

# WILL WOMANKIND NOW GO HUNTING?

## CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER IN THE AQHAT EPIC

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### **Summary: Will Womankind Now Go Hunting? Constructions of Gender in the Aqhat Epic**

Though the study of gender in ancient texts is fraught with difficulty, the Ugaritic Aqhat Epic lends itself to a literary analysis through the constructions of gender explicitly operative in the text. This article analyzes the four repetitions of the list of familial duties prescribed for the ideal son (Aqhat) and traces the ways these explicitly gendered duties are performed by two prominent female characters (Pughat and Anat). In light of the narrative's subversion of the gendered expectations set up in the beginning of the narrative, the article concludes with a brief reflection on the role of the epic-verse tradition in Ugaritic society.

**Keywords:** Ugaritic – Gender – Anat – Aqhat – Filial Duty – KTU 1.17

### **Resumen: Irán las mujeres a cazar ahora? Construcciones sobre el género en la Epopeya de Aqhat**

Aunque los estudios de género a partir de los textos antiguos se encuentra plagado de dificultades, la epopeya ugarítica de Aqhat permite desarrollar un análisis literario a través de las construcciones de género explícitamente operativas en el texto. Este artículo analiza las cuatro repeticiones de la lista de deberes familiares prescritos para el hijo ideal (Aqhat) y rastrea las formas en que dos personajes femeninos prominentes (Pughat y Anat) realizan estos deberes explícitamente relacionados con el género. A la luz de la subversión que establece la narrativa de las expectativas de género establecidas al comienzo de la misma, el artículo concluye con una breve reflexión sobre el papel de la tradición del verso épico en la sociedad ugarítica.

**Palabras clave:** Ugarítico – Género – Anat – Aqhat – Deber filial – KTU 1.17

\* Article received: August 10, 2021; approved: September 30, 2021.

## INTRODUCTION

Marina Warner, writing on the use of gender archetypes in the interpretation of fairy tales argues that the use of such gender constructions, “which is essentially ahistorical, helps to confirm gender inevitability and to imprison male and female in stock definitions.”<sup>1</sup> The danger of such a haphazard use of gender in the interpretation of literary texts is heightened when dealing with an ancient narrative in which the social constructions of gender operative in the historical context of the literature may be largely inaccessible to the interpreter. To proceed carelessly can lead to the misconstrual of gender categories at play in the text. This will not only have a deleterious effect on the validity of the resulting interpretation, but may also function to implicitly perpetuate contemporary gender stereotypes. And yet the presence of gender as a key theme in the Ugaritic Aqhat Epic is, I argue, undeniable, and a responsible interpretation will have to take account of this aspect of the narrative. While the social constructions of gender in Late Bronze Age Ugarit may not be entirely available to us, the Aqhat Epic does in fact offer explications through its characters and their speech of what kinds of social roles certain men and women are expected to fulfill, at least within the narrative-world of the text. The question of whether or not these constructions are reflections of the norms in Ugaritic society or intentional subversions of those norms is a difficult one, too large to be answered here. Still, the Aqhat narrative itself creates constructs of how the ideal son and daughter are expected to act, and by the end of the extant narrative the expectation of how these ideals will be performed are indeed subverted.

<sup>1</sup> Warner 1994: 279. The comparativist Wendy Doniger responds to Warner by noting that social constructions are expressed in linguistic patterns which “can only be changed within the rules of the game—which often means inverting given patterns or breaking dichotomies down into continuums, rather than creating new patterns with entirely different structures. Mythmakers know this, which is why all of them ... are *bricoleurs* rather than patented inventors” (Doniger 1998: 138). Part of my aim in this essay is to show in what ways our own Ilimilku was a kind of *bricoleur* in his own right.

The present essay begins by examining how the Aqhat Epic describes in detail the role of the ideal son and, to a lesser extent, the ideal daughter. Emphasis is placed on the fourfold repetition of the expectations of the ideal son. Many previous interpretations have seen this description of the ideal son to be secondary to the overall structure of the narrative, perhaps a pre-existing wisdom text that has simply been inserted into the narration as a “set piece.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, I argue this passage possesses crucial significance for the interpretation of the Aqhat Epic, clearly outlining the specifically gendered expectations for the ideal son. Over the course of the epic, though, these gendered ideals are not performed by Aqhat, the longed-for son, but are instead surprisingly fulfilled by two prominent female characters: the goddess Anat and Aqhat’s sister, Pughat, whose name literally means “girl” or “princess.” If the list of filial duties is a preexisting composition, it has not been taken up secondarily in the Aqhat Epic, but instead extends influence on the entirety of the narrative. In the second half of the paper, I move to a close analysis of Anat and Pughat, arguing that in continuity with a series of reversals of expectations in the narrative, their fulfilling of the role initially ascribed to the ideal son is deliberately narrated as a violation of the constructions of the ideal son or daughter at play in the narrative. It is this transgression of the roles set up at the beginning of the epic that finally brings justice to Danel’s family.

