, campness, cross-dressing, farce or female emancipation in the text. These critics have cast new light

---

[8] See chapter three for a detailed exposition of key examples.

[9] Chapter three identifies the body of reception history pertaining to these characters in Jewish and Christian interpretation, up to the twentieth century. Chapter four details twentieth and twenty-first century depictions of these characters, particularly 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.6.

[10] Chapter four details at length where modern scholars have identified unusual or non-normative gender roles.

on *Esther* research that has brought gender relations and norms to the fore, paving the way for successive studies on the topic of gender in this unusual book.[11]

Often, scholars have noted that Esther, Vashti and Zeresh behave in ways that go beyond their limiting female gender. Some scholars interpret this as gender role-reversal or subversion (Lacocque 1990:67). This type of analysis has been incredibly helpful for highlighting how gender in *Esther* can be realised in non-normative ways. As will be discussed, the reversal or subversion of gender roles implies that the structure of gender roles continues to exist. When a character subverts their gender role, they are acting in a way unlike their gender. Usually, this behaviour is more like that of the opposite gender, which undermines their assumed gender. Consequently, subversion implies that the only options available are those of one's gender, or the opposite gender. This implication is limiting as it does not acknowledge that there could be other possibilities outside of the gender binary, for example, gender fluidity, or identities that eschew gender altogether. However, non-binary/genderqueer identity is a relatively new concept. Therefore, it is not surprising that gender critics of *Esther*, most of whom were writing in the 1980s to 2000s, did not attempt to interpret this text in a manner divorced from the gender binary.

Alongside feminist scholarship on biblical texts, LGBT and queer theology emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Given the lack of acceptance for the LGBTQIA+ community and the use of biblical books against them by some religious groups, LGBT and queer theology has

---

[11] See chapter four.

attempted to reclaim the texts, to find voices in the text that speak to and for them. This work confronts queer exscription from theological scholarship and/or from the texts themselves, and uses biblical texts to challenge homophobia and discrimination. LGBT theology challenged heteronormativity in biblical interpretation, and queer theology introduced ways of approaching biblical texts that were not concerned with the gender binary, or that avoided binary tropes. This has continued to develop with the emergence in the mid-2010s of trans and intersex analyses of the Bible. For these groups, heteronormative or cisnormative analysis of a text is problematic as it makes the text inaccessible to those who do not consider themselves to be heteronormative or cisgender. Scholars approaching biblical literature from a trans or intersex perspective thus focus on ambiguity and difference rather than homogeneity.

It is important that I declare my own gender and sexuality before undertaking this study. I am a cisgender, heterosexual female of mixed heritage. Though one might argue that it should be the duty of those who identify as genderqueer/non-binary to analyse *Esther* in the way I propose,[12] I contend that the conclusions I draw from this study serve to, a) highlight the gendered bias present in modern *Esther* scholarship, b) identify which texts have been most influential in this regard, and c) offer possibilities for genderqueer/non-binary reading that is currently missing from *Esther* scholarship.

[12] cf. Susannah Cornwall's 2017 article 'Home and Hiddenness: queer theology, domestication and institutions', where she provides justification for cisgender people undertaking queer research.

To do this, I employ reception history as a guiding principle with a sharpening 'lens' of gender and queer theory. Reception history enables me to study the rich collection of *Esther* reception in modern scholarship and the ancient versions. I analyse them for their impact on us – twenty-first century, western students of *Esther* – with respect to understanding gender stereotyping and the gender binary in this text. Using reception history, I assess how the central characters' gender roles have been interpreted in modern scholarship. To investigate the impact of the ancient versions on *Esther* on characterisation in modern scholarship, I select and analyse the ancient versions of *Esther* and ask the question: can I read these accounts of *Esther* in a genderqueer/non-binary way, even though a great deal of modern scholarship characterises this text cisnormatively?

When first reading through secondary literature on *Esther* written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I was struck by the number of gendered terms used about the characters in this text. This modern scholarship is used by biblical studies students and readers today to access the text. Insights on the history, *Gattung*, characterisation and translation are gleaned from modern scholarship on *Esther*, like any commentary or introduction on any book of the Hebrew Bible. As Carruthers has argued, 'Because [Esther] it is such a difficult book, commentaries are central to its existence as religious communities depend upon secondary writings to make sense of it.' (2008: 2). This means that modern scholarship, particularly that which is frequently cited, holds a position of influence with readers and students, and may be as impactful on their understanding as the ancient text itself. Furthermore, modern scholarship has been written in an era in which the gender binary and male and female gender roles as we understand them are pervasive

and ingrained in Western society.[13] Therefore, it may be the case that the gender roles espoused in some modern scholarship are heteronormative or cisnormative.

Many modern *Esther* critics refer to the ancient versions of *Esther* alongside the Hebrew. The most commonly-cited ancient versions – the Septuagint, Alpha Text, Josephus's paraphrase in the *Judean Antiquities* and Jerome's Vulgate – sometimes display significant differences from the Hebrew version.[14] These versions are typically used to elucidate the Hebrew. This means that the ancient versions may also be impactful on modern critics' interpretations of *Esther*, both in general and as pertains to gender in this text.[15]

There are three questions I deem important to address in this study: 1) how do modern scholars realise gender in their interpretations of *Esther*, 2) do the ancient versions have the capacity to be read in a way that does not assume the gender binary, and 3) to what extent is the gender binary espoused in much of modern scholarship influenced by the different ancient versions? I aim to answer these questions in four stages. I begin by outlining the body of *Esther* reception often overlooked in modern reception and investigating gender depictions in key examples. Second, I assess the impact of modern scholarship by highlighting how binary gender roles have been reinforced.[16] Third, I

---

[13] Chapter two, particularly 2.2.2, 2.2.3 and 2.2.6, illustrates the pervasiveness of cisnormativity and how non-binary/genderqueer identity contrasts with it.
[14] Part Two of this thesis focuses specifically on these ancient versions and how they agree and disagree with one another. Chapter five gives a comprehensive overview of the history of each of these versions.
[15] Chapter four analyses how modern critics have interpreted *Esther*, and the analysis following Part Two identifies how and why the ancient versions may have influenced their assessments.
[16] See chapter four for detailed analysis.

undertake analysis of the ancient versions of *Esther* and these texts' capacity to be read as genderqueer/non-binary.[17] Finally, I determine if some ancient versions of *Esther* have been particularly influential on modern scholars' work[18] and posit suggestions for why they might be so. In this way, this thesis's methodology uses a blend of reception theory,[19] and gender and queer theory.[20]

[17] Part Two, chapters five to ten, undertake this assessment in depth.
[18] See chapter eleven.
[19] Chapter 2.1 details this.
[20] Chapter 2.2 details this.

# Chapter 2 – Thesis Methodology

This chapter is split into two halves. Chapter 2.1 discusses the reception history methodology employed in this thesis, by first examining the origins and development of reception history. I then examine reception history's application to biblical studies, and why and how one can conduct an ideological reception-historical study of a biblical text. Finally, I examine the process of selecting material for a reception-historical study and show how I have selected material for my study.

The second half of this chapter, 2.2, turns to gender theory. First, I look at the history and development of gender and queer theory and discuss the gender binary. Following this, I study gender in ancient Persia, to provide the necessary background to *Esther.* Subsequently, I examine non-binary/genderqueer identity and how queer theory can be applied to reception history. Finally, I demonstrate how I will use reception history and queer theory together, to undertake the genderqueer/non-binary reading of the ancient versions and modern interpretation of *Esther.*

## *2.1 – Reception History*

> All biblical scholars, perhaps without knowing it, use 'Reception History' in their studies. Whenever they take up a commentary, and assess the text of the Bible through the words of a commentator, they are, in effect, using reception history, because they are allowing the text to be received through the prism of a third party: they are thus engaged with the 'reception' of that text.
>
> Susan Gillingham 2011: 571

### *2.1.1 - Introduction*

As Gillingham points out, by engaging with scholarship on a biblical text one is engaging with its reception history. Looking at the reception history of a text need not be limited to its ancient translations. Reception-historical criticism – from here on termed 'reception history' – allows us to engage with the long and complex interpretive tradition of a biblical text, and assess its impact on later interpretations, including academic opinions on the text. Reception history also enables us to understand how we can interact with a text and its reception, to understand the impact it has on us as readers.

This thesis aims to look at the Book of Esther in a non-binary/genderqueer way in ancient versions and modern scholarship. As the ancient versions of *Esther* and modern, secondary literature on *Esther* are receptions of this book, they will be treated in this study as two different 'stages' of reception. These two distinct 'stages' were chosen for this study because modern scholarship on this text refers to the ancient versions for text-critical purposes or to better understand the story. This is because the Hebrew text is often vague and lacking in detail. Much scholarship on *Esther* claims to be primarily focused on

interpreting the Hebrew version, or does not state which versions are primarily being used.[21]

I chose modern scholarship as a stage of reception to focus on because of the impact that modern scholarship has on readers and students of the *Esther* text today. As mentioned in chapter one, when students approach a biblical text, often they will use modern critical scholarship alongside the text itself, whether they are reading it in Hebrew or in English. Using commentaries and critical work on biblical texts, particularly that which is frequently cited or highly esteemed, enables students to gain greater insight into the history and development of a text, understand issues with the language and its translation, and address literary-critical concerns. This use grants modern scholarship a privileged position. I contend that modern interpretations inform and shape readers' opinions of biblical texts, even if readers take a critical approach to reading modern scholarship. This applies to critics' opinions of all aspects of a text, including gender portrayal.

There are many different methods available for assessing a biblical text, including literary criticism, text criticism, form criticism, historical criticism and many more. Taking an approach that pursues the 'original' meaning of *Esther* in the context of this study is rather anachronistic. This is because attempting to look for genderqueer/non-binary behaviour or identity would involve making assumptions about how the ancient writers viewed gender roles and gender norms. My approach avoids anachronism by not seeking the authorial

[21] See chapter 4 for detail.

conception of gender, but rather by reading the ancient texts in a way that assesses how gender in *Esther* resonates for modern genderqueer/non-binary readers and readers sensitive to the gender binary. This has led me to use reception criticism, methodologically grounded in the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, Hans-Robert Jauss and Brennan Breed among others. Using reception history as a guiding principle will allow me to analyse the impact of the ancient versions on modern scholarship, as well as look at the impact that the ancient versions had on one another. Employing reception history in this manner also enables me to read the texts in a way to bring new meaning and resonance to them, away from 'traditional' or 'dominant' interpretations.

As a new discipline, reception history is still subject to debates concerning its meaning, methodology and goals. It is occupying a larger and larger place on the scholarly stage as academics from different fields within biblical studies have become aware of and have recognised the value of this research. As it is such a new branch of biblical research, there is a 'multiplicity of methods' (Morse 2014: 244) one might use that come under the umbrella term 'reception history'. This chapter will outline the methods which are relevant for this study.

### *2.1.2 - The Origins of Reception History*[22]

The Bible has a rich history of numerous, varied interpretations, translations and rewritings of texts and stories. From this, one can see quite clearly that there is a long history of 'reception' of the Bible. Biblical texts have been 'received' by people throughout history, who have created their own interpretations of the text which were then 'received' by others. Biblical texts have been written and rewritten in different languages and in different locations to serve the needs of those writing it and their communities. As I show in chapters three to nine of this thesis, the Book of Esther has a considerably large body of reception in text, art, music and film. Reception history can be used to assess the impact of reception: the impact on us as readers and the impact of one reception or many receptions on another.

The formulation of reception history as a field of enquiry officially emerged in the 1960s, with the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The influence of Gadamer's work on *Wirkungsgeschichte*[23] was far-reaching, and many academics working in the field of reception history or reception criticism still refer to him. Notably, his student Hans Robert

---

[22] The term 'reception history' is problematic in itself, with debates over the use of this term as opposed to 'reception criticism', 'reception theory', or the German terms *Wirkungsgeschichte*, *Rezeptiongeschichte*, *Rezeptionästetik* and *Wirkungsästetik*. It is not my purpose here to go into detail about these terms, their meaning and their influence. This is because the debates and discussions on these different terms, their origins and practice are numerous and wide-ranging. It is not the purpose of my research to analyse this field to a greater degree than is necessary to use reception history as a guiding principle of my study. This is because I am engaging with reception history as an ideological pursuit, particularly pertaining to gender theory. Focusing on how reception history can be specifically applied to gender-focused studies of biblical texts in this chapter enables me to formulate a clear and concise methodology that applies reception history to the task in had: non-binary and genderqueer analysis.

[23] This term is itself debated, with scholars translating and understanding it in a variety of ways. 'Effective history' (Holub 2003: 42), 'history-of-effects' and 'impact history' are some of the terms used to understand *Wirkungsgeschichte*.

Jauss critiqued and built upon Gadamer's work and has since become as influential as Gadamer in the field. As I will show, Jauss' work is crucial for this study, in particular, the way that he has responded to and critiqued Gadamer's idea of horizons. I will now outline Gadamer's work before moving onto that of Jauss.

Many critics consider Hans-Georg Gadamer as the founder of reception history. Gadamer laid the philosophical groundwork in reception history that all subsequent hermeneutical theories would build upon or engage in dialogue (Parris 2009: 2). He formulated his reception history in part as a reaction against the lingering Enlightenment belief that one could, through reason, trace the path back from the text we have today to the thought of the composing author, and against the polar-opposite view of Romanticism that tradition was the absolute authority. He was heavily influenced by what he perceived to be the hegemony of scientific thought and the popular opinion that methodology had become the guiding principle to attaining 'truth'. Influenced by Hegel's dialectic on history and Heidegger's *Being and Time*, he developed a theory that overcame what he perceived to be the limits of their respective hermeneutics.

Prejudice is a key element of Gadamer's hermeneutic, and it has played a crucial role in much of the subsequent study in this field. Gadamer argues that as a reader one is shaped by one's own tradition and historical circumstance, which he terms 'prejudice'. However, he argues that prejudice should not be understood in a negative manner (1975: 246). Rather, 'prejudice', and one's preconceptions, are a fundamental part of any hermeneutical endeavour (Holub 2003: 41). One needs to become aware of their 'prejudice' before

undertaking hermeneutical study. Understanding prejudice is key to attaining *'Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein'*, historically-effected consciousness, which is the knowledge one needs to engage with a text. *'Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein'* can be broken down into three parts: history, effect and consciousness. One's understanding is determined by their history, and accordingly it is an 'effect' of history. To Gadamer, 'consciousness' is recognising that one's understanding is impacted by history. One's 'horizon' is a part of this consciousness, which Gadamer describes as 'an essential part of the concept of situation' (1975: 289). This represents our situatedness in the world, from which we understand and interpret. These horizons are open and dynamic and move as the reader moves. Gadamer posits that, 'The concept of "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion.' (1975: 305). Identifying my horizon, from which I read modern interpretations and ancient versions of *Esther*, is important so that I can adequately express my historical, cultural and personal situatedness in this study.

According to Gadamer, this 'horizon' of our understanding then 'fuses' (*Horizontverschmelzung*) with the horizon of understanding of the text, though Gadamer admits that this historical horizon is illusory. This leads first to tension between text and reception, second an 'adjustment of competing pre-judgments' (Evans 2014: 5) and finally the creation of a new, great horizon. This great horizon, encompassing both horizons, has a reflexive function in that understanding is, essentially, historical consciousness becoming

aware of itself (Holub 2003: 43). Interpretation, for Gadamer, is application: the actualising or realising of a text in the present for the interpreter. Interpretation takes the form of understanding and dialogue, 'mediating between then and now, between the 'Thou' and the 'I'' (1975: 298). Realising the ancient versions of *Esther* in the present is what I undertake in Part Two of this thesis.

Habermas's critique of Gadamer's hermeneutic highlights the influential role of texts in society, culture and politics, as he argued that Gadamer does not appreciate the powerful role of texts (Jurgen Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozial Wissenschaften*, 1982: 306–10, cited in Evans 2014: 241). According to Habermas, Gadamer's theory ignores power structures and coercion that can be implicit or explicit in texts, and consigns them to 'ideologically frozen relations of dependence.' (Habermas 1987: 310).[24] Habermas instead proposed that hermeneutics is the means towards the greater end of the emancipation of the individual (Evans 2014: 241). One's hermeneutic can cause the emancipation of the individual by effecting the emancipation of texts through identifying their ideological biases. Jauss also argued for the emancipatory function of texts for the individual, which he does by expanding on Gadamer's hermeneutic (1975: 45, 74). It is the emancipation of texts, and thus the emancipation of the individual, that I am particularly interested in. Reading *Esther* in a non-binary/genderqueer way is an emancipatory form of reading. By reading this text in a manner free from the hegemonic gender binary, the reader engages in emancipatory action.

[24] For a defence of Gadamer's position in light of Habermas's arguments, see Evans 2014: 242-247.

Jauss, in his seminal paper, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory' (1970), moved away from Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* and, alongside critiquing Marxist and formalist literary theory, developed a hermeneutic based on 'horizon of expectations' and 'aesthetic distance' as its two key points of reference. Jauss understood reception of texts or objects to be implicitly related to an aesthetic judgment made of that text or object, which is based on judgments that preceded it. Thus, receptions exist in a chain of aesthetic judgments made as they have been passed down over time, which have influenced one another. Jauss felt that the influence of tradition was too homogenising, and one should instead consider a piece of reception in light of the effect it has had and what has affected it. Habermas's approach to tradition was similar to Jauss: he believed that it has a negative impact on our judgment. Indeed, he criticised Gadamer's view of tradition as a positive force, arguing that Gadamer had subordinated reason to tradition (Parris 2009: 10, 25). As Holub has summarised, 'literature becomes meaningful as a source of mediation between past and present, while literary history… becomes central for literary studies because it enables us to comprehend past meanings as part of present practices' (2003: 58). This applies to my work on *Esther* because I will mediate between past and present using the ancient versions and modern reception of *Esther*. I also identify the impact that modern reception and the ancient versions have had on how the gender binary is realised in this text.

As a reader, one's horizon of expectations – that is, one's prejudgments pertaining to a text or a work of art – is either surprised or disappointed. If it is disappointed, the 'aesthetic

distance' between reader and text is not too great, so it can be bridged. This process would create a 'differentiation' of horizons. If the reader's expectations are surprised, this indicates a large distance between reader and text, which suggests that a change of horizons is required. As Evans has summarised, *Wirkungsgeschichte* to Jauss is, 'the readiness to receive a new perspective both of a text and of oneself, and to have one's expectation thwarted' (2014: 8). However, Holub rightly points out that Jauss's horizon of expectations encounters the obvious difficulty of attempting to measure 'disappointment' or 'surprise', and that there are different forms and values of surprising or disappointing one's expectations (2003: 62). Indeed, this is one of the most difficult aspects of Jauss's hermeneutic to gauge: even if one could qualify one's expectations, how can one trust those expectations? The amount of personal subjectivity involved is significant.

Jauss outlined his approach to reading texts using seven theses. In Thesis One, Jauss states: 'literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period' (1970:10). Rather, 'History of literature is a process of aesthetic reception and production which take place in realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic and the author in his continued creativity.' (1970: 10). In Thesis Two, Jauss argues that a reader can avoid the 'threatening pitfalls of psychology' by constructing a 'frame of reference of the reader's expectations' that is comprised of an understanding of genres, themes and forms of preceding works as well as understanding 'the contrast between poetic and practical language.' (1970: 11). This forms the 'horizon of expectations', mentioned above.

Theses Three, Four and Five have particular relevance to my study, as they concern both the potentially emancipatory power of the text and its possible range of meanings. Jauss argued in Thesis Three that without provocation, negation or push (*Stoß*) one does not have an experience (*Erfahrung*) so cannot and will not develop (*Bildung*) as an individual or as part of a community or tradition. Simultaneously, tradition and historical distance are by nature homogenising and levelling, so one must make a special effort to read literature 'against the grain' to attempt to undo this (1970: 15). Jauss believed that the subversiveness of texts, for example, the biblical parables, had fallen victim to this homogeneity. As will be shown in chapter four of this study, this is precisely the case with the textual reception of *Esther*. The Hebrew text of *Esther* is a book replete with gaps, silences and vague details that could potentially hold subversive meaning. However, modern, academic interpretations often explain away the unusual, frequently by referring to the other ancient versions. Jauss also saw the potential for a wide spectrum of meaning of a text in different horizons of readers, which included the way that a text has the capacity to be socially formative for different groups or kinds of readers. By reading *Esther* in a non-binary/genderqueer way, I aim to provide readings of this text in its ancient versions that is free from the gender binary, and will resonate with gender binary-rejecting people.

Thesis Four posits that texts possess 'a surplus of meaning', and that the meaning of a text arises precisely from its interaction with readers. Contrary to some historical-critical scholars' views, there is not one 'true' meaning of a text that is available to the reader. However, Jauss was keen to argue that this does not mean that there are not incorrect

interpretations of texts. Instead, interpretations are provisional. Jauss's fifth thesis suggests that texts not only offer possible solutions to questions that previous texts have raised, but that new questions are also posited. Therefore, the tradition of interpretation is a series of questions and answers that uncover the meaning of texts through the passage of time. Reception history is, at its essence, a history of answers to a text that have shaped future receptions by the questions each interpretation has itself raised. I would argue that these three theses illustrate the flexibility of texts and their potential for meaning outside of the common, dominant interpretations in modern scholarship. By common and dominant, I mean the commentaries, introductions or monographs on *Esther* that are heavily cited and seen as go-to texts on the book. I aim to look at the Book of Esther in a way free from the constraints of the gender binary and provide an interpretation of gender in this text that may challenge the dominant interpretations.

In Thesis Six, Jauss argues that his theory serves to improve both the diachronic method and the synchronic method of literary analysis. He argues, 'It must be possible to analyze the literary horizon of a certain historical moment as that synchronic system in which simultaneously appearing works can be received diachronically in relation, and in which the work can appear as of current interest or not, as fashionable, out-dated or of lasting value, or before its time or after it.' (1970: 29).

Rather than subordinating literature to history, in his final thesis Jauss emphasises the 'socially formative function of literature' (1970: 37), thus its ability to influence and be influenced by its surroundings. If literature is viewed as socially formative, then the

horizon of expectations takes on much greater significance. Here Jauss proposes that literature can have an emancipatory function, as touched on above, which is very important for this study of *Esther*. Jauss's later work focused on the aesthetic element of his hermeneutics, moving the horizon of expectations away from the centre of his theory, and instead, developing and detailing the aesthetic experience to a much greater degree.

A key criticism of both Gadamer and Jauss is that the former does not provide any methodology for the efficient implementation of his theory, and the latter only provides a scant outline of a methodological approach.[25] Therefore, the task of formulating methodologies for reception history has fallen to those working in the field. There is still no consensus on the 'correct' way to conduct a study using reception history, although there are a number of biblical scholars one could look to for examples.[26] A further criticism of Gadamer and Jauss's hermeneutics is that because texts can take on a new meaning in every situation in which their horizon meets an alternate horizon, perhaps the focus is too much on the response to the text and not enough on the text itself. Jauss claims that his key aim is to focus on the ancient reader to discover how they would have viewed and understood the text in question (1970: 26), but if this were truly the end goal, then I would argue that the model does not seem to be evenly weighted in that direction.

---

[25] Though as I have shown above, Gadamer's hermeneutic was formulated as a direct response to what he saw as the limiting properties of methodology. Hence, in his case it is hardly surprising that he provides no methodology.

[26] Some examples include, Katherine Low 2013; Yvonne Sherwood 2000, 2012, 2017 (ed.); Susan Gillingham 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Peter Thatcher Lanfer 2012 and many more.

*2.1.3 - Using Reception History to Challenge Dominant Biblical Interpretations*

As discussed above, a central focus of many reception-historical studies of biblical texts is to examine the experience, impact or effect of the text upon its reader. As Gadamer and Jauss both identified, the ideology of the reader is also of the utmost importance, as this affects their horizon of expectations (to put it in Jaussian terms). The reader's ideology will influence the 'fusion of horizons' or the 'change in horizons', depending on whose hermeneutic one is using. This has a socially formative function, which can be applied to biblical studies. As Choon-Leong Seow maintains, 'The minority position can challenge the exegesis of the majority, thereby pointing to the ambiguity of the text to which the reader is invited to return' (2007: 574).

Similarly to Jauss's observation on tradition, in her study of the book of Jonah, Yvonne Sherwood has pointed out that there is a common tendency to smooth out difficult readings of the text. Over time, many readers have been encouraged not to focus on the 'red herrings', and instead, on the overall message. This has created a 'distaste for alterity and disruption, and a desire for a text that is smooth, easily digested, and purged of all that is potentially monstrous or abnormal' (2000: 62, 89-90). Sherwood turns to marginal 'backwaters and underbellies' (2000: 2) of Jewish and popular Jonah reception, to offer interpretations that challenge the mainstream.

There is a twofold problem that has been prevalent in interpretations of biblical texts: smoothing-out of problems, and adherence to dominant views and ideologies. Readings that deal with a text's difficulties head-on and engage with minority or subversive ideologies have been largely ignored. This is precisely the position from which this study on *Esther* begins. By analysing modern scholarship on *Esther*, the dominant, smoothed-out interpretations of gender in this text will be highlighted, alongside those that interpret gender 'against the grain'. This analysis will be compared with their source texts: the ancient versions of *Esther*. Therefore, these two stages of *Esther* reception are assessed in relation to one another, to identify if modern scholarship has smoothed out unusual gender possibilities in the ancient versions.

Awareness of reader ideology and bias is not limited to the field of reception history. As Aaron Chalmers pointed out in his 2016 article on cognitive bias in theology, there is a startling lack of articles about this topic in our field. He begins his article by pointing out that in October 2015 a search of the term 'cognitive bias' in the ATLA Religion Database yields no results (2016: 467-468). Four years later, the same is still true, save for his article on the topic.[27] The term 'cognitive bias' refers to the way that people contextualise and frame information and how this impacts one's judgement and opinions. There are many factors which shape this, including race, class, sexuality, political opinions and religious beliefs. One's interpretation of a biblical text will be significantly shaped by these factors,

[27] Search accessed 22 May 2020.

and ultimately one's opinions and judgements will be determined by them. This position is similar to Jauss' 'horizon of expectations'.

Chalmers argues that cognitive bias is the 'intuitive, automatic, and unintended consequences of our brains' faltering attempt to arrive at a judgment or decision.' (2016: 468) According to Chalmers, the five forms of cognitive bias relevant for biblical exegesis are 'confirmation bias', 'false consensus effect', 'in-group bias', 'functional fixedness' and 'illusory truth effect'. Most relevant to this study are 'confirmation bias', 'false consensus effect' and 'functional fixedness'. Confirmation bias relates to the selection and interpretation of texts because they confirm pre-existing views of a passage, or they confirm deeply-held beliefs of the exegete (2016: 470-471). False consensus effect refers to relating one's priorities, theology or personal beliefs to those of the biblical authors (2016: 473). Functional fixedness refers to the mental block that an exegete may experience when using a text in a way other to how it has been traditionally used, or interpreting it in a way that is different to how it has been previously interpreted (2016: 475). These forms of cognitive bias can provide us with a framework to identify and comprehend the ideology and bias of readers and modern interpreters.

Additionally, reception history can allow previously suppressed interpretations of the Bible to come to the fore. As mentioned in the previous section, Jauss's hermeneutic enables multiple readings which will challenge the reader and challenge the tradition, ultimately allowing for change and development. However, this approach can ruffle feathers. As Gillingham points out:

> [Reception history's] presence is, at times, uncomfortable for the status quo; it challenges historical critical methods when they are too exclusively focussed on just the ancient meaning, and it asks equally awkward questions of more recent 'readerly' methods when they are too confined by the words of the text and its subsequent literary impact as the only resource for meaning. (2015: 22).

Gillingham is not the only critic to comment on reception history's capacity to provide uncomfortable interpretations. Describing the study of biblical reception as akin to a Rubik's Cube, Sherwood states that interpretations 'might not satisfy an essential yearning for comfort, but you can turn it and turn it and take delight in the way it fascinates and discomforts you.' (2000: 187). This study turns towards awkward and discomforting interpretation by using genderqueer/non-binary analysis as its source for meaning. This challenges the status quo by highlighting how some modern interpretation has taken a binary gender approach to *Esther*.

Reception history, then, occupies a unique space in biblical studies in its ability to directly engage with ideologies and the difficulties in texts, and bring them together to produce ideological reception criticism. Holly Morse explains that this can 'expand the interpretative possibilities of biblical texts for modern readers, as well as increasing their awareness of problematic texts of the bible and equally problematic appropriations of them' (2014: 257). By critiquing the critics, Morse points out that those engaged in reception history (or reception criticism as she prefers to term it) can expose dominant interpretations and their consequences for minority groups, such as those in the LGBTQ+ community. In this thesis, I read *Esther* in a way which highlights the dominant interpretations and their current impact on genderqueer/non-binary readers, and provides

a new, equally valid, interpretation which appeals to those who wish to read biblical texts without the hegemonic gender binary.

### *2.1.4 - The Validity of Reading Esther in a Genderqueer/Non-Binary Way*

There is much scholarly work that justifies my reading of *Esther*. There is a notable and growing body of reception history that engages with gender theory. This has been growing in popularity over the past two decades, alongside reception-historical studies that take ideological approaches, including post-colonial interpretations, womanist interpretations and LGBT studies.

John Sawyer has outlined the positive methodological outcome of these ideological studies. He states that it has now become commonplace for readers to declare their bias at the beginning of their study. This means that readers are free to say what the text means for them without their opinion being interpreted as a claim on the 'actual' meaning of a text (2004: 6-7). Several scholars agree with this, including Samuel Tongue, who demonstrates in his study of poetic allusions of biblical texts that, 'a biblical text's iterability means that whatever could be construed as its primary meaning is always already a necessary fiction' (2015: 270). In his study of the impact of biblical texts in education systems in Africa, Masiiwa Ragies Gunda has argued that, 'Reception history must strive for a multiplicity of perspectives' (2015: 133). In this regard, ideological readings using reception history can widen the field of perspectives. As will be shown in chapter four of this thesis, there are not

yet interpretations of *Esther* that actively problematise the gender binary or offer non-binary interpretations. Therefore, this thesis widens the range of interpretations available.

Brennan Breed's idea of the 'virtual' and 'actual' fields has been very influential on my research, providing further justification for reading *Esther* without the gender binary. Breed argues that the moment a text leaves the pen of its author, it becomes reception (2014: 13). As we understand from contemporary studies of literature, the range of possibilities of meaning to a reader from the point of authorship is vast. Thus, it should be no different for a biblical text. He argues for the fixed temporality of texts, that texts are influenced by and are products of their historical context, but that one cannot use the historical context as the only means of understanding a text (2014: 76-88). Ultimately, Breed argues, biblical texts leave their original contexts and 'romp around in the present' because they are durable (2014: 93). Reconstructing a historical context is itself an act of creation, so there are many layers of history, creation and meaning embedded in our act of 'receiving' a text. There is no one position from which we, as readers, can objectively adjudicate on a piece of history, but we are capable of constructing a dialogic account that juxtaposes perspectives. With Foucault, Breed points out that, as biblical texts were formulated by means of 'composition, decomposition and re-composition' (Foucault 1977: 118), there is a 'superabundance of meaning' in texts. Applying this to *Esther*, it would be anachronistic to make a claim about the *Esther* authors knowledge or understanding of the gender binary, as discussed in the introduction to chapter 2.1. However, we can take a non-binary/genderqueer approach to *Esther* precisely because of the 'superabundance of meaning' that the text has as we allow it to 'romp around in the present'.

Using Gilles Deleuze,[28] Breed proposes that we should focus our attention on the virtual and the actual when reading or interpreting a text. When translating a word, for example, there are several different translation options one could choose from. All these options are so-called 'virtual' options, and the one that the interpreter settles on is the 'actual' option. However, all of these options, be they virtual or actual, are all *real* (2014: 121). Biblical texts are always a dynamic virtual field as the potential virtual multiplicities change and develop. Reading is a localised actualisation of the virtual. However, actualisations are not concretised and nor do they limit a text's potentiality. The commonality in the dynamic virtual field is that all the possible variants relate to the same story. Breed's interpretation is similar to Jauss's fourth thesis, discussed above. By viewing my analysis in these terms, my reading of *Esther* chooses one of many virtual fields and makes it an actual field. But this begs the question: how should we use reception history to read the text in a non-binary/genderqueer way?

Katherine Low's 2013 study, *The Bible, Gender and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*, is an interesting example of this kind of reception history at work. Low uses reception history as a guiding principle, but to not be too broad (or, conversely, too narrow) she applies a 'lens' of gender theory over her reception history methodology. Thus, Low looks at examples of how Job's wife has been interpreted using reception-historical criteria: the centrality of the reader's experience with the text, the impact of the text on society and

[28] Breed cites Gilles Deleuze 1994, 'Difference and Reception', pp. 185-6, 212, 239, 245.

culture and vice versa. With this, she employs the work of gender theorists such as Judith Butler to look specifically at the gender issues present in the portrayal of Job's wife. Crucially, Low sought to avoid a dichotomous approach in which portrayals of Job's wife are cast either as positive or negative, hero or villain. By employing a 'wider lens' of gender, Low intended to illustrate the complexity of this issue, rather than narrowly restricting it (2013: 14-15). She argues that using a secondary guiding principle allows her to identify trends in interpretation and to interpret the factors influencing those trends (2013: 18). Low's approach informs my methodology. However, for my study, other methodological additions are required. It is necessary to take an even more focused approach than Low has, looking specifically at genderqueer/non-binary theory and selecting textual receptions of *Esther* that would make for an interesting and informative study. This is outlined in chapter 2.2.

### *2.1.5 - Selecting Material for a Reception-Historical Study*

As Gillingham states, 'Reception history is not doing its work if it does not begin with the text: the actual words are important, whether in Hebrew or in translated form.' (2016). As the body of *Esther* reception is so large, it is the text which is the central focus of this thesis. Using textual reception begs the question: what is the 'original' text from which one understands the process of 'reception' to begin? Historical-critical methods of enquiry have traditionally been associated with the desire to get back to the 'original' text to understand

the author's intention, and reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben.*[29] This original intended meaning is, for historical-critical scholars, an important goal of theological enquiry. 'Traditional' historical-critical commentaries are characterised by some reception historians as attempting to find, 'one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention' (John Sawyer 2004, quoted in Evans 2014: 32). Reception historians, to summarise generally (though there are scholars who disagree), do not believe that discovering the ancient author's intention, or uncovering the *Urtext,* are of primary importance. Instead, these scholars view the entire range of interpretations and receptions as having equal scholarly value. Furthermore, reception historians assess the impact of a text's reception on readers, writers, communities, audiences and artists.

This difference in the two methods of enquiry has created a false dichotomy between historical criticism and reception history that many reception history scholars are keen to illustrate is not the case. Gillingham has pointed out:

> The processing of the data… requires making informed but nevertheless subjective choices about what to include and what to exclude. Yet this 'incarnational' aspect can be found, in different degrees, in most other fields of biblical studies as well; I think here of biblical archaeology, of social scientific analyses, of ancient Near Eastern comparative studies, and even of exegetical commentaries. So the problem is not exceptional: it is just that reception history, because of its breadth and scope, sometimes highlights this limitation particularly clearly. (2015: 25-26).

[29] cf. Evans 2014: 26-52 who discusses the decades-long debates between historical-critical scholars and reception historians.

When starting with the text in a reception-historical study, one needs to decide with which text they can begin analysis. With *Esther*, the Greek versions in the Septuagint (LXX) and the Alpha Text (AT) are rather difficult to confidently date. Furthermore, one might ask if it is appropriate to arrange the ancient texts chronologically. As Breed and many others have argued, the process of mapping the 'receptions' of a biblical text requires taking a version of the text, for example, the MT, and identifying this as the 'original' from which subsequent receptions follow. This is, many argue, making a value judgment not dissimilar from those of historical critics as to the intended, final version of a text. Furthermore, linear dating of ancient versions of biblical texts is problematic for many reasons, including, but not limited to, the following:

1) Preceding versions of a text, for example, the proto-MT or proto-LXX, are seen simply as variant preceding manuscripts that came before the 'finalised' version.
2) The *terminus ad quo* and *terminus ad quem* of texts can be long and may overlap between versions.
3) One may overlook further textual developments beyond their *terminus ad quo.*
4) Arranging versions chronologically can risk making assumptions about their relationship to one another.

Furthermore, as Breed has pointed out, even when we access the texts that we might use as our 'original', such as the MT versions in the BHQ, we are reliant upon grammars and lexica, editors, publishers and so on. Because of this, one can identify 'infinitely regressive mutual dependencies' (2014: 6). He further identifies that 'the assumption among critical scholars that those fault lines, these boundaries between original text and reception, between primary and secondary, simply occur as natural givens' (2014: 32). Contra to Tov, Luz,

Hendel and others, Breed argues that the use of proto-sources in the Qumran texts, for example, illustrates that there was a multiplicity of textual forms circulating concurrently at the earliest stages for which we have textual evidence. Further to this, he posits that there is no 'original' text and that we need to learn to think without thinking of an original text (2014: 57).

There are prominent reception historians who do not concern themselves too much with this issue and instead are content to use a version of the text as their starting point for study. Peter Thatcher Lanfer uses the MT as the starting point in his reception historical study of Genesis 2-3, though he acknowledges the 'limitations of these scholarly conventions' (2012: 19). William Schniedewind and Christopher Rowland are notably unconcerned with this issue in their studies, as Breed has remarked (2014: 7-8).

Some scholars, including William Lyons (2010), criticise the use of reception history as they believe it pushes exegesis into a secondary role. For these critics, one should primarily undertake exegesis, and only once that important analysis is complete can reception history begin. Samuel Tongue rejects this method, suggesting that exegesis 'fence[s] in and protect[s] the scholar from going too far', which when one is looking at interpretation and reception of a biblical text, is more of a hindrance than a help (2015: 257). Indeed, in his study of reception history, Robert Evans illustrates that the claims for singularity and certainty made by historical-critical exegesis does not carry much, if any, weight (2014: 113). Beal, Bowley and Reeves, and others also side with the idea that there is not one 'Bible' but instead many 'bibles' and as Timothy Beal has argued in relation to the book of

Esther, texts are palimpsests (Beal 1997a: 29; cf. Breed 2014: 82). Indeed, some textual critics who do not necessarily align themselves with reception history, also advocate the idea that texts were malleable in their formation and in their circulation, for example, James Kugel posited that, 'Biblical texts are almost all a moving target… in the beginning, God created malleability'.[30] These arguments, when seen in the light of many contemporary discussions on what starting point one should use when beginning a study in reception history, appear to provide a much wider picture of the issues prompted by starting with one 'official version' of a text. Nevertheless, we might argue that it would feel counterintuitive to begin a study of the 'reception' of a text without a starting point.

To choose a version as the 'original' and then study subsequent iterations as 'receptions' does not use the underlying hermeneutic of reception history correctly, nor is it particularly necessary. One can map the progress of change in the interpretations of a text without the need to declare one version as the 'original'. In this study, the uncertain *terminus ad quem* for many of the versions of *Esther* prevents me from creating a linear text history or hierarchy. Instead, I view the textual receptions fluidly, as having an uncertain relationship with one another. It is important to be cautious of the dangers involved when making assumptions about a version of a text being the 'original' or 'final' version. Instead, we should make clear in our study the reason for choosing a version as our starting point; for example, because it is an accessible and complete text, rather than making any claims

[30] James Kugel, 'A Text is More than its Words: How the Bible Kept Meaning After it was Written', paper delivered to the Oxford Old Testament Seminar, 25 January 2016.

about its historical 'worth'. We should view exegesis much like how Tongue suggests: that it is a supplementary form of enquiry that is no more or less important than all other forms of enquiry we might employ when looking at a biblical text (2015: 258).

In this study, I start with modern reception on *Esther* and then move onto the ancient versions of *Esther*. This is because modern reception displays the 'problem' that I wish to address: that *Esther* is interpreted by some critics in a manner which reinforces or maintains the gender binary. Furthermore, modern reception is the only stage of *Esther* reception which explicitly deals with gender theory in any depth. This is because gender theory only developed as a discipline in modern times. By starting with later, modern reception of *Esther*, I can point out the smoothing out that may have occurred in modern scholarship, and then turn to the ancient versions to find out if I can take an alternative approach. The reason why I look at these two stages is because the modern critics included in this study often use the ancient versions to interpret the *Esther* text.

Selecting and arranging modern reception for a reception-historical study is rather more straightforward than for the ancient versions. Each book or article has a clearly defined date, place of composition, and author. The temporal distance is not great between each piece of reception in this category. Furthermore, critics display explicit knowledge and awareness of one another's work as frequently they cite one another. To avoid a piecemeal approach, I group material by theme, to show commonalities between critics and illustrate varied opinions on the characters. My analysis of the ancient versions starts with the Masoretic Text (MT), with the caveat that there is a complicated history preceding the MT

version that we have today and it is not necessarily the 'original'. I follow the MT version with the LXX, the AT, Josephus's paraphrase in the 'Judean Antiquities' and St Jerome's Vulgate version. The analysis is preceded by an explanation of the difficulty in determining exact dates and loci of composition, and the relationship of the texts to one another. I then assess these five versions in four chapters, looking specifically at the behaviour of two characters in relation to one another. This creates an ordered structure that allows me to compare versions clearly and concisely, avoiding possible confusion that would be created by frequently jumping between versions.

### *2.1.6 - Summary*

Today, many scholars in many different areas of biblical studies have turned to reception history to explore interpretations of texts. William Lyons and Emma England's 2015 edited volume, *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* includes several essays from such scholars detailing their approaches, motivation and many other factors. Such a wide variety of methods illustrates the flexibility of the discipline, but also the lack of concretised methods. This is both a help and a hindrance for my study. It is helpful because there is a great deal of flexibility in undertaking a reception-historical study. However, it is a hindrance, because, without clearly-defined and universally accepted methods, one's work is open to dismissal by others. This section on reception history has shown why it is useful and relevant as a means of bringing new perspectives to *Esther*, how it can be used

for a gender-focused study, the emancipatory function of this thesis and how the texts themselves have been selected and will be handled.

## *2.2 – Gender Theory: Genderqueer and Non-Binary Identity*

> …gendered conformity – even conformity to nonconformity – cannot be a requirement of nonbinary identity. It cannot be defined in a way that upholds the very concepts it seeks to unravel. Unlike womanhood or manhood, nonbinary identity is open to anyone and forced upon no one. It is radically anti-essentialist. It is opt-in only.
>
> Robin Dembroff 2018

### *2.2.1 - Introduction*

In chapter 2.1.4, I stated that it is necessary for me to use a sharpening 'lens' of gender theory with reception history to make my study sufficiently focused on non-binary/genderqueer analysis. To do this, this section will first give an overview of feminist and gender theory. I then explain in detail what the gender binary is and outline its characteristics. I discuss gender in ancient Persia to provide the background to this enquiry. Following this, I explain genderqueer/non-binary theory, before moving on to the application of gender theory in biblical studies. Finally, I show how this will be applied to my reading of *Esther*.

### *2.2.2 - Gender Theory*

Gender theory underpins what we have come to understand as the 'gender binary' in modern thought. A central tenet of the gender binary and gender normative behaviour is that sex dictates gender. Since Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex*, was published in 1949, her now-famous quote, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,'

(1989 [1949]: 267) has shaped the academic discourse on sex and gender. In the 1960s, notable theorists including Betty Friedan, Valerie Saiving and Gloria Steinem challenged the notion that biology – the physical sex that a person is born with – automatically necessitates their social personhood and identity. It was not until the 1970s that the word 'gender' – borrowing the term from the field of linguistics – entered scholarly discourse to distinguish between that which is socially-learned behaviour in men and women, and those differences which are biologically granted. (Marinucci 2010: 69; Connell 1987). It was argued by these early gender theorists that gender is a social construct that defines the norms, behaviour, and appearance that is expected of men and women. This proposal is still widely accepted today. According to this theory, gendered expectations are imposed on human beings in western societies from infancy. These expectations are understood to be a social construct because biology does not itself create social ideals for men and women. We can think of these ideals as 'stereotypes'. I use stereotypes to determine how modern scholars have interpreted characters' behaviour in *Esther*, and I compare stereotypes with characters' portrayals in the ancient versions of *Esther* to identify genderqueer/non-binary behaviour.

In the 1970s, the emergence of criticism from trans people and those with biological intersex conditions expanded the discourse on binary gender roles. The trans experience was often dismissed as mental illness (and it must be noted, it is still considered as such by

many today)[31] and trans people were seen as second-class citizens in Western societies. The trans experience illustrated that there are many people for whom their biological sex and their gender identification did not match, and pointed to the fallacy of sex-gender interdependency. Queer theorists, particularly in the 1990s, did much to challenge the dominant gender ideology. Their work built on the foundations laid by de Beauvoir and the second-wave feminist scholars of the previous decades (Bornstein 1994; Butler 1990, 1993; Feinberg 1996, 1998; Halberstam 1998; Sedgwick 2008 [1996]). These scholars challenged heteronormativity (the idea that what is considered 'normal' is the alignment of one's sex and gender and sexuality, which then matches with cultural norms ascribed to either 'male' or 'female'). Pointing to the experience of gay men, lesbian women, those who are transgender, transsexual[32] or intersex, queer theorists from many different backgrounds, genders and sexualities highlighted that the binary demarcation of gender – 'male' and 'female' – severely limited the numerous possibilities that there are for people's sexuality and identity. Furthermore, they highlighted the significant extent to which the 'gender binary', as it is now commonly referred to, permeates Western culture. It is this difference between male/female and other possibilities for gender that will be explored in my reading of *Esther*.

---

[31] On 25 May 2019, the World Health Organisation approved reclassifying gender dysphoria in its 'global manual of diagnoses' from a mental illness to a 'gender incongruence'. Called ICD-11, the WHO's 194 member states now have until 1 January 2022 to comply with this reclassification and no longer view and treat trans people as mentally ill. https://time.com/5596845/world-health-organization-transgender-identity/ (Accessed 16 March 2020).

[32] In this thesis, the term 'trans' is used as a general term for transgender, transsexual or other trans people, to avoid drawing a false dichotomy between groups. See the Stonewall glossary for reference: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms#t (accessed 10 April 2020).

It is important to note that the sex/gender distinction and the emergence of scholarship in this field are not necessarily as holistic and linear as has been outlined above. Indeed, there is debate amongst scholars as to which academics were most influential in the 1990s. There is also debate between some feminist theorists and some lesbian and gay theorists concerning the influence of socialisation. Though both groups believe that men/women or hetero-/homosexual people deserve equality, many lesbian and gay theorists hold that socialisation is not a factor in determining sexuality, which some feminist theorists do not agree with (Marinucci 2010: 90). However, many third-wave feminists, queer scholars and postmodern feminists agree that society and culture dictate that there is 'normal' and 'deviant' sex and sexual practice, which is an attempt to exert control (Marinucci 2010: 97).

### *2.2.3 - What is the Gender Binary?*

In order to understand genderqueer/non-binary experience and characteristics, it is useful to first understand the gender binary, as it is this structure that genderqueer/non-binary people actively reject. The gender binary imbues our actions, thoughts, self-expression and even the very structure of our lives. At its core, the gender binary is the split of male and female behaviour, characteristics, aesthetics and expectations into two groups. One's sex dictates membership of either group. In this thesis, the distinction between sex and gender will be aligned with that of the biblical scholar Ken Stone (2008: 16) who argues that society and culture have organised and given meaning to differences of sex. 'Gender' is this

organisation and meaning, as it is the imposition of a human-made social category on the sexed body.

One of the most influential twentieth-century scholars on gender theory who significantly challenged the gender binary and cisnormativity is Judith Butler. Her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) are still, over thirty years later, frequently seen as the foundation stones for much of twenty-first century gender theory. Indeed, many queer readings of biblical texts use Butler's work (Hornsby and Stone 2011; Low 2013; Runions 2003; Stone 2008). Butler has herself published in the area of biblical hermeneutics and reception history, as a former student of Gadamer. She wrote an afterword to the 2006 edited volume *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (Amour and St. Ville eds.) where she discusses her work in relation to reception history and religion. Regarding the Bible, Butler contends, 'I understood that the text was precisely "living" to the extent that it remained interpretable, and that something of the text was extended and augmented with every interpretation.' (2006: 278). This thesis will engage with the text of *Esther* to extend and augment interpretation of the book, by looking at modern interpretations and the ancient versions.

Key to Butler's work is the idea of gender performativity. Building on the work of Michel Foucault, Butler identified that gender is not an ontologically-grounded truth, but rather we are all *doing* gender, all the time. Our speech, our behaviour, our participation with society and culture, the jobs we do, the partners we have; all are examples of us performing our gender. 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a

highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being,' she stated (1999 [1990]: 43-44). She is keen to point out that gender performativity is not just a bodily act but is also a speech act (2006: 286). Butler argued that we play an active role in the maintenance of the hegemonic binary, that is, the coalescence of gender, sex and sexuality, though this binary imposes strict limits upon us. That gender needs to be performed continually indicates its fragility, as it does not exist in reality. The gender binary is the repeated performance of binary gender norms. It stands to reason that genderqueer/non-binary behaviour will not involve performing normative behaviour, but rather non-normative behaviour will be performed. My study of *Esther* identifies where we might recognise non-normative behaviour in this text.

Notably, Butler argued that each performance is not identical to the last, and consequently varying performances of gender will be made. These differences allow us to challenge the hegemonic binary, or 'compulsory heterosexuality' as Butler termed it, as the dissimilar repetitions expose the artifice of gender. Gender performativity and the endless interpretability of texts are similar concepts. Quoting Butler's theory of gender performativity but substituting the word 'gender' for 'Bible', Ken Stone writes:

> "the substantive effect of Bible is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of Bible performance… Bible is always a doing… There is no Bible identity behind the expressions of Bible; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (2008: 19).

Just as we are all 'doing' gender, when we approach biblical texts, we are 'doing' interpretation, which itself constitutes 'Bible'. This argument is akin to the reception

history theory discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Furthermore, I would argue that when we are 'doing' interpretation of the Bible, our reading may also be 'doing' gender by how we interpret gender roles in the text. Thus, my reading of the ancient versions of *Esther* through a genderqueer/non-binary lens will be 'doing' interpretation with respect to gender, to see if these texts have the capacity to be read in a genderqueer/non-binary way.

Butler has pointed out that there is no subverting a norm without inhabiting that norm (2006: 285). Extending this argument further, one can argue that gender subversion inhabits the norms it subverts, that is, gender subversion inhabits the gender binary. Consequently, subversion is not fit for purpose in this context. As discussed in the introduction, in this study, gender subversion is not a useful means of reading *Esther* because it is still situated within the gender binary.

### *2.2.4 - Characteristics of the Gender Binary*

Foss et al. have pointed out that a 'complicating factor in discussions about gender is that each perspective on gender contains assumptions about human life and attempts to prescribe how gendered life *should* be lived.' (2013: 4). Consequently, it has social, political and moral ramifications. Gender is ambiguous, depending on who is determining what 'gender' means.

As mentioned in the previous section, when the gender binary and cisnormativity is discussed, it is assumed that gender is determined by sex. According to Foss et al., this perspective assumes that femaleness and maleness are biologically-driven constants which remain unchanged across time periods, geographies, cultures and religions (2013: 6-7). It is biology that determines behaviour and characteristics. Women are seen as nurturers and carers, driven by their biological role as child-bearers. As Griffin argues, features such as, 'having long hair, wearing various forms of clothing that restrict movement such as tight skirts and dresses, long, figure-covering garments, being submissive, nurturant, softly-spoken and docile, or enacting a subservient role to men' are characteristics of what is classed as 'feminine' (2017). Men are physically strong, dominant and competitive, driven by their hormones and physiology (Foss et al 2013: 7).[33] As Kate Moore LeFranc states:

> Binary gender, like heteronormativity, is 'decent', culturally acceptable, and anything which pushes back against these narratives of what bodies are supposed to do and supposed to look like, and whose bodies are allowed to be in proximity to whose – everything else is indecent, unacceptable, and it might as well be sexual assault. (2018: 245)

To understand how gender has been conceived in modern reception with respect to the gender binary, and to identify what cannot be read as genderqueer/non-binary behaviour in the ancient versions of *Esther*, I need a framework to refer to. Using a framework that outlines stereotypical behaviour for the genders is useful, as with it I can highlight characters who do not appear to have the capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading.

---

[33] See also the entry for 'Stereotype' in the Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies (Griffin 2017).

This allows me to draw a strong contrast between non-binary/genderqueer and binary gendered characters. Furthermore, characters' progression from binary to non-binary depiction can be mapped by referencing the framework. When analysing modern scholars' critiques of *Esther*, comparing gender stereotypes from a framework enables me to clearly identify if critics have interpreted *Esther* cisnormatively, using a frame of reference. The framework I have selected – Bem's Sex Role Inventory – meets these requirements, despite its limitations.

Sandra Bem formulated her Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) in the early 1970s. She classified behaviour and desires according to whether they were male, female or neutral. These were determined by surveying 100 college students about the desirability of 400 behaviours and characteristics. The results of the survey ascertained which were identified as masculine and feminine ideals, and which were neutral. This was pared down to twenty desired characteristics for males, twenty for females, and twenty neutral characteristics. These roles apply to those who have 'internalised society's sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women' (Bem 1974: 155). Using the BSRI, Bem surveyed over 700 Stamford psychology students and nearly 200 junior college students, asking them to rate each of these characteristics according to how they described themselves. Participants were then awarded a Masculinity score, a Femininity score and an Androgyny score (1974: 158). Her research showed that individuals identified themselves in a number of ways, with men tending more towards androgynous identification than women. Younger men surveyed from junior college tended to identify as androgynous rather than masculine,

unlike university men, and young women tended to identify as feminine or androgynous more than university women. According to the BSRI, these sex roles are as follows:

| **Masculine Items** | **Feminine Items** | **Neutral Items** |
|---|---|---|
| Acts as a leader | Affectionate | Adaptable |
| Aggressive | Cheerful | Conceited |
| Ambitious | Childlike | Conscientious |
| Analytical | Compassionate | Conventional |
| Assertive | Does not use harsh language | Friendly |
| Athletic | Eager to soothe hurt feelings | Happy |
| Competitive | Feminine | Helpful |
| Defends own beliefs | Flatterable | Inefficient |
| Dominant | Gentle | Jealous |
| Forceful | Gullible | Likeable |
| Has leadership abilities | Loves children | Moody |
| Independent | Loyal | Reliable |
| Individualistic | Sensitive to the needs of others | Secretive |
| Makes decisions easily | Shy | Sincere |
| Masculine | Soft spoken | Solemn |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Self-reliant | Sympathetic | Tactful |
| Self-sufficient | Tender | Theatrical |
| Strong personality | Understanding | Truthful |
| Willing to take a stand | Warm | Unpredictable |
| Willing to take risks | Yielding | Unsystematic |

Bem's research was hugely impactful on gender theory in the late twentieth century. Today, her research method is applied to assess gender identification in the psychological and medical fields.[34] Although it was established almost fifty years ago, the BSRI 'remains the most common measure of gender role in health-related research and is one metric to consider when evaluating gender.' (Turkstra et al. 2020). Similar studies have been undertaken in the twenty-first century, with similar results to Bem's; for example, Seem & Clark 2006. However, Bem's study is not universally accepted.[35] It has been shown in some studies that the BSRI has more validity in some geographical regions than others, and has a different impact based on the race of those surveyed (Holt and Ellis 1998; Konrad and Harris 2002).

---

[34] See, for example, Dolliver, M. (2019). 'The Impact of Gender Identity on Female Offending: A Quantitative Assessment using the BSRI', *Women & Criminal Justice, 29*(2).

[35] For a summary of the arguments against Bem's theory, see Choi, N., Fuqua D. R., & Newman J. L. (2008). 'The Bem Sex-Role Inventory: Continuing Theoretical Problems', *Educational and Psychological Measurement 68*. 881-900.

Given this criticism of the BSRI, it is important that I state that by using it, I do not attempt to make any claims about gender stereotypes in *Esther*'s world, or view the BSRI as the singular authority on gender roles in modern society. Rather, I use the BSRI to identify potential similarities between the characters in *Esther* who do not appear to behave in a non-binary manner, and gender stereotypes as highlighted by Bem, with the caveat that the BSRI outlines gendered behaviour in white, Western people in higher education. Furthermore, non-binary behaviour as defined by Dembroff, Matsuno and Budge, and others, does not highlight specific behavioural characteristics that are stereotypical and thus are rejected. Additionally, the characters in *Esther* do not self-identify as non-binary or gendered. Therefore, Bem's study is useful, to provide points of contrast between non-binary and binary behaviour. How I will use these characteristics in my reading of *Esther* will be discussed in detail in section 2.2.7.

### *2.2.5 - Gender in Ancient Persia*

Before I turn to the ancient versions, it is useful to understand gender in *Esther*'s world, to contextualise the text and gain insight into how the gender roles in *Esther* may relate to the story's setting. I do not assume that what we know about Persia in the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian periods, and the Jewish community at Elephantine in the Achaemenid period, definitely forms the background of the *Esther* tale. However, as Esther

is set in Persia, there may be some correlation between what we know about gender in this setting and *Esther*'s world.

Problematically, constructing sex and gender roles in the ancient world, particularly that of the Bible, is influenced by the predominantly androcentric biblical literature, written by and about men. As Francesca Stavrakopoulou has pointed out, in recent decades there has been a widespread shift in biblical scholarship and ancient history incorporating feminist, postcolonial, social-scientific and queer criticism that has challenged historical reliability of the biblical portrayal of the past (2017: 496). Furthermore, Susan Niditch has stated, 'we must always remember that biblical law is material edited, preserved, codified, and presented in literature, and not necessarily a reflection of actual lives.' (1998: 29). However, we can look to extra-biblical texts and archaeology to provide an insight into men and women's lives in ancient Persia in the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian periods.

Given that we cannot accurately determine the time or the place of composition, it is difficult to posit the 'actual' roles of men and women in *Esther*. Using the rough *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* of the text, and a possible locus of composition, we can outline some characteristics of men and women that may have been applicable in the society and culture that this text was composed in. The Hebrew version of *Esther* is thought to have been composed between the fifth and first centuries BCE. As Crawford points out, the

author of the Hebrew *Esther* shows 'vague familiarity with the geography of Susa,' (1999: 859) therefore we can posit that Persia is this text's locus of composition.[36]

Madreiter and Schnegg have identified from Classical sources[37] and from Persian documents and art that in Achaemenid Persia, there is a strict separation of the sexes and hierarchy within the sexes. Within the royal court, there was a clear public/private separation as well as a male/female separation (Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 122). Achaemenid Persian kings were polygamous and would only take Persian women as their wives (Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 138). The locus of 'hegemonic manliness' and ultimate power is the king, with other men subordinate to the king (Madreiter and Schnegg 2020). Men of noble birth could work for the king in advisory roles, but there was no comparable role to the king for men (Madreiter and Schnegg 2020). Men were expected to be loyal to the king and were characterised by the Old Persian word 'bandaka' (Madreiter and Schnegg 2020). Classical sources indicate that skill with arms was a 'mark of manliness', and Persian education seems focused on instructing Persian boys how to fight (Dandamayev 2011). Instruction in the worship of the gods, government, temperance, and courage for Persian boys of the noble classes began at age fourteen (Dandamayev 2011). We know little about ordinary men's lives.

[36] See chapter 5.1 for a detailed discussion on this.
[37] Notably, Classical sources tend to be critical of many aspects of the Persian nobility and royal court. See Madreiter and Schnegg, 2020.

Though women could and did hold employment in roles equal to men in Achaemenid Persia, according to the Persepolis Tablets women's names and roles were defined in relation to their male counterparts, rather than their personal names. However, royal women could own property and land, and manage workforces (Llewellyn-Jones 2013: 137). Where women did act independently, their names were recorded in the Persepolis Tablets and in their personal seals. These women could 'obtain social prestige by imitating men' (Madreiter and Scnegg 2020; cf. Brosius 2010). From the Parthian period, we know very little about the status of women because there are few surviving documents from that period, but based on Achaemenid and Seleucid practices, it is likely that royal women could also own property (Brosius 2010). There is evidence from the Sasanian Period that women played an active role in public life (Brosius 2010). Sasanian kings were polygamous, and there are several examples of them marrying non-Persian women (Brosius 2010).

To understand gender dynamics for Jews in the Achaemenid period, one might look at biblical texts that are thought to be contemporaneous with *Esther*, to see how they have envisioned gender. *Esther* is often compared with the Books of Ezra-Nehemiah in this way. As mentioned by many critics, women are not depicted very often or particularly positively in Ezra-Nehemiah (Eskenazi 1992a: 25-26; García Bachmann 2020: 221): for example, women are silent in Ezra-Nehemiah (García Bachmann 2020: 221) and a dichotomy has been drawn between 'holy seed' and 'foreign wives' in Ezra 7-10[38] (Frymer-Kensky 2002:

[38] Ethnicity, identity and intermarriage are key concerns of Ezra-Nehemiah, as life in Judah under Persian rule is negotiated. See Eskenazi 1992b: 117 for a succinct summary.

290). However, occasionally there are brief examples of female independence or empowerment – for example 'the female scribe' in Ezra 2:55 and the prophetess Noadiah in Neh 6:14 – which Eskenazi notes have often been overlooked by scholars (1992a: 36). There is also evidence in Ezra-Nehemiah that women were included in the religious community (Ezra 10:1; Neh 8:3, 12:43).

It is also interesting to consider extra-biblical evidence drawn from the Elephantine Papyri (Eskenazi 1992b: 118).[39] This collection of Aramaic legal documents from the fifth century BCE details life in the Jewish diaspora in the Jewish community on the island of Elephantine in Egypt. As Tamber-Rosenau notes, these documents are notable because the names of women are routinely given, something not common in the biblical texts of this period (Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 493). Three female characters are detailed in this material, Mipṭaḥyah, Tamut and Yehoyshima, and their stories are, as Azzoni notes, 'among the most striking documents about women in the ancient world.' (2012: 4).

Evidence from the Elephantine documents also indicates that non-royal women could own property in the Persian empire. The wealthy Jewish woman Mipṭaḥyah and the Egyptian slave Tamut both owned property, either independently or jointly with their husbands (Azzoni 2012: 4-7). Women could also contribute to the upkeep of the temple at

[39] I do not propose that the Elephantine documents necessarily indicate what life was like for all diaspora Jews in the Achaemenid period, or life in Judah in this period. However, this material does help us to understand that it is possible that women had significant rights and roles in Jewish diaspora communities in this period.

Elephantine and donate money in their own name to religious causes (Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 502). TAD A4.7 and A.4.8 detail that women were involved in the mourning rituals for the ruined temple, and daily religious observance by the Jewish community at Elephantine (Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 503).

It appears that women were entitled to their own inheritance. Mipṭaḥyah's inheritance is considerable, and as Azzoni notes, it was documented that should her second husband Esḥor die before they were to have children, she would inherit all his assets. This contrasts with Esḥor's inheritance, which does not include all of Mipṭaḥyah's worldly assets (Azzoni 2012: 5). Mipṭaḥyah also appeared to have a great deal of authority. As Tamber-Rosenau notes, she owned slaves which were branded in her name, not any of her husbands' (2016: 504; TAD B2.11). Tamut, an Egyptian slave, is documented as able to divorce her husband, a Judean man, without needing grounds to do so (TAD B3.3: 7-10) (Azzoni 2012: 7; Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 505). On her husband's death, Tamut would be entitled to receive his inheritance (Azzoni 2012: 8; TAD 3.3: 10-13). Tamut's daughter, Yehoyshima, has a high dowry, higher than that of Mipṭaḥyah. She also received immovable property twice from her father in 404 and 402 BCE (Azzoni 2012: 10; TAD B.3.10, 3.11). Yehoyshima and her husband's marriage contract stipulates that he would not inherit her assets unless he did not remarry, which indicates that she had a great deal of authority in the marriage contract (TAD B3.8; Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 507).

Women appear to have played a significant role as representatives of their community. Tamber-Rosenau proposes that the Elephantine documents suggest that there were

women ambassadors to the island. Pointing to the arrest of six women with five men in Thebes (TAD A4.4; Tamber-Rosenau 2016: 500), she highlights that it is not unlikely that the six women were a significant part of the delegation. To further her argument, she points to the existence of women messengers in the ancient Near East, including in biblical texts (2 Sam 17.17) and Neo-Assyrian epistolary finds (2016: 500-501).

Though it is difficult to definitively say if this was the case in Susa, where *Esther* is set, the Elephantine documents and the Persian evidence may suggest that Jewish and Persian women could or did have independent wealth, property and divorce rights and that they were included in many aspects of community life in the Achaemenid period. This may indicate that women in *Esther*'s world similarly had independence and authority, and give us an idea of why the three female characters in *Esther* appear to display independent and authoritative traits, such as refusing to obey one's husband (1:12), possessing wealth (8:1), giving advice unbidden (5:14; 6:13).

### *2.2.6 - What Does it Mean to be Genderqueer/Non-Binary?*

The advent of the trans and intersex theory that became prominent in the 1990s and continues today has done much to widen and make inclusive the academic and popular discourse on gender and sex differences. However, trans and intersex theory can still be quite limiting, as some scholars accept the difference between one's sex and one's gender, but will still assign sex and gender to the binary categories of 'male' or 'female' (Matsuno

and Budge 2017: 116). This presupposes that 'male' and 'female' are the only possible gender categories that one can hold. There are, as will now be discussed, people who entirely reject this male/female division, who identify as 'non-binary' or 'genderqueer.'

Today, the neologisms 'cisgender' (a person for whom their sex and gender are aligned) and 'cissexual' (a person for whom their sex, gender and sexuality are aligned) are often used as identity-markers. These identity terms enable people who are not LGBT to state what their sex or gender is and avoid suggesting a normal/abject dichotomy. Furthermore, there are many new identity terms that describe queer identities. As yet, these newer identification terms, including 'genderqueer' and 'non-binary', are not entirely commonplace. Genderqueer/non-binary experience can be generally termed as 'queer', but it also includes specificities that do not apply to all who identify as 'queer'. For example, cisgender people may describe themselves as queer, but they would not describe themselves as non-binary or genderqueer.

The terms 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' have become popularised in the very recent past, particularly among 'Millennials' (those born between 1980 and the mid-1990s), and young people from 'Generation Z', (born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s). Other terms used by people who identify as non-binary/genderqueer include 'genderfuck', 'gender neutral', 'pangender' and 'agender', among others. The two identity terms 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' are often used interchangeably, hence why they are included together in this study. As these identity categories are still in their infancy, popular media in the UK targeted at young people and adults frequently features articles and comment pieces that

explain what these terms mean, and how to be mindful of one's behaviour and speech when interacting with non-binary/genderqueer adults or children.[40] There are very few studies of the Bible that use genderqueer/non-binary identity or experience as a lens through which to read the text.[41]

The definitions of non-binary and genderqueer are not yet fixed and instead can and are used flexibly in popular discourse. For example, the term 'gender fluid' for some people can mean a person who moves between the gender categories of male and female, but to others, it is synonymous with the term 'non-binary'. Perhaps as a result, there is little scholarship on non-binary/genderqueer individuals and their identity (Richards et al. 2016: 98). This highlights how new these terms are and how flexibly-used they are. Therefore, I must define what it is I mean by genderqueer/non-binary in this study, and how I will use genderqueer/non-binary identity to read *Esther*.

Matsuno and Budge have categorised non-binary people as follows:

> Non-binary is a term that defines several gender identity groups, including (but not limited to): (a) an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities, (b) an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times, or (c) an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity. (2017: 116-117).

---

[40] See, for example, the 15 February 2018 article in Teen Vogue, '9 Things People Get Wrong About Being Non-Binary', https://www.teenvogue.com/story/9-things-people-get-wrong-about-being-non-binary (accessed 29 March 2018) and the recent *Washington Post* article, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2020/07/28/follow-their-lead-other-ways-parents-can-support-their-nonbinary-children/ (accessed 28 August 2020).
[41] See Tabb Stewart 2017: 308. Two notable examples are Henderson-Merrygold 2020 and Musa 2020.

However, this definition is not universally accepted. Robin Dembroff contends that the genderqueer/non-binary experience centres around a rejection of the gender binary, and occurs at an internal and external level, as well as at a political level (2019: 15). Per their[42] position, definition (b) would not apply.

Dembroff argues that a person may decide to dress and style oneself as androgynous, but they must also behave in a manner that does not ascribe to either gender stereotype. Furthermore, they must also exhibit personal or existential resistance to the dominant gender ideology. This means that they express their resistance in their ideological, political or social behaviour, and/or they express their resistance in their desire to be genderqueer (2019: 15-17). This marks genderqueer/non-binary behaviour as dissimilar from gender subversion, because subversion does not involve resistance. As Butler posited, the term subversion 'communicates something of the mire from which political agency emerges, whereas resistance 'tends to convey the purity and oppositional character of a stance.' (2006: 285). Thus, gender subversion and genderqueerness have very different essences. As I will show in chapter four, academic studies have already been undertaken in feminist or gender-focused criticism which problematised the gender roles in the text and highlighted areas of gender subversion or role reversals (Adelman 2014; Beal 1997a; Brenner-Idan 1995, 1999; Klein 2003; LaCocque 1990; Laniak 1998). However, interpretations that posit gender subversion in *Esther* continue to engage with the gender

[42] Dembroff uses the personal pronouns they/them.

binary,[43] whereas genderqueerness does not; and gender subversion is not an expression of resistance, but genderqueerness is.

Dembroff further states that the 'dominant gender ideology' is determined by a tripartite structure (2019: 19):

> The genital assumption: Someone's gender is determined by their natal external genitalia.
>
> The binary assumption: The only possible genders are the binary, discrete, exclusive, and exhaustive kinds of men and women.
>
> The social assumption: Someone's gender determines what their hierarchical social role ought to be. More specifically: males ought to have masculine roles, females ought to have feminine roles, and feminine roles are inferior to masculine roles.

Western, dominant, gender ideology is made up of the interconnectedness of the genital assumption, the binary assumption and the social assumption. One's genitals determine one's binary and social roles. A genderqueer/non-binary person does not reject the fact that they have binary genitals, but they reject the assumption that they must belong to one of two kinds: man or woman.

To identify binary gender characteristics, the BSRI, discussed above in chapter 2.2.4, is incredibly useful. The BSRI's list of male, female and neutral behavioural traits and desires serve as a guide with which we can understand characteristics which are ascribed to each

[43] cf. Musa 2020: 105.

gender. A genderqueer/non-binary person would reject the idea that they would or should possess characteristics dictated by one of two gender roles, and instead would exhibit characteristics from both sides of the binary, and neutral ones.

But how does one resist the dominant gender ideology and become genderqueer/non-binary? Dembroff has identified as forms of resistance: gender-neutral pronouns; gender non-conforming aesthetics; gender categorisation assertions; queering personal relationships; eschewing sexuality binaries; and space switching. Particularly useful for reading *Esther* are queering personal relationships, whereby one exhibits gender fluidity in their relationships with others such as performing both male, female and neutral roles, and space switching, illustrating fluidity between male and female spaces (2019: 22-23). This is because of the dialogical structure of *Esther* and the interplay between male and female characters.

The issues faced by people who identify as non-binary/genderqueer can be numerous, many of which pertain directly to an individual's rejection of the male/female binary (Losty and O'Connor 2018). For example, the relatively small number of gender-neutral bathrooms in public spaces often presents a problem for non-binary/genderqueer individuals, who must 'pick' a gender to temporarily conform to and then potentially face aggression from others for doing so.[44] Personal pronouns used by a non-

[44] For a personal account of this example, see Dembroff 2018.

binary/genderqueer individual can either be gendered - he/him or she/her - which may or may not match their biological sex, or gender-neutral: zie/hir or they/them. Similarly, the title one may wish to use if Mr or Miss/Ms does not feel appropriate to them may be the gender-neutral Mx. For many individuals, there is difficulty in gaining others' acceptance and encouraging others to use these pronouns and titles. For some genderqueer/non-binary people, their refusal of the male/female categories caused them to experience upset, tension and aggression (Losty and O'Connor 2018: 49-53).

### *2.2.7 - Queer Theory and Biblical Interpretation*

The intersection between reception history, outlined in chapter 2.1 and gender theory, as detailed above, is not as remote as one might assume. Since the 1970s, there has been an ever-growing and rich body of biblical scholarship which has used feminist theory or gender theory as a guiding principle. This built on the work of female scholars in the early twentieth century and earlier who undertook women-focused interpretations of biblical texts.[45]

That women and men have been granted very different levels of prominence in biblical literature, whereby men ostensibly occupy a great deal more of the texts than women do, provoked a great deal of exploration. The clear majority of biblical reception in the

[45] See Rosemary Radford Reuther's 2006 article, 'The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology' for a detailed history on this topic.

twentieth century and earlier was male-dominated, and thus biblical scholarship was heavily influenced by the male perspective, which potentially silenced female voices (Gilfillan Upton 2006: 99). Although feminist biblical criticism was heralded in the 1970s, from this decade on, female biblical scholars had to battle for space and recognition within the academy to establish feminist criticism as an acceptable form of hermeneutical enquiry. In feminist biblical criticism, questions have been investigated including what it means to be a woman in biblical texts and if we can detect latent or hidden female voices behind the dominant male ones in the texts. Many critics have also highlighted flagrant androcentrism and misogyny in biblical texts and in their reception. Crucially, feminist biblical criticism is not monolithic; scholars approaches and goals were and are varied. As Mary Ann Tolbert argued, definitions of feminism were as varied as the feminist scholars themselves, so it was not a worthwhile endeavour to attempt to classify feminist tradition (Gilfillan Upton 2006: 99-100).

Some critics believe that queer biblical criticism emerged from the feminist tradition. As Joseph A. Marchal argues, queer criticism is a specific kind of feminist criticism (2014: 261). Others, including Greenough (2020: 17), think it emerged alongside second-wave feminism and the lesbian and gay liberation movements. Both agree that feminist and liberation theology has been very influential on queer theology. Looking to many influential feminist thinkers including Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Tessa de Lauretis, queer theory embraced feminist theorists' work that argued for the destabilisation of gender norms, and the importance of intersectionality. The focus on the destabilisation of gender norms makes queer theology distinct from LGBT theology. As Marcella Althaus-Reid

and Lisa Isherwood argue, 'Queer Theology is a political and sexual queering of theology which goes beyond the gender paradigm of thinking of the early years of feminist theology but also to transcend the fixed assumptions of Lesbian and Gay Theology.' (2007: 305). Musa notes:

> Queer theory emphasizes the vulnerability of a binary gender system and its associated constructed binaries of sex and sexuality, highlighting instances of gender crossing or gender blurring. A queer approach thus challenges commonplace understandings of constructed identity categories, rupturing the normalcy of heteronormative discourses. (2020: 103).

Overall, queer critiques of the Bible have taken two forms: (1) looking for hints or themes of queerness in the biblical text itself, or (2) reading the text to see how it can speak to a reader who identifies as LGBTQIA+,[46] or who is viewing the text through that lens. Both forms tend to be liberative. As Althaus-Reed and Isherwood state: 'Queer Theology is a form of autobiography because it implies an engagement and a disclosure of experiences which have traditionally been silenced in theology.' (2007: 308). These two forms of analysis are not mutually exclusive, and although this thesis tends to follow the second mode of textual criticism, the first method is also engaged where possible. Deryn Guest deftly approaches the portrayal of Jael (2011), the genderless Mount Tehom, and of Jehu (2016) in this way. Guest identifies the text's capacity for queer reading but also recognises elements in the text which lend themselves to queer interpretation, or offer glimpses of

[46] This acronym is, in itself, frequently in a process of progression and flux as new or hitherto-overlooked groups come to be identified as occupying the same 'queer' space.

queer themes. Queer criticism of the Bible has been influential on this thesis's approach to reading *Esther* in a genderqueer/non-binary way.

