

Chapter 7

THE VIOLENCE OF POWER AND THE POWER OF VIOLENCE: HYBRID, CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE BOOK OF ESTHER

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Toward a Hybrid, Contextual Theoretical Framework of Feminist Biblical Studies

Reflecting on my theoretical—methodological and hermeneutical—framework when reading the Bible puts me on a journey through nearly four decades of my life. I started as a rather classical historical-critical scholar in Old Testament from the University of Tübingen and its faculty of Catholic Theology, although the subject of my doctoral thesis did not touch upon one of the classical fields of research, but on the so-called intertestamental literature: I wrote on the Ethiopic book of Enoch, which, in fact, is not a book but a composition of very different pieces and whose linguistic tradition—fragments in Aramaic and Greek, a whole book in Ge'ez—blurs clear distinctions between text, source, and redaction criticism.¹ During the time of my doctoral studies, in the late 1970s, I spent one academic year at the École Biblique et Archéologique, the French Biblical School in Jerusalem, a year that confronted me with fantastic and at the same time challenging experiences. I lived in the Arab (former Jordanian) district of the city, in a politically complex situation between Palestine and Israel, at a wonderful place within a community of professors and students from five continents, myself being the only person from Germany—hence a multicultural diversity bringing us sometimes to the opaque aspects of difference.

When I in 1981 obtained my first academic position as a research and teaching assistant at a German university, my students urged me to take note of a new development: feminist theology. Quickly I found myself interested. Mary Daly's book *Beyond God the Father*, just translated into German,² opened my eyes, and I realized how deeply Christianity and its symbols were permeated with patriarchal power.³ Methodologically, I decided to continue working along two lines in my further pursuit of biblical studies: one line had to be historical, on the religious history of ancient Israel, the reconstruction of its religion in different segments of

its society, and the search for ancient women's spaces and practices.⁴ In terms of this line of inquiry, I am aware of the hermeneutical circle of working on ancient texts with methods developed in modern times, and I am ready to reflect on the presuppositions of historical reconstructions in general, especially concerning silent, silenced, or distorted agents. I am also ready to renounce giving very precise dates in favor of at least an approximate narrowing down of the possible era of origin, but I feel I have to stick to that type of work as it links me with women's lives in cultures different from mine, and also with my own cultural and religious roots, nourishing roots and also poisoned roots, traditions that influence me whether I wish it or not and that have to be brought to consciousness within myself.

The second line of inquiry that I pursued, especially with regard to narrative biblical texts, is connected to a shift in my reading focus. Instead of primarily trying to identify different layers of a text to understand its historical evolution (source or redaction criticism), I moved on rather to reading the text as it stands now and to including methods of literary criticism, structural analysis, and narratology,⁵ subsequently including intertextuality and reception history. These methods allowed for readily relating biblical texts to contemporary themes or problems, which constitutes the regular way feminist rereadings of the Bible were done and continue to be done. But again I did not want to renounce an in-depth understanding of a biblical text in its historical context. The text as it stands now comes from a world very different from mine, and I want to—I *have* to—listen to these distant voices before I can go on reading the text as a texture in explicit dialogue with problems in our own context. One reason for this is that I want to relate to these voices from the past, respecting the specific struggles hidden in the texts; another reason is that going back to the world behind the texts is one possible way to prevent fundamentalist, literal understanding, as one has to respect the difference between the first readers' understanding and that of oneself. But there is also a third reason that shapes this line of inquiry that pertains to a deep desire to learn more about the ideologies that ancient texts transmit.

In this regard, before I discovered the notion and the concepts of gender, I experienced a double controversy, which marked the 1980s in Germany. One controversy concerned racism in feminist theory and theology, pertaining to color blindness and exoticism, as one of the German feminist theologians of the day, Christine Schaumberger, puts it.⁶ Women are different in their skin colors, a difference indicating a number of other differences according to contexts, and a feminism of the "White Lady," as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza labeled it,⁷ should not claim to speak in the name of all women. As I did some work with refugees from Eritrea at that time, I learned much about racism in my country, of well-meaning, stupid, and also aggressive forms, and I felt I had to know more about that community and their gender relations before being able to support these women, men, and children in their struggle to root themselves in their new context. I discovered that many of them were Roman Catholics, this forming between us a bridge of common experiences and values.

The other controversy starting in 1986 was centered on anti-Judaism in Christian feminist theology. I had some experience with Jewish studies during

my time in Tübingen and knew about Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism; however, I was surprised and sometimes shocked by the ignorance of some Christian feminist theologians in Germany who fell into the traps of such stereotypes or thought patterns.⁸ I tried to learn more about Jewish feminist theology, and I began to develop a better sense for similarities as well as differences from Christian feminism. There is not only the problem of the White Lady, but also the problem of Christian women silencing women of other religions! In the context of the commemoration of fifty years of the Reichspogromnacht/Kristallnacht pogroms (November 9–10, 1938) in Germany I carried out, together with my husband, a research project on the history of the Jewish community in the small town in which we were living at that time—one of the many Jewish communities erased in the Third Reich. We published our findings in a book,⁹ which gave rise to much public dispute regarding our perceived arrogance as late-born youngsters, but also regarding our boldness in showing the everyday collaboration of all those citizens of that town, most of them Catholics, in the process of discrimination, persecution, and elimination of their Jewish neighbors, men, women, and children.