## IDEAL SOCIAL ROLES IN THE AQHAT EPIC

Before turning to the text itself, it is important to note two primary dangers in attempting an interpretation along the lines I have suggested.<sup>3</sup> The first difficulty is the distance culturally and chronologically between the present interpreting community and the text itself. Of

<sup>2</sup> Greenstein 2012: 76. See also Avishur 1986: 58 and Healey 1979: 356.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a third danger to be observed is the fact that, as Ilona Zsolnay has noted in the context of gender studies in the ancient Near East, “the study of gender is a sociological and, indeed at times, politically motivated movement.” More than psychology or philosophy, “the field of gender studies forces reflective intellectual contemplation of the self.” Zsolnay 2018: 461.

course, this is a difficulty in any project which seeks to interpret ancient texts, but extra caution must be noted when using sociological categories such as gender. While gender may be seen to play an important role in the construction of the text, the question of whether the text simply reflects the social realities of its historical context or purposefully subverts its social norms is not easily answered. Moreover, the assumption that a simple gender binary is at work in the text cognate with what is familiar to the contemporary Euro-American context is indeed a hazardous one.<sup>4</sup> The argument here responds to this difficulty by focusing on how the Aqhat Epic itself constructs social roles for its characters and how those characters do or do not perform within those bounds. One need not reach beyond the text itself to see how gendered categories are operative in the narrative. The second difficulty is more challenging to circumvent: the broken state of the Aqhat Epic, with large lacunae and a missing conclusion, militates against any definitive conclusions regarding the text. Unless the missing pieces of the narrative are miraculously uncovered, which remains unlikely, the difficulty of working with an incomplete text will remain an ever-present challenge. A responsible interpretation, then, must acknowledge its precarious footing. Still, even despite the broken state of the text certain conclusions may be drawn with reasonable certainty. That ritual actions, concern for progeny, and discussion of the ideal roles of children are primary themes for the narrative is undeniable, as the following discussion will show.

<sup>4</sup> In her ethnographic study of the hijra in South India, Gayatri Reddy makes the important observation that different cultures may read the same social signifiers as relevant for differing social constructions; what appears a marker in the United States of sexual identity may be a marker in South India of class identification (Reddy 2005: 1-16). While I argue that the construction and transgression of gender ideals plays a role in this text, by no means do I intend to suggest this to be the only axis of identity operative in the narrative. Still, as Zsolnay argues, it is still evident that “ancient Near Eastern cultures had delineated gender roles. These societies were patriarchal in the more general definition of the term” (Zsolnay 2018: 467).

## *The Ideal Son*

The extant lines of the poem begin with the righteous Danel performing incubation rites,<sup>5</sup> which earns the attention of Baal who brings his case to El (KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 i.1-15). It is important to note that in this narrative Baal does not act on his own, but must first gain the approval of his father, El, in order to attend to Danel's pleas. There is a patriarchal structure of authority within the divine family. El will grant Danel's request for progeny, which is reported to Danel by a messenger (possibly Baal). In this orderly chain of command, from Danel to Baal, Baal to El, El to a messenger, and the messenger back to Danel, the filial duties of an ideal son are repeated no less than four times (KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 i.26-33; 1.17 i.44-48; 1.17 ii.1-8; 1.17 ii.16-23). Because of their importance for the text, I reproduce these lines here with my translation:<sup>6</sup>

<i>nšb . skn . ilibh .</i>	One who erects the stela of the gods of his fathers;
<i>b qdš / ztr 'mh .</i>	in the holy place the column of his people.
<i>l arš . mššu . qtrh</i>	One who brings out his smoke from the ground;
<i>l 'pr . qmr . atrh .</i>	who guards his steps from the dust.
<i>tbq . lht / nišh .</i>	One who shuts the jaws of his insulters;
<i>grš . d . 'šy . lnh</i>	who drives out the one who wrongs him.
<i>aḥd . ydh . b škrn .</i>	One who takes hold of his hand when he is drunk;
<i>m'msh / [k]šb' . yn .</i>	who carries him when he's satisfied by wine.
<i>ksmh . bt . b'l</i>	One who consumes his share in the house of Baal;
<i>[w]mnth . bt . il .</i>	and his portion in the house of El.
<i>th . ggh . b ym / [ti]t .</i>	One who plasters his roof on a day of mud;
<i>rhš . npšh . b ym . rt</i>	who washes his garment on a day of dirt.

The importance of this list is emphasized not only by its four-fold repetition early in the narrative, setting up the expectation of how Danel's son is to perform his duties, but also because of its origin in the

<sup>5</sup> See Kim: 2011, who sees the incubation scene in Aqhat as the most conservative of the incubation type-scenes present among this narrative, the beginning of the Kirta Epic, and the Hannah narrative in 1 Sam.

<sup>6</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 i:26-33. All Ugaritic translations here are my own. For my vocalization of the text of the filial duties see the appendix.

mouths of divine characters in three of its four instances. Baal, El, and El's messenger (who is possibly to be equated with Baal) each deliver this list of filial duties before Danel himself speaks these lines. Danel does not conjure these expectations on his own. The origin of the role a son is expected to fill in this narrative is thus not with humanity but with the gods, the highest authority; to transgress such expectations would be to transgress the expectations of the gods.

The list, which has been understood as a possible example of an Ugaritic wisdom literature tradition,<sup>7</sup> contains six bicola, each describing a particular duty of the ideal son.<sup>8</sup> David P. Wright argues the list may be broken into two halves, each describing two ritual actions with a third "mundane" action. While previous interpretations have argued for an understanding of the list as pertaining to "a situation in which the father has become too weak to take care of himself," a close attention to the duties in fact resists this reading.<sup>9</sup> The first two actions describe the son's responsibility to the ancestral god(s) and deceased family. The third duty prescribes defending the dignity of the father. Wright notes that there is "nothing to indicate that the father is dead when the son performs this duty. In fact, if this is to be connection with [erecting the stela of the gods of his fathers], then we may assume that, since there the father is alive, here he is also alive."<sup>10</sup> The ideal son thus has obligations to the deceased members of his family, which here are described in ritualistic terms. The third duty Wright describes as "mundane" rather than ritualistic.<sup>11</sup> In the second grouping of duties, the first

<sup>7</sup> Compare, for example, the third bicola with Prov 22:10: "Drive out (*grš*) a scoffer, and strife goes out; / quarreling and abuse will cease" (NRSV). See also the duties of an ideal wife in Prov 31:10-31.

