IRREALIS IN ESTHER
On Being Told What Was Not[1]

*"Events that do not take place have significance
only in relation to what actually does happen."*
(Grimes 1975, 65)

I recently asked a number of people to define "story". Their answers were uniformly along the lines of "A story tells [us] what happened," approximating Webster's definition of "story" as "a connected narration of past events" (1953).

Stories tell us "what happened", what happened "next", and what happened "after that".[2] They describe "what happened" when Goldilocks went into the woods, when Arthur pulled the sword out of the stone, when Abram was called by God, when Elisha was mocked, when David faced Goliath, when Ruth gleaned in Judah, when Peter stepped out of the boat. They depict events, including internal thoughts and external words and actions, and unfold successive and anterior events so that their readers or hearers see how they are related and interdependent.

Most readers would find the following "story" understandable, if a bit silly:

> Once upon a time a king and queen and their daughter lived in a castle. When their daughter was a baby, she was blessed by the good fairies, but cursed by the wicked witch. One day a handsome prince from a far-off land saved her from the curse, won her heart, and they lived happily ever after. *The End.*

It is [barely] possible to imagine a parallel "anti-story"—an "irrealitic" "story"—such as:

> There was no king, queen, daughter, or castle. The-princess-who-was-not had never been a baby, and so neither received the blessings of good fairies (there were none), nor the curse of the non-existent wicked witch. No prince (handsome, ugly, or otherwise) came from a non-land—whether near or distant—to fail or refuse to rescue her from the curse ungiven, or to win the heart which had never loved, beaten, or existed, nor did the not-prince fail to rescue or win the non-being who was not there to rescue or win, or to whom he might (had he himself lived) have failed to sing songs that had not been written. And so nothing was, and no one lived (at all).[3] *Stop.*[4]

After the first sentence or two, most readers find themselves waiting for "but", "however", or some sort of signal that would start the "real" story by introducing something that *did* happen, since that is "what stories do". Stories—by definition and experience—tell us about "events"; this example quickly becomes rather irritating, with listeners and readers alike grimly wondering "How long can this go on?"[5] Unless something happens there is no story. An "event-free story"[6] is a contradiction in terms.

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[1] A very rough draft of this paper has been posted on www.fredputnam.org since May 2006. I learned of David Stabnow's excellent dissertation (2000) after reading this paper at SBL (19 November 2006).

[2] Stories also have a "point"; they are not merely chronicles or lists of events. To say: "I got up. I washed and dressed. I ate breakfast. I went to work and worked all day. I went home and ate dinner. I went to bed. Then I got up and started all over again." is not to tell a story. A story requires a narrative "profile" that includes a pattern of tension and release, or conflict and resolution. Without this there is no story. A conflict- or problem-free story is a contradiction in terms.

[3] The "negative" version of the story is longer because of the negatives, or the "*nots*". Unlike a rope, which is shortened by knots, stories are lengthened by them.

[4] Not "The End", because that which does not really begin cannot end—the collocation of words that make up this "story" begin at a certain point on the page, but since there are no events, nothing actually began.

[5] The line is from "Working in a Coalmine", by Lee Dorsey; the parallel is deliberate.

[6] Robbe-Grillet's horrific short story "The Secret Chamber" is very nearly event-free. A single event is described in the first paragraph, but almost all of its events—themselves part of a single whole—occur within the span of a few sentences

KINDS OF INFORMATION IN NARRATIVE

Events & Non-Events

Although stories identify and describe events, they do not *only* tell us "what happened". Every story includes other "kinds of information",[7] such as the *background* and *setting* of events (time and place), *descriptions* of setting and characters, *evaluation* (of, e.g., events, or of a character's emotions, and motives), and so forth.[8]

Even event-clauses themselves convey other kinds of information, often entailing explicit or implicit information beyond the mere "happening", such as information about chronological and logical relationships between events, or some other aspect of dependence (e.g.).[9]

"Non-event" information is in fact quite varied, encompassing everything in the story beyond the bare event-line or storyline,[10] and may be either *narrational* (in the narrator's voice) or *quotational* (in the mouth of a character in the story).[11]

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about three-quarters of the way through the story (after three pages of description). The rest of the story's five pages consists of non-event information. There may be a very few biblical analogs, such as Ezezkiel's initial vision (Ek 1-3); although it describes a number of events, it also spends quite a bit of time describing, e.g.,

[7]The title of Grimes 1971. Grimes (1971, 1985) uses this term in the sense of semantic information in a very broad sense, whereas Bergen (1984a-b) refers to specific [lexical and] grammatical choices (nouns, verbs, &c.) that fulfill particular syntactical rôles. I am following Grimes.

[8]This list largely reflects that in Grimes 1971 and 1975.

[9]E.g., event sequence, overlap, separation, causation, duration. A sentence such as "Seeing that the fire had gone out, he went out to look for more wood", narrates one *event*: going. The *circumstances* surrounding that going, which are *not events* in themselves, are (1) the extinction of the fire ("the fire had gone out"); (2) he reason for his decision to go ("seeing that the fire had gone out"); and (3) the purpose of his going ("to look for more wood").

Although the going out of the fire "happened", this sentence notes the result of that "event", the event itself is not described. This simple example is actually quite complex, since the going out of a fire is actually the cessation of an activity—the fire stops burning (or, to complicate it further, the fuel stops being consumed by combustion).

There is an implicit sequence: (1) the fire went out; (2) "he" noticed that the fire had gone out; then he reasoned that (a) a fire was desirable or necessary (without more information we cannot know which), (b) he needed more wood in order to kindle a fire, (c) there was no wood immediately at hand, (d) there was wood [somewhere else], and (e) he needed to go to where the wood was so that he could bring some back in order to start another fire; and so (3) he "went out" in order to accomplish 2b-e. The last event implies, incidentally, that he and the site of the former fire were inside something (another example of non-event information: *setting/location*), but does not identify the type of enclosure.

[10]I am not here distinguishing the "preterite chain" or "narrative backbone" (Grimes, Longacre) from other events in the story, since a flashback describes an antecedent or previous *event*. I am rather referring to *all* of the non-event information in any story (again following Grimes).

[11]All information—event, background, &c.—can be conveyed via quotation or narration. Material conveyed via quotation, like every aspect of the story, is actually narrational, since the author decides which material to put in quotations and which to merely supply as part of the narrative structure. The distinction, though artificial, is nonetheless useful, and—from the perspective of the naïf reader—real.

Boaz's statement to Ruth is an example of quotational evaluation: "The whole gate of my people know that *you are an upright woman* [lyIx; tv,ae]" (Ru 3.11), telling the reader what cannot be known from the rest of the story to this point—namely, that Ruth was well thought of by the people of Bethlehem—which confirms the reader's positive interpretation of Ruth's behaviour to that point in the story. In the same book, the narrator offers an evaluatory description of Boaz: "*a valiant upright man* [lyIx; rABGI vyai]" (2.1); this is a bare assertion, unsupported by either narrational or quotational evidence, since this is his first mention in the story.

All evaluation, quotational and narrational, is open to the reader's agreement or dismissal, based on the evidence from the rest of the story. Quotational evaluation, however, tends to be much more powerful than the same information conveyed by the narrator, since it comes from *within the story*, rather than being added to it, and is unsolicited (and thus unexpected) by the reader.

This is often the occasion of tension in stories, as when, for example, David is called a man "according to [YHWH's] own heart" (1 Sam 13.14; cf. Jr 3.15), who plots murder to avenge an insult (1 Sam 25) and to conceal his adultery (2 Sam 11).

Another type of non-event information common to stories has been called "collateral" (Grimes 1975, 64; following Nabov) or "*irrealis*"[12] (Longacre 2001, 74, 79), such as "Now Abimelech *had not approached* her" (Gn 20.4a), "Now Samuel *did not yet know* Yahweh; Yahweh's word *was not yet revealed* to him" (1 Sam 3.7), or "The men rowed in order to return to the dry land, but they *could not*" (Jon 1.13).[13] Statements in which the narrator says that something did not happen or had not happened, or that a certain condition did not exist, are examples of narrational *irrealis*—"irrealis" because the describe that which "was not", or which "did not occur", and "narrational" because they are in the author's voice.

The burden of this paper is quite simple: It examines narrational *irrealis* in the literary product known as the biblical book of Esther in order to begin to investigate why authors mention what did not happen.[14] What, in other words, is the *narrational purpose* and *function* of naming, describing, or identifying *something that didn't happen* or *wasn't done*, or the way things *weren't*, especially since stories exist in order to tell readers *what did happen*. And, specifically, how does narrational irrealis function in the book of Esther?

First, a **disclaimer**. This paper does not analyze either the lexical or morphosyntactical aspects of negation,[15] or the linguistic phenomenon of negation in Biblical Hebrew or in human language in general.[16] Nor does it attempt to analyze or describe *all types of negation* in even this biblical narrative, although it mentions various types.[17]

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[12]The term "*irrealis*" is also used of "contrary-to-fact" conditions (e.g., "If you had come, you would have had a good time."). The form of the conditional protasis and apodosis tells us that the person did not come, and so did not have that particular good time.

[13]Irrealis is not limited to biblical stories. While preparing this paper, I ran across the following passage from Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* in which Miss Crawford tries to understand her attraction to Edmund Bertram:

> ... he began to be agreeable to her. She felt it to be so, though she *had not foreseen*, and could hardly understand it; for he *was not pleasant* by any common rule; he *talked no nonsense*; he *paid no compliments*; his opinions *were unbending*, his attentions tranquil and simple. There was a charm perhaps, in his sincerity, his steadiness, and his integrity, which Miss Crawford might be equal to feel, though *not equal to discuss* with herself. She *did not think very much* about it, however: he pleased her for the present; she liked to have him near her; it was enough. (1992, 601; italics added)

> In this brief passage, Miss Crawford notes four negative aspects of Edmund's person (e.g., "not pleasant", "talked no nonsense") and the narrator names three things that she did not do (she "had not foreseen", she was "not equal to discuss", and "[s]he did not think very much about it"). For an insightful discussion of "character" in literature, see Fox (2001, 6-9).

> A similar statement (which I have not yet re-traced) in *The Thin Red Line*, James Jones' fictionalized account of World War II in the Pacific, tells the reader that a severely wounded character "had not died", but not until ten or twelve pages after describing his removal from the front line.

[14]Authors control the content of their stories, necessarily eliding most things that *did* happen from their stories. Why then do they use precious space and time to note things that did not happen? Although the apostle John meant more than this, he at was at least referring to this limitation when he said, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which (if they were written one by one), I suppose that not even the world itself would have room for the books that would be written" (John 21.25).

[15]Works on the grammar and syntax of Biblical Hebrew [BH] routinely describe the morphoxyntax of negation. Cf., e.g., IBHS §39.3.2-3 (under "adverbs") (Waltker & O'Connor 1990); Gibson (1994, §58b, 64a); van der Merwe (2000, 318-20); Gesenius (1910, §152); Joüon-Muraoka (1991, §102j). [References are to primary discussions.] They list the various negative elements, which may be called "particles" or "adverbs" (e.g., *lō', 'al, bal,* [*l*ᵉ]*biltî, 'ephes, 'ên*), and discuss various types and constructions of conditional statements, rhetorical questions, prohibitions, &c. Since they are grammars, however, they do not address the literary rôle or function of negation in the text. If this is perhaps because narrational negation is considered part of the exegetical or hermeneutical quest, it is then more surprising that this subject is also not addressed in works on literary, linguistic, or discourse analysis of biblical narrative (although negation is occasionally mentioned; cf. Halberg's brief discussion of "non-event information, such as collateral [irrealis]" in her analysis of the account of Samuel's call (1 Sam 3)—a story in which narrational negation plays an extremely significant rôle (1989, 22).