A deeper understanding of what the concept of gender comprises came through my collaboration with the practical theologian Stefanie Rieger-Goertz. Together we organized, in spring 2005, the first colloquium in a German-speaking country on masculinity studies in theology¹⁰ including a wonderful tandem presentation about lesbian and gay theology—in the largest classroom of our Roman Catholic faculty at Münster. My contribution was on *ādām*, the first man according to Genesis 2, the first male, and the instability of his maleness.¹¹ Since then I have used gender perspectives to include masculinity studies and to sharpen Simone de Beauvoir's notion that we are not born women but made into them. My most recent attempt at an explicitly gendered approach is a study on the so-called Cycle of Elijah in 1 and 2 Kings. In this contribution, I also work with a queer perspective to understand the strange image of Elijah the hairy man in 2 Kings 1:8–9.¹² Queer studies help me to interrogate the matrix of a simple duality of sexes as well as the matrix of heteronormativity and to explore transgressions of the boundaries between the human and the animal.

Stephanie Feder, an expert on African biblical studies who also turned my attention to South African biblical studies on the book of Esther,¹³ helped me to discover postcolonial theory. Together we studied some of the classics by which we found affirmed and theoretically underpinned the importance of decentering perspectives and deconstructing meanings, and which provided us with new analytic or descriptive categories, such as orientalism in literature, but also in sciences and politics (Edward Said);¹⁴ the effects of colonialism on colonized people of color who take over white masks (Frantz Fanon);¹⁵ the constraints of nationalism and the need to perceive, think, and construct a third space accepting hybridity (Homi Bhabha, who builds on both Said and Fanon);¹⁶ and the multifaceted and not strictly class-related concept of (female) subalterns who cannot speak, or better, whose voices pass unheard within existing economic or cultural structures (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak).¹⁷ Musa Dube's fine book

*Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*¹⁸ and her Rahab prism of analysis greatly helped us to apply postcolonial theory to biblical studies. For me it was rather a painful experience to embrace that prism and to understand—in the sense of perceiving and accepting as correct—that the Exodus-to-Joshua narrative of the Hebrew Bible reveals structures of colonialism. I tried to find out more about concepts of land in the Hebrew Bible¹⁹ and the reception of such concepts in contemporary Christian-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli approaches,²⁰ as I felt that such *receptions* influence our *perceptions* of what is at stake in the biblical texts. Postcolonial biblical studies involve the critical study of the reception or appropriation of biblical concepts, so that these two recent trends in biblical studies intersect. However, postcolonial studies want to go beyond a mere critical standpoint and toward new, hybrid perspectives and spaces, and perhaps hybridity is indeed a concept that does justice to complexity, to the increasing complexity of situations, needs, and challenges people have to face—even when one has to be aware that such a concept can be co-opted to stabilize old forms of hegemony and establish new ones.²¹

In this regard, allow me to add an observation about international scholarship: it seems to become more and more difficult to follow developments in biblical research going on around the world. Language barriers—but even more, economic limitations—prevent easy exchange. Efforts to listen to voices outside the mainstream are necessary, together with the acknowledgment of our own inevitable limitations.

The Challenges of a Biblical Book

The text I suggest as an example to show how my theoretical framework informs my interpretive practice is the book of Esther.²² I chose Esther about fifteen years ago as a text I wanted to explore more deeply, for many reasons. It is one of two writings in the Hebrew Bible with its heroine in the title of the book, which of course makes it interesting for feminist readings. Its heroine, Esther, is in close interaction with three male figures: her cousin Mordecai; her husband, the Persian king; and the figure of the antagonist, Haman, the king's counselor. A gendered perspective seems promising, then—all the more so since two other women characters complete the image: Vashti, Esther's predecessor as Persian queen, and Seresh, Haman's wife. And there is even a third gender emerging at the stage, the eunuchs at the court of the king. Today most biblical scholars agree that the book of Esther is a fictional book with typecast characters, and that it is a book from Hellenistic times, using the Persian court as background for a reflection on Jewish identity under Hellenistic rulers, an identity, by the way, without reference to a land of Israel where Jews should live. The book is hence a voice from and for Jewish diaspora.

Esther is moreover a book that stands in rich intertextual relationship to the rest of the Jewish Bible, especially with regard to its wisdom traditions. Furthermore, it is a book with a complex reception history already in Jewish antiquity, as

besides the Hebrew version there is the version of the Septuagint and a Second Greek Text, considered today as another Jewish variant of the story;²³ there is an early commentary on the book in the Talmud's tractate Megillah, and there are two extant Targumic versions. They all show that, in its Jewish contexts, the story of Esther was not considered a fixed and intangible text but a fluid entity to tell, retell, and comment upon. The book of Esther, for Catholics, constitutes a canonical text different from the one in the Jewish Bible or in Bibles from churches after the Reformation. In modern Roman Catholic Bible translations, the six so-called additions of the Septuagint are usually inserted into the text taken from the Hebrew Bible. The book is hence presented as a *mixtum compositum* of the Hebrew and the Greek text, translated into a contemporary Western European language, a hybrid text.

At the same time, the book of Esther has quite a problematic reception history in Christian contexts. The first complete commentary appeared rather late, in the early Middle Ages only, when Rhabanus Maurus read the book as an allegory with Queen Esther standing for the church and Queen Vashti for the synagogue. Since Martin Luther and his turn to the literal meaning of the text, the book was found to be too Jewish, not "promoting Christ" as he would say, and in modern times Christian commentators took offense at an alleged Jewish particularism speaking through its text. The question of why, how, or in what way the book can be of interest for Christian readers is not trivial, then.

Finally, Esther is a book whose story, namely, the genocide of the Jewish people planned and set in motion by state authority (although under premodern conditions), cannot, for German contemporary readers, be heard without the specific background of our history: the Holocaust planned, set in motion, and realized by the German state and by the collaboration of many ordinary people. Against this background of genocide for reasons of racist anti-Semitism, the fact that in the Hebrew book of Esther God is not mentioned, and the motives given to annihilate the Jews are not religious, gained much significance. In my context, then, it seems obvious that I have to connect gendered readings of the book of Esther to an analysis of the dimensions of power and violence as detectable in the text of that book and in its early receptions. Building on my former publications,²⁴ I have proceeded in three steps (I–III in the following sections). To grasp the book's narrated (and probably historical) setting better, and also the challenge of multiple possible receptions today by readers under different political circumstances, it becomes meaningful, if not indispensable, to include aspects of postcolonial studies in my analyses.