<sup>8</sup> Baruch Margalit instead splits the list into eight duties, citing a seven-plus-one pattern at work here (Margalit 1989: 267-281). David P. Wright's reading better fits the structure of the lines, dividing the list into six duties, as I have done here (Wright 2001: 48-69).

<sup>9</sup> Van der Toorn 1996: 154. Indeed, the duties described in the fourth and sixth bicola require the father to be alive and at least well enough to drink excessively. Likewise, John F. Healey argues that the context of the duties requires the father to be alive and well (Healey 1979: 353-56). The ultimate issue is whether or not the first two duties refer to funerary obligations or activities of ancestral worship.

<sup>10</sup> Wright 2001: 61.

<sup>11</sup> Wright 2001: 62.

two again describe ritual actions. The drunkenness of the father probably refers to the father's role in a ritual feast or *marziḥu*.<sup>12</sup> The penultimate duty clearly refers to ritual service in the temples of the gods, and the final "mundane" duty details a responsibility of the son to maintain the cleanliness of the father's abode and garments. The list covers a range of duties, from an obligation to deceased kin, a charge to defend the dignity of the father, service in *marziḥu*-related activities, a general responsibility to the temples of Baal and El, and even the regular upkeep of the home and garments of the father.

This list of filial duties in its fourfold repetition is integral to understanding the development of the narrative. In Baruch Margalit's analysis of this passage, he determines the "exaggerated emphasis" on the ideal son is not a result of the hand of the poet, "but of the (priestly) tradents responsible for the present (and sole extant) recension of the poem."<sup>13</sup> Such a conclusion overlooks the crucial ways in which this passage functions in the narrative and its connections with what precedes and foreshadowing of what follows. The six duties of the son mirror the six days of Danel's feast to the gods preceding their repetition. The drinking activity described in the fourth duty foreshadows the drinking of Anat and Yitpan later in the text. The duty to defend the dignity of the father and the obligation to deceased kin will be taken up by Pughat in the latter half of the narrative.

The first two of these ways in which the list resonates with the narrative are mentioned by Wright, who still confusingly concludes that the duties "appear to stand apart from the narrative as well, because they do not describe what is actually occurring in the course of the narrative but instead portray ideal behavior."<sup>14</sup> The duties in fact do

<sup>12</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.114 describes the *marziḥu* of El, in which the high god "drinks wine until sated; sweet wine until drunk" (yšt . [y]n . 'd šb' . trṭ . 'd škr). The help of other gods is required to bring El safely back to his home, a duty here prescribed for the ideal son. Mark S. Smith also notes the resonance of this duty of the ideal son with "the drunken Jerusalem who has no sons to take her hand" in Isa 51:17-18 and the different reactions of Noah's sons to his drunkenness in Gen 9:20-27 (Smith 2014: 103). Note also the references to a *marzēaḥ* in Amos 6:6 and Jer 16:5.

<sup>13</sup> Margalit 1989: 280.

<sup>14</sup> Wright 2001: 69.

describe what will occur in the course of the narrative, which I discuss in more detail below. Rather than some sort of pious interpolation that distracts from the plot, this list sets up the expectations the rest of the narrative will hinge upon and foreshadows what is to come. If the poet has inserted a pre-existing wisdom text into his narrative he has done so carefully and intentionally, crafting the narrative around the content of this list of duties. What is most important to note here is the way this list sets up the expectations of the role Danel's son is meant to fulfill. The duties are moreover explicitly gendered: they are not described as the general duties of offspring, but of specifically male offspring.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of this list for understanding the role of the ideal son cannot be overstated, though there are other valuable data for understanding the construction of the ideal son in the text, perhaps most notably the gift of Aqhat's bow. Sadly, after the announcement of Danel's wife's pregnancy the text breaks off. Two entire columns are missing. When the text picks back up in KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 v, Danel sees the approaching of the craftsman god Kothar with the gift of a bow and arrow, which has presumably been requested by Danel<sup>16</sup> in the missing columns.<sup>17</sup> No shortage of ink has been spilled trying to identify the

<sup>15</sup> All of the verbs in each of the four instances of the list are masculine. Baal's request for El to grant progeny to Danel in KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 i:18-19 describes the situation in explicitly gendered terms: "To whom there is no son for him like his brothers" (*d in . bn . lh / km . ahh . w . šrš . km . aryh*).

<sup>16</sup> Edward L. Greenstein draws a helpful connection between the gift of the bow in the Aqhat Epic and the advice in Ps 127:4-5: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior / are the sons of one's youth. / Happy is the man who has / his quiver full of them. / He shall not be put to shame / when he speaks with his enemies in the gate." Arguments for the bow as a symbol of fertility are certainly strengthened by this seeming parallel. In both texts the gift of progeny is related to the symbolism of the bow and arrow. The result of progeny in the psalm is the dispelling of those who slander the father, which resonates with the third duty of the ideal son in the Aqhat Epic (Greenstein 2012: 77). Important for interpreting both of these texts is the fact that fertility in the ancient Near East was, as Stephanie Lynn Budin argues, primarily "a masculine attribute, in which it is the life-giving fluids of the penis, rather than what goes on in the womb, that creates new life" (Budin 2008: 25). Though it is not integral for the argument here, the bow as a phallic symbol may indeed have represented fertility.