In his 2001 edited volume, *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, Ken Stone introduced a queer focus as an 'interpretative category' (2001: 13), thus framing the essays in his volume as explicitly concerned with queer issues when approaching biblical texts. Since the publication of Stone's work in 2001, several scholars have engaged in the growing body of queer biblical scholarship, and today it is more comfortably situated as an accepted field of biblical inquiry. However, it is still by no means a dominant hermeneutic in scholarly circles. In a later piece, Stone has identified a similarity between Judith Butler's conception of the body and its culturally-imposed gender, and our conception of 'Bible'. He points out that a queer approach to biblical texts can allow us to gauge the performative way that we interact with the text. He states that this 'raises critical questions about the extent to which a single, stable, 'Bible' preexists [sic] our interactions with diverse manuscripts, texts, translations, hermeneutical assumptions, scholarly and other collective traditions, strategies (implicit or explicit) for reading, contexts for teaching, or institutions of publishing.' (2011: x). This implies that there is no ordered, cisnormative 'Bible' that exists before biblical scholars turn their interpretive eyes to a text. Rather, 'Bible' has infinite possibilities for meaning. As discussed in the previous section (2.1) this view aligns closely with that of Brennan Breed's idea of 'virtual' and 'actual' fields.[47] Breed argues for the infinite number of possibilities of textual interpretation, with all being equally valid to one

[47] Please see chapter 2.1 for a full discussion of Breed's thesis.

another. Therefore, this thesis allows a genderqueer/non-binary reading of the text to be accepted as a 'real' interpretation of the Bible.

Reception history lends itself well to pairing with queer criticism of the Hebrew Bible, as pointed out by Stone (2001: 16; 2013: 163-164) and Greenough (2020: 107-112). As reception history is primarily concerned with the impact of a biblical text and that which has historically shaped this impact, 'queer criticism can illustrate some of the unexpectedly queer ways in which biblical texts have been read in the past, juxtaposing traditional heteronormative readings with queer possibilities.' (Stone 2013: 164). This is how I approach this study. First, I highlight the varied interpretations of gender in the body of *Esther* reception that precedes modern scholarship. I then analyse the impact of modern twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on *Esther*, to highlight cisnormative approaches that have dominated the interpretation of this text. The impact of these cisnormative views is then juxtaposed with non-binary/genderqueer reading of the five ancient versions of *Esther*. This juxtaposition highlights the similarity or the contrast between my reading and those of modern critics. Furthermore, it identifies which, if any, of the ancient texts have been the most influential on the normative approach to *Esther* in twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship.

Deryn Guest's 2016 work, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics*, outlines four methods for undertaking queer reception criticism. These methods are: 1) reading with hetero-suspicion (2016: 111-156); 2) rupturing the gender binaries (2016: 157-194); 3) reclamation of the biblical text (2016: 195-230); 4) re-engagement with the texts

themselves and their previous interpretations (2016: 231-270). Guest uses the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion but instead narrows the focus to hetero-suspicion, to make it sufficiently focused for lesbian biblical interpretation. In Guest's study, she applies the hermeneutic of hetero-suspicion to identify problematic biblical texts and their interpretations where female homoeroticism is muted and obscured, or where female characters experience suppression under the imposition of misogynistic or cisnormative themes. My study applies a similar hermeneutic: that of cis-suspicion. This is employed to identify where interpretations of *Esther* that adhere to the gender binary, or where I can find the gender binary in my reading of the ancient versions. Guest's second method is rupturing gender binaries. To avoid structural essentialism which homogenises the experiences of women and of lesbians, and to undermine 'othering' in the biblical texts, Guest advocates a 'strategic constructionalism' that makes it permanently unclear what 'lesbian' means (2016: 159). This also avoids creating a false dichotomy between homo/heterosexual. My study is similarly focused on disrupting the gender binary to avoid 'othering', and to identify where the ancient versions have the capacity for non-binary reading. Guest's third method, reclaiming the biblical texts, seeks to approach the texts in a manner that challenges the 'dominant history of interpretation that has taken place within a heterocentric frame of reference' (2016: 209). My thesis does this by identifying the binary interpretations of *Esther* in modern reception, and then reading the ancient versions in a genderqueer/non-binary way. As Guest argues, 'queer readers bring to the surface features that have not been conventionally explored' (2016: 216). Guest's final method is 'committed to liberative engagement, committed to making a difference' (2016: 237). To Guest, queer reception criticism should challenge the normative interpretations of the

academy (2016: 242). My genderqueer/non-binary reading of *Esther* provides an interpretation of this text that both challenges the binary interpretations of this text in its reception history, and liberates some characters in the text from the constraints of the gender binary.

### *2.2.8 - Esther and Non-Binary/Genderqueer Interpretation*

The Book of Esther has been thought of as a 'strange' book, with role reversal (Lacocque 1990: 67), gender play, cross-dressing, farce and campness (West 2006: 279) noted by scholars. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the depiction of gender in *Esther* is considered unusual. However, that is not the text's only unusual feature. The book does not once mention God[48] or Jewish religious practice; for example, dietary considerations, specific prayers or concern for the Temple. This strangeness is aided by the lack of specifics given in the text, because, as mentioned in the previous section, the text of *Esther* is replete with gaps and silences, which encourage the reader to supply information to make the text 'work' (Wetter 2015: 260). As Vialle argues, 'Le livre d'Esther tm est ainsi un récit ouvert à une pluralité d'interprétations, ce qui, en définitive donne beaucoup de pouvoir au lecteur à qui il revient d'interpréter le récit et d'y comprendre,' (2012 : 577). This is visible in the Greek receptions of *Esther*, the writers of which appear to fill the gaps in the text.[49] The

[48] There is debate amongst scholars about whether God is implicitly referred to in the text or not. Many argue that the phrase מי יודע (4:14) is a veiled allusion to God (Moore 1971: 52, Paton 1908: 224-225).
[49] See Part Two of this thesis which highlights this in detail.

gaps and silences, coupled with the unusual themes in the text, mean that this book has the potential to lend itself to a non-binary/genderqueer interpretation.

If we use Dembroff's model of the characteristics of genderqueer people, Guest's queer hermeneutic, and Bem's Sex Role Inventory to understand binary gender behaviour, we can formulate a model of how we can read genderqueerness in *Esther*. The central feature of the non-binary/genderqueer experience, according to Dembroff, is the rejection of the idea that 'male' and 'female' are discrete groups, and one must belong to one group only. Rejecting the binary nature of male and female behaviour, dress, expression and characteristics, allows one to participate in both genders' expected norms. Furthermore, Dembroff points out that genderqueerness/non-binary experience cannot be defined by binary gender categories. Consequently, we must be careful to avoid structuralist identification of non-binary behaviour that depends entirely on the gender binary for meaning. However, non-binary and genderqueer experience and identity do not exist in a vacuum; in Western society, they co-exist with binary gender and cisnormativity. Therefore, it is extremely challenging to identify non-binary/genderqueer characteristics without referencing the gender binary.

We can use as our starting point Dembroff's assertion that genderqueer people are a 'critical gender kind', and they resist the dominant gender ideology (2019: 15-16). This means that they reject the genital assumption, the binary assumption or the social assumption, discussed above in chapter 2.2.6. Identifying modes of resistance, particularly space-switching and queering personal relationships in *Esther* will enable us to identify if

we can read the various characters' behaviour as non-binary/genderqueer. Using Guest's four modes of reading biblical texts queerly, I read with cis-suspicion, look for the rupturing of gender binaries, re-engage with previous interpretations and thus reclaim the text.

If we cannot read the various characters' behaviour as non-binary/genderqueer, we will assess if they can instead be read as conforming to binary gender roles. To identify binary behaviour, we must first familiarise ourselves with the descriptions in chapter 2.2.4 above that identifies the desired traits of males and females. This exercise takes place first on a scene-by-scene basis, and second, it is expanded to assess a character's behaviour and portrayal throughout a text. I will analyse whether characters exhibit the same behavioural traits throughout a text, or if their gender portrayal evolves. I will make a distinction in my analysis between the potential for genderqueer/non-binary behaviour, characters who adhere to the gender binary, and characters that are satirised or criticised for not performing desirable gender norms. By bringing a new form of interpretation to read *Esther*, genderqueer/non-binary reading, I offer the possibility of interpretation that is not situated within the confines of the gender binary.

A genderqueer reading of biblical texts will have an emancipatory function as marginalised groups will be able to read texts in a way that resonates for them. As Dembroff (2018) contends:

> Challenging these categories, in part by revealing the false but pervasive assumption that everyone fits within them, threatens those who wish to

> preserve social control over sexed bodies – especially control that systematically favours males who conform to dominant masculine norms. If people embrace an ontological space outside the gender binary, it undermines this ideology.

Undertaking a genderqueer/non-binary reading of *Esther* thus challenges the notion that gender in a text can only be interpreted in a binary manner, and undermines the hegemonic gender binary.

It is important to note that reading texts in a non-binary/genderqueer way does not necessarily mean that every character and every scenario can be read as non-binary/genderqueer. This is because not every character, scene or theme in biblical texts will have the capacity to be read in this way. Some characters and stories will adhere to fixed binary gender stereotypes, either of their own gender or possibly of the other gender. We may not encounter spaces that belong to more than one gender, and we may find that the characterisation throughout a text resists genderqueer reading.

Just as genderqueer/non-binary people's experience of their genderqueerness often contrasts with others' binary identity, behaviour and appearance in Western society, our reading of biblical texts may allow some characters to be interpreted as genderqueer, but others will be cisnormative, and thus a contrast will be drawn between them.

*2.2.9 - Summary*

This section has outlined reception history and queer theory, particularly pertaining to genderqueer and non-binary interpretation. To use this methodology, first I set the scene by showing the different approaches to gender in often-overlooked *Esther* reception that precedes modern academic scholarship. I will then assess the impact of modern reception of *Esther* in biblical commentaries and academic studies, to highlight the dominant themes. I will evaluate if and how the gender binary has been realised in modern scholarship on *Esther* and ascertain if there have been any interpretations of characters that did not adhere to the gender binary. This will then be juxtaposed with my analysis of the ancient receptions of *Esther* – the three Greek versions, the Latin and the Hebrew text – which will 'trouble' the ancient texts by offering a non-binary/genderqueer reading, where the text allows it. My genderqueer/non-binary reading will analyse characters' behaviour in cameo settings of two. Furthermore, using Dembroff's model of genderqueer behaviour, I will examine characters' relationships with others to see if they exhibit behaviour that we can read as genderqueer. To identify characteristics or behaviour which does not have the capacity to be interpreted as genderqueer/non-binary, I will use the BSRI to identify gender stereotypes and where the text does or does not match the model.

This analysis, when compared with the impact of modern reception, will highlight the differences in interpretation that can be gleaned when we read the biblical text through a non-binary/genderqueer lens. I aim to challenge cisnormative assumptions made in modern reception, and offer alternative interpretations of *Esther* that do not feature the gender binary. Analysing the ancient texts' capacity for genderqueerness will also highlight

patterns or similarities between the ancient texts which enables or restricts a queer reading. I will then suggest which ancient texts may have informed modern reception more than others and posit reasons why some modern scholars' interpretations adhere so closely to the gender binary.

# Chapter 3 – The History of Esther Reception

> Unearthing Esther's reception history is much more than an exercise in curiosity. Ignorance of how Esther has been appropriated in culture at large – how it has circulated and which debates and ideas it has informed – has led to critical ignorance of what the book may have signified to its readers… The gulf between contemporary responses to Esther and its past readings is remarkable.
>
> Jo Carruthers 2008: 3

## *3.1 – Introduction*

This chapter illustrates the rich body of reception that bridges the gap between the ancient versions of *Esther* and modern academic scholarship on this text. Specifically, I show the ways in which gender has been realised, and how binary and non-binary interpretations can be discovered in many stages of *Esther* reception, and how these interpretations have been hitherto overlooked in modern scholarship.

As the festal text for Purim, it is rather unsurprising that *Esther* has garnered a great deal of attention from Jewish exegetes through the ages. In fact, this text is the only book of the Hebrew Bible to have not one but two Targums written on it. It is also one of the most commented-on texts in rabbinic literature, second only to Genesis (Koller 2004: 3). Jewish reception of *Esther* in text continued until the present day. In contrast, there is considerably less Christian textual reception on this book. As Jo Carruthers points out, Esther was given a 'marginal status' in the Christian tradition, and comments on this text have been 'sporadic', or absent from many key figures in the Christian tradition (2008: 7). Notably, Esther is the only biblical book of the Hebrew Bible not represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The body of *Esther* reception also includes musical versions, artistic representations of the tale, poetry, theatre, film and literature.

This thesis looks at two 'stages' in *Esther* reception history – the ancient textual versions and modern secondary literature – but there is a great deal of material that bridges the gap between these two. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this material is often overlooked in modern scholarship. However, this reception can give us interesting insights into interpretations of gender in this book, many of which are androcentric, explicitly misogynistic or propose binary gender norms. That early interpreters of *Esther* took these approaches to characterisation in the story illustrates that gendering a text can and did happen at any and every stage of its life in reception. It is not unique to the stages of reception chosen for this study. I will now illustrate this with some choice examples.

### *3.2 - Jewish Textual Reception of Esther*

Early Jewish reception of *Esther* is characterised by the numerous interpretations of this text throughout history. Additionally, the targumic and midrashic interpretations often realise gender in markedly similar ways. There are common themes employed in much of this material that are misogynistic and androcentric. Characterising Vashti as a villain and humiliating her, portraying Esther as observant of religious purity, food and Shabbat laws, and depicting Mordecai as the hero of the tale, all enforce latent gender roles on these characters.

The two targumim on *Esther* – Targum Rishon and Targum Sheni – illustrate this clearly. Expansions include characterising Vashti as 'wicked' (Targum Rishon 1.1) and an enemy of the Jewish people. Indeed, this is a common interpretation of Vashti in Jewish reception. Targum Sheni states that Vashti's refusal of Ahasuerus was to avoid shame (1.12). Targum Rishon tends to emphasise Mordecai's control and authority over Esther (2.10), and Targum Sheni explains that Esther obeyed Mordecai because of her modesty (2.10). Targum Sheni also focuses on Esther's piety. For example, she does not partake in any impure activities with her Gentile husband (5.1).

The rabbinic midrash is 'unusually prolific' on *Esther* (Myron B. Lerner 2006: 176), but as Aaron Koller claims, the rabbinic interpretations of *Esther* display 'few consistent differences' (2004: 3). This is because there was a, 'large-scale and sustained effort on the part of the Rabbis to rid Esther of the parts of the story which are troubling or challenging, and to transform the story into a conventional biblical story.' (2004: 4). This is also the case concerning gender roles. This Jewish reception took the form of talmudic material and midrashim. There are two broad categories for this material: interpretations that focus on the method and practice of celebrating Purim, and interpretations of the text of *Esther* itself. Talmud Yerushalmi and the Mishnah's versions of the Megillah belong to the first category, as they focus on the time, date, location and praxis of the festival, with little discussion about the festival aetiology. The second category allows the rabbis to provide expositions on the various problematic elements of *Esther* in a typically haggadic way, using proems, name-etymologies, connections to other biblical books and figures and by drawing stark contrasts between the heroes and villains of the tale.

The gender roles portrayed in much of this midrashic material is notable on a few counts. The themes expressed in the midrash are often very similar to that in the targumim. The way the characters are dealt with is as follows:

1) Vashti is portrayed as an enemy of the Jewish people (b. Meg. 12b; Esther Rabbah XIII:i 6A-D), like Haman and Ahasuerus; she is characterised as Ahasuerus's object or 'vessel' (b. Meg. 12b; Esther Rabbah 1.1(XX:I 1E-M); Abba Gurion); Vashti's refusal of Ahasuerus is caused by her concern for propriety and to avoid bringing shame on herself or her husband (b. Meg. 12b; Panim Aḥerim B 1.1; Esther Rabbah XX:i; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer). Drawing a power dynamic of subject/object between Ahasuerus and Vashti is clearly androcentric. Furthermore, Vashti's concern to avoid shame illustrates an honour/shame dynamic which is gendered.[50]

2) Mordecai is portrayed as the hero of the tale, with an important lineage and personal history, and there are frequent allusions to and analogies with other significant biblical figures, including Jacob and Esau (b. Meg. 10b, 11a, 12b-13a, 13b; Esther Rabbah II; Panim Aḥerim A 3.1; Panim Aḥerim B 4.1-4). Emphasising Mordecai's importance over Esther's refocuses the story on an androcentric narrative.

3) Esther's role is significantly reduced, and she is dependent on God to achieve her goal[51] (b. Meg. 13a, 16a; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer) or she is almost entirely ignored (Abba

---

[50] For an explanation of the honour/shame dynamic and its relationship to the gender binary, see chapter 4.2.3.

[51] Esther Rabbah I and II are notable exceptions, as they do not appear to indicate that Esther was dependent on God for aid, or that she was physically and emotionally weak.

Gurion; Panim Aḥerim A). She is frequently described using negative female imagery, for example, Esther's response at 4:4 brings on menstruation (b. Meg. 15a; Panim Aḥerim B 4.4; Midrash Megilla 4.4) or she is elderly and unattractive (Panim Aḥerim B 2.7). Using negative female imagery imposes the gender binary onto Esther and portrays her as a deficient female for being impure or unattractive. Furthermore, downgrading Esther's success in favour of Mordecai displays a disregard for female agency in comparison with male agency.

4) Where Zeresh is included, her role is significantly expanded as Haman's adviser, and she is characterised as an enemy of the Jews (b. Meg. 16a; Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer; Esther Rabbah II; Abba Gurion). This treatment portrays Zeresh as a temptress and *femme fatale*, like Jezebel.

These examples of gender portrayals in the talmudic and midrashic receptions of *Esther* are strikingly cisnormative, androcentric and sometimes misogynistic in nature.

Alongside the extensive midrashic work that has been written on *Esther*, there is a large body of medieval Jewish exegesis that has garnered less attention.[52] Medieval exegetes from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries CE in mainland Europe, including Maimonides, Rashi, Rambam, Abraham Ibn Ezra and many others, contributed to the body of reception on *Esther* with their interpretations. These interpretations are very diverse, and are influenced by their location, the cultural and intellectual climate, contemporary philosophy,

[52] Indeed, Barry Dov Walfish's 1993 work 'Esther in Medieval Garb' is the only detailed scholarly study on this work.

and accepted methods of exegesis and textual criticism (Walfish 1993: 32). Some scholars, like Rashi (1040-1105), for example, paid a great deal of attention to the interpretations offered in the Babylonian Talmud. Others, like Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), tended to be more selective in their use of midrashic material, and address interpretations in the rabbinic material. What is notable, however, is the similarities between the rabbinic material and medieval commentators with respect to their interpretations of gender. The medieval scholars also tended to portray the narrative in an androcentric manner, and often impose gender binary tropes onto the male and female characters.

There are many examples from the body of medieval reception that display binary tropes, but I will select the most relevant examples to illustrate this point. Abraham Saba (1440-1508) argued that Esther was 'hidden in her deeds and in her modesty' (quoted in Dov Walfish 1993: 38), pointing to the Hebrew root סתר in Esther's name, meaning 'hidden'. Modesty is seen as a virtuous trait, and according to Saba, Mordecai was able to prevail over Haman because he had 'raised the modest and hidden Esther' (Dov Walfish 1993: 38). As Walfish comments:

> …it would seem that Saba considers Mordecai to be the active character in the process of saving the Jews. True, he could not have done so without Esther's help, but it is by her very nature, by virtue of her modesty and her hiddenness, not by any active role she herself plays in the drama, that Esther helps save the Jews. (1993: 38)

I suggest that modesty and hiddenness are stereotypical characteristics that women should desire to be. Consulting the BSRI, 'shy' and 'softly-spoken' are ideal female traits, which are very similar to modesty and hiddenness. Therefore, Saba reinterprets the tale as one where

gender roles are clearly established, and these gender roles cause or contribute to the characters' success.

Similarly, Abraham Ḥadidah[53] looked to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* to argue that Vashti's expulsion from the kingdom was justified. Ahasuerus wanted to show that honour was the highest good, and Vashti's behaviour was not honourable. She needed to be removed and punished to restore and preserve that honour (Walfish 1993: 48). Equating Vashti's refusal to appear before the men with shame or dishonour, and her removal with restoring honour, draws an honour/shame dichotomy between men and women where women are expected to obey men to maintain honour.

However, not all medieval exegesis seems to impose binary gender roles on this text. Isaac Arama, Isaac ben Joseph ha-Kohen, Joseph Ḥayyun and Zachariah ben Saruḳ analysed and praised Esther's rhetorical skill in Est. 7:3-4. Indeed, the latter described Esther as a 'good stateswoman' (Walfish 1993: 54). Medieval exegetes' interest in Esther's skill as a petitioner and her method led them to use her behaviour as a guide to etiquette and proper behaviour in a court setting. Arguably, this proposed court etiquette may not be aimed at women only, because the exegetes' analysis of Esther's rhetoric is not gendered.[54]

[53] Dates unknown. See Walfish 1993: 47.
[54] See Dov Walfish 1993: 52-55 for their analyses.

Similarly, Gersonides (1288-1344) also portrayed Esther as a particularly skilled orator. He maintained that Esther was a skilled and shrewd courtier who understood the social factions and allegiances within the royal court. He posits that Esther was considering negotiating with Haman to join forces with her and Mordecai, to bring down the king. Thus, her invitation to Haman to join her banquet (5:8) was a calculated move to put her in his favour, and also to make the king jealous (Walfish 1993: 165). Esther is characterised as an intelligent and resourceful individual. Consulting the BSRI, Esther's behaviour seems to fulfil the male stereotypes of 'analytical' and 'willing to take risks', but also the female characteristic of 'feminine', because she stirs up jealousy, and the neutral characteristic of 'adaptable' by identifying potential strategies for success and changing her behaviour accordingly. This depiction of Esther hints at genderqueerness.

These examples show how there are diverse approaches to gender and the gender binary in the medieval exegetes' interpretations of *Esther*. Some show a binary gender approach to the male and female characters, but some do not.

Today, liturgical use of *Esther* is prominent in orthodox communities (Carruthers 2008: 12), and it forms the basis of the annual festival of Purim. *Purimspiels* are perhaps the best-known popular representation of the *Esther* story.[55] The earliest extant version of a *Purimspiel* was composed in 1555 in Venice (Horowitz 2014: 28). These performances traditionally take place on Purim and involve participants dressing up and enacting the tale

[55] See Carruthers 2020, chapters 8-10.

of *Esther*, often in a raucous and carnivalesque manner.[56] For example, it is not unknown for *Purimspiel* participants to perform cross-dressing and drink excessively (Carruthers 2020: 35). Cross-dressing as an expression of joy and humour to celebrate a festival is certainly not cisnormative, and thus displays unusual gender roles. Concerning the text itself, there is continued interest in this text by modern exegetes, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter of this thesis. Online Jewish publications often write articles elucidating this problematic book for a mainstream audience.[57]

### *3.3 - Christian Textual Reception of Esther*

As Robert Hanhart has pointed out, 'In den Schriften der greich. und. lat. Kirchenschriftsteller begegnen Esther-Zitate äußerst selten.' (1983: 38). Indeed, *Esther* is characterised by its absence in early church exegesis or commentaries. A commonly-held reason for this is anti-Semitism in the early church. As Timothy Beal argues, this text has been subject to:

> …a particularly problematic Christian interpretive tradition in which the Jewish Bible, especially Esther, has been treated as a kind of Christian colony, a dark continent into which images of the Jew are projected as quintessentially not-us. This interpretive tradition… has been a powerful identity-shaping apparatus within modern Protestant Christianity, especially since Luther, and has simultaneously served to form an image of the Jew – especially the Jew in Esther – as that identity's ultimate vision of savage alterity. (1997a: 5).

[56] cf. Susan Niditch 2014: 271-272.
[57] Examples include thetorah.com and chabad.org, both accessed 12 June 2018.

Given the complete absence of divine agency in the Hebrew text, the undertones of sexuality, and the violence waged by the Jews against their enemies, this text is thought to have no 'redeeming' features. Thus, there has been little about the text that has been seen by early Christian scholars as worthy of much attention. Furthermore, as Moore argues, 'the book's *raison d'être* was meaningless for Christians' because Purim is not reflected in the Christian calendar (1971: xxx). Though the canonicity of this book went unquestioned in the Councils of Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397, it appears that there was still discomfort and anxiety about this book (Carruthers 2008: 8). Therefore, comments on *Esther* are often brief and rather insignificant. For example, in Late Antiquity, Tertullian, St Augustine, Clement of Alexandria and Athanasius offered brief comments on the text. Tertullian used Esther 1:1 to state the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, 'from India to Ethiopia' (ANF 3: 158). St Augustine mentions the book as being of the same era as Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi (NPNF-1 2: 382). In the Eastern Church, in Anatolia and Syria, Esther was frequently seen as not canonical. For example, it was not included by Melito of Sardis, Gregory of Nazianzus in Cappadocia, Theodore of Mopsuestia in Cicilia and many others.[58]

A theme present in some Church Fathers' comments on *Esther* is the portrayal of Esther as a godly, pious and honourable woman. For example, Clement of Alexandria used Esther's abhorrence for her headdress in the Greek Addition C.27 as justification for his pronouncement that headdresses and hair adornments were 'characteristic of women who

[58] See Moore 1971: xxv

have lost all sense of shame' (ANF 2: 274). Thus, he made a value judgment about shameful women and cast Esther in contrast to them. He did not criticise Esther, but making this value judgment imposes gendered norms onto her character. Similarly, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, encouraged readers of his fourth Festal Letter to follow Esther's example by praying to God and fasting, even when the destruction of her people was nigh, highlighting her piety (NPNF-2 4: 1245). Athanasius specifically states that Esther achieved success 'by no other means than by fasting and prayer to God'. This is interesting, because though Athanasius's opinion of Esther is positive, he does not include any of her actions in the royal court as explanations for her success. This opinion thus restricts Esther's agency considerably. These opinions impose an honour/shame dynamic[59] on the text, similarly to the midrashim and some medieval scholars' work, which is gendered.

Other brief Christian commentaries appeared in the Medieval period, with commentaries or notes made by Rhabanus Maurus, Wallafridus Strabus, Rupertus Abbatis Tuitiensis, Hugo of St. Victor and Nicholas de Lyra (Paton 1908: 104). These were not full commentaries, but were only partial or fragmentary, and they are not often cited in *Esther* scholarship. A common theme in Catholic commentaries from this time is likening Esther to the figure of the Virgin Mary (Carruthers 2008: 192-193, 199). Esther is portrayed as a pious and virtuous woman, not dissimilar to the Church Fathers. For example, Gabriel Biel likened Mary inheriting half the earth with Esther being offered half the kingdom by Ahasuerus (EBR 8 2014: 32). This is an incredibly high honour to bestow on Esther.

[59] See chapter 4.2.3 for an explanation of the honour/shame dynamic.

However, as I argued above in relation to the Church Fathers' comments, the midrashim and medieval Jewish exegesis, interpreting Esther in this way genders her and imposes the gender binary on her portrayal. In this example, Esther is portrayed as pure, virginal and devoted to God, which characterises her as honourable, thus acceptable, within a cisnormative honour/shame dichotomy. Furthermore, Esther is seen as honourable because she was offered half the kingdom by Ahasuerus, yet the actions she took to be offered this are not mentioned. I would argue that this describes Esther's success as being passively caused by a male agent, and thus she is portrayed as an object rather than as a subject of her story.

The Reformation marked a shift in Christian readings of *Esther*. The Catholic interpretation of Esther that equated her with Mary was disregarded. Luther notably condemned *Esther* in the strongest terms, stating that he wished it did not exist because it 'Judaizes too much' (*Table Talk* XXIV, cited in Moore 1982). Luther's view was shared by many Protestant scholars until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, little was written about *Esther* and it is difficult to interpret the gender roles in interpretations from this period. However, from the seventeenth century onwards, references to *Esther* appeared occasionally in writings, sermons and commentaries by figures such as Cotton Mather, Alexander Webster and Samuel Kem (Carruthers 2008: 16). For example, Mather depicts Esther as a model for wifely good behaviour, to bring honour on and salvation to one's husband despite his conduct (Halpern 2020). This interpretation is another gendered take on Esther.

Of the key commentaries and writings on the Old Testament from Near Eastern Christianity, *Esther* is mentioned rarely, and when it is, it is often paraphrased, with positive comments made about Mordecai and Esther's pious behaviour (Wechsler 2013: 34-38). This is problematic, as discussed above.

### *3.4 - Representation of Esther in Art, Music and Literature*

The body of artistic reception that exists for *Esther* – that is, interpretations of the text in art, theatre, film, poetry, music and so on – is large, though not as large as the body of textual interpretation. As in the preceding sections of this chapter, I will discuss some specific examples where the gender roles in artistic reception of *Esther* can be interpreted in a binary way, or which approach the characters or scenes in an androcentric or misogynistic manner.

There are some notably famous examples of *Esther* reception, including the French playwright Racine's 1689 play in three acts, 'Esther', used as a libretto by George Frederic Handel's 1732 oratorio, 'Esther' (HWV 50). Racine's libretto portrays Esther as extremely pious, and de-emphasises her beauty 'in favour of her piety' (Rooke 2012: 14). This characterises Esther in a way that is not mentioned in the Hebrew version, only the Greek versions, but it ignores the fact that the Hebrew and Greek versions do mention her beauty. This libretto portrays Esther in a way not dissimilar from the early modern Catholic theologians. Esther is characterised as being virtuous and, consequently, acceptable, which

makes her honourable. Her beauty, and thus her implied sexuality and desirability, may bring about shame, or cause her to be viewed shamefully, and so it is de-emphasised.

A few different themes from *Esther* have been rendered in art, through the ages. Scenes such as Ahasuerus's banquet, Esther alone, Haman and Mordecai, and Esther and Mordecai are commonly recreated by the old masters, including Rembrandt, Gentileschi, Aert de Gelder, Lievens and Reubens.[60] It is the scene in chapter five, where Esther goes into Ahasuerus's throne room, that has been most often retold in this medium. Rubens's 'Esther Before Ahasuerus' (1620), Gentileschi's 'Esther Before Ahasuerus' (1630), Rembrandt's 'Esther Preparing to Intercede with Assuerus' (1633), Poussin's 'Esther before Assuerus' (1640) and Caucig's 'Queen Esther Before Ahasuerus' (1815) are some of many examples which depict Esther swooning or fainting before the king. These depictions of Esther are notable because they look to the scene as portrayed in Greek Addition D, found in the LXX AT and Josephus's paraphrase, rather than the Hebrew version. Addition D portrays Esther as physically weak and overcome with emotion when she faces king Ahasuerus in his throne room, so she faints. As will be discussed in Part Two, this depiction of Esther is markedly different to the Hebrew text. Looking to the BSRI, a swooning Esther fulfils the female traits of 'shy' and 'gentle'. She is not strong enough to face the king's anger or to explain why she is there. I would argue that this depiction portrays her in a binary manner. If we compare these depictions with John Everett Millais' 'Esther' (1865), there is a marked

[60] See https://www.womeninthebible.net/bible-paintings/beautiful-esther/ for a full list of old and modern masters' versions of the *Esther* tale (accessed 16 September 2019).

contrast. In this painting, Esther stands strong, prepared to enter the throne room. In one hand, she holds her crown, ready to put it on. In the other, she clasps at her hair tie, about to let down her long hair. This appears to be an artistic rendering of 5:1, which is not included in the Greek versions. This depiction of Esther seems to fulfil the masculine trait of 'willing to take a stand', while her femininity is expressed in the depiction of her hair and clothing. Thus, her portrayal seems to be less clearly gendered. Consequently, it is clear that there are different interpretations in art of gender in *Esther*, particularly of Esther herself, which offer binary and non-binary possibilities.

Numerous film adaptations of *Esther* have been made, perhaps because of the violence and drama of the text. Often these versions have been realised with many inner-biblical allusions, political messaging, or have been subject to Christianisation. These adaptations include 'Queen Esther' (dir. John T. Coyle, 1948) and 'Esther and the King' which starred Joan Collins in the title role (dir. Raoul Walsh, 1960). 'Esther and the King' portrays Vashti as a serial adulterer who bursts into Ahasuerus's party and performs a striptease, before being banished. In this film, Esther is portrayed as modest, in stark contrast to the exhibitionist Vashti. Thus, 'Esther and the King' uses a gendered honour/shame motif in its characterisation. Other film adaptations include 'Esther' (dir. Amos Gitai, 1986) and 'One Night with the King' (dir. Michael O. Sajbel, 2006). Recently, the story was adapted for the children's television series VeggieTales, with the episode 'VeggieTales' Esther: The Girl Who Became Queen' (2007). Reimagining the tale for youngsters, the VeggieTales version depicts Vashti's banishment as an argument over a sandwich: King Ahasuerus demands

that Vashti make him a sandwich, but she refuses.[61] I would suggest that the VeggieTales' Vashti is depicted as rejecting the stereotypical female trait of being 'yielding', particularly to one's husband, for which she is punished.

### *3.5 - Summary*

This chapter has discussed the existing body of Jewish and Christian reception of *Esther* that bridges the gap between some of the ancient versions and modern scholarship. I have given this background to provide the context to the study of *Esther* reception history undertaken in this thesis. Furthermore, this material shows how the gender binary is present in many different stages of reception throughout the history of this text.

As this chapter has shown, *Esther* textual reception is vast, as are artistic and musical representations. There are numerous different approaches taken in the interpretation of this text, which have been influenced by geographical location, era, audience and preceding reception. *Esther* reception is palimpsestic in nature, having multiple layers of influence and inspiration embedded in each piece. As a result, the gender roles espoused in these different textual, artistic and musical receptions are not homogenous. For example, the midrashic and talmudic interpretations of the text have overtly misogynistic themes as concerns about ethnicity and religious values are addressed. Early Christian

[61] Further detail about the content and theme of these films can be found in Rhonda Burnette-Blesch's entry in EBR 8 2014: 51-53.

interpretations are characterised by their brevity. Where Esther is mentioned, she is usually characterised like the pious Virgin Mary. Indeed, piety is a common interpretation of Esther in Christian reception history. To be clear, describing Esther as pious is not negative. However, interpreting Esther's piety as the only cause of her success impacts her agency. This interpretation appears to employ binary gender stereotypes.

The next two chapters of this thesis will examine two different areas of *Esther* reception in text: modern scholarly reception and the ancient textual versions of this text. Again, this is to analyse the gender roles in those interpretations.

# Part I: Reception of Esther in Modern Interpretation

# Chapter 4 - Modern Scholarship on Esther

> …engagement with biblical texts always occurs within a context of authority – the commentator quotes in order to back up an argument; the misogynist cites to demonstrate women's depravity; the novelist alludes in order to create webs of meaning. And as the Book of Esther's focus is the court – with its faithful and manipulative ministers, resolute and rebellious women, incompetent king, and threatened minorities – insular interpretation is perhaps inevitable.
>
> Jo Carruthers 2008: 6

## *Chapter 4.1 - Introduction*

Modern scholarship, that is, twentieth and twenty-first century Western scholarship on The Book of Esther, is made up of a rich body of academic interpretation written predominantly by Jewish and Christian scholars. Scholarly reception of this text currently stands at an impressive library of commentaries, monographs, articles and thematic studies undertaken in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in English on *Esther*, alongside many shorter papers and articles that deal with more specific aspects of the text. As discussed in the previous chapter, historically there has been a dearth of Christian interpretation on this text. However, in the twentieth century there was an uptake in scholarly engagement with *Esther*, which continues to this day. Perhaps this very unusual text that focuses on political intrigue, humour and violence, piqued the interest of scholars and students alike. In contrast to some other books of the Hebrew Bible, for example, the books of the Pentateuch, research on *Esther* occupies a smaller position in the field of Biblical Studies. This means that there is significant discussion and debate between the key

scholars in the field of *Esther* research, yet the body of scholarship is not insurmountably large to study. This chapter will look at the body of scholarship to provide the detailed context for my own discussion of non-binary/genderqueer readings of *Esther* in the ancient versions.

The key texts on *Esther* that will be studied in this chapter are primarily from English and German academics, most from Jewish and Christian backgrounds.[62] Many of these scholars focus on translating and commenting on the text, without stating that they are taking an explicitly ideological approach. In this thesis, I will refer to these as 'traditional' commentaries, introductions or monographs.[63] Common areas of interest in these pieces include: discussion on whether divine agency was involved in the *Esther* tale, particularly focusing on the meaning of מִי יוֹדֵעַ (5:14); attempts to decipher exactly why Mordecai did not bow to Haman (3:2, 5); and Haman's genealogy and predisposed hatred towards Jews. Some commentaries, monographs and articles on *Esther* focus on thematic topics, such as characterisation or history, or they take an explicitly ideological approach; for example, feminist or gender-focused interpretation. Since the advent of feminist biblical criticism, a significant number of feminist and gender-focused works have been written on *Esther*. These texts tend to focus on the unusual gender roles in this book, and they challenge previously-held opinions that were androcentric or that minimised female characters' impact.

---

[62] There is a large body of work on Esther written in Modern Hebrew, which is not included in this study.
[63] cf. chapter 2.1.5 of this thesis.

Overall, these works focus their attention on the Hebrew MT version of *Esther,* and purport to comment on that version primarily. Some critics do not include material from the other ancient versions of *Esther* and focus solely on the Hebrew, including Timothy Beal (1997a, 1999), Lillian R. Klein (2003) and Linda Day (2005). Most *Esther* scholars refer to the Greek versions and the Latin, to greater or lesser degrees.[64] These versions are the Septuagint (LXX), the Alpha Text (AT), Josephus's paraphrase in chapter eleven of his 'Judean Antiquities' and the Vulgate. Some critics analyse these ancient versions of Esther side-by-side, including Carey Moore (1977), David Clines (1984), Michael V. Fox (1991b) and Linda Day (1995). Other critics include some material from the LXX, AT, Josephus's paraphrase or the Vulgate to supplement their analysis of the Hebrew. These critics include: Lewis Bayles Paton (1908); Hans Bardtke (1963); Carey Moore (1971); Michael V. Fox (1991a); Frederic Bush (1996); Jon Levenson (1997); Timothy Laniak (1998); and Adele Berlin (2001). Where the commentator has stated explicitly that their opinion on a particular topic, character, verse or phrase derives from a Greek version rather than the MT, it is noted in this chapter. Otherwise, these critics' opinions are assumed to derive from the Hebrew version of *Esther*.

This chapter will provide a summary of the key thematic focal points and issues that have been raised in scholarly reception. I am particularly interested in how modern scholars

[64] Fewer scholars also use the targumim and midrashim in their analyses of *Esther*, including Lewis Bayles Paton (1908), Adele Berlin (2001) and Yoram Hazony (2016).

have understood the six main characters in *Esther* – Ahasuerus, Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, Haman and Zeresh – rather than summarising their line-by-line exegesis. This means that this chapter is not simply a compilation of scholars' conclusions, but rather the representation of gender in their work is analysed to highlight the key positions taken on each character. I assess if critics have been gender critical, or if they have imposed the gender binary on the text of *Esther* in their work.

What is most notable about the academic reception of *Esther* is that scholarly opinions on Esther, Mordecai, Vashti and Zeresh can be generally divided into opposing groups, with some critics holding a centrist opinion. Esther is described as either an airheaded beauty queen or a heroine, Mordecai is depicted either as the hero of the tale, or as arrogant and proud, and Vashti is either a feminist hero or a literary device. That there are contrasting opinions is very interesting. What is it about the text that prompts the formation of two distinctly opposing views? Furthermore, what is the impact of these conflicting opinions on the gender roles that are being portrayed?

The Hebrew text of *Esther* attests to a significant number of gaps and narrative silences, as discussed in chapter 2.2.8. One would think that these gaps and silences might lead to many different and wide-ranging interpretations of the text, so it is rather interesting that much of scholarship can be roughly divided into two opposing groups. As will be shown in this chapter, there are two characters in the text – Haman and Ahasuerus – that have been subjected to almost universal consensus in modern academic scholarship. Furthermore, there is one character, Zeresh, who is largely ignored outside of feminist and gender-

focused scholarship. The opposing opinions on *Esther* have implications for the reception of the gender roles espoused in this text. As this chapter will show, 'traditional' scholarship tends to portray the characters in a binary gender manner. For readers today who identify as non-binary/genderqueer, or are critical of the gender binary and cisnormativity, this can render the text of *Esther* quite inaccessible. Gender-critical and feminist interpretations of this text cast an analytical eye over the unusual gender roles and gave voice to this text's non-normativity.

This chapter will study the central characters in *Esther* by looking at scholars' opinions on this text and analysing what gender roles they implicitly or explicitly propose. Not every published work on the text will be included, nor could it be. Rather, the key scholars whose work has been cited often and who have had a significant impact on *Esther* scholarship are included. This is to ensure that the discussion does not become piecemeal or stray from the intended goal of highlighting how, overall, modern reception of *Esther* has dealt with the gender binary and cisnormativity in this text.

## *4.2 - Mordecai as the Hero or the Troublemaker*

The character Mordecai has been subject to a divide in critical opinion. The narrative silences on his depiction, his somewhat unusual role in the plot, and his rather shocking behaviour have produced three common streams of reading:

1) that he is the infallible hero of the tale;

2) that he was an arrogant and proud troublemaker; or

3) a moderate approach somewhere in the middle.

The key issues that are discussed by academics are fourfold:

a) why Mordecai did not bow to Haman at 3:2 and whether this indicates that he was a proud character;

b) why Mordecai again did not bow to Haman at 5:9;

c) Mordecai's relationship with Esther;

d) Mordecai's relationship to and involvement in the royal court.

As will be discussed, these groups of scholars can often make their arguments in different ways. A summary of the key scholars who hold these opinions will now be outlined.

### *4.2.1 - Mordecai as the Hero*

Characterised as the hero of the tale, more frequently than Esther, Mordecai has been interpreted as a paradigmatic figure by many scholars. As Crawford has pointed out:

> Mainstream scholars have insisted on seeing Mordecai as the primary hero… in spite of the fact that at the moment of crisis, Mordecai (who has brought the situation into being by his refusal to bow before Haman) can only go to Esther and ask her to intercede with the king. (1999: 872).

This treatment has resulted in Mordecai being portrayed as a priest-like figure, fulfilling the binary stereotype of a religious male who is beyond criticism. Michael V. Fox is one notable critic who views Mordecai in this way. Fox's 1991 work *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* is a useful and detailed exposition of genre, theme and characterisation in this text, which also studies in-depth the textual development of the tale. Fox states that he mainly focuses on the MT version of *Esther*:

> This present study directs its attention primarily to the Massoretic (sic) Text (MT), the Hebrew text accepted as authoritative by Jews and most Christians. In contrast to a common usage in modern literary studies of the Bible, I do not speak of this text as the "final form" of the Esther story; rather, it is an intermediate form… the MT is (in my view) the form most rewarding for literary study. (1991a: 9)

He further argues that he uses the LXX and AT for 'comparative and (occasionally) textual purposes' (1991a: 9). Fox's work displays what can only be described as sheer adoration of Mordecai, opinions which are often echoed by Frederic W. Bush in his 1996 commentary on Esther. Fox summarises, 'Mordecai is an ideal figure, a repository of virtues, a shining example of how a Jew of the diaspora should behave… His unalloyed success, personal and public, for himself and for his people, shows that his behaviour is to be taken as exemplary.' (1991a: 185).

A common argument against Mordecai is that his refusal to bow displayed excessive pride. However, Fox believes that Mordecai's pride was lauded by the author, as it was driven by

national rather than personal pride. Furthermore, Fox highlights his piety, courage, loyalty both to the king and to the Jewish people, leadership, directness and lack of personal ambition as virtues which set him apart from the other characters in the book (1991a: 186). This is a view seconded by Bush, who highlights Mordecai's 'absolute loyalty and constancy.' (1996: 318), and Levenson who argues that Mordecai was 'motivated by the desire to maintain his authenticity as a Jew.' (1997: 68). Finally, Fox draws a comparison between Mordecai and Ezra, arguing that Mordecai is to the diaspora what Ezra was to the Judean community. (1991a: 187). Fox admits that unlike other characters, namely Haman, the author does not allow the reader to see into Mordecai's psyche. As a result, it can be difficult to interpret his behaviour, as he 'does things that are hard to explain.' To address this, Fox argues that 'the author wants us to guess, and so gives us enough clues to make some guesses better than others. Indeed, a discussion of Mordecai's character can proceed by attempting to fill in the silences.' (1991a: 191). Indeed, this strikes me as a particularly apt statement for Fox to make, as it is precisely this 'gap filling' which has led to his interpretation of Mordecai, in contrast to others which will be explored below. Finally, he states, 'of the two heroes in the book of Esther [the other being Esther], Mordecai is the dominant actor and the more sterling paragon.' (1991a: 196). By promoting Mordecai to the role of absolute hero over Esther, Fox reveals his latent bias against her, which is explored further in the next section of this chapter. This may be sexist bias, as Fox reads the text in such a way that fills in the gaps to benefit Mordecai at Esther's expense.

Textual examples of Fox's confident 'gap filling' can be seen on numerous occasions. On 2:10 he comments, 'Mordecai's command… shows him planning and waiting, his caution

intimating an atmosphere of danger.' (1991a: 32). However, one could question Fox's approach by pointing out that the text does not state *why* Mordecai directs Esther like this, so it is rather difficult to adjudicate on this matter. Perhaps the most important verses in Mordecai's portrayal, 3:2-4 which depict his refusal to bow to Haman, are interpreted by Fox as perfectly excusable. He argues, 'Attributing Mordecai's refusal [to bow] to arrogance is a misreading. It contradicts the book's image of Mordecai's as wise, provident, unassuming, and never pursuing personal honor… the view of Mordecai as arrogant could hardly be the *author's* attitude.' (1991a: 43).[65] It is pertinent to challenge Fox's assertion that reading 3:2-4 as displaying Mordecai's arrogance contradicts the portrayal of him as wise, provident, unassuming and so on, by highlighting that the latter may potentially also be a misreading based on gap-filling. Fox characterises Mordecai as the archetypal Jewish male in the diaspora. This characterisation is gendered as the diaspora male type forms half of a male-female hierarchy present in the diaspora community (Reinhartz 2012 [1992]: 403). This view of Mordecai is expressed by others, with Gunkel stating, 'Nun bewährt sich Mardochai als ein echter, strenggläubiger Jude,' when he does not bow to Haman (1916: 17). Positing that Mordechai is a 'true, devout Jew' is itself latently gendered, as Mordecai is conceived as adhering to religious obligations and expectations as a Jewish male. These scholars thus unconsciously implement the gender binary by using paradigmatic, gendered interpretations.

[65] See also Bardtke 1963: 316; Berg 1979: 67; Bush 1996: 379; Clines 1984: 45; Gunkel 1916: 16-17; Laniak 1998: 75; Levenson 1997: 67-8.

Carey Moore's 1971 commentary on *Esther* is among the most-cited academic works on this biblical text.[66] Therefore, his opinion has been impactful on modern *Esther* scholarship. Moore has also written on the topic of the Greek Additions in his book, 'Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions' (1977) and he demonstrates thorough knowledge of the Greek versions of the text in his 1971 commentary. We might assume that in his commentary he has been influenced to some degree by the Greek versions, though his focus is on the Hebrew text, and he refers to the LXX, AT, OL, Vulgate and Josephus frequently in his translation and commentary. Indeed, he has stated:

> It is certainly in the Greek rather than the Hebrew version that one can better identify with the wise Mordecai and the courageous Esther, thanks primarily to Additions C and D, which introduce the reader to the inner thoughts and feelings. In the Hebrew version, it is more asserted than illustrated that Mordecai was wise and good; while beautiful and courageous, Esther nonetheless seems to be almost two-dimensional, lacking in depth. (1971: lii-liv)

In contrast to the scholars cited in the previous paragraph, Moore tends to problematise the gaps in Mordecai's scenes, rather than immediately draw conclusions. He highlights that Mordecai's admission that he is a Jew (3:4) does not solve the problem of why he refuses to bow, because there are scriptural examples of Jews bowing down to foreign leaders; for example, 1 Sam 24:9; 2 Sam 14:4; Gen 23:7, 33:3. Moore concedes that it is likely that he refused to bow to a descendant of Agag, but Moore does not say that this is his firm conclusion (1971: 36). Thus, Moore posits possibilities. The option he puts forth here positions Mordecai as an ideal Jewish figure who is cognisant of his ancestral loyalty. At an

---

[66] Source: Google Scholar accessed 22 April 2020.

implicit level, this is gendered, as he fulfils the obligations expected of him by his tribe. However, as Moore does not state that this is his firm conclusion on the matter, it can reasonably be argued that this gendered role is one option of many possible interpretations of Mordecai's behaviour, which might carry the potential for a non-binary reading of his behaviour.

In chapter four of *Esther*, we read of Mordecai's mourning over the edict against the Jews and his dialogue with Esther about what they should do. This conversation takes place through her attendant Hathach, who acts as an intermediary. This scene has been subject to debate between the two opposing scholarly groups on how it should be interpreted. Fox interprets Mordecai's lamentation at 4:1 to be a sign that he 'immediately takes control of matters'. Furthermore, his behaviour may have been designed to shock Esther into action. (1991: 57). Fox portrays Mordecai as being entirely in control and views his actions as appropriate. This opinion is echoed by Cohen, who similarly heralds Mordecai as 'the hero of it all'. He argues that it was he who 'initiated the entire resistance' and 'forced Esther to take up her people's cause.' (1996: 104). Notably, these scholars do not comment on why Mordecai refused clothing from Esther (4:4); instead, they choose to berate her for sending him clothes in the first place.[67] This is a biased approach, which imposes gendered value judgments on the text by assuming that Esther was in the wrong and Mordecai's behaviour was infallible, without undertaking analysis to prove it.

[67] See chapter 4.3.

Moore considers this issue. He points out that it is not made clear in the Hebrew text why Mordecai refused clothes from Esther (4:4). Looking to talmudic Judaism's stress on not making a large, public display of personal sorrow, Moore concludes that perhaps Mordecai refused clothing from Esther to emphasise the dire public calamity that his mourning signified. (1971: 48). As above, this positions Mordecai as adhering to religious and ethnic obligations which are inherently gendered. However, because Moore again offers this as an interpretive suggestion rather than a definite conclusion, the ambiguous gaps are allowed to resonate. Thus, we can question if, in Moore's interpretation of Mordecai, the gender binary is present.

It is important to discuss if Mordecai held an official position in the royal court, because it affects the gender relations in the text. If he did, as argued by many scholars, his authority may be equal to or even outweigh that of Esther. From chapter eight onwards, he would no longer need her patronage, and thus the power dynamic between them would be restored to that of chapter two. This may not seem like an important feature when considering the gender binary, but this proposed power dynamic is cisnormative. If Mordecai does not hold an official position, but with the ring he has the physical means of sealing the king's edicts, he is still under the patronage of Esther and thus the power dynamic between them remains the same after the shift between Esther and Mordecai that occurred at 4:16. This power dynamic is not cisnormative, and thus it could indicate that the text has the capacity to be read in a genderqueer/non-binary manner.

Moore concludes that the giving of Haman's ring (8:2) transfers the same powers to Mordecai that the king had previously granted to Haman (1971: 77), which is also concluded by Paton (1908: 268), Clines (1984: 14), Bush (1996: 450), Levenson (1997: 16) and Alter (2016: 119) among others. These scholars argue that Mordecai's elevation to the position of prime minister is confirmed at 8:15 when he emerges from the palace dressed in finery (Beal 1999: 96). This assumes that when the king gave Haman his ring (3:10-12), he was conferring specific powers and authority on Haman. This may be because the king gives Haman his ring (3:10), and then it is stated that Haman wrote his edict in the name of the king and sealed it with his ring (3:12). However, this assumes that sealing Haman's written commandments with the king's ring is a sign of authority over and above the verbal permission that Ahasuerus granted to Haman, to write in the king's name. Comparing this with 8:8, 'for writing which is written in the name of the king and is sealed with the king's ring cannot be reversed.' indicates that the ring is a functional object which is used to confirm an edict into official law. There is no indication that the ring transfers power to the beholder, as if it did, it would be logical to assume that it would not be necessary to state that the edicts were written 'in the king's name' and 'sealed with the king's ring' (3:12; 8:8, 10). The text would instead state that Haman or Mordecai could write and grant authority themselves because they possessed the ring. It appears then that many scholars see a cisnormative power dynamic between Esther and Mordecai because they believe that he held an official role in the court, akin to prime minister.

To summarise, the interpretations of Mordecai as the absolute hero of the tale have many features in common. Many scholars agree that Mordecai refused to bow to Haman due to

ethnic enmity, that Mordecai became prime minister in place of Haman and that his behaviour in chapter four was to express intense and sincere mourning. Notably, these opinions, particularly those concerning Mordecai's ethnicity, justify and excuse the fact that he brought about the edict against the Jews which, ultimately, Esther worked to reverse. Additionally, these scholars significantly gender Mordecai. This imposes the gender binary on Mordecai's portrayal, and depicts him as a cisnormative character. What is common about most of these interpretations is that there occurs a great deal of gap-filling, whereby critics form conclusions based on narrative silences. This is also common amongst critics who hold the opposing opinions, as will now be discussed.

### *4.2.2 - Mordecai is not the hero of Esther*

There are many critics who do not agree with Fox and others' assessment of Mordecai as the hero of the *Esther* tale. It has been pointed out, often by feminist scholars, that his actions in *Esther* display arrogance, pride and stubbornness. In particular, these scholars take issue with Mordecai's actions in chapter three.

Sidnie White Crawford's paper in Peggy Day's edited volume *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (1989) focuses on the Hebrew version of *Esther* in the MT. She interprets the narrative silence on Mordecai's refusal to bow as indicative of his refusal to 'fit into the situation in which he finds himself.' (1989: 166). She argues that his behaviour is not connected to his Jewishness, but rather it shows that 'Mordecai is refusing to accept and

work with his subordinate position.' After this, he goes into a panic (4:1-2), and he becomes entirely dependent on Esther to fix the situation (1989: 169). Crawford interprets Mordecai as arrogant, because he is not as authoritative as he expects he should be, and he is entirely dependent on a female character. We could interpret this as satirical. Mordecai is deficient as a male, and thus he must be looked after by his niece. In this interpretation, Crawford satirises Mordecai for his male pride, and the irony that his pride caused him to become dependent on a woman. Crawford's approach highlights the fallibility of binary gender stereotypes.

Linda Day's *Abingdon Old Testament Commentary* on *Esther* (2005) primarily focuses on the Hebrew version. She states that Mordecai is a 'secondary character' in comparison to Esther, and that he is 'relegated to the periphery' in favour of her (2005: 44-45). She points out that a 'feminization' of Mordecai occurs when he refuses to bow, as a parallel is drawn between him and Vashti. Day thus suggests that Mordecai's behaviour is not strictly cisnormative. She also points out how the gender roles between Esther and Mordecai are unusual.

Rachel Adelman's 2014 article focuses on the Hebrew, alongside the rabbinic midrash. She argues that Mordecai does not give Esther the assurance and confidence required to allay her fears when she goes in to see the king (2014: 92). This means that she, rather than he, bears the burden of responsibility for risking her life and thus saving the Jewish people. Like Adelman, Day points out that Mordecai seems content to remain in a state of mourning at 4:4, and he does not wish to do anything to aid the Jews' plight. Similarly, Day highlights

at 4:7 that Mordecai appears to be acting as a victim, in contrast to Esther (2005: 80-81). Adelman and Day's take on Mordecai does not impose cisnormativity on his portrayal, and therefore there may be non-binary possibilities here.

Although fewer scholars view Mordecai as an antagonist than those who view him as the hero of *Esther*, their arguments are interesting. It appears that these scholars, like those who hold the opposite opinion, also fill in the gaps to explain the narrative silences in Mordecai's portrayal.

### *4.2.3 - Moderate Interpretations of Mordecai's Behaviour*

There are some scholars who take a moderate approach to Mordecai's interpretation. These scholars tend neither to condemn nor to praise him, but instead offer balanced criticism. These scholars approach the text in both gender-focused and more traditional ways, highlighting that this method is not limited to ideological readings of the text. Both impose the gender binary on Mordecai's portrayal, either implicitly or explicitly. This affects our capacity to read his behaviour in a non-binary/genderqueer way.

Lewis Bayles Paton's *International Critical Commentary* on *Esther* (1908) is the oldest work consulted in this chapter. It is also one of the most thorough in identifying and chronicling *Esther* reception through the ages. His commentary focuses on the Hebrew but frequently refers to the other ancient versions and the targumim, and makes intertextual references.

Paton condemns Mordecai's behaviour, stating that Mordecai, 'displays wanton insolence in his refusal to bow to Haman,' in chapter three (1908: 96). Furthermore, he argues, at 5:9, 'in spite of all the trouble that it has brought upon the Jews, Mordecai still persists in his insolent behaviour towards Haman. No wonder that Haman is angry, since even his edict of destruction has failed to humble this man.' (1908: 238). However, Paton views Mordecai's poor behaviour as fulfilling a literary function that allows the plot to progress,[68] so that Haman's edict can be written (1908: 197). Paton ascribes religious significance to Mordecai's mourning behaviour in chapter four, positing that though it was not stated in the text, this is no doubt what the author meant. Because the edict against the Jews was still in effect, he could not accept Esther's offer of clothing at 4:4 (1908: 214). Paton does not praise or condemn Mordecai's behaviour. Rather, by first stating that he fulfils a literary function and then that he is fulfilling religious obligations, he first dismisses Mordecai, then interprets him as being a paradigmatic Jewish male. This is unusual and inconsistent. The former is like Vashti's treatment by scholars and does not appear to gender Mordecai one way or the other, but the latter is particularly gendered, as discussed in section 4.2.1.

Two gender-focused studies on honour and shame in *Esther* are Timothy Laniak's *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther* (1998) and Lillian R. Klein's chapter on Esther in *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (2003). The honour/shame code is a structure dictated by gender. According to the system, men and women are bound by certain honourable forms of behaviour which they perform, lest they be viewed as

[68] Paton, and many other scholars, also hold this opinion about Vashti. See chapter 4.4.1.

shameful or risk bringing shame on themselves. In the ancient world, the primary means for men to perform and gain honour is by being sexually autonomous, which women cannot be. Other forms of male honour include providing for the family and their reflected honour, virility and courage. Women can achieve honour through shame. Shame enables women to maintain male honour by preserving female modesty and submitting to male authority (Klein 2003: 96-97). Klein's study on honour and shame in *Esther* is one that does not purport to comment on a version of the text other than the Hebrew. She argues that Mordecai and Haman were both seeking honour in respect to one another. Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman in chapter three was an attempt to retain his honour and not shame himself by bowing to an Amalekite (2003: 104). Laniak refers to the LXX, the AT and Josephus in his analysis of the MT text of *Esther*. He makes the same argument in his study on honour and shame (1998: 79-80). Haman's honour was affronted by Mordecai's action and thus he was shamed. Neither Laniak nor Klein make a value judgment about this behaviour. Rather they establish that all the characters in the text are bound by the honour/shame dynamic and it dictates how they act and why. Though neither Klein nor Laniak argue for or against Mordecai's role as a hero, their respective models significantly gender his portrayal. By offering only one potential course of action for Mordecai – maintaining his male honour – their interpretations limit his behaviour to binary opposites. Furthermore, the honour/shame dynamic is itself explicitly gendered, as it is the gender binary that informs if a character is experiencing or should experience honour or shame. However, as discussed in chapter three, the honour/shame dynamic does not appear to be a modern take on gender relations in *Esther*. As I highlighted in chapter three, the midrashic, medieval Jewish and early modern Catholic interpretations often imposed an

honour/shame structure on interpretations of Esther, Mordecai and Vashti. Thus, Klein and Laniak's work enables us to understand this structure at work in earlier reception, and to be mindful of the honour/shame dynamic when I approach the ancient versions. It is interesting that both scholars interpret the text as displaying an honour/shame dynamic when Laniak assesses the MT alongside the LXX, AT and Josephus's version, and Klein looks only at the MT. As Laniak's work precedes Klein's, perhaps we can surmise that his analysis, including that which refers to the Greek versions, has influenced Klein's study.

Timothy Beal's work on *Esther* has been particularly impactful on my study. His 1997 work *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* explored in detail the gender roles in this text. His work primarily focuses on the MT text, but offers very occasional references to the LXX and AT in footnotes. Similarly, his 1999 commentary for the *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* series also focuses on the MT text but refers to the Greek versions for translation and text-critical issues. Rather unusually, Timothy Beal's criticism of Mordecai appears to be gender-neutral in his 1999 study, but it is not so in his slightly earlier 1997 study. In his 1999 commentary, Beal problematises Mordecai's refusal to bow, like Moore, but he does not state his preferred interpretation for this scene. He posits that the identification of Mordecai with the Saulide line and Haman with Agag 'compounds tensions and ambiguities while frustrating any clear anticipation of a tidy narrative resolution.' (1999: 46). Further, he argues that 'there is no obvious answer' as to why Mordecai did not bow, and he suggests many possibilities, including that Mordecai was frustrated by not being rewarded for his deed at 2:21-23, and that there might be idolatry involved (1999: 46). However, in his 1997 work on Esther, he states that Mordecai

becomes 'feminized' when he refuses to bow, which appears to contradict his later commentary (1997a: 47). Notably, in his 1999 commentary Beal does not make a value judgment about Mordecai's behaviour. Instead, he allows the gaps in the narrative to speak for themselves. Beal's method is interesting as it is a rare example of a critic allowing the narrative to have gaps and silences without needing to fill them with firm conclusions. Furthermore, that Beal and Day interpret Mordecai's behaviour as feminised displays a non-normative approach to his portrayal. Their work highlights unusual gender roles occurring.

Of the moderate approaches to Mordecai's characterisation in modern scholarship, there is no consensus about how his gender has been portrayed. As shown here, when critics do not make value judgments about Mordecai, that does not automatically mean that they realise his portrayal in a gendered or a genderless way. Most critics tend to espouse a binary gender interpretation of Mordecai, but Beal and Day's approaches highlight that Mordecai can be understood as a non-normative character.

### *4.2.4 - Conclusion*

Many academics tend to hold one of the two dominant thematic views of Mordecai's characterisation outlined here. The most common view is that Mordecai is the infallible hero of *Esther*, without whom the Jews would not be saved. Others view him as the

arrogant and proud figure who established the drama for Esther to fix. There are some critics who hold a moderate position between these two groups.

But what of the gender issues raised by these opposing views? When interpreted as a hero, Mordecai appears to occupy the stereotypical 'male' role in the gender binary. He is the dominant character, the subject of the drama, and it is claimed that without him Esther would have achieved little. Mordecai is too proud to be obedient to Persian law, which depicts him as a stereotypical male, blinded to the danger that his arrogance puts his people in. Consulting the BSRI, Mordecai appears to be fulfilling the desired male characteristics of defending his own beliefs, being willing to take a stand and to take risks. Though this is a binary interpretation of Mordecai's gender, I would argue that gender-critical approaches that highlight Mordecai's pride satirise his behaviour. Mordecai's fragile male ego is his weakness, and thus the gender binary is flawed.

The alternative view is that Mordecai is a gender subvert from chapter four onwards because he becomes feminised, as argued by Klein, Beal and Day. Consulting the BSRI again, in this interpretation it could be said that Mordecai is fulfilling the desired female traits of yielding and being sensitive to the needs of others, and he displays no desired male traits. These interpretations highlight the fact that there are gender role shifts between the characters, and that Mordecai's character traits change as the narrative progresses. This means that Mordecai's gender can be interpreted as exhibiting unusual or non-normative qualities. This challenges his portrayal as a cisgender man and suggests that there may be other ways of interpreting his behaviour that are not subject to the gender binary.

Therefore, scholars that view Mordecai as the antagonist have laid the foundations for a potential non-binary/genderqueer interpretation of his character.

Furthermore, Timothy Beal's approach in his 1999 commentary on *Esther*, highlights that it is possible to take a gender-neutral approach to the text. He maintains that Mordecai's behaviour throughout the text is difficult to adjudicate on, because the text is so vague. Because of this, he posits many possible suggestions. This approach indicates that it is possible to glean valuable insights when reading the text in a gender-neutral way.

## *4.3 – Esther as Beauty/Brains*

As a reader accessing *Esther* scholarship for the first time, one is immediately struck by the opposing interpretations of Esther's character. She has been the subject of fervent disagreements, particularly concerning whether she achieved the salvation of the Jews on her own merit, or if God and Mordecai are the true saviours of the Jews and she was simply a pretty face.

Contrary to what one might assume, it is not feminist and non-feminist scholars who are divided into 'positive' and 'negative' views of Esther's character and portrayal. Within feminist scholarship, there is strict division between commentators. Some view Esther as the heroine of the tale. Others, as will be discussed, argue that Esther colluded with, rather than directly challenged, the patriarchal structure in Ahasuerus's kingdom. Critics including Fuchs and Laffey maintain that Esther's behaviour should be interpreted negatively. They argue that Vashti is the true heroine of the tale, not Esther, because Vashti refused to be the object of the male gaze. Some 'traditional' scholars have emphasised the description of Esther's beauty at 2:7 and her decision to dress royally at 5:1 (וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מַלְכוּת) as proof that it was her appearance and not her actions that caused her success. Indeed, some scholars have been particularly damning of her behaviour in this respect, as will be discussed below.

As a non-binary or genderqueer reader, one is faced with a challenge. The frequent ascription of Esther's behaviour to female stereotypes, and the resulting value judgment

made by many scholars, allows no room for genderqueer/non-binary voices to be heard in the text. However, as will be shown, there are some gender-critical scholars who grant Esther a powerful role in this text by highlight her shifting or unusual gender role in this text. Through their work, I argue that one can see the fragility of the gender binary and hints of non-normative behaviour, and thus I can take their work a stage further in my reading of the ancient versions.

### *4.3.1 - Esther as Pretty but Dumb*

A great deal of twentieth century *Esther* scholarship suggested that Esther was depicted as a brainless beauty queen. This is particularly common in work on *Esther* that pre-dates second-wave feminist scholarship on this text. Paton offered a particularly gendered take on the queen. He argued, '[Esther] wins her victories not by skill or by character, but by her beauty' (1908: 96). Paton's assessment of Esther's portrayal has been echoed numerous times elsewhere. For example, Gunkel argues that the truly 'female' moment of Esther's portrayal is her decision to wait before revealing Haman's deeds to Ahasuerus (1916: 28), because she was not courageous enough to reveal it sooner. By gendering Esther so significantly, these scholars clearly impose the gender binary onto the text.

Hans Bardtke's 1963 work *Das Buch Esther* primarily looks at the MT version of this text and offers some text-critical analysis using the LXX and AT versions. He interprets Esther's action in the early chapters as, 'undeserved and unexpected finding of grace' (1963: 302).

However, he points out that נָשָׂאת חֵן (2:15) indicates that Esther was 'earnestly and actively involved' in gaining favour, which appears to contradict his earlier statement (1963: 303).[69] Bardtke later argues that Esther was ordered by Mordecai to act, and that, because of their kinship and what had been established between them in 2:20, Esther was expected to obey (1963: 331). The idea that kinship automatically dictates Esther's response to Mordecai is highly gendered. Bardtke also engages in some curious gap-filling, explaining that Esther had clearly lost her marital favour with Ahasuerus. He argues, 'Sie hat durch ihre Schönheit auf den König gewirkt, aber diese Wirkung scheint erlöschen zu sein' (1963: 332). Bardtke's argument displays bias against Esther, stating that it was her beauty through which she gained favour with her husband, rather than by any other means. Indeed, he goes so far as to term this 'Ungnade und… geringen Gunst' (1963: 332). In contrast, the MT text does not detail that Esther lost Ahasuerus's favour.

In his commentary on chapter four, Bardtke argues that Esther did not understand the gravity of the situation facing the Jewish people, and thus she only acted after Mordecai ordered her to do so. This establishes a knowledge/ignorance dichotomy between Esther and Mordecai, as Bardtke depicts Esther as ignorant and witless in comparison to her wise male uncle (1963: 335). This can be interpreted by the modern reader as misogynistic criticism. Looking at Bardtke's interpretations through the lens of the BSRI, Mordecai acts as a leader, and Esther appears to yield to him. This depicts them as behaving in a

[69] Translation mine.

cisnormative manner.

Moore echoes Paton's position. He has recently revised his opinion in recognition that it is misogynistic.[70] However, it seems rather a case of 'too little, too late'. In particular, his view that, 'Between Mordecai and Esther the greater hero in the Hebrew is Mordecai, who supplied the brains while Esther simply followed his directions' (1971: li) is particularly damning. In his 1971 commentary, Esther is depicted as yielding to Mordecai's leadership. Moore also describes Esther as being 'two-dimensional, lacking in depth' (1971: liv), in contrast to her uncle Mordecai. Moore explains that the use of the verb תִּמְלֹךְ, 'be queen', in 2:4 תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי, was selected over the verb 'reign' because, '[Esther] did not rule; even after being queen for five years, Esther still occupied a weak and precarious position—in her own eyes at least—for she was most uncertain about her fate and her powers over the king' (1971: 18). Moore's assessment, which agrees with Paton's, illustrates not just a gendered interpretation of Esther but a highly negative view of her, too. He seems to make certain assumptions about her psychology that are not reflected in the MT text. It is difficult to see how one could read Esther in a non-normative way, free of the gender binary, if accessing the text through Paton, Bardtke and Moore's work.

Moore argues that Esther's decision to follow Hegai's advice at 2:15 'made… [her] more appealing to the king, but she also showed herself to be humble and cooperative' (1971:

[70] Moore writes, 'It is now glaringly evident that in a moment of chauvinism I wrote the introduction [to 'Esther']' (2003: 5). He does not, however, address the gendering of his commentary more generally.

24). The language of Moore's assessment is highly gendered and characterises Esther as docile. His tendency to fill in the gaps with inferences and assumptions that display his cisnormative approach to Esther are frequent throughout his commentary. For example, his take on 4:16 where he states, 'That Esther fasted so strictly made her, presumably, less attractive to the king but more acceptable to God.' (1971: 51). The Hebrew text makes absolutely no reference to Esther's attractiveness or unattractiveness in relation to fasting, and certainly not in relation to God who is, as mentioned before, conspicuously absent. Furthermore, Moore states without question that it was Esther's appearance that saved her life in chapter five: 'The magic of her beauty, which had captivated the king from the very beginning, apparently saved her…' (1971: 57). This interpretation is almost laughable, given that the Hebrew text does not indicate this at all. Esther goes in to see the king, and he extends his sceptre to her, but no detail is given in the Hebrew about what makes Ahasuerus do this. It is notable that Moore tends to fill in the gaps in Esther's portrayal, yet he did not do this with Mordecai.[71] It is not clear why he does this, but it may indicate that Moore holds bias against women.

Est. 8:5 is another example of Moore's tendency to gender his interpretation of Esther as he describes her speech as 'coy and coquettish' (1971: 78). Given that the phraseology employed by Esther in 8:5 is used by or about Esther on a number of occasions in the text (5:4, 8; 7:3; 9:13), why it is suddenly interpreted in such a gendered way is odd. Overall, his approach frequently lessens the impact of Esther's success by ascribing it to her

[71] See chapter 4.2.1.

appearance or her 'feminine ways', rather than her own agency. Though Moore does not acknowledge it in his 2003 comments on his 1971 commentary, his take on Esther has been both extremely influential and incredibly damaging. His comments have been frequently quoted by successive scholars, and his opinion is viewed as an authoritative source. As such, the pervasive dismissal of Esther as a bimbo is common in modern scholarship that follows his work.

Jon Levenson's 1997 commentary on *Esther* focuses primarily on the Hebrew text, but includes the Greek Additions in his translation.[72] He also makes frequent references to the LXX. Including the Additions in his work indicates that this extra material may have been influential on his analysis of the book as a whole. On Levenson's decision to include the Additions in his work, Beal has stated:

> Admittedly a compromise, this approach necessarily confuses the two very different narratives, creating a new bilingual hybrid… By inserting analyses of the Greek additions into the commentary on MT Esther… the continuity of that narrative is broken. (1999: xix)

Levenson does not go so far as to explicitly dismiss Esther as an air-headed beauty, but his translation of key verses in chapter two indicates this opinion. For example, Levenson translates וַתִּיטַב הַנַּעֲרָה בְּעֵינָיו וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו (2:9) as 'the maiden pleased him and attracted his favour' (1997: 59). In particular, the translation of וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד as 'attracted favour' points to her 'attraction' being key. Indeed, the verb נשא does not include 'attracted' in its

[72] Notably, Sidnie White Crawford also includes the LXX Additions in her 1999 commentary, but removes them from the Hebrew material and assesses them separately.

semantic range (DCH vol. V: 758-770; BDB: 669; HOL), and thus Levenson's choice here appears to be ideological. Similarly, at 2:15 Levenson translates וַתְּהִי אֶסְתֵּר נֹשֵׂאת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָּל־רֹאֶיהָ as 'but all who saw her found Esther charming' (1997: 59). The colloquial 'charming' does not definitively refer to Esther's appearance, however, neither does it seem particularly close to נֹשֵׂאת חֵן. Furthermore, Levenson switches the perspective of this verse from Esther finding favour in others' eyes, to others finding her charming. Levenson's version of this phrase makes Esther the object and those viewing her the subject, whereas the opposite is true in the Hebrew. This subtly diminishes her importance and agency in the verse. Looking to chapter five, Levenson translates נָשְׂאָה חֵן בְּעֵינָיו as 'she won his favour' (5:2) but he explains that, וְתִלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מַלְכוּת, 'Esther was clothed in royal apparel' (5:1) indicates that a 'mysterious grace' envelops her and causes her to be found favourable (1997: 89), which is a similar interpretation to Bardtke's. Levenson seems to imply that a mysterious presence, that is, the divine has provided this shroud of grace and, presumably, brought about her success. This interpretation seems more akin to the LXX and AT's interpretation than the MT's, as Addition D.1 in LXX and AT use the term δόξα, 'glory', further indicating that Levenson has been influenced by the Greek Additions in his translation of the Hebrew. However, Levenson does not explicitly state that he is referring to the LXX in his comments on this verse. Furthermore, the presence of 'mysterious grace' devalues Esther's action as her success is not thought to have been caused by her but rather another force.

Levenson is also guilty of gap filling. When pondering why Esther did not ask for anything else at 2:15, he posits, 'Having mysteriously won the favour of Hegai, she wisely relies on his expertise instead of her own instincts. This too may foreshadow her deference to an older man, Mordecai, in her moment of decision.' (1997: 62). Levenson's phraseology reveals latent gender bias. He believes that Esther's instincts were at odds with her decision to take Hegai's direction. Using 2:15 to point to 4:16 also fills in the gaps of the scene between Mordecai and Esther in chapter four and devalues as 'deference' her remarkable decision to act. Beal indirectly argues against Levenson's position, stating, '[Esther's] actions imply nothing so simple as obedience to either the king's command or Mordecai's command. She will go before him unsummoned, and later will issue *him* orders.' (1999: 63). Like Moore, Levenson is clearly guilty of imposing binary norms on this text. It may be that Levenson's interpretation has been influenced by the extra material in the Greek Additions, which proposes this power balance between Esther and Mordecai.

