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## **Transmission and Mortal Anxiety in the Tale of Aqhat**

Jacqueline Vayntrub

Brandeis University

### **Sons and Mortality<sup>1</sup>**

The father-son relationship, along with its ideals and potential failures, forms a central theme in the Ugaritic tale of Aqhat.<sup>2</sup> The narrative, however, does not simply establish or rehearse conventional expectations of sonship. Rather, the story establishes the father-son relationship to be conventional *in the space of the narrative* in order to replace this convention with an alternative: the blessing and success generated through the father-daughter relationship. Through the events of the story and the discourse of its characters, the narrative presents, delimits, and ultimately reshapes social relationships to conform to this agenda. While the story

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1. I am honored to offer this study of the father-daughter alternative to the father-son relationship in the Aqhat story to Dennis Pardee, a paragon of excellence in scholarship and dedication in training future generations.

2. A number of studies have already made this observation, in a variety of ways: Obermann 1946; Eissfeldt 1966; Koch 1967; Westermann and Günther 1976, 151-168 (from a non-literary, history of religions perspective); Ashley 1977, 279-280; Healey 1979; del Olmo Lete 1981, 358-362; Avishur 1986; Parker 1989, 107; Margalit 1989, 267-284; Husser 1996; Greenstein 2000; Kim 2011, 100-101. Few studies, however, have examined the purpose of such a story, the social function of telling such a tale in the world of the authors. A notable exception is the unpublished dissertation of Eugene McAfee (1996).

draws on real-world social concepts and experiences,<sup>3</sup> all the ideas presented to the reader are artificial products of the narrative generated through the structure and content of the discourse.

That is to say, the notion that the father-son relationship is a conventional path to success is just as much a function of the story's artifice as the idea that the father-daughter relationship is unconventional. An artificial father-son relationship is normalized by the narrative so that the father-daughter relationship can be presented on analogy but categorically as an alternative.

This study examines the ways in which formal speech performances by characters in the Aqhat tale are structured to generate the ideals of sonship so that these ideals may be dismantled for the alternative role of the daughter.

The tale opens with the primary problem motivating the plot's movement: *Dānî'ilu*, the story's hero, has no son. As one study has already observed,<sup>4</sup> the protagonist's childlessness and its resolution in the birth of a son—much like in the Kirta story—is a mere prelude to a more complex question upon which the story meditates: Can the father-son relationship,

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3. According to Hayden White (1980), narrative serves as solutions to conflicts between social ideals and experiences in the world. For an examination of the central social concepts of Late Bronze Age Ugarit, see David Schloen (2001). According to the recent dissertation of Christine Neal Thomas (2013), the geopolitical power of women in the Late Bronze Age has not been adequately considered by scholarship. Her study examines and theorizes, among other social relationships, the royal father-daughter relationship at Ugarit in the broader context of Hittite Syria, and thus serves as an important corrective to this gap in scholarship.

4. Thomas 2013, 15, 34, 36, 39-42.

traditionally conceived, protect the father from his own mortality? The narrative generates this question through unexpected movements in the plots: the circumstances leading to the death of the hero's son and heir and the avenging of his death by the hero's daughter.<sup>5</sup> These events are unexpected because the narrative has established for the reader *through its discourse* a set of expectations for the purpose and outcome of inter-generational relationships. In the context of understanding the tale as a reconceptualization of social ideals and expectations, the 'filial duties'—the literary unit repeated in its entirety four times in the speech of four different characters in the first half of the story—functions primarily to establish a traditional answer to the problem of the father's mortality.

A number of previous treatments of the 'filial duties' poem and its structural and thematic function within the larger story assumed the poem must have been an older, preexisting oral tradition incorporated into the text.<sup>6</sup> Such a conclusion takes for granted certain

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5. A number of studies have pointed out that the actions of *Dān'īlu's* daughter pose a paradoxical resolution of the narrative's central tension in the failure of the conventional expectations of the father-son relationship. See Margalit (1989, 438-440): "The quintessence of the message of *Aqht*...that in contrast to men...who are expert in the *taking* of human life, the women are expert...in the *creation* of life, both in its ephemeral manifestation on earth as well as in its abiding manifestation in the Netherworld" (p. 439).

6. Eissfeldt 1966. Healey makes an explicit connection between the poem's prosody and its presumed oral background: "This whole text is clearly a highly formalized unit and was probably part of oral traditional wisdom" (1979, 356; also Avishur 1986, 57-58). Margalit argues against del Olmo Lete's characterization of the poem as "hymnic" (1981), maintaining the poem is "a later, secondary

problematic assumptions about the development trajectory of literary forms. Namely, the idea that poetry—particularly certain types of non-narrative poetry (gnomic, didactic)—begins life in a literary tradition as simple, orally composed and transmitted songs assumes that literary traditions follow a determined trajectory.<sup>7</sup> In such a conceptual model, ‘originally oral,’ and therefore older, poems are distinguished by certain prosodic features. To give an example from past scholarship, Healey’s study of the ‘filial duties’ explicitly connected the poem’s prosody to a presumed oral background: “This whole text is clearly a highly formalized unit and was probably part of oral traditional wisdom.”<sup>8</sup> Avishur claimed that the integrity of the literary unit in its four-time repetition and its distinctive prosody apart from the surrounding narrative supports his argument that the “literary unit...existed independently and was integrated into the

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accretion to the original poem, betraying a priestly hand” (1989, 78, 280). Boda emphasizes the literary effect of the repetition of the poem in the first half of the narrative: “The four-fold repetition only enhances the increasing literary expectation in the book for the momentous birth date and once having taken the reader to these heights, prepares the way for the depths of disappointment at the death of Aqhat” (1993, 11).

7. Aristotle indicated that *paroimiai*, “proverbs,” are defined by their conciseness and this is the reason he gives for their survival through time. Aristotle’s book on *paroimiai* is lost (*Diog. Laert.* 5, 26), but the work is quoted in the fragment of another lost work, *On Philosophy*, (*Ecom. calv.* 22 = fr. 13 Rose). The idea of stages in the development of a literary tradition, with the gnomic or didactic at literature’s beginning, can be traced in biblical studies to Johann Gottfried Herder (1833, 8-9) and generally in philological method to Giambattista Vico (1948, §211-216; §404).