<sup>17</sup> Aqhat's recitation of the ingredients necessary for Kothar to fashion his bow in KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 v:20-23 probably recount what is now lost to us in columns iii and iv, likely narrating how Danel or Aqhat gathered the necessary materials and delivered them to Kothar. This is also the judgement in Parker 1997: 57.



meaning of Aqhat's bow. While the potential sexual connotations are obvious, they need not overly concern the argument here.<sup>18</sup> What is important to note are the assumptions Aqhat voices about how and by whom the bow is meant to be used. Shortly after the weapon is bequeathed to Aqhat, he is approached by a drinking Anat in the setting of some sort of banquet.<sup>19</sup> Anat is envious of Aqhat's bow and makes two requests for its possession. When Anat offers immortality in exchange for the bow, Aqhat replies in lines of dialogue remarkable for their dramatic irony: "Maiden, do not delude me, / for to a hero your delusions are rubbish .... I will die like all men, / I will die and I will be dead. / And I will speak again: / Bows are for warriors. / Will womankind now go hunting?"<sup>20</sup> Aqhat understands his bow as intended for the possession of a warrior (*mhrm*), which he implies Anat is not. The original audience of this text, like the modern interpreter familiar with the Ugaritic pantheon and mythic texts, knows Aqhat to be woefully mistaken—Anat is a fearsome warrior whose exploits are described in gruesome detail. The Baal Cycle describes a scene in which Anat's limbs are plunged in the gore of warriors (*mhrm*), the very same class

<sup>18</sup> The bow, an arguably phallic object used for hunting, is gifted to a son by his father, later to be envied by a female goddess. For discussion of the bow's significance along these lines, see especially Hillers 1973: 71-80; and the negative reception in Dressler 1975: 217-20. Anat is ultimately unable to obtain the bow even after taking Aqhat's life, which some interpretations have taken as additional evidence for the bow as a phallic symbol. Margalit, for example, comments on this scene in this way: "Anat is and remains, by nature, a 'weakling-woman' just as Aqhat said she was" (Margalit 1989: 337). Budin succinctly and sharply replies to this interpretation: "Margalit had issues." In addition, Budin argues against a sexualized understanding of the weapon: "Sometimes, a bow is just a bow" (Budin 2018: 58, 63 n.53).

<sup>19</sup> The lines immediately preceding this scene are broken. Margalit suggests this scene takes place at a "'coming of age' (Bar-Mitzva) feast" for Aqhat (Margalit 1989: 299). While Anat's drinking certainly conjures the possibility of the scene as a banquet, Margalit's conclusion that this banquet is akin to a Bar-Mitzva is quite far-reaching for the broken state of the text. Gregorio del Olmo Lete instead suggests a banquet of thanksgiving in which Aqhat is honoring the gods with their first fruits (del Olmo Lete 1981: 339). Again, the broken text hampers any conclusive setting for this scene. Ultimately, though, the setting of the encounter is secondary to the dialogue shared between the two parties.

<sup>20</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 vi:34-35, 38-41 (*al tšrgn . y btlm . dm . l ġzr / šrgk . ḥḥm ... [ap ]mt . kl . amt . w an . mtm . amt / [ap . m]tn . rgmm . argm . qštm / [k l . ]mhrm . ht . tšdn . tintt / [bh]*).

of people Aqhat intends to exclude Anat from.<sup>21</sup> Aqhat then adds further insult by implying with sarcasm that women cannot be warriors, that bows are exclusively for men. Stephanie Lynn Budin argues that in this scene, “Aqhat sees a girl before him, not a deity—he cannot fathom that her divine nature suits her to the masculine realm of warfare and weaponry.”<sup>22</sup> Even in the face of the deity, Aqhat cannot imagine the ideal role he is expected to play as hunter/warrior is accessible to a woman. From this interaction the reader can infer that Danel’s gifting of the bow to his son implies an expectation that as the ideal son Aqhat’s role will involve hunting and playing the role of a warrior. From the list of filial duties at the beginning of the narrative and the episode of Aqhat’s bow, the clear expectations of the son are neatly outlined for the audience. To Aqhat’s mind, such a role is explicitly gendered and exclusive to men.

### *The Ideal Daughter*

Identifying the construction of the ideal son in the Aqhat Epic is largely aided by the fourfold repetition of the duties of an ideal son and the lengthy narrative of Aqhat’s bow. The construction of the role of an ideal daughter is more difficult to determine. There is, frankly, less said about the ideal role of a daughter, which may be a result of the especially broken state of the text. Still, the text does describe duties that are implicitly gendered. The initial descriptions of Danel’s daughter Pughat are revealing, whose name, it should be emphasized, literally means “girl.”<sup>23</sup> Pughat’s epithet, the longest of any character in the extant Aqhat text, reads: “Puhgat, who rises early for water, / who col-

<sup>21</sup> See especially the full description in KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.3 ii:3-30, which describes in part Anat as “knees plunged in the blood of the soldiers, limbs in the gore of the warriors” in lines 13-15 (*brkm . tgl / b dm . qmr . hlqm . b mm' / mhrm*).

<sup>22</sup> Budin 2018: 61.