Structures of Power and Violence I—Image of the Persian Empire

In a first step, I want to bring to the fore the violence of power by which the Persian Empire is held together in the narrated world.²⁵ The king's political and economic power stretches over a gigantic area, from India to Ethiopia (Esth 1:1). The first chapter shows how the king exercises his power toward his rebellious

and insubordinate wife, Queen Vashti, which results in the promulgation of a law affirming the subordination of women, children, and slaves to the patriarch of every house in the empire (1:22). The second chapter regards the extension of the king's power into every household of the kingdom, by "[gathering] all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa," as the king's servants suggest (2:3). The Persian king is presented as lord of times and lord of the bodies, as Sarojini Nadar has pointed out,²⁶ as each of these young women is prepared during twelve months, one whole year, to meet the king for one night. One could add the king's lordship over the bodies of eunuchs, boys or men transformed into no-males by genital mutilation. This king creates a specific gender system with one male, himself, at its top, hence claiming hegemony. The king is subsequently surrounded by a body of male representatives of different ethnic origin (cf. Esth 1:3), thus integrating ethnic difference into the gendered structure—the other males dependent on him with restricted power over women, children, and slaves, as well as no-males who for their part participate in the king's power as his servants.

It is within these structures of gendered violating power that Esther enters the stage (cf. Esth 2:7). Esther herself is a vulnerable person, an orphan but under protection of her cousin Mordecai, a woman of great beauty, which is her risk and her chance. The way Mordecai is introduced (2:5–6) does not give him much political power, which is quite different from the Septuagint version, in which Mordecai is called a great man at the king's court from the outset of the story. Both Mordecai and Esther belong to a specific ethnic group, the Jews, within an empire, the Persian Empire. The book of Esther reflects the situation of people not so much colonized in their country of origin but colonized as displaced persons. Under these precarious conditions of absolute or even absolutistic power, the Jewish woman and the Jewish man tried to make their way. The book of Esther seems to be structured around these two characters: a man and a woman, who together represent their people. A feminist focus on Esther only would not allow one to see this complexity; the book invites a gendered reading. However, a mere gendered reading, on the other hand, misses the intersection of gender and ethnicity.

Once Esther is taken into the king's harem, she seems to collaborate with the system. Vashti, on the other hand, resists and refuses collaboration. This is why, in early feminist commentaries, all sympathies were with Vashti as a model of resistance, resistance interpreted as directed against patriarchy. But things seem to be more complex. Later in the story, Esther will also be insubordinate and risk her life when going to the king who did not call her to come (Esth 5:1–8)—an inverted correspondence to the character of Vashti, who did not go to the king in spite of having been called (Esth 1:12). Esther's insubordination has become necessary because her cousin chose rebellion or resistance against the king's order and provoked Haman's desire to annihilate all the Jews, Mordecai's people. Mordecai, in his own way, performs anew Vashti's refusal of a royal order that, in her case, provoked a decree of submission for all women. The Hebrew book of Esther seems to negotiate the scope of actions for Jews under the conditions of an empire; it does so by showing the agency of a singular Jewish man and woman. Read in

the context of Jewish scriptures, Mordecai and Esther together rewrite the life of Joseph, Jacob's son, in Egypt, in the context of the book of Esther.

Moreover, both Mordecai and Esther remember in their actions a non-Jewish woman, Vashti. Madipoane Masenya, in her efforts to reclaim Vashti for African South African female readers,²⁷ believes that "the Jewish narrator attempts to erase her [Vashti] from our memories,"²⁸ and asks if the figure of Vashti might have gotten a better narrative treatment if she had been construed as part of the Jewish people.²⁹ If seen the way I suggest, Mordecai and Esther's actions continue Vashti's presence rather than erase her memory, and moreover place her on the side of the biblical Joseph. Nevertheless, it is true that no textual voice is given to Vashti, and her reasons for not obeying a royal order remain unexplained. Vashti, in a way, is comparable to the Rani of Sirmur, a female ruler (1815–1827) in the northeastern part of British India, whose reasons to ask for *suttee/sati* at a time in which she was supposed to function as guardian of the minor king, her son, remained unsaid or at least untransmitted. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the Rani of Sirmur serves as an example of a subaltern who cannot speak.³⁰ The literary figure of Vashti remains incomplete: a question mark for critical readers.

Two lengthy descriptions in these first two chapters, the only ones in the book, attract attention. They expand on the splendor and luxury in the king's garden opened for the public (1:2–8) and on the inner space of the king's harem (2:8–9, 12–14). In their style they represent, in terms of Edward Said, an "orientalizing gaze" on the Eastern world as seen by Hellenistic authors. It is true that Jewish readers familiar with their Scriptures would connect these descriptions with the Deuteronomic prescriptions for a king according to God's will (cf. Deut 17:17: a king has to be moderate in his riches and moderate in the number of his wives). Such readers would understand that these descriptions add to the Persian king's character as problematic. Jewish readers, further, familiar with Greek-Hellenistic discourse on virtue, would find philosophical confirmation for such a negative judgment of the king not practicing temperance. Conveying this message by using "orientalizing" stereotypes borrowed from the global culture, then, might be a stylistic means of Jewish-Hellenistic authors to further denigrate the figure of the Persian king. On the other hand it remains true, as Sarojini Nadar underlines, that the passage Esther 2:1–18 silently ignores the violent aspects of what is happening with the young women during the night with the king.³¹ On a superficial level, readers might have delighted in peeping through the keyhole of the harem's door.³² But were critical readers or listeners in Hellenistic-Roman times able to fill the lacunae differently? Given the fact that the book of Judith, in many regards similar to the (Greek) book of Esther, is quite sensitive to sexual violence, one may admit that Hellenistic Judaism must have been a culture in which such sensitivity could be found. Indeed, the Septuagint version of the book of Esther seems to grapple with the problem. Esther 2:7 LXX mentions Mordecai's intention to enter into marriage with his cousin Esther, thus underlining the violent separation of a couple, when Esther is brought to the king's harem. In 2:13 LXX the *lectio difficilior* of the manuscript tradition has Esther taking with her not an object (2:13 MT) but a person of her choice during the night with the king. The king's falling in love with