> If the narrational function of irrealis is noted in, e.g., an exegetical commentary or article, the discussion is usually limited to a specific instance, and does not address its overall contribution to the entire story. This lemma-based discussion of irrealis is especially common when the irrealis is thematic or crucial to the story, such as "Now

NARRATIONAL IRREALIS IN ESTHER

There are more than forty cases of irrealis in the book of Esther. Roughly three-quarters are quotational, and one-quarter narrational. Both quotational and narrational occur in all of the narratives investigated;[18] this paper focuses on *narrational irrealis*, and summarizes the *kinds of information* found in irrealis and the contributions of irrealis to the storyline and artistry of the book of Esther. It then offers some suggestions about irrealitic embeddedness in stories, suggesting that irrealis is the narrative crux of Esther, and raises the possibility that irrealis provides an implicit counter-message that underlies (or undermines) the traditional reading of the book.

Kinds of Information in Irrealis

Narrational irrealis can be classified functionally as "static" or "dynamic", according to its contents.[19] Static irrealis describes a *custom* or *law* (what was forbidden or simply "not done"), or a *state* or *condition* (a situation that did not exist, or what something or someone was not). Dynamic irrealis identifies a non-occurring event.

1. Customs

Authors explain customs to provide background information that enables the reader to understand why things were or were not done, because they feel that readers might not know or remember them, or to heighten narrative tension, or both.

The narrator of Esther explains two customs as things that *were not done*, as when we are told why Mordecai did not enter the palace ["king's gate"] when he was dressed in mourning:

$$\text{וַיָּבוֹא עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ}$$
$$\text{כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק:}$$

And he went only as far as the king's gate,
because *it was not done* [*permissible*] *to enter the king's gate in sackcloth* (4.2).

This rule would have been known by courtiers, as it was by Mordecai; the author's felt need to provide an explanation suggests that he or she suspected that court customs were unknown in the reaches of the empire, or because of the passage of time. Identifying this custom helps readers understand why Esther sent clothes to Mordecai (4.4)—so that he could enter the palace—and heightens narrational tension—if Mordecai can't approach the king to argue his people's case, how can the Jews hope to escape Haman's plan?

The other custom explained via narrational negation was that members of the harem had only limited access to the king. Rather than say that a woman who had pleased the king *would* go to him *whenever* he called, the

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Sarai was barren; *she had no children*" (Gn 11.30b), which anticipates the theme of inheritance that dominates not only the story of Abram/Abraham, but also those of Isaac and Jacob.

[16]A brief but elegant paper on the notion of negational "range" by Mr. Merle Brubaker discusses the semantic reasons for the dual meaning of the sentence: "You can't cook broccoli too long" (personal communication).

[17]There are three interdependent aspects to any literary or linguistic analysis: the form of the utterance or text (its morphosyntax), the content of the text (semantics), and the function of the text (pragmatics; "close" reading), in addition to other considerations, e.g., socio-cultural context.

This paper also reflects the conviction that we need to be sure that we are actually reading the story that stands written before us (and not merely what we have heard or read about it, or remembered)—*before* attempting to interpret it. Reading carefully in order to understand is the task of studying literature, biblical or not. Questions that help us read stories include: (1) What is this author telling me [us] here? (2) Why does this author introduce *this* information *at this point* in the story? (3) What does this add to what he or she has already said?

[18]The study of irrealis in biblical narrative began by surveying both narrational and quotational irrealis in seven biblical stories that are more-or-less identifiable literary narratives: "Abraham" (Gn 11.27-25.10), "Joseph" (Gn 37-48), Samuel's birth and youth (1 Sam 1-3), "Ruth" (1-4), "Jonah" (1-4), "Esther" (Es 1-10), and a version of "Hezekiah" (Isaiah 36-39). The book of Esther was chosen at random for closer analysis, merely to provide a focus for this paper.

[19]These terms also apply to quotational irrealis.

narrator uses the woman's point of view to explain that she did *not* have free access, but rather had to be invited into the royal presence, just like everyone else:

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לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ

כִּי אִם־חָפֵץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרְאָה בְשֵׁם:

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<div align="center">

She *would not go* the king again

unless the king was pleased with her and she was called by name (2.14).

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By narrationally disempowering the women of the harem, the author anticipates Esther's hesitation to approach the king at Mordecai's bidding, especially since she had *not been summoned* for thirty days (4.11; an instance of quotational irrealis); as with the prohibition against sackcloth in the king's presence, its presence in the story implies the author's concern that readers might not know this bit of palace protocol.

Two more customs are explained via irrealis, but by characters in the story, rather than by the narrator.[20] Esther reminds Mordecai that the penalty for entering the king's inner court *unsummoned* was death:

<div align="center">

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקָּרֵא אַחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית

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<div align="center">

for [anyone] ... who *had not been called* there was one law: to put to death... (4.11)

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The narrator's voice has already said that this was the rule for the harem (2.14, above), but now Esther—a *character* within the story—explains that it applies even to the king's favourite wife, a stipulation to which (again increasing narrative tension) Esther adds the new information that she has not seen the king for a month.[21] She tells Mordecai this in order to justify her hesitation to obey him, which stands in strong contrast to her earlier submission (2.10, 20 (below)). The negative statement allows her to end with the reminder of her death, and to make the two statements morphologically and lexically parallel,[22] and syntactically chiastic:

... אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ	[anyone] who **goes in to the king** ...	A
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקָּרֵא	who is *not summoned* ...	B
לֹא נִקְרֵאתִי	I have *not* been *summoned*	B¹
לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ	to **go in to the king** (4.11)	A¹

Phrasing the same custom in a positive manner, e.g., "Whoever is summoned may go in ..." would not have had nearly the same effect,[23] even if it continued by saying something like "... and everyone else dies".[24]

Two characters mention the permanence of "laws of the Persians and Medes". When counseling the king about his response to Vashti's disobedience, Memucan mentions that they cannot be changed (1.19), and Xerxes himself reminds Esther and Mordecai that once decreed, such a law cannot be set aside (8.8):

<div align="center">

וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר

</div>

<div align="center">

... and it *will not pass* [away?], ... (1.19)

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<div align="center">

כִּי־כְתָב אֲשֶׁר־נִכְתָּב בְּשֵׁם־הַמֶּלֶךְ ... אֵין לְהָשִׁיב:

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... for whatever is written in the king's name ... *is not repealed* [does not turn back] (8.8)

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[20]They are thus *quotational irrealis*, because they are reported by a character, not by the narrator.

[21]Even when she agrees to approach the king, she warns Mordecai through her servants that she is going to do something that is not according to the law (tD'K; aOl rvea), a possible allusion that further contrasts her obedience to his rebellion. The following verse, however, shows the reversal of their roles: "Mordecai went away and did according to all that Esther had commanded him" (4.17).

[22]Both clauses have *lo'* followed by the *nifal* of the root *qr'*.

[23]This explanation of its form could be valid even if Esther was quoting a Persian statute.

[24]The last three negatively described customs entail "going in" to the king's inner chamber (4.11) or palace (4.2), which suggests that the author was assuming that his readers would generally lack familiarity with Persian court protocol.

Customs may thus be described—narrationally or quotationally—via irrealis.

2. State or Condition

Static irrealis also describes a *state* or *condition* as proleptic background information, setting the stage for later actions or events (or non-actions and non-events).[25] There is only one *narrational negation of state* in Esther, but it has a great deal of explanatory power for the story:

$$\text{כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם}$$

For she [Esther] had no father or mother (Est 2.7)

Biblical Hebrew uses the lexeme *yātôm* to indicate that a child was "fatherless", so that the author could have stated this positively:[26]

$$\text{* כִּי יָתוֹם הִיא}$$

* "... for she was an orphan"

The clause in the text, however, is more explicit than the apparently synonymous positive statement since it specifies that she lacks *any* parent, rather than being merely "fatherless".[27]

It also explains (1) why Esther was under Mordecai's patronage and protection (2.7); (2) why she submitted to Mordecai after being separated from him by joining the royal harem (2.10); (3) why she remained obedient to him even after her exaltation as first wife or "queen" (2.20); (4) why she was so concerned for his well-being (4.4-9); (5) why she obeyed him by approaching the king at the risk of her life (4.11-5.2); and (6) why she exalted him before Xerxes (8.1-2). In fact, without this particular *irrealis*, Esther's diffidence to Mordecai would be much more difficult to understand, and—to anticipate—[much of] the rest of the story might not follow.[28]

3. Negated Events

Although the preceding examples use narrational (and quotational) irrealis to describe customs and states in Esther, it most frequently identifies non-events—what a character failed or refused to do. The author describes ten non-events *via* narrational irrealis in Esther: what Esther, Mordecai, the enemies, and "the Jews" did not do (2.10, 15, 20; 3.2, 3; 4.4; 9.2, 10, 15, 16). Let us look briefly at each of these in turn.

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[25]Gn 2.5 is a vexed example of this, consisting of four irrealis clauses, three of which describe a state or condition: "Now a wild shrub *was not yet* in the land, and a wild plant *had not yet sprouted*, because Y<small>HWH</small> God *had not caused rain* upon the land, and *there was no* man to work the ground."

[26]That this word was available to the author of Esther is suggested by its presence in two other post-Exilic, Persian period works (Zc 7.10; Ma 3.5).

[27]The Hebrew word generally rendered "orphan" (~t'Ay) refers not to a parentless child (as does "orphan" in modern English), but to the fatherless. Ex 22.24; Ps 109.9, 12; La 5.3 link a man's death with his wife's widowhood and his children's fatherless estate.

This demonstrates the impossibility of language to say *exactly* or *precisely* the same thing in two different ways. It is invalid to say that an author "could have said" something in some other way—regardless of how close we may consider the parallel, because to change any detail of a text, however slight, is to change the text, and we cannot etically understand the implications of any change.

[28]In the other negative description of a state, the author "breaks the wall", asking the reader at the end of the book

$$\text{... הֲלוֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים ...}$$

Are they not written in the text of the words of the days ... (Es 10.2)

Like all rhetorical questions, this one involves the reader by garnering assent (Grimes 1975, 64). It also reassures the reader by saying that what he or she has just read is an accurate record of actual events. This particular question is *culminatory*, rounding off the record with a sort of cross-reference to a further, presumably even more trustworthy, source. It is, however, meta-narrational—not part of the story—referring to an event that lies outside the storyline.

All three irrealis that describe Esther occur in the context of becoming the king's new "first wife" (2.10, 15, 20). The first and third are parallel, saying that in obedience to Mordecai she *did not declare* her ancestry, either before being chosen by Xerxes (2.10) or after (2.20):[29]

לֹא הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ
כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד:

Esther *did not declare* her people or her ancestry,
for Mordecai had commanded her that she not declare [them]. (2.10)

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת מוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי

Esther *did not declare* her people or her ancestry,
as Mordecai had commanded her (2.20)

The author records this information via irrealis—despite the existence of roots such as *str* ("conceal"), *ksh* ("cover"), which would convey "the same" information (see note ??)—in order to demonstrate how closely she obeyed Mordecai's command, which is repeated as an indirect quotation (2.10b).[30]

The author suggests no reason for Mordecai's command, but in relation to the storyline, not disclosing her ethnic background may have maintained her eligibility for her night with the king, and probably meant that Haman would feel free to move against Mordecai and his people, not realizing that by attacking them he was also attacking Xerxes' current favourite.[31]

The second narrational irrealis about Esther lies between the other two.

לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הֵגַי

She *did not seek* anything except what Hegai said ... (2.15)

When she was preparing for her night with the king, she submitted herself to Hegai, the chief eunuch over the harem, instead of assuming that she had learned how to please the king. Framing her acceptance of Hegai's advice (2.15) with her obedience to Mordecai (2.10, 20) shows the reader that this is another example of her submission.

The close concatenation of these three negative statements, along with their arrangement framing the king's choice of Esther, implies that her humble subservience to two men—Mordecai and Hegai—was at least partially responsible for her success in becoming Xerxes's favourite (2.16-18), and even to her later success when—again obeying Mordecai—she would seek an audience with the king (5.1-6). Even as they highlight her humility (2.15) and obedience (2.10, 20), however, they anticipate that this same submission—here characterized as a sort of *via negativa* (obeying by not acting)— would eventually endanger her life by placing her in the position of first wife to Xerxes, and thus in a position to intercede for her people by approaching the king unbidden.

All the rest of Esther's actions are positive;[32] only these three acts are described negatively by the narrator.

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[29]For Hebrew texts not printed in the body of this paper, see Appendix I.