<sup>23</sup> DULAT<sup>3</sup> 656. Note also the Hebrew *pū'ā(h)*, one of the midwives in Ex 1:15. Eugene McAfee’s judgement is helpful: “Unlike the names of her parents and brother, however, Pughat’s name primarily reflects gender rather than social attributes” (McAfee 1996: 105).

lects dew from the fleece, / who knows the way of the stars.”<sup>24</sup> In the extant lines this epithet is repeated no less than three times in full, and once with only the first third.<sup>25</sup> The epithet in sparse language describes the entire span of this girl’s daily life. She rises early to fetch water in the morning. In the midday she gather dew from the fleece. She stays outside working late enough into the night that she knows the course of the stars. The tripartite epithet emphasizes Pughat’s role in performing household duties. Margalit argues that she is “conceived of essentially as a ‘water-girl.’”<sup>26</sup> While such a description seems initially to disparage the character, McAfee importantly notes that this is not “menial labor of an inconsequential member of society, but one of the life-giving activities—of which childbearing is another—upon which the rest of society depends.”<sup>27</sup> With Pughat’s name literally meaning “girl,” it is impossible to read the epithet associated with her as anything but specifically and intentionally gendered.

Other descriptions of female characters in the text may also add to an understanding of the ideal daughter operative in the narrative, but such descriptions must of course be taken with caution, as they may not pertain directly to Pughat. In the announcement to Danel of the eventual birth of his son and in the visit of the Katharat, divine women who aid in the process of conception, the narrator does not mention the agency of Danel’s wife who will actually bear the pregnancy. Indeed, she is not even named. She is first named in a later scene in which

<sup>24</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.19 ii:1-3 (*pġt . tkmt my / ħspt . lš ‘r . tl . yd [t] / hlġ . kbkbm*). Parker, Margalit, and del Olmo Lete take *tkmt* as related to the word for “shoulder,” *tkm*, and translate the first line with the sense of “carrier of water” (Parker 1997: 69; Margalit 1989: 158; del Olmo Lete 1981: 389). A better reading is offered by Wilfred G. E. Watson, who reads the verb in Pughat’s epithet as cognate with the Hebrew verb *škm*, which in the *hiphil* has the sense of “to rise early” (Watson 1976: 378). In the context of Pugaht’s epithet, this reading makes more sense, allowing a contrast in the first line and the third, rising early and staying out late until the stars make their courses known.

<sup>25</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.19 ii:1-3 spoken by Danel; 1.19 ii:5-7 by narrator; 1.19 iv:28 by narrator; 1.19 iv:36-38 by Danel. It is perhaps worth noting that the list of duties of an ideal son is only ever as dialogue by male characters, while Pughat’s epithet is spoken both by Danel and the narrator.

<sup>26</sup> Margalit 1989: 365.

<sup>27</sup> McAfee 1996: 110.

Danel calls her to prepare food and drink for the visit of Kothar, who will deliver the bow. Her role is passive, taking instruction from Danel, and her duties are relegated to the home. Indeed, her name, Danatiya, seems derived from Danel's own name. Hardly a character in her own right, she is rather an extension of Danel's agency. Finally, it is worth mentioning again Aqhat's negative description of women, implying that the role of the warrior and the action of hunting are exclusively masculine and off limits to women. One conclusion from this evidence, then, is the role of the daughter within this text to be a character whose domain is the household, preparing food and drink for guests, gathering water, working at the household before sunrise and well after sunset.<sup>28</sup>

## REVERSALS AND THE PERFORMANCE OF SOCIAL ROLES

The Aqhat narrative is replete with dramatic ironies and reversals, foremost being that Aqhat's sarcastic reply to Anat's requests for the bow brings about the very situations he supposes to be impossible, culminating in his own sister fulfilling the role initially described as intended for the ideal son. Aqhat tells Anat that bows are the weapons of warriors only, and womankind cannot play the role of the hunter. This act of gendered hubris leads to Aqhat's murder by Anat in a scene that turns the image of Aqhat as the hunter on its head. Rather than Aqhat hunting birds with his bow, Anat plays the role of a predatory bird who releases *Ytpn* as a weapon against Aqhat. Simon Parker rightly notes this scene is "a direct reversal of Aqhat's activity as a huntsman, in which he would release an arrow up at a bird."<sup>29</sup> In reply to Aqhat's claim that only men may play the role of the hunter, Anat forces him into a scenario in which Aqhat becomes the hunted. His death will eventually lead to Pughat's taking vengeance for her brother's murder, another instance of a woman proving wrong Aqhat's state-

<sup>28</sup> Notably, the goddess Anat is a female character, the daughter of El, who early in the narrative does not perform this role of the daughter as described here. This topic will be taken up in detail below.