Esther (2:17 LXX) might sound romantic but also might remind critical Jewish readers of Dinah, Jacob's daughter. In this story told in Genesis 34:2–4, Shechem, the king's son who falls in love with Dinah and wants to marry her, first is said to have raped her (Gen 34:2). In contrast to the book of Judith, though, Greek Esther does not explicitly side with a women's perspective. Nor does the Hebrew book of Esther, as Itumeleng Mosala has already argued convincingly.³³

Structures of Power and Violence II—Genocide

Second, it is important to focus on Haman and his planned genocide. When Haman explains to the king that a certain nation has to be eliminated to stabilize the empire (Esth 3:8–9), the king immediately agrees, genocide obviously being for him an acceptable political strategy. By handing over his signet ring to Haman, the king transfers his power to his counselor, thus making possible the planned genocide of men, women, and children as legalized by the state. In the world of the text it is clear that this monarch is ruthless when his power is concerned, and that he has no specific interest in the life of his subordinates. Therefore, Queen Esther cannot just go to the king and ask for the lives of the Jewish people. She tries to avert the imminent danger by taking advantage of the king's attention. She does this by virtue of her being an attractive woman who finds herself under the king's control as his wife. Moreover, Esther uses the king's preference for luxurious festivities. During a banquet, she describes Haman's attack as directed toward her person together with her people so that her husband finds his possession threatened by Haman (7:3–6). Ironically, Haman confirms the king's suspicion when he is found stretched out on Esther's couch (7:8). In postcolonial terms, what Esther performs is a sort of mimicry, playing the game of the emperor, to save the lives of her people.

Linked to this is the fight between the two males Mordecai and Haman.³⁴ Mordecai refuses to bow down before Haman knowing that he transgresses a commandment of the king. The Hebrew text does not give any explicit reason except that it refers to Mordecai's explanation of being a Jew. Many Jewish and Christian commentaries see the biblical antagonism of Israel/Saul and Amalek/Agag (Exod 17; 1 Sam 15) coming back to the stage in Mordecai the Benjaminite and Haman the Agagite. This is certainly one possibility well rooted in the text. Besides this, I would like to highlight another perspective: at any rate, the gesture of bowing down and prostration expresses submission, recognizing a hierarchy of bottom and top. Mordecai will not bow down, not even when he faces the king (cf. 8:1–2). For readers in Hellenistic times, it must have been clear without explication that Mordecai is painted as the prototype of resistance against self-divinization of any human being. For Jewish readers this resistance would signify fidelity to their one and only God; for non-Jewish Hellenistic readers it was rather an expression of human dignity.

One should note that in light of the fact that the book of Esther is without direct reference to God, both readings might well be possible. Haman's hatred of

Mordecai, then, is hatred for a man who does not submit to him, and Haman's hatred of the Jews is hatred for a whole people who, like Mordecai, will not submit. Against this background it appears significant that Esther, when going to see the king without being called to him, does *not* bow down. Instead, she stands upright in the inner court; she is perceived by the king as standing upright, and she approaches him to touch his scepter (5:1–2). Esther remains, so to say, on an equal footing with the king, and her gesture can be seen as Esther acting as a Jew without identifying her as such. In that moment she acts in a hybrid way, melting her appearance as queen and her Jewishness into one. On the other hand, she prostrates herself when she asks for the reversal of Haman's counter-edict (8:3). Here, her prostration seems to be her last resort as she has to rely wholly on the king's mercy. Ironically, Haman tries to save his life by bowing down (or falling down) before Esther the queen, by humiliating himself, but the king perceives this gesture as expression of Haman's attempt to gain royal power.

Haman, in the Hebrew book of Esther, is the prototype of a person in power ready to use his power for lethal violence. The proposal he presents to the king is suggestive: there is a people with their own laws, dispersed all over the empire; moreover they do not obey the king's laws. To eliminate these people would fill up the king's treasuries (3:8–9). For contemporary German readers, Haman's proposal to the king is reminiscent of the myth of the global Jewish conspiracy effective in Western and Eastern Europe since the late nineteenth century. It moreover reminds one of Nazi Germany robbing its Jewish citizens before allowing them to leave the country and even before their deportation into the death camps. In an anachronistic way and referring to his speech before the king, one could label Haman an anti-Semite. For German readers, it consequently seems inevitable to admit that German politics during the Third Reich was Hamanic. State officials at that time could point to Martin Luther's invectives in his writing *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), according to which this leader of the Reformation suggested that the Jews' houses were to be burned, their fortunes confiscated, and that they be drafted into forced labor, or expelled.

