

The power of chiasmus: Exploring the prayer of Esther in LXX Esther

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Dates:

Received: 17 Sept. 2022

Accepted: 28 Nov. 2022

Published: 30 Jan. 2023

How to cite this article:

De Beer, S.M., 2023, 'The power of chiasmus: Exploring the prayer of Esther in LXX Esther', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(1), a8135. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8135>

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As a figure constitutional of meaning within texts and schemes of thought, chiasmus plays an essential role. Taking chiasmi beyond their purely stylistic role calls for exploring their *structural* and *meaning-defining role* within texts and systems of thought. This study endeavoured to investigate the chiasmic structure(s) of LXX Esther's Addition C, the Prayer of Esther. The reverse parallelism of chiasmus can symbolise a wide series of affiliations. Jamin Pelkey's semiotic typology of chiasmus was utilised as a heuristic prism to explore the chiasmic structure(s) referred to in LXX Esther's Addition C (17k–z) and Addition D. A crucial question is in what ways and how these chiasmi contribute to communicate intersections or meeting points between two possibilities. Chiasmus can be employed both to outline contradictions or rifts between some set of oppositions and at the same time bring these differences into dialogue. It was illustrated how oppositions and contradictions related to the prayer of Esther are transcended.

Contribution: Referring to the narrative of LXX Esther, this article contributed to contested historical thought, source interpretation and literary studies.

Keywords: chiasmus; LXX Esther; heuristic prism; rhetoric; culture; dialectical tool; semiotics.

Introduction

Chiasmic structures in the prayer of Esther

Paul and Wiseman (2014:3) depict the chiasmus figure as a 'deep structure of life experience'. Furthermore, chiasmus is described as useful for 'both the production and discovery of meaning' (eds. Strecker & Taylor 2009:9), 'a dialectical tool' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:3), 'a process of change, a pattern that is both diagram and force, system and movement' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:5) and a 'powerful instrument for opposing dogmatism and time-honoured nonsense' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:5).

The prayer of Esther in LXX Esther (4:17l–z) is introduced by the following provocative sentence: 'καὶ Ἐσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατελιμμένη' [And Esther the queen took flight to the Lord gripped in agony of death] (LXX Esther 4:17k). The composition of this sentence exhibits a cross structure (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the sentence following this introduction (4:17k) and a section of the first sentence of Addition D (5:1) are constructed as shown in Figure 2.

The prayer of Esther is sandwiched between this cross structure. Based on these observations, the following aspects are considered:

- Generally, chiasmus is seen as a decorative flourish or merely a stylistic device (Nänny 1988:51; Pelkey 2017:21). Because word order in Greek and other ancient synthetic languages is (often) semantically irrelevant, are these cross references intentional or simply ornamental and mnemonic?
- Aside from introducing and enclosing Esther's prayer, the question arises whether the two mentioned chiasmi demonstrate the qualities Paul and Wiseman (2014:3) attribute to chiasmi, namely 'dialectical tools, processes of change, dynamic patterns, and powerful weapons against dogmatism and time-honoured nonsense'.

The prayer of Esther, fixed in the centre of a chiasmus, is also worth considering. Traditional explanations of the prayer focus on:

- questions about the morality of Esther's marriage to a gentile (Nickelsburg 1981:174)
- the dynamics of sincere prayer (DeSilva 2004:122)
- the way the protagonist Queen Esther articulates her emotions (Ego 2015:83–93)

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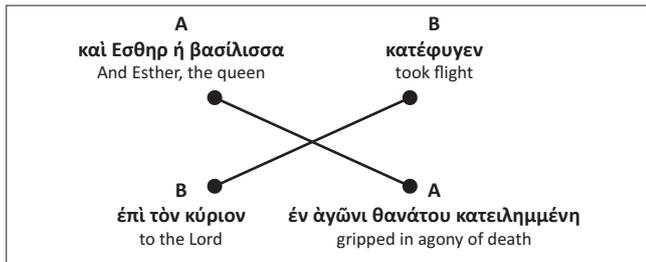


FIGURE 1: The chiasmic structure of the introductory sentence.

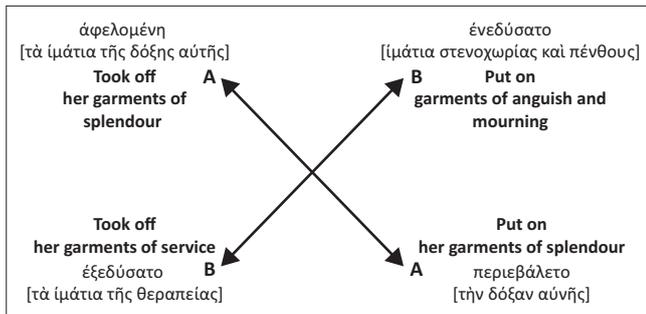


FIGURE 2: The prayer of Esther sandwiched between a cross structure.