<sup>29</sup> Parker 1989: 119.

ment about hunting as an exclusively male activity. The gendered boundaries Aqhat proposes are transgressed by both the goddess Anat and his human sister Pughat. Indeed, the first half of Aqhat's sarcastic reply to Anat, that he will die the death of every man, may also be proven wrong by the narrative's end if the reader is convinced by interpretations that argue for a conclusion that features Danel bringing his son back to life.<sup>30</sup> Sadly, the broken text precludes one from definitively arguing this to be the case. Still, considering the ways the extant text shows Aqhat's presumptions in his conversation with Anat to be so mistaken about the role of the warrior, one is on good footing to suppose Aqhat is mistaken about his claims of his own death as well.<sup>31</sup>

One additional example of the motif of reversal in the narrative likely occurs in the final extant scene as well, when Pughat serves wine to Yīṭpan as "the woman we hired," as Yīṭpan's servants call her. Quite a few interpreters, drawing parallels to the later apocryphal story of Judith, argue that in the lost conclusion to this scene Pughat will utilize the weapons hidden beneath her costume to take vengeance against Yīṭpan. The scene may also profitably be compared to the story of Jael in Judg 4-5: the violent warrior supposes he will dominate the woman who has given him drink, but she will surprisingly dominate him by taking his life. If instead one adopts the other common interpretation and Pughat is understood to be in disguise as Anat, a powerful reversal still takes place: the figure of the woman who hired *Yīṭpn* to murder a member of Danel's family is surprisingly murdered by a member of Danel's family in Anat's very guise.

<sup>30</sup> Wright argues against this notion, however: "The seven years of mourning place too much time between the crime and a possible resuscitation"; though he adds: "These, nevertheless, are only surmises, in view of the missing text" (Wright 2001: 222). It is interesting to note, though, that Anat's offer of immortality is specifically compared to that of Baal, who in the Baal epic does indeed die and come back to life.

<sup>31</sup> There are a few stories of the dead returning to life in the Elijah and Elisha narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Elijah brings the son of the Widow of Zarephath back to life in 1 Kgs 17:17-24; Elisha brings the son of the Shunammite woman's back to life in 2 Kgs 18-37; and an Israelite man is brought back to life after his corpse comes in contact with the bones of Elisha in 2 Kgs 13:20-21. Though such stories of mortals returning to life after death may have been uncommon, they were apparently not unthinkable.

With this recurring motif of reversal in the narrative noted, the ways in which Pughat fulfills the role meant for her brother become impossible to ignore. Indeed, the central argument of McFee's chapter on the Aqhat Epic in his *The Patriarch's Longed-for Son* is that Aqhat, the longed-for son, is "ineffectual" and "forces the hearer of the tale of Dan'el to reconsider the possibilities of domestic configuration and roles."<sup>32</sup> McAfee's overall argument here is helpful, though he neglects a few important features of the text which I want to emphasize here. Though he notes that "the gender contrast" between Aqhat and Pughat "is deliberate," he does not call to attention the ways Pughat fulfills the major duties outlined by the gods at the beginning of the narrative. Of the six duties prescribed for the ideal son, the reader never finds Aqhat performing one of them. Pughat, on the other hand, fulfills the majority of those expectations. She shows her obligation to the ancestor cult and deceased kin by her avenging of Aqhat's death. Likewise, her presumed murder of Yīṭpan fulfills the duty to defend the dignity of the father. Her performance of household duties is explicitly detailed in her lengthy epithet that describes her essential role gathering water for the home. Though the text does not present Pughat aiding her father in the context of a *marziḥu* feast, this duty does seem to foreshadow the drinking of Pughat and Yīṭpan later in the narrative. Danel's extraordinary grief at the loss of his son may also be compared to drunkenness.<sup>33</sup> Rather than an ideal son, these essential duties are performed by the "girl," Pughat, an ideal child.

In a text saturated with ritual action, especially as performed by Danel, it is remarkable that Pughat's taking up of the duties of the ideal

<sup>32</sup> McAfee 1996: 120. This argument is a part of McAfee's larger claim that the narratives of Danel, Kirta, and Abraham each involve a motif in which the patriarch's supposedly longed-for son arrives, but turns out to be ineffectual, while the duties of social reproduction are ultimately picked up by another character. This is in contrast with Kenneth T. Aitken's argument that the text represents a simpler ground theme of narrative movement from 1) Initial lack, to 2) Medial plot progression, finally to 3) The terminal lack is liquidated or not liquidated (Aitken 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Budin makes the case that though Danel is never depicted as drunk, "we do see the man in grief and sorrow, another context where the body is rendered infirm and in need of help," and it is Pughat who helps him (Budin 2018: 66).

son occur outside the context of ritual. Wright's *Ritual in Narrative*, which focuses on the extensive use of ritual in the Aqhat Epic, makes this observation: "Dani'il blesses his daughter [to take vengeance against Yitpan] by his life and virtue, not by the gods or their power."<sup>34</sup> For a character who is first seen giving oblation to the gods, and throughout the text is depicted performing ritual action, this is an incredible detail. In blessing Pughat to perform the duties Danel initially believed intended for his son, he does not invoke the gods who gave him this very set of expectations. Wright comments that the narrative is not concerned to present a flat, completely pious presentation of ritual, but rather presents "real experience, in which rituals did not always proceed smoothly and did not always have the effects desired."<sup>35</sup> The gods had implicitly sanctioned the list of filial duties intended for the ideal son. Here in Danel's acknowledgment that they will be performed by his daughter, he is notably silent in speech toward these gods.

While no gods are called upon in Danel's blessing of Pughat, the deity conjured in the imagination of the reader in this scene is undoubtedly the goddess Anat. Pughat's requesting of her father's blessing to avenge her deceased kin recalls the scene of Anat requesting the permission of El to murder Aqhat for his disrespect to the goddess.<sup>36</sup> Both daughters must gain the approval of their father before heading out on their missions of violence. Anat and Pughat both are female characters who serve to prove wrong Aqhat's claim that only men can play the part of the warrior. Read in tandem with the Baal Epic, the reader finds that both Anat and Pughat are characters driven to avenge the deaths of their brothers. Both Anat and Pughat have been described as occupying "liminal" positions,<sup>37</sup> operating somewhere between the

<sup>34</sup> Wright 2001: 228.