In Germany, there is indeed a long history of specifically Christian contempt, even hostility toward Judaism and Jews that, together with accepted forms of secular anti-Semitism, certainly prevented many faithful Christians during the Third Reich from developing deeper moral scruples against the ongoing disfranchisement of the Jewish population. One of the well-known German Old Testament scholars active in Jewish-Christian dialogue since the 1970s, the Catholic Erich Zenger, suggested to Christian readers to accept the book of Esther as examining their conscience, individually and in their faith communities, regarding anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.³⁵

In the context of the origin of the (Hebrew) book of Esther, Haman could be conceived of as a dangerous but finally ridiculous figure. He falls into the pit he dug for others. In the Septuagint version, Haman even forgot to seal his decree of annihilation, so that it did not come into force at all (Esth 3:10–13 and 14–15 LXX; cf. 8:8–10 LXX). The historian Erich Gruen points out that for Hellenistic Jewish readers the portion of humor inherent in the Hebrew book of Esther is

considerable.³⁶ Commentators tend to neglect this aspect of the narrative and assume or reconstruct a situation of imminent threat or persecution as the historical frame of the book of Esther without being able to determine a specific point of reference. Another, perhaps even better possibility is to read the book without such a presupposition and rather think of Jewish everyday experiences of being rejected as different or of being confronted with latent or open mistrust. Against such a background, the book of Esther might be understood as a story of a Jewish community in a non-Jewish environment, condensing such experiences through a plot of lethal threat and a happy ending into wisdom language: of death and life, to encourage one another and to affirm to one another that they are in control of the situation.

Structures of Power and Violence III—Massacre

A third aspect is the power of violence exercised by the Jews as described in Chapter 9. It is true that the counter-edict that Esther and Mordecai are allowed to write and to seal with the king's ring (8:11) is not the simple reversal of Haman's edict commanding the elimination of the Jewish people, men, women, and children (3:13). Esther's and Mordecai's edict focuses on self-defense against a military attack, and the syntax leaves serious doubt about whether the Jews are allowed to kill women and children along with the attacking men.³⁷ Chapter 9, however, does not fit into that logic of restricted violence.³⁸ The swords in the hands of the Jewish fighters cause a massacre without direct need of self-defense (cf. in particular 9:5). Esther demands a second day of fighting (9:13), which is not in correspondence to the one day of annihilation ordered by Haman, thus breaking the pattern of reversal as indicated by the metanarrative comment in Esther 9:1.

Esther 9 in particular has earned the book of Esther harsh criticism as an expression of mere thirst for revenge, in Christian as well as in modern liberal Jewish commentaries. It is interesting, then, that already the Septuagint version of that chapter seems to have felt the need to work on this problem. In the Septuagint, the most offensive verse (9:5) is simply skipped and not translated, and the number of persons killed is considerably reduced. As a whole, the Septuagint version places much importance on insisting that cultural and religious differences of the Jews are no threat for the dominant order. The Septuagint version tries, as I read it, to trace the king as a modest, righteous, and rational ruler who is eager to eliminate criminals from his empire. The problem is his trust in Haman, who succeeds in persuading the king that the Jewish ethnos is a people of criminals and parasites. Haman is the representative of Judeophobia,³⁹ already a reality in the ancient world, and the Greek book of Esther is a document written to show that such Judeophobia is a result of malign perception of cultural differences. This version of the Esther story tries to define a space and a place for the Jewish people under conditions of an empire. It does not challenge the structures of that empire, but believes in its moral foundations as largely compatible with Jewish moral and theological

presuppositions (cf. Addition E in the LXX). There are limits, however, to this compatibility: if a human, be it even a counselor or an emperor, claims veneration by prostration like a god, a Jewish man has to refuse, as Mordecai does (Addition C, 1–10)⁴⁰—and as Esther does: when going to see the king she would not bow down, but faint! And a mixed marriage between a Jewish woman and a non-Jew is something to avoid, as Esther presupposes in her prayer (Addition C, 12–30). She describes her own situation as a kind of permanent mask as wife of the Persian king, but at the same time she has interior distance toward her non-Jewish husband.

The Hebrew version, on the other hand, is not interested in mixed marriage or circumcision, but in submission versus refusal only, and in the resulting mortal threat. It puts all emphasis on the reversal of the situation after the counter-edict was sent out. It can be read as a book of rejoicing about having been able to escape a desperate situation, as a book of suppressed people who imagine being for once on the bright side, being victorious. This is how South African scholar Gerrie Snyman describes the reception of this text by some of his students who were asked to prepare a sermon on Esther 9: they were ready to read apartheid structures and the upheaval against them into the text and side as black people with the Jews as the former victims who had to fight against their oppressors.⁴¹ Snyman writes how he himself was shocked by the fact that he as an Afrikaner white male is put on the side of the Persians, the enemies who were to be killed. Perhaps this shock is analogous to the hermeneutical process Erich Zenger suggests for German Christian readers.

However, the book of Esther can also be read as in itself offering resistance against a mere justification of counter-violence. If we take into account the fictitious character of the book, it can be read as a counterfactual story, a counter-history. Later in Jewish history the feast of Purim to which the book is attached was enriched by carnivalesque customs. If we follow the analyses of Mikhail Bakhtin,⁴² carnival is a space and a time for subalterns to express their fears, hopes, and aggressions and to show their power—a limited space and time granted by the rulers, as the rulers are always uncertain about the stability of these limits.

Jewish interpreters of the book, such as biblical scholar Stan Goldman and Israeli film producer Amos Gitai, have emphasized the many reversals and ironies in the book. They ask whether Chapter 9 could not be seen as a text showing what happens when those who are downtrodden come to power, when the oppressed take on the masks of their oppressors. Amos Gitai's film *Esther* (1984)⁴³ places the reading of Haman's annihilation edict against the Jewish people in a scenic context evoking the suffering of the Palestinian people during the Naqba, but also later in the territories occupied by Israel. Moreover, he shows, at the end of his film, in a kind of visualized reversal, Mordecai in the garments of Haman, while the text of Esther 9:1–18 is read aloud by a speaker's voice: the Jews have taken over the masks of their enemies, and these masks become part of their identity and transform them deeply. But as a further, hybrid reversal, in a kind of epilogue, Gitai has the actors of his film appearing and "Mordecai" revealing himself as Muhammad Bakri, a Palestinian from

Nazareth. "We both hate Mordecai," he says, pointing to Gitai, "and that is why we made this film."