8. Healey 1979, 356.

story because it fits the subject matter.”<sup>9</sup> Unlike Healey, Avishur did not explicitly assign an original genre category to the poem based on its prosody. Nevertheless, Avishur insisted the poem’s *thematic content* indicated its relationship to wisdom literature.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that in identifying the prevalence of father-speakers in wisdom and instruction texts, Avishur had confused the thematic content of the wisdom genre with its framing device. While much of what scholarship conventionally categorizes as wisdom is depicted as advice from father to son, this relationship is a trope which serves to frame and authorize the wisdom claims made in these text.<sup>11</sup> Filial duties, in particular, do not seem to form a central concern of instructional texts. The poem does demonstrate affinities with other wisdom texts. These affinities, however, have more to do with how the poem is presented in the space of the narrative: the poem presents a set of expectations for social relationships which are transmitted, wholly intact, from one authoritative speaker in the narrative to the next.

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9. See Avishur (1986, 57-58).

10. “The duties of the son to his father belong to the area of wisdom and ethical literature” (Avishur 1986, 57-58). See also Healey (1979, 356).

11. Pardee notes regarding Akkadian wisdom texts found at Ugarit that these texts are presented in the context of advice from father to son (in the specific case of RS 22.439, as the parting advice of a father to a son embarking on a journey). This frame is a literary device in which to present the advice, and as Pardee indicates, the frame as a literary device is apparent when the instructions presented no longer applies to the immediate performance context of “advice to a son embarking on a journey” (2012, 110-111). For a recent thorough and theoretically informed study of wisdom texts contemporary and local to Late Bronze Age Ugarit, see Cohen (2013).

Aside from the fact that it is impossible to determine whether or not the ‘filial duties’ passage was an extant oral tradition incorporated into the narrative, such a line of inquiry seems to be unproductive. The poem’s composition—its message of filial succession and corresponding reframing of funerary ritual, its parallelistic structure, and its oral performance by characters in the space of the narrative—is sufficiently ‘traditional’ in its aesthetic and presentation to the story’s audience that the poem’s *actual* literary history as an independent unit is moot. Thus, instead of positing the compositional history of the narrative—that is, determining which elements were included at which point in time and via which medium—we might observe the literary effect of the poem’s presentation, namely, the poem’s oral transmission from one character to another in the story.

The filial duties passage is a self-contained composition performed by authoritative characters in the narrative (*Ba’lu*, *’Ilu*, the messenger announcing the birth of *’Aqhatu*, and *Dān’īlu*, the protagonist himself). As such, the poem occupies a traditional space *in the fictional world of the narrative*. Similarly, Greenstein, against the narrow description offered by Parker (1989, 37),<sup>12</sup> articulates that

The repetition [of the literary unit] is not a mere epic convention; it is a critically placed feature whose dramatic significance is...in the fact that

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12. McAfee (1996, 68-69) adds that the repetition intensifies the expectations of the audience for the son to perform according to the ideals claimed by the poem.

the audience hears it four times through...The audience is expected to apply its background and habits of thinking toward a fuller understanding of the narrated text. (2000, 145)

Along these lines, I argue that the poem functions to establish the central tension between conventional expectations for human mortality and filial succession, on the one hand, and unconventional possibilities for immortality and success, on the other. The poem assures readers that a son's role is to mitigate the threat of the father's inevitable death by caring for the father in life and death, and ultimately taking the father's place. The poem and its enduring promises, transmitted from one character to the next, are performed by authoritative male voices in the narrative. In a broad view of the plot, these male voices of unchanging, seemingly conventional expectations in the first half of the story are set against claims and actions by female characters in the second half of the story.<sup>13</sup> The poem's placement within the structure of the plot and its integrity throughout its transmission from one character to the next

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13. The juxtaposition between the actions of male and female characters has been noted. Margalit explicitly argued for a feminist agenda in the Aqhat narrative: "The hero of Aqht is in fact a heroine: Aqht's sister, Pughat. The villain of the story is another female, the goddess Anat. And the narrator's voice that speaks to us from behind the literary trappings is a voice of protest...against the norms and values of a warrior-aristocratic society...This social and moral critique, written from a feminist perspective if not actually by a feminine writer, permeates the texture of the narrative from the beginning to end" (1983, 67). See also his expanded study, Margalit (1989). More recently Julie Faith Parker has argued that "the liminal position" of the female characters in the story "is the source of their power" (2006, 557-575). McAfee (1996, 41) likewise observed that the "actual solution" to the problem posed by these childless narratives, both Aqhat and Kirta, involved the assumption of traditionally filial rights and responsibilities paradoxically by daughters and not sons.

formulates its primary argument—that the son is the guardian of the father’s life—as a convention of the protagonist’s world. The poem’s air of transmitted wisdom—its ‘traditional’ aesthetic—is likewise achieved by its thematic structure, giving primacy to activities whose effects endure, and by reframing funerary ritual within the context of the inter-generational relationship.

### **The Enduring Benefits of a Son: The Thematic Structure of the ‘Filial Duties’**

Previous studies of the literary unit have attempted to discern its structure with varying results. In the following discussion, I argue that the poem is organized to give primacy to those activities with the most enduring effect of its singular performance—the establishment of the mortuary stela for his father. Accordingly, the poem concludes with duties with the least enduring effect of their performance—the hygiene and maintenance of the father’s garment and roof of his home. The poem presents various social and ritual practices as filial responsibilities that serve to resolve the father’s mortal anxiety. That is to say, the poem presents activities in which the son acts *on behalf of* and ultimately *in the place of* the father, serving as a living extension of the father’s person (his ritual and social presence). In this way, the poem —on a



structural level — presents itself as a conventional resolution to the mortal anxiety confronted by the protagonist.<sup>14</sup>

Studies of the poem have maintained the six-line couplet division first proposed by Herdner (1938),<sup>15</sup> but have understood its arrangement of the son's responsibilities in different ways. Eissfeldt, following the poem's structure of six couplets, described the poem as a "Dodekalog," a list of twelve distinct duties the protagonist believes a son will perform for him.<sup>16</sup> Margalit determined Eissfeldt's calculus erroneous, finding "not more than eight discrete commandments."<sup>17</sup> Margalit identified the first duty, the raising of the monument of the

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14. Similarly Wright argues that the claims of the poem and its fourfold repetition in the space of the narrative "show where Aqhat fits into the hierarchical scheme of things and how he is expected to behave," and that its repetition "is a way of anchoring the list's ideals firmly in the reader's mind...provid[ing] a paradigm for how the son should behave" (2001, 69).