- the common *Grundlage* of LXX Esther's and Judith's prayers (Van Der Walt 2008:194–206)
- the meaning of the prayer by utilising an embodied cognition approach (Nolte & Jordaan 2009:293–309)
- Esther's prayer as an example of the ritual of penitential prayer, which became an instrument for subordinate people to perform imperial negotiation (Werline 1998:191–195)
- a synchronic literary reading of Esther's prayer by combining various approaches to expose the intersection of gender and imperial power (Stone 2018:193–226)
- trauma and danger in the LXX prayers of Esther and Judith (Efthimiadis-Keith 2022:123–134).

The chiasmic structures introducing and enclosing LXX Esther's prayer have not been extensively deliberated, and their significance to the prayer's interpretation as well as their functions has not yet been established. This study is motivated by an unsettling suspicion that there is more to the chiasmi surrounding the prayer of Esther than meets the eye. To elucidate this disquieting hunch, Jamin Pelkey's semiotic typology of chiasmus is applied as a heuristic prism to explore the chiasmi in LXX Esther's Addition C (17k–z) and Addition D.

Grausso (2020:5) suggests chiasmus to be an alternative manner of arriving at meaning by identifying relations between apparent opposite terms. A crucial question will be in what ways and how the chiasmi, which introduce and encircle Esther's prayer, contribute to communicate intersections or meeting points between two possibilities. Regarding Esther's prayer, various relationships between apparent opposite terms will be thoroughly discussed. Taking chiasmi beyond their purely stylistic function calls for exploring their structural and meaning-defining role within texts and systems of thought.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Chiasmus: More than a mere stylistic device

Chiasmus is an omnipresent literary and rhetorical device (Grausso 2020:iv), a phenomenon inciting endless possibilities. At a sentence level, chiasmus implicates a reordering of elements in a sentence to construct an **A-B-B-A** pattern. A keynote illustration is in Mark 2:27: 'The Sabbath (A) was made for man (B), not man (B) for the Sabbath (A)'.¹ Pelkey (2017) explains the chiasmus pattern:

The chiasmus pattern can be described as the parallel, or a symmetrical, inversion of two or more terms framed as antithetical pairs, being held in something of a mirror image relation to suggest relations and processes of unity, tension, reversal, and/or exchange. (p. 20)

Observing chiasmus to the extent of symbols, it represents a configuration of transecting lines. The most basic form thereof is the 'X'-symbol (Pelkey 2017:39–62). Chiasmus frequently joins together two deviating statements. Lissner (2007:17) postulates chiasmus to be a deep-rooted aspect of embodiment. 'Chi-thinking' resides in distinguishing 'likeness and difference, partitioning and totality, duality and reciprocation' (Lissner 2007:17). According to Pelkey (2017:1–38), chiasmic constructions stem from the fundamentals of *Homo sapiens*' form, that is, spread-out limbs and an extended posture creating an 'embodied X'. The particulars of chiasmus may diverge, but a chiasmic axiom or construction will constantly comprise a criss-crossing of some sorts. An 'X' is structured by the composition of symbols or replicating ideas. The 'spread-eagle posture' parallels deeply sensed experiences, and these proficiencies sift through many expressions of our lives, incorporating art and culture.

Chiasmus in the work of Merleau-Pont (1968) refers to reversibility. Chiasmus is defined as a phenomenon of body and mind. How do body and mind collaborate in creating motor function, sense and awareness? The right cerebral hemisphere relates to movement and utility in the left verge of the body, and the left cerebral hemisphere relates to movement and utility in the right verge of the body. Each chiasmic structure engages a junction or crossing of components, whether syntactic or anatomical. Gasché (1987:xvi) defines chiasmus as 'what allows oppositions to be bound into unity ... a form that makes it possible to determine differences concerning an underlying totality'. The International Rhetoric Culture Project (see <http://www.rhetoricculture.org>) states its aim to 'return rhetoric to daily life and relocate it at the basis of human culture' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:5). Chiasmus entertains a favoured position within the whole Rhetoric Culture Project, because 'rhetoric

¹Paul (2014:21) notes that the standard textbook example, '*Non ut edam vivo sed ut vivam edo*' [I do not live to eat but eat to live], provided by Quintilian (AD 35–100), was labelled *antimetabole*. The word *chiasmus* was not devised until the 2nd century, by Hermodorus of Tarsus. The distinction between the two terms is that *antimetabole* involves repetition of the same words in reverse order, whereas *chiasmus* denotes an inverted repetition of grammatical structure. The distinction between *antimetabole* and *chiasmus* disappeared over centuries.

and culture themselves stand in chiasmic relation to one another' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:6).