[30]The statements are lexically—but not morphosyntactically—identical; perhaps the difference between predication with a perfect (2.10) and a participle (2.20) was intended to imply a single versus an ongoing refusal to identify her ancestry.

[31]This language may sound rather circumlocutious, but both "failure" and "refusal" in English seem inappropriate, since they would imply (in this case) that Esther either tried but could not do something ("failed") or explicitly rejected an opportunity to act ("refused"). English apparently lacks a value-free word for not doing something (apart from "do/did not"). This lack of specificity may have motivated the comment in the "First Targum to Esther", which says "According to the daily circumstances, once the king asked her: From which nation are you, but Esther did not relate (the identity of) her birthplace and her people as Mordekhai had ordered her, ..." (Grossfeld 1983, 48). The Targum does not elaborate the same statement in 2.10.

[32]Esther is the subject of sixty-one positive predications: thirty-seven actions are ascribed to her by narration; twenty-four in quotations (either her own, or another characters).

Alone(?) among the courtiers in Susa, Mordecai did not obey the king's command to honor Haman (3.2).[33] Even when the rest of the court pressed him by appealing to the king's decree (3.3) "he *did not listen* to them" (3.4):[34]

<div align="center">

וּמָרְדֳּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:

Now Mordecai *did not bow* and he *did not show respect* (3.2b).[35]

... וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם

... but he *did not listen* to them (3.4).

</div>

The double irrealis in 3.2 reflects the twofold obedience of the rest of the court (3.2a), and thus highlights both their obedience and Mordecai's rebellion:

<div align="center">

וְכָל עַבְדֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כֹּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהָמָן

now all of the king's servants who were in the king's gate
were *bowing* and *showing respect* to Haman (3.2b)

</div>

When Mordecai's rebellion is described from Haman's point of view in a parallel "indirect discourse",[36] Mordecai's non-actions are united under a single negative particle:

<div align="center">

... וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מָרְדֳּכַי כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ

And Haman saw that Mordecai *was not bowing or showing* him *respect*, ... (3.5).

</div>

The narrator describes Haman's perception of Mordecai's two-part rebellion as a functional unity, thus seconding his own [the narrator's] description (3.2). In a parallel example, Haman is again enraged at Mordecai's lack of respect, this time after his first *soirée* with Esther and Xerxes.[37] Mordecai's non-act is again doubly described in yet another [indirect] quotational irrealis (albeit with different verbs than those used above):

<div align="center">

וְכִרְאוֹת הָמָן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ

"... but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's doorway
(now he *did not stand* and he *did not tremble* because of him ..." (Esth 5:9)

</div>

Twice the narrator tells us that Mordecai did not (and, as 3.4 makes explicit, *would* not) honour Haman, and twice repeats this information from Haman's point of view, an unparalleled level of repetition in the book that suggests the importance that the author assigns to this set of non-events.

Unlike the obedience which prompted Esther's non-disclosure of her Jewishness, however, the author suggests no explanation for Mordecai's rebellion, thus creating a contrast that highlights her obedience to him (and

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[33]Mordecai's persistent refusal to honor Haman or to acknowledge his rank (perhaps corresponding to "first advisor") was probably due to political intrigue and the jockeying for power that seems to characterize all of their interaction.

[34]Although the statement in 3.5 appears to be narrational irrealis, it actually reports Haman's perception ("Haman *saw* that Mordecai did not bow ..."), and is therefore an example of [indirect] quotational irrealis.

[35]I interpret the imperfect [prefix conjugation] verbal forms as describing both "ongoing non-events" (an oxymoron, like much of this discussion) and modal (hence "*would* not", rather than "*did* not").

[36]An example of *quotational* irrealis, even though it is narrated, because it describes the scene from Haman's perspective.

[37]This example of narrational irrealis is usually interpreted as a case of indirect discourse ("When Haman saw Mordecai ... and that he did not ..."). It would better be rendered "When Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate (now he had neither stood for nor trembled at him), Haman was filled with rage" (i.e., Haman was angry at merely seeing Mordecai, not specifically because of what Mordecai failed to do).

her submission to Hegai).[38] Ethnic[39] and religious explanations,[40] are more entertaining than helpful, and do not overcome this lack in the narrative,[41] which is the norm in biblical stories.

It is also possible that Mordecai's refusal signals a power play among contenders for the position of vizier (or personal irritation at not being promoted after saving the king's life), which may be in turn a hint that Esther's promotion lay behind Mordecai's, since he is not mentioned in relation to the court until after Esther has entered the harem (2.11), even though he was mentioned several times before then. What is more important than a "best" or "right" or "valid" explanation, however, is that the text *lacks any explanation*—the author does not attribute a motive to Mordecai's insurrection.

This rebellion incites the rest of the events described in the book, inflaming Haman so that he plots against the Jews. Mordecai's disobedience thus leads eventually to the deaths of Haman, his sons, and many hundreds and thousands of others. Indeed, it is the defeat of Haman's plot that fills the most of the rest of the book (3.6-9.16). So important to the story is Mordecai's "civil disobedience" that without it there would be no story, and thus no book of Esther. It is by far the most important non-event in the story.

The final statement of narrational *irrealis* related to Mordecai is his refusal to exchange his sackcloth for the clothes that Esther sent him (4.4):

$$\text{וְלֹא קִבֵּל:}$$

..., but he *did not accept* [them] (4.4).

His rejection of Esther's gift led to the conversation with Esther that brought her to approach Xerxes on his throne (4.5-16), which in turn brought about Haman's execution and the eventual deliverance of the Jews. Had Mordecai accepted the clothes as Esther expected (she being ignorant of his reason for wearing mourning), the impact of his message would have been lessened; rejecting them told Esther that something of great import was at stake. This refusal—an irrealis—is also dependent on his rebellion, since without his first irrealis the second would not have occurred. A non-event thus gives rise to another non-event, as well as to that which did occur.

The first two non-events that the author ascribes to Mordecai—not honouring Haman and not listening to the other courtiers—precipitate the major crisis of the book (Haman's plot); the third—not accepting Esther's gift—brings on the closely related crisis of Esther's uninvited approach to the throne, both of which were ethnic crises for the Jews. If the king had failed to recognize her, she would have been killed, and without her intercession, the Jews would have been destroyed.

3. The Enemies of the Jews

The main reason for the Jews' successful self-defence—stated in language that evokes the early chapters of Joshua[42]—was that "*no one stood* before them, because the terror of [the Jews] had fallen on them" (9.2).

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[38]Whereas Esther obeyed by not acting; Haman disobeyed by inaction.

[39]This explanation views Haman "the Agagite" (3.1) as a descendant of Agag the Amalekite, the enemy of Israel and of Saul (1 Sam 15.20, 32-33), and Mordecai "ben Jair ben Shimei ben Kish, a Benjamite" (2.5) as a descendant of Saul (1 Sam 9.1), Agag's enemy. Laniak points out that Mordecai shares this refusal to bow with Daniel (Dn 3.12; 6.10) and further compares the Jewish "civil disobedience" described in Judith 1.11 (which is, however, *not* passive) (1998, 70).

[40]The claim is that Haman wore an idol embroidered on his robe or suspended from a chain around his neck, so that bowing to him would have entailed "idolatry". Bechtel (rightly) points out that this is rather unlikely in a book as chary of religious reference as Esther (2002, 37). On these explanations, see as long ago as Cassel (1888, 93-95); cf. also *Targum Sheni.*

[41]Fox summarizes the explanations as arrogance, monotheism ("idolatry", above), divine dignity (cf. LXX Addition C), and tribal enmity (preceding note), and suggests that the last is the most helpful (1991, 44-45); Levenson points out the nearly exact parallel between the syntax of Es 3.4 and Gn 39.10 (the persistence of Potiphar's wife) and suggests that Mordecai's refusal was primarily ethnic (1997, 68). He also sketches parallels in plotline between the two stories (ibid.).

[42]Cf. Josh 1.5; 2.11; 5.1; 10.8; 21.44; 23.9. The first four are in the narrator's voice; the final reference to their enemies' inability is Joshua's. A further echo of Joshua occurs after the fighting ended: "like the days on which the Jews rested from their enemies" (9.22; cf. Josh 21.44; 22.4; 23.1, which are all, however, ascribed to the agency of YHWH).

<div dir="rtl">

וְאִישׁ לֹא־עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם
</div>

... but a man *did not stand* before them (9.2ba).

As with the irrealis ascribed to Esther (but unlike Mordecai's disobedience), the author provides a reason for the irrealis:

<div dir="rtl">

כִּי־נָפַל פַּחְדָּם עַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים׃
</div>

... because dread of them had fallen on all the people (9.2bb).

Their fear—a positive entity (2b)—had a negative result (2a): their weakness. This terror or dread transformed the Jews' position from one of rather hopeless self-defence to one of attacking a non-resistant foe, so that they were free to do "to their enemies as they pleased" (9.5). Whether or not the Jews would have been able to inflict sufficient damage on a defiant enemy to avoid the extermination that threatened them under the terms of Haman's decree, we cannot know; their enemies' fear, however, lost the battle before it was fought.

4. The Jews

In three identical statements the author says that the Jews did not plunder their enemies, in direct contrast to the king's edict in 8.11:

<div dir="rtl">

וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם׃
</div>

..., but to the plunder they *did not send* their hand. (9.10, 15, 16)

These three statements appear to be ancillary information in its purest form, in that they seem neither to advance the storyline, nor to affect the reader's understanding of the story. They thus seem to accord well with Grimes's description of "irrealis" as "things that might have happened but did not" (1975, 64). On the other hand, since Biblical Hebrew uses summary statements,[43] such as

<div dir="rtl">

*וּבְכָל־זֹאת לֹא שָׁלְחוּ
</div>

*but [now] in all this they *did not send* ...

we can ask why such a statement was not used here, perhaps in place of the third irrealis (9.16).

That it was not so written suggests that the three-fold repetition is deliberate and intentional, perhaps in order to place "the Jews" as a group on the same level of narrational irrealis as Esther and Mordecai, reaffirming their ethnic identity.

Raising the Jews to the same level of irrealis as Esther and Mordecai also furthers the larger cultic purpose of the book: Purim was intended to celebrate an ethnic deliverance, rather than to memorialize or commemorate

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[43]The phrase "[and] in all this ..." (וּבְכָל־זֹאת (once: כָּל־זֶה)) occurs fourteen times in the Bible, eleven times with a negated predicate (1 Sam 22.15; Jr 3.10; Ho 7.10; Jb 1.22; 2.10; Ne 13.6; Is 5.25; 9.11, 16, 20; 10.4); the five Isaianic occurences are identical: "In all this his anger did not turn back, and still his hand is outstretched" (אַפּוֹ וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה בְּכָל־זֹאת לֹא־שָׁב).

In Ps 78.32a (בְּכָל־זֹאת חָטְאוּ־עוֹד וְלֹא־הֶאֱמִינוּ בְּנִפְלְאוֹתָיו׃) the predicate is positive ("they sinned"); in the parallel line (32b) it is negative ("they did not believe"). Its first three canonical occurrrences are positive (1 Sam 22.15; 2 Sam 14.19; Ne 10.1).

Asking this question points toward another question of interpretation. The significance of any specific choice—lexical, morphosyntactical, &c.—is directly proportionate to the range from which that choice was made. If there was "no other way" to say something something, then the choices entailed in saying something in a particular way have no significance *as choices*. This, of course, begs another question, viz., our limited knowledge of the linguistic resources avaiable to the various biblical authors. Lexica, grammars, and (following them), commentaries often identify certain elements as "early" or "late", but this is just as often based on circular reasoning. We need to be extremely cautious about claming that something was or was part of the language at any stage, since we are reading documents that are not only examples of a dialect within a language, but also examples of idiolects, so that, e.g., the mere existence of a lexeme does not mean that it was equally available to every speaker of the language.

Esther and Mordecai.[44] This, combined with their morally superior reason for fighting their enemies and their failure to plunder them, also has the happy consequence of making the celebration of Purim one of thanksgiving for "national" deliverance, untainted by even a hint of greed or some other base motive.

NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF *IRREALIS* IN ESTHER

Each instance of narrational irrealis in the book of Esther has at least four functions: (1) it is *counter-expectational*; (2) it opens up *alternate possibilities* for the reader; (3) it *highlights* events that occurred; and together (4) they illustrate the author's *literary artistry*.

Countering Expectations

Narrational irrealis in Esther is consistently *counter-expectational*, in that readers might reasonably expect that what is described negatively—the "non-act"—would have occurred as a matter of course.

Esther might be expected, as a girl among girls,[45] to share her family and ethnic background (2.10); we might even expect that she would have been forced to do so as part of the training process, either in the harem or as part of becoming "first wife" (2.20).

We might also expect that after her training regimen she would have some confidence in her ability to prepare herself for her night with the king (2.15). Countering these not-unreasonable expectations highlights her submission to Mordecai and Hegai.

In the light of **Mordecai**'s evident support and respect for the king, whose life he had saved rather than allow or join the assassination plot (2.21-23)), we ought to be surprised when he disobeys him by refusing to join the rest of the court in paying homage to Haman (3.1-4).[46]

Their **enemies**' failure to defend themselves is likewise counter-expectational. The author has given readers *no* reason to suspect *at any point* in the story that the mere publication of Mordecai's decree would undo the opposition. The earlier statement that "fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (8.17), repeated in 9.2 following the narrative *irrealis*, hints at, but does not require such a response.[47]

Finally, the **Jews**' failure to plunder their enemies would have been culturally counter-expectational, and probably quite puzzling, especially since they did not fulfill the king's decree (8.11), but it demonstrates that the Jews did not attack their enemies out of greed or covetousness, but in self-defense.[48]

Alternate Possibilities

Not only can irrealis counter expectations, it also presents the reader with *alternate possibilities*[49]—events that could have occurred, choices that could have been made, but were not. And because those choices were not made, those courses of action not followed, we have this story and not another.

If some of the characters had chosen to do what they did not—for example, if Vashti had obeyed the king, or (apparently) if Esther had made her ethnicity known or prepared herself for the king, or if Mordecai had

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[44]Its threefold repetition suggests the special significance of this non-event to early readers, but the exact nature of that significance is difficult (actually, impossible) to ascertain at our cultural and temporal remove.

[45]This is not chauvinistic; my wife and I are proud and happy parents of three wonderful daughters. For helpful (but not indisputed) insights on male and female "talk", see Tannen 2001.

[46]Given his love for Esther (and their mutual knowledge of the [negative] custom), *she* would have expected him to accept her gift of clothes (4.4). This counter-expectation is internal to the story; Esther may have been surprised, but readers would not be, since they had been told the reason for Mordecai's appearance and the [negatively explained] custom.

[47]Of course, to readers familiar with the stories of Joshua, this response may not have been at all counter-expectational.

[48]Based on syntactical differences between the two texts, Gordis (1976, 49-53) suggests that this decree is not an example of *lex talionis*, but rather that it ends by quoting Haman's original decree (3.13), so that 8.11 should be rendered "By these letters ... to destroy, kill, and wipe out every armed force of a people or a province attacking 'them, their children and their wives, with their goods as booty'." Permission to plunder their foes would therefore not therefore have been explicit (but would still have been expected). Fox helpfully provides a parallel text of the two decrees (2001, 102) to show the differences between them, but does not follow Gordis's suggested reading.

[49]The phrase is from Grimes (1975, 64), and fits the generally "omniscient" point of view of the biblical narrators.

honoured Haman—events might not (in the case of Esther's candidacy) and could not (in Mordecai's case) have developed as they did. Nor does anything explicit in the story lead us to expect (1) that the participants would have done—or even contemplated doing—what the author says they did not do;[50] or (2) that what they did not do was even a potential course of action.

On the other hand, there is no implicit or explicit information by which to assess how plundering the enemy would have affected the end of the story—it merely identifies an unpursued alternative, leaving the reader to ponder the possibilities.

Highlighting

Non-events *highlight actual events*, or, as Grimes says, they

> ... set off what actually does happen against what might have happened", so that "what actually does happen stands out in sharper relief than if it were told without [irrealis]" (1975, 64, 65)

By setting **Mordecai**'s disobedience in direct contrast with the subservience of the rest of the king's "servants" (3.2), the narrative draws attention to what should have been a normal event—the obedience of the court to the king. If Mordecai had bowed and scraped to Haman along with everyone else, the author would have had nothing remarkable to report, and perhaps not even any reason to mention their obedience, which most readers would assume: the king commands, his servants obey.

Their **enemies**' inability to withstand them (9.2b) highlights the overwhelming Jewish success (9.1-16), an impression heightened, but not established, by the numbers of the dead (9.6-10a, 15, 16).

The **Jews**' failure to plunder their defeated enemies highlights two earlier events. The first was planned but never carried out. Haman planned to plunder the Jews, apparently for his own gain and to "bribe" the king (3.9, 11), a plan that may have reflected a Persian law that the property of traitors and rebels was forfeit.[51] On the other hand—and in direct contrast to Haman's plan to destroy him—the king gave Haman's estates to Esther, who gave them in turn to Mordecai (8.1-2). The irrealis ascribed to the Jews encourages readers to infer their moral superiority to Haman, to the king and Persian society and mores in general, and perhaps even to Mordecai.[52]

Literary Art

Narrational irrealis in the book of Esther is patterned. First, as the following table shows, these ten instances of narrational irrealis are *contextually clustered* by character, describing Esther (2.10, 15, 20), Mordecai (3.2, 4; 4.4), the enemies (9.2), and the Jews (9.10, 15, 16).

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[50]With the possible exception of the response of the Jews' foes (9.2; cf. 8.17).
[51]See Ezra 7.26 for an inexact parallel.
[52]At the same time, however, we do not know whether or not Mordecai would have been free to refuse such a gift.

TABLE I: NARRATIONAL EVENT IRREALIS[53]

Character	Ref.	Irrealis	Nature	Motivation
Esther	2.10	Esther did not declare her ethnicity	obedience	Mordecai's command
	2.15	Esther did not take anything …	??[54]	??
	2.20	Esther did not declare her ethnicity	obedience	Mordecai's command
Mordecai	3.2	Mordecai would not bow or show respect …		
	3.4	Mordecai did not listen …	rebellion	??
	4.4	Mordecai did not accept [clothing] …		
Enemies	9.2	No one stood before [the Jews].	??	fear of Jews
Jews	9.10	They did not set hand on the plunder.		
	9.15	They did not set hand on the plunder.	??	??
	9.16	They did not set hand on the plunder.		

This sequence also highlights Esther's obedience by sandwiching it between what can only be described as the disobedience or rebellion of both Vashti (1.12) and Mordecai (3.2-5), a narrational choice that increases her moral standing *vis à vis* both her predecessor and uncle.

Thirdly, if we consider "the Jews" a collective "character", each of the three Jewish characters in the story—Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews—is assigned three negated actions. This pattern was established by repeating the statement that Esther did not declare her background (2.10, 20), and by twice repeating the irrealis that the Jews did not plunder their enemies (9.10, 15, 16). The three instances of narrative irrealis credited to Mordecai, however, are distinct, without repetition (3.2, 4; 4.4).[55] This numerical parity places all three Jewish characters on the same level with regard to what they did not do.[56]

Only two cases of irrealis are recorded for Persian characters in the story, both of whom have relatively minor ("non-speaking") rôles: Vashti (1.12; see "semantic irrealis" in the appendix) and the enemies of the Jews are "credited" with one non-act apiece (9.2).

On the other hand, neither of the other two main characters—the king and Haman—is described as having failed or refused or been unable to do anything,[57] although they are described as having done more things than any other character.[58] Perhaps this lack of irrealis suggests their true insignificance as characters in the story. Writing a story entails leaving out not only most of what happened, but a very much higher percentage of what did not occur, which suggests that authors use narrational irrealis only when a character him- or herself needs to be extremely important in order for an author to mention what he or she did *not* do, or because it is crucial to the plot or to our ability to understand the story. Only the non-actions of Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews are important enough to warrant that sort of sustained attention; the king and Haman are, in the long run, without real or lasting significance (although without their deeds—banning Vashti, choosing Esther, exalting Haman on the king's side; and Haman's attempt at revenge upon Mordecai—the story could not be told).

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[53]This table refers only to narrational *event* irrealis; it does not refer to the irrealitic descriptions of state or law (2.7; 4.2), or to the three supra-narrational instances of irrealis that are in the author's voice (9.27, 28; 10.2).

[54]The sign "??" means that no motivation is identified in the text; it does not suggest that none can be posited.

[55]Technically, Mordecai is credited with *four* clause-level negations, but the doubled statement (3.2) is a hendiadys that fully contrasts his disobedience with the obedience of the rest of the court.

[56]This is true even though the irrealis of Esther and Mordecai are crucial to the plot in a way that the Jews' non-plundering is not (or, at least, the importance of the latter is not transparent (above)).

[57]The usual translation of 6.1 that "… the king could not sleep" is misleading; the text says that "… sleep fled from the king" (see appendix on "semantic irrealis").

[58]The total of ninety-nine deeds ascribed to the king (57) and Haman (42) nearly equals the 111 assigned to Esther (39), Mordecai (37), and the Jews (35).

Embeddedness & Significance

How important is narrational irrealis in Esther? I.e., how vital are these negative statements to either the story's progress or to the reader's ability to understand that story?

Perhaps the image of "embeddedness" or "rootedness" may be helpful: The more important any individual item is to a story, the more deeply it is embedded or rooted within the narrative,[59] i.e., the greater the difficulty in removing it without disrupting or destroying the story. Irrealis functions on at least three "levels" in the story of Esther:[60]

1. Some cases of irrealis could be omitted without affecting either the reader's ability to understand the story or the progress of the story, such as the edict concerning drinking (**1.8**).
2. Some examples of irrealis help the reader *understand* certain events in the story, but are *not necessary* to the progress of the plot or to the story itself: Esther's lack of parents, which helps the reader understand her obedience to Mordecai (**2.7**); Esther's refusal to declare her background (**2.10, 20**); the custom against appearing in mourning before the king (**4.2**); Mordecai's rejection of Esther's clothing (**4.2**); the flight of sleep from the king (**6.1**). Without more cultural information, we cannot determine how necessary they are.
3. Some of the statements of irrealis are embedded so deeply that they are *vital* to the story, so that without them *this story* (at least) could not be told because to remove them would either annul or destroy the story, or make it a different story altogether (which is ultimately the same thing). These include Vašti's refusal (**1.12**); Memucan's rehearsal of Vašti's refusal (**1.15-17**), which gains the approval of the king and his counselors; Mordecai's refusal to honour Haman (**3.2-4**); Haman's perception of Mordecai's rebellion (**5.5, 9**). To remove any of these leads to a different story, or to no story worth telling.

Thinking counter-factually about the irrealis described in the book of Esther suggests that:[61]

1. Without Vašti's refusal to obey the king's summons (1.12, 15-17), Esther could[62] not have become queen.[63] In itself this *might not* have prevented the major plot conflict of Haman *versus* Mordecai,[64] but it would have removed the Jewish queen from her salvific rôle.
2. Had Esther not withheld her ethnic identity (2.10, 20), Haman might have been content to plot against Mordecai alone (cf. 3.6), rather than risk arousing the queen's wrath (or the king's).
3. Without Mordecai's unexplained—and therefore *narrationally* unmotivated—refusal to honour Haman (3.3-5; 5.9), there would have been no plot against the Jews, nor would they have needed Esther to be queen in order to deliver them, and thus there would have been no story beyond Esther's promotion, no feast of Purim, and no [final] exaltation of Mordecai.

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[59]The larger discussion of embeddedness applies not only to irrealis; it is equally appropriate to ask the same questions about positive information, since some information (e.g., David's complexion (1 Sam 16.12) does not "affect" the storyline of 1-2 Samuel, or beyond, which should lead us to ask why the narrator included it).

[60]This list includes both narrational and [some] quotational irrealis.