Levenson's binary interpretation of Esther's behaviour continues in chapter seven. He argues that she 'poses as a weak and helpless woman' to trick Ahasuerus (1997: 102). Furthermore, he argues that the dramatic scene in chapter seven, where Esther reveals Haman's plot to Ahasuerus, 'gives the sense of a couple dancing beautifully together, but only because the woman is able to absorb the man's jerky motions with the utmost grace and poise' (1997: 103). Esther is characterised by Levenson as fulfilling the role of a stereotypical female to achieve her desired goal.

Fox takes a slightly more balanced approach to Esther's character which is not as damning as that of Moore and Paton, but does include some notably gendered language about her. Like Moore, Fox points out that 2:9 indicates activity on Esther's part as she gains Hegai's kindness. However, in a later comment about her behaviour in chapter two, he argues that 'Nothing suggests that she could ever take her people's fate into her hands.' (2003: 52). This may indicate that Fox dismisses as irrelevant the examples of Esther's agency in chapter two. At 4:4 Fox condemns Esther's act of sending Mordecai clothing, stating that, 'Her attention to superficials exposes her own superficiality' (1991a: 60). The use of the word 'superficiality' to describe Esther particularly exposes his own bias, as he interprets Esther's behaviour in a cisnormative fashion. Furthermore, like Moore, Fox applies a negative value judgment to his gendered analysis. When we consider how Fox interprets Mordecai, discussed above in the previous section of this chapter, it is unsurprising that he holds this view of Esther. As we have seen, Fox proposed that it was Mordecai, not Esther, who was responsible for the Jews' salvation, so in his interpretation he appears to minimise her importance compared to her uncle.

Fox's commentary seems to become more balanced after Esther issues her commands at 4:16. However, his summary conclusions highlight his latent prejudice. He states, '[Esther] moves from being a dependent of others (all of them men) to an independent operator who, whatever the objective restrictions on her freedom, will work out her own plans and execute them in order to manipulate one man and break another.' (1991a: 64). The use of the word 'manipulate' to describe her actions is a cisnormative take on Esther's actions as

those of a *femme fatale.*[73] Though he grants Esther agency, this is tainted by the trope of the manipulative woman. Furthermore, Fox's wording appears to establish a gendered dichotomy between Esther and the men in the story. Fox concludes that, 'nothing would avail if she lacked the power of erotic attraction,' and he praises her for her 'sexual talents' (1991a: 89), despite the lack of explicit evidence in the Hebrew to support this claim.

However, Fox appears to present a contradictory picture of Esther. Later, he points out in his summary chapter that, 'She does not—contrary to a common notion—simply exploit her beauty and erotic charm.' (1991a: 200). Perhaps Fox is not aware that he subconsciously layers gendered expressions that contradict this throughout his commentary. Indeed, Fox presents little evidence to support his claim that Esther is a complex figure. It is also possible that, like Moore and Bardtke, the MT text stands in tension with his gendered analysis and thus creates contradictions in his scholarly analysis. Notably, the way Fox describes Esther's achievements is rather different from how he describes Mordecai. Mordecai is depicted in Fox's work with rather more heroic terms such as 'thoughtful', 'stable', 'wise' and 'unassuming' (1991a: 43, 192), whereas he describes Esther with terms such as 'manipulative' (1991a: 73; 89; 115; 170; 201), 'meek' and 'humble' (1991a: 85). Though these words are not identical to those included in the BSRI, the words Fox uses about Esther are very similar in meaning to 'shy', 'softly spoken' and 'yielding'. The first group of words used to describe Mordecai are male-oriented positive

[73] For discussion on the evolution and pervasiveness of the *femme fatale* trope with reference to Delilah, see Blyth 2017: 3-4, 9-50.

words, whereas the second group used to describe Esther are distinctly female-oriented words which have both negative and positive connotations. I would instead suggest that the first group of words used to describe Mordecai could easily be used about Esther, as they are all applicable to her behaviour in the text. Indeed, as will be shown in Part Two of this thesis, there seems to be little evidence to justify Fox's use of these terms to describe Esther as depicted in the MT.

Fox posits justification for his interpretation of Esther. He argues, '*even* a stereotypical woman in a world of laughably stereotypical males is capable of facing the ultimate national crisis and diverting the royal power to her own ends.'[74] (1991a: 207). This concession that Fox grants Esther, that she is capable of diverting the national crisis in spite of her gender, and that she does it for her own ends, highlights latent misogyny in his interpretation. However, he further concludes that Esther was 'something of a protofeminist' and that the book itself is a satire of the masculine ego (1991a: 209). One cannot help but feel that though Fox easily makes these summary comments, his analysis of the text itself displays a rather different ideology. Indeed, Timothy Beal has made this point, arguing that Fox's approach 'tends away from close exegetical study of particular textual details, and instead makes broad sweeps across the surfaces of the text.' (1997a: 47).

[74] Italics are Fox's own.

Robert Alter's brief study on *Esther* in *Strong as Death is Love* (2016) takes a positive but rather gendered approach to Esther's portrayal. In particular, Alter engages in some very descriptive and creative gap-filling which has a latent cisnormative bias. For example, his explanation of how Esther found favour from Ahasuerus and gained his love (2:17) is as follows:

> …if sexual performance is the crucial test, how would one inexperienced virgin distinguish herself from the others?… The arch double meaning at the beginning of Chapter 5 raises the suspicion that this passive and not very competent king may have a problem with virility. If that is the case, the beautiful and understanding Esther might possibly be the one virgin who helps him overcome his difficulties. (2016: 97).

Alter's explanation embellishes the scant detail that we have in the MT with an entirely new and detailed narrative, akin to a midrashic interpretation of this scene. The assumption that Esther a) was not skilled at sex as she was a virgin, b) was understanding of the king's impotence (which itself is also an assumption), and c) she helped him overcome this impotence, characterises the scene in chapter two as phallocentric. Indeed, Alter's discussion of Esther in chapters four, five and seven is also phallocentric. By framing her position in the narrative in terms of the sexual pleasure she does or does not provide the king or Haman, though his opinion is positive, it reduces Esther to the functions she can fulfil with her body. For a non-binary or genderqueer reader for whom issues of physiology and gender are problematic, this makes for extremely uncomfortable reading.

As shown in this section, there have been some very influential and incredibly damning assessments of Esther in scholarship. These critics have dismissed Esther as being beautiful but stupid, though some have conceded that she exercises a little agency in chapter two.

What is common about these interpretations is that they have used gendered language to describe Esther, perhaps even without realising the gender bias implicit in using such language.

### *4.3.2 - Esther as Moderately Pretty and Moderately Dumb*

Some critics' approaches to Esther do not entirely dismiss her, but do not laud her either. David J. A. Clines's 1984 work, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* is highly regarded as a go-to academic study on *Esther*. Clines' focus is on the book's textual tradition and development. In particular, he uses the Greek versions to draw comparative analyses between versions and study the textual traditions. Clines's take on Esther is very positive as he believes that embedded in Esther's portrayal is a concern for the Jewish people. Her story is, he argues, primarily an achievement or success story (1984: 144) and she achieves what she sets out to do 'by a combination of charm, courage, rhetoric and energy… she deserves to succeed not because she is good but because she is resourceful.' (1984: 145). However, Clines states that providence plays a role in Esther's achievements (1984: 146), which could be interpreted as significantly reducing her agency.[75] It is possible that Clines holds this opinion because he uses the LXX and AT in his version alongside the MT, both of which include references to and action from God in the *Esther* tale.

[75] This will be discussed in detail in chapter eight.

Bush does not take as negative an approach to the text as many of his contemporaries, and he offers a detailed and informative take on the *Esther* text which does not appear to be overly biased. Yet there are examples in his work of gender bias and binary thinking. Bush takes a visibly positive approach to Esther in his interpretation of chapter two. He highlights that the idiom נָשָׂאת חֵן 'implies that she plays an active role… for the idiom has an active sense 'to win or earn favour'.' (1996: 368). Against Fox, Bush interprets Esther's action at 4:4 as being logical: she sent Mordecai clothing in order that she might speak to him directly (1996: 394). Like many of the scholars mentioned above, when assessing chapter four Bush states that there is providential purpose behind Esther's position as queen. When making this claim, Bush does not explicitly state that he looks to a Greek version to elucidate the MT. Until this point in his commentary Bush has highlighted Esther's 'superiority and success' (1996: 370) and that she is 'taking the initiative and determining the course of events' (1996: 406) by highlighting that her speeches and physical movements are carefully constructed to achieve her desired outcome. Therefore, it does not seem to be the case that he is lessening Esther's agency by including divine action, but rather he continues to emphasise her activity alongside it.

Unlike Fox, Bush does not use gendered language such as 'manipulate' or 'seduce' in relation to Esther. Indeed, he often suggests a gender-neutral interpretation of an action, for example, he states that Esther's falling at Ahasuerus's feet at 8:3 was an act of supplication, not of obeisance (1996: 444). His assessment of this scene highlights Esther's 'skillful rhetoric' when attempting to deal with a highly volatile monarch in a dangerous situation (1996: 450-451). In his thematic summary, Bush argues, rather controversially

given the body of scholarship that precedes his work, that Esther is a paradigmatic figure for diaspora Jews but is a more 'real' and 'lively' one than Mordecai (1996: 321). Bush's take on Esther appears to be one of the most 'positive' of any traditional academic analysis of her character. He does not appear to imbue his investigation with latent, negative gender bias.[76] It is interesting that, aside from Bush's view that divine agency is involved in Esther's action, he does not appear to be influenced by or reference the Greek texts with any great frequency in relation to Esther. His work does not go so far as to attempt to read the text in a genderqueer/non-binary way, but his analysis of Esther's character appears to allow for enough flexibility that we might be able to read non-normative resonances in his interpretation.

Another example of a moderate scholarly approach to Esther's portrayal is in Robert D. Holmstedt and John Screnock's 2015 commentary *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. This work primarily looks at translating and expounding the issues found in the Hebrew text. This means that there is less thematic discussion and, perhaps as a result, less gendering occurs. Like Bush's commentary, Holmstedt and Screnock's work, for the most part, shows that it is possible to comment on Esther without explicitly imposing the gender binary on her character. However, there are still detectable 'negative' interpretations of Esther in this work, which appear to go beyond the limits of a philological and semantic study to fill in some gaps. For example, they argue that Esther's appearance described in 2:7 alone marks her as being the ideal candidate for queen. They translate the *qal* participle

[76] As will be shown in chapter 4.4, this is not how Bush treats Vashti in his interpretation.

and noun phrase נָשָׂא חֵן at 2:15 and at 2:17 as 'received favour'.[77] This translates the *qal* form of this verb in a passive voice, unlike Bush's translation of 'win or earned favour' (1996: 364). When assessing Esther sending clothing to Mordecai at 4:4, they argue that she attempts to 'subvert his protest', because she either did not understand his purpose or did not understand the implications of her actions (2015: 143). As is common in other scholars' work on this verse, this approach ignores the fact that Mordecai could not enter the king's gates dressed in mourning garb (4:2), and thus Esther could not speak to him. This study illustrates, therefore, that even when one's concerns are not thematic, bias against women can creep in.

The scholars included here show that, though one can approach Esther in a moderate manner without offering a particularly fervent opinion of her, either positive or negative, these moderate approaches still exhibit some latent gender bias.

### *4.3.3 - Positive Views of Esther*

There are some critics who take a positive approach to Esther. These critics praise Esther's action and achievements rather than dismiss or condemn her. Their views have paved the way for my study, because their work has enabled me to see how we can view Esther's gender as an interesting and fruitful topic for further exploration. Furthermore, these

[77] 2:17 includes the same phrase but with the verb in the *qal* imperfect form with waw consecutive.

critics have done much to illustrate that Esther's behaviour can be interpreted in non-normative ways. It is important to note, as mentioned in chapter two, that as genderqueer/non-binary identity is very new and it succeeds much of the *Esther* criticism included here, it is unsurprising that these critics do not offer an assessment of this text which rejects or is outside of the gender binary.

Timothy Beal's 1999 commentary on *Esther* often deals with assessing characters' positions either as a subject or as an object. Beal highlights that Esther begins her role in the narrative as an object while others hold the role of subject around her, then she shifts to occupying the opposite role. This analysis demonstrates Esther's progression and change in the narrative and highlights the unusual behaviour patterns occurring in this text, and their impact on gender. Beal shows how Esther does not stay within her expected role as a subject, and she transcends the limits imposed on her by her gender. Indeed, Beal's work was very influential when formulating the goals of this thesis.

Linda Day's 2005 commentary on *Esther* can be described as a mainstream biblical commentary that has feminist leanings. Day takes a nuanced approach to Esther which eschews 'negative' assessments of her portrayal. Day interprets 4:16 as showing that Esther is reconstituting her female role, and that, 'Now she begins to learn how not to be the 'good wife'' (2005: 90). She highlights how Esther goes beyond the normative behaviour expected of her, as the story progresses. Day emphasises phallic symbolism in her interpretation of chapter five, pointing out that Esther 'plays up to the male ego' (2005: 101). Day is keen to point out that she is not condemning Esther for this action. Rather, she

states, 'the reader must recognise that Persian society is not the most gender-egalitarian environment one might desire. Perhaps Esther's approach, though conventionally female, is the pragmatic, even wise, choice; she does not attempt to change the system but works within it to achieve what she desires.' (2005: 102). By arguing that Esther used expected societal norms to achieve her goal, Day shows that Esther is tactical in her approach.

Yoram Hazony's 2016 work *God and Politics in Esther* focuses on the Hebrew text primarily, with some additional comments made about the talmudic and midrashic interpretations of *Esther*, but not the Greek or Latin versions. Hazony tends to take a positive approach to Esther's character. Indeed, he states unequivocally that 2:9 shows that it is not Esther's beauty that drives her success but her political favour. He further points out that Hegai's reaction to her illustrates this, as it is highly unlikely that such a professional man would have altered his professional behaviour and risk both his livelihood and his life. Knowing this, Hazony argues that Esther consciously sets out to '[make] it her business to understand what it is that [Hegai] wants, and seeks ways to advance his will with the active support of her own… Esther finds favour with all who have power over her, just as Joseph had in Egypt, by convincing them that in all her doings, she seeks their interest.' (2016: 24). By drawing a comparison between Esther and Joseph,[78] Hazony portrays Esther like a shrewd and intelligent protagonist. He then states that the relationship between men and women is the same as in politics, and that they require a certain dominant/submissive dynamic to achieve one's goals. He contends that Esther is aware of these power dynamics:

[78] See Berg 1979: 123-142 for a detailed comparison between *Esther* and the Joseph narrative.

'By giving Ahashverosh her initiative and the active use of her strength in the pursuit of his interest, Esther bestows on the king the gift of power – precisely that for which he has so desperately longed and for which he is immediately willing to make her queen.' (2016: 25). This is like Angeline Song's analysis of Esther's behaviour in the MT. Song draws a comparison between Esther's actions towards the men in the tale and how colonised people behave towards their colonisers to ensure their own survival. She argues that Esther utilises the expected behaviour norms of coloniser/colonised, which is also a dominant/submissive relationship, to elicit the best response from the king (2010: 60, 64-67). Therefore, we can perhaps interpret this dominant/submissive dynamic between Ahasuerus and Esther as her means of survival in a land in which she is a minority race, and a shrewd political move to use normative behaviour structures for her own success.

The examples given in this section show how Esther has been interpreted positively and they have often shown how Esther exploits and thus challenges binary gender norms. Furthermore, some critics have shown that one can interpret Esther as working within the gender norms of Persian society without construing it negatively. Both positions are important for my study, as they allow for the possibility that Esther displays non-normative behaviour, which I take further in my interpretation of non-binary/genderqueer behaviour in the text.

*4.3.4 - Feminist Division over Esther*

Of the feminist scholars who have approached this work, there is a great deal of division and disagreement over how to interpret Esther's character. On the whole, this division is focused on whether Esther is a tool of the patriarchy and thus she cannot be a true heroine, or whether she uses the patriarchal structure of the royal palace to achieve her own ends, in which case she is a figure to be lauded. As Crawford points out, 'Feminist scholars… find little to admire in Esther… Esther, it seems, is neither "woman" enough nor "man" enough to satisfy any of her critics.' (1999: 872). A few examples of each position will now be highlighted.

Esther Fuchs and Alice Laffey offer damning criticism of Esther's role in the narrative that has been often quoted by successive scholars. Fuchs condemns Esther in no uncertain terms, offering a critique not dissimilar to Paton. She argues that Esther was ignorant of Haman's edict because she was 'too busy with her makeup and other skin-deep activities' (1998 [1982]: 259). She argues that, 'Esther acts not out of independent initiative or spontaneous concern for her people, but out of filial deference, possibly even fear of her uncle… she is an agent rather than a genuine heroine.' (1999 [1982]: 260). She further argues that Esther 'procrastinates' about telling the king of Haman's plot, and that it is Mordecai, not her, who exercises the authority to have the edict revoked (1999 [1982]: 260). Fuchs states:

> Esther is described in terms that imply she is pretty, obedient, silver-tongued, and somewhat manipulative. She constantly flatters the king and never fails to recognize and stress his authority. She waits patiently and obediently till the king's permission is given for an audience; only then she

> speaks. She is shown to fall on her knees, cry, and implore the king (8:3). (1999 [1982]: 262).

Fuchs clearly characterises Esther as a stereotypical female, which she assesses negatively. When characterising Esther as 'submissive' and 'manipulative', Fuchs contrasts her with Vashti who, in Fuchs' opinion, embodies the opposite traits (1999 [1982]: 264-265). Furthermore, Fuchs' assessment echoes those of the 'traditional' commentators who use similar language to describe Esther.

Alice Laffey agrees with Fuchs' assessment, stating, 'buried in Esther's character is… full compliance with patriarchy… Esther is the stereotypical woman in a man's world. She wins favour by the physical beauty of her appearance, and then by her ability to satisfy sexually. She concentrates on pleasing those in power, that is, men… Her access to power is through these men.' (1988: 216). Susan Niditch is another feminist scholar who generally agrees with Fuchs' and Laffey's take on Esther. She argues that Esther is, 'an altogether appealing portrait of women's wisdom for the men of a ruling patriarchate, but hardly an image meaningful or consoling to modern women.' (1995: 39). Looking at the stories of Esther, Abigail and other biblical women, Niditch further argues, 'men can express their conscience and their best side, but through these women the superego prods in a nonthreatening and nonintrusive way.' (2014: 269). Positioning Esther as in collusion with the patriarchy reinforces rather than challenges the gender binary. Indeed, Fox challenges Fuchs and Laffey's position, highlighting that their approach is 'not so far in spirit from some Christian commentators.' (2003: 50).

The renowned feminist Simone de Beauvoir interpreted Esther rather similarly to Fuchs, Laffey and Niditch. Assessing the ways that women are idealised in male writing, she stated:

> Conciliator and mediator is thus how woman often appears: she is docile Esther accountable to Mordecai . . . she can overcome her weakness, her faintheartedness and her modesty through loyalty to the cause that is hers since it is that of her master's; she draws strength from her devotion which makes her a precious instrument. On the human level she is seen as drawing her greatness from her very subordination. But in God's eyes, she is a perfectly autonomous person. (2011 [1949]: 198).

de Beauvoir's analysis positions Esther as a stereotypically-gendered female as imagined by male writers. But she establishes a dichotomy between the Esther as realised by men in the human sphere, and by God in the divine sphere. Notably, de Beauvoir does not criticise Esther for this. Rather, she appears to place the blame on the gender binary as it exists in her society and as realised in literature written by men.

Shirly Bahar's assessment of Esther builds on that of de Beauvoir, Fuchs, Laffey and Niditch. She argues:

> …the text emphasizes Esther's entrance into an existing set of sexist discursive values, which beget Esther as a performative female figure. She thus cannot be perceived as an essential figure whose (id)entity is liberated from inscribed and subscribed gender policing. (2012: 171).

However, Bahar suggests that as Esther is performing the female gender, this destabilises her gender identity, as though she is performing drag. Bahar states, 'she exploits her identity convergences and, as a result, comes out in an act of masquerade. Esther's figure in the Book of Esther is thus far from presenting a coherent and stable identity.' (2012: 172).

She further argues, 'If Esther indeed were a gay person, she would fit neatly in neither the hetero nor the homo drawer but would instead render each of these binaries a performative affiliation.' (2012: 177). This claim suggests that Esther's behaviour is non-normative and she destabilises cisnormativity.

On the other side of the feminist debate is Sidnie White Crawford. Crawford agrees with the above scholars that Esther is situated within a patriarchal system and that she uses this system to achieve her own ends. However, like de Beauvoir, Crawford does not vilify Esther for this (2003a: 63-64). She challenges Fuchs and Laffey by pointing out that we cannot expect a biblical character to behave like a modern woman (2003a: 73). Crawford takes a much more logical and sympathetic approach to interpreting Esther's portrayal, that does not dismiss her behaviour as collusion. For example, she highlights the activity of the phrase וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד (2:9) to highlight that Esther was not, in fact, a purely submissive character (1989: 167; 1999: 888). Similarly, Crawford points out the logic in Esther's decision to follow Hegai's advice (2:15), to send Mordecai clothing (4:4), to refute Mordecai's advice (4:11) and her plea to Ahasuerus (8:5-6) amongst other actions (1989: 168-173). Crawford's approach thus avoids negatively condemning Esther's behaviour, which is welcome when compared to Fuchs, Laffey and Niditch's interpretations.

Adele Berlin's *JPS Commentary* on *Esther* (2001) translates and comments on the Hebrew text primarily, but uses the Greek versions as 'a key to understanding Esther' (2001: ix), as well as rabbinic sources. She takes an approach to Esther's character that is not dissimilar to Sidnie White Crawford. She points out that it is a misreading to juxtapose Vashti's

activity with Esther's passivity as it does a disservice to both women. She argues that Esther 'overcomes the limitations of [her] positions of weakness… not because she is a 'liberated woman' seeking independence and autonomy, but because she moves from a low status to a high status. It is a form of the Cinderella motif.' (2001: lvi). Though Berlin's critique does not make a negative value judgment of Esther, that she perceives Esther to be fulfilling a Cinderella trope implicitly imposes gender binary stereotypes on her and the characters surrounding her. Indeed, Berlin then argues, 'Mordecai and Esther are co-heroes, each contributing in ways that are congruent with their gender roles in the world of the biblical narrative in the Persian period'. (2001: lvii).

Angeline Song also directly challenges Fuchs and Laffey's assessments of Esther. As mentioned in the previous section, Song argues that Esther's behaviour towards Ahasuerus is similar to that of coloniser/colonised. Therefore, Esther was pragmatic in her decision to assimilate and not rebel. Song argues:

> From the point of view of class relations, her actions… can be seen as subversive, as she embodies the subtle strategy of the disenfranchised, whose vulnerable positions do not allow them the luxury of direct confrontation. Such a view is supported by the reversals or periptery that were achieved by Esther's strategically oblique actions. (2010: 67)

Song argues that Esther displayed a political shrewdness and pragmatism in her vulnerable position as a subordinate that Fuchs and Laffey do not take into consideration (2010: 65-67). She points out that the word חסד (2:9, 17) is 'a significant word in the Old Testament, implying faithfulness, devotion, loyalty and steadfast love' (2010: 61). To Song, this implies that the narrator wanted to portray Esther positively, as it is remarkable that she was able

to elicit this response in the egotistical and volatile king at the early stages of their relationship. Indeed, Song contends that this word shows that Esther is a 'unique and special character' (2010: 61). Ultimately, Song argues:

> An Esther who is neither 'Evil Eve' nor 'Virgin Mary' breaks the traditional stereotyping of women in the Old Testament as either being wholly 'good' like Tamar in 2 Samuel, or wholly 'bad'' like Jezebel in 1 Kings. Real life women and men are a mixture of both good and bad, capable even of contradictory thoughts and motivations. Former ages may have yearned for literary plaster saints, but many modern readers will feel more at home with a realistically multifaceted character like Esther. (2010: 67).

Song's analysis is similar to what I aim to do with my study: to show Esther as a combination of 'good' and 'bad', as having the capacity to be interpreted as a non-binary/genderqueer character who is not stereotypically gendered.

Feminist scholars have discussed Esther's role and character in depth, highlighting that there are clearly different ways one can interpret her when starting from the same ideological basis. There is a clear division in feminist opinions, with Esther interpreted positively and negatively by critics. A common theme in all the feminist scholars' opinions cited here is that Esther colluded with the ruling power system, but there is disagreement about whether this is a good or a bad thing. This has implications for my study, concerning non-binary/genderqueer people's experience participating in modern society. For many people, the experience may be akin to Song's suggestion of coloniser/colonised. They may feel like they must assimilate and behave subtly to survive. As Crawford and Song agree, Esther operated within the political system to achieve her goals. This may be analogous to

non-binary/genderqueer people's experience of public life, as they must pick a gender when using bathrooms, applying for a passport or driving licence, or applying for a job.

### *4.3.5 - Conclusion*

This section has outlined many commentaries and thematic scholarly work on Esther from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Understandably, not all work published in this period is reviewed here. Instead the most influential pieces have been selected for review.

As displayed in this section, the portrayal of Esther is, on the whole, highly gendered in critical studies. This gendering either occurs in a 'positive' or a 'negative' way, as scholars condemn Esther's behaviour or praise her for it. This is most identifiable in critics' approaches to her scenes in chapters two, four and eight. Condemnation of Esther appears to occur on two fronts: dismissing her as an empty-headed beauty queen and heralding Mordecai as the true hero, or lambasting her for upholding the patriarchy, with Vashti viewed as the more appropriate heroine. In gender-focused criticism that takes a positive approach to Esther, for example the work of Beal, Crawford, Day and Song, the focus on the power dynamics between Esther and Mordecai, Hegai, Ahasuerus and Haman is particularly useful for my study.

Criticism that is not gender-focused and that takes a broadly positive, that is to say, a non-judgmental approach to Esther's portrayal, is certainly in the minority. In particular, Clines

and Bush's approaches do not appear to needlessly introduce gendered themes into many aspects of their analysis of Esther. Bush and Clines' work shows that it is indeed possible to read the text in a manner divorced from the gender binary.

## *4.4 – Vashti as Literary Trope/Feminist Icon*

Queen Vashti is the first female character to be named in the Book of Esther. Her scene with king Ahasuerus opens the tale, which is rather unusual given that the book is named after an entirely different, and notably absent, queen. Historically, Vashti's presence in the narrative has puzzled many readers. As Beal has pointed out, in his experience, readers and students alike tend to forget or exclude the Vashti narrative from *Esther* (1997a: 16). This is because, he believes, readers do not know how to handle her unusual story, or understand how it fits into the plot as a whole. In modern scholarship, approaches to Vashti can be broadly grouped into two: those who view Vashti as merely a literary device, and those who hail her as an icon. Like scholars' approaches to Esther and Mordecai, this has created two contrasting opinions of Vashti. Within these two groups, scholars do not always agree on the minutiae of Vashti's portrayal.

Those who view Vashti as a literary device argue that Vashti's drama was the means to the greater end of Esther's promotion to position of queen. This approach tends to give Vashti minimal consideration beyond her perceived literary function, and these scholars spend little time discussing her actions. Those who view Vashti as an icon tend to take a conservative approach to her portrayal, arguing that she was a highly moral individual for refusing to display herself before Ahasuerus and his companions. Many feminists have heralded Vashti as an icon because she refused Ahasuerus's sexist request of her. As discussed in the previous section, feminist critics who hold this opinion often contrast Vashti's portrayal with Esther's, arguing that Vashti should be lauded over Esther who, they argue, colluded with the patriarchy. What is common to both the conservative and the

feminist scholarly opinions is that they both, to a greater or lesser degree, moralise Vashti's behaviour. Often this moralisation occurs in scholarly opinions which also profess that she is nothing but a literary tool. These arguments will now be outlined to highlight how many interpretations of Vashti adhere to binary gender tropes, but conversely, there are some gender-focused critics who interpret her character in subversive ways.

### *4.4.1 - Vashti as a Literary Device*

Many scholars including Gunkel (1916) and Alter (2016: 86) have argued that Vashti is a literary device. One of the most heavily-gendered analyses of Vashti comes from Bardtke. He notes Targum Sheni's interpretation of this scene, that Vashti displayed the private quarters of Ahasuerus to her female invitees, 'Für die Phantasie des Targumisten zweifellos eine ansprechende Vergegenwärtigungsleistung, die zugleich ein hübsches Beispiel der weiblichen Psychologie bietet.' (1963: 283). That the Targum's expansion – which as discussed in chapter three displays overtly androcentric themes – could display keen insight into female psychology is laughable. He further argues that though western interpreters have often lauded Vashti's behaviour, the author himself did not explain the reason for Vashti's rejection. Thus, it is only the refusal which is important. He explains that this establishes a comparison between the pagan Vashti and the Jewish Esther and their respective disobedience and obedience (1963: 286-287). I would argue against this by pointing out that the *Esther* narrator rarely gives explanations for any actions, so why this reduces Vashti to a literary device, but not another character, highlights Bardtke's implicit

bias against her. My analysis in the second part of this thesis aims to challenge this position by exploring Vashti's behaviour itself, to show that she can be interpreted as shocking and transgressive.

Moore states, 'Neither Vashti nor Zeresh is a believable life-and-blood individual; they are simply tools the author uses to construct his story.' (1971: lii). He argues later in his commentary that Vashti's behaviour was, 'a splendid literary device to better acquaint the reader with Xerxes.' (1971: 13). By reducing Vashti's behaviour to a device to display Ahasuerus's behaviour means that her role is to support a male character, rather than having any value herself. The approach taken by Clines (1984) is very like Moore's, as he proposes that the function of the Vashti story is one that sets the tone of the narrative that follows and encourages the reader to treat the king, his law and his royal court as suspicious (1984: 32-33).

Levenson interprets Vashti's scene as displaying that Ahasuerus is powerless in his own kingdom. He argues, 'The personal has become the political, or, to state the reverse, the political has been exposed as nothing more than the personal on solid gold stilts.' This comedy, he argues, continues throughout the text (1997: 13). Levenson's interpretation implies that Vashti's action is merely a reflection on Ahasuerus and his regime, as Clines argued. Reducing Vashti's refusal of Ahasuerus's request to a means by which the author could establish him as a foolish character clearly marks her as a literary device. In his commentary on the text, Levenson argues that Vashti's 'absolute and uncompromising refusal to comply with her husband renders her powerless and ineffective and ultimately

sweeps her from the scene' in the 'maintenance of her own dignity'. In contrast, he states that the 'positive antipode is Esther' who achieves 'higher goals' than Vashti does (1997:48). Levenson's approach is both gendered and moralised. Firstly, he states that Vashti's action was to maintain her 'dignity', a loaded word which implies that there are things which women should avoid in order to be honourable. This implies that Vashti acted in consideration for her gender role as a woman. Secondly, Levenson seems to argue that Vashti was wrong to try to preserve her female honour, in contrast to Esther who he characterises as dispensing with her female honour for the greater good. Though this might initially sound like a radical opinion, Levenson's comments are incredibly gendered. As discussed in the previous section of Part One, the honour/shame dichotomy is a gendered concept.[79] Furthermore, Levenson implies that one should forego honour *in specific circumstances only*. According to his logic, Vashti did not recognise the special situation and that is why she was removed from the narrative. Esther, on the other hand, did recognise this situation and thus she achieved her goal.

Bush argues that Vashti's refusal and her deposal '[sets] the stage for telling how Esther could rise to a position where she could affect the course of events.' (1996: 354). Like Moore, Clines and Levenson, he states that the scene casts a 'derisive eye' over the royal court and highlights the supremacy of law in the kingdom. Furthermore, Bush argues that Vashti 'reveals a sense of decorum and self-respect that places her outside of the mocking characterization that the narrator has given the rest of the royal court.' (1996: 354).

[79] See chapter 4.3.3.

Therefore, Bush characterises her action as being one of modesty, as well as reducing her action to the means by which the male characters could be characterised in the scene. Bush's opinion of Vashti is surprising when we compare it with his interpretation of Esther, discussed in chapter 4.3. He took a rather moderate approach to Esther and tended to make gender-neutral statements about her behaviour. In contrast, his approach to Vashti displays gender bias against her. Perhaps there are other factors which have influenced Bush's opinion of Vashti in contrast to Esther, such as her ethnicity or importance.

As shown in this section, it seems clear that when Vashti is dismissed as a tool to bring about Esther's entry into the Persian royal court, or to satirise the king and his companions, she is also depicted in a highly gendered manner. Many of the most prominent *Esther* critics hold this opinion. We have shown here that this portrayal not only displays latent gender bias, but that it also reinforces the gender binary. Notably, all the scholars listed in this section refer supplementarily to the Greek versions, specifically the LXX and AT, in their analysis of *Esther*, rather than only using the MT. Vashti is not included in the Greek Additions in the LXX, AT or in Josephus's version. Thus, I propose that the reason why scholars have often dismissed Vashti is because she is not mentioned in the Greek Additions.

*4.4.2 - Vashti as an Icon*

There are many scholars who interpret Vashti in a positive manner, heralding her as the victor of the narrative. These opinions have done much to highlight Vashti's importance in the plot as a whole, to identify the power that she wields in the text, and her strength of character for refusing to participate in Ahasuerus's games.

However, as will be shown here, though Vashti is interpreted as a positive role model, this portrayal does not challenge the gender binary but rather reinforces it. Often, scholars who laud Vashti's behaviour do so because they believe she is adhering to an honour/shame code. By refusing Ahasuerus's request to appear before his friends, Vashti was behaving honourably because she acted to preserve her modesty, so she should be celebrated. This is rather like the opinions of many scholars cited in chapter 4.2. As discussed elsewhere in Part One, this approach presupposes suitable behaviour for men and women, so it reinforces the gender binary when used in such analyses. Using the honour/shame code does not allow us to read Vashti in a non-binary way. In Klein's analysis, she argues that Vashti refused the king's request to preserve her own honour and not 'abandon her modesty' (2003: 100). This argument reinforces gender stereotypes because Vashti's behaviour maintains rather than challenges the status quo.

Fox argues that we do not need to have a reason explicitly given in the text for why Vashti refused. He points to the separation of the sexes indicated in the details of 1:9, that is, there are separate feasts for men and women, and he argues that the author thought it was 'obligatory or proper' for this separation to continue. Further, he states that, 'A reluctance

to display herself to a gathering of bibulous males… is enough to explain [Vashti's] refusal.' (1991a: 20). However, he then argues that Vashti threatened the king's court because, 'if a man's 'honour' depends on his ability to dominate his wife, then any failure to enforce obedience is tantamount to male disgrace.' (1991a: 21). Vashti upholds the binary separation of men and women by refusing to enter the male feast, as Fox argues. But the men see this as a slight on their honour as they could not control Vashti's behaviour. This implies that Fox satirises the king's court and their fragile male egos. Subsequently, Fox argues, 'Vashti's refusal is probably motivated by a sense of rank than any protofeminist ideals. She is, after all, the queen, not a mere concubine to be toyed with.' He also argues that the author was sympathetic to Vashti. (1991a: 167). Therefore, Fox makes it extremely clear that he considers Vashti to be defending, rather than challenging, cisnormative behaviour. The positive, conservative view of Vashti is exemplified by Jeffrey M. Cohen's analysis. He argues, 'the one person against whom no criticism at all could be raised was Vashti, a woman of true courage and valour. While Esther vacillated before undertaking moral action, and had to be persuaded to stand up for her people, Vashti acted decisively as a moral exemplar of the highest order.' (1996: 106). His opinion is common amongst those who view her as maintaining her dignity or avoiding shame.

Fuchs was discussed in the previous section for being explicitly damning of Esther. Fuchs draws a comparison between Esther and Vashti, praising the latter for her refusal to engage. She argues that Vashti 'refuses to humiliate herself' by being treated as a 'mere ornament' by her husband (1999 [1982]: 264). Laffey (1988) puts forward a similar analysis, arguing '[Vashti] will not become the sexual object of drunken men! [She] resists

patriarchal expectations… She was an enormous threat to the patriarchal status quo.' (1988: 214-215). For Laffey, Vashti's model can be a model for women to rebel against the dominion of their husbands. Both Fuchs' and Laffey's arguments point out the transgressive and shocking nature of Vashti's behaviour. This enables readers to see that Vashti could be interpreted as something other than a stereotypical female character. Both critics also focus on the power of Vashti's rejection of the king, and her refusal to engage. This is a feature I analyse in detail in chapter six of this thesis, as I believe it is similar to non-binary/genderqueer people's experience of refusing to engage in the gender binary.

Linda Day points out that the scene featuring Ahasuerus and Vashti displays men and women working against rather than with one another. As such, Vashti is a 'countercultural figure' (2005: 42). Day argues that Vashti appears to be 'principled and forthright' for refusing to do something she deemed degrading. She states, 'Not willing to be an object of Ahasuerus's action, in her refusal she maintains herself as a subject of her own action, and in so doing she opposes abusive power structures.' (2005: 43). This is certainly a very positive view of Vashti as a figure to be praised, and the use of the word 'countercultural' in Day's analysis carries with it the resonances of non-normative behaviour.

Timothy Beal has engaged with Vashti's character on a much deeper level than most. He first points out that Vashti's separate feast was a means of exclusion by the ruling males, to subordinate and control the women by placing them in a liminal space. However, by excluding this group the ruling males also, paradoxically, lost control of the group (1997a: 8). Beal argues that Vashti's refusal to do what is requested of her by Ahasuerus is highly

disruptive and it 'ruptures the very structure of the patriarchy she is expected to ground.' (1999: 11). Beal uses a subject/object dynamic to contrast how Vashti was expected to behave with how she actually behaved. He points out that Ahasuerus's status as an acting subject depends on Vashti's role as an object. However, her refusal sends this structure into chaos as she becomes the acting subject, which is not what is expected of her. Beal points to the text's use of the verb עָוְתָה (1:16) as proof that she has done something 'downright subversive' (1999: 13). Because of this, she is made abject by being removed from the king's court (1997a: 24). Like Fuchs and Laffey, Beal's analysis does much to highlight how scandalous and transgressive her actions were, considering the gender binary that the king and his advisers attempt to impose on the royal household. Furthermore, his analysis avoids moralising Vashti's behaviour and instead looks at power dynamics between the characters. Beal's analysis shows how unusual Vashti's behaviour is in the context of the patriarchal king's court and thus like Fuchs and Laffey, his work enables me to see transgressive possibilities in her behaviour which may be explored for non-binary/genderqueer resonances.

As shown here, there are many positive comments made about Vashti in modern criticism. These can be split into two separate groups: those who see Vashti as a moral exemplar, and those that argue how shocking and unusual her behaviour was. The former group reinforces binary gender stereotypes, as discussed. However, the latter group challenges this by offering interpretations of Vashti that do not adhere to the gender binary. Therefore, I would argue that the latter group of critics have set the scene for non-binary/genderqueer interpretation of Vashti. Notably, the latter group also analyse Vashti

using the MT only, and do not refer to the Greek versions or any rabbinic sources. This is notable, as it indicates that Vashti as portrayed in the MT text may be read in a non-normative way. My analysis in chapter six will assess if the MT text has a greater capacity for reading Vashti non-normatively than the LXX, the AT, Josephus's paraphrase and the Vulgate.

### *4.4.3 - Conclusion*

As shown in this section, modern scholarship on *Esther* has dealt with Vashti in one of two ways, with some overlap between the two. First, Vashti is seen as a narrative device that portrays the king and his companions in a negative way, or she is present in the tale to establish how and why Esther became queen. Second, Vashti is a positive role model or a heroine for ignoring Ahasuerus's request. This argument has been made from both conservative and feminist standpoints, with the former group arguing for Vashti's modesty and the latter group arguing that she rejects the patriarchy.

I contend that the critics who point out Vashti's transgressive and surprising behaviour – Fuchs, Laffey, Day and Beal – all imply in their work that there is something non-normative about Vashti. Refusing to engage with the status quo and unsettling the patriarchal structure of the citadel points to a character who behaves outside of cisnormative structures. Their interpretations influence my analysis of Vashti's behaviour in chapter six,

as they point out where and how Vashti may be interpreted as behaving outside of the gender binary.

## *4.5 – Ahasuerus and Haman*

Interpretations of the Gentile characters Ahasuerus and Haman are very consistent in modern scholarship. As will be discussed in this section, they are usually portrayed as figures of ridicule. Ahasuerus is interpreted as the greedy and licentious king who does not have control over his royal court. Haman is interpreted as arrogant and glory-seeking. Both characters are consistently interpreted as not having control over their emotions. Interestingly, while all the other characters in *Esther* are the subject of fierce debates in modern scholarship, Ahasuerus and Haman have been interpreted in modern reception, ancient translations and rabbinic interpretations in markedly similar ways. Therefore, Ahasuerus and Haman have the most stable interpretations of any characters in modern *Esther* scholarship. This consistency of interpretation extends to critics' understanding of their gender roles. Unlike every other central character in *Esther*, it has not been suggested that Ahasuerus or Haman behave in a subversive or non-normative fashion. Rather, the focus of criticism tends to be on how these characters fail in their respective jobs because of their hubris and emotional volatility.

### *4.5.1 - Ahasuerus*

Similar adjectives have been used to describe Ahasuerus consistently across modern scholarship. What is notable about his portrayal in the biblical text is that it lends itself to similar descriptions in modern commentaries. He does not appear to grow or develop as a character, unlike most of the other characters. Criticisms of Ahasuerus can be grouped into

a few categories, which depend on the scene that he is in. These are: Ahasuerus's wealth and greed; his sexuality; his incompetence as a ruler; and that he is powerless to the law.

Beginning with Ahasuerus's wealth and greed, *Esther* begins by recounting the Persian king's lavish and opulent palace and feasts. 1:1-8 is extremely detailed when describing the palace decorations and the excessive drinking undertaken by the king and his companions. Unsurprisingly, this has not been lauded in modern scholarship. Paton comments that 'the extraordinary length of this banquet… has aroused the wonder and the incredulity of [commentators] in all ages.' (1908: 130). A century after Paton pointed this out, little has changed. Almost all commentators mention the overwhelming opulence and wealth that appears to be at Ahasuerus's disposal. Bush states that the description in 1:4a-b displays the 'showy grandeur and prideful ostentation of the Persian monarch.' (1996: 353). Levenson argues, '[Ahasuerus] can show off the beauty of his trappings and his fabrics… but he finds himself powerless to show off the beauty of his own wife: that… requires human relations skills that he sadly and conspicuously lacks.' (1997: 13). He further argues, 'this enormous emphasis on wealth and status cannot speak well for the man who holds the world's most powerful office' (1997: 45). Indeed, the detailed descriptions of Ahasuerus's wealth and extravagance appear to satirise the king. That Ahasuerus then attempts to show off his wife after exhausting all his other 'possessions' indicates that these commentators view Vashti in a similar way. Fox points out that Ahasuerus is obsessed with displaying his honour, which is what he is doing by hosting the opulent feast that lasted for six months. This means that Vashti's refusal to do his bidding, and further display his honour, is a great offence to him indeed (1991a: 172). Discussing Ahasuerus's honour in this context

interprets his behaviour within a gendered honour/shame dynamic, which was touched on in the above Vashti and Esther sections of Part One. As with the interpretations of Vashti, using the honour/shame code to approach Ahasuerus results in a gendered interpretation of his behaviour. It is assumed that he should be able to summon his wife before his friends, because he is the dominant male, and by not doing so he is deficient in this role.

Related to Ahasuerus's depiction as a man obsessed with honour and wealth are depictions of his impotence as a ruler. Indeed, Ahasuerus's inability to control his wife is the first of many examples of Ahasuerus not having control over his kingdom. He is at a loss of how to handle the situation and he immediately defers to his advisers to tell him how to act. As Levenson argues, 'everything in Ahasuerus's realm is absurdly bureaucratised.' (1997: 54). Fox points out, 'Xerxes' need to seek advice in all situations and his alacrity in following it without discussion are suggestive of a man not fond of thinking for himself.' (1991a: 174). It is very interesting that Fox calls Ahasuerus 'Xerxes',[80] as it suggests that the LXX version, and English translations that follow the LXX version, may have been particularly influential on his study. The primacy of Persian law reemphasises that Ahasuerus is an impotent ruler, as he is powerless to the law (Clines 1984: 18). As Bush argues, 'the Persian empire is ruled inexorably by the law… It is, on the one hand, irrevocable… but, on the other hand, its source is the will and whim of a weak and unstable despot who seems to care about little other than his own pride and pleasure.' (1996: 355). Even regarding his own wife, Ahasuerus is constrained by the law, highlighting just how all-pervasive Persian law is in

[80] For summaries of the debates on who Ahasuerus/Xerxes is, see Berlin 2001: 5-6; Moore 1971: xxxv-xli.

the kingdom (Fox 1991a: 21). Commenting on 8:8, Levenson argues, 'We have again the impression of a man entangled in his own state apparatus… a prisoner of the legal order over which he presides.' (1997: 109). What is ironic about Ahausuerus's obsession with honour is that 'the will of others becomes law' as Memucan, Haman, Mordecai and Esther all have their goals established in law, as Fox argues (1991a: 173). Ironically, Ahasuerus does not seem to ever have his own desires written into law. That Ahasuerus is characterised in modern reception as an impotent ruler satirises him because he does not live up to the expectations of an ideal male ruler. If we consult the BSRI and compare it with interpretations of Ahasuerus, it is clear that he does not fulfil any of the characteristics listed. For example, he does not act as a leader, he is not able to make decisions easily and he does not have leadership abilities.

Ahasuerus's sexuality has become the topic of some scholars' interpretations, prompted first by his behaviour in chapters one and two, and then by Esther's statement that she had not been called in to the king for thirty days (4:11). Paton described Ahasuerus as a 'sensual despot' (1908: 96). Fox states that the beauty contest in which Esther competes for the role of queen (2:12-17) is, in fact, a sex contest, as the women compete with one another to see who can sexually please the king the most (1991a: 27). Many scholars agree on this point. As Bush argues, the 'only measure of the woman who is fit to rule as queen by the king's side is her beauty of figure and face and her performance in his bed!' (1996: 316). As mentioned in the section on Esther, Alter (2016) questions how Esther, a virgin, would have been able to please Ahasuerus sexually, because he had a problem with virility (2016: 97). The assumption made by Alter about Ahasuerus's sexual ability is astonishing.

As Day points out, the sexual is never made explicit in the text, which one would expect if the search for a new queen was primarily a sex contest (2005: 51-52). Indeed, she highlights the semantic ranges of the Hebrew verbs used to describe Ahasuerus's feelings towards Esther to illustrate her point. Following her argument, it seems that many scholars have engaged in some gap-filling here. This gap-filling is incredibly cisnormative in nature. Discussing Ahasuerus's virility, or lack thereof, plays into the phallocentric ideal of the sexually-powerful male. Ahasuerus is seen as deficient, and therefore the subject of ridicule for not meeting this expectation. Randall C. Bailey goes a step further. He interprets Ahasuerus's long and lavish drinking parties as homoerotic orgies 'with those who are drinking and doing whatever they desire' (2009: 236). Bailey highlights the organising theme of sex and sexuality in *Esther*, and argues that 'sexuality is often used as a negative signifier for the "other" as a way of legitimizing Israelite oppression of such people' (2009: 238). In Bailey's view, homoerotic characterisation in the Hebrew text indicates an intersectionality of sex, gender and ethnicity that negatively depicts colonisers or imperial powers.

Sidnie White Crawford has pointed out that Ahasuerus is driven by his emotions (1989: 171). Indeed, he and Haman are frequently portrayed in the text as being incredibly angry, to the point where they appear to lose control because of their anger. Laniak has pointed out that the verb used to describe Ahasuerus's anger, קצף, is only used of God elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (1998: 57). This could be interpreted as ridiculing Ahasuerus, as his behaviour illustrates self-aggrandisement, inwardly as well as outwardly. Emotional volatility in this context is connected to hubris, and thus Laniak condemns Ahasuerus as

not capable of being an effective ruler. Indeed, Levenson has also pointed out that 'there may be a hint of comedy' in Ahasuerus's anger, both in its length and intensity (1997: 54). Timothy Beal has pointed out that in the narrative there is a pattern of instigation-rage-recommendation-implementation-return of pleasure in regards to Ahasuerus and Haman (1997a: 99). Ahasuerus becomes filled with rage in response to Vashti and to Esther's revelation about Haman. On both occasions, his rage is assuaged when someone suggests a solution, which is then implemented immediately.

As identified in this section, while discussions of gender are not explicit, there is latent gendering occurring in many scholars' opinions of Ahasuerus's character. This underlying ideological bias portrays Ahasuerus as deficient for being an ineffective and inadequate king. Clearly, there is no possibility for a non-normative interpretation of Ahasuerus when viewing him through these critics' portrayals. Interestingly, scholars who use the Greek versions alongside the MT and scholars who only use the MT have come to the same conclusions in their assessment of his character. This may suggest that Ahasuerus is depicted in a similar way in all the ancient versions. Chapters six and eight of this thesis will ascertain if this is indeed the case.

### *4.5.2 - Haman*

Haman is characterised as the ultimate villain in the plot of *Esther*, as he is portrayed as having no redeemable features whatsoever. Like the king, he is obsessed with honour, but

Haman's personal honour manifests itself as desire for personal glory and to climb the political ladder. He is emotionally volatile, like Ahasuerus, which first leads to writing his edict against the Jews, second to building the gallows on which to hang Mordecai, and third being put to death. Like Ahasuerus, Haman's character has been interpreted by modern scholars very similarly, with little debate or deviation. Indeed, his portrayal throughout ancient and modern reception portrays him very similarly, with the differences shown in the intensity of his villainy and his reasons for hating Mordecai. Also like Ahasuerus, Haman does not develop or progress as a character, which may be why he is interpreted in a stable manner. He is often interpreted as being the evil opposite of the hero Mordecai in many scholars' opinions.

In most modern secondary literature, Haman's ethnicity is of primary focus. Many scholars argue that the enmity between him and Mordecai is ethnically-driven. Haman's 'humiliation', as he was put to death after Esther's shocking revelation to Ahasuerus, compounded by Ahasuerus thinking Haman was assaulting Esther, is commented on by all scholars. Haman's progression in the plot is a clear example of וְנַהֲפוֹךְ הוּא 'the reverse occurred' (9:1). What is interesting about analyses of Haman is that scholars have not gone into much detail on his character. Instead, work on *Esther* tends to focus on Mordecai and Esther. For Jewish scholars, Haman's character may provoke pain and discomfort. As a fervent anti-Semite who plots to annihilate all the Jews in Persia, the Holocaust similarities are undeniable. Therefore, it is somewhat expected that Haman's character would be universally condemned in scholarship. Furthermore, it is understandable that exploring and positing reasons why Haman decided to take umbrage with the Jews in Persia would

be a central focus. Proposing that Haman was ethnically predisposed towards hating Jews is a common opinion in scholarship, posited by both Jewish and Christian scholars alike.

Paton argues that it was 'probably the author's intention to represent Haman as descended from this race that was characterised by an ancient and unquenchable hatred of Israel.' (1908: 194). This opinion has not changed considerably over the last century. For example, Moore states, 'Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman because he was an Amalekite and thus the mortal enemy of all the Jews.' (1971: xvii). Clines points out that Haman and Mordecai's hostility towards one another was 'genetically determined' (1984: 14). Day states, 'that Haman is an Agagite throws the situation into the realm of old rivalries and ethnic animosities.' (2005: 65). Fox rebuts this argument and reasons that it is not ethnic enmity but a desire for control and exaltation that causes the hostility between them (1991a: 179-181).

Fox's detailed analysis of Haman's character highlights a key component of his portrayal that scholars agree on: his pride. For example, Haman's desire to be the man whom the king delights to honour (6:6-7, 9) displays his preoccupation with personal glory. Fox points out the obsessive nature of Haman's personality; that he becomes obsessed with Mordecai not bowing, as well as personal glory (1991a: 178). Levenson agrees, stating that 'Haman's gigantic self-reward and his exaggerated fear of disgrace… puts him on the course that will result in his most ignominious disgrace and, finally, self-destruction.' (1997: 69). He is also termed 'foolish' by Levenson (1997: 91) and others. An obsession with personal honour and glory is an obvious aspect of the honour/shame dynamic which, as discussed

numerous times in this chapter, is highly gendered. Haman is interpreted as taking the honour/shame dynamic to its extremes, which indicates that the gender binary is present in these interpretations.

Some scholars, including Fox (1991a) and Beal (1997a), have pointed out that Haman's character exposes his psyche. Beal argues, 'Insights into Haman's thoughts make him appear needy and unstable, vacillating between honour and rage, happiness and fear, and therefore more vulnerable to being undermined by both Mordecai and his more dangerous opponent, Esther.' (1997a: 74). A stark contrast is drawn between Esther and Mordecai, whose inner thoughts are not revealed to the reader, and Haman, who is portrayed transparently. Haman comes across as being highly emotionally volatile. Like Ahasuerus, he is prone to severe rages in response to seeing Mordecai, who refuses to bow to him. Also like Ahasuerus, Haman's wrath is assuaged when a solution is thought of and implemented (1997a: 99).

Haman's dependence on Zeresh has been commented on by a few scholars. Fox states, 'Haman readily accepts advice formulated in the imperative from his wife as well as from his counsellors, reminding us of the ironic but inevitable thwarting of the king's decree that every man should rule in his own house.' (1991a: 74). The text's subtle criticism of Haman's dependence on his wife's opinion reveals ironic subtext, which Fox highlights, but also it displays weakness, because he fails to meet expected male virtues. Consulting the BSRI, Haman fails to meet the desired male roles of making decisions easily and acting like a leader, similarly to Ahasuerus.

Overall, the criticisms of Haman are unsurprising because they depict him as the ultimate enemy. It appears that a preoccupation with drawing out Haman's role as the enemy has avoided any particularly lengthy exegesis on his character, which has, in turn, led to less explicit gendering of his character occurring. However, this is not to say that his character has not been gendered. As shown here, he is portrayed as a binary male obsessed with honour and glory, and this portrayal has not been problematised in modern scholarship. Like Ahasuerus's depiction, Haman is interpreted in markedly similar ways by scholars who refer to other ancient versions of *Esther* and scholars who do not. Turning to the ancient texts will be key when attempting to identify if it is possible to read Haman in a non-binary/genderqueer way, or if he is depicted similarly across the MT, LXX, AT, Josephus's paraphrase and the Vulgate.

### *4.5.3 - Conclusion*

As shown in this section, there appears to be broad consensus across *Esther* scholarship about the characterisation of these two characters. Ahasuerus is consistently portrayed as self-interested, greedy and lacking in sense. Haman is portrayed as foolish, villainous and obsessed with personal honour and pride.

As shown in this chapter, the other characters in *Esther* tend to have great divisions between scholars in their interpretations. This is clearly not the case with Haman and

Ahasuerus. Instead, depictions of these characters across *Esther* scholarship are markedly similar.

Neither Ahasuerus nor Haman are depicted as subverting or challenging their gender roles. Furthermore, cisnormative behaviour is imposed on Ahasuerus by many scholars, but fewer scholars do so with Haman. Most obviously, those who argue for Ahasuerus's lasciviousness portray him in a cisnormative way. Those who argue that he was impotent or lacking in virility, hence why he favoured Esther, characterise him as falling short of cisnormative ideals. Furthermore, as shown above, he is shown to be an ineffective ruler, not in control of his emotions and unable to control his wife, all of which depict him cisnormatively. It is difficult to see any possibility for non-binary/genderqueer reading of Ahasuerus as he has been realised in modern scholarship.

Haman's sexuality is not discussed in most scholarship on *Esther.*[81] As discussed in this section, analysis of Haman's portrayal has focused on his ethnicity, his pride and his obsession with personal glory. Some scholars have criticised Haman's dependence on his wife Zeresh's advice as an example of weakness. This is gendered analysis, as it ridicules Haman for taking the advice of a woman, thus establishing a dichotomy between the sexes.

[81] One notable exception is Randall C. Bailey's 2009 article which discusses Haman's role as Ahasuerus's homosexual partner.

We must ask why is it that Haman is not portrayed in contemporary reception with as much gender bias as Ahasuerus. It could be because of Ahasuerus's possible sexual relationship with Esther, and his position as ruling patriarch of the kingdom. Additionally, Haman's role as the antagonist of the tale has shifted academics' focus to discuss matters that do not lend themselves to gendering. Indeed, it is only in his relationship with his wife Zeresh that Haman is subject to explicit gendering.

Given the harmony in academic interpretations of Haman and Ahasuerus, one may also expect harmony or close similarity between the ancient versions in their depictions of these characters. Indeed, chapters six, eight and nine will highlight that this is the case, in stark contrast to the depictions of Vashti, Esther and Mordecai.

## *4.6 – The Silence on Zeresh*

As will be demonstrated in Part Two of this thesis, Zeresh has a small but significant role in the plot of *Esther*. In the Hebrew text, she appears in only two very short scenes: in chapters five and six respectively. In both scenes, she is depicted as giving her husband Haman advice. Notably, Zeresh has not been subject to much interest, discussion or debate in modern *Esther* scholarship. It is odd that Zeresh has had little attention, particularly because it is on her advice that Haman builds the gallows for Mordecai and she ominously prophesies his downfall.

This section will highlight the ways in which Zeresh has been characterised by the few scholars who have included her in their assessments of *Esther*. Athalya Brenner highlights this in her analysis of Zeresh in the midrashim (2003: 190-192). She points out that Zeresh is made the evil partner of Haman in some midrashim, but in others she is portrayed as being wise, which she comments has 'gone oddly unnoticed in feminist scholarship' (2003: 191). These two varied opinions are further characterised by the ideological stance of the critic. Those who are feminist or gender-focused tend to view Zeresh as a rather radical figure, but those who are more conservative in their approach do not.

### *4.6.1 - Zeresh the Schemer*

Most critics who view Zeresh as Haman's partner-in-crime appear to be heavily influenced by the rabbinic opinions of Zeresh. By partnering her with her husband and casting them

both as 'the enemy', Zeresh avoids being cisnormatively gendered. These interpretations could potentially allow for a non-binary/genderqueer reading. Other critics who view Zeresh negatively have tended to see similarities between her and Jezebel. This ascribes *femme fatale* tropes to her portrayal, and thus it is difficult to access the text in a non-binary way through these interpretations.

In his paper on 'Wisdom in Esther' (1963), Shemaryahu Talmon highlighted what he believed to be correlations between character typologies of the Wisdom school and the characters in *Esther*. He argued that the six main characters in the text were grouped into three types. Esther and Mordecai as the righteous wise, Haman and Zeresh as the cunning schemers and the witless dupes Ahasuerus and Vashti (1963: 441). Furthermore, Talmon argues that Zeresh's words to Haman at 6:13 have a 'proverbial' ring to them,[82] which is uncommon in *Esther* (1963: 427). He goes on to characterise Haman and Zeresh as 'evil' in comparison to the 'good' Esther and Mordecai, the latter possessing 'the basic accomplishments of the true sage' which is decidedly lacking in Zeresh and Haman (1963: 447). Talmon's analysis groups the characters together in a gender-free way and as a result, in his interpretation he does not appear to impose gender norms on Zeresh. This indicates that it may be possible to read Zeresh in a non-binary/genderqueer way.

Moore argues that there is much merit to Talmon's analysis, indicating that he agrees with these character types (1971: xx). Talmon and Moore's assessments of Zeresh are quite

[82] See Appendix D.

rabbinic in tone. However, as will be discussed below in section 4.6.3, Moore does tend to take a gendered approach to Zeresh's portrayal, unlike Talmon. Zeresh is frequently characterised in the Babylonian Talmud and some midrashim as a wicked schemer like her husband Haman.[83] When we consider how Haman was treated by critics, this interpretation of Zeresh is very similar. As the focus is on her being an enemy, gender bias and/or the gender binary creeps into the interpretation.

However, not all scholars take this approach. Grossman draws a comparison between Zeresh and Jezebel, arguing that Zeresh corresponds to the role of Jezebel while Haman corresponds to the role of Ahab in 1 Kings 21:7. He argues that this is because, like Jezebel, Zeresh plots to have her husband's enemy put to death (2009: 404). Grossman does not go into any further detail on this point, so he does not discuss the gender implications of connecting these two characters with one another. Rather, his point highlights that Zeresh fulfils the role of the scheming wife, in line with the biblical trope of the 'wicked woman'. The feminist scholar Alice Laffey similarly draws a likeness between Zeresh and Jezebel, and Zeresh and Abigail. However, rather than depicting Zeresh as a scheming woman, she argues that Zeresh is ultimately a product of patriarchal values and despite her intelligence, initiative and wisdom, she will fall when her husband does (1988: 217). Though her conclusions are different from those of the other critics, Laffey offers a cisnormative picture of Zeresh in her work. Reading Zeresh as a wicked schemer is damaging as it produces a

[83] See chapter 3.2 for a brief outline.

dichotomous reading. This dichotomy establishes and maintains the trope of the 'wicked woman', in contrast to the 'virtuous woman' Esther, and is thus significantly gendered.[84]

### *4.6.2 - Zeresh as the Strong Female*

The opposing view is to interpret Zeresh as a positive character. Crawford suggests that Zeresh 'thinks independently and leads the weaker Haman into action in response to his actions.' (1999: 911). Linda Day takes a similar approach. She states that in chapter five, Zeresh played the role of supporting wife and was 'intelligent and resourceful in her own right.' (2005: 107). Zeresh could come up with ideas to satisfy Haman when he could not think of any himself. However, Day then argues that Zeresh's character shifts considerably in chapter six, as she speaks with the voice of a seer. Day reasons that maybe Zeresh was no longer willing to play the role of the 'good wife', thus drawing a parallel with Esther's behaviour,[85] or perhaps after Mordecai's glorification, she sees that there is no positive outcome available for her husband (2005: 112-113). Day makes comparisons between Zeresh and Vashti, arguing that though neither character occupies a great deal of space in the narrative, the impact on the text of their presence is significant (2005: 113). She points out that like Vashti, Zeresh flouts Persian law as she is the ruler of the household, not Haman, thus contravening Memuchan's edict (2005: 113-114). This view that Zeresh was an impactful character like Vashti is significant, as it challenges the cisnormative portrayal

[84] For a detailed exposition on this trope, see Alice Bach 1997 and Athalya Brenner 2015 [1985].
[85] See above, chapter 4.3.

of her in other critics' work. As a non-conforming female, there could be resonances of queer behaviour here.

Crawford further points out that Zeresh is the third strong female character in *Esther* and, like Esther and Vashti, her presence displays a contrast between pairs of strong women and weak men. Her husband Haman relies on her strength to achieve his goals. Furthermore, Crawford terms Zeresh 'wise' for her foresight in chapter six (2003c: 333). Levenson argues similarly that though the conflicts in the text began with Mordecai and Haman, it is Esther and Zeresh who end up determining the action (1997: 92). However, Levenson pays little attention to Zeresh beyond this statement, so his reasons for writing this are not clear.

Although these critics have highlighted her remarkable ability to foresee what will unfold, in their estimations, Zeresh does not completely eschew the boundaries imposed by the gender binary. Instead, she acts like a prophetess.[86] Describing Zeresh as 'wise' and 'strong' uses words that are frequently used of male characters, which indicates that she is not viewed as a stereotypical female. Though the critics who take this opinion of Zeresh are not directly challenging the gender binary, using this language about her certainly points to an otherness about Zeresh in which we might be able to read genderqueer/non-binary behaviour.

[86] For discussion on the trope of the Prophetess in the Hebrew Bible, See Brenner 2015 [1985].

*4.6.3 - The Presence of Zeresh's Absence*

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, what is most obvious when approaching contemporary reception on *Esther* is the glaring omission of Zeresh from most scholars' work. In particular, it is notable that some critics whose work is gender-focused do not mention Zeresh, which Laffey has commented on (1988: 216). Zeresh's absence in scholarship is puzzling, given that she plays such a significant role in foreseeing and commenting on Haman's demise, a rather shocking action because she is his wife.

Moore argues that Zeresh, like Vashti, is simply a literary tool used by the author to continue the story (1971: liii). Bush argues that the narrator uses subtle irony to satirise Haman taking advice from his wife (1996: 418). Levenson also makes this argument in his work (1997: 92). Bush dismisses Zeresh's wise advice in chapter six, arguing that it does not seem likely that the advice given by her and Haman's friends was genuinely their opinion, but rather it reflected that of the narrator and audience (1996: 417), a position which Moore also takes (1971: 66). I would argue against this, as there is no evidence in the MT text to suggest that the narrator views Zeresh negatively, or that she functions as a mouthpiece for the narrator. Like Bush, Bardtke views Zeresh as a literary tool, similarly to his understanding of Vashti. He believes that Zeresh is employed to highlight the author's knowledge about Persian harems, from which Zeresh had to be summoned (1963: 341). I

have found no evidence in the ancient versions of *Esther* to corroborate Bardtke's claim that Zeresh came from a harem, and thus this statement reveals his latent gender bias.

Fox is another critic who pays little to no attention to Zeresh. He names Zeresh only once in his commentary, otherwise referring to her as '[Haman's] wife'. Fox treats Zeresh as a part of Haman's troupe of colleagues, and as such, he does not consider her as an individual (1991a: 74, 79). Nor does he mention Zeresh in his thematic analysis of the characters.

Timothy Beal's 1999 commentary on *Esther* does not mention Zeresh at all, not even in connection with Haman's advisers. Beal's 1997 work 'The Book of Hiding' mentions Zeresh only four times. Each time, she is mentioned in passing with Haman's advisers, but no detail is given about her, her character or her actions. This is particularly unusual, given Beal's keen interest in gender and the subject/object behaviour in *Esther*, so it is notable that he does not pay any attention to Zeresh. Feminist scholars, including Niditch (1995) and Fuchs (1999 [1982]), have not commented on her presence or role. Instead, Esther and Vashti are compared and contrasted, with Zeresh either ignored or mentioned incidentally. One wonders how Zeresh would have been interpreted, had she been subject to the level of scrutiny that Esther and Vashti have in the contemporary academic corpus.

Precisely because Zeresh has been ignored in modern scholarship, therein lies the possibility of genderqueer/non-binary reading. As a character relegated to the position of 'other' who does not provoke much discussion or debate, she prompts us to assess why she has been so discarded, and thus examine bias in scholarship. Perhaps her non-normative

behaviour has caused her to be rejected, and thus she can be a queer figure in the text. As will be explored in part two of this thesis, Zeresh's role has been expanded in the AT but not in the LXX. As many of the scholars cited in this section claim to use the LXX and AT, it is notable that Zeresh has not piqued their interest.

### *4.6.4 - Conclusion*

As shown in this section, the most common approach to Zeresh has been to ignore or dismiss her. Often, scholars have included her in a group with Haman's advisers and have not considered her apart or distinct from this group. Furthermore, some scholars view her as a literary tool, similarly to opinions of Vashti. There are a few scholars who interpret Zeresh as a strong female who leads the narrative, and a few who see her as an evil schemer.

These varied opinions are interesting to discuss in relation to gender. That Zeresh has been ignored in most academic work speaks volumes about ideological bias against women in the text, particularly against women who are sided with the enemy rather than with the hero. Though Zeresh has quite a remarkable role – instructing her husband on how to punish Mordecai, and foretelling Haman's demise – she has had little attention given to her. She, like Vashti, occupies a small space in the text of *Esther*, but she has a marked impact on the text.

There are two ways that Zeresh's gender has been realised in modern interpretation. In work that tends to dismiss her as a literary device or as a Jezebel character, she is portrayed as a binary female. However, there are examples where Zeresh may be interpreted in a way which allows us to read her in a non-binary/genderqueer manner. When scholars tend to view her as a strong character who foretells her husband's demise, or as fulfilling an 'enemy' trope alongside Haman, there are resonances of unusual, non-normative behaviour. For example, some words that are used about her are usually reserved for male characters. Additionally, that many scholars have ignored her points to her liminality, and thus potentially her genderqueerness.

## *4.7 – Conclusions*

This chapter has explored modern scholarship – that is twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on *Esther* – to determine how gender has been realised in these interpretations. This has been done by reading the most prominent scholars' work and their realisation of each character through a gender-focused lens. Reading contemporary *Esther* reception in this way has allowed me to ascertain if there is explicit or implicit gender bias present, and how this has impacted representation of the characters in the biblical text. I have illustrated that there is prejudice pertaining to the gender binary present in some contemporary academic reception on *Esther*, particularly in reception that does not purport to take a particular 'stance' on the text or read it through a specific 'lens'. The majority of critics who engage in gendering the text also tend to use the LXX, AT, Josephus's version or the Vulgate in their analyses, often as supplemental evidence to support their interpretation of the MT. This may suggest that the ancient versions may provoke gendered reading.

In *Esther* scholarship, female characters have often been exposed to criticism of their behaviour, they have been dismissed, or ignored. The male characters have been aligned with male stereotypes and shown to be deficient if they do not meet such ideals. What is interesting is that in much of feminist or gender-focused scholarship, the female characters tend to be interpreted as shocking and transgressive agents, with a few notable exceptions concerning the interpretation of Esther. Furthermore, some feminist or gender-focused critics have also espoused transgressive or non-normative portrayals of the male character Mordecai, in contrast to many 'traditional' critics. It is notable that many of the scholars

who take this approach in their interpretation also do not frequently cite the Greek versions alongside the MT. This implies that the MT may have the capacity to be read in a non-normative way. As discussed in this chapter, it is in the interpretations which portray characters exhibiting non-normative features, that is, characteristics which do not match those outlined in the BSRI as appropriate for their gender, that we may see non-binary/genderqueer resonances. I do not expect modern critics to have engaged with non-binary/genderqueer identity at all in their work. As these terms are less than a decade old, they were not in common parlance when most *Esther* scholars were interpreting the text. However, scholarship that highlights unusual features in this text shows that there may be alternative readings of this text which are not strictly cisnormative.

In the analysis that follows, I build upon and develop the work of these feminist and gender-critics. Where they have highlighted shocking, transgressive and non-normative behaviour, I return to the *Esther* texts and see if I can read this unusual characterisation as non-binary/genderqueer behaviour. Furthermore, I approach the ancient versions of *Esther* with a view to understanding if the 'traditional' commentaries have homogenised characterisation in *Esther*. I read *Esther* in a way which engages with non-binary/genderqueer experience by attempting to offer an interpretation of the text which is not prefigured or influenced by the hegemonic gender binary. This involves dispensing with our preconceived ideas of what comprises 'male' and 'female' behaviour, identity and attributes. Instead, we approach the text with simply 'behaviour' in mind, which is not tied to gender or sex, as discussed in chapter 2.2. By coming to the text with this focus, using the reception theory outlined in 2.1 and considering how this can be employed with

genderqueer/non-binary theory (chapter 2.2.6) we can determine if our expectations of the ancient versions are surprised or confirmed. Thus, we can see if the texts will allow us to read it without binary gender roles, and read the characters in a non-binary/genderqueer way, or if they will resist this reading.

# Part II: Reception in the Ancient Versions of *Esther*

# Chapter 5 – An Introduction to the Ancient Versions of Esther

## *5.1 - Introduction*

The Book of Esther has a rich reception history in translation, interpretation and commentary, which spans from the first and second centuries BCE to the present day.[87] This chapter will explore *Esther* reception in translation, that is, the ancient translations or versions of the text. However, the use of the term 'translation' is problematic, as it can indicate a linear translational history which implies a Hebrew 'original' from which the other versions are translations.[88] The ancient translations of *Esther* have complex relationships with one another and with the Hebrew text, which are still subject to debate between scholars. An outline of the history of each version will be given below.

*Esther*'s structure is unique, as the drama of the text takes place in scenes featuring two characters in dialogue with one another. This means that the narrative can be roughly broken up into seven cameos: Ahasuerus and Vashti; Esther and Mordecai; Mordecai and Haman; Haman and Ahasuerus; Ahasuerus and Esther; Haman and Zeresh and Mordecai and Ahasuerus. Very little of the drama in *Esther* takes place outside of these cameos, as the 'pairs' motif occurs throughout the story (Crawford 1999: 857). The cameos chosen for analysis in Part Two are Esther and Mordecai; Esther and Ahasuerus; Ahasuerus and Vashti and Haman and Zeresh. This is because the scenes and relationships depicted in these

[87] An overview of *Esther* reception from the ancient versions until the modern day is provided in chapter three.
[88] See chapter 2.1.5 for details.

cameos include many features that are of interest in a genderqueer/non-binary reading, as will be shown in this chapter. The male-male cameos in *Esther* focus primarily on issues of ethnicity, identity or position in the court, with gender a less prominent feature. Mordecai and Haman's scenes together have not been included because they primarily deal with the relationship between ethnic enemies, as Mordecai provokes Haman's wrath by refusing to bow to him. The Ahasuerus-Haman scenes have also not been included because they focus on these characters' official relationship in the royal court, Haman's ability to use Persian law and Ahasuerus's hubris. Mordecai and Ahasuerus's relationship is brief and appears to be centred on their roles as king and citizen, thus it is also not included. The thematic focuses of these male-male scenes mean that they do not comfortably fit within the scope of this study. This is not to say that issues of ethnicity, identity and position do not come up in the female-male cameos. Indeed, in many of these cameos, ethnicity and identity are inextricably linked to characters' behaviour. However, ethnic enmity is not the primary focus.

It is important to note that though some characters' behaviour can be interpreted as genderqueer/non-binary, it is not the case that all characters and scenes in our interpretation will necessarily be genderqueer/non-binary. Some characters and scenarios will resist this reading, and consequently they will contrast with our interpretation of characters who can be read in this way. This is akin to the lived reality of genderqueer/non-binary people, as discussed in chapter 2.2. The difficulty for those who identify as genderqueer/non-binary is that they are often being gendered by others, or forced to maintain gendered behaviour to fit in with modern society which is itself

gendered. Indeed, others around them and their work, home and social life might be cisnormative, though they are not. As Dembroff (2018) argues,

> Whatever… persons mean by claiming nonbinary identities, it is not a lack of gendered socialisation… While other feminisms question the unequal value placed on femininity and masculinity, highlighting the resulting gender inequalities, the nonbinary movement questions why we insist on these categories at all.

If a character's behaviour fluidly moves between male and female behavioural tropes, then we can interpret it as genderqueer/non-binary as it defies what we expect and thus challenges the categories of male and female behaviour.

### *5.1.2 - The Hebrew Text*

The Hebrew version of *Esther* is accessible to us in the MT. Little is known about the text which pre-dates the MT, and when the Hebrew version is discussed in this thesis, it is the MT text that I am referring to. It is problematic to assume that the MT of *Esther* 'pre-dates' the other ancient versions studied in this chapter, given the later date of the MT and its history. However, it is logical to assume that the MT of Esther bears some relation to an 'original' Hebrew text, and as our only means of accessing the Hebrew *Esther*, it must suffice.[89] As Fox argues, using the MT of Esther to access the Hebrew version of the text is the most rewarding for literary study (1991a: 9). It is thought by many that the Hebrew

[89] See chapter 2.1 for an explanation of this method.