15. As Pardee (1976, 236) noted in his published dissertation, it was Herdner who first discerned the poem's structure.

16. Eissfeldt 1966, 39. Each of these twelve duties, according to Eissfeldt, was distinguished by twelve active participles, eleven explicit and one implied (p. 43). Two of the lexical items Eissfeldt had identified as active participles (*ztr* and *dmr*) would be reanalyzed in subsequent studies as serving a different syntactic function in the clause: in both cases, the direct objects of the active participle of the previous poetic line. These two terms aside, Eissfeldt's reading of the other lexical items as active participles seems to have been upheld in subsequent studies.

17. Margalit 1989, 267. Margalit's description of the poem as a set of "commandments," however, is problematic: a hortatory interpretation of the text assumes an older, preexisting literary history for the poem, apart from its life in the Aqhat tale. Based purely on the performance context of the 'filial duties,' the poem seems only to communicate ideals for the unborn son rather than to impose demands on a listening audience.

father's deity (*nšb skn ilīb*), as "the first, if not also principal, duty of the son" (1989, 268).

Margalit (1989, 269) connected the activity of the *nāšibu*, "one who raises (the stela)," to that of the *pāqidu*, the kin (fictive or actual) who cares for and feeds dead ancestors.<sup>18</sup> Beyond the enumeration of eight "commandments," Margalit did not discern a sense of organization of structure to the poem and found the presence of the final two duties to be particularly incompatible in the list:

The first two [duties]...refer to the proper burial of the deceased father and...acts of necromancy associated with the ancestor cult...the third and fourth...involve the protection of the living father...the fifth...depicts the assistance rendered by the son to a drunken father...the sixth...alludes to participation in the official cults...the seventh and eighth...refer to...menial household chores...[whose] association with the preceding occasions wonder. (1989, 267-268)

Husser (1996, 96) discerned the major division in the poem at the halfway point, with pronominal suffixes concluding each half-line in the first half of the poem and suffixes in the middle of each half-line in the second half of the poem. Wright (2001, 68) likewise found the major division of the poem at the halfway point, and described the third couplet and the final

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18. For the use of the active participle in designating the activities of funerary ritual, specifically the activities of a ruler in the establishment of important dead individuals as the ruler's own kin, see Sanders (2012). Sanders notes, with respect to the *pāqidu*, that "The analogous goal for the king in mortuary ritual was to step into the role of the *pāqidu* 'ritual feeder and caretaker' of certain politically important dead. If successful, the effect would be to actually *create* the right ancestors and allies to be related to, with the ensuing rootedness to the territory and kinship affiliations of these still-present dead...these rituals can work to claim or even generate ancestors" (p. 29).

couplet as “mundane” opposed to the others which he classified as “ritual.” Avishur (1986, 57) identified the first two lines as “cultic” in theme, and identifies the remaining as “duties to society and family.” Boda disagreed with such a distinction, arguing “We can never separate cultic activity from societal/family activity in these ancient cultures” (1993, 23). The discussion presented here assumes that the basic poetic structure of the literary unit should guide an analysis of the poem, and generally agrees with Wright (2001, 67) that rather than enumerating any discrete number of “activities” listed, be they twelve or eight, the poem’s meaning is shaped by its six-couplet structure, “each of which is a conceptual unit.”

The analysis presented here does not find the various activities described in the poem to be categorically incompatible, since all these activities function thematically to outline ways in which the son replaces the father through care for him and performance of activities he would normally do for himself: maintaining his garments and residence, making offerings at the temple, and walking without assistance.<sup>19</sup> These activities *in place* of the father are listed according to the lasting nature of their effect and the frequency of their performance for continued maintenance: from their singular performance (the raising of a monument), to occasional but rare performance (defending the father against insults), to annual or seasonal performance (carrying the drunk father from a banquet, performing seasonal sacrifices in the

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19. So Pardee (1996, 279) and Husser (1996, 97).

father's stead), finally to frequent performance (attention to the hygiene of the father's body and place of residence).

The text presented here is KTU 1.17 I 26-33, and this translation largely based on that of Pardee and Bordreuil of the passage.<sup>20</sup> Deviations from this translation are indicated and explained. The translation is then followed by a presentation and analysis of the poem's structural features.

### Translation

1A <sup>26</sup> <i>nšb . skn . ilibh .</i>	One who raises up <sup>21</sup> the stela of his father's god, <sup>22</sup>
1B <i>bqđš<sup>27</sup> ztr . ʿmh</i>	in the sanctuary the votive emblem of his clan;
2A <i>lārš . mššú . qtrh</i>	one who sends up from the earth his incense,
2B <sup>28</sup> <i>lʿpr . dmr . ʾtrh</i>	from the dust the song of his place;

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20. The following analysis does not provide an in-depth commentary of all the lexical items in the poem, and treats individual lexemes as necessary for the structural argument. The translation presented here largely follows the vocalization, transliteration, and translation of KTU 1.17 I 26-33 published by Bordreuil and Pardee (2009, 173-177). Deviations from their translation and analysis are explained. A preliminary discussion of the passage's translation, its problems, and possible interpretations are discussed in Pardee (1976, 236-238).

21. It is generally accepted by scholars that *nšb*, *mššú*, *tbq*, *grš*, *ʾhd*, *mʿmsh*, *spū*, *th*, and *rhš* are all m.s. active participles (*mʿmsh* with a 3ms pronominal suffix), and this is reflected in my translation of these forms, "One who *participates in X activity*."

22. The identification of *ilib* as "the god of the father," and not the "ancestral deity," follows Bordreuil and Pardee's translation in *A Manual of Ugaritic* (2009), but see Pardee's explanation in a separate, earlier publication (1996, pp. 283-284 n. 17). In Pardee's analysis, the name designates not divine dead ancestors, but rather "the god of the father," and the activity of raising the stela marks the son's perpetuation of the family cult. Wright (2001, 53-54) likewise assumes the activity described is one performed by the son during the father's lifetime, but arrives at an interpretation different than Pardee: "The father is alive when the son performs duty A and...the *ilib* is the father's ancestor," citing van der Toorn (1996, 160), who understood the activity to be in service of the ancestral cult.