<sup>35</sup> Wright 2001: 228.

<sup>36</sup> Jo Ann Hackett draws parallels between the scene of Anat requesting El's permission with Ishtar's approaching Anu after Gilgamesh has insulted her in the Gilgamesh Epic and Sarai's approaching Abram for permission to expel Hagar in Genesis (Hackett 1989: 12-27). Interestingly, she does not mention the parallel scene of Pughat approaching Danel for permission to take vengeance.

<sup>37</sup> Neal Walls calls Anat both sexually and socially liminal (Walls 1992: 158). Julie Faith Parker also uses this signifier for Anat, Pughat, and Thitmanit in the Kirta Epic (Parker 2006: 557).

boundaries of male and female. Thus in Pughat's decision to avenge her brother's death at the hands of Anat, she somewhat ironically becomes a character who looks quite a bit like Anat. Mark Smith describes Pughat as "the unexpectedly heroic daughter."<sup>38</sup> While Pughat's actions do represent a reversal of the expectations laid out in the beginning of the text with the fourfold repetition of the duties of an ideal son, her volition in seeking revenge in a manner akin to the likes of Anat herself may not have been as unexpected to the original audience as it may seem to contemporary interpreters. Julie Faith Parker notes that the goddess Anat already shows "that strength and ability were not incongruous with young womanhood in the Ugaritic mind."<sup>39</sup> That the character of Anat features so prominently in the narrative even before the introduction of Pughat provides precedent for a female character, Anat the daughter of El, to perform her role in a manner that overlaps with what has been outlined as the ideal son. Aqhat does not seem to be able to comprehend Anat's performance of her character, leading to his claim that womankind cannot play the role of the warrior.

The model of Anat has already displayed to Pughat and the audience of this text a woman who performs the duties initially assumed by Baal, El, and Danel to be within the male sphere. The primary difference between these two women and their performance of these roles, however, is that Pughat must conceal her identity as a warrior. When she washes herself and prepares to face down Yitpan, she dresses in the armor of a hero (*ḡzr*) before donning the "clothes of a woman on top."<sup>40</sup> Remarkable in this depiction of Pughat's simultaneous donning of two costumes, that of the hero and that of the woman, is that this is the first instance where the loaded term "hero," *ḡzr*, is used to refer to any character other than Danel or Aqhat.<sup>41</sup> As Greenstein comments, this depiction of Pughat explicitly contrasts with Aqhat, for just as Pughat "blurs gender boundaries" her brother "had

<sup>38</sup> Smith 2014: 135.

<sup>39</sup> Parker 2006: 572-573.

<sup>40</sup> KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.19 iv:46 (*w' l . tlbš . nps . att*).

<sup>41</sup> Noted by Smith 2014: 129.



insisted on maintaining them” to his own detriment.<sup>42</sup> Budin argues that here “the girl is deliberately rendered androgynous.”<sup>43</sup> This scene spells out a theme that has been running throughout the entire narrative—the social roles discussed at length in the text are not innate or inevitable, but are in fact performed. Pughat’s dress of a warrior with the outfit of a woman on top draws the audience’s attention to the ways in which clothes may function as costume, an integral element of a role which is then performed.<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The reader’s willingness to accept some of my claims will likely relate to the reader’s own understanding of, at the most specific, the poet Ilimilku, and at the broadest, the role of myth in general. Nicolas Wyatt, for instance, argues that the texts bearing Ilimilku’s name, the Baal, Kirta, and Aqhat texts, have

*an agenda beyond the mere collection of old traditions: behind his authorial or redactional work there may be a more deliberate policy, to make a point, or to establish a claim, in short to deal in propaganda and ideology.... In the use of a mythical or legendary past the paradigms for the present are subtly and subliminally presented for absorption by reader and hearer.*<sup>45</sup>

Wyatt understands the Baal epic as an ideological statement about the “continuity” of the throne, “which persists in spite of the multiple changes in occupancy.”<sup>46</sup> So, too, is the Kirta Epic about the reliability of the institution of kingship even in the failure of the incumbent king. Wyatt suggests the Kirta Epic “is a subtle message concerning the

<sup>42</sup> Greenstein 2012: 77.

<sup>43</sup> Budin 2018: 67.

<sup>44</sup> Deut 22:5 forbids a woman from wearing a man’s apparel (*kālī geber*). Smith argues for a reader of *geber* as “warrior” and a reading of this text as referring to a prohibition of women utilizing the weapons of warriors (Smith 2014: 136). The presence of Anat in the pantheon at Ugarit suggests this was not a pronounced concern for the audience of the Aqhat Epic.

<sup>45</sup> Wyatt 1997: 777.

<sup>46</sup> Wyatt 1997: 790.

assumption of office by Niqmaddu II.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, discussing the text of our concern here, Wyatt argues the murder of Aqhat is an analogy for “preparing the ground for another candidate, who was perhaps Niqmaddu II.”<sup>48</sup> This is largely unconvincing, especially because Wyatt’s interpretation overlooks the fact that it is Pughat who takes up the duties left undone by her brother. If the narrative is about the legitimacy of the “alternative candidate,” that alternative candidate is the girl, Pughat, who operates outside the sphere of ritual action. This gender reversal seems entirely out of line with Wyatt’s presentation of Ilimilku as a conservative producer of royal propaganda.