[61]For an example of historical "second-guessing", see, e.g., Tuchman 1981 (188-207); "alternative" and "counterfactual" history have become technical terms in historiography. The first usually refers to a description of historical events from a non-traditional point of view, such as Zinn 1995 (North American history from the standpoint of native Americans); the second (also called "virtual" history) seeks to identify crucial historical turning points, and ask what would have happened had they not occurred, which is also an element in regular or traditional historiography. ["Alternate" history is a genre that often overlaps heavily with science fiction.]

[62]The events of Es 1 did not ensure or guarantee Esther's exaltation, but it *could not have happened* without them.

[63]Although, as McClarty suggests (Ryken 1993, 219)), this incident is not strictly required for the sense of the story itself (the book could have begun, e.g., "Now Xerxes needed/wanted a wife"), without it readers would wonder why Xerxes waited until his seventh year (2.16) to select a queen.

[64]If Mordecai's participation in Xerxes' court was a result of Esther's promotion (which we do not know), then Esther's promotion *was* a secondary, but very real factor leading to Haman's plot, since it put Mordecai in the position of being commanded to honour Haman, which would probably not have happened had Mordecai merely been a "private citizen".

4.   Without Mordecai's rejection of Esther's gift of clothing (4.4), she might not have responded to his despair by endangering her own life by approaching the king (4.16).

CONCLUSIONS

Irrealis in Narrative

1.   *Static* irrealis gives the reader *background* by explaining, e.g., customs and situations.

2.   Dynamic irrealis is
   a.   *counter-expectational*, telling the reader that something did not occur that might reasonably be expected to have happened;
   b.   *highlights* actual events, throwing them into greater relief by contrasting them with what might or could (or even should) have happened but did not;
   c.   opens up *alternate possibilities* for the reader, referring to choices and avenues that he or she may not have imagined, and that did not (in fact) happen, but nonetheless might have.

3.   Irrealis may be used *artistically*, as one piece of the interdependence of form and message which is intrinsic to any well-told tale.

Irrealis in Esther

In keeping with the tradition that Purim celebrates salvation, the story of Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, Haman, the king, and the Jews sets forth the official version of the events that culminated in Jewish deliverance and Mordecai's exaltation (10.1-3). At the same time, however, the irrealis entailed in the story implies a counter-traditional evaluation of Mordecai as morally culpable for the Jews' peril.

   Irrealis may be crucial to the *book* of Esther[65] for another reason, which is that its prominence within and importance to the storyline reflects the lack of any suggestion of divine word or deed. Here again we find the interdependence of form and message—non-events propel the story, and divine absence (implicit non-action) undergirds it.

   Narrational irrealis is integral to the story contained in the book of Esther. That which did not happen caused that which did, so that the positive events of the plot grow out of, depend upon, and are propelled by irrealis. Without telling us what didn't happen, the author would not have been able to tell us what did.

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All Saints' MMVI

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[65]I.e., to the literary product, not merely to the story contained in that literary product.

TABLE II : NARRATIONAL IRREALIS IN ESTHER

Custom

2.14	*not to go in* to the king without being called
4.2	*not to go in* the king's gate in sackcloth
4.11	*not to go in* to the king without being called

State/Condition

2.7	Esther *had no* father or mother
[10.2	*Are not* [these things] written in the ...][66]

Event

1.12	**Vashti** *refused* to come ...
2.10	**Esther** *did not declare* her ethnicity
2.15	**Esther** *did not take* anything except ...
2.20	**Esther** *did not declare* her ethnicity
3.2	**Mordecai** *did not bow* and he *did not do obeisance* ...
3.3	**Mordecai** *did not listen* ...
4.4	**Mordecai** *did not accept* [clothing] ...
9.2	***No one*** *could stand* before them [the Jews]
9.10	**They** [the Jews] laid *no hand* on the plunder
9.15	**They** [the Jews] laid *no hand* on the plunder
9.16	**They** [the Jews] laid *no hand* on the plunder

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[66]Listed for the sake of completeness, but part of the book, not of the story.

	TABLE III : IRREALIS IN ESTHER			
Ref.	BHS			
1.8	וְהַשְׁתִיָּה כַדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס	now the drinking [was] according to the statue: "*without compulsion*" ["*There is none who compels.*"]	q	c
1.12	וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ	*And Queen Vašti refused to go* at the word of the king	s	e
1.15	לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ	*She did not do* the command of King Xerxes	q	e
1.16	לֹא עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה	*Not against the king alone* has Queen Vašti sinned	q	e
1.17	הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה:	King Xerxes said to bring Queen Vašti before him, *but she did not come.*	q	e
1.19a	וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי פָרַס־וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר	... and let it be written in the laws of the Persians & Medes, *and it shall not pass away* ...	q	c
1.19b	אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ	... that *Vašti shall not come* before the king ...	q	st
2.7	כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם וְהַנַּעֲרָה	... for *she had neither father nor mother*	n	st
2.10a	לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ	Esther *did not declare* her people or her birth ...	n	e
2.10b	כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד:	... for Mordecai had commanded that *she not declare* [them].	n	c
2.14	לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם־חָפֵץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרְאָה בְשֵׁם:	*she would not go* again to the king unless the king was pleased with her and she was called by name	n	c
2.15	לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הֵגַי ...	... *she did not seek anything* except what Hegai said	n	e
2.20	אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת מוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי:	Esther *did not declare* her birth or her people, just as Mordecai had commanded her	n	e
3.2a	וּמָרְדֳּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע	But *Mordecai did not bow* ...	n	e
3.2b	וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:	and *he did not show respect.*	n	e
3.4	וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם	and *he did not listen* to them	n	e
3.5	וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מָרְדֳּכַי כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ	And Haman saw that *Mordecai would not bow or show respect* to him	q	e
3.8a	וְאֶת־דָּתֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים ...	and the king's laws *they do not do* ...	q	e
3.8b	וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין־שֹׁוֶה לְהַנִּיחָם:	... and for the king *there is no profit* in allowing them to remain.	q	st
4.2	כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק:	... for *it was not done to enter* [*there was no entering*] the king's gate clothed in sackcloth	n	c
4.4	וְלֹא קִבֵּל:	but he *did not accept* [them]	n	3
4.11a	כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ ... אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקָּרֵא אַחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית	Any man or woman who goes in to the king ... *who is not called*, one law: to put to death [that person]	q	c
4.11b	וַאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרֵאתִי לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	but as for me, *I have not been called* to go in to the king ...	q	e
4.13	אַל־תְּדַמִּי בְנַפְשֵׁךְ לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	*Do not think* [that you will] deliver your soul [in] the king's house,	q	e
4.16	וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ	... and fast for me, and *do not eat or drink* ...	q	e
5.9a	וְכִרְאוֹת הָמָן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי	but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's	q/i	e

	בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא־קָם	gate (now he *did not rise* ...		
5.9b	וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ	... and he *did not tremble* at him	q/i	e
5.12	לֹא־הֵבִיאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה כִּי אִם־אוֹתִי	And Haman said "Queen Esther *has not brought* with the king to the banquet which she has made [anyone] but me	q	e
5.13	וְכָל־זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שֹׁוֶה לִי	but all this *does not profit* me	q	s
6.3	לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר:	"A thing *was not done* for him".	q	e
6.10	אַל־תַּפֵּל דָּבָר מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:	*Do not let fail* a thing from all that you have said.	q	e
6.13	לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו:	*You shall not prevail* over him, but you shall surely fall before him.	q	e
7.b	כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שֹׁוֶה בְּנֵזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ:	... for *the distress is not worth* the damage to the king.	q	s
9.2	וְאִישׁ לֹא־עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם	... and *no one stood* before them	n	e
9.10	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	but on the plunder *they did not stretch* their hand	n	e
9.15	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	but on the plunder *they did not stretch* their hand	n	e
9.16	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	but on the plunder *they did not stretch* their hand	n	e
9.27	וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר לִהְיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֵת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּכְתָבָם וְכִזְמַנָּם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:	and *it will not pass* [fail] to be those who do [observe] the years of these days, according to the writing and the appointed time every year by year.	q/i	c
9.28a	וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים	and *these days of the Purim shall not pass* [fail] from amongst the Jews ...	q/i	c
9.28b	וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף מִזַּרְעָם:	... and *their memory shall not cease* from their seed	q/i	c
10.2	הֲלוֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מָדַי וּפָרָס:	... *are they not written* on the text of the words of the days of the kings of Media & Persia?	n	s

Key **content:** **c** *custom* **e** *event* **st** *state/situation/condition*

type: **n** *narrational irrealis* **q** *quotational irrealis* **s** *semantic [positive] irrealis*

q/i *indirect quot. irrealis*

N.B.: This is not yet complete

TABLE IV : PREDICATIONS BY CHARACTER

Subject	Narrational	Quotational	Events	Irrealis	Irr./Narr.
the Jews	35	16	**51**	3	8.6%
Esther	37	24	**61**	3	8.1%
Mordecai	39	8	**47**	3	7.7%
enemies	2	0	**2**	1	50.0%
Vashti	3	1	**4**	1	33.3%
the King	57	21	**78**	0	0.0%
Haman	42	19	**61**	0	0.0%
Totals	**215**	**89**	**304**	**11**	5.1%

1. "Narrational" and "Quotational" counts are approximate.
2. "Clausal subjects" are the topic of any clause, verbal or non-verbal, whether the words of the narrator ("narrational") or a character ("quotational").
3. "Acts" were tallied for these subjects *only* (i.e., the actions of the king's servants, Memucan's speech, &c. were not counted).
4. "Acts" may be in any mood—indicative, modal (imperative, jussive)—or in a real or rhetorical question.
5. "Narrational acts" are described by the narrator as part of the "story".
6. "Quotational acts" are described by or in the speech of a character in the story.
7. The totals for narrational and quotational acts are in inverse proportion to those for irrealis—quotational irrealis is more frequent than narrational irrealis in all stories examined, by at least a 2:1 ratio.
8. The very high ratio of irrealis to acts for Vashti and "the enemies" is skewed due to the small number of actions ascribed to them (2.2% of all events for these characters).

APPENDIX I: QUOTATIONAL IRREALIS[67]

Quotational *irrealis* is a negative statement in the mouth of a character in the story that reflects the experience, opinion, expectation, or desire of that character.[68] Authors use quotational (and its companion narrational) irrealis in order to tell a *particular* story.[69] Narrational irrealis, however, provides the perspective which the author wants to impress upon his or her readers.

Authorial control means that the storyteller decides not only which events to report (above), but also which speeches to quote, and how much of each speech. Authors also decide how to introduce (i.e., semantically characterize) those speeches ("He said",or "He wept / whispered / shouted / called / lifted up his voice and said"), by which he or she colours them for the reader. The narrator, however, intrudes most into the account of events in his or her description and evaluation of characters and events; for our purposes, in deciding which non-events he or she mentions (if any), and how to describe them.

That is, since exhaustive narration is patently impossible[70], authorial choice means that *most* non-events are *not* mentioned in the story. In the story of Abimelech (Jg 9), for example, we are never told what happened to Jotham after he fled Shechem. Nor are we told about his clothing, height, hair colour, weight, diet, or about the commerce of Shechem, the weather, who was born, who died, who married whom, the quantity or value of the grape harvest (9.13), or *most* other things among which the events described in Judges 9 happened.[71]

A further interplay of expectations is that readers not only know that the author is choosing his or her material, but they also implicitly trust the voice of the narrator, whereas they interpret a participant's speeches according to their impression of that character's veracity, an impression that depends on other information in the story. When Jacob deceives Isaac, pretending to be Esau, for example, the reader knows that Jacob is lying, but only because the narrator has told us that "*Jacob* said to his father 'I am Esau, your firstborn" (Gn 27.18). The [trustworthy] narrator has faithfully reported the speech of a untrustworthy participant.[72]

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[67]In quotational negation the narrator uses a character to tell what did not (indicative; e.g., Gn 15.3, 16), should [may, must] not (prohibition, e.g., Gn 13.8; 15.1; 18.3), or will not (promise, e.g., Gn 14.23-24; prophecy, e.g., Gn 15.4, 10; 17.5) happen, asks a rhetorical question (e.g., Gn 12.18); or offers a choice (polar question) or answers a polar question in the negative (simple negation). The last two types of quotational negation do not occur in Esther.