*Esther* was written by a Jew or Jews in the Persian diaspora, particularly given the Persian loan words found in the text and the proper names of some characters (Moore 1971: lix). However, Sandra Beth Berg posits that the "Persianisms" may in fact be an attempt to give the story a certain verisimilitude (1979: 170). Some argue that the Hebrew *Esther* was not written in the diaspora but in Israel, and it offers a comic critique of the diaspora experience (Stern 2010: 31). Fox argues that *Esther* is written in late biblical Hebrew and that the author was Susan (1991a: 139-140). Given that there are no Greek words found in the text, it is unlikely to have been written in the Hellenistic period, though this is contra Bardtke, who argues for a Hellenistic setting for the text. Crawford argues that it was written sometime between the late fourth and early third centuries BCE (1999: 860). Some scholars have dated this text's *terminus a quo*, with great uncertainty, to the late fifth century BCE, given the literary similarities with Chronicles and the first edition of Daniel (Day 2005: 16). The *terminus ad quem* is thought to be sometime in the second century (Moore 1971: liv) or first century BCE, due to the existence of the Septuagint version and its colophon. This is either around 77-78 BCE (Bickerman 1944: 347), or 114 BCE (Jacob 1890: 279-280). Indeed, many use Josephus's version as the likely period for the *terminus ad quem*, as his version was written around 90 CE (Bush 1996: 295). Interestingly, there has been no evidence of an Esther Scroll found at Qumran, though some argue that allusions to the text are visible in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Finkel 1962 cited in Ben-Dov 1999: 282) or that fragments of a proto-Esther source have been found (Crawford 1999: 862).[90]

[90] For a comprehensive summary, see Francisco-Javier Ruiz Ortiz 2017: 19-20.

Some scholars, notably Fox (1991b: 255) and Clines (1984: 64-68), argue for a Hebrew proto-Esther which pre-dates the MT Hebrew. Dorothy posits that a royal novella was used as a generative model for the *Esther* tale by a Semitic author (1997: 340). This novella was used as a 'receptacle' for the Esther plot. Charles Dorothy's exhaustive study on the redactional history of the Hebrew and Greek *Esther* texts argues for an Esther *Urtext* that pre-dates the Hebrew and Greek and which split off into numerous strands of the Esther tradition, with the Additions entering at different stages (1997: 332).

The Hebrew text quoted in this chapter comes from the recent *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* Leningradensis edition (2004) by Magne Sæbø. If the text is quoted from elsewhere, it is stated in the footnotes. Dictionary references are from the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew to English Lexicon, the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew or Holladay's Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament as included in Bibleworks 10-43 (2016). Pointed Hebrew is used when citing directly from the MT, and un-pointed Hebrew is used when discussing lexical forms.

### *5.1.3 - The Septuagint*

The version of *Esther* found in the LXX is often studied alongside the MT *Esther* to highlight the similarities and differences between the Hebrew and Greek translations of the biblical book. The LXX version of Esther is found in 36 extant manuscripts. The Greek version of *Esther* in the LXX, often referred to as the Old Greek translation, contains six Greek

Additions to the text of *Esther*, as well as a colophon. The colophon gives explicit information about the translator, Lysimachus, a Palestinian who translated the text into Greek. It was then transferred to Alexandria, or it was translated in Alexandria (Kahana 2005: xxvii). That the colophon states it was translated 'in the fourth year of Ptolemy and Cleopatra' has led most scholars to agree with Bickerman's assessment that it was translated in 77/78 BCE (1944: 347). However, this assumes that the colophon was not added later to the LXX text. It is thought by some scholars that the LXX is a translation of the MT as it is often very faithful to the MT text. The LXX does alter the MT's wording in a style more fitting in Greek; for example, by removing pleonasms, altering Hebrew synecdoches and rendering Hebrew idioms more appropriately in Greek (Kahana 2005: 446). The LXX sometimes paraphrases the Hebrew which has been argued as evidence of a misunderstanding of the Hebrew (Tov 2008a: 513-514). On the whole, scholars agree that it is a free translation of a Hebrew original, but there is some debate as to whether it translates the Hebrew text (or a very similar or shared source), or whether it has a different *Vorlage*. The latter, Tov argues, should be a possibility that we are always open to (2008a: 509). Clines notes, 'Almost everyone agrees… that no matter how free the Septuagint translator has been, it is essentially the Masoretic Hebrew text that was his Vorlage.' (1984: 69). Additionally, the LXX evinces some textual variants from the MT. In particular, as Dorothy notes, this Greek version of *Esther* appears to have undergone a 'Yahwization' (1997: 347). References to God are frequent in the LXX text, particularly in the Additions, as are explicit religious customs and practices, all of which are notably absent from the Hebrew text. Dorothy points out that the LXX appears to be more dispassionate when narrating *Esther*, in contrast to the AT (discussed below) (1997: 353).

The LXX Additions are the most noticeably different sections of this Greek translation from the MT text. The Additions are six lengthy units of additional material which is not present in the Hebrew. These have alphanumerical referencing, from A to F, and are present at the opening and closing of the tale and at intervals throughout the text. The Additions not only re-work material that is already in the *Esther* tale, such as Mordecai's uncovering of Bigthan and Teresh's plot against Ahasuerus (Addition A) but add in a great deal of new information. It is thought that the Additions were not all written by one hand, and indeed some scholars have shown that Additions A, C and D are of Semitic origin and F and Additions B and E were originally written in Greek (Dorothy 1997: 347; Tov 2008a: 517; Reinhartz 2017: 11; contra Moore 1971: lxxiii).[91] It is not clear at which point in the text's history of transmission that the Additions were added. It appears that they were written after the Book of Esther was written, but it is not clear whether they were inserted into the LXX after its composition or if they formed part of the LXX's parent text. Emanuel Tov argues that the Hebrew *Vorlage* used by the LXX translator contained Additions A, C, D and F in Hebrew, and the LXX translator added Additions B and E (2008b: 382). Moore disagrees with this and has pointed out that Additions B and E were certainly written by a different hand than that of the LXX-Esther translator (1973: 385; Clines 1984: 69). Moore also argues for the Semitic origin of Additions A, C, D and F but does not state that they were included in the LXX's *Vorlage* (1977: 155). Bickerman (1951: 117) argues that the Esther LXX, including the Additions, was one integral unit. In his thorough study on the MT,

[91] Contra Hanhart who argues that the Additions are originally Greek (1983: 96).

LXX and AT editions of *Esther*, Dorothy argues that Additions A and F are later editorial supplements added to the thematic frame 1:1 and 10:3 of *Esther* (1997: 279). As Kahana notes, it is almost impossible to establish a date for the Additions (2005: xxvi). Notably, the Additions are not included in the Targums or Talmudic material on *Esther*.

The Greek text of the LXX quoted in this thesis comes from Robert Hanhart's 1983 Göttingen edition, unless specifically stated otherwise. The English translations are from Karen Jobes's NETS translation (2007). Where sources for Greek vocabulary definitions do not include page references, such as Liddell, Scott and Jones' 'A Greek-English Lexicon' and 'Wörterbuch zu den Homerischen Gedichten für Schüler bearbeitet' by Georg Autenrieth, they are from Perseus Hopper.[92]

### *5.1.4 - The Alpha Text*

The second Greek version of *Esther* is commonly known as the Alpha Text (AT). This text had a smaller transmission history than the LXX, as it is found only in four extant manuscripts. This Greek version is shorter in length than the MT and LXX, though the narration appears to be more personally involved in the plot and characters (Dorothy 1997: 353). This version evinces several dissimilarities from both the LXX and the MT. The

[92] *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

AT includes the Greek Additions, like the LXX, but with some dissimilarities, because they preserve an older form of the Additions than found in the LXX (Jobes 1996: 5). Because there is no certainty about the *Vorlage* of the AT text, and because it exists in only four extant manuscripts, it is almost impossible to date this text with any degree of certainty. This means that we cannot be certain whether the AT, as we have it, pre- or post-dates the LXX. However, given that Josephus appears to have known the AT material, Dorothy dates the *terminus ad quem* to the first century CE (1997: 335).

Before this version was termed the 'Alpha Text' of Esther, it was known as the 'Lucianic Text' as it was thought to be a Lucianic recension of the LXX. This theory was refuted by Carey Moore's 1967 paper which proposed that the AT bore witness to a different Hebrew *Vorlage* than the MT and LXX. Moore's view has been adopted by many scholars including Fox (1991a), Clines (1984), Hanhart (1983: 87) and Jobes (1996), all of whom argue with Moore that there is a proto-AT which preceded the AT. Proto-AT was not a parent text of the MT, and thus the AT bears witness to a different textual tradition than does the MT and LXX. It is a matter for debate, however, whether the proto-AT pre-dates the MT (Fox 1991a: 97; Dorothy 1997: 348) or if proto-AT is an ancestor of the MT (Clines 1984: 72-92).

There is another group of scholars who disagree with Moore's assertion that the AT is not a direct recension of the MT. These scholars, including Tov (1999: 538) and De Troyer (2000: 398-402) argue for a linear recension history of the AT. They posit that the AT is a reworking of the LXX, which is, in turn, a recension of the MT. Tov points out that the AT writer(s) also had access to a Semitic source which was used to revise the LXX with (1999:

540). Given the few extant manuscripts of the AT, and that no textual witness of *Esther* has been found at Qumran, it is difficult to prove with any certainty which opinion is the likeliest possibility.

The Greek text of the AT quoted in this thesis comes from Robert Hanhart's 1983 Göttingen edition, unless specifically stated otherwise. Verse references are given first with the MT/LXX corresponding verse number, then followed by the AT's own verse number in parentheses.[93] The English translations are from Karen Jobes's NETS translation (2007), though on occasion Clines's translation (1984) is used, indicated with a footnote.

### *5.1.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase of Esther*

In chapter eleven of his 'Judean Antiquities', Flavius Josephus includes a paraphrase of the *Esther* narrative. This text was written in 93/94 CE in Rome. This version of *Esther* differs from the MT, LXX and AT because his appears to be more dramatic in style, reading more like a Greek novel rather than a biblical account. Josephus professed in his *Antiquities* that his intention was to render the biblical texts into Greek. He stated: 'I said that I was only translating [or paraphrasing/converting] the books… without adding anything of my own to the narrative or omitting anything from it.' (*Ant*. 10.218).[94]

---

[93] This matches the format of the AT's verse references in the NETS translation.
[94] Trans. Kneebone (2007: 52).

However, when reading Josephus's account of *Esther*, one is struck by the differences espoused in his version of the text from the Hebrew and Greek versions. As Kneebone has argued, Josephus's version appears to be more complex and nuanced than a simple paraphrase or translation of a biblical text. Indeed, she suggests that, 'the altered focus of a lived diaspora culture emerges strongly and repeatedly' in Josephus's version of *Esther* (2007: 53). Written in the decades after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the diaspora identity and ideology that emerges in Josephus's writing introduces themes into the text of *Esther* that are not present in the MT, LXX or AT, for example, a strong concern for νομος in response to the lack of connection with the Jewish land (Kneebone 2007: 53). Kneebone argues in a later paper, 'Josephus' version of the Esther tale continually sets itself against the reductiveness of binary oppositions, against a discourse in which diaspora Judaism emerges as a monolithic entity positioned against the host nation, an identity notionally the same for Esther as it is for Mordecai, for Josephus and for all other diaspora Jews.' (2013: 181). Thus, for Josephus, the diaspora experience was not one of glorifying the Jewish people over others, but one of preserving religious identity, promoting national loyalty and responding to diaspora issues such as anti-Semitism. Josephus re-frames the relationship between Jews and their host nation in a positive fashion. This is unlike the LXX Additions, which establish negative tension between Jews and Gentiles, for example, Esther's abhorrence for her physical relationship with Ahasuerus (C.26).

Josephus's portrayal of biblical women is often problematic. As Tal Ilan has pointed out, women in the Bible often behave unconventionally, for which Josephus developed a variety

of methods to avoid ethical and religious dilemmas. Some of these methods used Hellenistic models, and some have 'overly misogynistic overtones' (2017: 185).

Josephus's text does not appear to have a straightforwardly-identifiable *Vorlage*. Instead, his version displays elements found in the LXX, MT and AT, as well as themes that are also present in rabbinic discourses on *Esther*. However, as Kneebone points out, there is no evidence to suggest that Josephus had access to an Aramaic Targum on *Esther* (2013: 167). Bickerman has posited that there was an early proto-Greek version from which Josephus's version, the LXX and the AT independently derived (1951: 112) and Boyd-Taylor posits that Josephus used material common to both the AT and LXX (2015: 212; cf. Hanhart 1983: 34-36). Adele Berlin argues that Josephus used a version of the Esther story that no longer exists (2001: lii), although Tricia Aven contested this by showing Josephus's dependence on the LXX (2012: 121-169). In any case, it is important to note with Feldman (1970: 143,170) that the textual history of Josephus's version is complex and he was likely very free in his interpretation of source material. Josephus's text does not include all the Greek Additions – notably Additions A and F are not included – but it does feature material from Additions B to E (Ilan 2017: 178). However, the extent to which Josephus used material from the Additions is still a matter of debate amongst scholars (Seyberlich 1964, cited in Kneebone 2013: 167; Feldman 1998: 530).

The version of Josephus's text used here is B. Niese's 1892 edition of *Antiquitates Judaicae*, from the Perseus Digital Library.[95] English translations are from Spilsbury and Seeman's 2017 translation, unless stated in the footnotes.

### *5.1.6 - The Vulgate*

In 382 CE, Saint Jerome was commissioned by Pope Damascus I to revise the Gospels in the *Vetus Latina*. Jerome decided to extend this commission, and he translated most of the books of the Bible. Eventually, Jerome's Latin Vulgate was accepted as the official Latin Bible of the Catholic Church, after The Council of Trent (1545-63). We can date the composition of Jerome's *Esther* to between 390 and 405 CE. Jerome's version is remarkably close to the Hebrew text. He stated in his prologue to *Esther* that he desired to translate the Hebrew text of *Esther* as faithfully as possible. However, he acknowledged that the text he was using (perhaps the Old Latin) was problematic, and thus he turned to the Hebrew.[96] He stated:

> The Book of Esther stands corrupted by various translators. Which (book) I, lifting up from the archives of the Hebrews, have translated more accurately word for word. The common edition drags the book by knotted ropes of words hither and yon, adding to it things which may have been said or heard at any time. This is as is usual with instruction by schools, when a subject has been taken up, to figure out from the words which someone

---

[95] *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

[96] Jerome's prologue is also accessible on Library of Latin Texts – Series A, http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2361/LLTA/pages/TextSearch.aspx?key=PHIER0591D

> could have used, which one either suffered injury, or which one caused injury (to the text).[97]

This means that the Latin version of *Esther* we have in the Vulgate attests to a Hebrew manuscript from the fourth century CE which is markedly like the Hebrew MT text that we have today.

Curiously, Jerome removed the Additions from their position in the Greek versions of the *Esther* narrative and moved them to the end of the text, thus marking them as apocryphal. Jerome's action has divided critics, with some arguing that he acted in a manner that was 'arbitrary and inconsistent', and that he mutilated the translation (Tov 2008a: 517). Indeed, by moving the Additions to the end, it is hard to read these sections of the *Esther* text as they make little sense out of context. Thus, the version of the Additions included in the Vulgate will not be included in this study. The version of the Vulgate used here is the *Biblia Sacra luxta Vulgatam Versionem*, Fifth Revised Edition edited by Roger Gryson (2007) as included in Bibleworks 10-43. English translations are from the Douay-Rheims translation unless stated otherwise. Where sources for Latin vocabulary definitions do not include page references, such as from Lewis and Short's 'A Latin Dictionary', they are from the online Perseus Hopper.[98]

---

[97] Trans. Kevin Edgecomb 2006, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_preface_esther.htm accessed 17 September 2018. The Latin text of *Praefatio Hester* can be accessed in the Library of Latin Texts, http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2361/llta/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=847455

[98] *Perseus Digital Library*. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

*5.1.7 - Other Ancient Versions of Esther*

There are some other ancient versions of *Esther* not included in this study but still worthy of mention. The Old Latin, the version in Origen's Hexapla,[99] the Syriac Peshitta and two Aramaic Targums are some of the many ancient versions of this text, which as discussed in chapter three has a rich history in rabbinic interpretation. Bellman contends that the Old Latin version bears witness to a lost Greek *Vorlage* of Esther (2017: 5), as it displays some similarities but also notable differences to the Hebrew and Greek versions of this book. The dating and location of the Old Latin version are matters for debate, and this version has been largely excluded from the scholarly corpus on *Esther* reception. However, Haelewyck (2006: 450-451) posits that it is a Christian translation perhaps composed in Rome in the early fourth century CE. Haelewyck's assertions have not garnered much attention, and one hopes that the Old Latin text will be engaged with in the future by *Esther* scholars to determine its origin.

Other translations or versions of the text of Esther in Semitic languages include a translation in the Syriac Peshitta that Paton describes as a translation of the Hebrew with 'slavish fidelity' (1908: 17). There is also a Coptic-Sahidic version, an Ethiopic version and an Armenian version, all of which are markedly similar to the LXX (Bardtke 1963: 267; Hanhart 1983: 26-36). As discussed in chapter three, there are two Aramaic targumim of Esther: Targum Rishon and Targum Sheni. Flesher and Chilton have posited that the targumim are an important witness to the beliefs and understanding of ordinary Jews.

[99] For details on Origen's Hexaplaric recension, see Hanhart 1983: 60-81.

Their expansions are a product of an exegetical exercise whereby the authors intended to make clear the 'import of a passage that goes beyond the words on the page' (2011: 12), but also to bridge the gap between the ancient text and the receiving community. In practice, this means that while the Hebrew is, for the most part, very faithfully rendered into Aramaic, these texts include a number of long and detailed expansions and expositions in line with rabbinic thought that are unique to the targumim.[100]

### *5.1.8 - The Versions Selected for this Study*

I have chosen to use the MT, the LXX, the AT, Josephus's paraphrase and the Vulgate in my analysis. As frequently mentioned in Part One, it is common for modern critics to assess the text of *Esther* by looking primarily at the MT, but drawing supplemental evidence from these versions. The MT, LXX and AT in particular have been compared side-by-side in modern scholarship in work by Clines (1984), Day (1995), Fox (1991b), Kahana (2009), Jobes (1996) and Moore (1977). As shown in Part One, it is typically the 'traditional' critics, whose work does not purport to take an ideological stance, who use the Greek and Latin versions alongside the MT. Furthermore, their work tends to gender the text of *Esther* and impose binary interpretations onto the characters. In contrast, the majority of gender-focused critics only look at the MT and very infrequently cite the Greek or Latin. Their interpretations highlight that there are non-normative possibilities in this text. This

[100] See chapter 3.2 for examples of the Targums interpretation of the *Esther* story.

provokes the question: are the Greek and Latin interpretations of *Esther* gendered, and would they resist a gender-neutral reading? And have modern critics imposed their bias on the ancient versions? By assessing each text's capacity for a non-binary/genderqueer reading, I can ascertain which characters in which texts resist this reading, indicating that the text itself may be implicitly or explicitly gendered, and which texts respond to this reading. This analysis will enable me to investigate the role of modern scholars' cognitive bias in their work.

My decision not to include the Old Latin, the version in Origen's Hexapla and the Syriac Peshitta was twofold. This was a matter of containing the thesis's scope, so it would not become too broad and unwieldy. Furthermore, these versions are referenced very infrequently in modern scholarship, often not at all. These versions are more difficult to access and, in the case of the Peshitta, require further linguistic study before one can use them.

The targumim have not been included in this thesis because the extra material in Targum Rishon and Targum Sheni is vast.[101] Furthermore, these Targums would be better served in a similar study that compared them with the body of rabbinic material on *Esther*. This is because they share themes and characterisation with many *Esther* midrashim and the version of *Esther* in the Babylonian Talmud.

---

[101] cf. Paton 1908: 97

The tabular Appendices A-D that accompany this thesis are intended to be used as a visual tool alongside the chapters in Part Two. These appendices aid the reader by showing key verses of each ancient version of *Esther* side-by-side, to clearly display the similarities or differences between the versions.

# Chapter 6 – Ahasuerus and Vashti

## *6.1 – Introduction*

Ahasuerus and Vashti's scene takes place in the very first chapter of *Esther*. That they, rather than the titular character, feature in the opening scene is unusual. However, their interaction provides the catalyst for Esther's appearance in the following chapter, as Vashti is removed from the royal palace, vacating her position for Esther to eventually fill. As highlighted in chapter four, Vashti as depicted in the Hebrew text has been received by modern scholars as either a feminist icon who eschews feminine tropes for masculine ones, or as a defender of propriety. Given this dichotomy in modern secondary literature, this chapter aims to assess the capacity for a genderqueer/non-binary reading of Vashti and her husband Ahasuerus in the ancient versions of *Esther*, to offer a new perspective on Vashti and Ahasuerus's relationship that is not accessible in contemporary reception.

As will be shown in the following analysis, the portrayal of Vashti in many of the ancient versions does have the capacity to be interpreted as genderqueer. In the MT, the LXX, the AT and the Vulgate, she can be interpreted as eschewing the boundaries of cisnormativity entirely. Josephus's paraphrase is the exception, as it appears to have a different focus to the other texts, and thus the text's capacity for a non-binary/genderqueer reading is significantly diminished. The similarity between all but one of the ancient receptions is rather unusual.

Vashti and Ahasuerus's characterisations are rather different from the portrayals of Esther and of Mordecai, as will be shown in chapter seven. There are notable differences in the ancient versions' treatment of Esther and Mordecai. Unlike Esther and Mordecai, in the scenes featuring Vashti and Ahasuerus the differences between the versions are much subtler. This may indicate that Vashti and Ahasuerus are of less importance to the narrative than Esther and Mordecai. The two Jewish characters show more variety in ancient interpretations, rather than being depicted very similarly across the versions as the Persian characters have been. It is rather unsurprising that more attention would be given to the two Jewish characters who are responsible for the salvation of the Jewish people. Notably, the Greek Additions do not expand on Ahasuerus and Vashti's scenes together, nor do they mention Vashti at all. Given the significant impact that the Additions have on the portrayal of Esther and Mordecai, it can be argued that perhaps Vashti's absence from them contributes to the fact that her portrayal is broadly similar across the ancient versions. Ahasuerus and Vashti's scenes will now be explored in the ancient versions, and I will assess their gender portrayal and capacity for genderqueerness.

### *6.2 - The Masoretic Text*

The MT's portrayal of Vashti and Ahasuerus in relation to one another is characterised by a significant shift in their relationship, the turning point of which comes at 1:12. Vashti appears to have eschewed the gender binary and, with her behaviour, she challenges the gender binary in Ahasuerus's kingdom and becomes the primary character, in contrast to

the first half of chapter one. To undo the damage Vashti has wrought, Memuchan and his colleagues suggest that Vashti be removed and that female obedience be written into law. Thus, Vashti is a very dangerous character indeed. Vashti and Ahasuerus's scene in the MT text initially appears to have a hegemonic gender binary in place which Vashti destroys, prompting it to be rebuilt.

The opening verses of Vashti and Ahasuerus's scene portray a binary gender structure. The MT initially presents Ahasuerus and Vashti as occupying separate spaces as Ahasuerus made a drinking feast for לְכָל־הָעָם 'all the people' (1:5) and Vashti made a feast for נָשִׁים 'women' (1:9). The noun נָשִׁים appears in this version without the definite article. It could possibly be translated as 'the women' if the second clause in the verse, בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת makes the noun definite. However, נָשִׁים is an absolute noun in the first clause, and as it is indefinite it can be argued that גַּם וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֶּה נָשִׁים is the main clause, and בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת indicates the location for Vashti's feast. Therefore, Vashti's feast is for 'women' not 'the women', as the Hebrew noun does not include the definite article. If 'all the people' were at Ahasuerus's feast, why would Vashti want or need to host her own feast for women? It follows that Vashti's feast was for women because they were excluded from Ahasuerus's party. Vashti and the women are thus shown to be separate and distinct from Ahasuerus.[102] Catherine Vialle suggests that the separation of the feasts points to a greater power dynamic at play. She states:

[102] This will be discussed further in sections 3-6 of this chapter.

> A première vue, ce fait paraît naturel: hommes et femmes ont leur propre lieu de fête, ce qui est normal dans le contexte de l'empire perse. Mais si l'on considère ce banquet dans le cadre du motif récurrent dans le livre d'Esther tm, il apparaît comme indiquant implicitement qui va prendre le pouvoir – très brièvement dans les faits et plus longuement dans les pensées du roi et de ses conseillers: la reine Vashti qui organise le banquet et les femmes qui y assistent. (2012: 573).

There is a marked difference in the amount of detail given about the men's feast in comparison to the women's feast. Vashti's feast is briefly described in only one verse (1:9), whereas the king's feast is described thoroughly over six verses (1:3-8). We know from Herodotus V. 18 and IX. 110 that women were allowed at Persian feasts, so there must be a reason for the separation of the sexes, and for the greater attention given to the male feast, as it seems rather unusual and highly gendered. Notably, it is not the case in 1:9 that Vashti is submissive to the king. The use of עָשְׂתָה (1:9) in the *qal* perfect indicates that Vashti performed actions herself, thus she exhibits agency. The contrast between the characters is demonstrated by how much information the reader is given about them. Ahasuerus certainly appears to be the more important character, which implies that Vashti will not be the focus of the rest of the scene. Indeed, he is even mentioned at the end of her introduction in 1:9, as it is stated that she hosted her feast in the royal house 'which belonged to king Ahasuerus.' Vashti appears to operate within physical boundaries defined by her husband.

The gender binary structure established in this scene continues as the scene progresses. At 1:10 Ahasuerus uses three verbs against Vashti, as he 'commanded… to bring [in Vashti] … to show [her beauty]…' (1:10-11) (אָמַר…לְהָבִיא… לְהַרְאוֹת) before him and his party, wearing

her royal crown (1:11). The text then reads, לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפְיָהּ, 'to show the people and the princes her beauty.' This sentence in the Hebrew is key, as the direct object marker before יפיה indicates that she is the object of the male gaze.[103] Ahasuerus is positioned as the dominant and powerful male, with Vashti characterised as the obedient and sexually-appealing female. Thus, they appear to embody gendered stereotypes of 'masculine' and 'feminine'.

However, this gendered portrayal is directly challenged by Vashti. 1:12 delivers the rather shocking information that Vashti refused Ahasuerus's request. The reader is not given any explanation for why Vashti refused. Therefore, it is open to interpretation. Vashti refuses the male gaze, and in so doing, she first rejects and then re-forms differently the power dynamic between herself and Ahasuerus. She does not act in the equal opposite way to how she is expected to; she does not act 'manly' or in a 'masculine' way: she is neither dominant nor assertive.[104] Instead, she ambiguously refuses to behave as she is directed to, without offering an excuse. This is a shocking act of transgression which sees her defy the expectation that she should be obedient. She entirely eschews the constraints imposed on her by the gender binary. This can be interpreted as Vashti behaving in a non-binary/genderqueer fashion.

[103] For further discussion on the male gaze in biblical literature, see J. Cheryl Exum, 2015.
[104] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.

Because of her rejection of binary norms, the rest of the scene displays Vashti as the subject of conversation and Ahasuerus as a silent witness, as he acquiesces to the suggestions of his advisers. There is a stark contrast between verses 1-11, where Ahasuerus is portrayed as the ruler *par excellence*, and verses 14-20 where the king recedes into the background. Indeed, from verses 16-20 Ahasuerus is only spoken about, but he does not speak. Ahasuerus acquiesces to Memucan's suggestion to have Vashti removed and to find a new queen, because it 'pleases' him.[105] Subsequently Ahasuerus 'did as Memucan proposed', וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּדְבַר מְמוּכָן (1:21). The use of the noun דבר here is striking, as it was previously used to describe the king's command to Vashti (1:12), but here it describes Memuchan's command to the king. This portrays the Ahasuerus behaving in exactly the manner that he expected of his wife. He is silent and obedient, perhaps listening intently to Memuchan's words, waiting to be told what to do. It is ironic, because as the king's advisers ruminate on what to do with Vashti, and her impact on the kingdom, they have made her the subject of their conversation and concern, indicating her power to disrupt the royal court. Notably, this does not portray Ahasuerus as non-binary/genderqueer. Rather, he is depicted as undergoing satirical gender role-reversal.

It is notable that the two halves of the scene hinge on Vashti's refusal at 1:12. This indicates that her behaviour prompted a significant shift. Day states that the entire episode of Vashti's refusal is seen from Ahasuerus's perspective (2005: 29). This is an interesting

[105] This phrase, (וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ - 1:21), idiomatically translated as 'pleased', is also found in Gen 41:37; Jos 22:33 and 1 Kings 3:10 as well as a number of times in the book of Esther.

point, because although the reader is not offered a glimpse into proceedings as Vashti sees them, and therefore is distanced from her, there does not seem to be bias against her. Indeed, it appears as if the reader should view the description of Ahasuerus's response to her refusal as inappropriate, rather than Vashti's action.[106] Vashti is treated by the text of the MT as an innocent victim. To look at this using a non-binary/genderqueer lens, this means that the text does not mark Vashti's genderqueerness as an aberration. Rather, what appears to be an aberration is Ahasuerus and his royal advisers' insistence on binary gender roles.

The rest of the scene continues to describe Ahasuerus and his royal advisers' outrage at Vashti's behaviour and their insistence that the gender binary must be re-instituted. 1:16-18 specifically identifies the issue in Memuchan's eyes: that by rejecting the king's command, Vashti wronged *everyone*, 'to all the princes and to all the people' (1:16) עַל־כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים, in Ahasuerus's kingdom. In Hebrew, the repetition of עַל־כָּל before both 'princes' and 'people' seems particularly forceful. Vashti's genderqueerness is considered abject by these men; it provokes such disgust that they feel as though it is *all* the people who Vashti has offended. Her behaviour troubles the gender binary by exposing its fragility, provoking rage and horror. Furthermore, Memuchan's assertion at 1:18 intimates that women are fully capable of subduing men:

וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס־וּמָדַי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה לְכֹל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְדֵי בִזָּיוֹן וָקָצֶף

[106] See Fox 1991a: 169.

There are many different examples English translations. The KJV has, '*Likewise* shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus *shall there arise* too much contempt and wrath.'[107] The NIV has, 'This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.' There is no verb tying וּכְדֵי בְזָיוֹן וָקָצֶף to that which proceeds it. The particularly perplexing noun here is וּכְדֵי, which is not easy to translate in this sentence, particularly given that the verb is at the beginning of the verse and not immediately preceding it. If we translate the idiomatic כדי as '(there will be) *as enough* (i.e. in plenty)' (BDB: 191),[108] we might assume that the princesses of Persia and Media will speak to the princes with an abundance of contempt and wrath. This would seem to fit the sense of the verse quite well. Accordingly, I translate this phrase, 'there will be contempt and wrath in plenty'. The Hebrew implies that Memuchan thinks that for the women to speak to their husbands with contempt and wrath was itself dishonourable. But speaking with contempt and wrath is not necessarily the same as disobeying commands. It could then be pointed out that Vashti's non-binary/genderqueer behaviour – disobeying her husband's command – *ipso facto* was *not* dishonourable in the Hebrew text. Therefore, the Hebrew text satirises the reaction of king and his court to her behaviour. As Crawford suggests, concerning the books of Esther and Judith, 'the humiliation at the hands of

[107] Italicisation is in the KJV.
[108] Italicisation is in the BDB.

women subverts the norms of their respective societies… which are male dominated and patriarchal.' (2003a: 65).

To Memuchan and the royal advisers, it is a highly undesirable outcome for women to be contemptuous towards their husbands (1:17-18), and thus the non-binary/genderqueer Vashti must be removed from her position (1:19). This indicates a desire to maintain strict separation between the sexes, with men occupying the dominant position over women, who are expected to obey.[109]

Rather unusually, even after Vashti has been removed from the narrative in chapter one, the presence of her absence remains in the following chapter of the MT. The text states at 2:1:

הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ זָכַר אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ

'King Ahasuerus remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.'

However, the MT text does not go into any detail about how or why Ahasuerus 'remembered' Vashti. The verb זכר has a semantic range which includes 'to remember' as in 'to recall', 'to remember fondly' and 'to think of' (BDB: 269) but the Hebrew text does not make it clear which meaning would fit best in this context. If he is remembering her fondly, it suggests that Ahasuerus was not entirely in control of the decision to banish Vashti. This may be because he deferred to Memuchan to make the decision, and/or he was not in

[109] See also Beal 1995: 99 and Day 2005: 42.

control of his mental faculties because of his rage.[110] This further emphasises Ahasuerus's shift from powerful and authoritative to weak and obsequious. He now behaves how he expected Vashti to, as a stereotypical female. Curiously, chapter two of the MT evinces three mentions of Vashti after she has been banished, at 2:1, 4 and 17.[111] The impact of her genderqueer behaviour has been so significant that she leaves the presence of her absence on the text, perhaps leaving echoes of her queerness, too.

The first half of chapter one in the MT establishes a gender binary in Ahasuerus's royal palace. As shown, the sexes seem to be clearly separated, and power and authority are located in the male sphere. Vashti's refusal to participate in this structure defies cisnormativity, as she rejects that which is expected of her. Crucially, she does not behave 'like a man'. She simply refuses to participate in the system of normative behaviour. Thus, Vashti can be interpreted as acting like a non-binary/genderqueer character. Her conduct has a huge impact on the men in the royal court. Ahasuerus's fury, and Memuchan and his colleagues' insistence that Vashti be removed and her behaviour made illegal, highlights how transgressive her action was, and how she was viewed as abject. These violent reactions to her genderqueerness have the effect of revealing the fragility of the gender binary. In particular, that a law is required to enforce female conduct, to avoid other women behaving in a like manner, indicates that Vashti's genderqueerness provoked genuine fear. Ahasuerus appears to be fixed within the hegemonic gender binary. However,

---

[110] As will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis, in *Esther* there are several examples of characters losing control of their emotions and, in doing so, they sometimes exhibit subversive behaviour (3:5-6; 4:1-2; 5:9; 7:7-10).
[111] See Beal 1995: 95.

he seems to be feminised,[112] as he acts like Vashti was expected to, which is satirical. Thus, his silence and passivity are highly ironic. Thus, I conclude that the MT of *Esther* displays Vashti as having the capacity to be interpreted as non-binary/genderqueer, in stark comparison to her husband and his royal court.

*6.3 - The Septuagint*

As will be discussed in this section, the LXX version of *Esther* depicts Vashti quite similarly to the MT. There are some subtle differences between the two versions, as will be discussed, but overall the similarities outnumber the differences. Consequently, like in the MT, in the LXX, Vashti has the capacity to be interpreted as non-binary/genderqueer. Furthermore, Ahasuerus is portrayed as shifting from a dominant male to a passive female character, in stark contrast to his defiant wife.

The LXX, like the MT, establishes a separation between the sexes that appears to portray a strict gender binary in Ahasuerus's kingdom. 1:5 in the LXX states that Ahasuerus[113] threw his feast for τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. The noun ἔθνεσιν, the dative plural neuter form of ἔθνος could be translated as 'nations', 'gentiles', 'foreigners', 'class', 'tribe' or 'member' (LSJ). When we look ahead to 1:9, Vashti[114] makes a feast for ταῖς γυναιξὶν, 'the women.' That this noun is

[112] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.
[113] Ahasuerus's given name in the LXX is Artaxerxes.
[114] Vashti's given name in the LXX is Astin.

preceded by the definite article in Greek indicates more clearly than the Hebrew that this group of people are *the* women as opposed to being *some* women. Using our translation of 1:9 to inform our interpretation of 1:5, the former could logically indicate that the ἔθνεσιν of the city (1:5) are *the* men. The rest of the verse reads, ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ὅπου ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀρταξέρξης, 'in the palace where King Ahasuerus was.' This indicates the location of the feast rather than the women's social status. Like the Hebrew text, this suggests that the feasts in the LXX, hosted by Vashti and Ahasuerus respectively, are separated by sex. Similarly to the MT, Ahasuerus's feast is granted much more attention in the LXX than Vashti's, which denotes the imbalance of power between them.

Ahasuerus summons Vashti to appear before him using very similar language to the MT: δεῖξαι αὐτὴν… τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὅτι καλὴ ἦν, 'to show her… because she was quite beautiful' (1:11).[115] He appears to establish a cisnormative dynamic between himself and his wife, whereby she is expected to obey him. At 1:12, the LXX words Vashti's astonishing rejection of the king's summons as, καὶ οὐκ εἰσήκουσεν αὐτοῦ… ἐλθεῖν,[116] 'and she did not listen to him… to come'. The verb used in the Hebrew is וַתְּמָאֵן, which is the *piel* imperfect with waw consecutive form of מאן, 'refused' (MT). The Greek verb εἰσήκουσεν is the aorist active imperfect form of εἰσακούω. When εἰσήκουσεν is paired with the negative particle οὐκ 'did not listen to', it has a different nuance to the Hebrew. 'Did not listen' indicates that Vashti could

[115] See Appendix A.
[116] Kahana points out that this is a unique equation but was likely done to avoid the phonetic resemblance between the two verbal forms in Greek of the more direct translation (ἠθέλησε…ἐλθεῖν) (2005: 39-40).

choose to listen or not listen to requests from her husband, therefore Vashti possessed her own agency. Therefore, in my interpretation, it appears as if this text lessens the intensity of her transgression. The LXX continues this portrayal of Vashti as the scene progresses. At 1:17 in the LXX, Memuchan states that Vashti 'opposed' or 'spoke against' the king, using the aorist active indicative verb *ἀντεῖπεν* which is repeated twice in the verse. This verb has meanings including 'contradict,' 'refute,' 'speak against' or 'oppose.' (LSJ). In a sense, this is rather like the MT's account of this verse, and thus it appears that both versions depict Vashti very similarly.

It could be reasonably argued that the LXX displays the shift in roles between Vashti and Ahasuerus even more emphatically than does the Hebrew. From 1:13-21, Ahasuerus is spoken about, but he does not speak. The LXX features eight verses where the king takes a subordinate position, deferring to the advice of his friends, and Vashti becomes the centre of attention, compared to six verses in the Hebrew.

However, the LXX appears to limit the reach of Vashti's genderqueerness at 1:16. This text does not include the detail 'to all the people who are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus', as the MT does (1:16). Instead, this version makes it clear that Vashti's misdemeanour affected only the males in the royal court. This still portrays Vashti as being non-binary/genderqueer, however, it suggests that she does not trouble cisnormativity outside of the palace.

The LXX evinces some subtle differences to the MT in 1:17b-18.[117] Memuchan states that because Vashti had opposed the king, 'similarly' (ὁμοίως), the princesses of the rulers of Persia and Media would 'dare to dishonour their husbands.' Memuchan believes that Vashti created a chain of cause and effect. By refusing the king's request, she initiates the unwelcome consequence that wives would dishonour their husbands, presumably by behaving in the same manner. This had to be directly corrected in law by forcing women to give their husbands honour. According to Memuchan's logic, it was dishonourable that Vashti 'did not listen to' and 'opposed' the king. This may indicate that, in the opinion of the royal advisers, obedience was expected from women to maintain the correct balance of power between husbands and wives. This further emphasises the royal advisers' veneration of the gender binary. Like in the MT, Vashti's behaviour both disgusts and frightens them, which displays the fragility of the binary itself. They act to ensure that this cannot happen again.

One of the most obvious differences in the LXX to the MT is seen at 2:1. The LXX negates the verb זכר, so the text reads οὐκέτι ἐμνήσθη, 'he *no longer* remembered Vashti'.[118] When we consider Vashti's erasure from the narrative at the end of chapter one, it is compounded by the phrase 'he no longer remembered Vashti.' Unlike the MT, the LXX firmly erases her from the narrative. Furthermore, the LXX does not include the reference to Vashti in 2:17. This means that Vashti's influence does not appear to leave a lasting impact on the tale. It is

[117] See Appendix A.
[118] Italics mine. cf. Moore 1971: 17 and Kahana 2005: 66.

confirmed that her dangerous role has been contained and removed. The gender binary has been re-instituted in the royal court.

Vashti and Ahasuerus are not portrayed very differently in the LXX version of *Esther* than they have been in the Hebrew text. As highlighted in this and the preceding sections, 1:12 marks a turning point. Because of her refusal, Vashti becomes the focus of the conversation and action with Ahasuerus taking a secondary role. This is emphasised more in the LXX than the MT. Vashti's action can be interpreted as being non-binary/genderqueer in this version. However, the LXX does not grant Vashti as large a reach of influence as does the MT, as the impact of her behaviour affects only the princes and princesses of the kingdom. Once she has been removed from the text, she is firmly and decisively excised from the rest of the narrative.

### *6.4 - The Alpha Text*

The AT characterises Ahasuerus and Vashti very similarly to the LXX and MT. As will be discussed below, there are some significant differences in the AT which tend to emphasise, rather than restrict, Vashti's capacity for genderqueerness. The AT positions Ahasuerus and Vashti as equals in the first half of the text, and her behaviour appears to be an expression of her capacity as a free and unrestricted agent.

Like in the other ancient versions, the separation between the sexes is also present in the AT, indicating a strict gender binary structure in the court. Ahauserus's[119] feast is described lavishly in the AT (1:1-8), like in the LXX and MT.[120] However, unlike these other versions, the AT states that Vashti threw a 'grand reception', δοχὴν μεγάλην (1:9). The adjective μεγάλην in this verse is not present in the other ancient versions.[121] Vashti invites the women to a party which, unlike the king's feast, was not prone to licentiousness. This is noted by the use of δοχὴν at 1:9 rather than ποτον (1:5). Vashti is thus marked as acting in contrast to the king and perhaps indicates a modest gathering. Like the MT and LXX, the AT at 1:9 states that Vashti hosted 'all the women' (πάσαις ταῖς γυναιξὶν) thus indicating that men and women were separated.

Rather interestingly, the depiction of 1:11a in the AT appears to portray Ahasuerus and Vashti as equals, rather than Ahasuerus occupying a dominant position over Vashti.[122] This indicates Vashti was non-binary/genderqueer within a binary system even before her act of refusal. The king summons Vashti to be brought into the 'assembled drinking-party' wearing the royal diadem, before his army. The only verb in the AT used by Ahasuerus with Vashti as the intended object is ἀγαγεῖν, 'to bring' or 'to lead.' This is rather different from the other versions here studied, all of which use two or more verbs.[123] The Hebrew MT, the

[119] The king is named Assyeros in the AT, and Vashti is named Ouastin.
[120] See Appendix A.
[121] NETS and Clines (1984: 219) both opt for the rather ambiguous 'great,' which could refer to either size or quality.
[122] 1:11b is not attested in the AT version.
[123] See Appendix A.

LXX, Josephus's paraphrase and Jerome's Latin Vulgate all feature the verb 'to show'. This is usually paired with 'her beauty.' It is notable that neither Vashti's beauty, nor a verb stating that she was to be 'shown' are included in the AT. The exclusion of this information has the effect of the king's summons to Vashti appearing to be motiveless and unexplained. Furthermore, the AT portrays Vashti as having an equal amount of agency and authority to her husband, as she is not portrayed as an object to be exhibited before the male gaze. The combination of these two factors appears to portray two equally-situated characters rather than one being subordinate to the other.

The portrayal of Ahasuerus and Vashti as equals continues in the AT. Vashti's refusal at 1:12 employs different Greek verbs to those used in the LXX: οὐκ ἠθέλησεν Ουαστιν ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ βασιλέως, 'Vashti was not willing to do the king's bidding'. The verb ἠθέλησεν is the aorist active indicative form of ἐθέλω, 'to be willing.' When paired with the negative, this verb almost equates to δύναμαι and should be translated as, 'was not able' (LSJ). However, Autenrieth lists the use of this verb with the negative as 'be unwilling' or 'refuse.' Certainly, these two different translations would affect the meaning of the verse quite significantly. Should we opt for the former, this indicates that either Vashti had lost her agency, or she was unable to do the king's request, perhaps due to her own sense of propriety. Both 'unwilling' and 'refuse' indicate that she could fulfil his request but actively chose not to.

The second word of import in this verse is the neuter noun θέλημα, 'will' or 'bidding', which is of the same root as the verb ἐθέλω. The construction of this verse then plays on the 'wills' of Vashti and Ahasuerus, as one character's will is pitted against the other's. This wording is repeated in the AT at 1:13. It could be argued that Ahasuerus attempts to push Vashti into the subordinate role by making a request of her, and thus instituting binary gender roles between them whereby he is the summoner and she is the summoned one.[124] Her refusal rejects his attempt and therefore her subordination cannot be instituted, much to Ahasuerus's chagrin.

Like the MT and the Vulgate, but unlike the LXX, the AT states in Memuchan's speech that Vashti wronged not only the king and the rulers, but also εἰς πάντας τοὺς λαοὺς, 'to all the men' (1:16). The inclusion of λαοὺς, the plural accusative form of the masculine noun λαός, here is vitally important. This noun refers to 'men', particularly soldiers or royal subjects, or to 'people' more generally (LSJ). As this phrase is preceded in the verse by ἀλλα καὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας Περσῶν καὶ Μήδων, 'but also the rulers of the Persians and Medes', it could indicate that τοὺς λαοὺς should be translated as 'the men' who are subjects of the Persian and Median rulers, or soldiers. This indicates a division between the genders where Vashti's behaviour has directly offended the *men* in the kingdom, not 'the people'. This suggests that male opinion is of more import to the ruling elite than female opinion. However, if we translate τοὺς λαοὺς as 'the people', this agrees with the MT's version of 1:16 and portrays

[124] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.

Vashti's action as having an extremely wide-reaching impact. In both translations, Vashti directly defies the expectations of the men or the people in the kingdom by behaving as Ahasuerus's equal, reinforced by the AT's portrayal of the tension between their 'wills'. Therefore, in my reading, in response to Ahasuerus's request she steps outside of the binary gender structure that she is expected to obey.

In contrast to the other ancient versions, the key consideration of the royal advisers in the AT appears to be on the *fact* that Vashti transgressed, rather than on the *consequences* of her transgression. The AT reads at 1:16 that Vashti wronged everyone, ὅτι ἠκύρωσε τὸ πρόσταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως. 1:18 then explains that she rejected the king's word, and thus her position should be given to someone better. Again, this indicates that in the eyes of the royal advisers, the central problem is Vashti's refusal to be obedient. To correct the situation, Memuchan suggests that she is forced to do what the king required her to do: καὶ φαινέσθω ὑπακούουσα τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ βασιλέως (1:20). The present imperative verb φαινέσθω 'make [her] appear' is paired with the present active participle ὑπακούουσα which has the meanings, 'hearken', 'listen', 'give ear', and of dependents and subjects, 'submit to' or 'yield' (LS: 830). The use of φαινέσθω with ὑπακούουσα is rather interesting, as active translations of this verb do not indicate forcing someone to do something, but rather giving the *appearance* of doing something. These verbs indicate that Vashti could not be forced into submission, and thus the best course of action would be to force her to *appear* to be listening to the king.

Like in the MT, LXX and Vulgate, Ahasuerus is silent throughout the latter half of this scene. He has shifted from occupying a powerful role in the kingdom of Persia, to one of silent obedience, with 1:12 serving as the point at which this shift occurs. This is interesting given the use of φαινέσθω at 1:20, as discussed above, as Vashti does not lose her agency but she retains it, in contrast to her husband. As in the other ancient versions, this shows Ahasuerus being depicted as he expected his wife to behave. He has shifted from the role of male aggressor to servile female, in stark contrast to Vashti.

2:1 offers an interesting note on which to end the Ahasuerus and Vashti scene. The aorist active indicative verb ἔστη (from ἵστημι) is paired with the present active infinitive verb μνημονεύειν in the AT. The latter is the same verb as that used in this verse in the LXX (ἐμνήσθη – present active participle), but in the present infinitive active form. μνημονεύειν has the translations, 'to remember,' 'to call to mind' and 'to think of' (LS: 516). The first half of the verse is tricky to translate, but is rendered in NETS as, 'And so was established the tradition about Ouastin'. NETS translates the verb as the noun μνημόσυνον rather than as a verb, to fit with ἔστη. Clines translates this as 'he ceased to remember,' (1984: 221) which ignores ἔστη and adds in an adverb of negation, perhaps so that the AT agrees with the LXX here. To follow either interpretation involves some creative translation, because the first half of the verse is rather complicated. If we follow NETS, the AT's interpretation explicitly grants Vashti a lasting presence beyond her excision from the narrative. This is rather radical. Her power over the royal court is highlighted, particularly in the use of the phrase καὶ ὧν ἐποιήσεν Ἀσσυήρῳ (2:1). That Vashti is noted as having 'done' something to

Ahasuerus, for which a tradition is established about her, marks her as possessing her own authority and will to act. This is markedly different from the Hebrew, which uses the same verb עשה but without stating a direct object of the verb, and then states:

וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ. Vashti in the AT is portrayed as a powerful agent at 2:1, whereas in the Hebrew she was the object of others' actions. The AT specifically places Ahasuerus as the object and thus Ahasuerus, not Vashti, is characterised as the one acted upon who does not act.

The AT takes a rather different approach to the relationship between Ahasuerus and Vashti, yet Vashti can still be read as non-binary/genderqueer in this version. Vashti is situated within a binary system; a system to which her husband attempts to make her conform, as he does. The conflict between their 'wills' (1:12) highlights a tension between non-binary and binary characters. Vashti does not appear to be regarded as emphatically abject as in the MT and LXX. Instead, the AT portrays the royal advisers as being focused on the appearance of her behaviour. In the AT, manufacturing the appearance of conformity is sufficient, and thus Vashti is recognised as a powerful non-binary/genderqueer figure who will not genuinely conform. Vashti is still regarded as being dangerous, as her removal is required in the AT as elsewhere. However, the AT is less emphatic about the danger she poses to the royal court.

*6.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase*

As will be shown many times in Part Two of this thesis, Josephus's paraphrase displays many significant differences to the other ancient versions. This is clear in his portrayal of Ahasuerus and Vashti,[125] which displays significant differences to the other ancient versions studied in this chapter. Josephus's focus appears to be on the primacy of Persian law and Ahasuerus's folly in attempting to subvert his relationship with the law, not with his wife. Consequently, it appears that Vashti is given a strictly cisnormative characterisation, and thus she does not have the capacity to be interpreted as being non-binary/genderqueer.

Josephus does not significantly shorten his version of Ahasuerus's feasts or surroundings, so it reads very similarly to the other ancient versions included in this study (11.186-189). However, his version does not separate the feasts by sex. Ahasuerus's feasts are targeted at those who belong to the political sphere in the kingdom of Persia. Vashti's feast is not for 'women', but for a 'group of diners' or 'a party' (11.190). Josephus's paraphrase does, however, follow all the ancient versions' lengthy and lavish depictions of Ahasuerus's banquets and palace, which contrasts with the pithy mention of Vashti's party (11.190). Therefore, Ahasuerus and Vashti are not equal in the amount of attention they receive in the text.

[125] Josephus names Ahasuerus as Artaxerxes, and Vashti as Aste.

Josephus's paraphrase recounts Ahasuerus's summons to Vashti in a manner like the Hebrew, Vulgate and LXX versions, but portrays Vashti more emphatically as an object. The aorist active infinitive verb that he uses here (11.190), ἐπιδεῖξαι, means to 'exhibit as a specimen' (LSJ), which carries a different sense than the verb used in the other versions. The closest verb to this used elsewhere is δεῖξαι 'show' (LSJ) in the LXX (1:11). Of the seven common meanings for δεῖξαι, only one has the meaning 'display or exhibit' (LSJ). However, ἐπιδεῖξαι, a form of δεῖξαι, has the primary meaning of 'exhibit' (LSJ). This verb explicitly positions Vashti as the object of the male gaze. Furthermore, Josephus's paraphrase here uses three verbs against Vashti, ἐπιδεῖξαι 'exhibit her', ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὴν 'call her' and ἥκειν 'to come', which outnumber the verbs used in the MT, Vulgate and AT, but not the LXX.

Unlike the MT, LXX and AT, Josephus's paraphrase does not have the capacity for Vashti's action at 1:12 to be interpreted as being genderqueer. Rather, Vashti appears to ascribe to cisnormative behaviour and is principally driven by a gendered modesty code. His text states that Vashti refuses to obey the king owing to 'Persian law' (Πέρσαις νόμον),[126] which prevents her from displaying herself to other men. There is no indication that such a law existed,[127] so it is puzzling why it is referred to here. It appears that Vashti aims to maintain, rather than challenge, the status quo. Louis Feldman argues that Ahasuerus is portrayed by Josephus as an ideal ruler (1998: 136), and this law was referred to here to

[126] For further information on the preoccupation with the law in Josephus's *Esther*, see Emily Kneebone 2013: 168-174.
[127] As pointed out by Kneebone (2013: 169) both biblical and extra-biblical sources confirm this, including Herodotus' *Histories* 5.18, 9.110; Plutarch's *Artaxerxes* 5; Neh 2:6.

'increase the erotic interest', similarly to Greek romances (1970: 151). Kneebone, on the other hand, posits that Josephus has established two competing but legitimate authorities between which Vashti is being pulled: the king's demand and Persian law. By obeying one, she must disobey the other. Additionally, Ahasuerus is cast as a 'wretchedly human figure, able neither to overcome his desires nor to circumvent the law' (2013: 169).

This depiction of Vashti as defending the moral code of the royal court continues in Josephus's text. It is stated in 11.191 that Ahasuerus continued to make his request of her, and she continued to refuse. Three verbs are used in response to Ahasuerus, to indicate Vashti's refusal: οὐκ ἐπορεύετο, 'did not come'; οὐδὲν ἧττον ἐνέμεινεν, 'nevertheless she remained'; παραιτουμένη τὴν ἄφιξιν '[and] she refused the departure'. This creates a parallel with the three verbs Ahasuerus used to summon her (11.191). That Vashti refuses Ahasuerus's demand because it was prohibited for her to show herself to other people indicates her subordination to the law. Ahasuerus presumes himself to be above the law, and thus he made such requests of his wife.

As the scene continues, it appears that it is Ahasuerus's relationship with the law that is problematic. 11.192-193 recounts the king seeking advice from his courtiers on how to make a law with which to prosecute his wife, because, he complains, Vashti ὑπήκουσεν οὐδὲ ἅπαξ. The key verb being used about Vashti is ὑπήκουσεν, the aorist active indicative form of ὑπακούω, 'to listen' or with the dative 'to obey' (LS: 830). As discussed above, ὑπήκουσεν is used of Vashti's refusal in the AT at 1:20. This is emphasised with the negative particle οὐδὲ,

which stresses Vashti's continued action. Indeed, it is ironic that he seeks a law with which to punish his wife, when it was her adherence to the law that provoked him to punish her. That Ahasuerus is subordinate to the law is indicated by his need to operate within its boundaries, to prosecute his wife.

Vashti's behaviour is portrayed by Josephus as appropriate, and thus it is Memuchan and Ahasuerus who are satirised. Like the MT's version of this scene, Memuchan states that Vashti's behaviour is an insult (τὴν ὕβριν) to all Persian men. Memuchan argues that the Persian men would αἴσχιστα διαγεγονέναι τὸν βίον, 'live a shameful life'. Thus, he marks the wives' behaviour against their husbands as being explicitly 'shameful' or 'ugly' (11.194). Memuchan thinks women would not show 'reverence' (αἰδῶ) when they had the 'model' (παράδειγμα) of the queen's 'arrogance' (ὑπερηφανίαν) (11.194). He makes it explicit that Vashti's behaviour was a display of conceit, and would directly influence Persian women to do the same. However, as Vashti refused Ahasuerus's requests because it was illegal for her to do as he asked, this is highly ironic.

Furthermore, the verb used by Memuchan against Vashti is ἐκβαλεῖν (11.194), the aorist active infinitive form of ἐκβαλλω, meaning 'cast out,' 'expel,' or 'throw out' (LS: 236). This is much stronger than the verbs used in the MT, LXX and Vulgate, each of which opted for verbs which indicated that Vashti would 'no longer come in' to the king. Therefore, in Josephus's paraphrase of this scene, Vashti is being punished much more severely. This heightens the drama in Josephus's narrative but also could be interpreted as deriding

Memuchan and the king even more than in the other ancient texts, as their reaction to Vashti's adherence to the law was exaggerated.

Subsequently, Ahasuerus becomes submissive to the law, rather than to Vashti, and thus the dynamics of a 'feminised' male and genderqueer person identified in our reading of the MT, LXX and AT are not present in Josephus's text. Ahasuerus plays an even more diminished role in Josephus's paraphrase than he does in the other ancient versions. Memuchan exhorts him to punish Vashti, and the outcome reads as follows: κεκυρωμένα ἔδοξε τὴν Ἄστην ἐκβαλεῖν (11.194). Ahasuerus is not involved in the punishment, and it appears that he has entirely disappeared. Ahasuerus has listened intently to Memuchan's words and does not need to even utter consent. Perhaps here in the text, behind Ahasuerus's compliance, we can detect the presence of the verb ὑπακούω, used against Vashti. He is now being deferential to the law when he was not before, and the relationship he should have with the law has been restored.

Rather interestingly, after Vashti has been removed, Josephus's paraphrase details the king mourning her loss (11:195). This interpretation is different from the other ancient versions because it is explicitly romantic in theme. It is explained that Ahasuerus could not be reconciled to Vashti because of the law. This point strongly emphasises adherence to the law and the superciliousness of thinking oneself above the law, concluded with the detail that Ahasuerus was made unhappy by the loss of his wife, as though it is a punishment. Furthermore, it can be argued that Vashti is the innocent victim in the king's attempt to subvert his relationship with the law.

Josephus's paraphrase of the Ahasuerus and Vashti scene is rather different from the MT, Vulgate, LXX and AT studied in chapter 5.2. This version does not appear to have the capacity for genderqueer reading. Vashti's refusal seems strictly situated within a modesty code, which is distinctly cisnormative, as discussed above. Vashti is concerned to maintain the law which specifically imposes the gender binary. However, Josephus's paraphrase makes the law, not Vashti, the central consideration of the opening chapter of *Esther*, perhaps to highlight the inviolability of Persian law, and Ahasuerus's hubris.

### *6.6 - Jerome's Latin Vulgate*

The MT version of *Esther* bears a remarkable number of similarities to Jerome's Latin Vulgate. To not duplicate material and analysis, this section will primarily focus on dissimilarities between the Vulgate and the MT, as the similarities are numerous. It appears that the Vulgate does allow Vashti to be read as a non-binary/genderqueer character, as will be outlined below.

The Latin evinces one significant difference from the Hebrew at 1:18. The Latin does not refer to the princesses hearing Vashti's deed, as the Hebrew does. Instead, the wives of the princes of Persia and Media 'by this example' (*hoc exemplo*) will 'slight the commandments of their husbands' (*parvipendent imperia maritorum*). The use of *hoc exemplo* is similar to the LXX's use of ὁμοίως at 1:18 and Josephus's use of παράδειγμα at 11.194. That wives will

'slight the commandments of their husbands,' is a more appropriate response from Memucan than in the Hebrew,[128] as Vashti's example was, literally, to ignore her husband's command. Furthermore, this response does not mention shame, as the LXX and Josephus's version do. As in the LXX, this highlights the fragility of the gender binary and Memucan's concern to maintain it by any means necessary.

Like the MT, the presence of Vashti's absence remains in the following chapter of the Vulgate. Notably, the Latin verb *recordatus* (2:1b) does not have the meaning 'to remember fondly' and only carries meanings such as 'to recall' and 'to remember'. Therefore, the semantic range is slightly different to זכר. This is more like the verb used in the LXX than the verb used in the MT.[129] The Latin includes *quae passa esset*, 'what she had suffered,' which carries a different sense to the Hebrew וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ, 'what was decided against her'. 'Suffer' has a distinctly emotional value, whereas 'decide' does not. That Ahasuerus remembers Vashti and what she 'suffered' could perhaps imply that he empathised with her. Furthermore, it depicts Vashti as a figure of sympathy, thus perhaps indicates that her treatment was unjust. Notably, she is still portrayed as a genderqueer figure.

The Vulgate, as shown here, portrays Ahasuerus and Vashti remarkably like the MT. That these two versions are so similar is particularly notable, given the long gap in time between the two versions as we have them. The differences that we have seen in this section are

[128] See Appendix A.
[129] See Appendix A.

predominantly stylistic and may be due to translation issues from Hebrew into Latin. However, 1:18 is different to the MT, and is more similar to the LXX and Josephus's paraphrase. Overall then, it can be concluded that Jerome's Vulgate portrays a genderqueer Vashti who eschews the boundaries of a hegemonic gender binary. She is too dangerous to be allowed to remain in the palace. Consequently, she is removed and the gender binary is re-instituted.

### *6.7 - Conclusion*

As illustrated in this chapter, there is a clear difference between the capacity for genderqueerness in Josephus's version and in the other ancient texts. In all versions, the Ahasuerus' royal court appears to institute a gender binary; that is, the separation of the sexes with one gender, male, positioned as dominant and powerful, and females positioned as their objects. This is demonstrated by the separation by gender of Vashti and Ahasuerus's feasts (1:5, 9),[130] and Ahasuerus's summons to Vashti. Furthermore, the reaction of Ahasuerus's male advisers to Vashti's behaviour displays their conviction that the subjugation of women by their husbands is so important to the fabric of their society that its protection is required by law. Not only does this highlight that there is a gender binary structure at play in Ahasuerus's court, but simultaneously the fragility of this structure is illustrated. The presence of this binary structure in the royal court is common

[130] Notably, this is absent from Josephus's paraphrase.

to all the ancient versions. This is similar to Laniak and Klein's assessment that there is an honour/shame dynamic present in Vashti and Ahasuerus's scenes.[131]

In all ancient versions except for one, Josephus's paraphrase in the 'Judean Antiquities', Vashti is portrayed as eschewing the boundaries of the gender binary. In the MT, LXX, AT and Vulgate, she steps outside of the structure entirely, simply by refusing Ahasuerus's request, or not listening to the charge he delivered to her. She does not act 'like a woman' or 'like a man', she simply does not act, in a manner not dissimilar to Mordecai's conduct with Haman (3:2, 5). By stepping outside of cisnormative expectations and refusing to participate, Vashti as a non-binary character demolishes the fragile structure of the gender binary in the royal court. Subsequently, it had to be re-instituted by law, at Memuchan's suggestion. This echoes Laffey and Fuchs' claim that Vashti is a transgressive character who rejects the patriarchy.[132] Ahasuerus is the locus of the enforcement of the gender binary as his regal authority is the source of its establishment. That a character who is his female equivalent, the queen, should act to bring about its destruction and create chaos undermines it at the very highest level, i.e. she undermines the gender structure *on its own terms*. Ironically, after the turning point of 1:12, Ahasuerus continues to be depicted as fixed within the hegemonic binary structure in the royal court, but he has shifted to a 'feminised' position. This is not dissimilar to Day and Beal's assessment of Mordecai's

[131] See chapter four, particularly 4.3 and 4.4, for a discussion of Laniak and Klein's honour/shame theses.
[132] See chapter 4.4.2.

behaviour in chapters three and four.[133] However, none of the critics included in my analysis of modern scholarship have taken this view of Ahasuerus.

Vashti's genderqueer presence in the citadel does not last long. She is expelled and the gender binary reformed and enshrined in law, lest it be challenged again. However, the echoes of her presence and her emancipatory action remains in the MT, AT and Vulgate, with mentions made of her and what she did plaguing the minds of the men in the royal court.

The MT, LXX, AT and Vulgate display only subtle differences between one another. The LXX limits Vashti's influence to within the royal court only, and it slightly increases Ahasuerus's authority. Thus, it appears that we can read Vashti in the LXX as being genderqueer, but that is slightly toned-down compared to our reading of the MT.

It is also possible to read Vashti as a genderqueer character in the AT. Vashti and Ahasuerus are depicted more like equals in the opening verses of this scene, in contrast to the clearly binary structure of the royal court. She is removed from her royal station, but not before appearing to conform, thus creating the illusion of her adherence to the gender binary.

[133] See chapter 4.2.

As discussed in chapter 6.5, Josephus's paraphrase takes a markedly different approach to these scenes. This version concerns itself primarily with the power dynamics between Ahasuerus and the law, and secondarily between Ahasuerus and Vashti. It can be argued that it is Ahasuerus's attempt to subvert his relationship with the law, which is problematic, and Vashti's behaviour was acceptable because she was maintaining the law's gendered modesty code. Therefore, she does not have the capacity to be read in a genderqueer way.

To conclude, most of the ancient versions of *Esther* allow for a genderqueer/non-binary reading of Vashti. She eschews the restrictions of a cisnormative royal court simply by refusing to engage with it. In contrast, her husband who attempts to control her using the expected norms of behaviour of the gender binary, fails spectacularly and thus he is consigned to the role of an obsequious and silent, feminised character in this structure. Vashti's shocking and capricious behaviour threatens the gender structure of the royal court, and thus the king and Memuchan must remove her. It is possible that Fuchs, Laffey, Day and Beal would agree with my assessment. Their work showed that Vashti was a shocking character who behaved in a manner totally unexpected of her because of her gender. My analysis shows that Vashti was indeed behaving in a non-normative way, which I interpret as non-binary/genderqueer behaviour.

# Chapter 7 – Esther and Mordecai

## *7.1 - Introduction*

Esther and Mordecai have only four scenes together in *Esther*. This does not sound like many. However, these two characters undergo significant shifts in their relationship with one another in these scenes. Esther enters the narrative in chapter two as a silent character who displays little agency in contrast to her uncle Mordecai. In the MT, LXX and Vulgate, these roles change as the tale progresses. In chapter four, Esther, now queen, challenges Mordecai, and some scholars have argued that the MT demonstrates a role reversal between them (Lacocque 1990: 67). In chapters eight and nine, Esther and Mordecai's relationship to one another has changed, both publicly and privately.

In this chapter, I will show that Esther has the capacity to be read as a genderqueer/non-binary character in relation to Mordecai in the MT version of their scenes together. Mordecai is often portrayed as a cisnormative male in the opening chapters of the tale, though we can read genderqueer/non-binary behaviour in his depiction after 4:15-17. The Greek versions challenge our reading. This is because the Greek Additions expand on the scenes between Mordecai and Esther, limiting their capacity for genderqueer/non-binary reading. As such important characters in the narrative, it is unsurprising that Esther and Mordecai have been given significant attention in the Additions. Indeed, the Greek Additions in the LXX and AT contrast with the main body text of these versions, as the former does not allow a genderqueer reading, but the latter does. Josephus's version is difficult to read as consistently genderqueer or cisnormative, as the text sometimes allows

for a queer reading, but sometimes resists. Perhaps most surprisingly, the Vulgate version displays some small differences to Esther and Mordecai's scenes that depict these characters as less emphatically genderqueer/non-binary than the MT. We will now look at the text in detail to illustrate this.

*7.2 - The Masoretic Text*

In the MT's depiction of Esther and Mordecai, the dependent and quiet Esther and the dominant Mordecai of chapter two develop and change as the narrative progresses. We may read this shift as queering the gender and power roles between Esther and Mordecai, as will now be discussed. Esther's behaviour shifts towards that of a non-binary character in our reading, and in response, it seems that Mordecai's behaviour does also.

We meet our eponymous heroine not at the beginning of the book that bears her name, as one might expect, but seven verses into the second chapter. The text introduces Mordecai before Esther, with detail on his lineage at 2:5 and the movements that led to his appearance in the story at 2:6. He is portrayed as connected both to Benjamin and to the people of Jeconiah. As Fox states, Mordecai is to be understood as 'an ideal figure', and here his Jewishness exemplifies his idealness (1991a: 185-6) Though Beal does not agree with this assessment (1997a: 33). It is unclear why Mordecai is inside the royal complex, as the MT does not give any detail about his role in the court nor his connection to it.[134] As

[134] See Levenson 1997: 56.

Mordecai is introduced first, he appears to be the primary character. Furthermore, Esther is introduced in relation to Mordecai, and thus it seems like she derives her importance and value in the plot from him. When looking at this through a queer lens, this seems to adhere to binary gender norms: Mordecai is the patriarch and Esther is his subordinate. Esther's description in 2:7 is threefold: she is named, the relationship between her and Mordecai is explained, and she is described as יְפַת־תֹּאַר וְטוֹבַת מַרְאֶה, 'beautiful of form and good of appearance'. The first phrase, יְפַת־תֹּאַר, has been used at Gen 29:17 about Rachel, at Deut 21:11 about a beautiful woman, at Gen 41:18 to depict cows, and at 1 Kings 1:6 to describe Adonijah's appearance. A very similar description is used about Joseph in Gen 39:6. The Hebrew of this verse reads, יוֹסֵף יְפֵה־תֹאַר וִיפֵה מַרְאֶה, thus using an identical phrase paired with a very similar phrase to the Hebrew text of Esther. The phrase טוב מראה is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe women (Gen 24:16, 26:7; 2 Sam 11:2) and children, described with the masculine common plural ילדים (Dan 1:4). Therefore, there is nothing particularly gendered about the use of וְטוֹבַת nor יְפַת, and I would argue that there is nothing particularly 'female' about the wording used at Est 2:7. However, as this is the only information we have been given about Esther other than her relation to Mordecai, it seems to imply the presence of binary gender roles. She described in relation to her uncle, but her physical appearance is deemed an important descriptive feature.

This theme continues in the rest of the verse, and the following verse. The text informs us that Mordecai 'took' (לקח) Esther as his daughter (2:7c), which is repeated at 2:15a, both times in the *qal* form. Immediately following these uses, this verb is used in the *niphal* to

indicate Esther's movement from place to place (2:8, 16). לקח is a very commonly used verb that has the predominant meaning of 'to take' (BDB: 542). In the *niphal*, this verb has a range of meanings, including 'to be taken', 'to be captured' or 'to be taken away' (BDB: 542). לְקָחָהּ מָרְדֳּכַי 'Mordecai took her' (2:7) is immediately followed by וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר 'Esther was taken' (2:8), with a markedly similar pattern in 2:15-16:

וּבְהַגִּיעַ תֹּר־אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל דֹּד מָרְדֳּכַי אֲשֶׁר לָקַח־לוֹ לְבַת, 'And when the turn came for Esther, daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter' (2:15). This is followed by וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר 'Esther was taken' (2:16). In this reading, Esther is entirely passive to Mordecai and to where she is taken. She has not yet exhibited any agency of her own. Thus far, a queer reading of Esther and Mordecai's relationship in chapter two does not appear to bear much fruit, as the characters seem to be strongly affixed to binary stereotypes.[135]

This theme continues as the scene progresses. 2:10-11 further illustrates a silent and passive Esther in contrast to her speaking and active uncle Mordecai. Mordecai 'commands' her, using the verb צָוָה, and 'walks' to the palace 'to know' what is being 'done' to her. Esther does not perform any similar actions. Consequently, in these two verses, I detect tension between Mordecai who 'does' and Esther who is 'done to'. There is an interesting parallel drawn here with 6:3, Ahasuerus asks, 'what has been done to Mordecai...?' It is as though the verb לקח echoes through this scene. The text does not give a response from

[135] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.

Esther that would indicate how she feels about her separation from Mordecai.[136] Furthermore, the text gives us no information about why Mordecai could walk in front of the women's quarters, because we are not told whether he had an official role in the court or not. 2:20 recounts again that Esther followed Mordecai's directions, and thus she did not tell the king about her heritage. Not only does this verse largely repeat 2:10, but it also re-emphasises Esther's passivity, in contrast to Mordecai's activity.[137]

However, chapter two does not consistently depict Esther as a subordinate character. Rather, it appears that it is only in her relationship with Mordecai that this dynamic is present. 2:9a is the first time that the text recounts Esther doing something, rather than having something done to her, but it is not in relation to Mordecai. Esther wins the favour of Hegai, the keeper of the women, and he hurries to assist her with the beautifying process. No detail is offered as to how Esther does this or what she does, but nonetheless, when comparing the verb וַתִּשָּׂא (2:9), to וַתִּלָּקַח (2:8) there appears to be a marked contrast between Esther's passivity in 2:8 and activity in 2:9.[138] The *qal* form of יטב, immediately followed by וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד, seems to imply agency.[139] As a woman isolated and in an unfamiliar environment, it is logical that Esther would follow Hegai's suggestions.[140] Furthermore,

---

[136] Day argues that Mordecai is experiencing 'empty nest syndrome' and he 'continues to monitor her to assuage his own curiosity and worry' (2005: 47).
[137] Interestingly, Beal argues, 'She remains, literally, an object of concern… At the same time, Mordecai's own dependence on and investment in Esther suggests the vulnerability of his own subjective status' (1997a: 36). See also, Day 2005: 57-8.
[138] These verbs are discussed in detail in the following chapter, 8.2.
[139] Contra Day 1995: 37. See Beal 1997a: 35.
[140] There is a range of opinions on Esther's behaviour here and whether it indicates activity or passivity. See Crawford 1989: 167; Day 2005: 54; Hazony 2016: 24; and Levenson 1997: 62.

Esther displays activity at 2:15 and 2:17. Therefore, it could be posited that Esther behaves differently with other characters, yet in her relationship with Mordecai, she is firmly fixed in a cisnormative role. This begs the question, why is the dynamic between her and Mordecai different from the dynamic between her and Hegai or Ahasuerus?

Mordecai and Esther do not have any more scenes together until chapter four, and thus this question is left unanswered in chapter two. Perhaps we could argue that as Esther was a dependent of Mordecai's until she became married to Ahasuerus, the power dynamic between them was fixed by their familial relationship. Given that Esther showed agency and authority by obtaining favour from Hegai, the keeper of the women, and from Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, this might indicate that Esther's familial bonds are stronger than those dictated by her Persian citizenship.

Esther is then absent until chapter four, by which time Mordecai has had an altercation with Haman which brings about the edict for the annihilation of the Jewish people. When Mordecai hears about Haman's edict, he dons sackcloth and ashes and grieves openly.[141] This loss of emotional control has hitherto only been demonstrated by Ahasuerus and Haman's anger, but not by Esther or Vashti. Indeed, Mordecai's behaviour in this verse contradicts his warnings to Esther at 2:10 and 2:20 not to reveal her ethnicity, as he now

[141] There have been many proposed explanations for Mordecai's grief. For a brief summary of the key arguments see Moore 1971: 47. See also Fox 1991: 57 and Klein 2003: 105.

appears to willingly reveal his. That Mordecai comes to the king's gate may indicate that he seeks Esther's advice.

In response to hearing a report of Mordecai's behaviour, Esther is וַתִּתְחַלְחַל (4:4). This verb has many occurrences in biblical literature, denoting painful movement, fear, terror or panic.[142] The *hithpalpel* form of is unique to *Esther*. Esther is described as experiencing significant emotional anguish. Esther then 'sent clothes to clothe Mordecai', but he did not accept them. It is logical that Esther would send Mordecai clothing, as it is made clear in the text that no one could enter the palace gates dressed as Mordecai was (4:2).[143] For Esther to converse with him, he would have to change his attire.[144] This verse illustrates Mordecai's stubbornness, much like his behaviour towards Haman at 3:2-5. Similarly, the text does not provide a reason for Mordecai's refusal, and thus he makes the situation more complicated and demonstrates no consideration for the ramifications of his actions.[145] However, it is important to note that Esther has hitherto never conversed with Mordecai because he has always dictated to her without receiving a response. His stubbornness may be borne out of hesitancy, or he rejects Esther's attempt to initiate conversation with him. Here Esther is depicted as providing for Mordecai. This is the opposite of their relationship as depicted in chapter two, where it was detailed that Mordecai אֹמֵן, 'brought up' Esther. Mordecai's refusal to engage could be interpreted as a rejection of Esther's attempt to

---

[142] See BDB: 296.
[143] There have been some damning assessments of Esther's decision to send Mordecai clothing. See, for example, Fox 1991a: 198. Conversely, see Crawford 1989: 169 and Beal 1997a: 70. See also chapter 4.3 of this thesis.
[144] See Bardtke 1963: 329 and Bush 1996: 394-95.
[145] See Day 2005: 81.

behave differently towards him and alter their power dynamic, which was previously cisnormative.