An opposing view is taken by Aaron Tugendhaft, who speaks of Ilimilku’s “politically audacious” work in the Baal Epic in these terms: “Working with traditional themes and phrases, the elder statesman fabricated a poem that turned tradition on its head. This audacity has gone unnoticed even by scholars interested in the politics of poetry because it has been assumed that a poem written for a king must affirm the royal ideology of kingship’s divine foundation.”<sup>49</sup> Tugendhaft argues for understanding Ilimilku’s work alongside the likes of William Shakespeare’s political plays or the subversive westerns of John Ford, concluding that poetry “can both reinforce the myths that bind a society together and expose these myths as political fictions, and ... the Baal Cycle is the latter kind of poetry.”<sup>50</sup> While the present essay is not focused on the Baal Cycle, if one accepts Tugendhaft’s conclusions here the consequences for understanding Ilimilku’s work in the Aqhat Epic could be substantial. Is Ilimilku’s work a form of royal propaganda, ultimately in service of upholding the legitimacy of the king at its foundation, or does he present narratives that give occasion to critically reflect on matters of kingship, justice, and social roles? Margalit likely overstates the case when he argues that the Aqhat Epic is “an indignant,

<sup>47</sup> Wyatt 1997: 790.

<sup>48</sup> He frames this statement as a question, but it is clear his answer is in the affirmative (Wyatt 1997: 790).

<sup>49</sup> Tugendhaft 2018: 37.

<sup>50</sup> Tugendhaft 2018: 127.

yet subtly ironic critic of warrior-aristocrative ('Rephaite') society."<sup>51</sup> The lack of the text's conclusion prevents any conclusive judgements such as this. Moreover, this overlooks the nuance and complexity of the extant lines, which seem intent on establishing a complicated and somewhat ambiguous picture of violence and the role of a warrior.<sup>52</sup> So, too, is the text ambiguous in its treatment of wisdom material, like the duties of the ideal son, and the constructions of gender roles. I have not argued for a singular interpretation of the text's treatment of gender. Rather, the natural consequence of my argument is that this Ugaritic material deserves to be treated as the complex, difficult, and thought-provoking narrative it truly is, even in its broken form.

Despite the difficulty of analyzing gender in an ancient narrative text, I have shown that failing to attempt to do so with regard to the Aqhat Epic would be to disregard a major element of the story-world. Indeed, the anxiety over progeny and fourfold repetition of the duties of an ideal son set up major expectations for the explicitly gendered offspring of Danel, which are then largely performed instead by Danel's daughter, the "girl," Pughat. This reversal of expectations is in line with a series of reversals present in the narrative. Moreover, Pughat's actions are foreshadowed by the actions of Anat, another female character whose role does not align with the gender expectations of the text, as indicated by her interaction with Aqhat. All of these episodes raise serious questions about the nature of the Aqhat Epic. The description of the ideal son has been described as a "wisdom text," and Greenstein notes that the "creation and maintenance of order are a premiere feature of ancient Near Eastern and biblical wisdom."<sup>53</sup> Remarkably, then, in this narrative "it is the foolish eponymous hero of the tale who presses for order and his transgressive sister Pughat who proves to be wise."<sup>54</sup> Aqhat insists on a level of order featuring a strict dichotomy of what male and female characters are permitted to do, and

<sup>51</sup> Margalit 1989: 485.

<sup>52</sup> See especially Sun 2008, who argues the narrator's ambiguity regarding the ethics of Anat's violence is intentional and a central focus of the text.

<sup>53</sup> Greenstein 2012: 77.

<sup>54</sup> Greenstein 2012: 77.

it proves to be his downfall. It also proves to be wrong. There is a complexity to this text. Just as Wright notes the ambivalent picture of ritual presented by the narrative, so too does the text offer a complex image of gender constructions and the ways different characters do or do not perform those expectations. It is not a stretch to suggest this text may have allowed for a critical reflection on gendered social roles in Ugarit.

#### APPENDIX: VOCALIZED TEXT OF KTU<sup>3</sup> 1.17 1:26-34

*nšb . skn . ilibh . b qdš*

nāšibu sikkana 'ilī'abīhu bi-qadši

One who erects the stela of the gods of his fathers; in the holy place

*ztr . 'mh . l arš . mššu . qtrh*

zītūra 'ammihu li-'arši mušôši'u qutrahu

the column of his people. One who brings out his smoke from the ground;

*l 'pr . dmr . atrh . t̄bq . l̄ht*

li-'apari dāmīru 'atturīhu t̄bīqu laḥāti

who guards his steps from the dust. One who shuts the jaws

*nišh . grš . d . šy . lnh*

nā'īšīhu gārišu 'āšiya linhu

of his insulters; who drives out the one who does wrong to him.

*30 aḥd . ydh . b škrn . m'msh*

'āḥīdu yadahu bi-šikarāni mu'ammisuhu

One who takes hold of his hand when (he is) drunk; who carries him

*[k]šb' . yn . spu . ksmh . bt . b'l*

ki-šaba' yēni sāpi'u kasāmahu bêta ba'li

when he's satisfied by wine. One who consumes his share in the house of Baal;

[w ]mnth . bt . il . ṭḥ . ggh . b ym  
 wa-manatahu bêta 'ili ṭāḥu gaggahu bi-yômi  
 and his portion in the house of El. One who plasters his roof on a day of

[ti]t . rhš . npšh . b ym . rt  
 ta'ṭi rāḥiṣu napṣihu bi-yômi raṭi  
 mud; who washes his garment on a day of dirt.

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