Chiasmus has gained a great deal of attention in scriptural research (see Assis 2002:273–304; Breck 1999:249–267; Brouwer 2018a:195–214, 2018b:304–322, 2018c:99–127; Bryan 2020:407–423; Decaen 2021:56–74; DeSilva 2008:343–371; Gardner 1999:355–391; Thomson 1995:34–38; Tomasino 2019:101–120; Welch 1990:5–22). The wide-ranging chiasmic or central arrangements of biblical, ancient and premodern texts are widely recognised. However, a great deal of these studies concentrate on chiasmus as a particular structural technique, limited to syntactic rhetorical analysis (Levinson 2020:271–280; Nänny 1988:51–59). As far as chiasmus in biblical studies is concerned, these observations confirm Paul and Wiseman's (2014) comment:

Even today, anyone who has heard of chiasmus is likely to think of it as no more than a piece of rhetorical playfulness, a lively figure, at times challenging, useful for supplying a memorable sententious note or for performing a terpsichorean pirouette of syntax and thought. (p. 1)

This study presupposes that the chiasmi which introduce and enclose Esther's prayer are not merely stylistic devices but perform multifaceted functions. Jamin Pelkey's (2017:113–139) semiotic typology of chiasmus will be applied as a heuristic prism to explore these chiasmi. A functional typology of chiasmic structures is presented because reverse parallelism of chiasmus can symbolise a variety of affiliations. Pelkey's semiotic typology is briefly discussed.

Jamin Pelkey's semiotic typology of chiasmus

Pelkey (2017) grants considerable thought to 'semiotic-X' as a representation of the human form. The human physique uncovers positions that may be equally stabilising and disrupting. Pelkey identifies and describes diverse 'X'-poses of the human physique. In order to develop a typology of chiasmi, he expands on the work of Paul (2014:19–44). Rather than focusing on syntactic and rhetorical aspects of chiasmus, Pelkey demonstrates that it also entails thematic outcomes. To facilitate comparison, Pelkey's semiotic typology is given in a chart, as shown in Table 1 (see Grausso 2020:17).

As Pelkey's semiotic typology is used as a heuristic prism to analyse the chiasmi in LXX Esther (Addition C 4:17k–z and Addition D:1), the key focus is on how the diverse types of chiasmi convey meaning through their semiotic forms.

Pelkey's semiotic typology exploited as a heuristic prism to analyse LXX Esther

Addition C (4:17 k–z) and Addition D:1

The locus of Esther's prayer in LXX Esther: The Additions to LXX Esther disclose an *extended chiasmus*, sequences of the type 'a, b, c, d, e – e, d, c, b, a'. The Additions appear to have been written in pairs, one complementing the other. It is within this concentric structure that Esther's prayer (4:17k–z) wedges its way in. The placing and contents of the Additions are summarised (see Seeman 2011:5–6):

TABLE 1: Pelkey's semiotic typology.

Chiasmus type	Symbol	Description
1. Type: X		Description: In its essential appearance, 'X' denotes the human posture, by means of spread-out arms and legs. Pelkey (2017:63–83) defines this as a 'spread-eagle leap'. He considers the overall mood of the X-type chiasmus to be 'satisfaction'. Activities such as skiing and figure-skating challenge the competitor to compete with grace and meticulousness (Pelkey 2017:42).
2. Type: Hourglass		Description: The hourglass presents a disrupting figure, with a midpoint that cannot be sustained. It is denoted by an extreme and unnerving 'spread-eagle posture'. Pelkey (2017:85–111) portrays this as 'spread-eagle torture'. Hourglass types represent a 'tortured psyche', wherein there is a restriction that cannot be overcome without disassembling the configuration. The hourglass comprises a tapered centre, conjuring an impression that the structure will disintegrate. Symbolising tortured spread-eagle postures of the human figure, the hourglass embodies the extended limits of human endurance.
3. Type: Diamond		Description: A diamond transpires when two 'X'-figures intermesh around an inner, rhombic shape or general base (Pelkey 2017:204).
4. Type: Argyle		Description: The 'argyle pattern' entails replicating 'X'-patterns, dovetailing and crammed together. There is a shared communal space between the symbols (Pelkey 2017:193–225). Echoed patterns or meshes communicate an awareness of open-ended connection. Paul (2014:36) portrays the argyle pattern as 'an open-ended movement, returning to a starting point that is now changed'.

Source: Grausso, C.M., 2020, Chiasmus: A phenomenon of language, body and perception', University of Edinburgh, PhD dissertation, Edinburgh.

