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

As a figure constitutional of meaning within texts and schemes of thought, chiasmus plays an essential role. Taking chiasmus beyond their purely stylistic role calls for exploring their structural and meaning-defining role within texts and systems of thought. This study endeavored to investigate the chiastic 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 chiastic 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 chiasmus 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

Chiastic 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 Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατειλημμένη’ [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, 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 (Nicksburg 1981:174)
- the dynamics of sincere prayer (DeSilva 2004:122)
- the way the protagonist Queen Esther articulates her emotions (Ego 2015:83–93)
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 a \textit{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)’.\footnote{Paul (2014:23) 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.} 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 \textit{Homo sapiens’} form, that is, spread-out limbs and an extended posture creating an ‘embodied X’. The particulars of chiasmus may diverge, but a chiasmatic 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 chiastic structure engages a junction or crossing of components, whether syntactic or anatomical. Gascé (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

The chiastic 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 prayers (Van Der Walt 2008:194–206) within the whole Rhetoric Culture Project, because ‘rhetoric

- the common \textit{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 & Jordan 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)

The chiastic structure of the introductory sentence.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node (A) at (0,0) {\textsf{A \\text{καὶ \ Εσθήρ ἢ βασίλεισσα}} \\textit{And Esther, the queen}};
    \node (B) at (2,0) {\textsf{B \\katathugmen \\textit{took flight}}};
    \node (C) at (1,-1) {\textsf{έπι τὸν κύριον \\textit{to the Lord}}};
    \node (D) at (1,-2) {\textsf{έν ὑγίῳ βασιλείῳ κατευκλημένη \\textit{gripped in agony of death}}};
    \draw (A) -- (B) -- (C) -- (D) -- (A);
\end{tikzpicture}
\caption{The chiastic structure of the introductory sentence.}
\end{figure}

The prayer of Esther sandwiched between a cross structure.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\begin{tikzpicture}
    \node (A) at (0,0) {\textsf{A \\text{ἀφελμένη} \\textit{took off her garments of service}}};
    \node (B) at (2,0) {\textsf{B \\text{εὐνάδαπτο} \\textit{Put on her garments of anguish and mourning}}};
    \node (C) at (1,-1) {\textsf{B \\text{ἐλεύσατο} \\textit{Put on her garments of splendour}}};
    \node (D) at (1,-2) {\textsf{A \\text{ἐπιεβάλετο} \\textit{Put on her garments of service}}};
    \draw (A) -- (B) -- (C) -- (D) -- (A);
\end{tikzpicture}
\caption{The prayer of Esther sandwiched between a cross structure.}
\end{figure}
and culture themselves stand in chiastic relation to one another’ (Paul & Wiseman 2014:6).


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 chiasm 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 chiasm. A functional typology of chiastic 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 unconverses 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 chiasm, 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 chiasm in LXX Esther (Addition C 4:17k–z and Addition D:1), the key focus is on how the diverse types of chiasm 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chiasmus type</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Type: X</td>
<td><img src="https://example.com" alt="X" /></td>
<td>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 skating and figure-skating challenge the competitor to compete with grace and meticulousness (Pelkey 2017:42).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Type: Hourglass</td>
<td><img src="https://example.com" alt="Hourglass" /></td>
<td>The hourglass presents a disrupting figure, with a midpoint that cannot be sustained. It is denoted by an extreme and unerring ‘spread-eagle posture’. Pelkey (2017:85–111) portrays this as ‘spread-eagle torture’. Hourglass types represent a ‘tortured psyche’, whereas 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Type: Diamond</td>
<td><img src="https://example.com" alt="Diamond" /></td>
<td>A diamond transpires when two “X”-figures intermesh around an inner, rhombic shape or general base (Pelkey 2017:204).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Type: Argyle</td>
<td><img src="https://example.com" alt="Argyle" /></td>
<td>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’.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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’. 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. It may be argued that this cross structure is merely ornamental and mnemonic, as proposed by Nänny (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 interaction 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 chiasm.

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 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.

**FIGURE 3: Multiple effects of the cross structure.**

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

**Overview:** Following the introductory chiasmus (καὶ Ἑσθήρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατήφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατειλημμένη) 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’ (ἐδείτο κυρίου θεοῦ Ισραηλ καὶ εἶπεν ἐν Σούσοις καὶ Εσθηρ ἡ βασίλισσα κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατειλημμένη [LXX Esther 4:17k]). ‘Instead of valuable perfume’ (οὐχὶ τῶν ὑπερφαίνων ῥηισμάτων) [LXX Esther 4:17k]), ‘shedd her head with ashes and dung’ (πένθους τὴν κεφαλήν αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]). ‘Her humbled body extremely’ (τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἐπανένωσεν σφόδρα) [LXX Esther 4:17k]) and ‘every body part she adorned with joy’ (πένθους τῶν κόσμων ἀγαλμάτων αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]) ‘was covered by her tangled hair’ (ἐπήρεσε στρεπτῶν τριχῶν αὐτῆς [LXX Esther 4:17k]) ‘she pleaded to the Lord, the God of Israel, and said …’ (ἐξεύθετο κυρίον θεοῦ Ισραηλ 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 ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ ὡς ἐπάθησε προσευχὴν ἔξοδον 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
καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθριῶσα ἀκμῇ κάλλους αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς

She was blushing, on the highest point of her beauty, and she had a cheerful appearance, but her heart was blocked up with fear.

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 mordecai, 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 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 (4:31). 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.

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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). 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 her heart was blocked up with fear.

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 paradigms 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

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 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 (4:31). 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.

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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’ 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 interpretation of the ‘background hourglass shape as a cultural archetype of crisis and mortality, especially with 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:

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?’ 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 center 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 menstrual cloth’ (4:17w). She must share, yet again, ‘the bed of an uncircumcised and every foreigner’ (4:17u) 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

As a result of using Pelkey’s semiotic typology of chiasmus as a heuristic prism to deal with the chaotic 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
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 chiasm can ‘keep apart while bringing together’ which creates space for a third term beyond binary patterns, a provoking third space. This type of chiasm invites the attention to the diamond’s middle. The diamond-type chiasm, 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 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 chiasm 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 chiasm 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 chiastic 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 chiastic 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 chiasm 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 chiastic 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.

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