[68]We might therefore call quotational irrealis "internally perspectival" (i.e., a perspective "from within" the story itself), whereas narrational irrealis reflects the viewpoint or conclusion(s) of the narrator (storyteller, author, &c.), and is therefore "externally perspectival". Both types of negation are perspectival, and both need to be evaluated in the light of the entire narrative in which they occur.

[69]Discourse analysis suggests that to change any detail of a story—however slight or apparently immaterial—is to change the story as a whole. See my paper on the ESV's version of Genesis 44.1-13 (Putnam 2005a).

[70]I.e., no one—even Boswell or Proust—could record *every* internal (i.e., emotional, including such "invisible" events as physiological changes in the bodies of the participants) and external (i.e., physical) aspect of an experience, without limiting the setting and duration of the event, and the number of participants so severely that the account would sound rather like "playing" a Bach fugue by merely pressing every key used at the same time for one or two seconds— such a "story" would be dense but meaningless.

[71]Note that the validity of this statement does not depend upon one's view of the [historical] reliability of the story's description of events. In order to tell a story about any world, real or invented, the overwhelming flood of the necessary details of existence must be dammed to a trickle, so that those details not mentioned are implicit. Jotham, e.g., must have been a certain height, a height that could have been measured in cubits and spans, but the metaphysical necessity of that datum does not require that it be included in the story, *whether or not* those events happened, or happened as described. On the other hand, if we knew that Jotham was six cubits tall and carried a spear with a shaft the size of a weaver's beam, we might better understand why neither Abimelech nor the leaders of Shechem tried to outflank and capture him while he was distracted by telling his fable. Apparently his size was not a factor.

[72]Authors of certain types of literature use authorial misdirection to confuse or mislead readers and to maintain or increase tension and suspense—as when, e.g., Character A eavesdrops on or overhears Character B, but thinks that he or she is listening to Character C. Misled, Character A also misleads the reader. Agatha Christie writes an entire novel from the point of view of the murderer, who withholds certain information from the reader in order to maintain the suspense of the story. The use of misinformation to confuse the reader does not occur in biblical literature, although Hushai's advice (e.g.) contains misinformation in order to delay Absalom's attack on his father David (2 Sam 17.5-14), just as the snake deceives Eve (Gn 3.4-5) and Nehemiah's enemies tried to trick him (Ne 6.2-8; 10-13). This sort of intra-character deception *within* a story is not, however, an attempt to deceive the reader.

Based on the biblical stories studied on this subject, most biblical negation in biblical narratives occurs within direct speech.[73] Quotational negation is a less direct way of communicating *irrealis*, informing the reader that something did not happen through the mouth of, or in the opinion of, a character (e.g., Es 6.3), rather than omnisciently via the narrator, but it can also be a more effective means of communication, since it is less obtrusive.

The predominance of quotational negation in biblical narratives reflects the normal use of quotation to advance the story. One type of *quotational* negation could also be considered *pseudo-narrational*. The reader sometimes learns of non-events from characters, rather than from the narrator. At the turning point of the book, when the insomniac Xerxes asks how Mordecai had been rewarded for foiling the assassins' plot, the reader learns for the first time that Mordecai had not been rewarded:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ נַעֲרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מְשָׁרְתָיו
לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר:

And the king's men, his ministers, said,
"Not a thing was done for him" (6.3).

The king's failure to reward Mordecai is new information for the reader, and certainly counter-expectational. In Persian society as generally, someone who saved a king's life would normally be rewarded richly; the negative statement highlights Xerxes' *faux pas*, especially for the original readers, who would have assumed that the narrator simply omitted mention of the culturally obligatory reward.

Memucan's statement that Queen Vašti "*did not do* the word of King Xerxes ... and she *did not come*" (1.15, 17) is another example of new information. In contrast with the narrator's positive statement (see "semantic negation", below) that "*Vašti refused to come* at the king's command" (1.12), Memucan's description functions as a form of "delayed antithetical paraphrase" (below). The narrator said merely that Vašti had "refused to come" (1.12), but we have no way of knowing whether or not the king or his servants had somehow forced her to come. Memucan lets the reader know that she successfully resisted the king's command by failing to appear at all.

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[73]This begs the question of whether or not and to what extent the narrator has shaped "direct" quotations in biblical narrative. For the purposes of this paper, I assume that the words recorded as speech acts were actually spoken by the individuals to whom the narrator credited them, but without assuming that any conversation or statement is recorded in full. In 1 Sam 1-3 (the birth of Samuel and his establishment as a prophet), there are fourteen instances of narrational *irrealis* versus twenty-eight quotational negations, a 1:2 ratio, by far the highest ratio among the passages studied.

APPENDIX II: TYPES OF NEGATION IN ESTHER

Compound (Unitary) Negation

A "compound" or "unitary" negation consists of statements that can be grammatically analyzed as at least two separate negative clauses, but that are functionally unitary. Mordecai's refusal to honour Haman is doubly described by the narrator:

<div align="center">

וּמָרְדֳּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:

but Mordecai did *not bow* and he did *not show respect* (3.2b)

</div>

which contrasts Mordecai's behaviour with the obedience of the rest of the Persian court:

<div align="center">

וְכָל־עַבְדֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כֹּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהָמָן

now all of the king's servants who were in the king's gate
were *bowing* and *showing respect* to Haman (3.2b)

</div>

When the same event is described from Haman's point of view in a parallel "indirect discourse",[74] however, Mordecai's non-actions are united under a single negative particle:

<div align="center">

וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מָרְדֳּכַי כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ ...

And Haman saw that Mordecai *was not bowing or showing* him *respect*, ... (3.5).

</div>

This suggests that Haman—seconding the narrator's voice—saw the two actions as a functional unity. In a parallel example, Haman is again enraged at Mordecai's lack of respect, this time after his first *soirée* with Esther and Xerxes.[75] Mordecai's non-act is again doubly described (albeit with different verbs than those used above).

<div align="center">

וְכִרְאוֹת הָמָן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְלֹא־קָם וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ

"... but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's doorway
(now he *did not stand* and he *did not tremble* because of him ...)" (Esth 5:9)

</div>

The story of Esther contains two other "compound" negations. The account of the establishment of Purim describes two closely related actions; here the second extends the first, rather than merely paralleling it:

<div align="center">

וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים
וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף מִזַּרְעָם:

and these days of Purim *shall not pass* from among the Jews,
and their memory *shall not cease* from their seed (Es 9.28).

</div>

The narrator first says that the Jews would not fail to observe the days of Purim, the second that this was a permanent statute that extended to their offspring (i.e., Purim was neither a one-time, nor a mono-generational celebration (i.e., celebrated only by those who had been personally delivered), but would become part of the Jewish liturgical calendar).

---

[74]An example of *quotational* irrealis, even though it is narrated, because it describes the scene from Haman's perspective.

[75]This example of narrational irrealis is usually interpreted as a case of indirect discourse ("When Haman saw Mordecai ... and that he did not ..."). It would better be rendered "When Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate (now he had neither stood for nor trembled at him), Haman was filled with rage" (i.e., Haman was angry at merely seeing Mordecai, not specifically because of what Mordecai failed to do).

When she asks the Jews to support her visit to the king, Esther parallels positive and negative commands, in which the prohibitions explicate the positive command.

$$\text{וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ}$$

... and *fast* on my behalf, and *do not eat* and *do not drink* (Ex 4.16)

This parallels Mordecai's non-act (3.2, 5) in that eating and drinking form a single action (eating meals), just as bowing and showing respect honour someone.

Negated Antonym Paraphrase[76]

Esther's entreaty (4.16) is an example of "negated antonym paraphrase", in which a pair of clauses—one negative and one positive statement—say the "same thing" (e.g., "live" ≈ "not die"; "wise" ≈ "not foolish"; "fast" ≈ "not eat or drink"), a form of narrative "doubling" that reflects the "parallelizing" nature of biblical language, both narrative and poetic. In each case, both clauses describe the same circumstance. The positive "half" of the paraphrase usually precedes the negative in the stories that I studied, but not always; cf., e.g., "*Now the chief steward* did not remember *Joseph*, but he *forgot* him" (Gn 40.23; cf. Es 6.13b [below]).[77]

Although often narrational in other stories,[78] negated antonym paraphrase in Esther occurs only in quotations.

Haman's family and friends use negated antonym paraphrase to warn Haman of the dangers of opposing Mordecai.[79] Haman will not only fail to overcome Mordecai (negative), he will fall before him (positive):[80]

$$\text{אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מָרְדֳּכַי אֲשֶׁר הַחִלּוֹתָ לִנְפֹּל לְפָנָיו}$$
$$\text{לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו:}$$

"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is from the seed of the Jews,
you *will not overcome* him, but you *shall surely fall* before him" (Es 6.13b).

The king's negative edict about non-compulsory drinking is followed by a positively worded explanation (1.8):

$$\text{וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַדָּת}$$

---

[76]The term is Longacre's (1983, 78-79 *et passim*).

[77]This function is fairly common in biblical poetry, especially the proverbs, where negating an antonym often creates synonymously parallel lines (e.g., Pr 3.1, 5, 7). Perhaps the identification of either the positive or negated clause as the "paraphrase" of the other depends on their order, so that the first clause or line is paraphrased in the second.

[78]Cf., e.g., Is 36.21 ("But they were *silent*, and *did not answer* him a word"); Is 38.1 ("... for you *shall die* [are dead!], you *shall not live*"); Jon 3.10 ("God *relented* of the disaster ... and he *did not do* it"); Gn 11.30 ("Now Sarai was *barren*; she had *no children*"); 37.4 ("they *hated* him, and *could not speak peace*[fully] with him"); 37.22 ("*Shed no blood*; *throw* him in this pit ..., but *do not set a hand* on him" [double paraphrase!]); 37.24 ("Now the pit was *empty*; there was *no water* in it"); 40.23 ("But the chief steward *did not remember* Joseph, but *forgot* him"); 43.8 ("... that we may *live*, and *not die*"); 48.10 ("Now Israel's eyes were *dim* with age; he *could not see*"; cf. 1 Sam 3.2; 4.15); 1 Sam 1.13 ("Hannah was speaking *in her heart* ... and her voice was *not heard*"); 3.1 ("Now YHWH's word was *rare* in those days; *no vision* broke through"); 3.18 ("And Samuel *told* him *everything*, and he *did not hide* [anything?] from him" [perhaps the Hebrew text means that Samuel himself did not hide (reflexive), rather than that he hid nothing (transitive)]); 3.19 ("... and YHWH *was with* him, and he *let none* of his words *fall* to the ground"). These are all the examples of narrational antithetical paraphrase in the stories that I investigated. Note that, e.g., 1 Sam 2.12 ("Now Eli's sons were *worthless* [sons of Belial]; they *did not know* YHWH") is closely related to these examples, but—since Samuel did *not yet know* YHWH at the time of his call (3.7)—it must not be quite identical; Samuel was not *ben Belial*.

[79]In one of many ironies in the book of Esther, this warning comes from the same group of people who had counseled him to build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai (5.14), even though they knew at that time that Mordecai was a Jew (5.13), the fact that now leads them to this [contrary] conclusion.

[80]The connotations of falling are not positive, but the statement is semantically and grammatically positive: "... you will fall".

<div dir="rtl">

אֵין אֹנֵס
כִּי־כֵן יִסַּד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל־רַב בֵּיתוֹ
לַעֲשׂוֹת כִּרְצוֹן אִישׁ־וָאִישׁ:

</div>

And the drinking was according to the edict:
'*There is no one who compels* [drinking]',
for thus the king set on every chief of his house:
to *do according to each man's pleasure* (Es 1.8).

No one was to be forced to drink, but neither was anyone to be neglected. The second and fourth clauses contain the negated antonym paraphrase; perhaps the negative and positive iterations guarded against any misunderstanding or confusion.