- Addition A (precedes MT 1:1): Mordecai has a prophetic dream. He battles to understand it. He impedes on an assassination plot against the king. He is promoted, and the conspirators are punished. Mordechai's promotion gives motivation to the fury of Haman.
- Addition B (interpolates MT 2:13–14): The text of Haman's royal edict commanding the execution of the Judeans.
- Addition C (follows MT 4:17): Mordecai and Esther offer prayers to God for the Jews to be spared from abolition. Esther also asks God for bravery before the king.
- Addition D (replaces MT 5:1–2): Esther appears in the company of the king and faints twice. Mediated by divine intervention, the king receives her sympathetically.
- Addition E (interpolates MT 8:12–13): The text of Esther's royal edict accusing Haman of a conspiracy against the king; the execution decree is revoked and the commemoration of the 13th of Adar is instructed.
- Addition F (follows MT 10:3): Mordecai unravels his dream in the light of the events that have emerged and instructs the commemoration of the 14th and 15th of Adar (in LXX, followed by the colophon).

Within novels and epic poems, chiasmus may emerge as a ring structure, typified by a balanced pattern of repetitive topics or episodes in the plot (Grausso 2020:9). Although any passage reads linearly, from beginning to end, it can also integrate another movement: from the exterior to the interior, from the extremities toward the centre (Brouwer 2018c:105–106). The essential message of the text is recovered at its centre. Addition D introduces the dramatic climax of LXX Esther. Addition C generates the prelude to the climax and increases the suspense by including both prayers of Mordechai and Esther before her appearance in front of king Artaxerxes (Fox 2001:269–273; Gardner 1984:1–8; Wills 1990:116–310).

The chiasmi introducing and enclosing Esther's prayer are consequently discussed.

The introductory sentence to Esther's prayer: In LXX 4:16, Esther urges Mordechai 'to gather all the Jews staying in Shushan and fast on my behalf'.² This request is followed by Mordechai's prayer (4:17a–j) and Esther's prayer (4:17k–z). The introductory sentence to Esther's prayer (4:17k) exhibits a cross structure.³ It may be argued that this cross structure is merely ornamental and mnemonic, as proposed by Nänný (1988:51–52). According to Grausso (2020:28–44), however, the affiliation between elements 'A' and 'B' always incorporates a coherence. She suggests eight diverse types of relations. One kind has 'A' and 'B' sections that reciprocally influence or alter one another, termed the 'multiple effect type' (Grausso 2020:29). Ideally, there should be two-way activity or interaction between the elements to qualify as an example of this type. It represents interactivity of perspectives or entities, like Pelkey's argyle and diamond chiasmi.

The cross structure of the introduction to Esther's prayer shows multiple effects. These multiple effects are illustrated in Figure 3.

Queen Esther takes refuge in the Lord. Her 'agony of death' motivates her to take flight to the Lord. The possibility is present that her flight to the Lord will present a promising outcome, which is freedom from her agony.

Paul (2014:31) suggests a circle chiasmus that equals Pelkey's diamond-type chiasmus. The circle chiasmus (or diamond-type) brings one back to the initial point of departure, a perceptual progress within a closed system. 'The typical effect is one of melancholy, the perception of life as a labyrinth' (Paul 2014:31). Chiasmus is conceived as a circle or a diamond when it provokes the mind to follow a line of thought that reverts to the initial starting point. Change within a self-contained whole is suggested. The diamond chiasmus also alludes an alteration of being or a state of enlarged consciousness (Paul 2014:32). According to Pelkey (2014:206), the emphasis should be on the diamond's middle, creating a feeling of wonder, of losing oneself in something new and unexpected. This chiastic ability to 'keep apart while bringing together' (2017:24) creates space for a 'third term' beyond binary patterns, a provoking *third space*.

The diamond-type chiasmus introducing Esther's prayer gestures towards potential. With Esther's request for communal fasting, she invokes the biblical practice of intercessory abstentions. She embarks on reconnecting with her own individuality and identity (Berman 2001:655) by uniting with her fellow Jews. It is argued by Bach (1997:197–198) that the communal fast unites the Jewish residents of

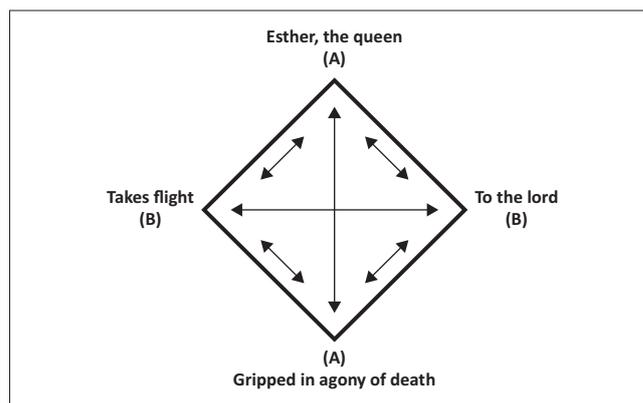


FIGURE 3: Multiple effects of the cross structure.