The following verse in the MT (4:5) describes Esther initiating conversation between herself and Mordecai with her eunuch, Hathach, as interlocutor. She wishes to know from Mordecai, לָדַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה, 'what it was and why it was.' This version of Esther is rather different from the Esther depicted in chapter two, who was entirely silent. She has stepped outside of the clearly gendered roles that previously existed between her and Mordecai in chapter two. Now she has the power and authority to demand answers from him. It is important to note that in my reading this does not mean that Esther is being 'subversive'; that is to say, she is undermining her female role and behaving in a male manner. Instead, I read Esther as behaving without the constraints of male or female binary tropes *in contrast to* her uncle Mordecai's behaviour. She shows concern for Mordecai's wellbeing, but is also assertive and demanding. These are desired traits for both males and females, according to the BSRI.[146]

Here Levenson points to the use of ידע by Mordecai at 4:1, and by Esther at 4:5, and argues that her consternation is not borne out of grief but out of embarrassment for not knowing about the edict (1997: 79). It is certainly odd that Mordecai knows of Haman's edict before Esther does, particularly given that she is closer than he is to the source of royal power and authority. However, the text states at 3:11 that king Ahasuerus hands over his authority in

[146] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.

this matter to Haman. After that point, the king has no direct involvement in the writing, authorising or disseminating of the decree. 3:12 specifies to whom the decree was sent, and notably though many members of the royal cohort were included, the king was not specified as a recipient of the decree, nor were his servants or advisers. The terms נערי־המלך and עבדי־המלך are used several times elsewhere in the narrative (2:2; 2:18; 3:3; 6:3; 6:5 and elsewhere), so the servants of the king were likely to be a recognised group. Thus, the king's inner circle may not have been aware of the edict, and if so, it is not surprising that Esther was similarly unaware.

Mordecai is clearly reluctant to engage with Esther on these terms. Not only does he refuse her offer of clothing, but his response to her via Hathach in 4:8 is redolent of someone attempting to regain control. He is aggressive and dominant in his speech. The MT uses this progression of verbs in the first half of Mordecai's speech:[147] 'show', לְהַרְאוֹת; 'inform', וּלְהַגִּיד; 'order', וּלְצַוּוֹת. Mordecai uses infinitives directed against Esther, 'to show Esther, to inform her and to order her'. This is reminiscent of his actions towards Esther in chapter two. In our reading, we can argue that this shows Mordecai grappling for power, trying to reinstitute the dynamic they had before. This creates tension between Esther and Mordecai. Mordecai seems to resist Esther's authority, and attempts to reinstitute the binary gender roles between them, as they were in chapter two.

[147] See Appendix B.

On receiving Mordecai's explanation from Hathach (4:9), Esther gives a firm and authoritative reply. She appears to chastise him for the ignorance of his request. We can also detect his frustration as he attempts to be more authoritative than Esther. She points out that Mordecai is ignorant of the law in place, which prevents her from acting as he directs her to. Esther has more power, authority, knowledge and rationality than Mordecai, who is focused on his attempt to command her. Using the BSRI as a guide, if Esther were to respond in a manner desirable for her gender, she would be gentle, softly spoken and yielding. She does not do this. While she is sensitive to Mordecai's needs, as shown in 4:4, she is also assertive and defends herself. Her display of traits that are masculine and feminine without admonishment from the narrator means that we can read her as genderqueer.

The text then details a speech from Mordecai that is two verses long (4:13-14), where he admonishes Esther, either for her reticence or to encourage her to intervene. Again, this portrays Mordecai as refusing to accept that Esther possesses more knowledge of affairs than he does, and that she can reject his command. It seems that Mordecai is refusing to engage with the hierarchical structure of the kingdom. As Queen, presumably Esther holds more authority than Mordecai does and he should obey her. At the same time, Mordecai's action appears to be rather conceited. He ignores Esther's statement that it is forbidden for her to appear before the king. Perhaps he rejects her opinion because he views her as his

subordinate niece. It is unclear if at 4:13-14 Mordecai is offering a factual statement to Esther or he is threatening her.[148]

Esther's reply to Mordecai establishes once again her authority and her decisiveness (4:15-16). She does not directly respond to Mordecai's speech, but rather she tells him what will now happen and what he is to do. At 4:16, Esther uses a series of imperatives to order Mordecai to act:

לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ

'Go, gather together all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. And do not eat and do not drink'

This is reminiscent of Mordecai's speech to Esther, just a few lines previously (4:8), where he used imperatival speech to tell her how to behave. Furthermore, with Berg, this speech contrasts sharply with Esther's obedience to Mordecai at 2:10 and 2:20 (1979: 73). The *qal* imperative verbs לֵךְ, כְּנוֹס and וְצוּמוּ are commands directed at Mordecai. Esther appears to have taken control of the situation, formulated a plan, and now she instructs Mordecai but, notably, she does not behave 'like a man'. She simply instructs another character on what to do, to enact a plan. As Crawford states, 'She is active, a risk-taker, not passively compliant. She is a queen, a figure of royal authority, such even that Mordecai hurries to obey her.' (1999: 905). This can be interpreted as genderqueer behaviour because there is

[148] See Moore 1971: 50. Whether one believes there to be divine intervention at work in 4:14 can affect how this verse can be understood, specifically to what ממקום אחר refers to. For example, Bardtke 1963: 333. See also Baldwin 1984: 80, Moore 1971: 50, 52 and Paton 1908: 222, cf. Berlin 2001: 44, Bush 1996: 396-97 and Levenson 1997: 81.

no discernible adherence to gender norms in her actions or speech. Indeed, as Beal argues, 'With regard to both the character and the book of Esther, then, the unconceived, perhaps inconceivable self is the one in control.' (2015: 111).

The last phrase of 4:16, וְכַאֲשֶׁר אָבַדְתִּי אָבָדְתִּי, is particularly difficult to render in English, and thus there has been confusion over how this is to be interpreted. The verb אבד in the *qal* has several meanings which include 'to perish', 'to be ruined', 'to be destroyed' both in the literal and figurative sense, as well as 'to be lost' (BDB: 1).[149] Additionally, Esther repeats the term Mordecai used at 4:14 (תֹּאבֵדוּ) and twists it, instead anticipating that she will perish if she helps the Jews.[150] Thus, she subtly rebuts Mordecai's assertion. In chapter four, Esther is nurturing, concerned, logical, thoughtful and commanding; all behavioural traits that do not belong to one gender or the other.

Mordecai's response at 4:17 can also be interpreted as genderqueer. He does not speak, he simply 'did according to all that Esther commanded him'. Mordecai's silence is not a feminisation or an act of submission, but an acceptance of Esther's plan. He puts aside his attempt to impose the gender binary on their relationship and instead does as he is charged. At the same time, he accepts her queerness.

---

[149] Bardtke understands it to indicate Esther's expression of voluntary sacrifice, as she takes on the possibility of death for her people's sake (1963: 335). Paton, on the other hand, understands her statement to be a 'despairing resignation to the inevitable.' (1908: 226). There could be an allusion to Jacob's words at Gen 43:14, כאשר שכלתי שכלתי, which, given the number of parallels between the stories of Esther and Joseph, it is not unlikely that this is the case. See Berg 1979: 123-142 and Levenson 1997: 82.
[150] See Day 2005: 86.

The next scene involving both Mordecai and Esther is 8:1-8. In the MT, Ahasuerus appoints Haman's property to Esther, who in turn gives it to Mordecai. She then takes steps to have Haman's edict against the Jews revoked. This is an interesting scene because Esther appears to be the instigator of the action; she sets Mordecai over Haman's property (8:2) while Mordecai is a silent participant, behaving like an onlooker.[151] This portrays both characters in a non-binary fashion. Esther is responsible for determining Mordecai's financial status and Mordecai has no say in the matter. Now Mordecai is Esther's dependent, as he is 'set over' (וְתָּשֶׂם) Haman's house, but he is not 'given' Haman's house. As discussed above concerning 4:16-17, this behaviour is not a 'masculinisation' of Esther nor a 'feminisation' of Mordecai. Critically, the text does not make a value judgment about this dynamic. Mordecai is not satirised or criticised for not being the dominant character in this scene, and for depending on Esther. This is in contrast to Ahasuerus's depiction in chapter one. Esther is not portrayed negatively for being dominant and assertive. Therefore, our reading of the text does not indicate that they are acting inappropriately for their gender. Rather, they both have the capacity to be interpreted as being genderqueer. For the next few verses, Mordecai is a silent onlooker, as Esther petitions Ahasuerus. Thus, it appears that he has accepted her primary role in their relationship.

It is not until 8:9 that Mordecai has an active role again, as it is mentioned that the edict was written 'according to all that Mordecai commanded' (KJV). This is rather jarring. It is

[151] Per De Troyer 2000: 91, cf. Fox 1991: 90.

Esther who has played a very active role in the first eight verses of the scene, rather than Mordecai, who has been a secondary character. Now Mordecai holds an authoritative position so he can command edicts, albeit in the king's name rather than his own.

The final section of *Esther* that includes both Esther and Mordecai is 9:29-32. This section is thought by many to be a later addition, as it is not included in the OL, AT and Josephus's paraphrase, and there are many contradictions and difficulties with its content. The MT employs the third person feminine singular form of כתב, 'she wrote' at 9:29. Though as it is followed with, 'and Mordecai the Jew', many English translations of the Hebrew, both biblical and in commentaries, change this verb to the 3rd person plural form, 'they wrote'. There is debate about whether 'and Mordecai the Jew' is a gloss here, as it does not agree with the verb.[152] In any case, this small section of the penultimate chapter recounts Esther and Mordecai performing actions to establish the history of Purim and explain the existence of the Book of Esther. If we ignore possible issues of glosses or late additions and instead read the text as we have it in the MT, the picture presented of Esther and Mordecai appears to be similar to chapter eight. Esther writes the second letter of Purim with the support of Mordecai and Mordecai then sends the letter, (וַיִּשְׁלַח 9:30).[153] Purim was established כַּאֲשֶׁר קָיַם עֲלֵיהֶם מָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה 'As Mordecai the Jew and Esther the Queen confirmed over them' (9:31), which appears to grant Esther and Mordecai equal

[152] See Moore: 1971: 95; Levenson 1997: 132; Bush 1996: 469-71; Paton 1908: 57-60; Fox 1991a: 123-28; Clines 1984: 55. See also Appendix B.
[153] Dommershausen here argues, 'Die 3. Pers. mask. sing. der Verbform ist am besten unpersönlich aufzufassen: <<man schickte Briefe>> im Sinne von: Esther ließ Briefe verschicken.' (1968: 134), contra Moore 1971: 95.

action in the text. However, Esther has greater influence on the people, as it is her letter that confirms Purim, although Mordecai organises its dissemination. Like in chapters four and eight, both Esther and Mordecai could be viewed as genderqueer/non-binary characters. This is because although they are fulfilling their roles as senior monarch and non-specific royal court member to write, send out and thus establish Purim, their respective behaviour is entirely gender neutral. Neither character enacts particularly 'male' or 'female' characteristics.

The MT has portrayed the relationship between Esther and Mordecai as undergoing a seismic shift from beginning to end of the narrative. In our queer reading, the first scene with these characters in chapter two portrays Esther as a stereotypically gendered female. She is silent, passive and obedient. Mordecai, in contrast, is the patriarch of their small family. He controls her movements and her future, until she is passed into the hands of another male, Hegai. Consequently, Esther and Mordecai's relationship in chapter two does not have the capacity to be read as genderqueer.

However, after Esther settles into her role in the royal palace, her behaviour changes. Their next interaction in chapter four is rather different. As discussed in this section, it can be argued that Esther behaves in a non-binary way by refusing to engage with Mordecai in the uncle-niece dynamic that they previously had, which was dictated by their gender. This creates tension between Mordecai and Esther, shown in their dialogue mediated by Hathach. However, Mordecai acquiesces to her status and does as she directs. This is not a feminisation of Mordecai, but rather an acceptance of her plan and authority.

The final scenes continue this shift in their relationship, as Mordecai becomes elevated in position by Esther but, notably, they do not appear to act as stereotypical male or female characters. Rather, they act as would be expected to in the royal court, but again, this does not have any bearing on gendered behaviour. Instead, they can be read as non-binary/genderqueer. The final scene with Esther and Mordecai appears to show them as equals, performing their respective tasks fitting of their respective stations, but in a gender-neutral way.

### *7.3 - The Septuagint*

The Greek Additions in the LXX and AT often offer a markedly different portrayal of the characters in comparison to the main text. This can be seen in the depictions of Esther and Mordecai, but not as acutely as in the depictions of Esther in relation to Ahasuerus. This section will work through Esther and Mordecai's scenes in the LXX and highlight the differences between the main 'body' text and the Additions where they arise. The Greek Additions do not feature Esther and Mordecai communicating with each other directly. However, Addition C operates as an extension of chapter four. Therefore, some of this Addition will be included here for the information it gives the reader about Mordecai and Esther, directly following their scene together in chapter four. The rest of Addition C is included in chapter eight's study of Esther and Ahasuerus, as it relates to Esther's preparation before going in to see Ahasuerus.

At 2:7, the LXX's version of לְקָחָהּ is ἐπαίδευσεν, the aorist form of the verb παιδεύω which has the range of meanings, 'to bring up', 'to train', 'to teach' and 'to educate' (LS: 584). This Greek verb seems to have a different semantic range to לְקָחָהּ. It is followed by αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα,[154] 'he trained her for himself as a wife.' This version of 2:7 is thus markedly different from the Hebrew, as Esther is taken as Mordecai's wife, rather than his adopted daughter.[155] The Greek version is not reflected elsewhere in ancient translations of *Esther*. This difference dramatically alters the dynamic of the relationship between Esther and Mordecai in the Septuagint, compared to the Hebrew text. However, this portrayal displays Mordecai as the patriarch and Esther as his dependent. Whether they have a father-daughter relationship or a husband-wife relationship, in this scene, Esther is still subordinate to Mordecai. She is described as τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν τῷ εἴδει, 'And the girl was beautiful in appearance.' It is very possible that this shortened description of her beauty was chosen to tidy up the Hebrew pleonasm. Without the doubling of information about Esther's beauty, she appears to be slightly less objectified in the LXX than she is in the MT.

Like the MT, the LXX also displays Esther appearing to behave in a different manner with others, but not her uncle. The wording of the LXX at 2:9a, καὶ ἤρεσεν αὐτῷ τὸ κοράσιον, appears to increase Esther's activity in gaining approval than does the MT.[156] This is

---

[154] LXX MS 93 has θυγατέρα, supported by the OL, which Fox suggests was amended to bring it closer to the MT (1991a: 276).
[155] See Paton 1908: 171; Moore 1977: 184, 186; Fox 1991a: 275-276.
[156] See Appendix B.

because the wording of the Greek, that Esther 'pleased' Hegai, has a different sense to the Hebrew, that she was 'good in [Hegai's] eyes'. The former implies Esther did something to please Hegai, whereas the latter implies that she was judged to be good, perhaps physically. The LXX then follows this with 'and she found favour', like in the MT.

Two verses later at 2:11 the LXX opts for the verb 'fare' (συμβήσεται) rather than 'done', עשה, so the verse reads, 'Each day Mardochaios walked around in front of the harem court, to learn how Esther would fare'.[157] The verb used, συμβήσεται, has meanings that include 'to happen' and 'to come to pass', thus it clearly strikes a different tone to עשה, which implies that Esther was a passive object who was having things 'done' to her. 'Fare' implies that Esther may have to do certain things to 'fare' better while competing in the beauty pageant. To look at this from a queer perspective, this implies that Mordecai was concerned with Esther's welfare, but not necessarily that she was a passive object.

The version of 2:20 in the LXX is more detailed than the MT.[158] The text states that Esther was brought up by Mordecai to 'fear God and do his commandments.' Furthermore, the text states that on joining the royal household, 'Esther did not change her way of life.' This is an explicitly religious addition which highlights Esther piety and concern for Judaism though

---

[157] Jobes (1996: 25) and Kahana (2005: 97) disagree on the correspondences in this verse. Jobes has לדעת = ἐπισκοπῶν whereas Kahana has ,יעשׂה בה ומה = συμβήσεται and אסתר שלום את לדעת = ἐπισκοπῶν τί Εσθηρ However, most side with Kahana's correspondences, .יעשׂה בה ומה אסתר שלום את = συμβήσεται.τί Εσθηρ and thus hers have been used here. She argues that the Greek translator understood the two Hebrew and .(synonymous word pairs as conveying one notion: how Esther fares (2005: 97

[158].See Appendix B

she has become enveloped in a gentile household. The same verb used in 2:10 is used again here, ἐνετείλατο, 'command'. In a queer reading of this scene, this appears to further the influence and control exerted over Esther by Mordecai and the presence of a gendered dichotomy between them. This is compounded by the explicit religious and cultural dimension added to this relationship. That Esther is made subordinate to Mordecai displays binary behaviour.

The LXX's version of 2:22 is rather similar to the MT's version, as Mordecai 'makes [the plot] known' to Esther. In the MT, he 'tells' it to Esther. Mordecai is subtly positioned as a dependent of Esther's here, as he needs her to bring it to the king's attention. He does not appear to have the power to do so himself.

Therefore, chapter two in the LXX is different from the MT in several ways. The rather shocking introduction of Esther with the detail that ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα indicates a romantic relationship rather than a familial one. However, this appears to still be one of provider-dependent. Nevertheless, the LXX versions of 2:9 and 2:11 appear to further the theme of Esther's agency outside of her relationship with Mordecai, which was also discussed in the previous section. Overall, chapter two presents a portrayal of Esther and Mordecai that is binary in nature.

As discussed in the previous section, chapter four is the turning point in Esther and Mordecai's relationship. In the MT, there is tension between Esther and Mordecai as they attempt to hold firm against the other, and put across their point of view. The LXX's version

of this scene begins with Mordecai shouting, 'an innocent nation is being destroyed!' undoubtedly drawing more attention to himself and seeming more emotionally frenzied than he does in the MT. Furthermore, Mordecai's behaviour directly contradicts the advice he gave to Esther at 2:10 and 2:20. In response, the verb of anguish used to describe Esther's reaction at 4:4, ἐταράχθη, is the aorist passive of ταράσσω, 'to trouble' or 'to be upset' (LS: 792). This Greek verb is not as emphatic as the Hebrew וַתִּתְחַלְחַל, indicating to 'writhe in agony,' or 'tremble', which indicates physical manifestation of grief or upset. Thus, the Greek presents Esther's reaction as less extreme than does the MT. That Esther was 'troubled' by Mordecai's behaviour appears to fit her characterisation in this scene as logical and calm, in stark contrast to him. In the LXX, Mordecai δὲ οὐκ ἐπείσθη, 'could not be persuaded', by Esther's offer of clothes. The use of the aorist passive ἐπείσθη is interesting as it implies that time was spent trying to persuade Mordecai, but he would not be moved, which further emphasises his stubbornness.

Both the LXX and the MT use the same progression of verbs in the first half of Mordecai's speech in 4:8: 'show', δεῖξαι, לְהַרְאוֹת; 'inform', εἶπεν, וּלְהַגִּיד; 'order', ἐντείλασθαι, וּלְצַוּוֹת, but the two versions render 'inform' differently.[159] The MT uses infinitives solely directed against Esther, whereas the LXX translates δεῖξαι and εἶπεν similarly, but attaches εἶπεν to ἐντειλασθαι, 'he told him to order her', changing the object of this verb. The LXX removes one imperative directed at Esther by Mordecai.[160] The LXX includes an additional speech

[159] See Appendix B.
[160] Kahana posits that the LXX's parent text could have reflected this change (2005: 193).

from Mordecai following this verse, imploring her to 'remember' where she came from. He also urges her to 'call upon' God (ἐπικάλεσαι), 'speak' to the king (λάλησον), and 'plead' with him (ῥῦσαι). All three Greek verbs are imperatives, and thus the LXX depicts Mordecai as strongly and emphatically commanding Esther, more so than in the MT. It seems here that the gender roles depicted in chapter two are reinforced. This small expansion in the LXX has the effect of increasing Mordecai's role over Esther's, and it appears that he holds more authority over her than she does over him, as displayed in chapter two. The insistence that she should 'call upon the Lord' establishes the theologising tone of Additions C and D, which follow this chapter.[161]

The second half of 4:8 in the MT, 'to implore him and to make a request before him' has a unique equation between the MT and LXX of παρατεομαι = חנן (Kahana 2005: 194). These two verbs have different semantic ranges: the former has the sense to 'beg' or 'entreat', whereas the latter has the meanings to 'show favour' or 'be gracious' (Kahana 2005: 194). Thus, Mordecai suggests to Esther completely different approaches to the problem in the LXX and the MT. Furthermore, παραιτήσασθαι is then followed by a slight alteration from בקשׁ in the MT to ἀξιοω, altering the meaning from 'to demand' in the MT to a verb which has the meanings 'to ask' and 'to implore'. The approach demanded by Mordecai seems to be more emotional in the LXX than in the MT, and it could perhaps indicate that Mordecai wanted Esther to use her 'feminine wiles' to appeal to Ahasuerus. However, in the LXX,

[161] Analysis of Addition C follows below. See chapter 8.3 for a detailed exposition of Addition D.

Esther still takes the same course of action as she does in the MT. Therefore, I would argue contra Day (1995: 53) that Esther's behaviour is not affected by Mordecai's extra dialogue. Furthermore, Mordecai's significant charge to Esther in the LXX makes her behaviour seem more shocking, as she defiantly argues her case despite his persistent suggestions. Thus, Esther rejects Mordecai's proposal that she take a feminine approach to this task, and instead she behaves as she sees fit.

4:10 in the LXX does not use the same verb as the Hebrew text. Rather than 'command' as used in the MT, Esther states to Hathach, πορεύθητι πρὸς Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ εἰπὸν, 'go to Mardochaios and say'. Perhaps we could argue that as she does not 'command' Mordecai like she does in the MT, there is less authority in her words. Thus, the LXX lessens the tension, compared to the MT. 4:11 in the LXX closely follows the MT, and thus Esther is characterised as chastising Mordecai for his lack of knowledge. The remainder of this scene is recounted in the LXX much like the MT, with only minor differences that need not be detailed here. This means that 4:16-17 is rather surprising in the LXX, as the final two verses display a shift whereby Esther now holds power over Mordecai and can 'command' him, in contrast to 2:10 and 2:20.

When we consider Esther and Mordecai's behaviour in the LXX's version of chapter four and compare it with the MT, there are clear similarities. In both versions, Esther is nurturing, eager to aid Mordecai, logical, calm and intelligent. In the face of Mordecai's imperatival commands, she is decisive and commanding. She appears to be genderqueer/non-binary, as her behaviour does not fit into only the female or only the

male gender stereotypes. If we consult the BSRI, Esther's characteristics in chapter four belong to both the masculine and feminine columns. Mordecai's behaviour in the LXX is rather similar to the MT, though the LXX appears to emphasise his dominance over Esther more than does the MT. Therefore, the power shift between Esther and Mordecai at the end of chapter four is even more shocking in the LXX than in the MT. As in the Hebrew, the power dynamic radically shifts between them, and Mordecai can also be interpreted as genderqueer/non-binary.

This scene is immediately followed by Addition C in the LXX. Mordecai implores God, first with praises, then with petitions for the Jewish people to be saved, and explains that his behaviour towards Haman was justified. This is directly followed by a scene where Esther petitions God, however, her petition is rather different from Mordecai's. Mordecai relies on orally communicating his wish to God, which focuses on saving his people. Esther undertakes physical mourning rituals before petitioning God, including changing her clothes to mourning clothes and covering her head with ashes and dung. The content of Esther's speech to God focuses on outlining how Israel had sinned, her disgust with her gentile collusion, and asking for aid for herself. This will be discussed in-depth in chapter eight of this study.

Chapter eight of *Esther* is very similarly depicted in the LXX compared to the MT, with only a few differences. One particularly noticeable difference is that the LXX reads, 'and Mordecai was summoned (προσεκλήθη) before the king', which is rather different from the MT's 'Mordecai came before the king'. The equation בא = προσκαλεω is a unique one

(Kahana 2005: 304), which indicates that Mordecai did not come to the king of his own volition.[162] Therefore, Mordecai is granted even less agency in the LXX than he is in the MT. The rest of their scenes together in this chapter are rendered similarly to the MT, however, Mordecai is not included at 8:9. Given the context, this makes more sense as the focus in this scene has been on Esther and Ahasuerus. Therefore, Esther's authority clearly outweighs that of Mordecai.

It is interesting to note that the LXX does not have a version of the Hebrew text of 9:30. Thus, the text does not include an example of Mordecai acting with his own agency. The MT text offers more explanation in 9:31 about the letter, which is not included in the LXX.[163] Additionally, the LXX makes no mention of Mordecai in this verse. With Day (1995: 159), it appears that the construction in the MT and in the LXX emphasises Esther's authority. Thus, the last scene in the text that features Esther and Mordecai together does not feature detail that gives Mordecai solo agency, whereas Esther is granted two examples of activity on her own, as the LXX text also reflects the verb form of the MT at 9:29, 'she wrote' (ἔγραψεν) rather than 'they wrote'.

In summary, the LXX's version of the relationship between Esther and Mordecai is similar to the MT's version, but often this text is more emphatic than the MT in its depictions. For example, the binary gender roles in chapter two and in chapter four, before the turning

---

[162] Contra Day 1995: 139.
[163] Jobes and Kahana agree that the LXX paraphrases 9:32 in 9:31 (Jobes 1996: no page reference; Kahana 2005: 430). See also Appendix B.

point at 4:15-17, are more greatly emphasised and expanded in the LXX. When looking at chapter four from a queer perspective, it is emphasised that Mordecai is unable to accept Esther's authority as queen, and he attempts to treat her as he did in chapter two. Mordecai strongly resists Esther's rejection of the gender binary and her queerness, before finally relenting. Once he accepts her position, the LXX emphasises this shift in their dynamic more than does the MT. Mordecai is almost absent from chapters eight and nine, and thus Esther's non-binary authority has prevailed.

*7.4 - The Alpha Text*

The AT's version of the scenes between Mordecai and Esther tend to be shorter than those found in the MT and LXX. This brevity is typical of the AT, which tends to render shorter versions of most of the scenes in *Esther*. This text also includes the Greek Additions with only very minor differences between this version and that of the LXX.

2:7 is markedly shorter in the AT. The AT retains only 2:7a-b and appears to paraphrase 2:7c of the MT and LXX into 2:7a. This version states that Mordecai 'brought up' Esther 'faithfully' (πιστῶς) in 2:7a, thus introducing a religious theme to this verse. Notably, the AT is the only version to use the gender-neutral noun παις, as Day notes (1995: 36). Like the LXX, the AT does not use an equivalent of לקח to indicate when Esther and Mordecai became connected, as the more benevolent ἐκτρέφων is used, which indicates nurturing. However, the AT includes a version of Esther's beauty that is similar to the MT because it is

pleonastic, unlike the LXX's version. Indeed, the AT's version includes the phrase ὡραία τῇ ὄψει 'lovely to see' which is very similar to the Hebrew טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה literally 'good in the sight' at 2:7. Thus, Esther appears to be situated in the text of the AT as an object of desire. She is described as the 'daughter of his father's brother' and that she is 'beautiful in appearance and lovely to see'. She is then taken to the king's house. Mordecai seems to be her benefactor and carer; she is his dependent.

This version of *Esther* does not include 2:10 nor 2:20, the latter of which included religious instruction from Mordecai in the LXX. It is interesting that these two verses are not included in the AT, so neither is the commander-commandee relationship between Esther and Mordecai. However, at 2:8 Esther is 'taken', using the aorist passive verb ἐλήφθη from λαμβανω, 'to take', which is semantically closer to the Hebrew verb לקח than the Greek verb used in the LXX. As in the MT, this verb implies a patriarch-dependent relationship between Esther and Mordecai, where she is not in control of her movements. Thus, their relationship appears to be depicted in a binary fashion.

The AT uses the same phraseology at 2:9a as the LXX.[164] Thus, this version also appears to increase Esther's agency in contrast to the MT.[165] This creates a dichotomy between Esther's behaviour with other men, and her behaviour with Mordecai. When she is interacting with her uncle, she does not act, but rather, she is acted upon. However, the

[164] See Appendix B.
[165] With Day 1995: 37.

opposite seems true in relation to Hegai[166] and the king. The rest of the scene in chapter two featuring Mordecai and Esther is not included in the AT's version. This version has provided us with only a brief insight into their relationship.

Notably, the AT's version of 4:1-3 does not include mention of Mordecai's emotional response to the edict against the Jews. Indeed, the text states that 'the city of Susa was in turmoil', but Mordecai does not lament or cry aloud. Rather, 4:2 describes that he returns home, 'folded up his clothes and put on sackcloth'. After sprinkling ashes on himself, he goes and stands in the outer courtyard, presumably of the royal palace. This text describes Mordecai's actions but does not give any insight into his emotional state or reaction to the news. This is unusual when compared with the other ancient versions, which emphasise Mordecai's anguish. Similarly, Esther's response in 4:4 is not emotional, because the AT does not include an equivalent for וַתִּתְחַלְחַל. She calls her eunuch to deliver a strongly-worded message to Mordecai, that the eunuch should Περιέλεσθε τὸν *σάκκον*, 'take off his sackcloth' and bring him to her. The imperative verb Περιέλεσθε emphasises Esther's authority. Now she is clearly performing the role of monarch, and shows that she can command Mordecai. Mordecai, in response, curtly refuses to be acted upon in this way. Both characters are portrayed as calm, logical and effective in their own roles. They are in tension here as Esther acts in a genderqueer manner as she upends the power dynamic between herself and Mordecai.

[166] Here named Bougaios.

Mordecai's speech to Esther at 4:4-5 is similar in tone to Esther's charge to him. Μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς, employing ἀποστρέφω, 'turn back', in the aorist subjunctive form, and κολακεῦσαι, the aorist optative form of κολακεύω, 'to be a flatterer', state the things that Esther should not do. This speech is unusual. It is placed before Esther states that she cannot legally appear before the king, so it suggests that Mordecai has little faith in Esther's ability to act in a manner that would bring about the salvation of their people. In my reading, this clearly displays Mordecai's preference for maintaining the gender binary in their relationship. The remainder of this verse is very close to the LXX's version, as is 4:5, which mirrors the imperatives at the end of 4:8 in the MT and LXX.[167] His speech ends with, 'So he made known to her the tribulations of Israel.' (4:6(9)). It is not indicated in the AT that Esther is ignorant of the edict and she does not act particularly surprised by Mordecai's reaction to the news of the edict in this version. Therefore, it is odd that he feels compelled to give her this information. I suggest that Mordecai was making assumptions about Esther's ignorance and inability to act, which she clearly defies in the following verse. 4:6(9) in our reading displays Mordecai's cisnormative bias towards Esther.

The AT offers a damning response from Esther. She states, Σὺ γινώσκεις παρὰ πάντας, 'You know as well as anyone…' which appears to explicitly rebuke Mordecai. Esther highlights that Mordecai has not diligently considered his suggestion. Furthermore, given that just preceding this, Mordecai had informed Esther of the tribulations of Israel, the verb

[167] See Appendix B.

γινώσκεις sticks out in particular. In 4:6(9) Mordecai assumed that Esther did not 'know' about Israel's predicament. Ironically, it was Mordecai who was ignorant, which Esther here highlights. Esther pushes Mordecai further at 4:8, questioning him and illustrating that he is mistaken. To view this through a queer lens, Esther's rebuttal of Mordecai's logic directly challenges his perception of her as his subordinate niece, and the traditional binary gender roles that Mordecai adheres to. She does not acquiesce to his claims about her ignorance but disputes them.

In the AT, 4:9(13) offers a shorter response from Mordecai than we find in the MT and LXX, but it mirrors the sentiment of those versions. Mordecai tells her, 'If you ignore your nation and do not help them…' before this version matches the other versions.[168] Esther's response to him again highlights her determination and focus. She directs two orders at Mordecai: the aorist imperative, Παραγγείλατε, 'proclaim', and the aorist passive subjunctive, δεήθητε, 'petition', telling him exactly how he should act. Esther refuses to be viewed by Mordecai as his submissive counterpart. Her speech coupled with her rebuttal at 4:8 together portray a character who possesses knowledge, intellect and determination. Here, Esther appears to reject the female gender role. Her behaviour traits seem to match those of a man. It is important to look at the relationship between Mordecai and Esther, to see if that can shed any light on if we can read her behaviour as non-binary/genderqueer. If we assess Esther's behaviour in chapter four compared with her behaviour in chapter two, it seems that there has been a shift in her relationship with Mordecai. In chapter four, she

[168] See Appendix B.

no longer accepts the status quo, that is, her subordination to him. This hints at queerness, because she actively rejects her previous position as a stereotypical female. Her rejection of one binary role does not necessarily mean that she is non-binary/genderqueer in our reading of the AT, but it does imply a form of queerness as she subverts her gender role. Mordecai submits to Esther's will and authority entirely, offering no comment. He finally accepts her queerness and acts accordingly.

Addition C in the AT is very similar to the LXX, with only minor differences that do not affect the drama. However, given Esther's direction to Mordecai at 4:11(15), which is not included in the LXX, Mordecai's petition to God is directly commanded by Esther. Thus, Addition C in the AT confirms that Mordecai did as Esther instructed him. As in the LXX, the content of this Addition depicts Mordecai offering justification for his actions and asking God to favour his people. Also like in the LXX, the AT's Addition C.18(12) shows Esther taking a physical approach to mourning by 'humbling' her body. The AT repeats the word ταπεινόω 'humble' in different forms three times to describe Esther's actions, and she uses it herself in her petition to God. The LXX uses this verb only once. Notably, this verb, or its noun form, is not specifically gendered but means to 'humble' or 'humiliate' more generally (LSJ). Indeed, it is used to describe actions of or impact on both men and women in numerous examples in the Septuagint.[169] Therefore, it cannot be argued that Esther humbling her body to mourn and petition God is a specifically 'female' act. However, it does

[169] For example, Dinah is 'humbled' by Shechem at Gen 34:2; Manasseh 'humbles' himself before God in 2 Chron 33:12; God 'humbles' or 'humiliates' the Philistines in 1 Sam 7:13; Delilah 'humbles' Samson by cutting off his hair in Judg 16:19.

contrast with the description of Esther's beauty at 2:7. We may read this as indicating that Esther could not be beautiful before God, and she needed to appear lowly.

Chapter eight in the AT exhibits a very notable variance to the other ancient translations. Esther is not included in the transfer of property, as Ahasuerus grants Haman's property directly to Mordecai. The scene in chapter eight is much-diminished in the AT compared to the LXX and MT generally. It is Mordecai who appears to have taken the primary role in this scene, and he communicates with Ahasuerus directly while Esther is relegated to the background. Furthermore, the AT does not include 9:29-32, so Esther's act of letter-writing in the penultimate scene is not included. Instead, Mordecai is the primary character in the last two chapters. Once Esther reveals Haman's guilt, her usefulness in the narrative has ended and she has been removed.

The AT has many similarities with but also numerous differences from the MT and LXX. When assessing how to read this text in a genderqueer/non-binary way, chapter two is depicted in the AT in much the same way as it is in the LXX and MT. Esther is portrayed as Mordecai's silent dependent. She displays agency only with other men. Chapter four in the AT is rather different to the other versions of this scene. Esther and Mordecai are portrayed as being in tension. They seem to reject one another's authority from the outset. They are locked in a battle of wills with one another, much like Vashti and Ahasuerus in the AT.

In our reading, Esther behaves like a queer character because she asserts herself, rejects Mordecai's attempt to maintain the gender binary, highlights his lack of knowledge and

ultimately prevails. However, she is not necessarily a non-binary character. The brevity of the AT means that we can view Esther as subverting her gender but not necessarily eschewing the gender binary altogether. Mordecai can be interpreted as refusing to accept her change in status. He attempts to keep treating her as his dependent, as she was in chapter two. He struggles to come to terms with Esther's queer identity and her rejection of the previous status quo.

Addition C continues the depiction of chapter four, as Mordecai is shown to be doing exactly as Esther told him. Esther also prays to God, as Mordecai does, and she performs physical mourning rituals. Esther hides the physical appearance of her beauty and splendour and becomes 'humbled' to communicate with God. That her beauty is incompatible with communicating with the divine indicates removal of the outward appearance of gender. Esther must both act and look like a non-binary individual to petition God.

Chapter eight reverts to the portrayal from chapter two. Esther is barely present, and it seems like Mordecai has taken over. He behaves in a binary manner. Though the AT portrays Esther as non-binary in the middle of the text of *Esther*, this is not consistently maintained. Once Esther's role in the narrative has been fulfilled, she is removed from the text in favour of her uncle, Mordecai. Mordecai, for the most part, appears to struggle with Esther's authority and position in Ahasuerus's kingdom.

*7.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase*

As seen in the other sections of this chapter, the version of *Esther* offered in Josephus's 'Judean Antiquities' is often rather different in tone and focus to the other ancient versions. The differences in Josephus's text often have a marked impact on our capacity to read the characters as genderqueer or non-binary. However, rather unusually, the relationship between Esther and Mordecai still possesses some queer attributes in Josephus's text. Though this version bears many dissimilarities to the other ancient versions, they are not so significant as to radically alter our reading of queerness in this text.

At 11:199 (2:7), Josephus describes that Esther, 'surpassed all women in beauty' which is similar to the way that the king spoke of Vashti[170] (11:190). Because of this similarity, and when compared to the way this is depicted in the MT, LXX and AT, Esther's description sounds hyperbolic. As Tal Ilan argues, 'it seems that he was interested less in how god-fearing Esther was than in her femininity.' (2017: 178). By offering a value judgment on Esther's beauty and stating that she was the most beautiful woman in Persia indicates that her beauty has something to do with her success in the plot. If this is the case, it means that it is not Esther's actions but her appearance that is her greatest asset, which removes some of her agency. However, the second half of 11.199 indicates a degree of agency. Josephus's text reads, 'the grace of her countenance attracted the eyes of the spectators on her' which is not as active as the Hebrew, נֹשֵׂאת חֵן, which indicates that Esther was doing something to be found favourable. Rather, it is Esther's face that is looked on and found to be pleasing.

[170] See chapter 6.5.

Josephus's text uses the verb παραδοθεῖσα 'to hand over' (11.200) in the aorist passive form, which has a different nuance to לקח and ἐπαίδευσεν. 'Handed over', παραδοθεῖσα, has an interesting semantic range, as most instances of its use are of an object. When used of a person, the sense of the verb παραδίδωμι is to give someone over into the hands of another, particularly a hostage or an enemy, possibly with the sense of betrayal or treachery (LSJ). This verb indicates that Esther was perhaps 'owned' by Mordecai. Either Esther is implicitly considered as comparable to an object, or Josephus is subtly criticising Mordecai for handing Esther over to the eunuchs in preparation for having intercourse with the king. Notably, Esther's passing to the eunuchs is rather unlike Mordecai handing her over to a group of males. Esther is handed over into a liminal space, between male and female, to be prepared to meet the king (West 2006: 285). When reading this from a queer perspective, this move into a liminal space from the hands of a male is quite provocative, and it signals that Esther may be about to undergo a radical transformation. Notably, Josephus does not include 2:9a. In other versions, this verse is the first time that the text depicts Esther doing something, rather than having something done to her. Thus, Esther is portrayed as being a cisnormative female not just with Mordecai but with other men too.

11.203 (2:10) states that Esther did not disclose to the king 'the nation from which she came'. This matches 2:10 but with one very key difference: it is not stated anywhere in Josephus's version that Mordecai commanded Esther not to disclose her ethnicity. She appears to behave with her own motives and agency. As in the other versions, at 11.204

Mordecai checks up on Esther, and because he loved her like a daughter, he was daily πυνθανόμενος περὶ τῆς κόρης τίνα διάγει τρόπον, 'inquiring about how the girl was managing'. The use of διάγει is similar to the LXX's use of 'fare' (συμβήσεται) which implies a benevolent inquiry into Esther's general wellbeing, rather than stating that things are being 'done' to her (עשה in the Hebrew), perhaps against her will. Thus, Josephus's version does not seem to be projecting a binary dynamic onto Esther and Mordecai here.

Mordecai's behaviour on hearing of Haman's edict is similar in Josephus's version (11.221) to the LXX (4:1). However, his reaction is made more intense in this text. 11.222 (4:3) in Josephus's text is different from the MT, LXX and AT. A value judgment is made about Mordecai's clothing that is unique to this version. οἰκτρῷ σχήματι, literally 'pitiable appearance', indicates that Mordecai was not dressed at all appropriately. Thus, it is logical that Esther would want him to be attired correctly so that he could come into the citadel. Mordecai does not simply refuse in Josephus's version: 'his reason for putting it on had not yet ended'. Mordecai here is shown to be fulfilling his religious obligations, and it does not seem that he is rejecting Esther's offer for the sake of it.

Josephus's paraphrase spells out what is not explicit in the Hebrew of 4:5: לָדַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה. Josephus's version states that Esther wanted to know 'what sad thing had happened for him to be mourning and refusing to take off the clothes he was wearing despite her invitation.' (11.223). By making this explicit, Josephus also makes it

clear that Esther had no idea why Mordecai was upset nor why he was in mourning. This gap-filling depicts Esther as lacking key information, in contrast to Mordecai.

11.225 (4:8) is slightly different from the MT, LXX and AT. Mordecai uses similar verbs directed at Esther, for example, καὶ περὶ τούτων δεηθῆναι τοῦ βασιλέως ἐνετέλλετο, 'he urged her to beg the king concerning these things'. However, Josephus includes a line unique to his text, μὴ ἀδοξῆσαι λαβεῖν σχῆμα ταπεινόν, 'and not to disdain to wear humble clothing'. This is an interesting addition here. The AT and LXX both use the term 'humble' to describe Esther's process of mourning in their respective versions of Addition C. In particular, the AT's frequently repeats ταπεινόν, 'humble' in different forms in Addition C. Mordecai's direction that Esther should not be afraid to wear humble clothing indicates that he thinks Esther should go into the king's quarters in mourning garb. Remarkably, Esther not only ignores this advice but she does the exact opposite: 11.234 details Esther removing her mourning garb and dressing herself in finery, τὸ σχῆμα μεταβάλλει κοσμησαμένη δ᾽ ὡς ἐχρῆν τὴν βασίλισσαν. Esther's decision to dress herself in 'a manner befitting the queen' is clear defiance of what Mordecai charged her to do. This is very shocking. She knows that she will have success if she dresses in her royal finery, whereas Mordecai does not. This is a direct rejection of binary gender norms. Rather than dressing as proscribed to her by her male guardian, she dresses as she sees fit. Thus, in this verse, Esther can be interpreted as being a non-binary character.

Esther's response to Mordecai at 11.226 (4:11) begins, ταῦτα γνοῦσα, 'when she understood the situation.' This detail continues the portrayal of Esther as being ignorant. Furthermore, this detail is unusually placed, given that it precedes Esther's explanation for why she cannot go in to see the king. It would be more appropriate to include this phrase before Esther determines what she will do. The tone of her excuse in 11.226 is a lot more apologetic than in the LXX and AT.[171] She goes into detail about the conditions on which a person would be pardoned if they did go into the king's chambers. Presumably, this is included so that the following scene makes sense to the reader. However, in our queer reading of this text, it also appears to make Esther seem overly apologetic and like she is giving excuses about why she cannot do as Mordecai says. Therefore, the patriarch-dependant relationship and thus the gender binary prevails here.

Mordecai's response in 11.227 (4:13-14) is rather like the LXX, as is Esther's final decision to act in 11.228 (4:16). Esther's instructions are like those in the Hebrew and Greek versions, as she charges him to πορευθέντι 'go' (aorist passive participle), συναγαγεῖν καὶ νηστεῦσαι, 'to gather together and to fast' (both in the aorist infinitive). Esther is portrayed here as exhibiting agency as she does in the MT, LXX and AT. However, given what has come before, it is difficult to see this as the apex of Esther's queerness, as we can read this elsewhere. Rather, the picture presented by Josephus of this scene is one in which, overall, the gender binary has been maintained with only two instances where we can glimpse a queer Esther.

---

[171] Refer to Appendix B.

Addition C in Josephus's text features Mordecai offering his petition to God. Rather than justify his behaviour and ask for God's favour, as in other versions, his approach is rather different here. Mordecai takes partial responsibility for his actions and asks that God spare his people as they are not the cause of the edict. Esther's behaviour is similarly depicted: she dresses in mourner's clothing and throws herself to the ground. Josephus makes it explicit that this behaviour is τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ, 'in keeping with the ancestral law', thus identifying her behaviour as ethnically motivated.

11.269-270 mirrors the events of 8:1-2 in the Hebrew text. The king summons Mordecai because Esther made it known to the king her relationship with Mordecai, and Esther bestows on Mordecai Haman's property. The verb 'bestow', δωρεῖται in the present active, is rather different from the MT and LXX's versions of this verb. Mordecai is given Haman's property by Esther so that he now possesses it as his own, rather than acting as a custodian as he does in the Hebrew. This grants Mordecai significant wealth and status in the Persian royal court and pre-empts his elevation by the king (11.284).

11.270 recounts Esther petitioning the king one last time as she does in the MT. In this scene, Mordecai stands silently in the background, allowing Esther to hold the fore, like in the MT. This enables Esther to occupy centre stage and achieve what she set out to do: save her people. Though Mordecai appears to have greater status here than he does in the MT and LXX, that Esther still outranks him may show that her power and authority are greater than his.

As shown in this section, there are many elements of Josephus's version which are surprising because they are so different from the other ancient versions. The relationship between Mordecai and Esther allows these characters to be interpreted as genderqueer and/or non-binary in some areas. However, this is not consistent throughout Josephus's text, and thus, as a queer reader, one finds one's expectations being constantly surprised or undermined.

The way that Josephus has realised chapter two is particularly interesting. When reading the scene through a queer lens, Josephus subtly criticises Mordecai's decision to hand Esther over, like an object, to the eunuchs. However, that Esther is handed from Mordecai to the ambiguously-gendered eunuchs is notable. She may be being treated like an object, thus as a binary-gendered female, but the queer reader notices small glimpses of an Esther who does not fit this mould. Esther decides not to reveal her ethnicity to anyone because she deems it necessary, but Mordecai does not 'command' her to. This is important, as Mordecai's involvement in Esther's life significantly diminishes once she moves from his company, though he still asks after her (11.204). However, Josephus's filling in of the gaps in the Hebrew and Greek versions has resulted in a version of chapter four which shows Esther being deferential to Mordecai. She is portrayed as lacking in knowledge and unable to challenge him directly. She does, however, ignore his advice on how she should dress. This small act of defiance foreshadows what is to come: Esther's salvific action. This then shifts again in chapter eight as Mordecai is fully dependent on Esther for his elevation and to do what he cannot by reversing Haman's edict.

Therefore, when assessing Esther and Mordecai's relationship in Josephus's *Antiquities* through the lens of genderqueerness, one is struck by the inconsistencies in the gender portrayal. The characters swing from binary to non-binary interpretations and back again, so that it is difficult to highlight a consistent theme. Nevertheless, it is surprising that we can read genderqueerness at all in this text. As seen elsewhere, Josephus's paraphrase tends to focus on themes which often do not allow the possibility of a genderqueer reading.

### *7.6 - The Vulgate*

The Vulgate, as noted in the preceding sections of this chapter, usually stays remarkably close to the MT in its version of *Esther*. However, the relationship between Esther and Mordecai is rather different. The differences between the Latin and the Hebrew in these scenes are very subtle, but when we read them through a queer lens, the impact can be quite significant. It seems that the shift from binary to non-binary gender in Esther's character in chapter four is not as emphatic as it is in the MT, and as the narrative progresses Esther and Mordecai are positioned as equal, non-binary characters.

Esther is described in the Vulgate similarly to the MT at 2:7, as: *pulchra nimis et decora facie*, 'exceedingly pretty and beautiful of appearance'. This strongly emphasises Esther's physical appearance, perhaps more so than in the Hebrew with the inclusion of the adverb *nimis,* 'exceedingly'. When reading this from a queer perspective, the emphasis on Esther's

beauty appears to present a gendered portrayal of Esther, as it does in the MT. Because Esther is judged to be prettier than most women, this indicates that her adoption by Mordecai and her success in the Persian court was primarily because of her appearance rather than her actions.

The Vulgate renders לקח as *adoptavit* at 2:7c which has the meanings 'to take by choice', 'to select', 'to choose' and, most likely here, 'to adopt' (L&S), which is again different to the Hebrew verb used. That Mordecai 'adopted' Esther does not present a gendered portrayal of their relationship to one another. *Adoptavit* does not have the same semantic resonances as the Hebrew, because the Latin does not indicate 'taking' Esther, but adopting her, which is logical given the circumstances. This Latin verb seems to be gender neutral. This is shown in the Latin version of Ex 2:10, *quem illa adoptavit in locum filii*, 'And she adopted him for a son'. The MT version of this verse does not employ the verb לקח in this context but instead uses חיה: וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן, 'he became her son'.[172]

In the following verse (2:8) the Vulgate uses a similar verb to לקח, *traderentur* in the passive form, which has the meanings, 'to give up', 'to hand over', 'to surrender' and 'to consign' among others (L&S), to describe Esther being taken to the house of the women. The use of this verb denotes that Mordecai passed Esther over to Hegai unwillingly, as though he was forced to do so. The Hebrew verb neither denotes willingness nor

[172] This is the only other occurrence in the Vulgate of the Latin verb *adopto.*

unwillingness, so the use of *traderentur* is very interesting. Coupled with the Vulgate's use of *adoptavit*, Mordecai's care for Esther comes across in the Latin text. However, *traderentur* indicates that Mordecai claimed ownership over Esther and could pass this ownership over to someone else. Male ownership over a female implies binary gender roles.

The verb used at 2:10, *praeceperat*, to describe Mordecai's instruction to Esther not to reveal her ethnicity to the king, here in the active pluperfect form, has the meanings 'advise', 'admonish', 'warn' or 'inform'. The *piel* verb used in the Hebrew is the rather forceful: צוה, 'command', 'charge' or 'order' (BDB: 845). This verb implies a strict power dynamic between Esther and Mordecai: Mordecai dictates how Esther behaves, and Esther complies. The Latin verb *praeceperat* does not imply as strict a power dynamic as the Hebrew. There are examples in other Hebrew Bible texts that use *praeceperat* in place of Hebrew verbs that do not imply this power dynamic, such as דבר (1 Chr 10:13), רשׁון (Ezr 3:7) and שׁלח (Ezr 6:13). It implies that Mordecai's instruction to Esther is not a 'commandment', but he tells her to conceal her ethnicity to avoid peril. This continues the characterisation of 2:7, as Mordecai benevolently cares for Esther like a father. Interestingly, the Vulgate translates צִוִּתָה at 4:17 similarly, opting for the pluperfect of *praecipio*. This draws a parallel between Mordecai's behaviour towards Esther in chapter two and Esther's behaviour towards Mordecai in chapter four.

However, the Vulgate does not consistently use the verb *praecipio* in place of צוה. The verb used at 2:20 matches the Hebrew, *mandatum*, 'commandment', which implies the same power dynamic as in the Hebrew: Mordecai controls Esther's behaviour.

The verb used at 4:4 to describe Esther's reaction to news of Mordecai's behaviour is *consternata,* 'to bring into confusion', 'perplex', 'terrify' and 'alarm' (L&S). This is not quite as extreme in semantic range as וַתִּתְחַלְחַל, but still gives the impression that Esther was shaken by the news. This verb in the Latin, like the Hebrew, is not gendered in its semantic range; it does not indicate a particularly 'female' response to the situation. Esther's instruction to Hathach – that he go to Mordecai and, 'learn of him why he did this' – appears to refer to Mordecai's refusal of clothing, specifically marked by *hoc,* 'this'. The Vulgate's approach to this verse, then, does not imply that Esther was ignorant of the edict, but she was unaware of why Mordecai refused her offer of clothing. Esther makes a valid request to determine why Mordecai does not want to take off the sackcloth and enter the king's gates to speak to her directly. Thus, the Latin text shows that Esther is not ill-informed, but rather she possesses the requisite knowledge.

4:11 in the Vulgate depicts Esther questioning Mordecai's logic, much like the AT's version of this scene. She asks him, *quomodo ad regem intrare potero quae triginta iam diebus non sum vocata ad eum*, 'How then can I go in to the king, who for these thirty days now have not been called unto him?' The key word here is the interrogative adverb *quomodo*, 'how?'. Not only is she highlighting his lack of knowledge compared to hers, but also his lack of reason. This creates a knowledge/ignorance dichotomy between them. Again, here as

elsewhere in this scene, Esther appears to be acting in a non-binary/genderqueer way, and it seems more apparent in the Latin version than in the Hebrew.

The Vulgate makes an amendment to 9:29, changing וַתִּכְתֹּב to *scripseruntque*, the third person plural perfect form of *scribo.* At 9:32, the Vulgate states that these matters were written in a book 'that is called Esther'. Thus, the Vulgate changes Esther's action into an act performed by both Mordecai and Esther.

Addition C is included in the Vulgate, but it is located at the very end of the text along with the other Additions. This means that the depiction of Esther and Mordecai in this Addition does not impact their depictions in chapters two to nine, and the scene is out of place in its context. Because of this, it has not been included in this section's analysis.

Overall, when assessing the Vulgate's capacity to read Esther and Mordecai in a genderqueer way, it seems that the text begins by displaying binary gender roles, which in Mordecai's case do not change until chapter eight. Esther appears to shift into a queerer role in chapter four, but their relationship is slightly more equal than it is in the Hebrew. However, she still takes charge of his elevation and saving her people while he remains passive to her, displaying them both in a genderqueer manner. The starkest differences between the MT and the Vulgate are in 9:29-32. Their depiction as equals confirms their non-binary relationship to one another.

*7.7 - Conclusion*

What is interesting about the relationship between Esther and Mordecai in the ancient versions is that there are some features of the text which are depicted consistently across these interpretations. For example, in my reading, chapter two displays strictly binary gender roles between Esther and Mordecai, which stand in contrast to Esther's relationship with Hegai and Ahasuerus.

Themes in the Hebrew text of chapter four have been more strongly emphasised in the Greek text. In the LXX, AT and Vulgate, Esther highlights Mordecai's ignorance of the Persian law which explicitly prevents her from going to speak to the king. Indeed, the AT and the Vulgate depict Esther as challenging Mordecai's logic by using an interrogative tone. Thus, in this verse of the LXX, AT and Vulgate, Esther appears to be significantly assertive. What is common across the MT, LXX, AT and Vulgate is that chapter four displays tussling between Esther and Mordecai. Mordecai attempts to treat Esther as his helpless niece and thus maintain their cisnormative relationship. Esther, on the other hand, shifts from a position of no authority to one of great power and influence. In this shift, she eschews the restrictions placed upon her in her binary relationship with Mordecai. In the MT, LXX and Vulgate, Esther is portrayed as being non-binary/genderqueer because she troubles the gender binary. She retains her 'feminine' traits but also adopts 'masculine' traits. Overall, her behaviour does not 'belong' to either gender.

At the close of chapter four, Mordecai relents and does as she commands him. However, is it an act of resignation, or does it signal that Mordecai is non-binary/genderqueer? Given

that Mordecai maintains a lower position than Esther into chapter eight, excluding the AT's version of events, the latter seems likely. Unlike Haman and Ahasuerus, Mordecai is not subject to satire throughout the narrative as a deficient male. Mordecai and Esther both become genderqueer in relation to one another from 4:16 onwards. Mordecai can be read as genderqueer in the MT, LXX and in the Vulgate.

In the AT, Esther appears to subvert her female gender role but she does not necessarily become non-binary/genderqueer in chapter four. There are hints of queerness in her covering her beauty in Addition C, however these are challenged by the cisnormative statement Esther makes at C.27.[173] The AT's version of chapters eight and nine are probably the most surprising of all the ancient versions. Where the MT, LXX, the Vulgate and Josephus's version render chapter eight similarly, the AT almost completely removes Esther from this scene. When reading this through a queer lens, her absence is jarring given her prominent role in the story before this. We might interpret her non-normative behaviour in the preceding chapters as useful for achieving the ends of removing Haman from the plot. However, after this has been achieved, it appears that she is no longer needed, or perhaps she is too transgressive to be further tolerated.

While the MT and the main texts of the LXX and AT display Esther's shift from Mordecai's dependent to the queen of Persia, Josephus's text depicts many different gender roles throughout, but particularly in chapter four. Though Esther emphatically questions

[173] This is discussed in detail in the following chapter, 8.3-4.

Mordecai's command and highlights its stupidity, and she acts in exactly the opposite manner to what he advised, it is not clear that she rejects binary gender roles in this scene. Josephus highlights that Esther was not aware of Haman's edict, and thus, Mordecai possesses more knowledge than she does.

With its consistent portrayal of progression from binary to non-binary gender roles in relation to Mordecai, the MT, the LXX and the Vulgate appear to have the greatest capacity for a genderqueer reading. That the LXX allows for such reading is unusual, because the Greek versions often have less capacity for queer interpretation than the Hebrew and Latin texts, as will be shown in the next chapter of this thesis. I contend that because the material from the Additions does not affect Esther and Mordecai in relation to one another as much as other characters, their queerness can resonate. As will be shown in the following section, the relationship between Esther and Ahasuerus is significantly impacted by the Greek Additions.

# Chapter 8 – Ahasuerus and Esther

## *8.1 - Introduction*

Esther and Ahasuerus have six scenes together in this text. Their relationship is interesting to study, to assess the gender dynamics; first as potential mate and king, then husband and wife, and king and queen. As discussed in the previous chapter and in the fourth chapter of this thesis, Esther is frequently depicted in modern scholarship as either a bimbo or a gender subvert. Conversely, Ahasuerus is not subject to binary interpretations that portray him either cisnormatively or subversively. Rather, scholars agree that he is an impotent figure of ridicule. It is notable that scholars agree on this when there is so much debate about Esther's role. Thus, it will be interesting to see if there is agreement or discord in my reading of Esther and Ahasuerus as portrayed in the ancient versions.

The Hebrew MT, as in the two preceding cameos, will be shown to have the greatest, consistent capacity for genderqueer/non-binary reading. In Esther and Ahasuerus's scenes the LXX, the AT and Josephus's version include even more material, often in the Additions, that lengthens their scenes or provides extra information. The material in the Greek Additions, particularly Addition D, radically alters Esther's capacity to be read as genderqueer/non-binary. As I will discuss, the effect of the Additions impacts the main text of the LXX and AT that follows. The impact of the Greek Additions on the Esther-Ahasuerus relationship is greater than on any other character or relationship in *Esther*, because Esther is frequently portrayed as physically and emotionally weak. Overall, the Vulgate has the

capacity for Esther to be read as non-binary/genderqueer but includes more cisnormative details than does the MT.

*8.2 - The Masoretic Text*

As shown in the preceding two chapters, the Hebrew MT has allowed for a genderqueer/non-binary reading of both Vashti and Esther, and to a lesser extent, Mordecai. Ahasuerus's portrayal in this version resisted a queer reading in his scenes with Vashti. We will now explore whether it is possible to read Esther and Ahasuerus in a genderqueer/non-binary way and if our analysis will be like that of the preceding cameos.

The opening verses of chapter two in the MT – when Esther is first introduced to the reader – appears to portray her as a silent and passive woman with little agency of her own. As mentioned in chapter 7.2, 2:7 recounts that Esther is related to Mordecai, that she is an orphan, and that she is beautiful. In chapter two, Esther is four times 'taken' (וַתִּלָּקַח – in the *niphal* form at 2:8 and 2:16, in the *qal* form at 2:9 and 2:16) from place to place. These instances of the verb לקח may indicate that Esther has little agency of her own.[174] However, this is immediately succeeded by 2:9, where the text reads that Esther 'pleased him and found favour in his sight'. This information is repeated at 2:15:

[174] Fox indicates that 2:16, in particular, stresses Esther's passivity (2001: 37).

וַתִּשָּׂא־חֵן וָחֶסֶד לְפָנָיו and 2:17 אֶסְתֵּר נֹשֵׂאת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָּל־רֹאֶיהָ. For a supposedly passive character, these three examples of Esther's behaviour give pause for thought. In the MT, the phrases נשׂא חן and מצא חן, with the verbs in different forms, are employed a number of times: the former at 2:9; 2:15; 2:17; 5:2 and the latter at 5:8; 7:3; 8:5. In modern English translations, these two phrases are usually rendered as 'won' or 'found favour'. As Adele Berlin highlights, this phrase also has connections to Joseph and Daniel (Gen 39:4, 21; Dan 1:9) (2001: 26). In the space of two verses (2:8-9), there are connections to the Joseph narrative. As a result, there are grounds for assessing this phrase in a gender-neutral manner, as these phrases are used in biblical texts about both male and female characters.

The verbs used in the MT, מצא and נשא, have varying semantic ranges: in the *qal*, מצא can mean 'to find', 'to attain to', 'to gain', 'to secure' or 'to encounter' (BDB: 592) and נשא 'to lift', 'to carry', 'to bear' and 'to take' (BDB: 669). Both verbs tend towards active rather than passive meanings, as they describe someone doing something, as opposed to having something done to them. The two common nouns used to accompany this phrase, חן and חסד, are only once paired together in this book (2:17). חן has the meaning 'favour', 'grace' or 'elegance' predominantly, and has a rather limited semantic range (BDB: 336). חסד is rather more malleable, meaning 'goodness', 'kindness', specifically in the sense of 'obtaining kindness', 'fidelity' and 'lovely of appearance' (BDB: 338). Connected to this is the phrase, יטב בעיני, often literally translated as 'good in the eyes of', or more idiomatically as 'find approval' (Kahana 2005: 90). This Hebrew synecdoche בעיני 'in the eyes of' is an idiomatic expression that occurs in relation to Esther at 2:9; 2:15; 5:2; 5:8; 7:3 and 8:5.

It is curious that the verb טוב and the phrases נשׂא חן and מצא חן are first used of Esther in the text throughout chapter two. However, there is a noticeable shift to these phrases being used *by* Esther after 5:2. In the MT, Esther's character undergoes a significant shift from being 'found favourable' and 'pleasing', to indicating to others what is 'pleasing' and what should be 'found favourable'. Furthermore, once Esther indicates what is 'pleasing' or what should be 'found favourable' from 5:2 onwards, the characters to whom she says this, consistently acquiesce to her will. When we consider Esther's behaviour in chapter two, it is interesting to note that when these phrases are used about her, it does not necessarily indicate that Esther is behaving without agency. Rather, that she 'wins favour', נשׂא + חן or חסד, indicates that she is doing something to be found favourable. On this verb, Crawford argues: 'The active construction is important; she does not 'find' favour, but actively earns it.' (1999: 888). What she does to win favour, we can only guess at, as the narrative leaves it open to interpretation. To rebut many scholars' opinions that Esther found favour solely because of her beauty, I maintain that if this were the case, then presumably the narrative would mention her appearance alongside this phrase. That the text does not mention her beauty again after 2:7 means that we must assess her behaviour in the immediate context. The Hebrew indicates that Esther did something for other characters to find her favourable, and therefore it appears that she acted with agency and autonomy. Since these verbs are not themselves gendered, I view this agency in a genderqueer way.

Ahasuerus acts with a great deal of power and authority at 2:17. In the MT he 'loved' Esther (וַיֶּאֱהַב); 'set' the royal crown on her head (וַיָּשֶׂם כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ); 'made' her queen (וַיַּמְלִיכֶהָ); 'made' a feast and a release to the provinces (וַיַּעַשׂ); and 'gave' gifts (וַיִּתֵּן). He performs the actions expected of a king seeking a new queen, but he also throws a party and gives out extravagant gifts. These details could be satirical, as satire about the king is a common theme that runs through the MT text.[175] Ahasuerus may be depicted as an inefficient ruler because of his overblown and extravagant behaviour, coupled with his inability to make decisions on his own.[176] This portrayal uses the stereotype of the arrogant male foreign ruler, to highlight his incapacity in the role. With its focus on Ahasuerus's hubris and the primacy of Persian law, this characterisation of Ahasuerus is difficult to read in a non-binary way, in contrast to Esther who displays hints of queerness.

Chapter five is the next occasion when Ahasuerus and Esther interact with one another in the Hebrew text. After fasting for three days[177] (4:16), Esther is finally ready. She dons royal apparel, וַתִּלְבַּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מַלְכוּת, and makes her way to the king's quarters, where she prepares to enter. The translation 'royal apparel' (KJV), or 'royal robes' (NIV; NRSV) is misleading. The Hebrew מַלְכוּת is not specifically royal apparel but rather 'royalty'. This verb is used at 1:2 to describe Ahasuerus's throne, 1:19 as a compound noun with דבר, 'royal edict', and at 4:14 in the infinitive to describe the royalty that Esther acquired. Like at

[175] For a succinct summary on satire in *Esther*, see Kathleen M. O'Connor, 'Humour, Turnabouts and Survival in the Book of Esther', 2003, pp.52-64.
[176] This is discussed in chapter 4.5.
[177] cf. chapter 4.3.1 for Moore's damning assessment of Esther's three-day fast, which he interprets as designed to make her 'more attractive' to the king.

2:9, 15 and 17, the text is not specific about what this vague phrase means, so we can only guess. Levenson and Fox agree that it indicates Esther is becoming fully royal in appearance and person (Fox 1991a: 68; Levenson 1997: 89). Therefore, this noun in the feminine form does not appear to have a gendered use here. It is not stated that Esther puts on royal clothing – which is unusual because the MT describes Mordecai being dressed in detailed finery at 8:15 – so the use of 'royalty' is mysterious. Perhaps it indicates that Esther prepares herself for her encounter with the king by resuming her royalty after fasting. This phrase in the Hebrew is not specifically gendered, and thus we can read it in a genderqueer way.

The juxtaposition of Esther standing outside the court of the palace, while the king sits on his throne inside the palace creates an interesting mental picture of an inside/outside relationship,[178] which could symbolically be setting the scene where Esther crosses, or to use Beal's term, 'transgresses', the boundary from without to within[179] (1997a: 76). In our reading, we can view this symbolically as Esther moving from being privately to publicly genderqueer, but also crossing from one sphere into another. If we look to Dembroff's definition of genderqueer/non-binary action, they identify space-switching as a facet of genderqueer/non-binary behaviour (2019: 22-23).[180] Esther appears to be space-switching here. As she goes into the king's chambers in 5:1-2, she does not show any emotional

[178] Day notes that this scene places more emphasis on the physical location of things, and where they are in relation to one another, than is typical for most biblical texts (2005: 93).
[179] Beal also points out that Mordecai does not transgress the law in the same way that Esther does (1997a: 76).
[180] See chapter 2.2.6 (p.77) and 2.2.8 (p.85) of this thesis for details.

vulnerability or frailty. She does what she set out to do: she goes into the king's quarters and gains his favour with little difficulty. The text offers no emotional response from Esther, and thus no hint that she feels uncertainty or doubt. She dresses, she walks, she enters, and she gains favour. Similarly to 2:9, 15 and 17, the Hebrew text does not offer any explanation as to why she gains favour.

5:2 gives the reader the information that the king extended his sceptre to her in pardon, and Esther touched the tip in response. This may be a euphemism, as Bailey claims (2009: 241). This action confirms that Esther has achieved her goal of going into the king's quarters without being punished. Therefore, we can interpret 5:1-2 as Esther behaving in a genderqueer manner which is accepted by the ruling body.

It is curious that though Ahasuerus has the appearance of being generous to his wife at 5:3, he in fact limits the scope of her request to 'up to half of the kingdom'.[181] When reading this in a genderqueer/non-binary way, it could be interpreted as the king grappling with the uncertain power dynamic between he and Esther. Esther has crossed over into his sphere by appearing before him unsummoned and unapologetic, in a genderqueer manner. By attempting to limit the scope of her appeal, the king could be exercising caution. Esther's response – to invite him to a feast – circumvents his caution, as she does not offer a direct

[181] For further detail on Ahasuerus's preoccupation with power and wealth, see chapters four and eight. Rather differently, Moore argues that this verse could be a 'polite oriental exaggeration which was not meant to be taken too literally.' (1971: 55).

challenge to his masculinity. Unbeknownst to him, she continues to act in a genderqueer/non-binary way, as she asks him to do something and he immediately agrees.

The account of the first feast at is only three verses long (5:6-8), and yet it further displays Esther behaving authoritatively, which we can interpret as non-binary. The king continues to limit the breadth of Esther's request to half of his kingdom, perhaps still cognisant of the fact that he is her guest, rather than the other way around. This is further compounded by the fact Ahasuerus does not respond to Esther's petition at 5:8; instead, he is completely silent. The following verse focuses on Haman's joy at being invited to the second feast, thus the reader concludes that Esther has been successful in her request. The king is now needed less for plot exposition, though Esther remains fully present and speaking. Esther's genderqueer behaviour appears to become more and more successful as the plot progresses. She acts with greater authority and standing as Ahasuerus appears to become less present and vocal. Levenson notes that Esther's speech at 5:7-8 is 'masterfully constructed' and there are strong parallels between 7:3 and Moses's petition to the Lord in Ex. 33:12-17 (1997: 101). The parallel drawn between the female Esther and the male Moses is particularly significant. It points to her important standing as the hero of the tale, irrespective of her gender.

At 7:1, like 5:6, Ahasuerus and Haman are guests of queen Esther. She hosts the banquet for them and they have been summoned to her queer space, unlike 5:1 where Esther entered the king's male space unbidden. She rules this space, and as such, she can dictate proceedings. Like at 5:8, Esther asks if she is found favourable before submitting her

request. As discussed in chapter four of this thesis, some critics have labelled Esther's behaviour here as 'manipulative'. This description is significantly gendered, as it implies that Esther is behaving as a *femme fatale*. To read Esther's request in a genderqueer way, a useful comparison is with Haman's request to the king at 3:8. Both characters make the king the subject of their speech, and emphasise their concern for the king's well-being above all. Haman requests that he is granted the authority for his edict to be written because it is not in the king's interest for the Jews to be in his kingdom. Esther requests for her people to be saved because they will be killed. Otherwise, it would not have been important enough for her to bother the king with. Both characters use flattery to achieve their goal. Thus, flattery is not a female pursuit, as many modern scholars indicate with their criticism of Esther.[182] Haman has not been labelled 'manipulative' by scholars at 3:8. Esther recognises the need for flattery and so employs it to achieve her goal. This is not a gendered act.

Two verses later (7:6), when Esther reveals to Ahasuerus that Haman is the adversary of whom she speaks, the emphatic staccato of her statement is impressive. She says, אִישׁ צַר וְאוֹיֵב הָמָן הָרָע הַזֶּה, 'a man, an adversary and an enemy, this wicked Haman!'. The English translation cannot do justice to the verbal force of הָמָן הָרָע הַזֶּה. Esther does not come across as a cisnormative female here, but neither does she appear to be behaving like a man, or like a deficient female.

[182] See chapter 4.3.1.

The king loses control of his emotions at 7:7. When he discovers that Haman is the culprit, Ahasuerus rises up in anger and leaves the room to go into the garden. The verb used to describe Ahasuerus's anger in 7:7 and 10, חמה, is the same verb used of his fury against Vashti at 1:12 and 2:1, and Haman's rage at 3:5 and 5:9.[183] Therefore, this verb implies that Ahasuerus has entirely rejected Haman, much like he did to Vashti, and this verb draws a parallel between Haman and Ahasuerus. Ahasuerus leaves Esther in the room with her enemy, Haman, as he is unable to cope with the situation. Ahasuerus displays lack of intelligence as he does not consider the danger he has left her in. Additionally, he again displays his inability to make decisions or act on his own. We can interpret his portrayal as that of an inadequate king. Comparing with the BSRI, Ahasuerus does not meet the desired male characteristics of decisiveness and assertiveness, and he is satirised for this. Timothy Beal says of this characterisation in the MT:

> Although the book of Esther draws several of its conceptual metaphors from other Hebrew biblical texts (e.g. the heart as self, the self as fillable, the self filled with wine, the self filled with heat, heat abating or dissipating from self, etc.), it deploys them in such a way as to call into question any delusion of self control and agency on the part of its royal patriarchal subjects. Instead of affirming agency, these metaphors conceive of the self ostensibly in power as easily manipulated and unsettled, thereby revealing a highly insecure subjectivity that is, literally, never fully in possession of itself. (2015: 110)

Perhaps the most obvious example of וְנַהֲפוֹךְ הוּא (9:1) in *Esther* occurs at 7:8. Haman, left alone in the chamber with Esther 'falls' onto her couch to beg for his life, just as Ahasuerus walks in. The irony underscores the satire of what follows. The Hebrew verb used by

[183] See Michael J. Chan (2013) for an exposition of royal rage in the Hebrew Bible.

Ahasuerus, לִכְבּוֹשׁ, has the meaning 'to subdue' or 'to bring into bondage' (BDB: 461), but it has the meanings elsewhere in the *qal* 'to make subservient', 'to make subject', 'to violate' and 'to rape' (DCH vol. IV: 361). This infinitive construct verb לִכְבּוֹשׁ implies taking one's agency away from them. By admonishing Haman for this, I suggest that Ahasuerus is defending Esther's agency and her genderqueerness. Haman attempts to impose binary gender roles on Esther, but Ahasuerus does not allow him to do this. We could argue that Ahasuerus recognises Esther's genderqueer/non-binary agency and respects it. To read his action in this way allows the genderqueer/non-binary character to have prominence and respect.

Haman is then cast out from the story by order of the king. As a result, 8:1 sees Esther receive Haman's property.[184] That Esther is granted property and wealth means that she is now a very powerful person indeed. However, the edict against the Jews has not been reversed, though Haman has been removed. Consequently, at 8:3 Esther throws herself at the king's feet, weeping and begging him. This is a markedly different Esther to the character we have heretofore seen in the Hebrew narrative. Previously, she was notable for her poise, control and stoicism when interacting with the king. Day thinks it is possible that here Esther is employing her 'feminine wiles' to achieve her aim, but that this does not indicate weakness (2005: 132). However, this opinion is markedly cisnormative. Rather than her behaviour being 'manipulative' or 'feminised', Esther recognises the need to show

[184] Bush (1996: 444) explains that it is likely, following information on Achaemenid Persia from Josephus (*Ant* 11.17) and Herodotus (3.128-29), that Haman's property was confiscated by the state. Ahasuerus then granted this to Esther, as she had been wronged directly by Haman.

emotions to appeal to the king, and indeed she may feel those emotions. She is making a commotion, but at the same time, she is in control of her actions. It is made clear that she is in control because as soon as the king extends his sceptre to her again she 'rose up' (תָּקָם) and 'stood' (וַתַּעֲמֹד) before the king (8:4). It appears that she used her emotional display at 8:3 as a tactic to petition the king again. As Paton (1908: 269) and Levenson (1997: 107-8) both argue, Esther again risks her life at 8:3 in an entirely necessary way, because the king has not yet undone Haman's decree. Furthermore, Esther and Mordecai both cry in the text, and thus I contend that it is not a gendered action.