The heightening function of irrealis probably shows up most clearly in negated antonym paraphrase. Grimes suggests that irrealis

> ... relates non-events to events. By providing a range of non-events that might take place, it *heightens the significance* of the real events. (1975, 65; emphasis added)

Even though the "range of [potential] non-events" in these examples from Esther is quite narrow—two possibilities (often polar opposites), naming both halves of the antithesis highlights the positive statement.[81]

Negative Explanation ("because/for/since" there was no ...)

In Es 2.7b the narrator says that Mordecai supported his cousin Esther *because* she was an orphan, but uses a negative clause to explain her state because BH apparently lacked a specific lexeme corresponding to "orphan":

<div dir="rtl">

וַיְהִי אֹמֵן אֶת־הֲדַסָּה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דֹּדוֹ
כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם

</div>

Now he was supporting Hadassah (she was "Esther", his uncle's daughter),
because *she had no father or mother* (2.7).

The negative circumstance *explains the positive* deed described in the first half of the verse—why Mordecai would (or needed to) care for his cousin. It characterizes Esther as an orphan—but in terms of her loss, rather than her status, and also anticipates the reader's question about how a cousin could have Mordecai's degree of control over this young woman's life, a control that becomes increasingly apparent as the story unfolds.

Mordecai stopped outside the "king's [palace] gate" (4.2), an action that might have been more transparent to the story's early readers than to us, but the author explains it anyway, in an aside to the reader, much like the explanation of Esthers' situation (2.7; above).

<div dir="rtl">

כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק:

</div>

... because it *was not* [lawful?] *to enter* the king's gate wearing sackcloth (4.2).

These negative explanations, one of a custom and the other of an individual situation, begin with כִּי אֵין לְ (although thereafter the syntax is quite different). The main difference between them is that we might expect the original readers to have known the legal custom, but not necessarily Esther's circumstance (unless they already knew the story).

Semantic "Irrealis"

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[81]A closely related phenomenon, not found in Esther, is the use of *polar questions*, which are "... a useful device for introducing more than one alternative at once" (Grimes 1975, 67).

When the king sent his eunuchs to fetch the queen into the men's banquet hall (1.10-11), she "*refused* to go ..." (1.12):

$$\text{וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ}$$

And Queen Vashti *refused* to go at the word of the king (Est 1.12)

Negative statements assert that an event did not take place, using the lexicon and grammar of negation, which entail a particle (or "adverb") that negates the predicate.

Irrealis in a negated clause does not allow readers to infer what *did* happen, unless it presents one side of a polar opposition. For example, life and death being mutually exclusive, the statement "he didn't die" means "he lived". It does not, however, allow us to infer anything about the nature or quality or activities of his life, whether or not he ever again loved, fought, or played the harmonica. That is, when we read that someone *didn't do* something, we are not allowed to infer from that irrealis *what she did*,[82] just as being told *what did not happen* does not allow us to supply *what happened instead*.

Irrealis is not, however, limited to negative statements.

"Semantic irrealis"—implicit negation—refers to irrealis without a negative particle or negated predicate, a kind of irrealis that is possible because some lexemes by their very nature describe a non-action, for example "be silent" (i.e., "not make [a] sound"), "refuse ..." (i.e., "be unwilling"), "reject" (i.e., "not accept"), "stop" or "cease" (i.e., "do no longer"),[83] so that positive predicates can make negative statements. Semantic irrealis thus names an act, even if that act entails a non-event (e.g., "finish", "complete", "stop").

Did Vašti throw a fit, beat the messengers, or send an insult back to the king? The story does not say.[84] [Her refusal turned out to be quite insult enough.]

The speeches of the king and Memucan (more quotational irrealis), however, make it clear that she never appeared before the king:

$$\text{לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ}$$

"... she *did not do* the command of the king ..." (1.15)

$$\text{וְלֹא־בָאָה:}$$

"... but she *did not come*." (1.17)

Her rebellion, therefore, was successful, if short-lived. Vashti's refusal is the first of two instances of semantic irrealis in Esther. **Vashti**'s rebellion justified her inclusion in the story, and stands contrasted to the obedience of the king's courtiers in serving wine (1.7-8), and trying to fetch her (1.10-11); Memucan's reasoning in counseling the king to ban Vashti from his presence suggests that until that time, Persian women had obeyed their husbands (1.17-20), unlike Vashti, whose example would only foment empire-wide domestic rebellion.

One of many remarkable providential "coincidences" recounted in the story of Esther is the king's insomnia (6.1). What sounds like normal (i.e., lexical) narrational irrealis in translation[85] is a positive statement in Hebrew:

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[82]Another example of semantic irrealis occurs in Lv 10.3b: "... & Aaron was silent" (וַיִּדֹּם אַהֲרֹן). We do not know what he did, only that he did not respond to Moses. We do not in fact even know the reason for the sentence. Did Aaron *refuse* to speak or was he *unable* to speak (because he was, e.g., mourning his sons, agonizing over their guilt, or stricken by Yahweh)? Does the clause merely contrast his silence with Moses' prophetic speech (10.3a)? Just how silent was that grieving father, beyond his lack of words? The narrator gives us no information beyond the semantic negation.

[83]This highlights the difference between, e.g., the roots *klh* (כלה) and *chdl* (חדל). חדל announces merely that the activity stopped, which is semantic irrealis—i.e., irrealis from the nature of the root, without negating particles. כלה, on the other hand, specifies that the actitivy ceased because there was no more to be done or that no more *could* be done; חדל does not suggest anything about degree of completion.

[84]An alternative action is rarely described when !am is used (e.g., 1 Sa 8.19; 2 Sa 13.9; Jr 3.3; 5.3; 11.10; Zc 7.11).

[85]This negative statement ("... the king couldn't sleep") is in fact the nearly unanimous rendering of all English, French, and German versions that I could find. The few that rendered this with the biblical metaphor were Young's Literal, Darby, Holman Christian Standard, and a [very] few German translations. LXX says that "The Lord took [or "kept"] sleep from the king that night" (ὁ δὲ κύριος ἀπέστησεν τὸν ὕπνον ἀπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως τὴν νύκτα ἐκείνην ...).

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נָדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ

That night, the king's sleep *fled* ... (6.1)

On the level of discourse, the main effect of semantic irrealis in Biblical Hebrew is that by raising non-events to the level of the narrative backbone (preterite chain), non-events parallel in function the main events in the story, rather than being relegated to the status of the background information that is generally communicated in [often-disjunctive] negated clauses.[86] Two non-events—Vashti's *dis*obedience and the king's *in*somnia—are described as events.

We could perhaps argue about the propriety of calling these irrealis, since there is no negation. Not every positive predication identifies a negative course of action, although every action necessarily entails the negation of every possible alternative (at least the moment).

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[86]This function parallels the use of predicate *wayhî* (i.e., *wayhî* followed by a subject, rather than a circumstantial clause, as in, e.g., Gn 12.10), another syntagm that elevates a non-event (or at least a non-sequential event) to the level of the narrative backbone. See Putnam 1996.

Appendix III : PLOT SUMMARY WITH NARRATIONAL & QUOTATIONAL IRREALIS

1. "Vašti *refused* to come at the king's command, ..., and *she did not come*" (1.12 ... 17); her resultant demotion (1.19-22) led eventually to Esther's elevation (2.5-18), described using both narrational semantic negation ("Vašti refused") and quotational antithetical paraphrase ("... since she has not done [obeyed] the command of King Xerxes ... and she did not go" (2.15, 17)).

2. Because "*Esther had no father or mother*" (1.7b), she was subservient to her cousin, Mordecai (2.7a, 10, 20).

3. Obedient to Mordecai (above), "*Esther did not report*" her ethnic background (2.10, 20), which meant that (1) Haman could move against the Jews with the impunity born of ignorance; and (2) that Esther could intercede for the Jews at the right time.

4. "*Esther did not ask* for anything except what Hegai ... advised" (2.15a), which was at least part of the reason that she was selected by Xerxes (she had also "won favour in the eyes of everyone who saw her" (2.15b; cf. 2.9)).

5. *Non-Sequential*: Because "[n]*othing had been done* for [Mordecai]" (6.3), at the appropriate time (i.e., after the events described in 2.21-23), Xerxes was (1) disposed to honour him; and (2) began Haman's disgrace by forcing him to honour Mordecai (a disgrace predicted by Haman's wife and advisors (6.13)). This disgrace, however, is rather incidental to the story of the book, although not to its [secondary?] purpose—to honour Mordecai.

6. "***Mordecai did not bow to or honour** [Haman]*" **(3.2, 4, 5; 5.9), so that Haman decided to destroy Mordecai and his people (3.6-15).** This is the main plot mechanism of the book.

7. "*Mordecai would not accept* [the clothes that Esther sent]" (4.4), which drew Esther into his plan (4.5-16).

8. A quotational negation—that Esther "*had not been called* to come to the king for thirty days" (4.11)—is both new information for the reader (who has been given no reason to suspect this in the story), and heightens the narrative tension, since the reader does not know if Esther has fallen out of favour, so that Xerxes would not be willing to receive her when she appeared before him (5.1-2). This tension is only increased by the knowledge of the custom described in 2.14.

9. Esther and the Jews did "not eat or drink for three days and nights" (4.16); another quotational negation, perhaps mentioned to inject a vaguely religious flavour into the stream of events.

10. Mordecai "did not rise or tremble before [Haman]", which [further] enraged Haman (5.9) so that he built the gallows (5.14) upon which he himself would be hung (7.9-10).

11. "That night *the king's sleep fled*" (6.1), a **semantic negation** for "That night the king could not sleep".[87]

12. **The Absence of Narrational Negation** (7.6-9.1). Although negational statements (quotational and narrational) are scattered through the first two-thirds of the book of Esther, there is a striking lack of negation from the point at which Esther denounced Haman (7.6) until the enemies of the Jews "did not stand before them" (9.2; cf. the table in Appendix I). This is the longest negation-less stretch of narrative in Esther. Perhaps this lack of irrealis has to do with the resolution of the major tension in the book—not merely Esther's revelation of Haman's plot, but the king's response of repudiation, and the death of Haman, which foreshadows the foiling of his plot and the destruction of his family.

13. "No one stood before [the Jews]" (9.2), which meant that they were able to deliver themselves by destroying their enemies (9.5-16). This information is not, however, necessary to the reader or the plot, since the narrator

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[87]This function ("sleep fled") occurs also in Gn 31.40 (Jacob's complaint to Laban).

copiously documented their victories, and also said that "the Jews dominated their enemies" (9.1) and further explains the negation by adding "… for terror of them fell [had fallen] on all the peoples" (9.2).

14. The Jews "did not stretch out their hand to the plunder" (9.10, 15, 16); i.e., they were not motivated by greed (contrast Haman).

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Appendix IV: IRREALITIC GRAMMAR IN ESTHER

This appendix discusses the lexicon and morphosyntax of irrealis in Esther.