3A	<i>ṭbq . lḥt<sup>29</sup> niṣh</i>	one who shuts up the jaws of his detractors,
3B	<i>grš̄ . d . ršy . lnh</i>	one who drives out anyone who would do him in;
4A	<i><sup>30</sup>[ā]ḥd . ydh . bšk[r]n .</i>	one who takes his hand when (he is) drunk,
4B	<i>m<sup>c</sup>msh<sup>31</sup>[k]šb<sup>c</sup> . yn</i>	one who bears him up when he is full of wine;
5A	<i>spū . ksmh . bt . bʿl</i>	one who supplies his grain(-offering) in the Temple of <i>Baʿlu</i> ,
5B	<i><sup>32</sup>[w]<sup>l</sup>m<sup>l</sup>nth . bt . ʾil</i>	his portion in the Temple of <i>ʾIlu</i> ;
6A	<i>ṭḥ . ggh . bym<sup>33</sup>[ṭ]ṭ</i>	one who rolls his roof when rain softens it up, <sup>23</sup>
6B	<i>rḥṣ . npṣh . bym . rṭ</i>	one who washes his outfit on a muddy day.

### Poetic Structure<sup>24</sup>

I.	1A	<b>a</b> <i>nṣb</i> One who raises up	<b>b</b> <i>skn ilibh</i> the stela of his father's god,
	1B	<b>c</b> <i>bqdš</i> in the sanctuary	<b>b'</b> <i>ztr ʿmh</i> the votive emblem of his clan;
	2A	<b>a</b> <i>lārṣ</i> from the earth one who sends up	<b>b</b> <i>mššū</i> his incense,
	2B	<b>a'</b> <i>lʿpr</i> from the dust	<b>c'</b> <i>ḍmr ʾṭrh</i> the song of his place;
	3A	<b>a</b> <i>ṭbq</i> one who shuts up	<b>b</b> <i>lḥt niṣh</i> the jaws of his detractors,
	3B	<b>a'</b> <i>grš̄</i> one who drives out	<b>b'</b> <i>d ršy lnh</i> anyone who would do him in;

23. Literally, “on a day of mud.” See *DULAT* 892.

24. Alternately, following a suggestion of the reviewer, one might maintain a poetic structure across lines, designating all the participles as *a*, the direct objects as *b*, and the adjuncts as *c*. As such, as the reviewer has astutely observed, one notes that all of the direct objects receive the possessive suffix.

II.	4A	<b>a</b> <i>āḥd</i> one who takes	<b>b</b> <i>ydh</i> his hand	<b>c</b> <i>bškrn</i> when (he is) drunk,
	4B	<b>a'</b> <i>m'ms</i> one who bears	<b>b'</b> <i>h</i> him up	<b>c'</b> <i>kšb<sup>c</sup> yn</i> when he is full of wine;
	5A	<b>a</b> <i>spū</i> one who supplies	<b>b</b> <i>ksmh</i> his grain(-offering)	<b>c</b> <i>bt b'l</i> in the Temple of <i>Ba'lu</i>
	5B		<b>b'</b> <i>wmnt<sup>h</sup></i> his portion	<b>c'</b> <i>bt il</i> in the Temple of 'Ilu;
	6A	<b>a</b> <i>ṭḥ</i> one who rolls	<b>b</b> <i>ggh</i> his roof	<b>c</b> <i>bym ṭiṭ</i> when rain softens it up,
	6B	<b>a'</b> <i>rḥš</i> one who washes	<b>b'</b> <i>npš<sup>h</sup></i> his outfit	<b>c'</b> <i>bym rṭ</i> on a muddy day.

### Description

The poem is organized into two halves, a division marked by differences in the syntactic structure. In the first half (couplets 1-3), the final term of each half-line bears a pronominal suffix (for example, *nšb skn ilib<sup>h</sup> / bqdš ztr 'mh //*); in the second half (couplets 4-6) the the suffix comes before the final term of each half-line (for example, *āḥd ydh bškrn / m'ms<sup>h</sup> kšb<sup>c</sup> yn //*).<sup>25</sup> This difference in structure between the first and second half of the poem highlights the distinct emphases of each. The first half outlines activities performed by the son for the father that are not bound to a specific occasion or situation whereas the second half emphasizes the

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25. A feature recognized by Husser (1996, 96).

son's duties *in specific contexts*: *bškrn*, “when drunk”; *kšb<sup>c</sup> yn*, “when he is full of wine”; *bt b<sup>l</sup>*, “(in) the Temple of *Ba<sup>l</sup>u*”; *bt il*, “in the Temple of *’Ilu*”; *bym tīt* and *bym r<sup>t</sup>*, “on a day of mud.” The distinction between the first and second half, that activities in the second half are outlined for specific situations or contexts, supports a reading of the poem that gives primacy to enduring and singular activities.

The first couplet gives primacy to the most significant of the duties of a son towards his father, the guiding reason for having a son: that he may perform acts of memorialization so that the father's presence and personhood may persist beyond his lifetime. These are socially meaningful acts that symbolically designate the son as acting, and ultimately existing, *in place* of the father. The first named activity, “rais[ing] up the stela of his father's god...the votive emblem of his clan,” outlines an act of duty which is the *most enduring*.<sup>26</sup> The final line of the

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26. The root *NŠB* designates both the action of setting up a monument (the son's responsibility towards the father) *and* succession (or, in the case of Kirta's son, Yašsubu, usurpation). In the publication of his Schweich Lectures, Pardee (2012, 90) notes that Yašsubu's name “may itself be derived from the root that expresses the son's duty of raising a stela for his father” found in the poem under examination here. For forthcoming treatments of this topic, see Suriano (forthcoming), who examines the cultural meaning of Biblical Hebrew מצבת; Sanders (forthcoming); Parker (1995, 532-559). See also Watson (1979, 807), who understands the social role of the firstborn son in Kirta to be the replacement of the father, and interprets Yašsubu's premature claim to the throne in KTU 1.16 vi 52-54 (literally, his claim to sit in the place of his father) to violate the natural order of the son's replacement of the father.

poem, by contrast, describes an activity which is the *least enduring* of them all—the incidental maintenance of the garment and roof of the father.