Shushan while also demonstrating their distinctness from the Babylonians. The Jewish fast convenes a counterbalance to the festivals of the Persians. The character of Esther unveils sensitivity to her Jewish identity. There is an implied possibility that the God of Israel may change the lot of Israel's people. The diamond-type chiasmus thus suggests a *third space*, a context for the God of Israel to overturn the predicament of the Jewish people and the opportunity for Esther to reclaim her identity.

A further chiasmus: Addition C (4:17k) and Addition D (5:1)

Overview: Following the introductory chiasmus ('καὶ Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατελιημμένη') Esther took flight to the Lord in agony of death' [LXX Esther 4:17k]), 'she took off her garments of splendour' (ἀφελομένη τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς δόξης αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]) and 'put on garments of anguish and mourning' (ἐνεδύσατο ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους [LXX Esther 4:17k]). 'Instead of valuable perfume' (ἀντὶ τῶν ὑπερφηάνων ἡδυσμάτων [LXX Esther 4:17k]), 'she filled her head with ashes and dung' (σποδοῦ καὶ κοπριῶν ἐπλησεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]). 'She humbled her body extremely' (τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἐταπεινώσεν σφόδρα [LXX Esther 4:17k]) and 'every body part she adorned with joy' (πάντα τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἀγαλλιᾶματος αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]) 'was covered by her tangled hair' (ἐπλησε στρεπτῶν τριχῶν αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]). 'She pleaded to the Lord, the God of Israel, and said ...' (ἐδέετο κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἶπεν [LXX Esther 4:17k]). The content of Esther's prayer then follows (LXX Esther 4:17l–z).

Addition D:1 affirms that 'on the third day after she ceased praying, she took off her garments of prayer and put on her garments of splendour' (καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ὡς ἐπαύσατο προσευχομένη ἐξεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς θεραπείας καὶ περιεβάλετο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 5:1]). There is a stark contrast between Esther's adornments in Addition C and Addition D. The sentence following the introduction (4:17k) and a section of the first sentence of Addition D (5:1), encircling Esther's prayer, are constructed as shown in Figure 4.

An hourglass type of chiasmus

This chiasmus is an example of an hourglass type (Pelkey 2017:85–111) or a mirror type (Paul 2014:23). According to

2. LXX Esther 4:16 – 'βαδίσας ἐκκλησίασον τοὺς Ἰουδαίους τοὺς ἐν Σούσαις καὶ νηστεύσατε ἐπ' ἐμοί'.

3. LXX Esther 4:17k – 'καὶ Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατελιημμένη' [And Esther the queen took flight to the Lord gripped in agony of death].

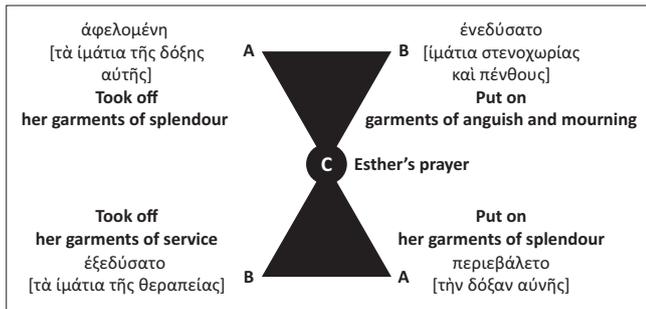


FIGURE 4: An hourglass chiasmus.

Paul (2014:23), the mirror chiasmus implies ‘projection of one meaning onto another’. The chiasmus figure is furthermore associated with ‘mental blockage, stasis or paralysis’. The citation ‘Fair (A) is foul (B) and foul (B) is fair (A)’ affirms a paradox that results from projection, because ‘fair’ and ‘foul’ are consistent contraries. There is a mirroring aspect to chiasmus when the second half contradicts the first without clarifying that the second half is preferred, resulting in unresolved tension.

In comparison with the mirror chiasmus, Pelkey (2017:102) suggests that the hourglass chiasmus has the characteristics of a tortured psyche, one in which restrictedness cannot be overcome unless the structure is dismantled. He proposes that ‘the cluster of paradoxes that ensues from bringing opposite relation – either or, neither nor, both and – implies tension, torture or total collapse’ (Pelkey 2017:102). The hourglass has a narrow centre which induces a perception that the construction will break down. An hourglass represents the body’s ‘tortured spread-eagle’ pose, strained beyond its capacity. Pelkey’s reasoning provides valuable stimulus for the understanding of the hourglass chiasmus employed in this specific context of the Additions to LXX Esther.