Esther's request at 8:5 includes a fourfold pattern of request phrases, which is double the number previously used by Esther. Esther has become more vocal as the story has progressed. As her authority and power have grown, and as more people have shown that they respect her position, she could embrace her non-binary role, and thus her confidence has grown.

Ahasuerus's speech to Esther at 8:8 shows him again devolving responsibility to others, as he allows Esther and Mordecai to write whatever they would like and have it sealed with his signet ring. Though on the surface the text of the MT appears to show an authoritative king – one example being the use of the *qal* infinitive, כִּתְבוּ – It appears that the king is being ridiculed for again passing responsibilities onto others without oversight. Indeed, the flippancy with which the king hands over his authority is underscored by כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם as the king couches Esther's request in terms of what is 'pleasing'.

A contrast is drawn between Esther and Ahasuerus in chapter eight. Esther has a great deal of power and authority without it necessarily being obvious that she does. For example, she is queen, yet she is also steward over a great deal of property, she is more vocal than her husband, and she can dictate and command laws to be made. Ahasuerus has the outward appearance of power and authority as he holds the primary position over 127 provinces. However, he is unable to execute this power without significant assistance and encouragement, not just here but throughout the narrative. His behaviour here also shows that he has not developed as a character. Unlike Esther, who has grown in outspokenness, authority, respect and confidence, Ahasuerus is a static character. To interpret this another way, through her genderqueerness Esther embraced her character and has grown into it. Through his cisnormativity, Ahasuerus remains the same, as he is portrayed as a deficient character who does not fulfil the ideal ruler type.

9:12-14 depicts Esther and Ahasuerus's relationship in much the same way as realised throughout the MT text. Ahasuerus appears to be ignorant of what is happening in his own kingdom. He asks Esther a multi-layered request at 9:12:

בִּשְׁאָר מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ מֶה עָשׂוּ וּמַה־שְּׁאֵלָתֵךְ וְיִנָּתֵן לָךְ וּמַה־בַּקָּשָׁתֵךְ עוֹד וְתֵעָשׂ

'What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? And what is your petition? It will be given to you. And what is your request? It will also be done.'

This is the fourth and final time in this text that Ahasuerus asks Esther what she wants, and he uses the same verbs here as at 5:6 and 7:2: שאל and בקש. Esther responds as expected, beginning her petition at 9:13 with אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב. She does not, however, continue with

the other phrases she routinely includes in her four preceding appeals. Rather, she launches straight into her request. I contend that Esther feels no need for the formalities as she has fully assumed her powerful and authoritative genderqueer role, which is accepted by Ahasuerus. He continues to defer to her and she knows that she will be successful when she asks for something.

The final verse that features an interaction between Esther and Ahasuerus is 9:25. The MT details that Esther went in to see the king, using a third person singular feminine suffix on the infinitive construct of בוא. Notably, scholars including Paton (1908: 296), Clines (1984: 53), Bush (1996: 481-482) and Levenson (1997: 127) do not believe that the feminine suffix refers to Esther. Rather, they argue that it refers to the plot. They justify this position by pointing out that Esther has not been mentioned by name since 9:11. However, I suggest that it refers to Esther, because the text indicates that Haman's murderous plot had been revealed and overturned *because* Esther had gone in to see the king. By stating in the Purim letter that Ahasuerus 'gave orders in writing' – using the third person singular *qal* form of אמר – grants him more influence in what occurred than as detailed in chapters eight and nine. The only order Ahasuerus gave directly was for Haman's execution, not for the reversal of the edict against the Jews. Esther is still portrayed as a non-binary person but, curiously, in Mordecai's letter Ahasuerus is depicted differently to how he has been in the text. In the letter, he appears to be portrayed as a good king.

To summarise, the MT has the capacity for readers to interpret Esther as a non-binary/genderqueer character. As discussed in this section, Esther appears to act in a

gender-neutral way, and she is not constrained by the gender binary. Many of the examples studied in this section are those used by critics who dismiss Esther as a bimbo, or as a manipulative woman.[185] This section illustrates how these examples have been gendered by these critics' opinions, and that it is possible to read them in a non-normative way. Ahasuerus, on the other hand, can be interpreted as behaving in normative fashion, as a ruler who is decidedly lacking and is thus the subject of satire. To read the MT text through a queer lens is to identify a contrast between Esther and Ahasuerus, and their capacities to be interpreted in a non-binary manner. Esther can be interpreted as such but Ahasuerus cannot.

### *8.3 - The Septuagint*

The LXX's versions of the scenes featuring Ahasuerus and Esther are quite similar to those in the MT. However, the relationship between Ahasuerus and Esther has been realised very differently in the Greek Additions. When reading these scenes in a genderqueer/non-binary way, this creates significant tension between the main text of the LXX and the Additions. Though we can read Esther as genderqueer/non-binary in the 'body' text of the LXX, we are unable to do so when reading her portrayal in the Additions. Furthermore, her portrayal in the Additions colours her portrayal in the main text. Notably, Ahasuerus has been realised

[185] See chapter 4.3.1.

the same way in the main text and the Additions and thus he can only be read as a cisnormative character.

Like in the MT, Esther is 'taken' to Hegai[186] at 2:8, using the Greek aorist verb ἤχθη from ἄγω, meaning to 'bring', 'take' or 'lead' (LS: 10). Initially, then, Esther is portrayed as a binary female, as she is in the MT. Looking at Esther's action 'finding favour' in the LXX, it appears that the Greek translators may have viewed מצא and נשא with חן or חסד as synonyms, treating both verbs and nouns as having the same meaning. Most occurrences of these phrases have been translated as εὗρον χάριν in the LXX, using the participle form of the verb εὑρίσκω, 'to find out', 'to devise', 'to acquire' and 'to get for oneself' (LS: 331-332). This verb is closer in meaning to מצא than to נשא, and perhaps it is synonymic with the latter (Kahana 2005:90). Furthermore, it is interesting that the LXX writers did not see a distinction between these verbs and they instead chose to render both with εὑρίσκω. If the MT author understood there to be a difference in activity and passivity between נשא and מצא, as Moore posits (1971:21), why this difference was not obvious to the LXX writers, or why this difference was not reproduced in the Greek is significant. The use of εὑρίσκω means that Esther's agency is realised in the Greek in the same way as in the Hebrew at 2:9, 15 and 17. She is clearly doing something to cause people to find her favourable. Like in the Hebrew, there is no indication that this action is gendered in any way, and thus we can read it as a genderqueer/non-binary action.

[186] Hegai is named 'Gai' in the LXX.

The Hebrew phrase בעיני that usually accompanies נשׂא חן or מצא חן is rendered in LXX Esther with *ἐνώπιον*, 'face to face' (LS: 267).[187] A closer consideration of *ἐνώπιον* in the LXX shows that it is employed to render both בעיני and לִפני, perhaps indicating that the Greek writers understood them to be synonyms. לִפני is the paired word of this Greek word, but pairing with בעיני appears to be a paraphrastic choice. Karen Jobes argues that the paraphrastic translation might be due to the Hebrew synecdoche not working well in Greek (1996: 122). It is interesting to note that without the phrase 'in the eyes of' we have less of a sense of others' gaze on Esther.

Rather differently to the MT's use of the *niphal* form of לקח at 2:15 and 2:16, the LXX opts for two aorist forms of the verb *εἰσέρχομαι*, 'to go in' or 'to enter' (LS: 232). This verb changes the portrayal of Esther in these verses, as in the Greek text she is not being taken to the king, but rather she goes in of her own accord. Alongside Esther's 'finding favour' in the LXX, this adds another example of Esther exercising genderless autonomy.

The LXX exhibits minor differences from the MT in Ahasuerus's portrayal. Notably, the LXX at 2:18 adds in the detail that the feast was hosted by Ahasuerus to celebrate his wedding, presumably to clarify what the Hebrew text does not. However, this detail also presents the king as more of a measured individual than he is portrayed in the MT. The narrative silence

[187] See Appendix C.

on his motivation for holding the feast in the MT allows for the possibility that this action is another example of the king's self-indulgent extravagance and licentiousness. Therefore, Ahasuerus does not appear to be portrayed as an incapable and incompetent ruler in the LXX.

Addition C precedes Esther going in to Ahasuerus to seek his assistance in chapter five.[188] Esther humbles her body in mourning and petitions God. I will first look at C.26-27 before going back to C.24, which will be analysed alongside Addition D and chapter five. C.27 details Esther petitioning God and explaining her hatred of her royal crown.[189] Of her crown, she states, βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηνίων, 'I abhor it like a menstrual cloth'. Esther uses female gender imagery, notably one of the key features of the female sex that is considered to be inferior or sub-standard, to construct this simile. Mention of Esther's menstruation explicitly establishes a dichotomy between her as the 'leaky' woman and Mordecai as the 'solid' male,[190] as Mordecai's petition precedes hers in this Addition. Furthermore, this adds a shameful element to Esther's portrayal, as not only is she cursed with menstruation, but the royal position is also to be understood as shameful. This is a highly gendered portrayal.

---

[188] Some of the material in Addition C was discussed in chapter 7.3-4 on Esther and Mordecai.

[189] cf. Reinhartz's study of LXX Esther. She argues, 'LXX Esther not only stresses the importance of endogamy and the dietary laws, but also provides a nuanced view of the situation of diaspora Jews vis-à-vis their host cultures.' (2017: 25)

[190] On menstruation and 'leaky' women, see Swancutt 2006: 71.

At C.24, Esther asks God to 'Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the one who fights against us'. In the following verse she asks, 'But save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone…'. These two verses add a lot of extra information to the LXX's portrayal of Esther, which radically alters how she is to be perceived. By stating in Addition C that she wants God to 'put eloquent speech in my mouth', she indicates that what follows in chapters five and seven – where she petitions the king – is a direct result of divine intervention, which Adele Reinhartz posits (2017: 15). When paired with Addition D – which portrays Esther as physically and emotionally incapable of undertaking her task – this means that Esther's agency is considerably diminished. It is interesting that Ahasuerus is here termed τοῦ λέοντος, 'the lion' (LS: 470). Ahasuerus is not referred to with this term again in the LXX's text. This term in the Greek means 'lion' and includes connotations of a violent predator. We could interpret this as showing that Esther considered Ahasuerus to be a dangerous adversary. That she asks for the king's heart to be changed to hate Haman offers a different interpretation of Esther's action in the LXX to the MT. In the latter, it is Esther's reveal of Haman's deeds to Ahasuerus that leads to his execution. However, this Addition suggests that it is God's agency that achieves this. Furthermore, that Esther asks for God to help her as she is 'all alone' (τῇ μόνῃ) portrays her as unable to cope with her predicament. This, along with Addition D, offers a very different picture of Esther's behaviour when we view it through a queer lens.

Addition D offers an alternative version of the scene at the beginning of chapter five. This version is notably different to the Hebrew, and it is difficult to read in a genderqueer/non-binary way. D.1 recounts that Esther took off her mourning garb and περιεβάλετο τὴν δόξαν

αὐτῆς, 'put on her glory'. Translations of the noun δόξα include 'splendour', 'honour' and 'glory' (LS: 209). In the LXX, many of these meanings are related to God; as a manifestation of his power, to describe a person created in the image of God, or to describe celestial beings. Therefore, this Greek noun is rather different from the MT's use of מַלְכוּת which does not have the same semantic range. Consequently, it is unlikely that δόξα is a direct translation of מַלְכוּת. Furthermore, D.2 re-emphasises the divine connection to this word, stating that it came 'after calling upon the all-seeing God and saviour.' Therefore, Esther becomes 'splendid' (ἐπιφανὴς) as a result of petitioning God.

Addition D takes a rather romantic approach to Esther's depiction. For example, D.3 depicts a physically incapacitated Esther. τῇ μὲν μιᾷ ἐπηρείδετο ὡς τρυφερευομένη, 'on one she leant gently for support,' portrays her as physically incapable of walking without her handmaidens. D.5 continues this theme. Describing Esther's happy face as 'radiant with the full flush of her beauty' draws the reader's attention to her appearance. In the MT, Esther's appearance is not discussed after her introduction in 2:7. Reading this through a genderqueer lens, one is struck by the cisnormative picture of the delicate maiden Esther presented here.[191] This is certainly not the same queen we read about in chapter five of the MT.

[191] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.

D.7 details that Ahasuerus responded to Esther's entrance in his quarters with fury. This information in the LXX is logical. We have been told in chapter four (4:11) that it is illegal for Esther to enter the king's quarters unbidden. Further, we know that Ahasuerus is prone to sudden bursts of rage when he is defied (1:12). Therefore, his response in Addition D does not seem unusual for his character. Esther's portrayal as a delicate maiden continues, for upon seeing Ahasuerus's angry face, she faints (D.7). The text reads, *καὶ ἔπεσεν ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ μετέβαλεν τὸ χρῶμα αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει καὶ κατεπέκυψεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἅβρας τῆς προπορευομένης*, 'The queen staggered, her colour turned pale from faintness, and she collapsed on the head of the attendant who went before her.' This is told in three parts. First, Esther 'fell', described with the aorist form of *πίπτω*. Then her facial complexion changes from faintness or feebleness (*ἐκλύσει*) and she bends down or stoops (*κατεπέκυψεν*) on the head of her handmaiden. This detailed verse makes it absolutely clear that Esther was not physically strong enough. As Reinhartz contends, 'Esther exemplifies the overawed and submissive woman who faints at the sight of royal splendour,' (2017: 25). When reading Esther's depiction through a genderqueer lens, we are struck by how difficult it is to read her as a non-binary/genderqueer character. This is because the language used about her is significantly gendered. Though *ἐκλύσει* is not a particularly gendered term – it has been used about male and female characters elsewhere in the LXX[192] – in this context Esther's depiction is that of a feeble woman. This depiction contrasts with the king, who is portrayed as strong and powerful. Thus, God steps in. At D.8, *καὶ μετέβαλεν*

[192] For example, Ezek 23:33; Isa 21:3; Jer 29:3; 2 Macc 3:24.

ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραΰτητα, 'And God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness.' Without this action, Esther may have been punished by the king, and she would have been powerless to stop it.

At D.8, the king comforts Esther like a child. Furthermore, Ahasuerus is portrayed in a sympathetic way, as he lovingly cares for his feeble wife. We can read this as clearly portraying cisnormative roles between Ahasuerus and Esther. He is the powerful ruler who loves his wife; she is the weak woman who needs her husband to comfort her. After regaling Ahasuerus with praise, Esther faints again (D.15). The text then moves to 5:3 and does not include the MT's version of 5:1-2.

By expanding two verses in the MT (5:1-2) into sixteen verses in Addition D (D.1-16) the LXX version implies that it has been immensely difficult for Esther to gain the king's favour. In fact, she only does so once God's intervention assuages the king's fervour, and she does not seem physically capable of achieving her desired goal. In our reading, this means that Esther in Addition D resists a genderqueer/non-binary reading, and she is instead depicted as a physically and emotionally weak woman who is dependent on male agency.

Esther and Ahasuerus's scene in chapter seven is quite similar to that in the MT, with only some slight differences. At 7:4, Esther does not state that she would have kept silent and not bothered the king. Rather, Esther argues that she did keep silent but that, 'The slanderer is not worthy of the court of the king.' Therefore, as in the MT, she is couching her request in terms of what is in the best interest of the king, using flattery like Haman did in

chapter three. In our interpretation, Esther's action displays her intelligence, as she acutely understands how to word a petition to be successful. As this material is outside of the Additions, it is not made explicitly clear that God is responsible for making her eloquent. However, this scene follows Addition C.24. If we are to view the LXX 'body' text and the Additions as one unit, Esther's behaviour in chapter seven would also be influenced by her request for divine agency, specifically her appeal for eloquent speech. Therefore, the intelligence and skill she displays is not organic. This furthers the cisnormative interpretation of her we gleaned from our reading of Additions C and D, and chapter five.

7:7 does not provide insight into Ahasuerus's emotional state when he goes into the garden, unlike the MT. Given that the only divine action he was subject to in this version was that God changed his heart from anger to gentleness, he may still be under the influence of divine action. This makes Ahasuerus seem in control of his emotions; perhaps he removed himself from the room to think. He has, after all, been told that his second-in-command wants his wife's people exterminated. This portrays Ahasuerus as a balanced and measured character and not the subject of satire, possibly because of divine interference.

Notably, the version of 7:8 in the LXX indicates that the violence Ahasuerus perceives Haman to have been wielding against Esther is more forceful here than as portrayed in the MT. The description the LXX uses is the verb βιάζῃ from the verb βιάζομαι which has the meanings, 'to constrain', 'to suffer violence', 'to force one to do' or 'to force entry' (LS: 150), which are more intense than the Hebrew verb. In our genderqueer reading, we can view this action as rape. Ahasuerus takes offence at Haman's attempt to subdue Esther when, as

the male ruler and husband, that would be his role over her. Thus, there is tension between the two normative male characters, and Esther is pushed into a cisnormative position.

The beginning of chapter eight in the LXX is much like that in the MT. However, there are differences between these texts as the scene progresses. For example, the verb used at 8:4 is the aorist passive ἐξηγέρθη, 'she was made to rise'. This is rather different from the *qal* verb in the MT, וַתָּקָם, 'she rose'.[193] That the passive is used in the LXX presents a very different picture of Esther. In the MT, Esther had an outburst of emotion at 8:3, which is much less extreme in the LXX. Further to this, the LXX shortens the length of Esther's speech at 8:5-6, instead opting for a shorter and more regular two-line petition, which is also the case in 9:12-14. In the LXX, this petition is not marked as being different in any way to her petitions elsewhere in the book, which is not the case in the MT. When viewing this through a genderqueer lens, Additions C and D influence our interpretation of this scene. All of Esther's petitions to the king come after these Additions, and that they have been described in the LXX very similarly in all four scenes may indicate that Esther's action is directly caused by God each time. God has given her eloquent speech which she employs again and again. Esther therefore appears to be a puppet controlled by divine agency and she exercises none of her own.

[193] Kahana posits that this change may have been made to avoid using the same verb that would be employed for עמד in the same verse, or that the translator read or understood a passive verb in their Hebrew version (Kahana 2005: 312).

Though Addition D detailed that God changed the king's heart to gentleness, that is the only way that God acted upon him that we know of. Therefore, Ahasuerus in chapter eight can be interpreted in the same way as in the MT. He lacks the key skills befitting his role as king, because he readily grants someone else the authority to sign edicts in his name. Actions that redeem his failures – for example, allowing Esther to act as she desires – are caused by divine intervention. Interestingly, as discussed above, satire of Ahasuerus in the LXX is considerably less than in the MT. On numerous occasions, the king is portrayed with sympathy or as thoughtful and kind, in contrast to the MT. However, although Ahasuerus may seem like a good character, I would suggest that this may be because of God's involvement.

The last key example of a difference in Esther's characterisation comes at 9:25. The Hebrew employs the third person feminine form of the verb בוא in the phrase וּבְבֹאָהּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ. The LXX instead has καὶ ὡς εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα. εἰσῆλθεν is usually translated by scholars as 'he went in', indicating Haman (Paton 1908: 296; Bush 1996: 482), and thus Esther is not included in this verse. This seems logical, because unlike the MT, this section of the verse is directly followed by, λέγων κρεμάσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον. This refers to Haman telling the king to have Mordecai hanged. However, by amending this to an account of how Haman went to see Ahasuerus to have the Jews condemned, Esther's crucial part in the story is erased.

The portrayal of Esther and Ahasuerus in the 'body' text of the LXX displays many similarities to the MT. As shown here, there are many verses which are the same,

particularly in their early scenes. However, the LXX Additions significantly shift Esther's depiction, and to a lesser extent Ahasuerus's. Additions C and D, by first detailing that Esther petitioned God for assistance, then by depicting her as physically unable to complete her task before God intervened, change Esther's portrayal markedly. These Additions then colour how the remainder of the narrative is to be interpreted, as Esther's actions in relation to Ahasuerus always appear to be caused by divine assistance. This suspends Esther's autonomy, and thus she cannot be read as a genderqueer character. Her portrayal in Addition D as a feeble damsel is shocking in comparison to the confident and direct Esther of the MT. Thus, the Additions impose the gender binary on her.

In relation to Esther, Ahasuerus has been portrayed as a more sympathetic character in the LXX due to divine action, and there seems to be little satire levied against him in this version. This means that he is portrayed as a cisnormative male ruler. Notably, this contrasts with his depiction in relation to Vashti, where the LXX appears to deride him.[194] Therefore, if we read the LXX 'body' text and the Additions as one unit, both Esther and Ahasuerus are portrayed cisnormatively in this version. In our interpretation of the text, it is very difficult to read either of them as being non-binary or genderqueer.

[194] See chapter 6.3 of this thesis.

*8.4 - The Alpha Text*

The second of the three Greek translations of *Esther* studied in this thesis exhibits many differences to the MT and LXX concerning the character of Esther. In some cases, these agree with the LXX and in some cases with Josephus's paraphrase of the text, but overall, the AT agrees with the MT more frequently than it does the LXX.[195] The Greek Additions to *Esther* are included in the material of the AT, but have some minor differences from the LXX's version of the Greek Additions. As I will show, in contrast to the LXX, the 'body' text of the AT appears to agree with the Additions in many places. Therefore, this text resists a genderqueer/non-binary reading.

At 2:9, Esther is described as finding the personal favour and compassion of Hegai[196] in the same way as in the MT and LXX. However, there is extra detail at the end of 2:9 in the AT which is slightly different. The text reads that Esther was led in to the king, using the aorist passive verb εἰσήχθη from the verb εἰσάγω, 'lead in' (LS: 231). Then the text states that Esther was ἤρεσεν αὐτῷ σφόδρα, 'very pleasing to him'. ἤρεσεν is the aorist indicative form of ἀρέσκω, 'to be pleased/satisfied with a thing' (LS: 115). This does not have sexual connotations, nor does it necessarily indicate that Esther was physically pleasing to look at. Rather, the term is vague. This term does not indicate that Esther did something to be pleasing, but that Ahasuerus independently found her favourable.

[195] Appendix C illustrates this.
[196] Hegai is named Bougaios in the AT.

This is also the case at 2:17. The text reads: ἐφανη ἐπιφανεστάτη Εσθηρ (2:17), 'Esther was shown to be the most splendid'. ἐφανη is the aorist passive form of φαινω, which is here likely to mean 'make known', 'reveal' or 'disclose' (LS: 853-854). Therefore, it was revealed that Esther was 'remarkable' or 'distinguished.' Notably, Esther does not seem to make this known herself, as the verb is in the passive form. This phrase immediately precedes καὶ εὗρε χάριν καὶ ἔλεον κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, 'and she found his favour and personal compassion.' It seems that Esther was not wholly responsible for gaining favour, but someone or something else was. To read this through a genderqueer lens, it appears that Esther is judged positively but she does not act entirely on her own. Ahasuerus throws a wedding feast for Esther and gives gifts. Like in the LXX, this shows Ahasuerus acting more sensibly than he does in the MT and one does not get the sense that he is being satirised here. Therefore, he appears to be portrayed cisnormatively and without obvious criticism.

Addition C in the AT is very similar to the version in the LXX. C.25(24) has a small difference. Like in the LXX, Esther asks God to put eloquent speech in her mouth. She then asks for God to give her the right words to say to Ahasuerus, and she asks for these words to be accepted by Ahasuerus. This makes it explicit that what comes after is caused by God and not her. The rest of Addition C is markedly similar to the LXX as Esther continues to petition God and assure him that she is unwillingly situated in the king's palace, abhorring her status 'like a cloth of a woman that sits apart' (C.26(27)). This term ἀποκαθημένης is used in the LXX versions of Leviticus, Isaiah and Ezekiel[197] to describe a menstruating

[197] Ezek 36:17; Isa 30:22, 64:5; Lev 15:33, 20:18.

woman (Erbele-Küster 2017: 84). Therefore, Esther is clearly drawing a negative comparison to her situation and female uncleanness. As in my analysis of the LXX, that she uses this imagery is highly gendered, for she is displaying her disgust for female bodily processes. Thus, she engages with androcentric dialogues on cleanliness practices, specifically what is נדה.

The version of Addition D in the AT is very like that in the LXX. At D.1, the AT makes it clear what τῆς δόξης is, by preceding it with τὰ ἱμάτια, so the text reads 'garments of glory', that is, very fine clothing. This removes any question about what δόξης means. This difference in the AT depicts Esther's concern with her apparel but little else. The descriptions in Addition D of Esther's preparation to go into the king after this are identical. She is displayed as a feeble woman who is not physically or emotionally prepared for her task (D.2(3-4), 3(5)).

Ahasuerus is portrayed in the same way in the AT's version of Addition D. He is furious at Esther's entrance (D.5(7)), which is not out of character for him. Furthermore, his reaction is appropriate within the context of Persian law prohibiting Esther's action. God acts upon him and then he changes his opinion (D.7(8)), comforting Esther like she is a small child (D.8(9), 9(10-11)). She similarly regales him with praise, but, rather than fainting again as she does in the LXX, the AT adds the detail, 'and upon her face was a measure of sweat.' (D.12(14)). In our reading, we can interpret this rather romantic depiction of Esther's physical incapacity as a damsel in distress portrayal, like the LXX's version.

The remainder of chapter five, detailing Esther's feast and her second petition to Ahasuerus, is closer to the MT than the LXX. Esther eloquently petitions the king at her feast and he agrees to come to her second feast. As described above in relation to the LXX, it is difficult to read genderqueerness in this scene because of Additions C and D. These Additions have fundamentally changed the character of Esther's action in the AT because Esther asked for eloquent speech and for her words to be found favourable, both of which she displays here. Ahasuerus is portrayed in the same way as in the LXX and MT. He offers her a request and consents to her petition.

Chapter seven in the AT has many differences from the LXX and MT. The AT appears to continue the theme of lessening Esther's authority and strength. At 7:2 the text includes a verse not included in the MT or LXX: 'Esther struggled with her reply, because the adversary was before her eyes, and God gave her courage as she called upon him.' This is similar in content to D.8, but none of the other ancient versions attest to a verse of this kind here. This immediately reminds the reader that in the AT it is God, not Esther, who is orchestrating the plot and manufacturing Esther's success, because she was incapable of succeeding on her own. Like Additions C and D, in our reading, we can interpret this as significantly gendering Esther's portrayal.

The version of 7:6 attested in the AT is markedly different to this verse in the MT and LXX.[198] It is an expansion which appears to be similar in tone to 7:4, as Esther seems to be

[198] See Appendix C.

placating Ahasuerus to achieve the best outcome. However, as discussed above, this can be attributed to divine action as it follows Additions C and D. In our reading of the expansion at 7:6, Esther comes across as fearful and timid. Ahasuerus's angry response at 7:5 to the news that a villain is in his midst makes Esther immediately reconsider her words. She states, 'Do not be angry, lord, for it is enough that I have found your conciliation. Enjoy your meal, O King, and tomorrow I will do according to your word.' She says this upon seeing Ahasuerus's anger, as she fears what may happen. Again, in our queer reading, this promotes a powerful male/timid female dichotomy. It seems likely that this is a continuation of the portrayal of Esther's hesitancy and fear, as portrayed in 5:5 in the AT. The angry depiction of Ahasuerus continues in this scene. At 7:9(7) and elsewhere, the AT shows the king as being much more emotional. He exhibits anger and vexation as well as appearing upset, and he 'leaps up' (ἀνεπήδησε) as opposed to 'rising up' as in the LXX and MT (ἐξανέστη; קום).[199]

At 7:8, the AT employs a verb with the same root to that used in the LXX, ἐκβιάζῃ to describe what the king believes Haman is trying to do to Esther. However, this verb in the AT is not quite as forceful as that of the LXX (βιάζῃ), as it has the meanings 'to force out,' 'dislodge,' and 'expel' (LS: 236). This verb is much closer to the MT's use of לִכְבּוֹשׁ. This means that, unlike the LXX, rape is not the immediately implied action, but instead, assault generally. This is less gendered than in the LXX.

[199] Day, with Dorothy, identifies that here the king is being portrayed as more of a sympathetic and emotional character (1995: 125, 127).

The AT's version of chapter eight is rather different to the other ancient versions. This interpretation differs in structure and content, as will now be discussed. Rather remarkably, the AT entirely removes Esther from 8:1 (7:15). The text reads, 'So the king called Mardochaios and granted him all that belonged to Haman.' This is markedly different from the MT, LXX, Josephus's version and the Vulgate which all state that the king gave Haman's property to Esther. Subsequently, Mordecai petitions the king to have Haman's edict reversed, and then it is to Mordecai, not Esther, that the affairs of the kingdom are entrusted (7:17). Esther appears to have been completely removed from this scene, as 8:3-8 is not included in the AT.

The AT then jumps forward to a version of 9:12-14. Esther petitions the king with a remarkable statement: 'Allow me to punish my enemies with bloodshed.' (7:18). She then petitions for Haman's children to be executed, though the AT does not describe this with direct speech from Esther. The king states, 'let it be done' (7:19) and at 7:20, the text reads, 'so she struck the enemies in great numbers'. This is a different kind of petition than previously made by Esther in the AT. She does not first ask whether she has been found favourable, and so she does not make a conditional request. This request is direct and short. Furthermore, her action does not fall within the remit of the divine assistance that she requested in Additions C and D. Her request also does not focus on what her people should be allowed to do, but what she wants to do. That she performs this action herself is unusual as it is rather different from the MT and LXX and, as it is not included as something she asked God for assistance with, we can interpret that she used her own agency.

Furthermore, this speech from Esther appears to contrast with her depiction in the AT, which has granted her less agency. Thus, these verses offer a rare glimpse of a queer Esther in what has otherwise been a highly gendered text. Many critics argue that Esther is bloodthirsty and vindictive here (cf. Day 1995: 143). However, examples of biblical figures punishing their enemies to death is hardly an uncommon feature of Hebrew Bible texts. We can argue that the tendency to label Esther as 'bloodthirsty' or 'vindictive' is based on a false tension between her gender and her behaviour. Indeed, it may be the case that we can interpret Esther as 'masculinised' here.[200] The AT text does not make a value judgment about Esther's behaviour, and as such, we cannot argue that Esther's action is viewed negatively. Furthermore, this portrayal of Esther runs counter to many of the examples in the AT which limit Esther's authority, confidence and power.

The AT's version of 9:12-13 in situ is different from the MT and LXX's versions.[201] Ahasuerus does not ask Esther what she wants, as he does elsewhere. Rather he only asks how her people have fared. She then responds in a like manner to the LXX, as she asks directly for her people to be allowed to 'destroy and plunder whomever they want.' (7:46). Ahasuerus grants her request. As discussed above, because this petition was lodged after Additions C and D, it is difficult to view this as an expression of Esther's agency, but rather divine intervention.

[200] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.
[201] See Appendix C.

To summarise, the AT's version of the scenes featuring Esther and Ahasuerus are significantly gendered because they adhere to the gender binary with one exception: 7:20. The key features of the AT text that cause this gendering are Additions C and D which, as in the LXX, portray Esther petitioning God for assistance because she is not physically or emotionally capable of achieving success. This colours our genderqueer reading of Esther's action in chapters five and seven of the AT because we view her behaviour in light of her request to God for aid. However, unlike the LXX, the main text of the AT does not contrast significantly with this material. Rather, in much of the text, Esther's portrayal continues or supports that in the Additions. 7:20 is one exception to this, as Esther performs an action not included in her petition to God: she asks that she be allowed to punish her enemies, rather than asking for someone else to punish them. However, it appears that this is the exception, rather than the rule. Ahasuerus is characterised as a cisnormative ruler, with some satire directed at him, like in the MT.

### *8.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase*

The version of the scenes between Ahasuerus and Esther in Josephus's version includes the Greek Additions. This paraphrase often agrees with the AT against the MT or LXX. Like the AT and LXX, his version excludes 5:1-2. As will be shown here, the portrayal of Esther in this version is very like the other Greek versions, but Josephus tends to emphasise Esther's physical appearance more than the other versions. She is depicted as a remarkably pretty, delicate and feeble woman who is too scared of Ahasuerus to succeed on her own.

Ahasuerus is depicted similarly to the LXX as there is less satire directed against him in Josephus's version than in the MT and AT. Thus, he is cast as a binary male.

Josephus's version of the phrase 'finding favour' at 2:9 (11: 199) is, τὴν χάριν τοῦ προσώπου τὰς ὄψεις τῶν θεωμένων μᾶλλον ἐπάγεσθαι. This unusually equates נשא with ἐπάγεσθαι, 'bring to oneself' (LS: 278), which is slightly different in force from the LXX and AT's versions. There are several different ways one could translate ἐπάγεσθαι, including 'to procure for oneself' or 'to bring on'. These meanings indicate that it is active in force. However, Josephus makes the point that it is Esther's beauty and the 'grace of her countenance' that 'draws' or 'attracts' those who look at her, perhaps in keeping with the tradition of the Hellenistic novel (Feldman 1970: 149). It is unclear if one is supposed to see activity on Esther's part. Rather, it seems that this phrase does not depict Esther doing something to obtain favour. She is instead passively the object of others' gaze.[202] In our reading of this text, we are struck by the cisnormative thrust of this verse, because the focus is on Esther's appearance.

The other instances of the phrase 'finding favour' in *Esther* are not present in Josephus's paraphrase. Furthermore, Esther has little direct discourse in his version of the scenes featuring her and Ahasuerus. Rather, Josephus narratively describes that Ahasuerus asked

[202] For further information on Josephus's approach to biblical women, see Betsy Halpern-Amaru, 1988, and Louis H. Feldman, 1970. Contra to this position is Tal Ilan, 2016. Feldman suggests that Josephus was keen to not mark Esther out as a chosen favourite of Hegai, which may be why he paraphrased this verse quite differently, though he offers little evidence to support his argument (1970: 146).

Esther what she wants, and then the narrator explains what Esther asked for. However, this approach does not remove Esther's agency or authority.

Josephus's version indicates that the king did have sexual intercourse with the women vying for the position of queen. The verb used to describe Ahasuerus's interaction with the women is πλησιάζω, 'come near' (LS: 647) which has an idiomatic meaning of sexual relations (11.202). That he introduces this theme is significant, as it is not indicated in any of the other ancient versions. Though the text does not explicitly state it, it could be argued that Esther had sex with Ahasuerus in Josephus's version. At 2:17, Josephus replaces the Hebrew 'she obtained favour and kindness', with ἡσθεὶς αὐτῇ, 'he was pleased with her'. Though this version makes Ahasuerus the subject, the verb in the nominative aorist passive could imply that he was 'being' pleased by her. Thus, she was actively making him pleased with her, perhaps in a sexual way. However, before we can judge Ahasuerus's licentiousness, it is detailed in this version that Ahasuerus then 'lawfully' (*νομίμως*) took Esther to be his wife (11.202), and hosted a month-long marriage celebration. As discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, the preoccupation with legality and adherence to the law is a dominant theme in Josephus's version.[203] Ahasuerus is depicted as carefully following his obligations as king, and thus he acts logically and properly. Like the LXX, the text does not appear to satirise him in these scenes. This is interesting, because scholars of the MT *Esther* often argue that the supposed sexual aspect of the search for a new queen is satirical (Fox 1991a: 209; Levenson 1997: 54). It does not appear that this is the case in

[203] See chapters 6.5 and 7.5.

Josephus's version. To read this through a genderqueer lens, Ahasuerus is portrayed as a cisnormative male ruler who determines who he sleeps with and who he wants to marry.

Addition C is much shorter in Josephus's version than in the LXX and AT. As Ilan argues, 'Esther, a weak woman, prays to God for the courage to be able to go before the king.' (2017: 178-179). Josephus's version includes detail that Esther petitioned God to have 'mercy', ἐλεηθῆναι, on her, and for her words to appear to be persuasive to the king, δόξαι… πιθανὴν… τοὺς λόγους (11.232). This is the same as in the LXX and AT, and thus this Addition significantly affects what follows. Unlike the LXX and AT's version of Addition C, Esther goes on to ask God to make her appearance παρακαλοῦσαν τὸ δὲ εἶδος εὐπρεπεστέραν τῆς τάχιον οὖσαν, 'more beautiful than ever before'. This clearly confirms that Esther's appearance continued to garner her success in Josephus's narrative, but also that God was responsible for her physical resplendence. As Ilan points out, 'Whereas in the Septuagint version she herself takes the trouble to ensure that her appearance is as striking as possible, in Josephus she needs God's help to do so.' (2017: 179). Josephus renders מַלְכוּת/δοξης, 'royalty'/ 'glory' (5:1) by explaining that Esther dressed 'in a manner befitting the queen'. Esther's appearance is again shown to be of primary importance, and is thus represented like the AT's version. Like in the LXX and AT, Josephus's version depicts Esther needing support from her handmaidens. Her face was flushed and she was 'adorned by a soft and majestic beauty' (11.234). The use of the verb ἐπικειμένη, literally 'to lie on' or 'be imposed', implies divine agency acting on Esther to make her appearance beautiful. Like

Josephus's version of 2:9, Esther is here portrayed cisnormatively, like in the LXX and AT. She is depicted romantically as a damsel in distress.

As in the LXX and AT, Esther immediately faints on seeing Ahasuerus's anger and is seized by paralysis (11.236). Ahasuerus comforts her gently, as he does in the LXX and AT. 11.239 displays another example of Josephus's concern for the law, as Ahasuerus is depicted as putting the rod into Esther's hand and stretching his staff over her neck, 'in a manner prescribed by the law' (11.239). Ahasuerus continues to act in an appropriate manner for his status, as Esther continues to act in an appropriate manner for her gender. As in the Greek versions, it is made explicit that God intervened to change Ahauserus's heart to gentleness (11:237). Here, however, it is introduced with Josephus's standard way of introducing reflections on divine agency affecting mortal affairs, 'I think' οἶμαι.[204] Rather unusually, Ahasuerus's words to Esther are markedly different from 5:3 in the other ancient versions (11:241). The text reads: 'he encouraged Esther to be of good cheer and to hope for the best, for, he said, he would grant her even half of the kingdom if she desired it.' This contrasts with the more formal response given by the king in the other ancient versions. At 5:5, Josephus's paraphrase is the only ancient version that does not indicate the king's desire to do as Esther had asked as soon as possible. 11:242 in Josephus's text simply states, 'he consented to it'. This depicts normative gender roles between Esther and Ahasuerus as her needs are less important than his, and he does not need to give much heed to them.

[204] cf. Spilsbury and Seeman 2017: 42, 77

Similarly to the LXX, Josephus's paraphrase employs the verb βιάζῃ to indicate the violence Ahasuerus believed Haman wielded against Esther. As discussed above, this verb has connotations of sexual assault and rape. Unlike the LXX, Josephus has already introduced an erotic theme into his narrative as discussed above. In our reading, this indicates that Ahasuerus believed that Haman was attempting to physically subdue his wife in a dishonourable manner, which upset him greatly. Ahasuerus's concern for Esther's honour, intimately connected with his own honour, shows that he is firmly fixed within the gender binary.

As mentioned above, Josephus does not use direct discourse for Esther's requests to Ahasuerus. This means that their request-response pattern is described narratively, and Esther is successful when she petitions Ahasuerus (11.241-243; 262-264, 269-271). Most of Esther's requests to Ahasuerus are very similar in tone to the LXX and AT and thus there is no need to study them each individually. However, 8:4-5 and 9:25 are not included at all in Josephus's paraphrase. As with the LXX and AT's versions, Esther's success must be analysed considering Josephus's versions of Additions C and D. Interestingly, Esther's request at 9:13 includes a curious insertion that she 'begged', which is not displayed in any other ancient translation. Here, she continues to struggle to achieve her goals, and thus she begs for Ahasuerus to help. She has not gained full autonomy.

To conclude, Josephus's paraphrase is very like the other two Greek versions because it includes versions of Additions C and D. These Additions have the same effect on the gender

roles in Esther and Ahasuerus's scenes as in the AT and LXX. Esther is portrayed as a weak and feeble yet dazzlingly beautiful woman who is not physically or emotionally strong enough to complete her tasks. Ahasuerus is portrayed positively as a male, gentile ruler. These two characters have a binary relationship throughout the text, and thus they cannot be read as genderqueer/non-binary figures.

### *8.6 - The Vulgate*

As with many of the sections of this chapter, the relationship between the MT and the Vulgate appears to be a close one. There are not many differences between these two versions of *Esther* in the scenes featuring the eponymous heroine and Ahasuerus. This is notable, because the Vulgate showed differences in the portrayal of Mordecai and Esther's scenes. As mentioned in chapter 7.6, in the Vulgate, the Greek Additions were grouped together and moved to the end of the text. This means that most of Esther's scenes with Ahasuerus in chapter five and onwards do not follow Additions C and D in the narrative, and thus they are not coloured by this material.

The Latin Vulgate renders the phrase 'finding favour' in 2:9, 5:8, 7:3 and 8:5 with the verb, *invenit* paired with *gratiam*, 'found favour'. In 2:17 the verb is unusually amended to *habuitque* and paired again with *gratiam*. *Invenit* has a wide semantic range, with meanings that include 'to find out', 'to discover', 'to earn' and 'to acquire' (L&S), some of which are more active than others. In this verse, it is usually translated as 'found', indicating a slightly

less active tone than 'acquire' or 'earn', but it is important to remember that the semantic possibilities for this verb are numerous. *habuitque* has meanings that include 'to have', 'to hold', 'to keep', 'to possess', 'to cherish', 'to entertain' and 'to contain' (L&S) among others. These are quite different to the meanings ascribed to *invenit. Habuitque gratiam* can be translated as 'have favour' or 'possess favour'. This difference in these verbs also coincides with the fact that 2:17 is the only example in the MT where חֵן and חסד are paired together. Like *invenit*, *habuitque* also appears to have an active range of meanings, but rather than indicating that Esther actively receives favour, it shows that she continued to keep favour. The Vulgate appears to represent this phrase similarly to the Hebrew, with Esther displaying agency and autonomy in this text. To a genderqueer reader, this can be read as her acting outside of the binary norms, thus becoming a queer character.

2:15 contains a curious expansion to the verse: 'for she was exceeding fair, and her incredible beauty made her appear agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all'.[205] This is similar to Josephus's paraphrase of this phrase. This version explicitly states that it was her beauty that caused her to appear agreeable. Somewhat similarly, 5:2 is rendered *placuit oculis euis*, 'she pleased his eyes', rather than 'she found favour'. This is unusual because 5:2 in the MT employs the phrase נָשְׂאָה חֵן. This, coupled with the detail at 5:1 that Esther clothed herself with *regalibus vestimentis*, 'royal apparel', like the AT and Josephus's version, indicates a concern for Esther's physical appearance. Thus, 5:1-2 may signify that Ahasuerus granted Esther clemency because of the way she looked, rather than because of

[205] See Appendix C.

her actions. This is rather different from the MT, and in our reading, it prompts us to view Esther in a cisnormative light.

At 5:6 Esther's authority and poise starkly contrasts with her husband's lack thereof, as he is portrayed as a drunk. The Vulgate's translation contrasts with the other ancient translations,[206] as it states that the asked Esther what her request was, *postquam vinum biberat abundanter*, 'after he had drunk wine plentifully.' This is also a feature of 7:2, as the text reads that the king asked her *postquam vino incaluerat*, 'after he was warm with wine'. These two examples increase the satire directed at Ahasuerus in this version compared to the MT. Furthermore, at 7:5, when Ahasuerus responds to Esther's statement that there was an evil antagonist in their midst, the Vulgate includes a phrase not included in any of the other ancient versions. Ahasuerus first asks, 'who is he', as in the Hebrew, but then he adds, *et cuius potentiae*, 'and of what power', that he could do this. This is incredibly ironic, as it is with his power that Ahasuerus allowed this to happen. That Ahasuerus is ignorant of the power Haman used, as it was the king's own power, highlights his deficiency as king.

The verb used by Ahasuerus at 7:8 to describe how he perceives Haman's action against Esther is *opprimere*. This verb has the meanings, to 'smother,' 'stifle,' 'fall on,' 'overpower' and 'subdue' (L&S). Notably, this word does not appear to have connotations of sexual violence or oppression, and it is thus more akin to the MT and AT's respective versions of the verb. However, this word still indicates that Haman was trying to exert power over

[206] See Appendix C.

Esther which Ahasuerus takes offence at. A gendered honour/shame dynamic can be detected here.

The Vulgate includes an explanatory insertion at the beginning of 8:3: 'And not content with these things…'. The granting of gifts to Esther and Mordecai from Ahasuerus is not sufficient, as her people are still at risk of annihilation. Esther now understands what more she needs to do to achieve her desired goal. She has tried to use her words alone, but evidently something more explosive is necessary to motivate Ahasuerus to act.

To summarise, the Vulgate is often very close to the MT's version of the scenes featuring Esther and Ahasuerus, but displays significant differences in its version of 2:15 and 5:1-2. These differences emphasise Esther's appearance over her action. This is rather different from the Hebrew text which, after 2:7, does not mention Esther's appearance again. The additional mentions of Esther's appearance in the Vulgate are reminiscent of the Greek Additions and Josephus's version. The focus on Esther's beauty means that her appearance, not her actions, guaranteed her success. It is thus difficult to view her as a genderqueer character when she is described as such. However, the rest of the scenes featuring Esther and Ahasuerus match the MT, so the examples that illustrate Esther behaving successfully outnumber mentions of her beauty. Because of this, when reading these scenes in the Vulgate through a queer lens, we can often view Esther as a genderqueer character who uses her skill and logic to bring about the salvation of her people. This text appears to increase satire of Ahasuerus by describing him as drunk on two occasions, so his incapacity as ruler is emphasised more than in the MT. Ahasuerus is portrayed as a binary character

who fulfils the role of gentile ruler. However, this depiction is satirised, because he is clearly lacking in this regard.

### *8.7 - Conclusion*

When we read these scenes through a genderqueer lens, the ancient versions can be divided into two groups: those that depict Esther cisnormatively, and those that depict her as a non-binary/genderqueer character. Interestingly, in my reading of all the ancient versions, Ahasuerus is depicted as a binary male. He acts like a typical, male, gentile ruler. However, the MT and Vulgate heap satire on him, depicting him as an inefficient king. It is important to note that it does not seem as though Ahasuerus's inability to perform adequately his role as Persian ruler implies that he is somehow subverting his gender role. Rather, when reading him through a genderqueer lens, he appears to be characterised as a fool, rather than as a wise ruler. The LXX and Josephus's paraphrase do not appear to satirise Ahasuerus, and the AT takes a position somewhat in the middle.

The key feature of the versions that depict Esther cisnormatively – the LXX, the AT and Josephus's paraphrase – is that they include Additions C and D. Addition C, which details Esther's petitions to God for aid, and Addition D, which describes her physical and emotional frailty, as well as God's intervention, radically alter these texts' capacity for genderqueer/non-binary reading. When reading these Additions through a genderqueer

lens, we are struck by how gender-normative Esther's behaviour is. In the LXX in particular, Esther's depiction in the Additions markedly contrasts with the 'body' text of this version.

It is easy to see how the Additions affect the capacity for genderqueerness in the ancient Greek versions. Without this material, it is perfectly possible to read Esther and Ahasuerus's scenes as depicting a non-binary Esther in the LXX, and in some but not all areas of the AT. Indeed, the scenes featuring Esther and Ahasuerus display tension between the LXX Additions and the main text of the LXX versions more than for any other characters. Josephus's text is rather different, as outside of the Additions his version tends to espouse a gendered, rather than queer, Esther.

# Chapter 9 - Haman and Zeresh

## *9.1 - Introduction*

The characters of Haman and Zeresh have only two short scenes with one another in *Esther*. Indeed, perhaps because of her rather minor role in the plot, Zeresh has been overlooked by scholars in much of modern academic work on *Esther.* However, Zeresh's small role in the story is not unimportant. On the contrary, Zeresh's brief appearances in the Hebrew text are rather poignant. It appears that the MT, the LXX and the AT can be read in a way which allows Zeresh to be interpreted as a genderqueer/non-binary character, in stark contrast to her husband. As will be shown, Josephus's version features Zeresh so briefly that it is difficult to read her in a genderqueer way. In a rather unusual departure from the MT, the Vulgate does not allow her to be read as genderqueer.

## *9.2 - The Masoretic Text*

In the Hebrew text, 5:10-14 and 6:13 are the scenes that feature Haman and Zeresh in conversation with one another. Notably, Zeresh is on both occasions accompanied by Haman's 'friends', or 'wise ones', (חֲכָמָיו / אֹהֲבָיו) and she gives advice to Haman with this group. However, Zeresh is the only character who is explicitly named. Furthermore, the MT appears to depict a curious reversal of fortunes between Haman and his wife, which, like Haman's interactions with Mordecai, demonstrate וְנֶהֱפוֹךְ הוּא (9:1). Zeresh can be read as a non-binary/genderqueer character, in contrast to her husband who desires flattery and subordination from his peers.

It is interesting to note that Haman is introduced at the beginning of 5:10 with the *hithpael* verb וַיִּתְאַפַּק, which has the meanings 'to restrain', 'to hold back' and 'to be strong' (BDB: 67).[207] When one considers Haman's behaviour in the narrative thus far, he has been characterised precisely by his inability to be restrained. This verb will become relevant at 5:13, as will be discussed below. Zeresh and Haman's friends are summoned by Haman, as he וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא, 'sent and fetched for', his friends and his wife (5:10). This pleonasm is rather unusual in this context, as the former would, logically, be sufficient on its own to demonstrate Haman's action. Perhaps the use of two verbs is subtly satirical, but also establishes a power dynamic between Haman and his wife whereby Haman is the summoner and Zeresh is the summoned.[208] Whether Zeresh and the friends are brought in against their will is not mentioned.[209] Notably, Haman's friends are introduced before his wife, perhaps indicating a hierarchy of importance. Thus, from the first verse of this scene, we are presented with binary gender roles between Haman and Zeresh.

Haman goes on to regale his wife and friends with tales of his opulent wealth, the number of his sons and how he was the king's specially-chosen officer (5:11). This is particularly humorous because it is unlikely that Zeresh and the friends were not already aware of these things. Furthermore, he boasts about being the only other male invited to Queen Esther's feast (5:12). Haman's hubris is stark, and in this genderqueer reading, he is

---

[207] Indeed, this verb only occurs in the biblical texts in the *hithpael* form (BDB: 67).
[208] cf. the BSRI, p.67-68.
[209] See Levenson 1997: 92.

attempting to establish his dominance over his wife and friends by displaying his position of power over them.

However, 5:13 appears to shatter the illusion of Haman's power and dominance. He admits that he does not gain any pleasure from his wealth and status when he sees Mordecai sitting in the king's gate. His hatred towards his enemy is so great that he cannot enjoy the things that should bring him immense joy. Mordecai's behaviour means that Haman cannot establish his dominance over public life, only his private life. This emotional response contrasts with the 'restraint' (וַיִּתְאַפַּק) that Haman exhibited at 5:10.

Then, 5:14 challenges the notion that Haman is entirely dominant at home. Zeresh and the friends give him advice on how to deal with his problem. Notably, he does not solicit this advice. Zeresh, named before the friends, (וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֹהֲבָיו), does not wait to be asked before she gives advice, she simply offers her opinion on the matter. The third person feminine singular *qal* verb used in this verse, וַתֹּאמֶר, demonstrates that this suggestion comes directly from Zeresh primarily, and the friends secondarily. Crawford contends, 'his other (male) advisers, appearing as an afterthought in the sentence structure, merely acquiesce to her suggestion.' (1999: 911). This verse contrasts with 5:10, where Haman held the dominant role. Furthermore, this draws a knowledge/ignorance dynamic between Haman and Zeresh, as Haman does not know what to do, yet his wife does. This is similar to Esther and Mordecai's interaction in chapter four, where Mordecai

attempts to use knowledge against Esther to reinstitute the gender binary, but it is she who possesses the requisite knowledge to save her people.[210]

Haman does not verbally respond to Zeresh's advice. Rather, the text reads, 'And the thing pleased Haman, and he built the gallows' (וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הָמָן וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ). He accepts this advice readily as it 'pleases' him. He does not question Zeresh's proposal, or offer his opinion on it. Zeresh suggested that he, יַעֲשׂוּ־עֵץ and then Haman וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ. This parallelism indicates that the power dynamic has shifted. Now Haman immediately does as Zeresh suggests, whereas the opposite was true at 5:10.

Identifying genderqueer behaviour in our reading of Haman and Zeresh is not quite as obvious as in some of the other pairings. Indeed, the brevity of Haman and Zeresh's scene in chapter five portrays a subtle gender dynamic between these characters. Haman behaves as a typically-gendered male, concerned with power and dominance. Zeresh eschews the subordinate position expected of her and participates in the drama in an unexpected way by expressing her opinion. This mirrors the relationships between Ahasuerus and Esther, and Mordecai and Esther. Furthermore, Zeresh's suggestion is accepted without question, further emphasising that she is neither subordinate nor dominant in her relationship with Haman, which we can interpret as genderqueer.

[210] See chapter 7.2.

The second scene between Haman and Zeresh is only one verse long. 6:13 shows a significant shift away from the subtlety of the scene in chapter five. This scene follows Haman's reversal of fortunes with respect to Mordecai, where he has been compelled by his loyalty to the crown to honour Mordecai in a manner he himself desired to be honoured. Haman returns home 'mourning and with his head covered' (6:12), and recounts his sorrows to 'Zeresh his wife and all of his friends' (6:13). In response, Zeresh and the 'wise ones' offer Haman more unsolicited advice. The term אֹהֲבָיו (6:13a) has been replaced by חֲכָמָיו at 6:13b, which could indicate a different group of people to those advising him in the previous chapter. This might explain why the order was reversed, placing Zeresh in second position at 6:13b compared to 6:13a, as these people are speaking to Haman in an official capacity. However, as the advice they give is neither official nor active in nature, i.e. they are not recommending that Haman take a specific course of action, perhaps it is less likely that they are royal advisers. Perhaps the MT author wanted to avoid an exact repetition of 'to his wife Zeresh and all his friends' and so preferred to structure chiastically their names for literary effect[211]. In any case, it seems that Zeresh and the advisers speak together as a group, as the text uses the third person masculine plural verb וַיֹּאמְרוּ. The advice offered at 6:13 sounds like a warning, rather than a suggestion. They state that Haman would not prevail over Mordecai but would כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו using the *qal* infinitive absolute with the imperfect. This emphatically states that Haman would 'surely fall' against Mordecai if he is 'of the seed of the Jews'. Using such strong language is rather different to the scene in

[211] cf. Moore 1971: 66.

chapter five. Previously, they encouraged Haman to build gallows to defeat Mordecai. Here, they say in no uncertain terms that Haman will not prevail.

There are many points to note about this verse. First, the ominous counsel given to Haman by Zeresh and the wise ones is unsolicited. Haman does not ask what he should do nor how to remedy his melancholy. Second, this advice will be proven true. In the next scene, Haman will be put to death on the gallows that he built for Mordecai. Therefore, Zeresh and the 'wise ones' appear to have been granted the power of foresight, as they can see what will take place. Third, Haman does not respond to their guidance at all, either verbally or nonverbally. Their advice is left hanging in the scene, resonating with the reader and establishing the theme of the next scene. Lastly, it is notable that Zeresh and the wise ones are compelled to deliver their opinion to Haman when it clearly is not what he wishes to hear. It is quite radical, as Haman has shown previously how furious he becomes when people behave in a manner that he does not anticipate. This shows a great deal of courage from Zeresh and the wise ones.

Indeed, this scene highlights Zeresh's superior knowledge to that of her husband and that she is not subordinate to him. In this scene, as in the last, Zeresh and the friends do not demonstrate particular gender roles either alongside or in contrast to Haman. Indeed, the polarity appears to be in the depiction of their knowledge in contrast to his ignorance. This mirrors the knowledge/ignorance dynamic between Ahasuerus and Esther, as well as the knowledge/ignorance tension between Esther and Mordecai in chapter four. Politically, there is no reason why Zeresh should possess more knowledge than her husband

concerning his fate, nor why she should be compelled to share this information with him without being asked to do so. Therefore, I suggest that Zeresh's portrayal can be read as non-binary, as she does not engage with her proscribed gender role and instead delivers an unsolicited, damning assessment of Haman's situation.

*9.3 - The Septuagint*

Overall, the LXX's versions of the scenes featuring Haman and Zeresh[212] are very similar to those in the MT. There are only a few noticeable differences between these two versions which do not impact the assessment of the characters as detailed in relation to the MT. This means that the capacity to read Zeresh as genderqueer/non-binary in this text is maintained. The minor differences in this text will now be discussed.

As seen in other chapters of this thesis, the LXX's tendency to remove pleonasms in the Greek and render them with only one verb is seen in the first Haman and Zeresh scene. Rather than instead using וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא (5:10), the LXX has 'called' or 'summoned' (ἐκάλεσεν), which seems to be a logical paraphrase of the Hebrew. The pleonasm אֶת־כְּבוֹד עָשְׁרוֹ 'the glory of his riches', is rendered as τὸν πλοῦτον αὐτου, 'his wealth', and thus it is less emphatic. Furthermore, the LXX does not include an equivalent in Greek for וְרֹב בָּנָיו (5:11). Haman regales Zeresh and his friends with tales of his wealth and elevation by Ahasuerus,

[212] Zeresh's name in the LXX is Zosara.

but not how many sons he had. This means that there is less satire directed at Haman than in the Hebrew. It is made explicit in the LXX that Haman was promoted to the 'first' position in the kingdom by the king, with the infinitive verb πρωτεύειν, 'to be first'. The phrase reads, πρωτεύειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι τῆς βασιλείας, 'to be first and to be leader of the kingdom' (5:11) which is more definitive than the version in the MT. The MT states that Ahasuerus 'elevated [Haman] above all the princes and the servants of the king'. In both the MT and the LXX Haman describes his lofty position, but in the LXX it is absolutely clear that he is second to none in Persia. One would assume from this description that there are binary gender roles between Haman and his wife Zeresh, because of his public standing.

5:14 in the LXX is rendered almost identically to the MT. Zeresh, with Haman's friends, speaks to Haman and offers the unsolicited instruction to build the gallows. The verb in Greek matches the Hebrew as it is the third person singular εἶπεν which indicates that it was Zeresh primarily who was speaking. As in the MT, this can be interpreted as Zeresh behaving in a genderqueer manner. She steps outside of the expected power and gender dynamic to give Haman her opinion, which he then follows without question.

6:13 is also remarkably similar in the LXX and MT versions, including the repetitions and reversal of 'his wife Zeresh and his friends'. Notably, the LXX does not include an equivalent for חֲכָמָיו but instead uses οἱ φιλοι(ς) on both occasions. This makes it clear that it is the same people who were present at 5:10-14. 6:13 in the LXX also features the equation of נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל 'you will surely fall' as πεσὼν πεσῇ, 'you will fall when you fall', which renders the

infinitive absolute and imperfect literally in Greek, in an 'imitation of the Hebrew construction' (Kahana 2005: 267).

However, 6:13 does feature one notable difference from the Hebrew version. Zeresh and the friends explain that Haman will fall before Mordecai, ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ 'because a living God is with him'. This difference fits with the overall theologising tone of the LXX *Esther.* However, the LXX does not often make amendments of this kind to the 'body' text, preferring instead to rely on the Additions to include God in this text.

The LXX's version of the scenes between Haman and Zeresh are markedly similar to the MT. This means that, when using a queer lens, Zeresh can be interpreted as a non-binary character. This is because she first gives advice which was not solicited and which Haman takes, and secondly, she offers a grim prediction that comes to pass, and which, again, was not solicited. Zeresh appears to possess knowledge which her husband does not, which is ironic given his position as primary in the kingdom.

### *9.4 - The Alpha Text*

Like the LXX, the AT also removes the duplicated verbs at 5:10, replacing it with συνήγαγε, which can mean, 'to bring together' or 'to assemble'[213] (LSJ). These meanings have a similar

[213] On the latter translation, see Moore 1971: 59.

semantic range to the verbs used in the MT and LXX. As in the LXX, the text appears to satirise Haman less than the MT does. Furthermore, at 5:10 Haman also includes his sons in this group, listing first his friends, then his sons, then his wife Zeresh. Interestingly, the AT does not include 5:11, and thus Haman does not brag to his wife, friends and sons about his achievements, wealth and virility. Instead, the text moves to 5:12, detailing Haman's boasts about being invited to Esther's feast. That Haman tells his friends and family about being invited to Esther's feast does not sound as arrogant and ridiculous as telling them about his wealth and achievements, and thus the AT does not appear to satirise him, like the LXX.

Haman's admission of emotional vulnerability at 5:13 in the AT is slightly different to the MT and LXX.[214] He admits to the friends, his sons and Zeresh that he suffers distress (λυπεῖ) when he 'sees Mordecai the Judean in the gates of the king, and he does not bow to me.' The MT and LXX depict Haman petulantly stating that his wealth and his glory mean nothing as soon as he sets eyes on Mordecai. In contrast, the AT appears to portray Haman more sympathetically. First, Haman's distress is not connected to not enjoying his wealth and glory. Second, the use of the verb λυπη is rather different in tone from the LXX's version of this verse, in which Haman states that his situation οὐκ ἀρέσκει. Not being 'pleased' by something is rather different to being 'caused distress', with the former having resonances of hubris and childishness, and the latter appearing to be more personal and hurtful. Furthermore, the specific detail given by Haman in this version that he is caused distress when Mordecai does not bow down to him highlights that Mordecai is still contravening the

[214] See Appendix D.

law and, technically, Haman's response is justified. This justification means that although Haman is being emotionally open about his feelings towards Mordecai, they are firmly situated within the power dynamic dictated by the hierarchical structure of the kingdom.

In the AT, it is only Zeresh who speaks to Haman at 5:14. Unlike the MT and LXX, the friends mentioned at 5:10 are not included, and neither are mention of Haman's sons. This means that her action is even more stark, as it is unsolicited and she speaks alone. Zeresh's advice to Haman in the AT is longer than in the MT or LXX. She offers a logical solution to Haman's distress by pointing out to him that 'the king has allowed you to destroy the Judeans and the gods have given you a day of destruction to take revenge on them…'. This gives the explicit reason why Zeresh suggests such action, and also situates it within the preceding narrative as justified. Both the king and Haman's gods have established it so. Zeresh is depicted as a genderqueer character here because she gives her advice without being asked, but her advice is clearly grounded in what has come previously. She ignores the hegemonic power dynamic between herself and her husband and points out to him what should be self-evident, highlighting a knowledge/ignorance dynamic between them. She then gives him her advice, which like in the other versions he immediately follows without question or comment. This contrasts with Haman's attempt to establish himself as the dominant character over his friends, sons and wife at the opening of this scene.

6:13 is slightly different in the AT to the MT and LXX. 6:13a (6:21) does not include 'the friends' and Zeresh is again the only named character. This means that Zeresh occupies a primary position alongside Haman in the narrative. However, 'the wise ones' are included

later in this verse (6:13b [6:22]), which agrees with the MT's version. The content of this warning is rather different in this version. Rather than foretelling Haman's demise and connecting it with Mordecai's ethnicity, they state aloud what Haman's current situation is. According to Zeresh and the wise men, Haman 'spoke evil about him' (λαλεῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ κακά) and thus 'evil things have been coming to you' (προσπορεύεταί σοι τὰ κακά). Because of this, they conclude that he should stop his behaviour, 'because God is among them.' (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐν αὐτοῖς). When reading this through a queer lens, a number of issues come to mind. 6:13b (6:22) employs the third person singular aorist active form of λεγω, thus indicating that it was primarily Zeresh who spoke. This is unlike the MT and LXX, both of which use a plural verb.[215] Like the other versions, the AT depicts Zeresh as speaking without being asked for her opinion, which displays agency and action. However, rather differently to the MT and LXX, Zeresh does not foretell that Haman will fall before Mordecai. Instead, she points out a connection between Haman's behaviour and his current bad luck, suggesting that perhaps he should cease his behaviour. Consequently, Zeresh can be read as a genderqueer character because she does not wait to be asked for her opinion. She leads the wise men, and she gives her advice, yet she has not become 'masculinised'.

[215] See Appendix D.

*9.5 - Josephus's Paraphrase*

Like the LXX and AT, Josephus's version does not feature the pleonasm 'summoned and brought in', and instead uses the same verb as the LXX, ἐκάλεσεν (11.245). Like the LXX and AT, this appears to remove the humour and satire directed at Haman. In this text, Haman summons his wife Zeresh[216] and his friends, but similarly to the AT he does not regale them with tales of his riches and virility. As in all the other versions, he boasts about being honoured by Esther and invited to dine with her at her feast. The wording on 11.246 follows the LXX in that Haman reveals to his wife and friends that he was μὴ ἀρέσκεσθαι when he saw Mordecai in the courtyard. Like the LXX, this portrays Haman as being both emotionally vulnerable and ridiculous.

Josephus does not include the friends at 5:14 (11.246) like the AT's version of this scene. However, the brevity of Zeresh's role is such that one could be forgiven for completely missing it. Zeresh simply suggests that Haman build the gallows, which he then does. Zeresh appears to have been reduced to a functional tool to explain how the gallows came to be built.

Josephus increases Haman's emotional vulnerability in his version of 6:13 (11.259) more than in any other version. Indeed, Haman cries (μετὰ δακρύων) as he recounts to his wife and friends what happened. However, Zeresh does not get the opportunity to give much

[216] Zeresh is named Gazasa in Josephus's paraphrase.

advice to her husband. The text reads 'they said' (ἔλεγον) which without the repetition of 'his wife Zeresh and the wise ones' means that Zeresh's voice becomes lost in the group. The group points out that 'he would no longer be able to get revenge on Mordecai, for God was with him.' The addition of God in this verse is similar to the LXX and AT, but Josephus's version is much briefer. This advice displays knowledge and foresight that Haman does not have. However, because Zeresh does not have a voice here, it is difficult to view her as genderqueer.

Overall then, Josephus's version of the scenes featuring Haman and Zeresh have significantly minimised Zeresh's role. The advice that she gives in chapter five is much shorter, and she is not given a voice apart from the group in chapter six. Though Josephus also uses the third person singular verb 'she said' in chapter five, and Zeresh gives her advice to Haman without being asked for it, her role is considerably reduced. Thus, it is not clear whether she can be interpreted as being genderqueer or not.

*9.6 - The Vulgate*

This version is very similar to the MT throughout its rendering of the scenes with Haman and Zeresh. Like the LXX, this version does not feature the pleonasm 'sent and fetched for' in the Hebrew, but instead uses the verb *convocavit*, 'assemble' or 'summon' (L&S), which has a similar semantic range to the Greek verb used here in the LXX, ἐκάλεσεν.

At 5:13 the Vulgate text includes extra material to the MT and LXX. The Latin reads, *et cum haec omnia habeam nihil me habere puto,* which sounds rather like an admission of arrogance from Haman. He accepts that he is in a very fortunate position though his emotions make him feel as though he is not. This introspective Haman is rather dissimilar from the other interpretations of his character. Again, Haman is emotionally vulnerable in front of his wife and friends and thus opens himself up to be advised by a genderqueer character.

5:14 in the Vulgate is dissimilar to the MT and LXX because the verb used in the Latin is *responderuntque*. This is the third person plural form of the verb 'to answer' which is dissimilar both in semantic range and form to that used in the MT and LXX. The Hebrew and Greek versions use a singular verb, indicating that it was Zeresh primarily who spoke to Haman. Secondly, the Latin uses a verb that means 'to answer', whereas the Hebrew and Greek use a verb which means 'to say'. This is key, because at 5:13 Haman does not ask a question that Zeresh and the friends answer, and thus Zeresh's opinion was not solicited. This difference in the Vulgate has the effect of it appearing that Zeresh and the friends – who are one group in this version – have had their opinion sought by Haman and to whom they are duly responding.

6:13 in the Vulgate displays a clarification in the Latin for the confusing 'wise ones' and 'friends' detail in the Hebrew. The verse opens with Haman speaking to his wife and his friends, but it is the 'friends', the 'wise ones' and his wife who answer him. Thus, the Latin specifically indicates that they are two different groups of people. This group of advisers

who Haman employs would be expected to possess knowledge or give advice that Haman did not himself possess. It seems that this group is there specifically to advise Haman. This means that Zeresh's role as the one who possesses the correct information in contrast to her husband is lost, and her advice is not unsolicited. Therefore, she does not appear to be portrayed as a genderqueer character.

### *9.7 - Conclusion*

In chapter four, I highlighted how Zeresh was interpreted by a few modern critics as a subversive character, but, overall, she was completely ignored by most scholars. As this chapter has shown, there is much to be gained from applying a queer lens to reading the scenes between Haman and Zeresh. Therefore, I contend that ignoring Zeresh in *Esther* criticism, particularly gender-focused criticism, is not justified. As illustrated in this chapter, in the MT, the LXX and the AT, Zeresh displays genderqueer/non-binary qualities. This is for a number of reasons. In my queer reading, Haman attempts to institute a power dynamic between himself and his wife, where he summons her and she comes at his call. Haman continues this theme by regaling his wife and his friends about his wealth, virility and the glory bestowed on him by the king. This introduces a binary dynamic between himself and his wife and friends, where he is the powerful and dominant character in contrast to them. However, this is challenged at 5:13 when he admits that he cannot enjoy any of these things whenever he sees Mordecai.

This glimpse of emotional vulnerability from Haman opens to queering the relationship between Zeresh and Haman. The following verse sees Zeresh, supported by the friends, stepping outside of the power dynamic that her husband has attempted to institute. She speaks to him and gives him a suggestion for how to solve his problem. This is notable, because Haman did not ask for help, nor did he seek Zeresh's advice. However, Haman is 'pleased' by her suggestion and he immediately does it. There are parallels here with Memuchan and Ahasuerus at 1:16-21. Memuchan gives advice to Ahasuerus, the king is 'pleased' by it, and immediately gives the go-ahead. Therefore, that Memuchan and Zeresh could act in such similar ways indicates that Zeresh's actions are not 'gendered' but genderqueer, in my reading. This is because reading Zeresh and Memuchan's similar behaviour through a non-binary/genderqueer lens enables us to understand their actions without the confines of the gender binary. Zeresh is given more important actions in chapter six, where she possesses knowledge and foresight that her husband does not. Again, she bravely speaks without being asked to and foretells what is to come.

How are we to interpret Haman's gender in these scenes? As noted, he appears to attempt to institute the gender binary at 5:10. But can we read his acquiescence to Zeresh's suggestion as queerness, or as an expression of his flawed masculinity? As discussed in relation to Ahasuerus, in our queer reading there is a difference between behaving in a genderqueer/non-binary way, and being a deficient cisnormative character that is satirised in the text for this. For example, Ahasuerus is the king of 127 provinces, yet he cannot make decisions without others' aid, which is ridiculed in the text. The same appears to be the case here. Haman is not behaving queerly by taking Zeresh's advice, but rather, he is being

subtly derided for: a) finding Mordecai's behaviour so enraging; b) not knowing how to cope with his rage; and c) being dependent on the advice of others, specifically his wife, when it was decreed in chapter one that wives should give honour to their husbands (1:18, 20). This appears to be confirmed in chapter six, as it is shown that Haman is doomed, and thus his actions have been flawed all along.

The MT takes the most satirical approach to Haman and Zeresh's scenes. This comedy is lessened or removed in the LXX, AT, Josephus's paraphrase and the Vulgate. This does not affect the capacity to read Zeresh's behaviour as genderqueer/non-binary. However, it does affect how we read Haman's behaviour. The satirical elements of the Hebrew text increase my ability to read his behaviour as an attempt to impose the gender binary and a strict power dynamic. However, Zeresh's genderqueerness does not exist solely in contrast to Haman's behaviour. His emotional vulnerability at 5:13, depicted similarly across the versions, offers a challenge to the hegemonic binary, and thus Zeresh can step outside of this structure.

The AT clearly has the greatest capacity for reading Zeresh as a genderqueer character. The text's use of the third person singular verb at 5:14 and at 6:13b (6:22), where Zeresh speaks alone, and the length of her advice at 5:14 verse all indicate a strong, confident and powerful role for this character. This version of Zeresh is even more striking than in the MT and LXX.

Interestingly, the Vulgate offers a slightly different version of events which affects Zeresh's ability to be read as genderqueer. Using a plural verb instead of the singular at 5:14, and indicating that Zeresh was replying to Haman, reduce the impact of her action. Furthermore, she speaks in chapter six with Haman's advisers, i.e. people employed by him to tell him what to do, and she is not in possession of knowledge in contrast to her ignorant husband, but rather she stands in the background to the men giving their advice. Thus, the Vulgate is a difficult text in which to read Zeresh as being genderqueer. Josephus's paraphrase is also difficult to read as genderqueer. This is because Zeresh's role has been significantly shortened. Though she is named in Josephus's version of chapter six, she is not named again when the group speaks, and therefore, the sense that she is included in the group is lost.

## Chapter 10 – Conclusions on the Ancient Versions of *Esther*

Chapters five to nine of this thesis discussed in detail the relationships between Esther and Mordecai; Ahasuerus and Esther; Haman and Zeresh; and Ahasuerus and Vashti in the ancient versions of *Esther*. I analysed these relationships for their capacity to be read in a genderqueer/non-binary way, using a queer framework. The results of this study have been mixed. Some characters have been portrayed in a similar manner across the ancient versions, all of which do not lend themselves to queer reading, such as Ahasuerus and Haman. However, there are other characters who can be read as genderqueer in some versions, but have been realised differently in other versions and so cannot be read in this way. Significantly, there is not one character in this study who can be read as genderqueer/non-binary in every ancient version.

As I have shown in Part Two, Vashti, Mordecai, Zeresh and Esther all have the capacity to be read in a genderqueer manner in some of the ancient versions. For Vashti, Esther and Zeresh, their queerness comes primarily from their refusal to adhere to the norms expected of them, whether they be identity norms, gender norms or political norms, or a combination of all three. Vashti actively rejects the behaviour expected of her, which provokes an intense reaction from those who are firmly positioned within the ruling hierarchy and hold the primary positions in this hierarchy: Ahasuerus and his royal consort. Esther and Zeresh do not reject the hierarchy or power structures of Ahasuerus's Persia. Rather, these characters reject the gender binary by behaving in a manner that is not stereotypically 'male' or 'female'. Similarly, Mordecai can be read as a genderqueer

character in relation to Esther in some versions, but notably this happens only when Esther refigures the dynamic between them.

In contrast to the queer possibilities afforded by our reading of Mordecai, Zeresh, Esther and Vashti, the characters of Haman and Ahasuerus are never capable of being read in a non-binary/genderqueer way. They fulfil stereotypes of Persian (that is, foreign) rulers, and as such, there are no aspects of their personality that lend themselves to a non-normative reading. There are, on occasion, glimpses of Haman's emotional vulnerability. Haman and Ahasuerus are subject to a great deal of satire, particularly in the MT and Vulgate. Satire of Ahasuerus and Haman focuses on their hubris and their inability to behave in a manner befitting their station. This emphasises how one is expected to behave when holding a position of power in Persia. This satire cannot be read in a queer way, as it reinforces rather than challenges the hegemonic gender binary.

Mordecai's insistence on instructing Esther and attempting to make her submissive portrays him as gender-normative until 4:16 when he submits to Esther's authority. Following this in the MT, the 'body' text of the LXX and in the Vulgate, Mordecai defers to Esther and supports her. Unlike the other male characters who are satirised in these versions for displaying non-normative behaviour, Mordecai is not. This means that he is not a deficient male, and thus we can read hints of queerness in his portrayal.