The first half of the poem outlines meaningful actions associated with establishing and maintaining the presence of the father beyond his natural lifetime. The first action refers to the material object which, if there were to be a text inscribed upon it, would speak in the voice of the memorialized subject, preserving the presence of the speaker in perpetuity.<sup>27</sup> The activities described in the second couplet seem to be likewise supportive of establishing the ongoing presence of the father, though the social and ritual context of these lines are more obscure.

The son's duty to send up incense, specifically, the "smoke" of the father (*mššû qtrh*) has been lexically linked to the later passage in the story narrating Aqhat's death, where his

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27. See Green (2010). Wright, citing evidence of these kinds of stones around the ancient Near East and previous scholarship, understands *skn* here, as elsewhere in texts from Emar and Mari (*sikkānu*) to designate "stones...that represent deities or mark the divine presence" (2001, 50-51). If, however, the *ilib* is not in fact a divine ancestor but the god of the father — that is, the deity which is venerated by the father — then Wright's interpretation precludes these monuments from a memorial function, because they represent *divine* presence and not the presence of the father. Wright, however, understands the *ilib* to be the ancestral deity, the "father's deceased kin, who is also the son's kin" (p. 53). This interpretation would imply then, that in 2 Sam 18:18, Absalom sets up his own pillar for worship of his divine presence after his death, though there are no kin to venerate him ויצב לקח ואבשלם - "Now Absalom, during his lifetime, took and raised up the pillar that was in the Valley of the King, for he said 'I have no son to memorialize my name,' and he called the pillar by his name..."



*npš*, “life-breath,” and *brlt*, “spirit,” are described as *qtr bāph*, “smoke from his nose.”<sup>28</sup> While the specific function or role of the “smoke” or “incense” alluded to here may be lost on the modern reader, the general context of the activity seems to be one of mortuary or memorial ritual; this we may assume from the couplet’s placement alongside the first activity of raising the stela and the funerary associations of the named locations in the couplet (*lārš*, “from the earth,” and *l’pr*, “from the dust”).<sup>29</sup> A number of possible translations have been proposed for the activity in parallel with *mššū qtrh*, “one who sends up (the father’s) smoke,” namely, the phrase *dmr ātrh*.<sup>30</sup> The various possibilities will not be reviewed here. Instead, we will focus briefly on how *dmr ātrh*, translated as “the song of his place,” fits into the context of memorial ritual and the theme of the first half of the filial duties poem. In a number of studies, the term

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28. KTU 1.18 IV 24-26. Wright (2001, 55-56) discusses the potential issues with connecting these two passages, namely, that in the description of Aqhat’s death, the term is used in poetic imagery and not as a term specifically for the human “soul” or presence.

29. See Lewis (1989, 43-44).

30. See Pardee’s (1976, 236-238) review of previous attempts to decipher the meaning of *dmr ātrh* in the context of the phrase. Margalit’s (1989, 267-81) comprehensive analysis and review of scholarship on the entire passage is a significant collection of previous interpretations. Margalit (1989, xiii), in his introduction to the book, claims that his inspiration for such a study was, in fact, a comment made by Dennis Pardee at a symposium in 1979 marking the fiftieth anniversary of Ugaritic Studies that the Ugaritic texts deserve “reasoned commentaries” like those of biblical literature.

*atr* is understood to designate an actual cultic location.<sup>31</sup> Here I propose a different possibility for (*mššú*) *dmr atrh*, “(one who sends up) the song of his place”: *dmr atr* would refer to the son’s performance of a funerary song, specifically a song known by its incipit, *atr*, a song attested in a ritual text from Ugarit. In the ritual text RS 34.126 (KTU 1.161), the goddess *Šapšu* performs a song whose interpreted function is to transmit rulership from the dead ruler to the new, living ruler who takes the dead king’s place.<sup>32</sup> The song, like the first half of the poem of filial duties, articulates succession in the context of funerary ritual. The third couplet

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31. Though noting that *atr* occurs most frequently in Ugaritic as a preposition, Pardee already in his dissertation considered its usage to be connected to the other terms of location in the passage: “It is not impossible that the word *atr* is to be construed as a noun ‘place’...in this case, *dmr atrh* would be interpreted ‘the song of his place (= sanctuary?)’” (1976, 238). See this interpretation in the later studies of Dijkstra and de Moor (1975, 176); Dietrich and Loretz (1984, 57-62). Wright (2001, 60) provides a discussion of the various translation possibilities.

32. See Suriano (2009). In Suriano’s reading of KTU 1.161, the acknowledgement of succession is made by *Šapšu*, addressing the new king in second person and referring to his predecessor’s place as *atr b’lk*, “the place of your lord.” The imperatives directed at the new king to lower himself is explained by Suriano as the speaker’s “command[ment of Ammurapi] to publicly mourn” after “approach[ing] the throne of his lord and father” ( p. 9). Pardee (2002, 87-88) understands *Šapšu*’s address differently, reading *atr* here as a preposition, “After your lords,” and understands the addressee to be the dead king, a reading which accounts for the imperatives in line 22 (*rd wšpl*, “descend and lower yourself”). If the phrase *dmr atrh* means “the song of *atrh*,” either reading of *atr* in KTU 1.161 is possible, since *atr* in the phrase designates merely the song’s incipit: “the song ‘His Place’” or “the song ‘After Him’” (Bordreuil and Pardee 1982). See also Tsumura (1993, 45-46).

describes the son's responsibility to protect the father's reputation, a responsibility likewise taken by the textual medium itself in the mortuary inscription genre.<sup>33</sup>

Generally, couplets 3-6 all describe the activity of explicitly protecting a father from a variety of threats, both external and internal: (3) guarding a father from those who would destroy his reputation, presumably in death but perhaps also in life; (4) protecting the father's bodily integrity while intoxicated; (5) making offerings on behalf of the father; (6) occasional maintenance of the home and vestments of the father. While the first three of these activities protect against vital threats (a destroyed reputation, bodily harm through intoxication, failure to make regular offerings), the final activity does not protect against a vital threat, only against the living father's discomfort. Moreover, since this final activity is clearly performed only for the benefit of a living father, it is the least enduring activity of them all, since a roof will presumably need to be re-rolled and his garment will certainly require re-washing. Likewise, the presentation of offerings on the father's behalf and the son's physical support of his intoxicated father, follow a greater degree of regularity, perhaps with increasing frequency as the father ages, than the activities in the first half of the literary unit, which were either performed once (setting up the stela) or without any predictable regularity (protecting the father's reputation from detractors). Regular, systematic maintenance is a natural feature—a