While Gitai's film on the book of Esther concerns a dynamic in Israel/Palestine, Stan Goldman, on the other hand, reads the book as a message for Jews who live outside Israel and want to live in diaspora.⁴⁴ For Goldman, the book, with its continuing reversals and ironies, stimulates a continuing self-critical reflection on Jewish identity between adaption to the non-Jewish context and belonging to the Jewish community.

Let me conclude with one last glance at the figure of Esther in Chapter 9. She asks for a second day of fighting in Susa. And the king, overwhelmed by the reports of successful Jewish fighters outside the city, grants it to her. For a moment Esther seems to appear in the colors of the Assyrian goddess Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, to whom she probably owes her name.⁴⁵ For a moment she is part of the excess of bloodshed. How can feminist theologians deal with that? I think the Jewish feminist rabbi Elisa Klapheck and the Christian theologian Marianne Heimbach-Steins, who developed independently from each other,⁴⁶ bring in a good perspective: both point to the development of Esther as a character—from a young woman, beautiful, charming, and silent, to a woman who speaks up and risks her life; from a morally quasi-innocent being to someone who becomes a moral person, who dares to take decisions, who takes on responsibility, and who is involved and entangled in violence and runs the risk of becoming guilty. The ironic, subversive style of the narrative would then be a self-critical stimulus that women, too, badly need.

Notes

1. Marie-Theres Wacker, *Weltordnung und Gericht. Studien zu 1 Henoch 22*, FB 45 (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1982; 2nd ed. 1985).
2. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973); translated into German by Marianne Reppekus, *Jenseits von Gottvater Sohn & Co. Aufbruch zu einer Philosophie der Frauenbefreiung* (München: Frauenoffensive, 1980).
3. My first publication after the doctoral thesis was an overview of the current state of discussion in feminist theology—the first one in a German-language theological handbook; see Marie-Theres Wacker, "Feministische Theologie," in *Neues Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, Volume 1, ed. Peter Eicher (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1984), 353–60; reworked for the Second Edition (1991), 45–51.
4. In this intellectual journey, I found myself closely aligned with the work of Phyllis Bird. See her essays collected later in Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). My own investigation was rather centered on questions of goddess veneration and emerging monotheism in ancient Israel; cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, *Von Göttinnen, Göttern und dem einzigen Gott* (Münster: LIT, 2005); essays between 1986 and 2001; and also Marie-Theres Wacker, "Traces of the Goddess in the Book of Hosea," in *The Latter Prophets. A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner, First Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 219–41.

5. I was deeply impressed by Mieke Bal, *Femmes imaginaires. L'Ancien testament au risque d'une narratologie critique*, Collection ES/Écrire les Femmes 1 (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1986). The rewritten English version has a less theoretical discussion, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). Another author who impressed me strongly was J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTSup 163 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).
6. Christine Schaumberger, "Verschieden und vereint. Frauen der Dritten und Frauen der Ersten Welt," *Schlangenbrut: Zeitschrift für feministisch und religiös interessierte Frauen* 3 (1983): 40–2.
7. Cf., e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Transforming the Legacy of the Woman's Bible," in *Searching the Scriptures Vol. 1: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 1–24; also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Boston: Beacon, 1998), 36–40.
8. One of my early statements in this controversy was published in German, French, and English; see Marie-Theres Wacker, "Feministische Theologie und Antijudaismus. Diskussionsstand und Problemlage in der BRD," *Kirche und Israel* 5 (1990): 168–76; "Theologie Féministe et Anti-judaïsme. Mise à Jour et Évaluation de la Situation en R.F.A.," *Recherches féministes* 3 (1990): 155–65; "Feminist Theology and Anti-Judaism: The Status of the Discussion and the Context of the Problem in the FRG," *JFSR* 7 (1991): 109–17. For an overview of my commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue in general and Jewish-Christian feminist exchanges in particular, cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, "Von der Wurzel getragen. Feministische Exegese und jüdisch-christliches Gespräch in biographischer Brechung," in *Der jüdisch-christliche Dialog veränderte die Theologie. Ein Paradigmenwechsel aus ExpertInnen-sicht*, ed. Edith Petschnigg and Irma Traud Fischer (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), 97–111.
9. Bernd Wacker and Marie-Theres Wacker, ... *verfolgt, verjagt, deportiert. Juden in Salzkotten 1933–1942. Eine Dokumentation aus Anlaß des 50. Jahrestages der "Reichskristallnacht"* (Salzkotten: Private Publication, 1988); and the Enlarged Edition, Bernd Wacker and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Ausgelöscht. Erinnerung an die jüdische Gemeinde Salzkotten* (Salzkotten: Judentum in Salzkotten, 2002).
10. Cf. Marie-Theres Wacker and Stefanie Rieger-Goertz, eds., *Mannsbilder. Kritische Männerforschung und Theologische Frauenforschung im Gespräch*, Theologische Frauenforschung in Europa 21 (Münster: LIT, 2006).
11. Cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, "Wann ist der Mann ein Mann? Oder: Geschlechterdisput vom Paradies her," in *Mannsbilder. Kritische Männerforschung und Theologische Frauenforschung im Gespräch*, ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Stefanie Rieger-Goertz, Theologische Frauenforschung in Europa 21 (Münster: LIT, 2006), 93–114.
12. "Homme sauvage et femmes étrangères. Le cycle d'Élie (1 Rois 17–2 R 2) selon les perspectives 'Genre'/Gender (I–II)," *Lectio Difficilior* 2 (2014). Parts III–IV on postcolonial approaches and on monotheism in the Cycle of Elijah are in preparation; cf. http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/14_2/wacker_marie_theres_homme_sauvage_et_femmes_etrangeres.html, accessed January 27, 2016.
13. Stephanie Feder, "Esther Goes to Africa: Rezeptionen des Esterbuches in Südafrika," in *Esters unbekanntes seiten. Theologische Perspektiven auf ein vergessenes biblisches buch*, ed. Stephanie Feder and Aurica Nutt, Festschrift Marie-Theres Wacker (Ostfildern: Grünewald-Verlag, 2012), 41–55.
14. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

15. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noir, masques blancs* (Paris: Edition de Seuil, 1952), translated by Charles Lam Markmann as *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspéro, 1961), translated by Constance Farrington as *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963).
16. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, with a new preface by the author (London: Routledge, 2006); Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 291–322; Jonathan Rutherford, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 207–21; see also Homi K. Bhabha, *Über kulturelle Hybridität. Tradition und Übersetzung*, trans. Katharina Menke, ed. Anna Babka and Gerald Posselt (Berlin: Turia & Kant, 2012). This volume, which was based on a conference in Vienna, also included a round-table conversation with Homi Bhabha.
17. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward the History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Cf. especially chapter 3 on "History," 198–311.
18. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000).
19. Extremely illuminating in this regard is the work of Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).
20. One outcome is the issue on *Land Conflicts, Land Utopias*, ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Elaine M. Wainwright, *Concilium* 2007/2 (London: SCM, 2007), in which we included Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem as a Palestinian voice. Another outcome is my article on Ben-Gurion's reading of the book of Joshua, cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, "Feldherr und Löwensohn. Das Buch Josua—angeeignet durch David Ben-Gurion," in *The Book of Joshua*, BETL 250, ed. Ed Noort (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 609–47. My aim was to get an idea of Ben-Gurion's thinking against the background of the world political situation of his time, especially around the year 1948—the year of the proclamation of the State of Israel and the year of the Naqba/"Calamity," as the Palestinians call the expulsion of several hundreds of thousands of Arab people from their territories.
21. See, e.g., Kien Nghi Ha, "Crossing the Border? Hybridity as Late-Capitalistic Logic of Cultural Translation and National Modernisation," *Transversal Texts* 11/2006, available at: <http://eicpc.net/transversal/1206/ha/en>, accessed January 27, 2016.
22. Two commentaries I find particularly illuminating are Adele Berlin, *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 2001); and Linda M. Day, *Esther*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005). Cf. the extensive bibliography by Edith Lubetski and Meir Lubetski, *The Book of Esther: A Classified Bibliography* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008). A great source for a compared narratological approach to Esther MT and LXX, but without interest in feminist or gender perspectives, is Cathérine Vialle, *Une analyse comparée d'Esther TM et LXX: Regard sur deux récits d'une même histoire*, BETL 233 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012). Beate Ego has announced her new commentary on Esther for the year 2016, BKAT (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener). The deadline of submission for my manuscript did not allow me to refer to it.

23. I am happy to have had the opportunity to work with Kristin de Troyer on a German translation and a short commentary on the two Greek texts of Esther for the German "LXX.de." Cf. Kristin de Troyer and Marie-Theres Wacker, "Esther (Das Buch Ester)," in *Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2009), 593–618; Kristin de Troyer and Marie-Theres Wacker, "Das Buch Ester," in *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare Vol. I: Genesis bis Makkabäer*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 1,253–96. See also my contributions on EstLXX, Marie-Theres Wacker, "Mit Toratreue und Todesmut dem einen Gott anhangen. Zum Esther-Bild der Septuaginta," in *Dem Tod nicht glauben. Sozialgeschichte der Bibel*, ed. Frank Crüsemann et al., Festschrift Luise Schottroff (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004), 312–32; Marie-Theres Wacker, "Three Faces of a Story: Septuagintagriechisches und pseudolukianisches Estherbuch als Refigurationen der Esther-Erzählung," in *La Septante en Allemagne et en France/Septuaginta Deutsch und Bible d'Alexandrie*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and Olivier Munich, OBO 238 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 2009), 64–89; Marie-Theres Wacker, "Innensichten und Außensichten des Judentums im septuagintagriechischen Estherbuch (EstLxx)," in *Gesellschaft und Religion in der spätbiblischen und deuterokanonischen Literatur*, ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Thomas R. Eißner, DCLS 20 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 55–92.
24. Marie-Theres Wacker, *Ester: Jüdin, Königin, Retterin* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2006); Marie-Theres Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt des Judenhasses—mit tödlicher Gewalt gegen Judenhass? Hermeneutische Überlegungen zu Est 9," in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie des Alten, Ersten Testaments*, ed. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberg, Festschrift Erich Zenger, Herders Biblische Studien 44 (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 609–37; Marie-Theres Wacker, "Widerstand—Rache—verkehrte Welt Oder: Vom Umgang mit Gewalt im Esterbuch," in *Ester*, ed. Klara Butting, Gerard Minnaard, and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Die Bibel erzählt ...* (Wittingen: Erev Rav, 2005), 35–44; Marie-Theres Wacker, "... ein großes Blutbad: Ester 8–9 und die Frage nach Gewalt im Esterbuch," *Bibel Heute* 167 (2006): 14–16.
25. I owe this insight to Klara Butting's chapter on the book of Esther in *Die Buchstaben werden sich noch wundern. Innerbiblische Kritik als Wegweisung feministischer Hermeneutik* (Berlin: Alektor-Verlag, 1994), 49–86; see also Klara Butting, "Esther: About Resistance Against Anti-Judaism and Racism," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, trans. Martin Rumscheidt et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 207–20.
26. Sarojini Nadar, "'Texts of Terror' Disguised as the 'Word of God': The Case of Esther 2:1–18 and the Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible," *Journal of Constructive Theology* 10 (2004): 59–79; republished as "'Texts of Terror': The Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible, Church, and Society: The Case of Esther 2:1–18," in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 77–95. Cf. also Sarojini Nadar, "The Politics of Reconciliation: Re-inscribing the Wounded Body Through a Feminist Body Hermeneutic," *Concilium: International Journal of Theology* (2013): 35–41.
27. Cf. Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), "Their Hermeneutics Was Strange! Ours Is a Necessity! Reading Vashti in Esther 1 as African Women in South Africa," in *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical*