As mentioned in many chapters of Part Two, there are sometimes minor differences between the versions – for example, how a verb is presented between versions – which can

radically alter how a character is portrayed, and subsequently their capacity to be read in a genderqueer way. There are also some big differences in characterisation between versions that have significant impacts on non-normativity. It is important to ask why it is that characters who are read as queering the norms in one text cannot be read as such in another. Most often, it is the Greek Additions, found in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version, which restrict genderqueer/non-binary reading of Esther and Mordecai. I suggest that the more traditional norms espoused in the Greek Additions, particularly concerning gender roles and ethnic practices, impose cisnormativity onto the texts in which they are situated. The contrast between the 'body' text and the Additions is most obvious in my reading of the LXX. In this version, these sections appear to be in tension.

As discussed many times in this chapter, the main text of the LXX, outside of the Additions, is often markedly similar to the Hebrew text of the MT. Therefore, one would assume that the queer reading of the LXX would be the same as in the MT. For example, Vashti and Zeresh are not included in the Additions and as I have shown, it is possible to read their characters as genderqueer/non-binary in the LXX. However, the LXX's version of the Greek Additions significantly change the text's capacity for queer reading, or create contradictions and tensions in the plot which obfuscate queer analysis. This is most obvious in Additions C and D, because these Additions offer a cisnormative depiction of Esther. They also affect how we view her actions in the text that follows the Additions. If we separate the main text of the LXX from the Additions and analyse them separately, we can see that the main LXX text often has the capacity to be read as depicting Esther, Vashti,

Mordecai and Zeresh as genderqueer characters. However, when we include the Additions, we can only view Zeresh and Vashti in this way.

In contrast to the LXX, the 'body' text of the AT often follows the ideological focus of the Additions. This version regularly promotes Mordecai to hero status over Esther. For example, in this version, Esther was almost entirely removed from chapter eight in favour of her uncle. As discussed above, this is rather different to the 'body' text of the LXX. I would therefore suggest that there is greater unity between the 'body' text of the AT and the Additions. In the AT, Vashti can be read as a queer character, perhaps more so than in the other versions, and Zeresh is portrayed in the queerest manner of any of the ancient versions. This may be because neither character appears in the Additions, and neither is hero/heroine of the tale. The AT also often appears to endorse ethnic normativity and gender normativity in the main text, though not to the same extent that Josephus's paraphrase does.

Notably, the Additions in the Vulgate do not have the same impact as they do in the Greek versions because they are at the end of the text and thus do not colour my reading of chapters one to ten in the Latin. However, as shown in Part Two, while the Vulgate is often very close to the Hebrew, its portrayal of Esther and Mordecai is less emphatically queer in our reading than in the MT. Furthermore, the Vulgate does not allow a genderqueer/non-binary reading of Zeresh. This shows that it is not a straightforward duplication of the MT.

The Greek Additions' approach to the gender binary is like the main text of Josephus's paraphrase, which as mentioned often in Part Two emphasises ethnic normativity and promotes diaspora living. This affects the characters' capacity to be read as genderqueer. Josephus's version is the only text which does not allow Vashti to be read as genderqueer. Furthermore, Josephus's version significantly minimises Zeresh's role. As discussed in chapters seven and eight, Josephus does not appear to consistently allow for Esther or Mordecai to be read as genderqueer/non-binary. Halpern-Amaru has pointed out that Josephus has often made heroic biblical women submissive in his accounts of biblical narratives (1988: 143-170). This, combined with his use and knowledge of haggadic traditions, may have contributed to his depiction of Esther. Furthermore, his text has diaspora identity at heart (Kneebone 2013: 167; cf. Boyarin 1994: 4). As a diaspora Jew, the diaspora experience and identity espoused in the story of *Esther* may have resonated strongly with Josephus, and his approach to the text appears to show the influence of lived diaspora existence. Kneebone argues that Josephus also looked to the Greek romance genre in his version of *Esther*, which, among other things, promoted heterosexual romance, intrigue, foiled plots and living in foreign cultures. She points out, 'Josephus' fusion of Jewish and Greek literary forms in the Esther narrative bespeaks a distinctively diasporic poetics that capitalises on the conventions of the Greek romance as a vehicle for depicting divided loyalties, disguised and conflicted identities and the testing of firm moral codes.' (2013: 168). I contend that Josephus's complex approach affected his portrayal of the characters by making them explicitly cisnormative, though I am not suggesting that this was a conscious decision by him.

The Greek Additions not included in this analysis are A, B, E and F. Additions A and F portray Mordecai as the archetypal Jewish hero fighting the evil enemy Haman. These two Additions – not included in Josephus's version – frame the LXX and AT texts and refigure the tale as one about Mordecai's battle between good and evil. Additions B and E depict Ahasuerus's letters to his kingdom, first in B to establish Haman's edict and then in E to state that Haman was the kingdom's enemy and not to follow his edict. The remaining Additions – C and D – affect Esther's portrayal most significantly, as mentioned above.

Both of these Additions in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version depict Mordecai and Esther preparing for the challenge that now faces them: saving the Jewish people. For the most part, these Additions take a religious approach to this issue. Addition C portrays Mordecai praying to God to ask for assistance with his mission. Esther is depicted as humbling herself by covering her entire body, including her hair, and fasting to petition God effectively. Fasting to humble oneself is mentioned in many other texts of the Hebrew Bible.[217] This could indicate queer behaviour, as Esther removes the outward appearance of femininity before she can communicate with the divine. However, mention of masking her beauty appears to be specifically gendered. As Joanna Vitale discussed in her 2015 DPhil thesis, while it was important to the Greek authors to highlight Esther's beauty, it was of significant concern to them to present her as modest (2015: 273-274). Furthermore, Esther's activity in Addition C includes a number of features which can only be described as cisnormatively female in tone and character. For example, mention of Esther's disgust for

[217] Ezr 8:21; 2 Chr 20:3; Isa 58:5; Jer 36:9; Jon 3:5; 1 Kgs 21:9-12.

her position as queen, likening it to the abhor she feels for her 'menstrual rag' (LXX and AT) negatively includes female themes.

Addition D's depiction of Esther walking in to the king's quarters focuses on her physical and mental weakness. When reading this through a queer lens, it appears to be markedly gendered. For example, this material stands in stark contrast to the depiction of Esther going in to see Ahasuerus in 5:1-2 of the MT, which can be read in a genderqueer way. Thus, the cisnormative focus of the Greek Additions in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version portrays Esther as a normative, weak female and Mordecai as a normative and heroic male. Perhaps this characterisation was included here to enforce ethnic gender stereotypes in the diaspora, positing the 'proper' way for men and for women to behave. Alternatively, local influences on the Greek Additions, such as the influence of Hellenistic romance novels[218] or Jewish novellas[219] could also be possible explanations, as shown by Day (1995: 215, 221) and Fox (1991a: 272).[220] Additionally, the potential influence of the Book of Judith should not be ignored, as it shares many similarities with the Greek versions of *Esther*.[221]

This study shows that the Additions have had a significant impact on the ability to read the characters in *Esther* as genderqueer/non-binary, most obviously in the LXX. This stands in stark contrast to the MT, and often the Vulgate, which do not feature such material, and

---

[218] The use of this term is itself problematic. See Sara Johnson 2005: 576-578.
[219] See Laurence M. Wills 2011.
[220] Day points out that though Esther bears many similarities to women in Greek novels, the central theme of love and sensuality, a key feature of the Greek romance novel, is played down in the Greek versions of *Esther* (1995: 218). See also Kristin De Troyer 1997: 341-343.
[221] See Day 1995: 222-225; LaCocque 1990: 71-74; Levenson 1997: 25-26; Moore 1977: 220-222.

thus allow for a queer reading of many of the characters. Consequently, I have shown that it is possible to read some characters in *Esther* in a non-binary/genderqueer way. As Stone argues, '…in a queer 'doing' of a Bible, we also 'undo' the Bibles that are so often used against us. Queer readings make it possible for other Bibles to come into existence.' (2008: 21).

# Chapter 11 – Thesis Conclusions

## *11.1 - Introduction*

As discussed in the opening chapters,[222] when one assesses a biblical text through the lens of a commentator, one is engaging with biblical reception history (Gillingham 2011: 571). This study has utilised biblical reception history by looking at the many different lenses through which *Esther* has been interpreted, from the ancient versions to modern academic interpretations. Using this method, I engaged with the complex interpretative tradition of the Book of Esther and analysed its impact on later interpretations, up to and including twentieth and twenty-first century academic scholarship.

Furthermore, I have used reception history to understand the impact that a text and its reception have on modern, gender-critical readers. This has enabled me to read the text in a way that brings new meaning and resonances to it. By reading texts 'against the grain' (Jauss 1970: 15) one can challenge the possible smoothing-out that these texts may have undergone through the passage of history.[223] In addition, texts possess a surplus of meaning that can be different for every reader (Ricoeur 1976: 55) and, when one reads them, they leave their original contexts and 'romp around in the present' (Breed 2014: 93). This has an emancipatory function, as one can liberate a text from its oppressive earlier interpretations.

---

[222] Chapter 2.1
[223] Ibid.

As discussed in chapter two, the roles and experience of women, and the experience of sexual difference, have often been overlooked in biblical interpretations. Androcentrism, phallocentrism and misogyny in biblical texts and their interpretations has been challenged by scholars since the 1970s with the emergence of feminist biblical criticism. The development of intersectional feminist theory prompted postcolonial feminist readings and queer interpretations which disputed heteronormativity, cisnormativity, Eurocentrism and empire mentality in texts.[224] Today, it is more common and acceptable to question the homogeneity of tradition than it has been before. Indeed, a great deal of the feminist and gender-critical scholarship on *Esther* has informed this thesis' approach to assessing gender roles in the text (Beal 1997a, 1999; Crawford 1989, 1999, 2003c; Day 2005).[225]

As discussed in chapters one and two, genderqueer/non-binary interpretation of biblical texts is a very new field.[226] In part, this is because the identity terms 'genderqueer' and 'non-binary' have only recently become common parlance and gained legal recognition. Unsurprisingly, to date there are no studies of *Esther* that take this approach. This means that there has been a great deal of scope for investigation in this study, to examine the different aspects of non-binary/genderqueer identity, and to identify if the body of *Esther* reception is welcoming or hostile to non-binary/genderqueer readers.

---

[224] See chapters 2.2.1-2.2.3 for detail.
[225] See Part One for detailed exposition.
[226] See chapter 2.2.

As the gender binary is so pervasive in modern society,[227] it is reasonable to assume that it has also pervaded the secondary literature that *Esther* students use alongside the biblical text. This begs the question: pertaining to gender, do modern academic interpretations of *Esther* tend to smooth out the text and overlook non-normative readings? Furthermore, what is the impact of modern secondary literature on how we view the ancient text? As shown in chapter 2.2.6, those who identify themselves as non-binary/genderqueer tend actively to reject the gender binary. If it is the case that much of modern academic scholarship is imbued with the gender binary or its associated ideology, does this mean that it is hostile to non-binary/genderqueer readers?

To answer these questions, first I detailed my methodology and approach in chapters one and two, as mentioned above. This ensured that my goals were suitably outlined, and my use of reception history and gender theory would be adequately focused. After this, I identified four distinct stages of analysis to address, three of which are now complete. First, in chapter three, I assessed the body of Jewish and Christian *Esther* reception that is often overlooked in modern scholarship but which forms a bridge between the ancient versions and the modern interpretations assessed here. This showed how gendered interpretations can be discerned at many different stages of *Esther* reception. Second, in Part One (chapter four), I analysed modern *Esther* scholarship from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to determine how scholarly interpretations have realised gender. I assessed if the characters in this text had been depicted in normative or non-normative ways. My criteria

[227] See chapter 2.2

for this were to look at the most influential and most frequently-cited modern scholarship on *Esther*. Third, in Part Two (chapters five to ten), I turned to the ancient versions of *Esther* to read them in a non-binary/genderqueer way. This was to ascertain if it is possible to read the Hebrew, Greek and Latin versions of the text in a way which allows non-binary/genderqueer themes, characterisation and voices to emerge. The ancient texts selected were those that are most often cited in modern scholarship. I showed that, although non-binary/genderqueer characterisation is difficult to read in 'traditional', modern *Esther* interpretation, this is not so in the MT version of *Esther*, the Vulgate and the main 'body' text of the LXX. Additionally, the AT allows us to read two characters – Vashti and Zeresh – in this way.

In this conclusion, I will undertake the fourth and final stage of analysis. I will posit why there is such a great 'aesthetic distance' (Jauss 1970: 9, 14-15)[228] between some modern scholarship, which I have termed 'traditional' scholarship, and the MT version of *Esther,* on which many critics claim to primarily comment. I will propose that the Greek Additions have been significantly impactful on this modern reception. I will then explore the role that cognitive bias may have played.

What has not been possible to include in the scope of this thesis is a full line-by-line analysis of the Babylonian Talmud, the targumim and midrashim, to determine their impact on commentaries, monographs, articles and introductions on *Esther*, and to assess

[228] See chapter 2.1.2

the impact that the ancient versions have had on the rabbinic literature. As shown briefly in chapter three, the portrayal of gender roles in many of the midrashim and the Babylonian Talmud is often cisnormative and includes misogyny and androcentrism. I undertook significant research of the rabbinic material for this thesis, which showed that, overall, they took a cisnormative approach to the character of Esther and portrayed Vashti and Zeresh as villains and enemies of the Jewish people. Mordecai was cast as the archetypal Jewish hero, and Ahasuerus and Haman are demonised as enemies of the people *par excellence.* However, as discussed in chapter five, this material would be best placed in a study that primarily focuses on rabbinic *Esther* reception, so it was not included in this thesis. Furthermore, by principally focusing on this material, one could include the vast body of *Esther* reception found in complete, partial and fragmentary midrashim, that would otherwise be limited by space constraints. The next stages of research could focus on this body of material. Using the model employed in this study, I believe that an in-depth analysis of the *Esther* midrashim could be compared with modern reception, specifically Jewish academic criticism, for example the work of Adele Berlin and Yoram Hazony. It would be very interesting to identify if this body of reception has the capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading, or if this material only has the capacity for cisnormative interpretation. Considering this analysis, one could determine if the midrashim have been particularly impactful on scholars' interpretations of gender in *Esther*.

*11.2 - The Results of this Study*

As discussed in chapter four, modern scholarship on *Esther* can be divided roughly into two groups:

1) secondary literature that displays cisnormative bias which is misogynistic, androcentric or erases female and queer voices (for example, Bardtke 1963; Bush 1996;[229] Fox 1991a; Levenson 1997; Moore 1971; Paton 1908); and
2) secondary literature that engages with gender themes and recognises that *Esther* portrays unusual or subversive gender roles (for example, Beal 1997a, 1999; Brenner 1995; 1999; Crawford 1989, 1999, 2003a, 2003c, 2005; Day 1995, 2005; LaCocque 1990; Laniak 1998; Klein 2003).

The latter group, which I term 'gender-critical' scholars, have read *Esther* against the grain. Their work highlighted that one can read the gender roles in this text as not strictly cisnormative. Consequently, as shown in my study, it is the second group which is of most interest to me and informed my approach to the ancient versions of *Esther.*

The commentaries and thematic studies discussed in chapter four all claim to use the MT as their primary source for analysing the text of *Esther*. Critics whose work was shown to be the most androcentric or latently biased against women claimed that they focused primarily on the MT. However, as discussed, these critics also used the LXX, AT, Josephus's version or the Vulgate to furnish the MT with further detail or to clarify difficult aspects of

[229] As discussed in chapter 4.3.3, Bush does not appear to take a negatively-gendered approach to Esther, but he does in his interpretations of Vashti and of Zeresh.

it (Bardtke 1963; Bush 1996; Fox 1991a; Levenson 1997; Moore 1971; Paton 1908). Scholarship that focused primarily on the MT and did not refer to the ancient Greek or Latin versions very regularly or at all was shown to be the least stereotypically gendered (Beal 1997a, 1999; Crawford 1989, 2003c; Day 2005; Fuchs 1999 [1982]; Hazony 2016; Holmstedt and Screnock 2015; Laffey 1988; Niditch 1995). There are some critics who look at the ancient versions side-by-side, and all make it explicit that this is their intention to directly compare these texts (Adelman 2014; Bickerman 1951; Clines 1984; Day 1995; De Troyer 2000; Dorothy 1997; Feldman 1970; Fox 1991b; Jobes 1996; Kahana 2005; Miller 2014; Moore 1967, 1977).

Part Two undertook in-depth analysis of the ancient versions. As I demonstrated, of the five ancient texts studied, the MT has the most consistent capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading of the characters Esther, Mordecai, Vashti and Zeresh. This seems to be because, in my reading, the gaps and silences that are characteristic of the MT version allow non-normative interpretations to emerge. As the Vulgate text is so close to the Hebrew, the same can also be said for this version.[230]

The LXX is not so straightforward. As discussed in chapter ten, if one only reads the 'body' text of the LXX, and not the Additions, this text has as great a capacity for non-binary/genderqueer reading as the MT. For example, as shown in chapters six and nine, the LXX allows both Vashti and Zeresh to be read as non-binary/genderqueer. Furthermore, as

[230] Except for the portrayal of Zeresh. See chapter 9.6.

illustrated in chapters seven and eight, Esther and Mordecai can be read as non-binary/genderqueer in the material that the LXX shares with the MT. However, the Greek Additions – included in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version[231] – present a markedly different picture of Esther and Mordecai's behaviour which significantly restricts their capacity to be read as non-binary/genderqueer.[232] In the LXX, Esther's characterisation in the Additions significantly contrasts with the 'body' text. This means that the LXX version of *Esther* does not have the capacity to read in a non-binary/genderqueer way when one includes the Additions in their reading. Consequently, as the LXX is considered to be one unit and it is not appropriate to remove the Additions, in this version it is not possible to read Esther or Mordecai as being non-binary/genderqueer.

As shown in my analysis, the AT allows Vashti and Zeresh to be read as non-binary/genderqueer but this version does not have the capacity for Esther or Mordecai to be. This is not due to the Additions alone, but some noticeable differences in Esther's portrayal outside of the Additions, too. Josephus's paraphrase resists a non-binary/genderqueer reading overall, although occasionally we can detect hints of queerness.

Given the results of my investigation, a further question to consider has arisen. What prompted some scholars to take a cisnormative, misogynistic or androcentric approach in

---

[231] And in the Vulgate, though as discussed in chapter four, St Jerome moved the Additions to the end of the book because he was not comfortable with including them *in situ*. Therefore, they have not been included with the Additions analysis conducted in this study.
[232] See chapters 7.3-7.5 and 8.3-8.5.

their readings of *Esther*, when we can detect non-normative possibilities in some of these texts, particularly the Hebrew MT? I propose that cognitive bias plays a significant role. There are two main sources of this bias. First, the influence of personal and cultural bias against women and non-normative people must be considered. Second, the impact of the Greek Additions on modern *Esther* reception should not be understated.

### *11.3 - Cognitive Bias in Esther Criticism*

As discussed in chapter two,[233] using Chalmers' model, my own study is subject to cognitive bias. Using Jauss's reception-history theory,[234] reading *Esther* in a non-binary/genderqueer way involves my horizon of expectations of the text being either surprised or disappointed by my reading of the text. My horizon of expectations is informed by my personal beliefs and world-view, which Chalmers would identify as 'false consensus effect'. The meeting of these horizons, and my interpretation that follows, illustrates 'confirmation bias', because my pre-existing understanding or beliefs about a text is either confirmed or disappointed. I do not believe that cognitive bias is negative in and of itself. Rather, one should be mindful that personal bias can and does play a significant role in all biblical exegesis and interpretation. Furthermore, one should explicitly declare one's bias where possible, to ensure that readers are aware of it.

---

[233] See chapter 2.1.3.
[234] Explained in chapter 2.1.2.

My analysis has also problematised and challenged 'functional fixedness'; that is, the difficulty exegetes may experience when interpreting a text in a new way that differs from that used by preceding interpreters. Functional fixedness is a form of cognitive bias that can be applied to the critics included in Part One. However, as I demonstrated, the degree to which critics challenge or accept their 'functional fixedness', either consciously or unconsciously, can differ significantly.

As I discussed in the introduction and in this thesis' methodology, when studying *Esther* academically, one often begins by reading side-by-side the biblical text and modern secondary literature on that text, particularly commentaries or introductions. This is to furnish one's reading of the biblical text with extra, relevant information. Commentary on the story, the literary themes, history, *Gattung,* characterisation and other aspects useful for understanding a text are elucidated in this literature. Further, if one intends to undertake one's own exegesis of a text, often this is done by referencing key monographs, introductions, articles and commentaries written in the past century or more, to clarify and provide guidance on exegetical issues. In particular, the 'traditional' commentaries written by Bardtke 1963; Bush 1996; Fox 1991a; Levenson 1997; Moore 1971; Paton 1908 and others[235] are viewed as go-to texts. These critics are viewed as key commentators on the book and are frequently cited in *Esther* scholarship and wider biblical criticism.[236] Due to

[235] As analysed in chapter four.
[236] A brief Google Scholar search of these titles shows between 150-225 electronic citations for each. This does not incorporate titles that are not digitally available on Google, and thus the actual number of citations is likely to be higher. Accessed 2 February 2020.

their popularity and frequent citation in other scholars' work, I believe that these interpretations hold privileged positions in *Esther* scholarship, which grants them significant authority. Furthermore, the format of these titles imply that they are 'neutral'; that is, they provide an unbiased approach to the text.

However, as shown in Part One and as stated above, it is not the case that 'traditional' scholarship on *Esther* is impartial. It is possible that these scholars' cognitive biases – comprising of 'confirmation bias', 'false consensus effect' and 'functional fixedness' – have encouraged them to take an androcentric, misogynistic or cisnormative approach to the *Esther* text. To be clear, I believe that these scholars have made an invaluable contribution to the body of *Esther* research. Personal bias and good scholarship are not mutually exclusive. However, it is possible that these scholars were influenced by their own personal or cultural views, or the views of preceding scholars. I do not consider my bias and ideology to be any more or less excusable than theirs. However, I have made it clear at the beginning of this study that it is subject to bias and non-binary/genderqueer ideology. This means that readers will be in no doubt that my analysis is an interpretation; that I have made a 'virtual' field 'actual', to use Breed's terms.[237] The problem, as I see it, is that the 'traditional' critics do not do this, and consequently the implication is that they are neutral and impartial, in contrast to ideological interpretations.

[237] See chapter 2.1.4 for details on Breed's thesis.

For many non-mainstream interpretations of biblical texts – for example, postcolonial or feminist readings – the importance of declaring bias has been paramount. This is because it is their objective to read the text 'against the grain'. They point out what their ideological approach will be and for what purpose. Applying this to my study, the 'traditional' biblical introductions and commentaries written by Bardtke 1963; Bush 1996; Levenson 1997; Moore 1971; and Paton 1908, and the thematic work written by Fox (1991a), do not include declarations of personal bias. However, this does not mean that they are free from prejudice. They are written by critics who have shaped their work based on their personal, social and cultural purview. Gender-critical approaches to *Esther* by Beal 1997a, 1999; Crawford 1989, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Day 2005; Fuchs 1999 [1982]; Klein 2003; Laffey 1988; Laniak 1998 and others, are also biased, but many critics in this group declare their biases in their work, either explicitly in an introduction (Beal 1997a, 1999; Klein 2003), by including their work in feminist anthologies (Bal 1999; Crawford 1989; De Troyer 1995; Fuchs 1999 [1982]; Laffey 1988; Niditch 1995), or by focusing on gender themes in their exegesis (Crawford 1999, 2003c; Day 1995, 2005). Crucially, when a reader engages with their work, it is clear that they view *Esther* through an ideological lens. I contend that gender-critical scholars are also subject to confirmation bias because they use the text of *Esther* to confirm their feminist or gender-critical beliefs. Indeed, some of these critics are influenced by functional fixedness, as their analysis agrees with that of other feminist *Esther* scholars, or gender-critical work on this text that preceded theirs.

*11.4 - The Impact of the Greek Versions on Esther Criticism*

As discussed in chapter two,[238] 'Esther is a strange book, which is filled with gaps and silences that the reader needs to supply information for' (Wetter 2015: 260). There are many instances in the MT where motives and actions are unexplained by the narrator; for example, Mordecai's decision not to bow to Haman (3:3, 5) and Esther's success with Ahasuerus (5:1-2). For all *Esther* critics, this has prompted considerable critical discussion to uncover more information about the unexplained plot developments.[239] As I showed in chapter four, many critics, in particular the 'traditional' critics, have turned primarily to the Greek versions to fill in the gaps. As illustrated in Part Two, these versions offer more detail than the MT, and they often fill in the gaps of the MT with distinctly normative characterisations. However, these critics often do not state that they are drawing conclusions from the Greek versions. I believe that the normative portrayals in the LXX, AT and Josephus's paraphrase bridge the large 'aesthetic distance' between these critics and the MT version that they may have found problematic.

One notable example of this practice is Moore's assessment of 5:1-2. He states, 'The magic of her beauty, which had captivated the king from the very beginning, apparently saved her…' (1971: 57). In chapter four, I stated that this interpretation of this scene in the Hebrew was 'laughable'.[240] This is because the Hebrew text does not mention Esther's

[238] See chapters 2.1.2 and 2.2.7.
[239] Critics include Bardtke (1963); Beal (1997a, 1999); Bush (1996); Bickerman (1951); Crawford (1989, 2003, 2005); Day (2005); Fox (1991a); Levenson (1997); Moore (1971) and Paton (1908).
[240] See chapter 4.3.1.

beauty in this scene, or even allude to it. Indeed, Esther's beauty has not been mentioned in this version since 2:7. In contrast, the LXX, the AT and Josephus's version of this scene all explicitly mention Esther's beauty. The LXX and the AT both describe Esther as 'radiant with the full flush of her beauty' (D.5), and Josephus states that she was 'adorned by a soft and majestic beauty' (11.234). Thus, Moore's conclusion that Ahasuerus pardoned Esther because of her beauty seems to indicate influence from the Greek versions.

As shown in chapter four, a common focus for many scholars is identifying if and where God may be present in the text. In the MT, Mordecai's donning of sackcloth and ashes in 4:1 and Esther's fasting with her maids at 4:16 are the only potential references to religious practices in the book, and these are not, by any means, explicit. Some scholars argue that מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר in the MT (4:14) refers to God (Baldwin 1984: 80; Berlin 2001: 44; Bush 1996: 396-397; Crawford 1999: 905; Kirk-Duggan 1999: 195; Levenson 1997: 81; Moore 1971: 50, 52; Paton 1908: 222) or that it could possibly, but not definitely, refer to God (Fox 1991a: 63; Vialle 2012: 577). All three of the Greek versions directly address this issue.

As discussed in chapters seven and eight, God's presence in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version has a marked impact on how Esther's behaviour is understood. In chapter five of *Esther*, which is preceded by Additions C and D, God's intervention coupled with the depiction of Esther's physical and emotional weakness, portrays her as incapable of saving her people alone. Without God, Esther as depicted in the Additions would have been unsuccessful in her endeavours. This is not to say that divine activity *de facto* undermines the agency of biblical characters in general. Rather, it is made clear that Esther is incapable

of acting on her own and therefore she requires assistance. This detail undermines her agency. Consequently, I believe that Esther's treatment in the Additions may have encouraged modern, 'traditional' critics to view her negatively. This may have prompted them to use gendered language to describe her behaviour. For example, they describe her as 'coquettish' (Moore 1971: 78), 'superficial' (Fox 1991a: 60) and 'manipulative' (Fox 1991a: 73, 89, 115, 170, 201) and state that her success was due to her attractiveness, not her skill (Bardtke 1963: 332; Moore 1971: li, 57; Paton 1908: 96).[241]

In contrast, Vashti and Zeresh have not been condemned in modern scholarship as strongly as Esther.[242] Neither Vashti nor Zeresh are described as 'bimbos' as Esther is. Instead, Vashti and Zeresh have been largely ignored (Laffey 1988: 216). Indeed, Gunkel (1916), Alter (2016: 86), Moore (1971: 13) and Clines (1984: 32-33) argue that Vashti is a literary tool only, and Moore (1971: liii), Bush (1996: 418), Levenson (1997: 92) and Bardtke (1963: 341) say the same about Zeresh. One could argue that Vashti and Zeresh are not as important as the titular character, and thus it is expected that they would garner less attention. However, I would also look to the Greek Additions for insight. Vashti and Zeresh are not included in this material. They are not mentioned directly or even alluded to. Thus, it is possible that their exclusion from the Additions enabled or encouraged modern scholars not to include them in their work. I have noticed that scholarship which includes lengthy critiques of Zeresh and Vashti tends to be that which focuses on feminist

[241] See chapter 4.3.
[242] See chapters 4.4 and 4.6.

interpretation or gender critique, and does not refer to the LXX in their assessment of the MT; for example, the work of Day (2005) and Crawford (2003c).[243] The exception is Timothy Beal. His thematic interests would, one might think, prompt an interest in Zeresh. However, he does not mention her at all in his 1999 work, and only four times in his 1997a work, though he pays a great deal of attention to Vashti in both.

As shown in chapter four, the male characters in *Esther* have been granted significant attention, particularly in 'traditional' scholarship. Mordecai has been subject to a great deal of debate about his character, motives and religious virtue. Ahasuerus has been the focus of discussion about kingship and satire, and debates about Haman have centred primarily on his ethnicity and his role as the antagonist. Notably, modern critics have broad consensus about Ahasuerus and Haman's portrayals.[244] In the LXX and AT, the story of *Esther* has been refigured as a battle between good and evil.[245] The LXX and AT versions introduce the three male characters at the very beginning of the text in Addition A, with the image of the two dragons in battle (LXX A.5; AT A.4); the two dragons being Haman and Mordecai. Both the LXX and AT end their texts by stating that Haman and Mordecai's grand battle, and God's intervention to save Mordecai's people, was the focus of the tale (LXX F.4; AT 7:54).[246] Esther gets a very small mention in Addition F: 'There was the little spring that became a river, and there was light and sun and abundant water; Esther is the river, whom the king

---

[243] With the exception of Linda Day's 1995 work *Three Faces of a Queen*. However, Day's work considers the full texts of the MT, LXX and AT side-by-side, rather than adopting an approach that uses the MT as a guide with added input from the LXX and AT.
[244] See chapter 4.5.
[245] This material is not included in Josephus's paraphrase.
[246] See Jonathan A. Thambyrajah 2019 for a detailed examination of Mordecai's dream in the Greek Additions.

married and made queen.' (LXX F.3). In the AT, she is referred to as 'the little spring' (AT 7:54). These Additions highlight the difference between Mordecai's importance and Esther's importance in the LXX and AT. As shown in chapter four, this difference is also reflected in 'traditional' modern scholarship.

Consequently, it is possible that scholars could relate to the gender-normative portrayals of Esther and Mordecai, and the androcentric focus in the Greek Additions, as these portrayals confirmed their pre-existing gender bias. This demonstrates confirmation bias and false consensus effect. Scholars may have been unable or unwilling to interpret *Esther* very differently to interpretations that precede theirs, demonstrating functional fixedness. Furthermore, the homogenising effect of the body of 'traditional' modern scholarship on *Esther* may have had a significant impact on all subsequent reception. As I have argued in this thesis, using the LXX, the AT and Josephus's paraphrase – all of which include Additions C and D – to elucidate the Hebrew text of *Esther* removes the disruptive, non-normative possibilities that exist in the MT. This is because different versions are used to smooth out interpretations of the Hebrew, and fill in the gaps that are characteristic of this version. Furthermore, using the Additions creates a false unity between the ancient versions. This false unity is fundamentally cisnormative and androcentric.

### *11.5 - Final Conclusion*

Since I began writing this thesis, the cultural landscape has shifted. The growing politicisation of gendered spaces, particularly women's bathrooms and changing rooms, is

a topic of fervent debate in 2020. The rejection and demonisation of non-cis women by public figures including the author J.K. Rowling[247] has encouraged many trans-exclusionary people to define what it means to be a woman. They cite menstruation, ovulation, having breasts and other physical assets as markers of 'real' women. However, by attempting to define what a woman is, one inevitably excludes some cis-women – for example those who do not menstruate because they have had their uterus surgically removed – and includes some non-binary/genderqueer people who do not identify as women. This highlights how the gender binary is imposed on people, and how problematic and potentially harmful it can be.

I set out to explore how modern scholars have understood characterisation in *Esther* and whether cisnormativity has been the dominant interpretation. I then investigated if I could read *Esther* in a way entirely free from the gender binary. I read the text of *Esther* against the grain, to point out if or where modern interpretations may offer 'smoothed out' interpretations. In so doing, this study has contributed to the body of work on *Esther* by introducing a new topic for analysis that had not yet been examined: non-binary/genderqueer reading. Through this process of reading, I identified that the MT has the greatest consistent capacity for a non-binary/genderqueer reading. Similarly, the Vulgate also has this capacity, as it is so close to the Hebrew. In contrast, the Greek Additions, found in the LXX, AT and Josephus's version, have the least capacity for this reading. This means that, concerning the portrayal of Esther and of Mordecai, the LXX, the

[247] See J.K. Rowling's twitter feed (@jk_rowling) for numerous examples.

AT and Josephus's version resist genderqueer/non-binary reading. I then showed how the ancient versions of this text can have a substantial impact on how the Hebrew version has been received, and posited suggestions for why the Greek versions have been so influential.

My work highlights the need to analyse modern reception as well as ancient reception when assessing gender bias in a biblical text. One needs to cast a critical eye over the impact of the many different ancient versions on modern scholarship, as well as the impact of modern scholars' work on one another. As shown in my thesis, cognitive bias in biblical studies, specifically confirmation bias, false consensus effect and functional fixedness, may be latently present in all modern scholarship. It would be worthwhile to further examine cognitive bias as part of reception-historical analyses of other biblical texts, particularly those where opinion is so divided as in *Esther* reception.

It is also important for me to state, for the avoidance of doubt, that bias, whether that be pertaining to gender, class, race, religion or sexuality, is often deeply ingrained within reception. Centuries of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, androcentrism and misogyny as dominant political and social forces have become embedded in interpretations of texts, in all media. Indeed, we might view this prejudice as 'normal' or 'expected' within the context, which highlights how smoothed-out the text or its reception has become, and how we willingly accept it. We must work hard to defy this bias, and spend time unpicking its tightly-woven threads in an attempt to liberate the text for our own purposes.

As Hornsby and Guest argue, 'Heteronormativity is not *in* the text, waiting to be discovered; the interpreter or reader brings the assumption of heteronormativity to the text and uses the text to justify heteronormativity.' (2016: 4). I have shown that cisnormativity is a limit imposed by modern scholars, and we can read *Esther* without it. Therefore, I have demonstrated that, 'queer criticism calls attention to the unexpected configurations of sex, gender, and kinship in the Bible and its history of reception.' (Stone 2013: 163).

# Bibliography


Abelove, H., Barale, M. A., & Halperin, D. M. (1993). *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York; London: Routledge.

Abraham, I. (2011). Biblicism, Reception History, and the Social Sciences. *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception, 1*(2), 359-367.

Ackerman, S. (2001). *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns.

Ackerman, S. (2009). *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press.

Adelman, R. (2014). "Passing Strange"—Reading Transgender Across Genre: Rabbinic Midrash and Feminist Hermeneutics on Esther. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 30*(2), 81-97.

Aitken, J. K. (2015). *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*. London: T & T Clark.

Alsop, R., Fitzsimons, A., & Lennon, K. (2002). *Theorizing Gender*. Oxford: Polity.

Althaus-Reid, M., & Isherwood, L. (2007). Thinking Theology and Queer Theory. *Feminist Theology, 15*(3), 302-314.

Anderson, C. B. (2004). *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Gook of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law*. London: T & T Clark.

Armour, E. T., & St. Ville, S. M. (2006). *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Aus, R. D. (1992). *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in the Judaic Illumination of Earliest Christianity*. Atlanta GA.: Scholars Press.

Aven, T. (2012). *Three Versions of Esther: Their Relationship to Anti-Semitic and Feminist Critique of the Story.* PhD Thesis. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Azzoni, A. (2012). Women of Elephantine and Women in the Land of Israel. In Botta, A. F. (ed.) *In the Shadow of Belazel. Aramaic, Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Belazel Porten.* Leiden: Brill.

Bach, A. (1997). *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bach, A. (ed.). (1999). *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*. New York; London: Routledge.

Bahar, S. (2012). Coming Out as Queen: Jewish Identity, Queer Theory, and the Book of Esther. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality, 13*(3), 167-178.

Bailey, R. C., Liew, T. B. & Segovia, F. F. (eds.). (2009). *They Were All Together in One Place?: Toward Minority Biblical Criticism*. Atlanta GA.: Society of Biblical Literature.

Bakhos, C. (2006). *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Leiden: Brill.

Bal, M. (1987). *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Baldwin, J. G. (1984). *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

Bardtke, H. (1964). *Luther und das Buch Esther*. Tübingen: Mohr.

Bardtke, H., & Hertzberg, H. W. (1963). *Der Prediger/ Das Buch Esther*. Gütersloh: G. Mohn.

Barr, J. (1990). The Vulgate Genesis and St. Jerome's Attitudes to Women' in Holloway, J. B., Wright, C. S., & Bechtold, J. (eds.) (1990). *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*. New York; London: Peter Lang.

Bartlett, J. R. (2002). *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*. London; New York: Routledge.

Barucq, A. (1959). *Judith; Esther* (2nd ed.). Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

Baskin, J. R. (2002). *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature*. Hanover, NH.; London: University Press of New England.

Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Seduction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

Bauks, M., Horowitz, W., Lange, A., & Hene, B. (eds.) (2013). *Between Text and Text: The Hermeneutics of Intertextuality in Ancient Cultures and their Afterlife in Medieval and Modern Times.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Beal, T. (1995). *Identity and Subversion in Esther.* (PhD Thesis). ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Beal, T. (1997a). *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther*. London: Routledge.

Beal, T. (1997b). *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*. London; New York: Routledge.

Beal, T. (1999). Esther. In Linafelt, T. & Beal, T. (1999). *Ruth and Esther: Berit Olam*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press.

Beal, T. (2011). Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures. *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches, 19*(4-5), 357-372.

Beal, T. (2015). 'Who filled his heart to do this?' Conceptual Metaphors of the Self in the Book of Esther. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 40*(1), 97-111.

Bellis, A. O. (2007). *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (2nd ed.). Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press.

Bellmann, S. (2017). The Theological Character of the Old Latin Version of Esther. *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, 27*(1), 3-24.

Bellmann, S., & Portier-Young, A. (2019). The Old Latin Book of Esther: An English Translation. *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, 28*(4), 267-289.

Bem, S. L. (1974). The Measurement of Psychological Androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42*(2), 155-162.

Ben-Dov, J. (1999). A Presumed Citation of Esther 3:7 in 4Qdb. *Dead Sea Discoveries, 6*(3), 282-284.

Berg, S. B. (1979). *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure*. Missoula, MT.: Scholars Press.

Berlin, A. (2001). *Esther = Ester: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*. Philadephia PA.: Jewish Publication Society.

Berquist, J. L. (1995). *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press.

Bickerman, E. J. (1944). The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther. *Journal of Biblical Literature, 63*(4), 339-362.

Bickerman, E. J. (1951). Notes on the Greek Book of Esther. *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 20*, 101-133.

Bird, P. A. (1997). *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press.

Blyth, C. (2017). *Reimagining Delilah's Afterlives as Femme Fatale: The Lost Seduction*. London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

Boer, R. (2011, May). Against "Reception History". *The Bible and Interpretation*. Retrieved from https://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/boe358008.shtml

Börner-Klein, D. (1991). *Eine Babylonische Auslegung der Ester-Geschichte: Der Midrasch in Megilla 10b-17a*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Börner-Klein, D. (2004). *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Börner-Klein, D., & Hollender, E. (2000). *Rabbinische Kommentare zum Buch Ester*. Leiden; Boston MA: Brill.

Bornkamm, H. (1969). *Luther and the Old Testament*. Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press.

Bornstein, K. (1994). *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. New York NY; London: Routledge.

Boyarin, D. (1994). Introduction: Purim and the Cultural Poetics of Judaism - Theorizing Diaspora. *Poetics Today, 15*(1), 1-8.

Boyarin, D., Itzkovitz, D., & Pellegrini, A. (eds.). (2003). *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. New York NY: Columbia University Press.

Breed, B. W. (2014). *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History.* Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.

Brenner, A. (1994). *On Feminism, Anger and Humour in Biblical Studies*. Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit.

Brenner, A. (1997). *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible*. Leiden: Brill.

Brenner, A. (2003). *Are We Amused?: Humour about Women in the Biblical Worlds*. London: T & T Clark International.

Brenner, A. (2015 [1985]). *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (2nd edition.) London: Bloomsbury.

Brenner, A. (ed.). (1995). *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Brenner, A., & Dijk Hemmes, F. v. (eds.). (1993). *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*. Leiden: Brill.

Brenner, A., & Henten, J. W. (eds.) (2002). *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century: Authority, Reception, Culture and Religion*. London: Sheffield Academic.

Brenner, A., & Radday, Y. T. (eds.) (1990). *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Almond.

Bronner, L. L. (1994). *From Eve to Esther: Rabbinic Reconstructions of Biblical Women*. Louisville KY.: Westminster John Knox Press.

Brosius, M. (2010). Women (i) In Pre-Islamic Persia. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Retrieved from https://iranicaonline.org/articles/women-i

Brown Tkacz, C. (1996). *Labor tam utilis*: The Creation of the Vulgate. *Vigiliae Christianae, 50*(1), 42-72.

Brown, F., Driver S. R. R., & Briggs C. A. (eds.). (2004). *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers.

Büchner, D. (2017). *The SBL Commentary on the Septuagint: An Introduction*. Atlanta GA.: SBL Press.

Burnette-Bletch, R. (2014). Esther (Book and Person) VIII. Film. In Seow, C. L., & Spieckermann, H. (eds.). *The Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception, Volume 8.* 50-54. Boston MA; Berlin: De Gruyter.

Burnette-Bletch, R., (2015). Speaking as "Any Foolish Woman": Ms. Job in the History of Reception. In Ackerman, S., Carter, C. E., Nakhai, B. A., Bohmbach, K. G., & Greifenhagen, F. V. (eds.) (2015). *Celebrate Her for the Fruit of Her Hands: Essays in Honor of Carol L. Meyers.* Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns.

Burnette-Bletsch, R. (2016). *The Bible in Motion. Part 1: A Handbook of the Bible and its Reception in Film*. Berlin, Germany; Boston MA: De Gruyter.

Butler, J., (1999 [1990]). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York NY.: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2000). *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life & Death*. New York NY.: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J. (2006). Afterword. In Armour, E. T., & St. Ville, S. M. (eds.). *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. pp. 276-291. New York NY.: Columbia University Press.

Butler, J. (2011 [1993]). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Cairns, E. C. (2017). *Esther in Early Modern Iberia and the Sephardic Diaspora: Queen of the Conversas*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Carruthers, J. (2008). *Esther Through the Centuries*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Carruthers, J. (2020). *Politics of Purim: Law, Sovereignty and Hospitality in the Aesthetic Afterlives of Esther*. London: T & T Clark.

Cathcart, K. J., Maher, M., & McNamara, M. (eds.) (1996). *Targumic and Cognate Studies: Essays in Honour of Martin McNamara*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

Cavalier, C. (2012). *Esther*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

Chalmers, A. (2016). The Influence of Cognitive Biases on Biblical Interpretation. *Bulletin for Biblical Research, 26*(4), 467-480.

Cheng, P. S. (2011). *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*. New York NY: Seabury Books.

Cixous, H., Clément, C., & Wing, B. (1996). *The Newly Born Woman*. London: Tauris.

Claassens, L. J., & Sharp, C. J. (eds.) (2017). *Feminist frameworks and the bible: Power, Ambiguity, and Intersectionality.* New York NY: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

Cleto, F. (1999). *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Clines, D. J. A. (1984). *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story*. Sheffield: JSOT.

Clines, D. J. A. (2009). *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Clines, D. J. A. (2011). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew, volumes IV and V*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Cohen, A., & Rosenberg, A. J. (1984). *The Five Megilloth: Hebrew Text & English Translation* (Rev. ed.). London: Soncino Press.

Cohen, J. M. (1996). Vashti: An Unsung Heroine. *Jewish Bible Quarterly, 24*(2), 103-106.

Collins, B. J., Buller B., & Kutsko J. F. (2014). *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2nd ed.). Atlanta GA.: SBL Press.

Collins, J. J. (2000). *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub.

Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Connell, R. (2002). *Gender*. Oxford: Polity.

Connell, R. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

Conti, M., Pilara, G., & Oden, T. C. (2008). *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Downers Grove IL.: InterVarsity Press.

Cornwall, S. (2011). *Controversies in Queer Theology*. London: SCM.

Cornwall, S. (2012). Recognizing the Full Spectrum of Gender? Transgender, Intersex and the Futures of Feminist Theology. *Feminist Theology, 20*(3), 236-241.

Cornwall, S. (2015). *Intersex, Theology, and the Bible: Troubling Bodies in Church, Text, and Society*. New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cornwall, S. (2017). Home and Hiddenness: Queer Theology, Domestication and Institutions. *Theology & Sexuality, 23*(1-2), 31-47.

Craig, K. M. (1995). *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque*. Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press.

Crawford, S. W. (1989). Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora. In Day, P. L. (ed.). *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. pp. 161-177. Minneapolis MN: Fortress.

Crawford, S. W. (1999). The Book of Esther: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections. In Keck L. E. (ed.*), The New Interpreters Bible Commentary Volume VI*. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press.

Crawford, S. W., & Greenspoon, L. J. (eds.). (2003a). *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*. London: T & T Clark.

Crawford, S. W. (2003b). Not According to Rule: Women, The Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran. In Paul, S. M., Kraft, R. A., Schiffman, L. H., Ben-David, E., & Fields, W. W. (eds.). *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*. 127-150. Leiden: Brill.

Crawford, S. W. (2003c). Esther. In Dunn, J. D. G., & Rogerson, J. W. (eds.). *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. 329-336. Grand Rapids MI; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans.

Dandamayev, M. (2011). Education (i) In the Achaemenid Period. In *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition. Retrieved from https://iranicaonline.org/articles/education-i.

Day, L. (1995). *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Books of Esther*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Day, L. (2005). *Esther*. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press.

Day, L., Pressler, C., & Sakenfeld, K. D. (eds.). (2006). *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*. Louisville, KY.; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Day, P. L. (ed.). (1989). *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress.

de Beauvoir, S. (trans. Borde, C., & Malovany-Chevallier, S.) (2011 [1949]). *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage Books.

De Troyer, K. (1997). Septuagint and Gender Studies: The Very Beginning of a Promising Liaison. In Brenner-Idan, A., & Fontaine, C. R. (eds.). *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*. 326-343. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

De Troyer, K. (2000). *The End of the Alpha Text of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41* (Rev. and updated translation ed.). Atlanta GA.: Society of Biblical Literature.

De Troyer, K. (2003). *Rewriting the Sacred Text: What the Old Greek Texts Tell Us About the Literary Growth of the Bible*. Leiden: Brill.

de Waal, J., & Goldman, Y. (eds.). (2004). *Biblia Hebraica Quinta editione cum apparatu critico novis curis elaborato: Megilloth*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgellschaft.

Dean, A. S., & Archer, W. J. (2017). Transgressing the Father Figure: Performing Queer Theology as an Act of Liberation. *Theology & Sexuality, 23*(1-2), 67-92.

DeFranza, M. K. (2015). *Sex difference in Christian Theology: Male, female, and intersex in the image of god*. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Defranza, M. K., Arel, S. N., & Stockly, K. (2018). Sex on the Margins: Centering Intersex, Transgender, and Sexually Fluid Voices in Religious and Scientific Discourse. *Theology & Sexuality, 24*(2), 65-71.

Dembroff, R. (2018, October). Why be nonbinary?. *Aeon*. Retrieved from https://aeon.co/essays/nonbinary-identity-is-a-radical-stance-against-gender-segregation

Dembroff, R., & Wodak, D. (2018). he/she/they/ze. *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy, 5*(20190619)

Dembroff, R. (2019). Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind. *Philosopher's Imprint*, *20*(9), 1-23.

Dennis, T. (2010). *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament*. London: SPCK.

Derrida, J. (1977). *Limited inc: Abc*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J. (1987). *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Desjardins, M. R., Richardson, P., & Wilson, S. G. (eds.). (2000). *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Dickey-Young, P. (2005). Religion. In Essed, P., Goldberg, D. T., & Kobayashi, A. L. *A Companion to Gender Studies*. pp.506-518. Malden MA: Blackwell Pub.

Dickinson, C., & Toomey, M. (2017). The Continuing Relevance of "Queer" Theology for the Rest of the Field. *Theology & Sexuality, 23*(1-2), 1-16.

Dijk Hemmes, F. v., & Brenner, A. (eds.). (1994). *Reflections on Theology and Gender*. Kampen: Kok Pharos.

Dommershausen, W. (1968). *Die Estherrolle. Stil und Ziel einer alttestamentlichen Schrift.* Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk

Dorothy, C. V. (1997). *The Books of Esther: Structure, Genre and Textual Integrity*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Drinkwater, G., Lesser, J., & Shneer, D. (eds.). (2009). *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*. New York NY: New York University Press.

During, S. (1999). *The Cultural Studies Reader* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Edgar, S., & Kinney, A. M. (eds.) (2010). *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation*. Cambridge MA.; London: Harvard University Press.

Ego, B. (1996). *Targum Scheni zu Ester: Übersetzung, Kommentar und theologische Deutung*. Tübingen: Mohr.

Elliott, M. W. (2010). Effective-History and the Hermeneutics of Ulrich Luz. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 161-173.

Epstein, I. (1960). *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*. London: Soncino Press.

Erbele-Küster, D. (2017). Menstruation and the Sacred in (Post) Biblical Discourse. In Berlis, A., Korte, A-M. J. A. C. M, & Biezeveld, K. *Everyday Life and the Sacred: Re/configuring Gender Studies in Religion*. 99-113. Leiden: Brill.

Eskenazi, T. C. (1992a). Out from the Shadows: Biblical Women in the Postexilic Era. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 54*. 25-43.

Eskenazi, T. C. (1992b). Ezra-Nehemiah. In *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Newsom, C. (ed.). Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Evans, R. (2014). *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jauss in Current Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.

Exum, J. C. (2006). *The Bible in Film*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Exum, J. C. (2007). *Retellings: The Bible in Literature, Music, Art and Film*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Exum, J. C. (2012). *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (2nd ed.) Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Exum, J. C. (2015). *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

Exum, J. C., & Clines, D. J. A. (1993). *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Feinberg, L. (1996). *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman*. Boston MA: Beacon Press.

Feinberg, L. (1998). *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue.* Boston MA: Beacon Press.

Feldman, L. H. (1970). Hellenizations in Josephus' Version of Esther. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, 101*, 143-170.

Feldman, L. H. (1998). *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible*. Leiden: Brill.

Fewell, D. N. (1992). *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Fischer, B., Weber, R., Gryson, R. (eds.). (2007). *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Fish, S. E. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Flesher, P. V. M & Chilton, B. (eds.). (2011), *The Targums: A Critical Introduction*. Waco TX.: Baylor University Press.

Foucault, M., (Bouchard, D. F., & Simon, S. eds.). (1977). *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca NY.: Cornell University Press.

Foss, S. K., Domenico M. E., & Foss, K. A. (2013). *Gender Stories: Negotiating Identity in a Binary World*. Long Grove IL: Waveland.

Fox, M. V. (1991a). *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*. Grand Rapids MI.: W.B. Eerdmans.

Fox, M. V. (1991b). *The Redaction of the Books of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts*. Atlanta GA.: Scholars Press.

Fox, M. V. (2003). Three Esthers. In Crawford, S. W., & Greenspoon, L. J. (eds.). *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*. 50-60. London: T&T Clark.

Freedman, H., & Simon, M. (1977). *The Midrash Rabbah* (New compact ed. in 5 vol ed.). London: Soncino Press.

Freund, E. (2003). *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism*. London: Routledge.

Friedlander, G. (1981). *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer: (The Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer the Great) According to the Text of the Manuscript Belonging to Abraham Epstein of Vienna* (4th ed.). New York NY.: Sepher-Hermon Press.

Frymer-Kensky, T. (1992). *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*. Oxford: Maxwell Macmillan International.

Frymer-Kensky, T. (ed.) (2006). *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism.* Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society.

Fuchs, E. (1999 [1982]). Status and Role of Female Heroines in the Biblical Narrative. In Bach, A. (ed.). *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*. 77-84. New York; London: Routledge.

Furey, C. M., LeMon, J., Matz, B., McKenzie, S. L., Römer, T. C., Schröter, J., Walfish, B. D., & Ziolkowski, E. (eds.) (2018) *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception Online*. Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Gadamer, H., (Weinsheimer, J., & Marshall, D. G. trans.). (2013 [1975]). *Truth and Method* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

Gafni, I. (1997). *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Gaither, L. L. (1997). *To Receive a Text: Literary Reception Theory as a Key to Ecumenical Reception*. New York NY: P. Lang.

García Bachmann, M. L. (2020). The Various Roles of Women in the Historical Books. In Kelle, B. E. & Strawn, B. A. (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of the Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gilfillan Upton, B. (2006 [2002]). Feminist Theology as Biblical Hermeneutics. In Frank Parsons, S. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gillingham, S. (2011). An Introduction to Reception History with Particular Reference to Psalm 1. *Revue Des Sciences Religieuses, (85)*, 571-599.

Gillingham, S. (2015). Biblical Studies on Holiday? A Personal View of Reception History. In Lyons, W. J., & England, E. (eds.). *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.

Gillingham, S. (2016). The Psalms Then and Now: "Reception History" as a Way of Seeing and Hearing the Psalms. *National Bible Society of Ireland, Psalms for PIBA*. Retrieved from https://www.nationalbiblesocietyofireland.ie/psalms-for-piba/

Goodman, P. (1949). *The Purim Anthology*. Philadelphia PA: Jewish Publication Society of America.

Gowler, D. B. (2010). Socio-rhetorical Interpretation: Textures of a Text and its Reception. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 191-206.

Graybill, R. (2016). *Are We Not Men?: Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets*. New York NY: Oxford University Press USA.

Greenough, C. (2020). *Queer Theologies: The Basics*. London: Routledge.

Griffin, G. (2017). *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grimm, G. (1977). *Rezeptionsgeschichte: Grundlegung einer Theorie: Mit Analysen und Bibliographie*. München: W. Fink.

Grossfeld, B. (1983). *The First Targum to Esther: According to the MS Paris Hebrew 110 of the Bibliothèque Nationale*. New York NY: Sepher-Hermon Press.

Grossfeld, B. (1991). *The Two Targums of Esther*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Grossfeld, B. (1994). *The Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther: A Critical Edition Based on MS. Sassoon 282 with Critical Apparatus*. New York NY: Sepher-Hermon Press.

Grossman, J. (2009). 'Dynamic Analogies' in the Book of Esther. *Vetus Testamentum, 59*(3), 394-414.

Grosz, E. A. (1989). *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Gruen, E. S. (2010). *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press.

Guest, D. (2005). *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics*. London: SCM.

Guest, D. (2006). *The Queer Bible Commentary*. London: SCM.

Guest, D. (2011). From Gender Reversal to Genderfuck: Reading Jael through a Lesbian Lens. In Hornsby, T. J., & Stone, K. *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*. 9-44. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Atlanta.

Guest, D. (2012). *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Guggenheimer, H. W. (2012). *The Jerusalem Talmud. Second Order, Mo'ed*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

Gunda, M. R. (2015). *On the Public Role of the Bible in Zimbabwe.* Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.

Gunkel, H. (1916). *Esther* (1.-4. tausend ed.). Tübingen: Mohr.

Habermas, J., & Shapiro, J. J. (1987). *Knowledge and Human Interests* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

Hacham, N. (2010). Haman, Mordekhai's Slave. *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 122*(1), 96-101.

HaCohen, R. (2010). *Reclaiming the Hebrew Bible: German-Jewish Reception of Biblical Criticism*. New York NY: De Gruyter.

Haelewyck, J. (2003). *Hester*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder.

Haelewyck, J. (2006). The Relevance of the Old Latin Version for the Septuagint, with Special Emphasis on the Book of Esther. *The Journal of Theological Studies, 57*(2), 439-473.

Hägg, T. (1991). *The Novel in Antiquity* (English ed.). Berkeley CA.: University of California Press.

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham NC; London: Duke University Press.

Halberstam, J. (2001). The Transgender Gaze in 'Boys Don't Cry'. *Screen, 42*(3), 294-98.

Hall, K., & Bucholtz, M. (1995). *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. New York; London: Routledge.

Halpern, S. (2020, February). Puritan Purim. *Lehrhaus.* Retrieved from https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/puritan-purim/

Halpern-Amaru, B. (1988). Portraits of Biblical Women in Josephus' "Antiquities". *The Journal of Jewish Studies, 39*(2), 143.

Hanhart, R. (1983). *Esther,* (2., durchgesehene Aufl. ed.). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Hazony, Y. (2016). *God and Politics in Esther* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Henderson-Merrygold Jo. (2020). Gendering Sarai: Reading Beyond Cisnormativity in Genesis 11:29–12:20 and 20:1–18. *Open Theology, 6*(1), 496-509.

Holt, C., & Ellis, J. (1998). Assessing the Current Validity of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. *Sex Roles, 39*(11-12), 929-941.

Holub, R. C. (2003 [1984]). *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New ed.). London: Routledge.

Hornsby, T. J., & Guest, D. (2016). *Transgender, Intersex, and Biblical Interpretation*. Atlanta GA.: Society for Biblical Literature.

Hornsby, T. J., & Stone, K. (2011). *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*. Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Horowitz, E. S. (2006). *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence*. Princeton NJ.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Horowitz, E. S. (2014). Esther (Book and Person) II:3 Modern Judaism. In Furey, C. M., Matz, B., McKenzie, S. L., Römer, T. C., Schroeter, J., Walfish, B. D., & Ziolkowski, E. (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception Online.* Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1515/ebr.estherbookandperson

Ilan, T (1999). *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Ilan, T (2006). *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and Other Jewish Women*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Ilan, T., Or, T., Salzer, D. M., Steuer, C., & Wandrey, I. (eds.). (2007). *A Feminist Commentary on the Babylonian Talmud: Introduction and Studies*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Ilan, T. (2016). Josephus on Women. In Chapman, H. H., & Rodgers, Z. (eds.). *A Companion to Josephus*. 210-221. Chichester, England: Wiley Blackwell.

Ilan, T. (2017). Flavius Josephus and the Biblical Women. In Wacker, M-T., & Schuller, E. (eds.). *Early Jewish Writings*. 167-186. Atlanta GA.: SBL Press.

Irigaray, L. (Whitford, M., ed.) (1991). *The Irigaray Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Iser, W. (1980). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jacob, B. (1890). Das Buch Esther bei den LXX. *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 10*(1), 241-298.

Jahn, G. (1901). *Das Buch Ester, nach der Septuaginta hergestellt, übersetzt und kritisch erklärt*. Leiden: Brill.

Jauss, H. R. (trans. Bahti, T.) (1982). *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Minneapolis MN.: University of Minnesota Press.

Jauss, H. R. (trans. Benzinger, E.) (1970). Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory. *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation, 2*(1), 7-37.

Jerome, Mierow, C. C., & Lawler, T. C. (1963). *The Letters of St. Jerome*. Westminster MD: London: Newman Press; Longmans, Green.

Jobes, K. H. (1996). *The Alpha-Text of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text*. Atlanta GA.: Scholars Press.

Jobes, K. H. (1999). *Esther*. Grand Rapids MI.: Zondervan.

Jobes, K. (2007). Esther. In Pietersma, A., & Wright, B. G. (eds.). *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under that Title*. 424-440. New York NY; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, S. R. (2005). Novelistic Elements in Esther: Persian or Hellenistic, Jewish or Greek? *Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 67*(4), 571-589.

Joosten, J. (2010). Translating the Untranslatable: Septuagint Renderings of Hebrew Idioms. In Hiebert, R. J. V. (ed.). *"Translation is Required": The Septuagint in Retrospect and Prospect*. 59-70. Atlanta GA.: Society of Biblical Literature.

Josephus, F. (trans. and eds. Thackeray H. S. J., Marcus R., Wikgren A. P. and Feldman L. H). (1998), *Jewish Antiquities*. Cambridge MA.: London: Harvard University Press.

Josephus, F. (trans. Niese, B.). (1892). *Flavius Iosephii Opera*. (Berlin: Weidman). *Perseus Digital Library*. Crane, G. R. (ed.). Tufts University. Retrieved from http://www.perseus.tufts.edu

Kahana, H. (2005). *Esther: Juxtaposition of the Septuagint Translation with the Hebrew Text*. Leuven: Peeters.

Kalmanofsky, A. (2017). *Gender-Play in the Hebrew Bible: The Ways the Bible Challenges its Gender Norms.* London: Routledge.

Kamionkowski, S. T. (2003). *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study in the Book of Ezekiel*. London: Sheffield Academic Press.

Keim, K. E. (2017). *Pirqei deRabbi Eliezer: Structure, Coherence, Intertextuality*. Leiden; Boston MA: Brill.

Kirk-Duggan, C. (1999). Black Mother Women and Daughters: Signifying Female-Divine Relationships in the Hebrew Bible and African-American Mother-Daughter Short Stories. In Brenner, A. (ed.). *A Feminist Companion to Ruth and Esther*. 192-210. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Kirk-Rappaport, P. (2017). Another Esther: Sor Juana's Biblical Self Portrait. In Sherwood, Y. (ed.). *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field.* 98-155. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kittel, R., Alt, A., Eissfeldt, O., Kahle, P., Elliger, K., & Rudolph, W. (eds.). (1977). *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung.

Klancher, N. (2013). A Genealogy for Reception History. *Biblical Interpretation, 21*(1), 99-129.

Klein, L. R. (2003). *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press.

Kneebone, E. (2007). Dilemmas of the Diaspora: The Esther narrative in Josephus' Antiquities 11.184-296. *Ramus, 36*(1), 51-77.

Kneebone, E. (2013). Josephus's Esther and Diaspora Judaism. In Whitmarsh, T., & Thomson, S. (eds.). *The Romance between Greece and the East*. 165-182. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Knight, M. (2010). Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 137-146.

Koller, A. J. (2014). *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Konrad, A., & Harris, C. (2002). Desirability of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory Items for Women and Men: A Comparison Between African Americans and European Americans. *Sex Roles, 47*(5), 259-271.

Kraus, H. (2011). *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1-4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kvam, K. E., Schearing, L. S., & Ziegler, V. H. (eds.). (1999). *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Bloomington IN.: Indiana University Press.

Lacocque, A. (1990). *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition*. Minneapolis MN.: Fortress Press.

Lacocque, A. (2008). *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading*. Evanston IL.: Northwestern University Press.

Laffey, A. L. (1988). *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective*. Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press.

Laffey, A. L. (1990). *Wives, Harlots and Concubines: The Old Testament in Feminist Perspective*. London: SPCK.

Lanfer, P. T. (2012). *Remembering Eden: The Reception History of Genesis 3: 22–24.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lange, A., & Weigold, M. (eds.). (2011). *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Laniak, T. S. (1998). *Shame and Honor in the Book of Esther*. Atlanta GA.: Scholars Press.

Larkin, K. J. A. (1996). *Ruth and Esther*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Lee, N. C. (2013). Lamentations and Polemic: The Rejection/Reception History of Women's Lament . . . and Syria. *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology, 67*(2), 155-183.

LeFranc, K. M. (2018). Kinky Hermeneutics: Resisting Homonormativity in Queer Theology. *Feminist Theology, 26*(3), 241-254.

Lerner, M. B. (2006). The Works of Aggadic Midrash and the Esther Midrashim. In Safrai, S., Safrai, Z., Schwartz, J., & Tomson, P. J. (eds.). *The Literature of the Sages. Part 2, Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*. 133-230. Assen: Philadelphia PA: Royal Van Gorcum; Fortress Press.

Levenson, J. D. (1997). *Esther: A Commentary*. London: SCM.

Levine, A. J. (1991). *"Women Like This": New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*. Atlanta GA.: Scholars Press.

Liddell, H. G., & Scott, R. (1983). *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lieb, M., Mason, E., & Roberts, J. (2011). *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Llewellyn-Jones, L. (2013). *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Løland, H. (2008). *Silent or Salient Gender?: The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46, and 49*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Long, S. (2013). *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Reception of a Biblical Story in Music*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Losty, M., & O'Connor, J. (2018). Falling outside of the 'nice little binary box': A psychoanalytic exploration of the non-binary gender identity. *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, 32*(1), 40-60.

Loughlin, G. (2007). *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Low, K. (2013). *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Luther, M., (1995 [1483-1546]). *Table Talk*. London: Fount.

Lyons, W. J. (2010). Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 207-220.

Lyons, W. J., & England, E. (eds.). (2015). *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*. London: Bloomsbury.

Macwilliam, S. (2016). *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*. London: Routledge.

Madreiter, I. & Snegg, K. (2020). Gender and Sex in Achaemenid Persia. In Jacobs, B. & Rollinger, R. (eds.). *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire*, 2 vols., (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World). Malden, MA; Oxford. (Forthcoming 2021). Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/7059813/Gender_and_Sex_in_Achaemenid_Persia_

Marinucci, M. (2010). *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory*. London: Zed.

Marshal, J. A. (2014). Queer Studies and Critical Masculinity Studies in Feminist Biblical Studies. In Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (ed.). *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement.* Atlanta GA: SBL Press.

Mather, C. (1691). *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion. or the character and happiness of a vertuous woman: In a discourse which directs the female-sex how to express, the fear of god in every age and state of their life; and obtain both temporal and eternal blessedness*. S.G. & B.G. i.e., Samuel and Bartholomew Green for Samuel Phillips at Boston.

Matsuno, E., & Budge, S. (2017). Non-Binary/Genderqueer Identities: A Critical Review of the Literature. *Current Sexual Health Reports, 9*(3), 116-120.

Matthews, V. H., Levinson, B. M. & Frymer-Kensky, T. (eds.). (1998). *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Meyers, C. L. (1988). *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, T. (2014). *Three Versions of Esther: Their Relationship to Anti-Semitic and Feminist Critique of the Story*. Leuven: Peeters.

Moi, T. (2002). *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Moore, C. A. (1967). A Greek Witness to a Different Hebrew Text of Esther. *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 79*(3), 351-358.

Moore, C. A. (1971). *Esther*. Garden City NY.: Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Moore, C. A. (1977). *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions*. New York: Yale University Press.

Moore, C. A. (1982). *Studies in the Book of Esther*. New York NY: Ktav Publishing House.

Moore, C. A. (2003). 'It Takes a Village' to Produce a Commentary: A Case in Point. In Crawford, S. W., & Greenspoon, L. J. (eds.). *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*. 3-8. London: T & T Clark.

Moore, S. D., & Sherwood, Y. (2011). *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press.

Morgan, R. (2010). Sachkritik in Reception History. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 175-190.

Morse, H. (2014). What's in a Name? Analysing the Appellation 'Reception History' in Biblical Studies. *Biblical Reception, 3*, 243-262.

Musa, A. (2020). Jael is Non-binary; Jael Is Not a Woman. *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies, 1*(2), 97-120.

Nestle, J., Howell, C., & Wilchins, R. A. (eds.). (2002). *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary*. Los Angeles CA; New York: Alyson Books.

Neusner, J. (1982). *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*. Chicago IL; London: University of Chicago Press.

Neusner, J. (1988). *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. New Haven CT; London: Yale University Press.

Neusner, J. (1989). *Esther Rabbah I: An Analytical Translation*. Atlanta GA: Scholars Press.

Neusner, J. (1989). *The Midrash Compilations of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries: An Introduction to the Rhetorical, Logical, and Topical Program*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.

Neusner, J. (2004). *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash*. Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Neusner, J., Avery-Peck, A., & Chilton, B. (eds.). (2001). *Judaism in Late Antiquity*. Boston, MA: Brill.

Newton, K. M. (1997). *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader* (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Niditch, S. (1995). Short Stories: The Book of Esther and the Theme of Woman as a Civilizing Force. In Mays, J. L., Petersen, D. L., Richards, K. H., & Tucker, G. M. (eds.). *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honour of Gene M. Tucker*. 195-209. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Niditch, S. (1998). Portrayals of Women in the Hebrew Bible. In Baskin, J. R. *Jewish women in historical perspective* (2nd ed.). 25-45. Detroit MI.: Wayne State University Press.

Niditch, S. (2014). Interpreting Esther: Contexts, Categories and Creative Ambiguities. In Bail, U., Calduch-Benages, N., & Maier, C. M. (eds.). *The Writings and Later Wisdom Books*. 255-274. Atlanta GA.: SBL Press.

O'Kane, M. (2010). Wirkungsgeschichte and Visual Exegesis: The Contribution of Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 33*(2), 147-159.

O'Toole, L. L., Schiffman, J. R., & Edwards, M. L. K. (eds.). (2007). *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2nd ed.). New York NY.: New York University Press.

*Oxford English Dictionary: The Definitive Record of the English Language* (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parris, D. P. (2009). *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*. Eugene OR.: Pickwick Publications.

Paton, L. B. (1908). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Punt, J. (2010). Power and Liminality, Sex and Gender, and Gal 3:28. A Postcolonial, Queer Reading of an Influential Text. *Neotestamentica, 44*(1), 140-166.

Radford Ruether, R., (2006 [2002]). The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology. In Frank Parsons, S. (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Raṿeh, '., & Fish, K. (2014). *Feminist Rereadings of Rabbinic Literature*. Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press.

Repphun, E., Galbraith, D., Sweetman, W., & Harding, J. (2011). Beyond Christianity, the Bible, and the Text: Urgent Tasks and New Orientations for Reception History. *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception, 1*(1), 1-11.

Reinhartz, A., (2017). LXX Esther: A Hellenistic Jewish Revenge Fantasy. In Wacker, M-T., & Schuller, E. (eds.). *Early Jewish Writings*. 9-28. Atlanta GA.: SBL Press.

Richards, C., Bouman, W. P., Seal, L., Barker, M. J., Nieder, T. O., & T'Sjoen, G. (2016). Non-Binary or Genderqueer Genders. *International Review of Psychiatry, 28*(1), 95-102.

Ricœur, P. (1976). *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth TX: Texas Christian University Press.

Roberts, A., Donaldson, J., Coxe, A. C., Menzies, A., Richardson, E. C., & Pick, B. (eds.). (1999). *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids MI.: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

Rooke, D. W. (2007). *A Question of Sex?: Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Rooke, D. W. (2012). *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ruane, N. J. (2013). *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ruiz-Ortiz, F. (2017). *The Dynamics of Violence and Revenge in the Hebrew Book of Esther*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Runions, E. (2003). *How Hysterical: Identification and Resistance in the Bible and Film*. New York NY; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sacks, S. D. (2009). *Midrash and Multiplicity: Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Renewal of Rabbinic Interpretive Culture*. Berlin; New York NY.: De Gruyter.

Sakenfeld, K. D. (2003). *Just Wives?: Stories of Power and Survival in the Old Testament and Today*. Louisville, KY.; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

Sawyer, D. F. (2017). Queen Vashti's 'No' and What It Can Tell Us About Gender Tools in Biblical Narrative. In Sherwood, Y. (ed.). *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field.* 343-354. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sawyer, J. F. A. (2013). A Case Study in Reception History. *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism, 16*(1), 66-73.

Schaff, P., & Wace, H. (eds.). (1988). *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. second series*. Edinburgh; T & T Clark; Grand Rapids MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Schniedewind, W. M. (1999). *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1-17*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.

Scholz, S. (2017). *Introducing the Women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, Gender Justice, and the Study of the Old Testament*. New York NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Screnock, J., & Holmstedt, R. D. (2015). *Esther: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text*. Waco TX: Baylor University Press.

Sedgwick, E. K. (2008). *Epistemology of the Closet* (Updated with a new preface. ed.). Berkeley CA.: University of California Press.

Seem, S., & Clark, M. (2006). Healthy Women, Healthy Men, and Healthy Adults: An Evaluation of Gender Role Stereotypes in the Twenty-First Century. *Sex Roles, 55*(3-4), 247-258.

Segal, E. (1994). *The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary*. Atlanta GA: Scholars Press.

Seow, C. L. (2007). Job's Wife, With Due Respect. In Krüger, T. (2007). *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen: Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verita vom 14.-19. August 2005*. 351-375. Zürich: TVZ, Theologischer Verlag Zürich.

Seow, C. L., & Spieckermann, H. (eds.) (2014). Esther (Book and Person). In *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception, Volume 8.* 10-54. Boston MA; Berlin: De Gruyter.

Sherwood, Y. (2000). *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Silverstein, A. (2006). The Book of Esther and the Enuma Elish. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, 69*(2), 209-223.

Silverstein, A. J. (2018). *Veiling Esther, Unveiling Her Story: The Reception of a Biblical Book in Islamic Lands.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simon, M. (1939). Esther. In Freedman, H., Simon, M., & Slotki, J. J. (eds.). *Midrash Rabbah: Volume IX*. London: Soncino Press.

Simon, M., Rabbinowitz, J., Lazarus, H. M., & Epstein, I. (eds.). (1990). *Megillah*. New York NY.: Traditional Press.

Ska, J. (2005). A Plea on Behalf of the Biblical Redactors. *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology, 59*(1), 4-18.

Skemp, V. T. M. (2011). Learning by Example: Exempla in Jerome's Translations and Revisions of Biblical Books. *Vigiliae Christianae: A Review of Early Christian Life and Language, 65*(3), 257-284.

Slotki, J. J., Brodie, I., & Epstein, I. (eds.). (1990). *The Babylonian Talmud. Index Volume*. London; New York NY.: Soncino Press.

Smith, A. (2011). *Esther, Empress of Persia: The Book of Esther in a Persian Setting: Complete with Full Hebrew Text, Translation and Notes, with Accent on the Persian Background*. Eli, Israel: Elibooks.

Smith-Christopher, D. (2017). Sleeping with the Enemy? Reading Esther and Judith as Comfort Women. In Southwood, K., & Halvorson-Taylor, M. *Women and Exilic Identity in the Hebrew Bible*. 99-128. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.

Song, A. (2010). Heartless Bimbo or Subversive Role Model? A Narrative (Self) Critical Reading of the Character of Esther. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology, 49*(1), 56-69.

Spilsbury, P. and Seeman, C. (2017). *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary. Volume 6A, Judean Antiquities 11.* Leiden: Brill.

Stavrakopoulou, F. (2017). The Ancient Goddess, the Biblical Scholar and the Religious Past. In Sherwood, Y. (ed.). *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field.* 495-513. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stern, E. (2010). Esther and the Politics of Diaspora. *The Jewish Quarterly Review, 100*(1), 25-53,191.

Stone, K. (ed.) (2001). *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Stone, K. (2006). The Garden of Eden and the Heterosexual Contract. In Armour, E. T., & St. Ville, S. M. (eds.). *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*. 48-70. New York NY.: Columbia University Press.

Stone, K. (2008). Bibles that Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity. *Biblical Theology Bulletin, 38*(1), 14-25.

Stone, K. (2013). Queer Criticism. in McKenzie, S. L., & Kaltner, J. (2013). *New meanings for Ancient Texts: Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and their Applications*. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox.