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33. See Suriano (2009, 20-22).

necessity—of relationships with the living; only in the imagination of the needs of the dead, in the creation of ritual, would a father-son relationship require regular maintenance activity.<sup>34</sup>

Pardee and Bordreuil summarized the multi-dimensional and trans-generational character of RS 34.126 as “le Roi est mort...vive le Roi!”<sup>35</sup> The ‘filial duties’ poem in Aqhat can be similarly characterized, moving between the enduring and singularly symbolic actions performed by a son in succession of his father in death and the frequent and mundane activities performed by a son in protection of his father in life. The categorical boundaries between the actors shift constantly according to the cycles of human mortality: the king is dead, the king is alive, long live the king; the father dies, the son becomes the new father, who has a new son, and so on and so forth. The ‘filial duties’ represent this cycle in its organization from the enduring to the ephemeral, everyday.

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34. For example, feeding the dead. Sanders shows how in West Semitic mortuary practices, appetite and embodied presence were connected in ritual imagination, that “the meal has a special kind of power to render someone’s personhood via need, and to perform the satisfaction of that need through feeding” (2013, 50).

35. Bordreuil and Pardee 1982, 128. See commentary on this by Suriano (2009, 22).

### The Transmission of the ‘Filial Duties’ and the Problem of Human Mortality

The poetics of the poem’s performance, its transmission from one speaker to the next, likewise reflects such a presentation of the cyclical nature of human life and its shifting roles from one actor to another. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the mapping of social relationships—the son who becomes the father, etc.—is part of the narrative’s artifice. In reality, individuals are individuals, sons do not ‘replace’ their fathers. The notion that sons replace their fathers is presented by authoritative speakers in the first half of the narrative as a resolution to the anxiety of fathers that they do, indeed, die. The poem offers itself as a conventional response to this anxiety, and does so through its presentation in the narrative as wisdom transmitted from one speaker to another.

The poem is performed four times by speakers in the first half of the narrative: first by *Ba’lu* in counsel with *’Ilu*, then by *’Ilu* in response to *Ba’lu*’s performance, then by an undetermined messenger (either *’Ilu* or some other character) in the form of a birth announcement to *Dānī’ilu*, and finally, by *Dānī’ilu* himself. At least twice these performances are given as a response to the immediately preceding performance of the same poem: *’Ilu* repeats the poem back to *Ba’lu*<sup>36</sup> and *Dānī’ilu* repeats the poem back to the messenger.<sup>37</sup> The

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36. KTU 1.17 I 44-48.

37. KTU 1.17 II 16-23.

poem remains unchanged from performance to performance, save the shifting pronominal suffixes. Whereas *Ba<sup>l</sup>u* and *ʾIlu* refer to the benefits “he,” that is, *Dānīʾilu*, gains from a son, the messenger addresses these benefits to *Dānīʾilu* in the second person, and *Dānīʾilu* in the first person:

*Ba<sup>l</sup>u* to *ʾIlu* (1.17 I)

<sup>32</sup>*tḥ* . *ggḥ* . *bym* <sup>33</sup>[*tī*]*t* one who rolls **his** roof on a day of mud  
*rḥṣ* . *npṣḥ* . *bym* . *ṛt* one who washes **his** outfit on a day of dirt

*ʾIlu* (1.17 I) [these lines are missing; extant portions of the poem attest to a third person referent, as above]

Unnamed messenger to *Dānīʾilu* (1.17 II)

<sup>6</sup>[*ḥ*] <sup>7</sup>*ggk* . *bym* . *tīt* . one who ro[lls] **your** roof on a day of mud  
*rḥṣ* <sup>8</sup>*npṣk* . *bym* . *ṛt* one who washes **your** outfit on a day of dirt

*Dānīʾilu* (1.17 II)

<sup>22</sup>*tḥ* . *ggy* . *bym* . *tīt* one who rolls **my** roof on a day of mud  
<sup>23</sup>*rḥṣ* . *npṣy* . *bym* . *ṛt* one who washes **my** outfit on a day of dirt

These slight changes from speaker to speaker serve as reminders to the reader that while the poem presents seemingly universal expectations of sonship, its claims are framed to address the particular mortal anxieties of the story’s protagonist, *Dānīʾilu*, and not that of the deities.

The first iteration of the poem is embedded in the first attested direct-speech of the narrative. These opening words, outlining the reader’s expectations for order and meaning in the protagonist’s world, are in fact not uttered first by our protagonist, whose pious actions are recounted by the narrator. The natural order of things—what an individual like *Dānīʿilu* can and should expect as a result of his social position and piety—comes from on high, so to speak, words set in the mouth of *Baʿlu* who, motivated by his compassion for the mortal protagonist, confers with ʿ*Ilu* on his specifically *sonless* condition.<sup>38</sup> The scene is reminiscent of the first dialogue between characters in Job’s narrative frame, set in the divine realm between Yahweh and the Adversary on the allocation of reward or punishment to Job, the mortal protagonist.<sup>39</sup> *Baʿlu* argues in favor of *Dānīʿilu* to ʿ*Ilu*, that the mortal’s cries for a son<sup>40</sup> (which may have been the subject of the missing opening lines) deserve to be answered:

<sup>23</sup> *ltbrknn ltr . il aby*

Bless him, O Bull ʿ*Ilu*, my father,

<sup>24</sup> *tmrnn l bny . bnwt*

make him succeed, O Creator of  
creatures;

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38. Text reads in KTU 1.17 I 16: [w]yqrb . bʿl . bḥnth, literally, “approaches [ʿ*Ilu*] in kindness.” That is to say, *Baʿlu* approaches ʿ*Ilu* motivated by his favor of, or kindness towards *Dānīʿilu*. The identification of the addressee as ʿ*Ilu* is contextually discerned. See Parker (1997, 79). For this translation of ḥnt, see *DULAT* 366.