- Discourse*, ed. Caroline van der Stichele and Todd Penner, GPBS 9 (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 179–94; Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), “A Small Herb Increases Itself (Makes Impact) by a Strong Odour’: Re-imaginig Vashti in an African-South African Context,” *OTE* 16 (2003): 332–42. For her specific *bosadi* perspective of reading, cf. also Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), “Esther and Northern Sotho Stories: An African-South African Woman’s Commentary,” in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube, GPBS 2/2 (Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 27–49.
28. Masenya, “Small Herb,” 334.
 29. Masenya, “Small Herb,” 339.
 30. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 209–46.
 31. See my note 26 and also Sarojini Nadar, “Gender, Power, Sexuality and Suffering Bodies in the Book of Esther: Reading the Characters of Esther and Vashti for the Purpose of Social Transformation,” *OTE* 15 (2002): 113–30.
 32. See Marie-Theres Wacker, “Ester im Bild,” in *Ester*, ed. Klara Butting, Gerard Minnard, and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Die Bibel erzählt ...* (Wittingen: Erev Rav, 2005), 78–87 (86–7).
 33. Itumeleng J. Mosala, “The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women’s Struggle for Liberation in South Africa,” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 129–37.
 34. Both characters act out their maleness against a female figure, a line of argumentation that is beyond the scope of this essay. On Haman’s wife Seresh, cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, “Seresch,” in *Lieblingsfrauen der Bibel und der Welt. Ausgewählt für Luise Metzler zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Christina Duncker and Katrin Keita (Norderstedt: BoD, 2009), 140–51.
 35. Erich Zenger, “Das Buch Ester,” in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. Christian Frevel, Eighth Edition (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 376–86 (386).
 36. Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 137–48. In his effort to retell the story of the book in a humorous way, Gruen does not escape, for his part, an orientaling gaze, proving that the text strongly suggests it.
 37. See Rainer Kessler, “Die Juden als Kindes- und Frauenmörder? Zu Est 8,11,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte*, ed. Erhard Blum, Christian Macholz, and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, Festschrift Rolf Rendtorff (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 337–45. Kessler suggests that, grammatically, the phrase *along with women and children* can well be part of the grammatical subject—those threatened (= the Jews themselves)—instead of the object—those who are allowed to be killed (= the adversaries).
 38. Tricia Miller, in her two books on Esther, tries to show that Jewish defense in the face of planned genocide is the red thread in the Esther story. See Tricia Miller, *Three Versions of Esther: Their Relationship to Anti-Semitic and Feminist Critique of the Story*, CBET (Leuven: Peeters, 2014); Tricia Miller, *Jews and Anti-Judaism in Esther and the Church* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2015). Miller’s books are very illuminating in that she shows the broad anti-Jewish and even anti-Semitic reception the Esther story found through the centuries. I agree that Christians need to examine their conscience. I feel, though, that the line she draws between anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism and critical rereadings of the Book/s of Esther is too clear-cut, leaving no room for divergent readings—also from Jewish perspectives—or negotiations on the violent aspects within the story, quite apart from the actual situation between Israel and Palestine.

39. An expression I take from Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). On Haman's Judeophobia, cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, "Innensichten," 68–76.
40. Mordecai, in his prayer, reflects on his reason for not bowing down: he would have bowed down for the sake of Israel (add. C:5–7)—conceivably a rehabilitation of Esther's prostration later in the narrative (cf. 8:3–4).
41. Gerrie Snyman, "'Ilahle Elinothuthu'? The Lay Reader and/or the Critical Reader—Some Remarks on Africanisation," *Religion & Theology* 6 (1999): 140–67; Gerrie Snyman, "Narrative Rationality, Morality and Readers' Identification," *OTE* 15 (2002): 179–99; Gerrie Snyman, "Identification and the Discourse of Fundamentalism: Reflections on a Reading of the Book of Esther," in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps, JSOTSup 195 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 160–208; Gerrie Snyman, "Race in South Africa: A Hidden Transcript Turned Public? The Problem of Identifying with Esther/Mordecai or Haman in the Book of Esther," *Scriptura* 84 (2003): 438–52.
42. This is how Kenneth Craig suggests one read the book of Esther: Kenneth M. Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnavalesque* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995).
43. Cf. Marie-Theres Wacker, "Das biblische Estherbuch zwischen Palästina und Israel. Zum Film 'Esther' von Amos Gitai (1985) und seiner Kontextualisierung," in *Religion und Gewalt im Bibelfilm*, ed. Reinhold Zwick, Film und Theologie 20 (Marburg: Schüren, 2013), 39–59.
44. Stan Goldman, "Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther," *JSOT* 47 (1990): 15–31.
45. Ludger Hiepel, "Ester das ist auch Ištar. Eine Lesebrille für die hybride Esterfiguration vor dem Hintergrund der altorientalischen Kriegs- und Liebesgöttin," *BN* 163 (2014): 53–71.
46. Elisa Klapheck, "Ester und Amalek. Ein jüdisch-feministisches Selbstverständnis nach der Shoah," in *Von Gott reden im Land der Täter. Theologische Stimmen der dritten Generation seit der Shoa*, ed. Katharina von Kellenbach, Björn Krondorfer, and Norbert Reck (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 242–55; Marianne Heimbach-Steins, "Subjekt werden—Handlungsmacht gewinnen. Eine Glosse zu Est 4,13–14," in *Esters unbekanntes Seiten. Theologische Perspektiven auf ein vergessenes biblisches Buch*, ed. Stephanie Feder and Aurica Nutt, Festschrift Marie-Theres Wacker (Ostfildern: Grünewald-Verlag, 2012), 189–92.