Strain, D. (2018). *Ruth & Esther: There is a Redeemer & Sudden Reversals*. Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus.

Sulzbach, A. (1920). *Targum Scheni zum buch Esther*. Frankfurt am Main: J. Kaufmann.

Swancutt, D. (2006). Sexing the Pauline Body of Christ: Scriptural Sex in the Context of American Christian Culture War. In Burrus, V. & Keller, C. *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline.* 65-98. New York NY: Fordham University Press.

Swindell, A. C. (2010). *Reworking the Bible: The Literary Reception-History of Fourteen Biblical Stories*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.

Tabb Stewart, D. (2017). LGBT/Queer Hermeneutics and the Hebrew Bible. *Currents in Biblical Research, 15*(3), 289-314.

Talbot, M. M. (2010). *Language and Gender* (2nd ed.). Cambridge; Malden, MA.: Polity.

Talmon, S. (1963). 'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther. *Vetus Testamentum, 13*(1), 419-455.

Talmon, S. (1995). Was the Book of Esther known at Qumran? *Dead Sea Discoveries, 2*(3), 249-267.

Tamber-Rosenau, C. (2016). Female Diplomats in Jewish Elephantine? A New Look at a Papyrus from the Yedaniah Archive. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, *40*(4), 491-510.

Thambyrajah, J. A. (2019). Mordecai's Dream in Esther—The Greek and Latin Versions, Character, and the Tradition of Interpretation. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 43*(3), 479-490.

Thompson, J. L. (2013). *Reception History: Why Should We Care What Earlier Christians Thought about the Bible?* Cambridge: Grove Books.

Tigay, J. H. (1985). *Empirical Models for Biblical criticism*. Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Tompkins, J. P. (1980). *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Tongue, S. (2015). 'What is Language but a Sound We Christen?' Poetic Retellings as an Improper Surprise for Biblical Reception History. *Biblical Interpretation, 23*(2), 248-271.

Tov, E. (1999). *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*. Leiden: Brill.

Tov, E. (2008a). The LXX Translation of Esther: A Paraphrastic Translation of MT or a Free Translation of a Rewritten Version? In Horst, P. W. v. d., Houtman, A., Jong, A. d., & Weg, M. W. M. d. (eds.). *Empsychoi Logoi-- Religious Innovations in Antiquity: Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*. 507-526. Leiden: Brill.

Tov, E. (2008b). *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible and Qumran: Collected Essays*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Turkstra, L. S., Mutlu, B., Ryan, C. W., Despins Stafslien, E. H., Richmond, E. K., Hosokawa, E., & Duff, M. C. (2020). Sex and Gender Differences in Emotion Recognition and Theory of Mind after TBI: A Narrative Review and Directions for Future Research. *Frontiers in Neurology, 11*

Turner, B. S. (2008). *The Body & Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles CA; London: SAGE.

Vialle, C. (2010). *Une analyse comparée d'esther TM et LXX : Regard sur deux récits d'une même histoire*. Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters.

Vialle, C. (2012). La problématique du pouvoir dans Esther hébreu (TM) et Esther grec (LXX). *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 124*(4), 568-582.

Vries, J. d., & Karrer, M. (2013). *Textual History and the Reception of Scripture in Early Christianity = Textgeschichte und Schriftrezeption im frühen Christentum*. Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature.

Walfish, B. (1989). The Two Commentaries of Abraham Ibn Ezra on the Book of Esther. *Jewish Quarterly Review, 79*(4), 323-343.

Walfish, B. (1993). *Esther in Medieval Garb: Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Esther in the Middle Ages*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.

Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: SAGE.

Wechsler, M. G., & Tanḥum, b. J. (2010). *Strangers in the Land: The Judeo-Arabic Exegesis of Tanḥum ha-Yerushalmi on the Books of Ruth and Esther*. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press.

Wechsler, M. G. (2014). Esther (Book and Person) III: B, Near-Eastern Christianity. In Furey, C. M., Matz, B., McKenzie, S. L., Römer, T. C., Schroeter, J., Walfish, B. D., & Ziolkowski, E. (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and its Reception Online.* Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1515/ebr.estherbookandperson

Weems, R. J. (1995). *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets*. Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press.

Wegner, J. R. (1988). *Chattel or Person?: The Status of Women in the Mishnah*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

West, M. (2006). Esther. In Guest, D. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. 278-285. London: SCM.

Wetter, A. (2015). *"On Her account": Reconfiguring Israel in Ruth, Esther, and Judith*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.

Wills, L. M. (1995). *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press.

Wills, L. M. (2011). Jewish Novellas in a Greek and Roman Age: Fiction and Identity. *Journal for the Study of Judaism, 42*(2), 141-165.

Wolfreys, J. (2002). *Introducing Criticism at the 21st century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Wünsche, A. (1907). *Aus Israels lehrhallen: Kleine Midraschim*. Leipzig: E. Pfeiffer.

Zipor, M. A. (2006). When Midrash Met Septuagint: The Case of Esther 2,7. *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 118*(1), 82-92.

Zlotowitz, M., & Scherman, N. (1976). *The Book of Esther: A new Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic sources* (2nd ed.). Brooklyn NY: Mesorah Publications.

## *Introduction to the Appendices*

The four appendices that follow – Appendices A to D – accompany the analysis undertaken in Part Two, chapters six to ten. These appendices display side-by-side the specific verses studied in Part Two, in each of the five ancient versions. This enables the reader to easily and quickly look at each verse analysed in chapters six to nine, to compare them. Appendix A should be used alongside chapter six, Appendix B alongside chapter seven, Appendix C alongside chapter eight and Appendix D alongside chapter nine. The versions of the texts reproduced in the following tables are the same as used in Part Two.

Appendix A — Vashti and Ahasuerus

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1:5 | עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד־קָטָן מִשְׁתֶּה | ἐποίησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πότον τοῖς ἔθνεσιν τοῖς εὑρεθεῖσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν | ἐποίησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πᾶσι τοῖς εὑρεθεῖσιν ἐν Σούσοις τῇ πόλει ἀπὸ μεγάλου ἕως μικροῦ, πότον ἐν ἡμέραις ἑπτα ἔνδον ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ τοῦ βασλιέως | (187) ἔπειτα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ τοὺς πρεσβευτὰς αὐτῶν ἐν Σούσοις ἐπὶ ἡμέρας κατευώχησεν ἑπτά τὸ δὲ συμπόσιον | *cumque implerentur dies convivii invitavit omnem populum qui inventus est Susis a maximo usque ad minimum* |
| 1:9 | וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה עָשְׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים | καὶ Αστιν ἡ βασίλισσα ἐποίησε πότον ταῖς γυναιξὶν | καὶ Οὐαστιν ἡ βασίλισσα ἐποίησε δοχὴν μεγάλην πάσαις ταῖς γυναιξιν | (190) ὁμοίως τε τῶν γυναικῶν ἡ βασίλισσα Ἄστη συνήγαγεν συμπόσιον | *Vasthi quoque regina fecit convivium feminarum* |
| 1:9 | בֵּית הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ | ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ὅπου ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀρταξέρξης | ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ τοῦ ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις ὅπου ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀρταξέρξης | (190) ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις | *in palatio ubi rex Asuerus manere consueverat* |
| 1:10 | כְּטוֹב לֵב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיָּיִן | ἡδέως γενόμενος | ἐν τῷ εὐφρανθῆναι τὸν βασιλέα ἐν τῷ οἴνῳ | — | *cum rex esset hilarior et post nimiam potionem incaluisset mero* |
| 1:11 | לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּכֶתֶר מַלְכוּת | εἰσαγαγεῖν τὴν βασίλισσαν πρὸς αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν αὐτὴν καὶ περιθεῖναι αὐτῇ τὸ διάδημα | ἀγαγεῖν Ουαστιν τὴν βασίλισσαν εἰς τὸ συνεστηκὸς συμπόσιον ἐν τῷ διαδήματι τῆς βασιλείας αὐτῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον τῆς στρατιᾶς αὐτοῦ | (190) ἣν ἐπιδεῖξαι βουλόμενος τοῖς ἑστιωμένοις ὁ βασιλεὺς πέμψας ἐκέλευσεν αὐτὴν εἰς τὸ συμπόσιον ἥκειν | *ut introducerent reginam Vasthi coram rege posito super caput eius diademate* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1:11 | לְהַרְאוֹת הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפְיָהּ כִּי־טוֹבַת מַרְאֶה הִיא׃ | δεῖξαι αὐτὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἄρχουσιν καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὅτι καλὴ ἦν | — | (190) κάλλει τὰς γυναῖκας ἁπάσας ὑπερβάλλουσαν | *ostenderet cunctis populis et principibus illius pulchritudinem erat enim pulchra valde* |
| 1:12 | וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּיַד הַסָּרִיסִים | καὶ οὐκ εἰσήκουσεν αὐτοῦ Αστιν ἡ βασίλισσα ἐλθεῖν μετὰ τῶν εὐνούχων | καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησεν Ουαστιν ποιῆσαι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ βασιλέως διὰ χειρὸς τῶν εὐνούχων | (191) ἡ δὲ φυλακῇ τῶν παρὰ Πέρσαις νόμων οἳ τοῖς ἀλλοτρίοις βλέπεσθαι τὰς γυναῖκας ἀπηγορεύκασιν οὐκ ἐπορεύετο πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ πολλάκις τοὺς εὐνούχους ἀποστέλλοντος πρὸς αὐτὴν οὐδὲν ἧττον ἐνέμεινεν παραιτουμένη τὴν ἄφιξιν | *quae rennuit et ad regis imperium quod per eunuchos mandaverat venire* |
| 1:12 | וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעֲרָה בּוֹ | καὶ ἐλυπήθη ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ὠργίσθη | ἐλυπήθη σφόδρα, καὶ ὀργὴ ἐξεκαύθη ἐν αὐτῳ. | (192) ὡς εἰς ὀργὴν παροξυνθέντα τὸν βασιλέα | *unde iratus rex et nimio furore succensus* |
| 1:15 | כְּדָת מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בַּמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי | καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν αὐτῷ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους ὡς δεῖ ποιῆσαι Αστιν τῇ βασιλίσσῃ | (1:13) τί ποιήσαι τῇ βσιλίσσῃ | (193) ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ πολλάκις εἰς τὸ συμπόσιον ὑπήκουσεν οὐδὲ ἅπαξ προσέταξεν οὖν δηλοῦν τίνα κατ᾽ αὐτῆς νόμον | *cui sententiae Vasthi regina subiaceret* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1:16 | לֹא עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי עַל־כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ | οὐ τὸν βασιλέα μόνον ἠδίκησεν Αστιν ἡ βασίλισσα ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντας τοὺς ἄρχοντας καὶ τοὺς ἡγουμένους τοῦ βασιλέως | Οὐ τὸν βασιλέα μόνον ἠδίκηκεν Ουαστιν ἡ βασίλισσα, ἀλλα καὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας Περσῶν καὶ Μήδων καὶ εἰς πάντας τοὺς λαοὺς ἡ ἀδικία αὐτῆς ἐξῆλθεν, ὅτι ἠκύρωσε τὸ πρόσταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως. | (193) οὐκ αὐτῷ μόνῳ ταύτην γεγονέναι τὴν ὕβριν ἀλλὰ πᾶσι Πέρσαις | *non solum regem laesit regina Vasthi sed omnes principes et populos qui sunt in cunctis provinciis regis Asueri* |
| 1:17 | הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה | καὶ γὰρ διηγήσατο αὐτοῖς τὰ ῥήματα τῆς βασιλίσσης καὶ ὡς ἀντεῖπεν τῷ βασιλεῖ ὡς οὖν ἀντεῖπεν τῷ βασιλεῖ Ἀρταξέρξῃ | (1:14) καὶ οἱ ὁρῶντες τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ οἱ καθήμενοι ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις | (192-193) καὶ λέγειν ὡς ὑβρισθείη πρὸς αὐτῆς κληθεῖσα γὰρ πολλάκις ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ συμπόσιον ὑπήκουσεν οὐδ᾽ ἅπαξ | *rex Asuerus iussit ut regina Vasthi intraret ad eum et illa noluit* |
| 1:18 | וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֹּאמַרְנָה שָׂרוֹת פָּרַס־וּמָדַי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־דְּבַר הַמַּלְכָּה לְכָל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְדֵי בִזָּיוֹן וָקָצֶף | οὕτως σήμερον αἱ τυραννίδες αἱ λοιπαὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων Περσῶν καὶ Μήδων ἀκούσασαι τὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ λεχθέντα ὑπ᾽ αὐτῆς τολμήσουσιν ὁμοίως ἀτιμάσαι τοὺς ἄνδρας αὐτῶν | — | (194) οὐδεμία γὰρ τοῦ συνοικοῦντος ἀνδρὸς αἰδῶ ποιήσεται παράδειγμα τὴν τῆς βασιλίσσης ὑπερηφανίαν πρὸς σὲ τὸν κρατοῦντα ἁπάντων ἔχουσα | *atque hoc exemplo omnes principum coniuges Persarum atque Medorum parvipendent imperia maritorum unde regis iusta est indignatio* |
| 1:19 | לֹא־תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ לְרֵעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה | μηδὲ εἰσελθάτω ἔτι ἡ βασίλισσα πρὸς αὐτόν καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτῆς δότω ὁ βασιλεὺς γυναικὶ κρείττονι αὐτῆς | (1:18) καὶ γνωσθήτω ἠθετηκυῖα τὸν λόγον τοῦ βασιλέως Οὐαστιν. ἡ δὲ βασιλεία δοθήτω ἄλλῃ, κρείττονι οὔσῃ αὐτῆς | (194) ἔδοξε τὴν Ἄστην ἐκβαλεῖν καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ἐκείνης τιμὴν ἑτέρᾳ γυναικί | *ut nequaquam ultra Vasthi ingrediatur ad regem sed regnum illius altera quae melior illa est accipiat* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1:20 | וְכָל־הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ יְקָר לְבַעְלֵיהֶן לְמִגָּדוֹל וְעַד־קָטָן | καὶ οὕτως πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες περιθήσουσιν τιμὴν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἑαυτῶν ἀπὸ πτωχοῦ ἕως πλουσίου. | καὶ φαινέσθω ὑπακούουσα τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ βασιλέως... καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες δώσουσι τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν αὐτῶν ἀπὸ πτωχῶν ἕως πλουσίων. | — | *et cunctae uxores tam maiorum quam minorum deferant maritis suis* |
| 1:21 | וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּדְבַר מְמוּכָן | καὶ ἤρεσεν ὁ λόγος τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ τοῖς ἄρχουσι καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς καθὰ ἐλάλησεν ὁ Μουχαιος | καὶ ἀγαθὸς ὁ λόγος ἐν καρδίᾳ τοῦ βασλιέως, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἑτοίμως κατὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦτον. | (194) ἔδοξε τὴν Ἄστην ἐκβαλεῖν | *placuit consilium eius regi et principibus fecitque rex iuxta consultum Mamuchan.* |
| 2:1 | זָכַר אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי | οὐκέτι ἐμνήσθη τῆς Αστιν | καὶ οὕτως ἔστη τοῦ μνημονεύειν τῆς Ουαστιν | Διακείμενος δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἐρωτικῶς καὶ μὴ φέρων τὴν διάζεθξιν, καταλλαγῆναι μὲν αὐτῃ διὰ τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἐδύνατο, λυπούμενος δὲ ὡς ἐπ᾽ ἀδυνάτοις οἷς ἤθελε διετέλει (195) | *recordatus est Vasthi* |
| 2:4 | תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי | βασιλεύσει ἀντὶ Αστιν | κατασταθήσεται ἀντὶ Ουαστιν. | ἔξειν γυναῖκα σβέννυσθαι γὰρ τὸ πρὸς τὴν προτέραν φιλόστοργον ἑτέρας ἐπεισαγωγῇ καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἐκείνην εὔνουν ἀποσπώμενον κατὰ μικρὸν γίνεσθαι τῆς συνούσης (196) | *ipsa regnet pro Vasthi* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2:17 | וַיַּמְלִיכֻהָ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי | ἐπέθηκεν αὐτῇ τὸ διάδημα τὸ γυναικεῖον | ἐπέθηκε τὸ διάδημα τῆς βασιλείας ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς. | περιτίθησι τὸ διάδημα (203) | *fecitque eam regnare in loco Vasthi* |

Appendix B - Esther and Mordecai

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2:7a | וַיְהִי אֹמֵן אֶת־הֲדַסָּה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דֹּדוֹ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם | καὶ ἦν τούτῳ παῖς θρεπτή θυγάτηρ Αμιναδαβ ἀδελφοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄνομα αὐτῇ Εσθηρ | καὶ ἦν ἐκτρέφων πιστῶς τὴν Εσθηρ θυγατέρα ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ | (198) εὑρέθη τις ἐν Βαβυλῶνι κόρη τῶν γονέων ἀμφοτέρων ὀρφανὴ | *qui fuit nutricius filiae fratris sui Edessae quae altero nomine Hester vocabatur et utrumque parentem amiserat* |
| 2:7b | וְהַנַּעֲרָה יְפַת־תֹּאַר וְטוֹבַת מַרְאֶה | καὶ ἦν τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν τῷ εἴδει (2:7c) | καὶ ἦν ἡ παῖς καλὴ τῷ εἴδει σφόδρα καὶ ὡραία τῇ ὄψει. | (199) πασῶν δὲ τὴν Ἐσθῆρα συνέβαινεν τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν αὐτῇ τοὔνομα τῷ κάλλει διαφέρειν καὶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ προσώπου τὰς ὄψεις τῶν θεωμένων μᾶλλον ἐπάγεσθαι | *pulchra nimis et decora facie* |
| 2:7c | וּבְמוֹת אָבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לְקָחָהּ מָרְדֳּכַי לוֹ לְבַת | ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταλλάξαι αὐτῆς τοὺς γονεῖς ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα | — | (198) παρὰ τῷ θείῳ Μαρδοχαίῳ τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν ὄνομα αὐτῷ τρεφομένη οὗτος δ’ ἦν ἐκ τῆς Βενιαμίτιδος φυλῆς τῶν δὲ πρώτων παρὰ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις | *mortuisque patre eius ac matre Mardocheus sibi eam adoptavit in filiam* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2:8b | וַתֻּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יַד הֵגַי שֹׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים | καὶ ἤχθη Εσθηρ πρὸς Γαι τὸν φύλακα τῶν γυναικῶν | καὶ ἐλήφθη τὸ κοράσιον εἰς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ βασιλέως | (200) παραδοθεῖσα δὲ αὕτη τινὶ τῶν εὐνούχων εἰς ἐπιμέλειαν | *et Aegaeo traderentur eunucho Hester quoque inter ceteras puellas ei tradita est ut servaretur in numero feminarum* |
| 2:9a | וַתִּיטַב הַנַּעֲרָה בְּעֵינָיו וַתִּשָּׂא חֶסֶד לְפָנָיו וַיְבַהֵל אֶת־תַּמְרוּקֶיהָ וְאֶת־מָנוֹתֶהָ לָתֵת לָהּ | καὶ ἤρεσεν αὐτῷ τὸ κοράσιον καὶ εὗρεν χάριν ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσπευσεν αὐτῇ δοῦναι | (2:8) καὶ ἤρεσεν αὐτῷ ὑπὲρ πάσας τὰς γυναῖκας. (2.9) καὶ εὗρεν Εσθηρ χάριν καὶ ἔλεον κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσπευσε προστατῆσαι | — | *quae placuit ei et invenit gratiam in conspectu illius ut adceleraret* |
| 2:10 | לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד | καὶ οὐχ ὑπέδειξεν Εσθηρ τὸ γένος αὐτῆς οὐδὲ τὴν πατρίδα ὁ γὰρ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐνετείλατο αὐτῇ μὴ ἀπαγγεῖλαι | — | — | *quae noluit indicare ei populum et patriam suam Mardocheus enim praeceperat ut de hac re omnino reticeret* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2:11 | וּבְכָל־יוֹם וָיוֹם מָרְדֳּכַי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים לָדַעַת אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמַה־יֵּעָשֶׂה בָּהּ | καθ᾽ ἑκάστην δὲ ἡμέραν ὁ Μαρδοχαῖος περιεπάτει κατὰ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν γυναικείαν ἐπισκοπῶν τί Εσθηρ συμβήσεται | — | (204) μεταβὰς δὲ ὁ θεῖος αὐτῆς ἐκ Βαβυλῶνος εἰς Σοῦσα τῆς Περσίδος αὐτόθι διῆγεν ἑκάστης ἡμέρας πρὸς τοῖς βασιλείοις διατρίβων καὶ πυνθανόμενος περὶ τῆς κόρης τίνα διάγει τρόπον ἔστεργεν γὰρ αὐτὴν ὡς αὐτοῦ θυγατέρα | *qui deambulabat cotidie ante vestibulum domus in qua electae virgines servabantur curam agens salutis Hester et scire volens quid ei accideret* |
| 2:20 | אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת מֽוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי וְאֶת־מַאֲמַר מָרְדֳּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עֹשָׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה בְאָמְנָה אִתּוֹ׃ | ἡ δὲ Εσθηρ οὐχ ὑπέδειξεν τὴν πατρίδα αὐτῆς οὕτως γὰρ ἐνετείλατο αὐτῇ Μαρδοχαῖος φοβεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ποιεῖν τὰ προστάγματα αὐτοῦ καθὼς ἦν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ καὶ Εσθηρ οὐ μετήλλαξεν τὴν ἀγωγὴν αὐτῆς | — | — | *necdumque prodiderat Hester patriam et populum suum iuxta mandatum eius quicquid enim ille praecipiebat observabat Hester et ita cuncta faciebat ut eo tempore solita erat quo eam parvulam nutriebat* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:1 | וּמָרְדֳּכַי יָדַע אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה וַיְקָרַע מָרְדֳּכַי אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבַּשׁ שַׂק וָאֵפֶר וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וַיִּזְעַק זְעָקָה גְדֹלָה וּמָרָה | ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐπιγνοὺς τὸ συντελούμενον διέρρηξεν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνεδύσατο σάκκον καὶ κατεπάσατο σποδὸν καὶ ἐκπηδήσας διὰ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλεως ἐβόα φωνῇ μεγάλῃ αἴρεται ἔθνος μηδὲν ἠδικηκός | Ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐπέγνω πάντα τὰ γεγονότα, καὶ ἡ πόλις Σοῦσα ἐταράσσετο ἐπὶ τοῖς γεγενημένοις, καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ἦν πένθος ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐνεδύσατο σάκκον καὶ ἐκπηδήσας διὰ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλεως ἐβόα φωνῇ μεγάλῃ Αἴρεται ἔθνος μηδὲν ἠδικηκός | (221) Ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος μαθὼν τὸ γινόμενον περιρρηξάμενος τὴν ἐσθῆτα καὶ σάκκον ἐνδυσάμενος καὶ καταχεάμενος σποδιὰν διὰ τῆς πόλεως ἐφέρετο βοῶν ὅτι μηδὲν ἀδικῆσαν ἔθνος ἀναιρεῖται | *quae cum audisset Mardocheus scidit vestimenta sua et indutus est sacco spargens cinerem capiti et in platea mediae civitatis voce magna clamabat ostendens amaritudinem animi sui* |
| 4:2 | וַיָּבוֹא עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ | καὶ ἦλθεν ἕως τῆς πύλης τοῦ βασιλέως | ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐλθὼν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ καὶ περιεβάλετο σάκκον καὶ σποδωθεὶς ἐξῆλθεν ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξω καὶ ἔστη | (221) καὶ τοῦτο λέγων ἕως τῶν βασιλείων ἦλθεν καὶ πρὸς αὐτοῖς ἔστη | *et hoc heiulatu usque* |
| 4:4a | וַתָּבוֹאינָה נַעֲרוֹת אֶסְתֵּר וְסָרִיסֶיהָ וַיַּגִּידוּ לָהּ וַתִּתְחַלְחַל הַמַּלְכָּה מְאֹד | καὶ εἰσῆλθον αἱ ἄβραι καὶ οἱ εὐνοῦχοι τῆς βασιλίσσης καὶ ἀνήγγειλαν αὐτῇ καὶ ἐταράχθη ἀκούσασα τὸ γεγονὸς | — | (222) ὡς δ᾽ ἀπήγγειλάν τινες τῇ βασιλίσσῃ τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον ἐν οὕτως οἰκτρῷ σχήματι πρὸ τῆς αὐλῆς ἑστῶτα ταραχθεῖσα πρὸς τὴν ἀκοὴν | *ingressae sunt autem puellae Hester et eunuchi nuntiaveruntque ei quod audiens consternata est* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:4b | וַתִּשְׁלַח בְּגָדִים לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי וּלְהָסִיר שַׂקּוֹ מֵעָלָיו וְלֹא קִבֵּל׃ | καὶ ἀπέστειλεν στολίσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ ἀφελέσθαι αὐτοῦ τὸν σάκκον ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἐπείσθη | (4:3) καὶ ἐκάλεσεν εὐνοῦχον ἕνα καὶ ἀπέστειλε πρὸς Εσθηρ, καὶ εἶπεν ἡ βασίλισσα Περιέλεσθε τὸν σάκκον καὶ εἰσαγάγετε αὐτόν (4.4) ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἤθελεν. | (222) ἐξέπεμπεν τοὺς μεταμφιάσοντας αὐτόν (223) οὐ πεισθέντος δὲ ἀποδύσασθαι τὸν σάκκον οὐ γὰρ ἐφ᾽ ᾧ τοῦτον ἀναγκασθείη λαβεῖν δεινῷ πεπαῦσθαι | *et misit vestem ut ablato sacco induerent eum quam accipere noluit* |
| 4:5b | וַתְּצַוֵּהוּ עַל־מָרְדֳּכָי לָדַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה | καὶ ἀπέστειλεν μαθεῖν αὐτῇ παρὰ τοῦ Μαρδοχαίου τὸ ἀκριβές | — | (223) τοῦτο προσκαλεσαμένη τὸν εὐνοῦχον Ἀχράθεον καὶ γὰρ ἔτυχεν αὐτῇ παρών ἀπέστειλεν Μαρδοχαίῳ γνωσόμενον τίνος συμβεβηκότος αὐτῷ σκυθρωποῦ πενθεῖ καὶ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦτο περικείμενος οὐδ᾽ αὐτῆς παρακαλούσης ἀπέθετο | *praecepit ut iret ad Mardocheum et disceret ab eo cur hoc faceret* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:8 | וְאֶת־פַּתְשֶׁגֶן כְּתָב־דָּת אֲשֶׁר־נִתַּן בְּשׁוּשָׁן לְהַשְׁמִידָם נָתַן לוֹ לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר וּלְהַגִּיד לָהּ וּלְצַוּוֹת עָלֶיהָ לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהִתְחַנֵּן־לוֹ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלְפָנָיו עַל־עַמָּהּ | καὶ τὸ ἀντίγραφον τὸ ἐν Σούσοις ἐκτεθὲν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀπολέσθαι αὐτοὺς ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ δεῖξαι τῇ Εσθηρ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ἐντείλασθαι αὐτῇ εἰσελθούσῃ παραιτήσασθαι τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἀξιῶσαι αὐτὸν περὶ τοῦ λαοῦ μνησθεῖσα ἡμερῶν ταπεινώσεώς σου ὡς ἐτράφης ἐν χειρί μου διότι Αμαν ὁ δευτερεύων τῷ βασιλεῖ ἐλάλησεν καθ᾽ ἡμῶν εἰς θάνατον ἐπικάλεσαι τὸν κύριον καὶ λάλησον τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ ἡμῶν καὶ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ θανάτου | ἀλλ᾽ εἶπεν Οὕτως ἐρεῖτε αὐτῇ Μὴ ἀποστρέψῃς τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ κολακεῦσαι τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ τοῦ λαοῦ μνησθεῖσα ἡμερῶν ταπεινώσεώς σου ὧν ἐτράφης ἐν τῇ χειρί μου, ὅτι Αμαν ὁ δευτερεύων λελάληκε τῷ βασιλεῖ καθ᾽ ἡμῶν εἰς θάνατον. | (224) ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐπέδειξε τῷ εὐνούχῳ τὴν αἰτίαν τό τε γράμμα τὸ κατὰ τῶν Ἰουδαίων εἰς ἅπασαν τὴν ὑπὸ τῷ βασιλεῖ χώραν διαπεμφθὲν καὶ τὴν τῶν χρημάτων ὑπόσχεσιν ᾗ τὴν ἀπώλειαν τοῦ ἔθνους ᾐτεῖτο παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἀμάνης (225) δοὺς δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἀντίγραφον τῶν ἐν Σούσοις προτεθέντων κομίσαι τῇ Ἐσθῆρι καὶ περὶ τούτων δεηθῆναι τοῦ βασιλέως ἐνετέλλετο καὶ σωτηρίας ἕνεκεν τοῦ ἔθνους μὴ ἀδοξῆσαι λαβεῖν σχῆμα ταπεινόν ᾧ παραιτήσεται τοὺς Ἰουδαίους κινδυνεύοντας ἀπολέσθαι τὸν γὰρ τὴν δευτέραν ἔχοντα τῷ βασιλεῖ τιμὴν Ἀμάνην κατηγορήσαντ᾽ αὐτῶν παρωξυγκέναι κατ᾽ αὐτῶν τὸν βασιλέα | *exemplarque edicti quod pendebat in Susis dedit ei ut reginae ostenderet et moneret eam ut intraret ad regem et deprecaretur eum pro populo suo* |
| 4:10 | וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לַהֲתָךְ וַתְּצַוֵּהוּ אֶל־מָרְדֳּכָי | εἶπεν δὲ Εσθηρ πρὸς Αχραθαῖον πορεύθητι πρὸς Μαρδοχαῖον καὶ εἰπὸν ὅτι | καὶ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτῷ κατὰ τάδε λέγουσα | (226) ταῦτα γνοῦσα πέμπει πάλιν πρὸς Μαρδοχαῖον | *quae respondit ei et iussit ut diceret Mardocheo* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:11 | כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ<br>וְעַם־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹדְעִים | τὰ ἔθνη πάντα τῆς βασιλείας γινώσκει ὅτι | Σὺ γινώσκεις παρὰ πάντας ὅτι | (226) ὁ εἰσερχόμενος πρὸς αὐτὸν ἄκλητος ἀποθνήσκει | *omnes servi regis et cunctae quae sub dicione eius sunt norunt provinciae quod... igitur quomodo ad regem intrare potero quae triginta iam diebus non sum vocata ad eum* |
| 4:13 | וַיֹּאמֶר מָרְדֳּכַי לְהָשִׁיב<br>אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אַל־תְּדַמִּי<br>בְנַפְשֵׁךְ לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ<br>מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים | καὶ εἶπεν Μαρδοχαῖος πρὸς Αχραθαῖον πορεύθητι καὶ εἰπὸν αὐτῇ Εσθηρ μὴ εἴπῃς σεαυτῇ ὅτι σωθήσῃ μόνη ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ παρὰ πάντας τοὺς Ιουδαίους | (4:9) καὶ ἀπέστειλε πρὸς αὐτὴν Μαρδοχαῖος καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ | ἀλλὰ συγγνώμης τυχὼν σώζεται Μαρδοχαῖος δὲ τούτους κομίσαντος αὐτῷ τοῦ εὐνούχου παρὰ τῆς Ἐσθῆρος τοὺς λόγους ἀπαγγέλλειν ἐκέλευσεν αὐτῇ μὴ τὴν ἰδίαν οὕτως σκοπεῖν σωτηρίαν ἀλλὰ τὴν κοινὴν τοῦ ἔθνους | *rursum mandavit Hester dicens ne putes quod animam tuam tantum liberes quia in domo regis es prae cunctis Iudaeis* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:14 | כִּי אִם־הַחֲרֵשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בָּעֵת הַזֹּאת רֶוַח וְהַצָּלָה יַעֲמוֹד לַיְּהוּדִים מִמָּקוֹם אַחֵר וְאַתְּ וּבֵית־אָבִיךְ תֹּאבֵדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לְעֵת כָּזֹאת הִגַּעַתְּ לַמַּלְכוּת | ὡς ὅτι ἐὰν παρακούσῃς ἐν τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἄλλοθεν βοήθεια καὶ σκέπη ἔσται τοῖς Ιουδαίοις σὺ δὲ καὶ ὁ οἶκος τοῦ πατρός σου ἀπολεῖσθε καὶ τίς οἶδεν εἰ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐβασίλευσας | (4:9) Ἐὰν ὑπερίδῃς τὸ ἔθνος σου τοῦ μὴ βοηθῆσαι αὐτοῖς, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ θεὸς ἔσται αὐτοῖς βοηθὸς καὶ σωτηρία, σὺ δὲ καὶ ὁ οἶκος τοῦ πατρός σου ἀπολεῖσθε. (4.10) καὶ τίς οἶδεν εἰ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐβασίλεθσας | (227) εἰ γὰρ ἀμελήσειεν τούτου νῦν ἔσεσθαι μὲν αὐτῷ βοήθειαν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως αὐτὴν δὲ καὶ τὸν πατρῷον οἶκον αὐτῆς ὑπὸ τῶν ὀλιγωρηθέντων διαφθαρήσεσθαι | *si enim nunc silueris per aliam occasionem liberabuntur Iudaei et tu et domus patris tui peribitis et quis novit utrum idcirco ad regnum veneris ut in tali tempore parareris* |
| 4:16 | לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וָיוֹם גַּם־אֲנִי וְנַעֲרֹתַי אָצוּם כֵּן וּבְכֵן אָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כַדָּת וְכַאֲשֶׁר אָבַדְתִּי אָבָדְתִּי | βαδίσας ἐκκλησίασον τοὺς Ιουδαίους τοὺς ἐν Σούσοις καὶ νηστεύσατε ἐπ᾽ ἐμοὶ καὶ μὴ φάγητε μηδὲ πίητε ἐπὶ ἡμέρας τρεῖς νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν κἀγὼ δὲ καὶ αἱ ἄβραι μου ἀσιτήσομεν καὶ τότε εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα παρὰ τὸν νόμον ἐὰν καὶ ἀπολέσθαι με ᾖ | Παραγγείλατε θεραπείαν καὶ δεήθητε τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκτενῶς κἀγὼ δὲ καὶ τὰ κοράσιά μου ποιήσομεν οὕτως, καὶ εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ἄκλητος, εἰ δέοι καὶ ἀποθανεῖν με. | (228) ἡ δὲ Ἐσθήρα ἐπέστειλεν μὲν τῷ Μαρδοχαίῳ τὸν αὐτὸν πέμψασα διάκονον εἰς Σοῦσα πορευθέντι τοὺς ἐκεῖ Ἰουδαίους εἰς ἐκκλησίαν συναγαγεῖν καὶ νηστεῦσαι πάντων ἀποσχομένους ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἡμέρας τὸ δ᾽ αὐτὸ ποιήσασα μετὰ τῶν θεραπαινίδων τότε προσελεύσεσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ παρὰ τὸν νόμον ὑπισχνεῖτο κἂν ἀποθανεῖν δέῃ τοῦτο ὑπομενεῖν | *vade et congrega omnes Iudaeos quos in Susis reppereris et orate pro me non comedatis et non bibatis tribus diebus ac noctibus et ego cum ancillulis meis similiter ieiunabo et tunc ingrediar ad regem contra legem faciens invocata tradensque me morti et periculo* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4:17 | וַיַּעֲבֹר מָרְדֳּכָי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּתָה עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר | καὶ βαδίσας Μαρδοχαῖος ἐποίησεν ὅσα ἐνετείλατο αὐτῷ Εσθηρ | καὶ ἐποίησεν οὕτως Μαρδοχαῖος. | (229) Καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος μὲν κατὰ τὰς Ἐσθῆρος ἐντολὰς | *ivit itaque Mardocheus et fecit omnia quae ei Hester praeceperat* |
| Addition C. 5-7 | — | [5] σὺ πάντα γινώσκεις σὺ οἶδας κύριε ὅτι οὐκ ἐν ὕβρει οὐδὲ ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ οὐδὲ ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ ἐποίησα τοῦτο τὸ μὴ προσκυνεῖν τὸν ὑπερήφανον Αμαν [6] ὅτι ηὐδόκουν φιλεῖν πέλματα ποδῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς σωτηρίαν Ισραηλ [7] ἀλλὰ ἐποίησα τοῦτο ἵνα μὴ θῶ δόξαν ἀνθρώπου ὑπεράνω δόξης θεοῦ καὶ οὐ προσκυνήσω οὐδένα πλὴν σοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου καὶ οὐ ποιήσω αὐτὰ ἐν ὑπερηφανίᾳ | [14(5)] σὺ γάρ πάντα γινώσκεις, καὶ τὸ γένος Ισραηλ, ὅτι σὺ οἶδας [15] καὶ οὐχ ὅτι ἐν ὕβρει οὐδὲ ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ ἐποίησα τοῦ μὴ προσκυνεῖν τὸν ἀπερίτμητον Αμαν [(6)] ἐπεί εὐδόκουν φιλῆσαι τὰ πέλματα τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν τοὺ Ισραηλ, [(7)] ἀλλ᾽ ἐποίησα ἵνα μηδένα προτάξω τῆς δόξης σου, δέσποτα, καὶ μηδένα προσκυνήσω πλὴν σοῦ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, καὶ οὐ ποιήσω αὐτὸ ἐν πειρασμῷ | (230) οὐδὲ γὰρ ἁμαρτόν τι κινδυνεύειν ἀκλεῶς ἀποθανεῖν ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸν γὰρ εἶναι τὴν αἰτίαν τῆς Ἀμάνου ὀργῆς ὅτι μὴ προσεκύνησα μηδ᾽ ἣν σοί δέσποτα φησίν τιμὴν παρεῖχον ταύτην ἐκείνῳ παρασχεῖν ὑπέμενον ὀργισθεὶς ταῦτα | — |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:1 | וּמָרְדֳּכַי בָּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־הִגִּיד אֶסְתֵּר מַה הוּא־לָהּ | καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος προσεκλήθη ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ὑπέδειξεν γὰρ Εσθηρ ὅτι ἐνοικείωται αὐτῇ | (7:14) καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τῇ Εσθηρ Καὶ Μαρδοχαῖον ἐβουλεύσατο κρεμάσαι τὸν σῴσαντά με ἐκ χειρὸς τῶν εὐνούχων, οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι πατρῷον αὐτοῦ γένος ἐστὶν ἡ Εσθηρ. καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ βασιλεὺς τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον | (269) Μαρδοχαῖον δὲ προσκαλεσάμενος καὶ γὰρ ἐδήλωσεν αὐτῷ τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν συγγένειαν Ἐσθήρα | *et Mardocheus ingressus est ante faciem regis confessa est enim ei Hester quod esset patruus suus* |
| 8:2 | וַתָּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי עַל־בֵּית הָמָן | καὶ κατέστησεν Εσθηρ Μαρδοχαῖον ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν Αμαν | (7:15) καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ πάντα τὰ τοῦ Αμαν. | (270) δωρεῖται δὲ καὶ ἡ βασίλισσα Μαρδοχαίῳ τὴν Ἀμάνου κτῆσιν | *Hester autem constituit Mardocheum super domum suam* |
| 9:29 | וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַּת־אֲבִיחַיִל וּמָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי אֶת־כָּל־תֹּקֶף | καὶ ἔγραψεν Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα θυγάτηρ Αμιναδαβ καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος ὁ Ιουδαῖος ὅσα ἐποίησαν | — | — | *scripseruntque Hester regina filia Abiahil et Mardocheus Iudaeus* |
| 9:30 | וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים | — | — | — | *et miserunt* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9:31 | לְקַיֵּם אֵת־יְמֵי הַפֻּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בִּזְמַנֵּיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר קָיַם עֲלֵיהֶם מָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי וְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה | (9:30) καὶ Μαρδοχαῖος καὶ Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα ἔστησαν ἑαυτοῖς καθ᾽ ἑαυτῶν καὶ τότε στήσαντες κατὰ τῆς ὑγιείας αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν βουλὴν αὐτῶν | — | (293) ἔγραψεν δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος τοῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀρταξέρξου βασιλείᾳ [ζῶσιν] Ἰουδαίοις ταύτας παραφυλάσσειν τὰς ἡμέρας καὶ ἑορτὴν ἄγειν αὐτὰς καὶ τοῖς ἐκγόνοις παραδοῦναι τοῦ πρὸς πάντα διαμεῖναι τὸν χρόνον τὴν ἑορτὴν ἕνεκα καὶ μὴ λήθῃ παραπολέσθαι | *observantes dies Sortium et suo tempore cum gaudio celebrarent sicut constituerat Mardocheus et Hester* |
| 9:32 | וּמַאֲמַר אֶסְתֵּר קִיַּם דִּבְרֵי הַפֻּרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְתָּב בַּסֵּפֶר | (9:31) καὶ Εσθηρ λόγῳ ἔστησεν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ ἐγράφη εἰς μνημόσυνον | — | — | *et omnia quae libri huius qui vocatur Hester historia continentur* |

Appendix C - Ahasuerus and Esther

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2:16 | וַתִּלָּקַח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אֶל־בֵּית מַלְכוּתוֹ | καὶ εἰσῆλθεν Εσθηρ πρὸς Ἀρταξέρξην τὸν βασιλέα | — | ἀφικομένης δὲ τῆς Ἐσθήρας πρὸς αὐτὸν | *ducta est itaque ad cubiculum regis Asueri* |
| 2:17 | וַיֶּאֱהַב הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־הַנָּשִׁים | καὶ ἠράσθη ὁ βασιλεὺς Εσθηρ | — | καὶ πεσὼν τῆς κόρης εἰς ἔρωτα (202) | *et amavit eam rex* |
| 2:17 | וַתִּשָּׂא־חֵן וָחֶסֶד לְפָנָיו מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלֹת | παρὰ πάσας τὰς παρθένους | ὡς δὲ κατέμανθανεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πάσας τὰς παρθένους, ἐφάνη ἐπιφανεστάτη Εσθηρ καὶ εὗρε χάριν καὶ ἔλεον κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ | ἡσθεὶς αὐτῇ (202) | *plus quam omnes mulieres habuitque gratiam et misericordiam coram* |
| 2:17 | וַיָּשֶׂם כֶּתֶר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ וַיַּמְלִיכֶהָ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי | καὶ ἐπέθηκεν αὐτῇ τὸ διάδημα τὸ γυναικεῖον | καὶ ἐπέθηκε τὸ διάδημα τῆς βασιλείας ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς. | νομίμως αὐτὴν ἄγεται γυναῖκα καὶ γάμους αὐτῇ (202)<br>εἰσελθούσῃ δὲ εἰς τὸ βασίλειον περιτίθησι τὸ διάδημα καὶ συνώκησεν (203) | *eo super omnes mulieres et posuit diadema regni in capite eius fecitque eam regnare in loco Vasthi* |
| 2:22 | וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ בְּשֵׁם מָרְדֳּכָי | καὶ αὐτὴ ἐνεφάνισεν τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς | — | Μαρδοχαῖος δὲ διὰ τῆς Ἐσθήρας φανεροὺς ἐποίησε (207) | *illa regi ex nomine Mardochei qui ad se rem detulerat* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Addition C.24-28 | — | δὸς λόγον εὔρυθμον εἰς τὸ στόμα μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ λέοντος καὶ μετάθες τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς μῖσος τοῦ πολεμοῦντος ἡμᾶς εἰς συντέλειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ὁμονοούντων αὐτῷ [25] ἡμᾶς δὲ ῥῦσαι ἐν χειρί σου καὶ βοήθησόν μοι τῇ μόνῃ καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ εἰ μὴ σέ κύριε [26] πάντων γνῶσιν ἔχεις καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἐμίσησα δόξαν ἀνόμων καὶ βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριτμήτων καὶ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίου [27] σὺ οἶδας τὴν ἀνάγκην μου ὅτι βδελύσσομαι τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ὑπερηφανίας μου ὅ ἐστιν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου ἐν ἡμέραις ὀπτασίας μου βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηνίων καὶ οὐ φορῶ αὐτὸ ἐν ἡμέραις ἡσυχίας μου [28] καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ δούλη σου τράπεζαν Αμαν καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα συμπόσιον βασιλέως οὐδὲ ἔπιον οἶνον σπονδῶν | ἐπιφάνητι ἡμῖν, κ΄θριε, καὶ γνώσθητι ἐν καιρῷ θλιψεως ἡμῶν, καὶ μὴ θραύσῃς ἡμᾶς [25(24)] δὸς λόγον εὐρθυμον εἰς τὸ στόμα μοθ, καὶ χαρίστωσον τὰ ῥήματά μοθ ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ μετάστρεψον τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς τῶν ὁμονοούντων αὐτῷ. [(25)] ἡμᾶς δὲ ῥῦσαι ἐν τῇ χειρί σου τῇ κραταιᾷ, καὶ βοήθησόν μοι ὅτι σὺ πάντων γνῶσιν ἔχεις, [(26)] καὶ οἶδας ὅτι βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριτμήτου, καὶ ἐμισησα δὸξαν ἀνόμου καὶ παντὸς ἀλλογενοῦς. [26(27)] σὺ, κὺριε, οἶδας τὴν ἀνάγκην μου, ὅτι βδελύσσομαι τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ὑπερηφανίας ὅ ἐστιν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου, καὶ οὐ φορῶ αὐτὸ εἰ μὴ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀπτασίας μου, καὶ βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος ἀποκαθημένης. [27(28)] καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ δούλη σου ἐπὶ τῶν τραπεζῶν αὐτῶν ἅμα. [28] καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα βασιλέως συμπόσια, καὶ οὐκ ἔπιον σπονδῆς οἶνον, καὶ οὐκ εὐφράνθη ἡ δούλη σοθ ἐφ᾽ἡμέραις μεταβολῆς μοθ εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ σοι, δέσποτα | (231) ἱκέτευε δὲ καὶ Ἐσθήρα τὸν θεὸν τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ ῥίψασα κατὰ τῆς γῆς ἑαυτὴν καὶ πενθικὴν ἐσθῆτα περιθεμένη (232) καὶ τροφῇ καὶ ποτῷ καὶ τοῖς ἡδέσιν ἀποταξαμένη τρισὶν ἡμέραις ᾔτει τὸν θεὸν ἐλεηθῆναι μὲν αὐτήν δόξαι δ᾽ ὀφθεῖσαν τῷ βασιλεῖ πιθανὴν μὲν τοὺς λόγους παρακαλοῦσαν τὸ δὲ εἶδος εὐπρεπεστέραν τῆς τάχιον οὖσαν (233) ἵν᾽ ἀμφοτέροις καὶ πρὸς τὴν παραίτησιν ὀργῆς εἴ τι παροξυνθείη πρὸς αὐτὴν ὁ βασιλεύς χρήσαιτο καὶ πρὸς τὴν συνηγορίαν τῶν ὁμοεθνῶν ἐν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις σαλευόντων μῖσός τε γενέσθαι τῷ βασιλεῖ πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τὴν ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῖς τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐὰν ὀλιγωρηθῶσιν ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ κατασκευάσοντας | — |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Addition D.1-6 | — | καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ὡς ἐπαύσατο προσευχομένη ἐξεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς θεραπείας καὶ περιεβάλετο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῆς [2] καὶ γενηθεῖσα ἐπιφανὴς ἐπικαλεσαμένη τὸν πάντων ἐπόπτην θεὸν καὶ σωτῆρα παρέλαβεν τὰς δύο ἅβρας [3] καὶ τῇ μὲν μιᾷ ἐπηρείδετο ὡς τρυφερευομένη [4] ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα ἐπηκολούθει κουφίζουσα τὴν ἔνδυσιν αὐτῆς [5] καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθριῶσα ἀκμῇ κάλλους αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἱλαρὸν ὡς προσφιλές ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῆς ἀπεστενωμένη ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου [6] καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα πάσας τὰς θύρας κατέστη ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν τῆς ἐπιφανείας αὐτοῦ ἐνεδεδύκει ὅλος διὰ χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν καὶ ἦν φοβερὸς σφόδρα | καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ὡς ἐπαύσατο Εσθηρ προσευχομένη, ἐξεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς θεραπείας, καὶ περιεβάλετο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς δόξης [2] καὶ γενομένη ἐπιφανὴς καὶ ἐπικαλεσαμένη τὸν πάντων γνώστην καὶ σωτῆρα θεὸν παρέλαβε μεθ᾽ ἑαυτῆς δύο ἅβρας, [(3)] καὶ τῇ μὲν μιᾷ ἐπηρείδετο ὡς τρυφερευομένη, [(4)] ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα ἐπηκολούθει ἐπικουφιζοθσα τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτῆς [3(5)] καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθριῶσα ἐν ἀκμῇ κάλλους αὐτης, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ὡς προσφιλές, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτης ἀπεστενωμένη [4(6)] καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα τὰς θύρας ἔστη ἐνὼπιον τοῦ βασιλέως. καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ, καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν ἐπιφανείας ἐνδεδύκει, ὅλος διάχρυσος, καὶ λίθοι πολυτελεῖς ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ, καὶ φοβερὸς σφόδρα [5(7)] καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπθρωμένον ἐν δόξῃ ἐνέβλεψεν αὐτῇ ὡς ταῦρος ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ αὐτοῦ [6] καὶ ἐφοβήθη ἡ βασίλισσα, καὶ μετέβαλε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει, καὶ ἐπέκυψεν ἐπί τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἅβρας τῆς προπορευομένης | (234) Ταῦθ᾽ ἱκετεύουσα τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀποδύεται μὲν τὴν ἐσθῆτα ἐκείνην καὶ τὸ σχῆμα μεταβάλλει κοσμησαμένη δ᾽ ὡς ἐχρῆν τὴν βασίλισσαν σὺν δυσὶν θεραπαίναις ὧν ἡ μὲν ἐπερειδομένην αὐτὴν κούφως ἔφερεν ἡ δὲ ἑπομένη τὸ βαθὺ τοῦ ἐνδύματος καὶ μέχρι τῆς γῆς κεχυμένον ἄκροις ἀπῃώρει τοῖς δακτύλοις ἥκει πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα μεστὴ μὲν τὸ πρόσωπον ἐρυθήματος προσηνὲς δὲ καὶ σεμνὸν ἐπικειμένη τὸ κάλλος (235) εἰσῄει δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν μετὰ δέους ὡς δὲ κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ καθεζομένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου | — |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Addition D.7-11 | — | καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον δόξῃ ἐν ἀκμῇ θυμοῦ ἔβλεψεν καὶ ἔπεσεν ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ μετέβαλεν τὸ χρῶμα αὐτῆς ἐν ἐκλύσει καὶ κατεπέκυψεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἅβρας τῆς προπορευομένης [8] καὶ μετέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραΰτητα καὶ ἀγωνιάσας ἀνεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ μέχρις οὗ κατέστη καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὴν λόγοις εἰρηνικοῖς [9] καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ τί ἐστιν Εσθηρ ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδελφός σου θάρσει [10] οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃς ὅτι κοινὸν τὸ πρόσταγμα ἡμῶν ἐστιν [11] πρόσελθε | [7(8)] καὶ μετέβαλε τὸ πρόσωπον ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ μετέθηκε τὸν θυμὸν αὐτοῦ εἰς πραότητα [8] καὶ ἐγωνιάσας ὁ βασιλεὺς κατεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ καὶ παρεκάλεσεν αὐτὴν [(9)] καὶ εἶπεω Τί ἔστιν, Εσθηρ ἐγω εἰμι ἀδελφός σου [9] θάρσει [(10)] οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃς, ὅτι κοινόν ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα ἡμῶν, καὶ οὐ πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀπειλή. ἰδοὺ τὸ σκῆπτρον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ σου | (236) χρυσοῦ δὲ καὶ λίθου πολυτελοῦς φοβερώτερον καὶ δι᾽ αὐτὰ μᾶλλον θεασαμένη καί τι κἀκείνου προσιδόντος αὐτὴν ἀπηνέστερον καὶ διακεκαυμένῳ ὑπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς τῷ προσώπῳ πάρεσις αὐτὴν εὐθὺς λαμβάνει καὶ τοῖς παρὰ πλευρὸν οὖσιν ἀχανὴς ἐπέπεσεν (237) ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς κατὰ βούλησιν οἷμαι τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν διάνοιαν μετέβαλεν καὶ δείσας περὶ τῇ γυναικί μὴ καὶ πάθῃ τι τῶν χειρόνων ὑπὸ τοῦ φόβου (238) ἀνεπήδησεν ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ταῖς ἀγκάλαις αὐτὴν ὑπολαβὼν ἀνεκτᾶτο κατασπαζόμενός τε καὶ προσομιλῶν ἡδέως καὶ θαρρεῖν παρακαλῶν καὶ μηδὲν ὑποπτεύειν σκυθρωπόν ὅτι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἄκλητος ἔλθοι τὸν γὰρ νόμον τοῦτον πρὸς τοὺς ὑπηκόους κεῖσθαι τὴν δὲ ὁμοίως αὐτῷ βασιλεύουσαν πᾶσαν ἔχειν ἄδειαν | — |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Addition D.12-15 | — | καὶ ἄρας τὴν χρυσῆν ῥάβδον ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς καὶ ἠσπάσατο αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν λάλησόν μοι [13] καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ εἶδόν σε κύριε ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ καρδία μου ἀπὸ φόβου τῆς δόξης σου [14] ὅτι θαυμαστὸς εἶ κύριε καὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου χαρίτων μεστόν [15] ἐν δὲ τῷ διαλέγεσθαι αὐτὴν ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ ἐκλύσεως αὐτῆς καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐταράσσετο καὶ πᾶσα ἡ θεραπεία αὐτοῦ παρεκάλει αὐτήν | [10(12)] καὶ ἄρας τὸ σκῆπτρον ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς, καὶ ἠσπάσατο αὐτὴν. καὶ εἶπεν Λάλησόν μοι [11(13)] καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Εἶδόν σε ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ, καὶ ἐτάκη ἡ καρδία μου ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θυμοῦ σου, κύριε [12(14)] καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μου πρόσωπον αὐτῆς μέτρον ἱδρῶτος [(16)] καὶ ἐταράσσετο ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ πᾶσα ἡ θεραπεία αὐτοῦ, καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτήν. | (239) ταῦτα λέγων τὸ σκῆπτρον αὐτῆς ἐνετίθει τῇ χειρὶ καὶ τὴν ῥάβδον ἐξέτεινεν ἐπὶ τὸν αὐχένα αὐτῆς διὰ τὸν νόμον εὐλαβείας αὐτὴν ἀπολύων (240) ἡ δ’ ὑπὸ τούτων ἀναζωπυρήσασα δέσποτ’ εἶπεν οὐκ ἔχω σοι τὸ αἰφνίδιον τοῦ συμβεβηκότος μοι ῥᾳδίως εἰπεῖν ὡς γὰρ εἶδόν σε μέγαν καὶ καλὸν καὶ φοβερόν εὐθὺς | — |
| 5:1 | וַתַּעֲמֹד בַּחֲצַר בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית נֹכַח בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ בְּבֵית הַמַּלְכוּת נֹכַח פֶּתַח הַבָּיִת | — | — | — | *stetit in atrio domus regiae quod erat interius contra basilicam regis at ille sedebat super solium in consistorio palatii contra ostium domus* |
| 5:2 | וַיְהִי כִרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עֹמֶדֶת בֶּחָצֵר נָשְׂאָה חֵן בְּעֵינָיו | — | — | — | *cumque vidisset Hester reginam stantem placuit oculis eius* |
| 5:2 | וַיּוֹשֶׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר אֶת־שַׁרְבִיט הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר וַתִּגַּע בְּרֹאשׁ הַשַּׁרְבִיט | — | — | — | *et extendit contra eam virgam auream quam tenebat manu quae accedens osculata est summitatem virgae eius* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5:3 | וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־לָּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וּמַה־בַּקָּשָׁתֵךְ | καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεύς τί θέλεις Εσθηρ καὶ τί σού ἐστιν τὸ ἀξίωμα | καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεύς Τί ἐστιν, Εσθηρ, ἀνάγγειλόν μοι, καὶ ποιήσω σοι | (241) ὑπεχώρει μου τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ κατελειπόμην ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς μόλις δ᾽ αὐτῆς καὶ ταῦτα φθεγγομένης καὶ μετὰ ἀσθενείας αὐτόν τε ἀγωνία καὶ ταραχὴ κατελάμβανεν καὶ τὴν Ἐσθῆρ᾽ εὐψυχεῖν καὶ τὰ κρείττω προσδοκᾶν παρεθάρρυνεν ὡς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ ἡμίση τῆς βασιλείας εἰ δέοιτο τούτων παραχωρήσοντος αὐτῇ | *dixitque ad eam rex quid vis Hester regina quae est petitio tua* |
| 5:4 | וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב | εἶπεν δὲ Εσθηρ ἡμέρα μου ἐπίσημος σήμερόν ἐστιν εἰ οὖν δοκεῖ τῷ βασιλει | καὶ εἶπεν Εσθηρ Ἡμέρα ἐπίσημός μοι αὔριον, εἰ δοκεῖ οὖν τῷ βασιλεῖ | (242) ἡ δὲ Ἐσθήρα ἐφ᾽ ἑστίασιν αὐτὸν μετὰ Ἀμάνου τοῦ φίλου πρὸς αὐτὴν | *at illa respondit si regi placet* |
| 5:4 | אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ | τὴν δοχήν ἣν ποιήσω σήμερον | (5:14) τὸν ποτον, ὅν ποιήσω δοχήν αὔριον. | (242) ἐλθεῖν ἠξίωσεν παρεσκευακέναι γὰρ αὐτὴν δεῖπνον ἔλεγεν | *ad convivium quod paravi* |
| 5:5 | לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־דְּבַר אֶסְתֵּר | ὅπως ποιήσωμεν τὸν λόγον Εσθηρ | (5:15) ὅπως ποιήσωμεν τὸν λόγον Εσθηρ | (242) ὡς δ᾽ ἐπένευσεν | *ut Hester oboediat* |
| 5:5 | אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר | εἰς τὴν δοχήν ἣν εἶπεν Εσθηρ | (5:16) τὴν δοκήν, ἣν ἐποίησεν Εσθηρ, δεῖπνον πολυτελές. | (243) ἡ δὲ εἰς τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ἀνεβάλλετο φράζειν αὐτῷ τὴν αὐτῆς βούλησιν εἰ πάλιν ἔλθοι πρὸς αὐτὴν μετὰ Ἀμάνου ἐφ᾽ ἑστίασιν | *ad convivium quod eis regina paraverat* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5:6 | וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיָּיִן | ἐν δὲ τῷ πότῳ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς Εσθηρ | — | | *dixitque ei rex postquam vinum biberat abundanter* |
| 5:8 | אִם־מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב לָתֵת אֶת־שְׁאֵלָתִי וְלַעֲשׂוֹת | εἰ εὗρον χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως | (5:18) εἰ εὗρον χάριν ἐναντίον σου, βασιλεῦ, καὶ εἰ ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλέα ἀγαθὸν δοῦναι τὸ αἴτημά μου | — | *si inveni gratiam in conspectu regis et si regi placet ut det mihi quod postulo et meam impleat petitionem* |
| 5:8 | – | — | (5:19) καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεύς Ποίησον κατὰ τὸ θέλημά σου. | — | — |
| 7:3 | וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב | εἰ εὗρον χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως | Εἰ δοκεῖ τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ ἀγαθὴ ἡ κρίσις ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ | (262) ποιεῖσθαι περὶ τούτων τοὺς λόγους | *si inveni gratiam in oculis tuis o rex et si tibi placet* |
| 7:4 | הֻחֲרַשְׁתִּי כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שֹׁוֶה בְּנֵזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ | παρήκουσα οὐ γὰρ ἄξιος ὁ διάβολος τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ βασιλέως | καὶ οὐκ ἤθλεον ἀπαγγεῖλαι, ἵνα μὴ λυπήσω τὸν κύριόν μου, ἐγένετο γὰρ μεταπεσεῖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κακοποιήσαντα ἡμᾶς. | (263) οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἠνωχληκέναι αὐτῷ εἰ πρὸς δουλείαν πικρὰν ἐκέλευσεν αὐτοὺς ἀπεμποληθῆναι μέτριον γὰρ τοῦτο τὸ κακόν παρεκάλει τε τούτων ἀπαλλαγῆναι | *et gemens tacerem nunc autem hostis noster est cuius crudelitas redundat in regem* |
| 7:8 | וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ הֲגַם לִכְבּוֹשׁ אֶת־הַמַּלְכָּה עִמִּי בַּבָּיִת | εἶπεν δὲ ὁ βασιλεύς ὥστε καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα βιάζῃ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ μου | (7:11) εἶπεν Οὐχ ἱκανον σοι ἡ ἁμαρτία τῆς βασιλείας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γυναῖκά μου ἐκβιάζῃ ἐνώπιόν μου, ἀπαχθήτω Αμαν καὶ μὴ ζήτω. | (265) ἐπεισελθὼν ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν μᾶλλον παροξυνθεὶς εἶπεν ὦ κάκιστε πάντων καὶ βιάζεσθαί μου | *et ait etiam reginam vult opprimere me praesente in domo mea* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:1 | נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן | ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἀρταξέρξης ἐδωρήσατο Εσθηρ ὅσα ὑπῆρχεν Αμαν | — | (269) τὴν δὲ οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ἐχαρίσατο τῇ βασιλίσσῃ | *dedit rex Asuerus Hester reginae domum Aman* |
| 8:3 | וַתּוֹסֶף אֶסְתֵּר וַתְּדַבֵּר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתִּפֹּל לִפְנֵי רַגְלָיו וַתֵּבְךְ וַתִּתְחַנֶּן־לוֹ | καὶ προσθεῖσα ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα καὶ προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ᾐξίου | — | (270) καὶ δεῖται τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπαλλάξαι τοῦ περὶ τῆς ζωῆς φόβου τὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔθνος δηλοῦσα τὰ γραφέντα κατὰ πᾶσαν τὴν χώραν ὑπὸ Ἀμάνου τοῦ Ἀμαδάθου | *nec his contenta procidit ad pedes regis flevitque et locuta ad eum oravit* |
| 8:4 | וַתָּקָם אֶסְתֵּר וַתַּעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ | ἐξηγέρθη δὲ Εσθηρ παρεστηκέναι τῷ βασιλεῖ (8:5???) | — | — | *illaque consurgens stetit ante eum* |
| 8:5 | וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב וְאִם־מָצָאתִי חֵן לְפָנָיו וְכָשֵׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְּעֵינָיו יִכָּתֵב | καὶ εἶπεν Εσθηρ εἰ δοκεῖ σοι καὶ εὗρον χάριν πεμφθήτω | — | — | *et ait si placet regi et inveni gratiam coram oculis eius et deprecatio mea non ei videtur esse contraria obsecro… corrigantur* |
| 8:6 | כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוּכַל וְרָאִיתִי בָּרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא אֶת־עַמִּי וְאֵיכָכָה אוּכַל וְרָאִיתִי בְּאָבְדַן מוֹלַדְתִּי | πῶς γὰρ δυνήσομαι ἰδεῖν τὴν κάκωσιν τοῦ λαοῦ μου καὶ πῶς δυνήσομαι σωθῆναι ἐν τῇ ἀπωλείᾳ τῆς πατρίδος μου | — | (270) τῆς γὰρ πατρίδος αὐτῇ διαφθαρείσης καὶ τῶν ὁμοφύλων ἀπολομένων οὐκ ἂν ὑπομένειν τὸν βίον | *quomodo enim potero sustinere necem et interfectionem populi mei* |
| 8:7 | וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וּלְמָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי | καὶ εἶπεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς Εσθηρ | — | — | *responditque rex Asuerus Hester reginae et Mardocheo Iudaeo* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8:7 | הִנֵּה בֵית־הָמָן נָתַתִּי לְאֶסְתֵּר וְאֹתוֹ תָּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ עַל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יָדוֹ (בַּיְהוּדִיים) [בַּיְהוּדִים] | εἰ πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα Αμαν ἔδωκα καὶ ἐχαρισάμην σοι καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκρέμασα ἐπὶ ξύλου ὅτι τὰς χεῖρας ἐπήνεγκε τοῖς Ιουδαίοις τί ἔτι ἐπιζητεῖς | — | — | *domum Aman concessi Hester et ipsum iussi adfigi cruci qui ausus est manum in Iudaeos mittere* |
| 8:8 | וְאַתֶּם כִּתְבוּ עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ | γράψατε καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματός μου ὡς δοκεῖ ὑμῖν | — | (271) ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ὑπέσχετο μηδὲν ἄχαρι αὐτὴν μηδ᾽ οἷς ἐσπούδακεν ἐναντίον ἔσεσθαι γράφειν δὲ ἃ βούλεται προσέταξε περὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐκείνην ἐκ τοῦ βασιλέως ὀνόματος καὶ σημηναμένην αὐτοῦ τῇ σφραγῖδι πέμπειν εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν βασιλείαν | *scribite ergo Iudaeis sicut vobis placet ex regis nomine* |
| 9:12 | מֶה עָשׂוּ וּמַה־שְּׁאֵלָתֵךְ וְיִנָּתֵן לָךְ וּמַה־בַּקָּשָׁתֵךְ עוֹד וְתֵעָשׂ | πῶς οἴει ἐχρήσαντο τί οὖν ἀξιοῖς ἔτι καὶ ἔσται σοι | (845) Πῶς σοι οἱ ἐνταῦθα καὶ οἱ ἐν τῇ περιχώρῳ κέχρηνται | (289) τί ποτ᾽ εἴη γεγονὸς διαποροῦντος καὶ τί πρὸς τούτοις ἔτ᾽ αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι βούλεται πυνθανομένου πραχθήσεσθαι | *quantam putas eos exercere caedem in universis provinciis quid ultra postulas et quid vis ut fieri iubeam* |
| 9:13 | וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִנָּתֵן גַּם־מָחָר לַיְּהוּדִים | καὶ εἶπεν Εσθηρ τῷ βασιλεῖ δοθήτω τοῖς Ιουδαίοις χρῆσθαι | (8:46) καὶ εἶπεν Εσθηρ Δοθήτω τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις οὓς ἐὰν θέλωσιν ἀνελεῖν καὶ διαρπάζειν. καὶ συνεχώρησεν. | (289) γάρ παρεκάλεσεν ἐπιτραπῆναι τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις καὶ τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ἡμέραν οὕτως χρήσασθαι τοῖς ὑπολειπομένοις τῶν ἐχθρῶν | *cui illa respondit si regi placet detur potestas Iudaeis ut* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9:13 | לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדָת הַיּוֹם וְאֵת עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הָמָן יִתְלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ | δοθήτω τοῖς Ιουδαίοις χρῆσθαι ὡσαύτως τὴν αὔριον ὥστε τοὺς δέκα υἱοὺς κρεμάσαι Αμαν | — | (289) καὶ τοὺς δέκα τοὺς Ἀμάνου παῖδας ἀνασταυρῶσαι | *et decem filii Aman in patibulis suspendantur* |
| 9:25 | וּבְבֹאָהּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אָמַר עִם־הַסֵּפֶר | καὶ ὡς εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα | — | — | *et postea ingressa est Hester ad regem obsecrans* |

# Appendix D - Haman and Zeresh

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5:10 | וַיִּתְאַפַּק הָמָן וַיָּבוֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיָּבֵא אֶת־אֹהֲבָיו וְאֶת־זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ | καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς φίλους καὶ Ζωσαραν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ | ὁ δε Αμαν εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ καὶ συνήγαγε τοὺς φίλους αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ Ζωσάραν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ | (245) καὶ παρελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν γυναῖκα Γάζασαν ἐκάλεσεν καὶ τοὺς φίλους | *et dissimulata ira reversus in domum suam convocavit ad se amicos et Zares uxorem suam* |
| 5:11 | וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הָמָן אֶת־כְּבוֹד עָשְׁרוֹ וְרֹב בָּנָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גִּדְּלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְּׂאוֹ עַל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ | καὶ ὑπέδειξεν αὐτοῖς τὸν πλοῦτον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν δόξαν ἣν ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτῷ περιέθηκεν καὶ ὡς ἐποίησεν αὐτὸν πρωτεύειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι τῆς βασιλείας | — | (245) ὧν παρόντων διηγεῖτο τὴν τιμήν ἧς οὐ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀπολαύοι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τῆς βασιλίσσης | *et exposuit illis magnitudinem divitiarum suarum filiorumque turbam et quanta eum gloria super omnes principes et servos suos rex elevasset* |
| 5:12 | וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן אַף לֹא־הֵבִיאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה כִּי אִם־אוֹתִי וְגַם־לְמָחָר אֲנִי קָרוּא־לָהּ עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ | καὶ εἶπεν Αμαν οὐ κέκληκεν ἡ βασίλισσα μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως οὐδένα εἰς τὴν δοχὴν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ ἐμέ καὶ εἰς τὴν αὔριον κέκλημαι | καὶ ἐκαυχᾶτο λέγων ὡς οὐδένα κέκληκεν ἡ βασίλισσα ἐν ἐπισήμῳ ἡμέρᾳ αὐτῆς εἰ μὴ τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἐμὲ μόνον. καὶ αὔριον κέκλημαι. | (245) καὶ γὰρ τήμερον ὡς δειπνήσειεν παρ᾽ αὐτῇ μόνος σὺν τῷ βασιλεῖ κληθείη πάλιν εἰς τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν | *et post haec ait regina quoque Hester nullum alium vocavit cum rege ad convivium praeter me apud quam etiam cras cum rege pransurus sum* |
| 5:13 | וְכָל־זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שֹׁוֶה לִי בְּכָל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ | καὶ ταῦτά μοι οὐκ ἀρέσκει ὅταν ἴδω Μαρδοχαῖον τὸν Ιουδαῖον ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ | τοῦτο δὲ λυπεῖ με μόνον, ὅταν ἴδω τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον τὸν Ἰουδαῖον ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ τοῦ βασιλέως, καὶ μὴ προσκυνεῖ με. | (246) ἔλεγέν τε μὴ ἀρέσκεσθαι Μαρδοχαῖον ὁρῶντα ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ τὸν Ἰουδαῖον | *et cum haec omnia habeam nihil me habere puto quamdiu videro Mardocheum Iudaeum sedentem ante fores regias* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5:14 | וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֹהֲבָיו יַעֲשׂוּ־עֵץ גָּבֹהַּ חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה וּבַבֹּקֶר אֱמֹר לַמֶּלֶךְ וְיֹתְלוּ אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי עָלָיו וּבֹא־עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל הַמִּשְׁתֶּה שָׂמֵחַ וַיִּיטַב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הָמָן וַיַּעַשׂ הָעֵץ | καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ζωσαρα ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ φίλοι κοπήτω σοι ξύλον πηχῶν πεντήκοντα ὄρθρου δὲ εἰπὸν τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ κρεμασθήτω Μαρδοχαῖος ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου σὺ δὲ εἴσελθε εἰς τὴν δοχὴν σὺν τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ εὐφραίνου καὶ ἤρεσεν τὸ ῥῆμα τῷ Αμαν καὶ ἡτοιμάσθη τὸ ξύλον | καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ζωσάρα ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ Ἐκ γένους Ἰουδαίων ἐστίν, ἐπεὶ συγκεχώρηκέ σε ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀφανίσαι τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, καὶ ἔδωκάν σοι οἱ θεοὶ εἰς ἐκδίκησιν αὐτῶν ἡμέραν ὀλέθριον, κοπήτω σοι ξύλον πηχῶν πεντήκοντα, καὶ κείσθω, καὶ κρέμασον αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου, ὀρθρίσας δὲ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα λαλήσεις αὐτῷ, καὶ νῦν εἰσελθὼν εὐφραίνου πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα. (24) καὶ ἤρεσε τῷ Αμαν, καὶ ἐποίησεν οὕτως. | (246) τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ Γαζάσης εἰπούσης κελεῦσαι ξύλον κοπῆναι πηχῶν ἑξήκοντα καὶ πρωὶ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως αἰτησάμενον ἀνασταυρῶσαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον ἐπαινέσας τὴν γνώμην προσέταξεν τοῖς οἰκέταις ξύλον ἑτοιμασαμένους στῆσαι τοῦτο ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ πρὸς τιμωρίαν Μαρδοχαίῳ | *responderuntque ei Zares uxor eius et ceteri amici iube parari excelsam trabem habentem altitudinem quinquaginta cubitos et dic mane regi ut adpendatur super eam Mardocheus et sic ibis cum rege laetus ad convivium placuit ei consilium et iussit excelsam parari crucem.* |
| 6:13a | וַיְסַפֵּר הָמָן לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וּלְכָל־אֹהֲבָיו אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ | καὶ διηγήσατο Αμαν τὰ συμβεβηκότα αὐτῷ Ζωσαρα τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῖς φίλοις | καὶ διηγήσατο Αμαν τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ πάντα τὰ γενόμενα αὐτῷ | (259) Ἀμάνης δ᾽ ὑπ᾽ αἰσχύνης πρὸς αὐτὸν παραγίνεται καὶ μετὰ δακρύων τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ τοῖς φίλοις τὰ συμβεβηκότα διηγεῖτο | *narravitque Zares uxori suae et amicis omnia quae evenissent sibi cui* |

| Verse | MT | LXX | AT | Josephus | Vulgate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6:13b | וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מָרְדֳּכַי אֲשֶׁר הַחִלּוֹתָ לִנְפֹּל לְפָנָיו לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו׃ | καὶ εἶπαν πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ φίλοι καὶ ἡ γυνή εἰ ἐκ γένους Ιουδαίων Μαρδοχαῖος ἦρξαι ταπεινοῦσθαι ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πεσὼν πεσῇ οὐ μὴ δύνῃ αὐτὸν ἀμύνασθαι ὅτι θεὸς ζῶν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ | (22) καὶ εἶπεν ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ σοφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἀφ᾽ ὅτε λαλεῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ κακά προσπορεύεταί σοι τὰ κακά. ἡσύχαζε, ὅτι ὁ θεος ἐν αὐτοῖς. | — | *responderunt sapientes quos habebat in consilio et uxor eius si de semine Iudaeorum est Mardocheus ante quem cadere coepisti non poteris ei resistere sed cades in conspectu eius* |
| 6:14 | עוֹדָם מְדַבְּרִים עִמּוֹ וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ | ἔτι αὐτῶν λαλούντων παραγίνονται οἱ εὐνοῦχοι | (23) καὶ αὐτῶν λαλούντων παρῆν τις ἐπὶ τὸν πότον σπουδάζων αὐτόν | (259) οἱ δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἀμύνασθαι τὸν Μαρδοχαῖον ἔλεγον δυνήσεσθαι τὸν γὰρ θεὸν εἶναι σὺν αὐτῷ | *adhuc illis loquentibus venerunt eunuchi regis* |