39. Job 1:6-12.

40. Text reads in KTU 1.17 I 16-18: abynt [d]nil...ānh ḡzr.

<sup>25</sup>*wykn . bnh . bbt .*                      so that he may have a son in his house,  
<sup>šrš</sup> . *bqrb* <sup>26</sup>*hklh .*                      a descendant within his palace.

*Baʿlu*’s request that *ʾIlu* bless (*BRK*) *Dānīʾilu* and make him succeed (*MR(R)*)<sup>41</sup> is repeated in the narrator’s description of *ʾIlu*’s fulfillment of the request.<sup>42</sup> In *Kirta*, as here, a request by *Baʿlu* to *ʾIlu*, with these specific verbs, “to bless” and “to make succeed,” refers explicitly to the blessing of progeny:<sup>43</sup>

<sup>14</sup>*ltbrk* <sup>15</sup>[*krt . ]tʿ* .                      Bless Noble *Kirta*!  
*l tmr . nʿm[n . ]* <sup>16</sup>*glm . il*                      Make the pleasant [lad] of *ʾIlu* succeed.

The narrator tells of *ʾIlu*’s fulfillment of *Baʿlu*’s request in the same words, that *Kirta* will indeed have a son:

<sup>18</sup>*brkm . ybrk* <sup>19</sup>[*ʿbdh*] .                      Blessings he blesses [his servant],  
*ybrk . il . krt* <sup>20</sup>[*tʿ* .                      *ʾIlu* blesses *Kirta* [the Noble,  
*ymr]m . nʿ m[n] . glm . il*                      makes the pleasa[nt] lad of *ʾIlu* succeed.

These words in the *Aqhat* tale, as in *Kirta*, designate the blessing specifically of a son, and so it is especially notable that these same words recur at the end of *Aqhat*, this time a request by daughter *Puǧatu* to her father *Dānīʾilu*. While at the beginning of the story the request for

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41. The semantic content of the verb here, *M-R* or *MRR*, is discerned on the basis of its parallel with *BRK*, “to bless.” On the problems of identifying this root with *MRR* “to be bitter” and tracing a semantic development in Ugaritic “to be strong,” see Pardee (1978).

42. KTU 1.17 I 34-36.

43. KTU 1.15 II 14-16.



blessing and life comes through *Ba'lu* on *Dānī'ilu*'s behalf, at the end of the story, this request comes directly from daughter *Puǵatu*'s lips, on her own initiative, to avenge her brother's death and restore justice to the household:

<sup>32</sup>*ltbrkn . ǎlk brktm*                      Bless me, I will go blessed,  
<sup>33</sup>*tmrn . ǎlk . nmrrt*                      make me succeed, I will go with  
 success,

<sup>34</sup>*imḥṣ . mḥṣ . ǎhy .*                      I will slay my brother's slayer,  
<sup>35</sup>*ǎkl [m] kl [y]l . ǔmty*                      I will finish [the one who] finished my  
 mother's child.

The request for *Dānī'ilu*'s success, in his case, in producing an heir, is issued through conventional means: pious devotion and mediated by *Ba'lu* to 'Ilu. When *Dānī'ilu*'s daughter makes the same request at the end of the story, to *Dānī'ilu*, it is unmediated and without ritual context. The daughter's petition directly to *Dānī'ilu*, set against the established pattern of piety and male-mediated request for blessing in the first half of the narrative, is in the world of the narrative, unconventional.<sup>44</sup>

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44. Although the daughter's words requesting *Dānī'ilu*'s blessing are set against conventions for these requests established earlier in the narrative, her specific request for success — the success in avenging her brother's death — utilizes vocabulary used elsewhere to describe the goddess *Anatu*'s activities, both here and in the Baal cycle. A sequence of repeated speech performance of '*Anatu*'s motive for killing *Dānī'ilu* moves from *YṬPN*'s mouth in third-person reference to *Dānī'ilu* (KTU 1.18 IV 12-13) to '*Anatu*'s own words directed to the now dead *Dānī'ilu* in second person address (KTU 1.18 IV 40-41), and finally, presumably, '*Anatu*'s formal performance of this motive in first person voice to the completed deed (KTU 1.19 I 13-16). This thrice repeated motive describes '*Anatu*'s action specifically with the verb MḤṢ: *ʿl ḥth . imḥṣh . / kd . ʿl . qṣth imḥṣh //* “On account of his staff I slew

Returning to the initial scene of the Aqhat narrative, it is in this context, of *Baʿlu*'s request that *ʾIlu* bless *Dānīʾilu* with an heir, that the poem of filial duties is first uttered by a character. *ʾIlu* responds to *Baʿlu*'s performance of the poem by blessing *Dānīʾilu*<sup>45</sup> and promising the successful outcome of intercourse with his wife,<sup>46</sup> repeating and confirming, word-for-word, *Baʿlu*'s request, which frames his reiteration of the poem of filial duties:

<sup>42</sup> <i>wykn . bnh</i> <sup>43</sup> [ <i>bbt</i> .	May he have his son [in (his) house,
<i>šrš]</i> . <i>bqrb hklh</i>	a descendant] in the midst of his palace.

At this point in the text, at around line 47 of the first column, the tablet is badly damaged, and so the specific events that follow are unclear. The first lines of the second column are also missing, and when the text resumes, it is in the midst of the performance of the poem of filial duties, yet again. This time, the poem is addressed to a second person audience, and as it becomes clear at the end of line 8, *Dānīʾilu* is the audience of this performance. The speaker, presumably a messenger announcing the birth of a son, remains unidentified. *Dānīʾilu* hears the

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him, that on account of his bow, I slew him..." Similarly, the verb MḤṢ describes *ʿAnatu*'s activities in her battle scene in the Baal cycle, see KTU 1.3 II 5-8: *whln . ʿnt . tmḥš bʿmq ... tmḥš . līm . ḥpy[m]* "See! *ʿAnatu* smites in the valley...she sites the people of the s[ea]shore."

45. Narrator describes *ʾIlu*'s actions and speech as a blessing in KTU 1.17 I 34-36a; in 1.17 I 36b-43a, *ʾIlu* speaks, using a vow formula, declaring that *Dānīʾilu* will succeed in his attempts to have a son.