Lexicon

	Gloss	Reference(s)
לֹא	*no, not*	22xx (> 4000xx in BH)
		1.15, 16, 17, 19; 2.10, 14, 15; 3.2, 4; 4.4, 11, 16; 5.9, 12; 6.3, 13; 9.2, 10, 15, 16, 27, 28
	הֲלֹא	10.2 (supra-narrational rhetorical question)
אֵין	*no, not*	9xx (c. 700xx in BH)
	+ptc	1.8; 2.20; 3.5, 8; 5.13; 7.4
	+NC	4.2; 8.8
	non-vbl.	2.7
אַל	*no, not*	4xx (c. 600xx in BH)
		4.13, 16(*bis*); 6.10

Morphosyntax

Sbj.	Pred.	Sytnax							Ref.
Ptc		* - S		אֹנֵס	אֵין		כְּדָת	וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה	1.8
n.		* - l+sfx – O		אָב וָאֵם	לָהּ	אֵין			2.7
n.pr.	Ptc	* - S – P – O	מוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ	מַגֶּדֶת	אֶסְתֵּר	אֵין			2.20
n.pr.	Ptc	* - S – P – O	לוֹ	כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה	מָרְדֳּכַי	אֵין	הָמָן כִּי־	וַיִּרָא	3.5
sfx	Ptc	w+O - * - P		עֹשִׂים		אֵינָם	הַמֶּלֶךְ	וְאֶת־דָּתֵי	3.8a
---	Ptc	O - * - P	לְהַנִּיחָם	שֹׁוֶה			אֵין־	וְלַמֶּלֶךְ	3.8b
---	l+NC	* - P – O	אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ	לָבוֹא	אֵין				4.2
kol-zeh	Ptc	w+S - *+sfx – P – O	לִי	שֹׁוֶה		אֵינֶנּוּ		וְכָל־זֶה	5.13
n.	Ptc	ki - * - S – P – O	בְּנֵזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ	שֹׁוֶה	הַצָּר		אֵין	כִּי	7.4

---	l+NC	ki – O – * - P/NC			לְהָשִׁיב		אֵין	כְּתָב...	כִּי־	8.8

TABLE III : IRREALIS IN ESTHER

Ref.	Clause	Parse	Sbj.	Neg.	BHS	Voice	
1.12	P/Pr – S – VC/l+NC	fs+art	noun	מֵאֵן	וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ	n	s/e
2.7	ki – neg – IO – S – w+S		pr sfx	אֵין	כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם וְהַנַּעֲרָה	n	st
2.10a	neg – P/P – S – O	3fs Q P	noun	לֹא	לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ	n	e
2.14	neg – P/P – adv – O	3fs Q F	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם־חָפֵץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרְאָה בְשֵׁם:	n	c
2.15	neg – P/P – O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הֵגַי ...	n	e
2.20	neg – S – P/Ptc – O	fs H Ptc	noun	אֵין	אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת מוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי:	n	e
3.2a	w+S – neg – P/F	3ms Q F	noun	לֹא	וּמָרְדֳּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע	n	e
3.2b	w+neg – P/F	3ms Dt F	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:	n	e
3.4	w+neg – P/P – O	3ms Q P	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם	n	e
4.2	ki – neg – S/l+NC – O	Q NC	NC	אֵין	כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק:	n	c
4.4	w+neg – P/P	3ms D P	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא קִבֵּל:	n	e
9.2	w+S – neg – P/P – adv	3ms Q P	noun	לֹא	וְאִישׁ לֹא־עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם	n	e
9.10	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
9.15	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
9.16	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
10.2	q+neg S/pron – P/Ptc	mp Qp Ptc	pron	הֲ+לוֹא	הֲלוֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מָדַי וּפָרָס:	n	s
1.8	w+S – "adv – neg – S"	ms Q Ptc	ptc	אֵין	וְהַשְּׁתִיָּה כַדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס	q	c
1.15	neg – P/P - O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ	q	e

1.16	neg – O - adv - P/P - O	3fs Q P	noun	לֹא	עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לֹא	q	e
1.17	w+neg – P/P	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה:	q	e
1.19a	w+neg – P/F	3ms Q F	PGN	לֹא	וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי פָרַס־וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר	q	c
1.19b	rel – neg – P/F – S – adv	3fs Q F	noun	לֹא	אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ	q	st
2.10b	neg – P/F	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד:	q	c
3.5	neg – S – P/Ptc – w+P/Ptc	ms Q Ptc ms Dt Ptc	noun	אֵין	וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מָרְדֳּכַי כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ	q	e
3.8a	w+S – neg+sfx – P/Ptc	mp Q Ptc	noun + sfx	אֵינָם	וְאֶת־דָּתֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים	q	e
3.8b	w+O – neg – S – VC/l+NC	mp Q Ptc	ptc	אֵין	וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין־שֹׁוֶה לְהַנִּיחָם:	q	st
4.11a	rel – neg – P/F	3ms N F	noun	לֹא	כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקָּרֵא אַחַת דָּתוֹ לְהָמִית ...	q	c
4.11b	w+S/pron – neg – P/P – VC/l+NC	1cs N P	PGN	לֹא	וַאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרֵאתִי לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	q	e
4.13	neg – P/F – adv – VC/l+NC	2fs D F	PGN	אַל	אַל־תְּדַמִּי בְנַפְשֵׁךְ לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	q	e
4.16		2mp Q F	PGN	אַל	וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ	q	e
5.9a	neg – P/P	3ms Q P / ms Q Ptc	PGN	לֹא	וְכִרְאוֹת הָמָן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא־קָם	q/i	e
5.9b	w+neg – P/P – adv	3ms Q P / ms Q Ptc	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ	q/i	e
5.12	neg – P/P – S – adv	3ms H P	noun	לֹא	לֹא־הֵבִיאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה כִּי אִם־אוֹתִי	q	e
5.13	w+S – neg+sfx – P/Ptc – O	ms Q Ptc	sfx	אֵינֶנּוּ	וְכָל־זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שֹׁוֶה לִי	q	s
6.3	neg – P/P – adv – O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה עִמּוֹ דָּבָר:	q	e
6.10	neg – P/F – O	2ms H F	PGN	אַל	אַל־תַּפֵּל דָּבָר מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:	q	e
6.13	neg – P/F – O	2ms Q F	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־תוּכַל לוֹ כִּי־נָפוֹל תִּפּוֹל לְפָנָיו:	q	e
7.4	ki – neg – S – P/Ptc – adv	QV	noun	אֵין	כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שֹׁוֶה בְּנֵזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ:	q	s

9.27	w+neg – P/F – S/l+NC	3ms Q F	Q NC	לֹא	וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר לִהְיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֵת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּכְתָבָם וְכִזְמַנָּם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:	q/i	c
9.28a	w+S – neg – P/F – adv	3mp Q F	noun	לֹא	וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים	q/i	c
9.28b	w_S – neg – P/F – adv	3ms Q F	PGN	לֹא	וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף מִזַּרְעָם:	q/i	c

Key

	content:	c	*custom*	e	*dynamic: event*	st	*static: situation/condition*
	type:	n	*narrational*	q	*quotational*	s	*semantic*
				q/i	*indirect quotational*		

1. Forty-one (41) negations/irrealis in Es.
2.
3.
4.

‘en + Ptc/šwh = only Esther (3xx)

Ref.	Clause	Parse	Sbj.	Neg.	BHS		
1.8	w+S – "adv – neg – S"	ms Q Ptc	ptc	אֵין	וְהַשְׁתִיָּה כַדָּת אֵין אֹנֵס	q	c
1.12	P/Pr – S – VC/l+NC	fs+art	noun	מאן	וַתְּמָאֵן הַמַּלְכָּה וַשְׁתִּי לָבוֹא בִּדְבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ	n	state
1.15	neg – P/P - O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־עָשְׂתָה אֶת־מַאֲמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ	q	e
1.16	neg – O - adv - P/P - O	3fs Q P	noun	לֹא	עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עָוְתָה וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לֹא	q	e
1.17	w+neg – P/P	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ אָמַר לְהָבִיא אֶת־וַשְׁתִּי הַמַּלְכָּה לְפָנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה:	q	e
1.19a	w+neg – P/F	3ms Q F	PGN	לֹא	וְיִכָּתֵב בְּדָתֵי פָרַס־וּמָדַי וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר	q	c
1.19b	rel – neg – P/F – S – adv	3fs Q F	noun	לֹא	אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תָבוֹא וַשְׁתִּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ	q	st
2.7	ki – neg – IO – S – w+S		pr sfx	אֵין	כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וָאֵם וְהַנַּעֲרָה	n	st
2.10a	neg – P/P – S – O	3fs Q P	noun	לֹא	הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלַדְתָּהּ לֹא	n	e
2.10b	neg – P/F	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	כִּי מָרְדֳּכַי צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַגִּיד:	n	c
2.14	neg – P/P – adv – O	3fs Q F	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־תָבוֹא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם־חָפֵץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרְאָה בְשֵׁם:	n	c
2.15	neg – P/P – O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הֵגַי ...	n	e
2.20	neg – S – P/Ptc – O	fs H Ptc	noun	אֵין	אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מַגֶּדֶת מוֹלַדְתָּהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עָלֶיהָ מָרְדֳּכָי:	n	e
3.2a	w+S – neg – P/F	3ms Q F	noun	לֹא	וּמָרְדֳּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע	n	e
3.2b	w+neg – P/F	3ms Dt F	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:	n	e
3.4	w+neg – P/P – O	3ms Q P	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם	n	e
3.5	neg – S – P/Ptc – w+P/Ptc	ms Q Ptc ms Dt Ptc	noun	אֵין	וַיַּרְא הָמָן כִּי־אֵין מָרְדֳּכַי כֹּרֵעַ וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לוֹ	q	e
3.8a	w+S – neg+sfx – P/Ptc	mp Q Ptc	noun +	אֵינָם	וְאֶת־דָּתֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים	q	e

			sfx				
3.8b	w+O – neg – S – VC/l+NC	mp Q Ptc	ptc	אֵין	וְלַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין־שֹׁוֶה לְהַנִּיחָם:	q	st
4.2		Q NC	NC	אֵין	כִּי אֵין לָבֹוא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבֹושׁ שָׂק:	n	c
4.4	w+neg – P/P	3ms D P	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא קִבֵּל:	n	3
4.11a	rel – neg – P/F	3ms N F	noun	לֹא	כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יָבֹוא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקָּרֵא אַחַת דָּתֹו לְהָמִית ...	q	c
4.11b	w+S/pron – neg – P/P – VC/l+NC	1cs N P	PGN	לֹא	וַאֲנִי לֹא נִקְרֵאתִי לָבֹוא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	q	e
4.13	neg – P/F – adv – VC/l+NC	2fs D F	PGN	אַל	אַל־תְּדַמִּי בְנַפְשֵׁךְ לְהִמָּלֵט בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ ...	q	e
4.16		2mp Q F	PGN	אַל	וְצֻומוּ עָלַי וְאַל־תֹּאכְלוּ וְאַל־תִּשְׁתּוּ	q	e
5.9a	neg – P/P	3ms Q P / ms Q Ptc	PGN	לֹא	וְכִרְאֹות הָמָן אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא־קָם	q/i	e
5.9b	w+neg – P/P – adv	3ms Q P / ms Q Ptc	PGN	לֹא	וְלֹא־זָע מִמֶּנּוּ	q/i	e
5.12	neg – P/P – S – adv	3ms H P	noun	לֹא	לֹא־הֵבִיאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה כִּי אִם־אֹותִי	q	e
5.13	w+S – neg+sfx – P/Ptc – O	ms Q Ptc	sfx	אֵין	וְכָל־זֶה אֵינֶנּוּ שֹׁוֶה לִי	q	s
6.3	neg – P/P – adv – O	3fs Q P	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־נַעֲשָׂה עִמֹּו דָּבָר:	q	e
6.10	neg – P/F – O	2ms H F	PGN	אַל	אַל־תַּפֵּל דָּבָר מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:	q	e
6.13	neg – P/F – O	2ms Q F	PGN	לֹא	לֹא־תוּכַל לֹו כִּי־נָפֹול תִּפֹּול לְפָנָיו:	q	e
7.4	ki – neg – S – P/Ptc – adv	QV	noun	אֵין	כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שֹׁוֶה בְּנֵזֶק הַמֶּלֶךְ:	q	s
9.2	w+S – neg – P/P – adv	3ms Q P	noun	לֹא	וְאִישׁ לֹא־עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם	n	e
9.10	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
9.15	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
9.16	w+O – neg – P/P – O	3mp Q P	PGN	לֹא	וּבַבִּזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:	n	e
9.27	w+neg – P/F – S/l+NC	3ms Q F	Q NC	לֹא	וְלֹא יַעֲבֹור לִהְיֹות עֹשִׂים אֵת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּכְתָבָם וְכִזְמַנָּם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:	q/i	c
9.28a	w+S – neg – P/F – adv	3mp Q F	noun	לֹא	וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ	q/i	c

					מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים	
9.28b	w_S – neg – P/F – adv	3ms Q F	PGN	**לֹא**	וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף מִזַּרְעָם:	q/i	c
10.2	q+neg S/pron – P/Ptc	mp Qp Ptc	pron	**הֲ+לוֹא**	הֲלוֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מָדַי וּפָרָס:	n	s