The tortured spread-eagle posture in LXX Esther Addition C and D

In Addition C (17k) and Addition D:1, Esther’s body is sketched with dramatic detail. She removes her garments of splendour and puts on garments of mourning. She defiles her head with ashes and dung to exhibit her subordination to the God of Israel. This action of Esther’s character is significant, considering the broader context of the Esther narrative.

As Wetter (2012:331–332) hints, Esther’s treatment may be considered a form of a *rite of passage*. She is separated from her prior social relations and groomed for her life in the royal harem. The purpose of a *rite of passage* is to alter someone’s social position temporarily or enduringly. The individual who is submitted to these rituals is alienated (often physically) from his or her previous identity, elapses through a stage of change in which the former position is disseminated, and eventually advances as a different personage who has incorporated and personified a transformed status regarding the societal and sacred order. It is evident in the storyline of Esther that she has been detached from her former social context (2:8) and is no longer in contact with the traditional

social structure. She is consigned to the supervision of a stranger (2:8) and exposed to a series of beauty treatments (2:12) to groom her body for the entertainment of King Artaxerxes. She steps to the fore, abiding in the new position of royal courtesan (De Beer 2021:6). As part of her quest for the position of the king’s wife, Esther competes in a beauty contest and is required to reveal her feminine physique. Consequently, she becomes Artaxerxes’ new concubine (2:15). Artaxerxes downgrades her to a bodily object even further by summoning her when he wants to converse with her (4:11). As Beal (1995:91–92) explains, patriarchal laws created a ‘gendered’ Esther. The notion that Vashti and Esther are representations of women in the imperial interaction zone, for whom constant uncertainty exists, is also argued by Stone (2018:56). They are subjugated both by imperialism and patriarchy, hence defined by a general male experience and masculine supremacy.

According to Berman (2001:661), Esther’s initial indifference to Mordechai’s request and plea to intercede (4:11) on her people’s behalf before the king is explained by Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of the ‘Other’. The ‘Other’ is regarded as an insignificant object. Women who aspire to survive in a patriarchal society must submit to ‘Otherness’, thereby sacrificing subjectivity. Reconstructed to be an object, the ‘Other’ realises her femaleness in the observance of the ‘Absolute, Essential’ male. Berman (2001:652) asserts the character of Esther to be the essential victim of seclusion. The barricade of the palace symbolically restricts and separates her from the realm of the Jews (Berman 2001:652; Stone 2018:54–56). Mordechai’s request moulds Esther into a ‘tortured spread-eagle body’. Her function is that of an intermediary between Mordechai, the Jewish people and the king. Mordechai warns Esther that if she refuses to comply with his request, she and her family will die (Stone 2018:203).

As Wetter (2012:330–332) explains, Esther’s plea for the Jews to fast is an attempt to make amends for the rituals that cut Esther off from her people. The ‘Other’ becomes a subject. She degrades her body, moulded to conform to the requisites of her function as Persian queen. Wetter (2012) states:

Although the ultimate strategist of both the beauty treatments and the fast is the author himself, on the narrative level it seems to be Esther who finally deploys a strategy other than silent submission and who resolutely determines her own religious and ethnic identity. (p. 331)

Esther is mindful of the influence of her attractiveness and employs it to deal with the king. Stone (2018:259) points out that Esther’s primary means of negotiation are performances of frailty and sexuality. With her glorious appearance, she hopes to win the king’s compassion and sympathy (De Beer 2021:6).⁴ A crucial stage in Esther’s claim to subjectivity is her confrontation with Haman (7:1–10). She is aware that she needs to play her expert ‘Other’ card to succeed (Berman 2001:601). She never reveals her Jewish heritage but bemoans

4. LXX Esther 9:2 – ‘καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθρίωσα ἀκμὴ κάλλους αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἰλαρὸν ὡς προσφιλές ἢ δὲ καρδία αὐτῆς ἀπεστενωμένη ἀπὸ τοῦ φόβου’ [She was blushing, on the highest point of her beauty, and she had a cheerful appearance, but her heart was blocked up with fear].

her people's dilemma. Stone (2018:193–226) emphasises Esther's progression in agency to negotiate as God's representative. Haman, the Jewish adversary, is removed by using tactical planning. Esther's spread-eagled posture persists. Her spread-eagled body implies 'tension, torture, or total collapse' (Pelkey 2014:102). Obvious strain exists between Esther's subjectivity and her 'Otherness'.

LXX Esther 9:29 states that 'queen Esther, daughter of Aminadab' as well as the 'Jew Mordechai'⁵ authorised a letter to the Jews. This account accentuates her dualistic character, namely her 'Otherness', being the subservient spouse of Artaxerxes, and her individuality, being a Jew who associates with her ancestors. Esther's prayer shows the liminality of her character, as Stone (2018:222) observes. The 'spread-eagled posture' continues. Esther is equally Jew and Persian queen.