46. KTU 1.17 I 39-43.

performance and responds by reciting the poem for the last time in the narrative, this time in first-person reference to himself.

The transmission of the blessing and promises of a son in the form of the poem of filial duties now completed, the story resumes the initial device designating the passage of narrated time (“one day, and a second,” and so on), generating anticipation for a shift in the protagonist’s situation. Again, at the end of the second column, we reach the break in the text, missing the birth of *ʾAqhatu*. When the extant text resumes in column five, the narrative has shifted its theme of transmission from speech performance (the poem of filial duties) to an actual object: a bow, fashioned by *Kôṭaru-wa-Ḥasīsu*, is given to *Dānīʾilu*, who then passes the object to his son. As the story goes, it is in fact *ʾAqhatu*’s rigid fidelity to retaining that which was passed to him by his father, the bow, that results in his death. *ʾAqhatu* refuses *ʿAnatu*’s promises of material success and even immortality in exchange for the bow.

While the poem of filial duties implicitly promised a kind of sustained existence for the father through the activities of the son, the bow is retained by *ʾAqhatu* in his explicit refusal for *ʿAnatu*’s promises of immortality. Elana Ashley, in a 1977 dissertation, identifies the human desire for immortality to be a significant motif of the narrative.<sup>47</sup> In her study, she limits immortality to explicitly that which *ʿAnatu* offers *Dānīʾilu* in exchange for the bow: *blmt*, the

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47. Ashley 1977, 279-280.

condition of “deathlessness.”<sup>48</sup> Ashley sees this kind of desire for deathlessness in tension with what she calls “social convention,” that is, “prescribed rites...through which man could realize his desires” (p. 280). Specifically, Ashley refers to funerary ritual, performed by one’s son, as the conventional means by which one could mitigate one’s inevitable fate. It seems that the conventional expectations for a mortal in the world of the narrative is that a man lives one’s life, sires a son, grooms him to be heir, passing to him his knowledge and possessions, and then dies knowing that the son will continue in the manner of the father. The son continues the name and duties of the father, living in his stead.

Although Ashley does not state as much in her study, it seems that the narrative holds the father-son relationship as the conventional path to life-beyond-death, a path which is in direct tension with an unconventional possibility, one offered by the goddess *‘Anatu*:

<sup>25</sup>*wt’n . btl* <sup>26</sup>*nt*

*‘Anatu* the girl replied:

*irš . hym . lāqht . g̃zr*

“Request life, *’Aqhatu* the hero,

<sup>27</sup>*irš . hym . wātnk .*

request life, and I will give (it) to you,

*blmt* <sup>28</sup>*wāšlhk*

deathlessness I will bestow upon you...”

The offer of immortality is rejected as an impossibility according to *’Aqhatu*’s worldview, and is framed in terms of other, related conventional views, such as traditional gender roles:

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48. KTU 1.17 VI 26-28. Ashley 1977, 372.

<sup>33</sup> <i>w . y'n . áqht . g'zr</i>	<sup>33</sup> <i>'Aqhatu</i> the hero replied:
<sup>34</sup> <i>ál . tš[r]gn . ybtlm .</i> <i>dm . l'g'zr</i> <sup>35</sup> <i>šrgk . h'hm.</i>	“Girl, don’t deceive <sup>49</sup> me to a hero, your deception is rubbish... <sup>50</sup>
...	
<sup>38</sup> <i>mt . kl . ámt</i> <i>wán . mtm . ámt</i>	The death of all I will die, I will also surely die.
<sup>39</sup> <i>[áp m]tn . rgmm . árgm .</i>	Another word I will say:
<i>qštm</i> <sup>40</sup> [ ] <i>mhrm .</i> <i>ht . tšdn . tin'tt ...</i>	Bows are [ ] of warriors, will womenkind now hunt?

The tension between these two possibilities for human (im)mortality is heightened by the juxtaposition of the quotidian, expected behavior from the mortal character, *'Aqhatu*, the dutiful son, against the otherworldly, unconventionally behaved (for human women), goddess *'Anatu*.<sup>51</sup>

While the brazen behavior of the goddess *'Anatu* can be assimilated into the reader’s understanding that gods do not play by the same rules as humans, daughter *Pu'gatu*’s cannot.

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49. Literally, “to twist, entangle.” See *DULAT* 844.

50. *DULAT* 389.

51. While much of the interpretation offered by D.R. Hillers (1973) is based on long outdated approaches to the study of ancient literature (myth patterning and psychoanalysis, see Margalit (1989, 53), the insight that the feminine is set against the masculine in the structure of the narrative remains a valuable one. I follow Margalit who aptly summarizes the value of Hillers’ study: “Hillers’ may well have exaggerated the sexual aspects of the bow, but not its centrality to the plot—and its symbolism as denoting maturity and manhood. By depriving Aqht of his bow, Anat would unwittingly deprive the lad of the most eloquent testimony to his newly attained maturity...the bow is a symbol of the societal norms...” (p. 75).

The appearance of *Dānî'ilu*'s daughter—her aspirations as blood avenger—comes as a surprise to the reader: *Dānî'ilu* sought a continuation through conventional means, through a son, when all the while he had a daughter who had the wisdom<sup>52</sup> to do right by the family and its name.

One need not interpret the entire *Aqhat* tale as having a “feminist agenda,” as Margalit (1983, 67) does, or to read the story as an argument for feminine power in liminality, as Parker (2006, 557-575) does, in order to observe the effectiveness of juxtaposing masculine and feminine voices in the narrative. One cannot say for certain why a story is told in one way or another, whether specific categories of social relationships are set against each other in the story in an intellectual exercise, to highlight the limits of these categories, or whether the shape of the narrative serves a broader, real-life social agenda, to legitimate the enduring power wielded by real-life father-daughter relationships. In a sense, posing such a question may yield less interesting results than trying to understand poetics of the narrative, the ways in which these stories are told.

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52. One of *Dānî'ilu*'s three epithets for *Puġatu* is *yd't hlk kbkbm*, “One who knows the course of the stars,” (KTU 1.19 II 1-3; IV 37). As Margalit points out, “The only other dramatic person of whom this verb [YD<sup>c</sup>] is predicated in *Aqht* is the proverbially wise El (1.18:I:16)” (1989, 365).

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