The hourglass chiasmus introducing and enclosing Esther's prayer represents her 'spread-eagled tortured pose'. She is depicted as a character constantly torn between irreconcilable possibilities, namely object or the 'Other' and subject, to yield to Mordechai's appeal and face death or deny the appeal and face the death of her people, as well as being Persian queen or Jew. The chiasmus reflects a constant duality and suggests a body stretched beyond what it can endure. It brings about a sense of life as fate, an unsolvable enigma. The effect on the reader or receiver relates to Pelkey's (2017:107) comment: 'We map our body memories of outstretched limbs onto the full face of the outstretched image and feel the pertinent crisis in our very bones'.

The function of Esther's prayer, the centre of the hourglass

Esther's prayer, wedged into the centre of the hourglass chiasmus, justifies consideration. The focus is not on the contents of the prayer, nor on its immediate or historical context. The effect of the semiotic 'X' on a thematical level is deliberated. The function of the prayer is better understood through a comparative visual design that incorporates the hourglass figure and its 'unstable centre'. Pelkey (2017:107) discusses an hourglass structure that closely resembles that of Esther's prayer – James Franco's poster of the film *127 Hours* Fox Searchlight (2010).

The film narrates the story of Aron Ralston, who was compelled to amputate his arm. He was trapped by a rock while canyoning. He found himself in a situation where his physical body was not able to hold up. The poster depicts his intolerable situation. Franco's poster portrays a wedged boulder located in the core of the image. Pelkey (2017:107) suggests that this image functions as a hyperbolic allusion to a grain of sand. The figure accesses the receiver's comprehension of the 'background hourglass shape as a cultural archetype of crisis and mortality, especially with

5. LXX Esther 9:29 – 'καὶ ἔγραψεν Ἐσθη ἡ βασιλίσσα θυγάτηρ Ἀμιναδαβ καὶ Μαρδοχάϊος ὁ Ἰουδαῖος ὅσα ἐποίησαν τὸ τε στερέωμα τῆς ἐπιστολῆς τῶν Φρουραί' [Queen Esther, the daughter of Aminadab and Mordechai the Jew, wrote down everything they had done and authorized the letter concerning the Purim].

reference to limited time' (Pelkey 2017:107). Because the rock symbolises a grain of sand in the hourglass, the 'human figure above is next to go'. The slogan underneath the title, 'Every second counts', reinforces this interpretation. Pelkey (2017) explains:

The blockages at the centre of [this image] suggest that the posture must be frozen; no momentary reconciliation of limbs with 'both/and'; no momentary relaxation of effort with 'neither/nor' – only contradiction, negation, and difference separated at extreme angles. The longer the posture is frozen, the more discomfort shades into torture... To make sense of [the design] body memory is apparently at work, helping us feel the end is near. The centre will not hold. (p. 107)

Esther's prayer also suggests a temporary delay in an upcoming event. When the grain of sand falls through the hourglass, Mordechai's words (4:14) are triggered: 'Who knows if you were not elected queen for a time like this?'⁶ The centre will not hold and when the grain of sand falls, action will be required, potentially resulting in torture or discomfort. The prayer in the centre slows down the action but heightens the expectation of doom. The hourglass chiasmus in Esther is a symbol of limited time and man's unavoidable mortality. The prayer wedged into the centre symbolises a grain of sand that temporarily holds the figure of Esther above. 'Every second counts', undeniably. The blockage forces the figure of Esther to give something of herself before facing forthcoming tragedy. She has to remove her garments of splendour and put on garments of 'anguish and mourning' (LXX Esther 4:17k). To face the king, she is obliged to put on her garments of splendour and her crown, which she 'abhors as a menstruous cloth' (4:17w).⁷ She must share, yet again, 'the bed of an uncircumcised and every foreigner' (4:17u)⁸ to rescue her people. To negotiate on behalf of God, Esther does what she must, even what is despicable (Stone 2018:221). Survival equals sacrifice.

The power of chiasmus explored Oppositions and contradictions transcended

As a result of using Pelkey's semiotic typology of chiasmus as a heuristic prism to deal with the chiastic structures in LXX Esther's Additions C and D, it is revealed how oppositions and contradictions can be accommodated. What did this study disclose about the function of the chiasmus figure as a 'deep structure of life experience' (Paul & Wiseman 2009:3) and by what means did it meet the expectations of being 'a dialectical tool, a process of change, a dynamic pattern, a

6. LXX Esther 4:14 – 'τίς οἶδεν εἰ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον ἐβασίλευσας' [Who knows if you were not elected to be queen for a time like this?].

7. LXX 4:17w – 'σὺ οἶδας τὴν ἀνάγκην μου ὅτι βδελύσσομαι τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ὑπερηφανίας μου ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου ἐν ἡμέραις ὀπτασίας μου βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμνήτων καὶ οὐ φορῶ αὐτὸ ἐν ἡμέραις ἡσυχίας μου' [You know that I am under pressure, I loathe/abhor the sign of my proud position on my head when I am in public. I loathe/abhor it like a menstrual cloth, and on my resting days, I do not wear it].

8. LXX Esther 4:17u – 'πάντων γινώσκων ἔχεις καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἐμίσησα δόξαν ἀνόμων καὶ βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριμιγῶτων καὶ παντὸς ἀλλοτρίου' [You know everything, you know I abhor the honours of the lawless, I abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and every foreigner].

powerful instrument for opposing dogmatism and time-honoured nonsense?' (Paul & Wiseman 2014:3, 5).

Chiasmus as a 'dialectical tool'

Chiasmus can be employed both to outline contradictions or rifts between some set of oppositions and at the same time bring these differences into dialogue (Paul & Wiseman 2014:2). The diamond-type chiasmus can 'keep apart while bringing together' which creates space for a *third term* beyond binary patterns, a provoking third space. This type of chiasmus invites the attention to the diamond's middle. The diamond-type chiasmus, introducing Esther's prayer, suggests possibility for a *third space*, a place for the God of Israel to act upon the predicament of the Jewish people and for Esther to reclaim her identity. Every so often, irreconcilable opposites present great potential.

The hourglass chiasmus introducing and enclosing Esther's prayer is shown to be symbol of Esther's 'spread-eagled tortured posture'. Her character is constantly torn between irreconcilable possibilities, a body stretched beyond what it can endure. It brings about a sense of life as fate and an unsolvable enigma. This awareness of life's opposing prospects has a cathartic effect because 'we map body memories of outstretched limbs onto the outstretched image of the hourglass chiasmus to feel crisis in our own bodies' (Pelkey 2017:108). Every so often, we must reside in irreconcilable possibilities and acknowledge it.

The prayer of Esther, wedged into the centre of the hourglass chiasmus, slows down action and heightens the expectation of doom. The hourglass chiasmus in Esther is a symbol of limited time, of man's unavoidable mortality. The prayer embodies a grain of sand that temporarily holds the figure of Esther above. However, the centre will not hold, and tragedy cannot be avoided. Every so often we must acknowledge that survival equals sacrifice.

Chiasmus as 'a process of change, a dynamic pattern'

Constant movement within the chiasmus figure inspires the perceiver to resolve incompatible opposites. The diamond-type chiasmus encourages us to keep our eyes open for an unimaginable third space. The narrative of Esther depicts the character's struggle to regain her identity. Space is created for an intervention to change the predicament of the Jews.

Hourglass chiasmi allow us to reconcile irreconcilable opposites. We become attentive to the stability, logic, relations and inevitable laws that lie beneath life's conflicts, apparent chaos and fragmentation. Awareness on its own suggests potential movement and promises change. Despite Esther's constant torment between irreconcilable possibilities, which gives the reader or receiver a sense of life as fate, the awareness of life's opposing prospects has a cathartic effect. Whenever we undergo catharsis, something new is expected to emerge.

Chiasmus as a 'powerful instrument for opposing dogmatism'

Paul (2014:10–42) suggests that the fundamental function of chiasmic modelling is to move past 'Hegelian holism', a 'synthesis between thesis and antithesis' that is likely to put an end to human uniqueness. The challenges of life cannot be met by synthesising contradictions and oppositions. The diamond-type chiasmus suggests a third space between oppositions and new possibilities. The hourglass chiasmus hints at endurance despite a 'spread-eagled tortured posture'. Chiasmus implies that the 'incomplete, the preliminary is mirrored by the preliminary within' (Hariman 2014:63).

Conclusion

By exploiting the structure and semiotic typology of chiasmus as a heuristic prism to deal with the chiasmic structures in LXX Esther's Addition C and D, it was exposed how oppositions and contradictions are transcended. Chiasmus can be employed both to outline contradictions or rifts between some set of oppositions and at the same time bring these differences into dialogue. Even though chiasmus serves aesthetic purposes, it also contributes to discursive communication.

As a 'deep structural representation of life experiences' (Paul & Wiseman 2009:3), the diamond- and hourglass-type chiasmi studied in this article revealed:

- The potential for provoking a new *third space* lies in the irreconcilability of opposites.
- There are times when we must live in irreconcilable possibilities and acknowledge them. A cathartic effect, however, can be achieved by recognising life's opposing perspectives. As a result of catharsis, something new emerges.

When chiasmic structures are understood as more than stylistic devices, endless possibilities for literary and scriptural studies are revealed. It appears that chiasmus can indeed be used for both the production and discovery of meaning, as Strecker and Taylor (eds. 2009:9) proposed.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

S.M.d.B. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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