

RHETORIC AND FORMS OF DECEPTION IN THE HEBREW BIBLE:  
A COMMUNICATIVE-STRUCTURAL APPROACH

*Introduction*

Among the dynamics that biblical literary art utilizes to create narrative tension and drama in the plot, deception is certainly one of the most widespread.<sup>1</sup> In the past decades, the recurrence of narrative episodes in which deception was perpetuated by the characters has stimulated the curiosity of biblical scholars, who have devoted increasing interest to this theme.<sup>2</sup> Although most studies investigate deception in its contextual and theological significance, this essay aims to analyze deception from a communicative-structural perspective in the context of the narrative texts of the Hebrew Bible.

In this study, I will argue that the rhetorical structure in a textual section is not merely a

stylistic device in the narrative, but it contributes also to the characterization of some characters to pursue certain narrative goals. Specifically, I will analyze the textual structures in some episodes where a character performs a lie in order to deceive the listener(s).<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, an overview of the pragmatic-communicative status of the phenomenon of deception will first be presented. Secondly, we will see how research has identified in the rhetorical structures of the biblical texts a tool used to convey character traits. Next, some biblical episodes in which deception is perpetuated through a lie will be structurally analyzed. As a final step, a synthesis of the evidence gathered will be presented.

<sup>1</sup> The philosophical and linguistic debate about lying and deception is vast. Following C. Roderick and T.D. FEEHAN, *The intent to Deceive*, «Journal of Philosophy» 74 (1977), pp. 143-149, lying is not simply saying something that you believe to be false. For example, if you say “I am the Prince of England” while performing a play, you are not lying. Furthermore, according to T. CARSON, *The Definition of Lying*, «Nous» 40 (2006), p. 298 and R. SORENSEN, *Bald-Faced Lies! Lying without the Intent to Deceive*, «Pacific Philosophical Quarterly» 88 (2007), p. 256, “it’s not a lie if you believe it”. Thus, the additional condition is an intention to deceive. Nevertheless, T.R. LEVINE and S.A. MCCORNACK, *Theorizing About Deception*, «Journal of Language and Social Psychology» (2014), pp. 1-10, challenge this concept by proposing a model whereby intentionality would not be necessary for the purpose of deception. As I will explain later, in this study, I understand deception as the result of deliberate lying. On this topic and bibliography, see D. FALLIS, *Lying and Deception*, «Philosophers’ Imprint» 10/11 (2010), pp. 1-22. In the following section, I will specify the term deception in light of philosophical and pragmatic research.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars have investigated the theme of deception in the Bible from different perspectives. Deception is considered from a theological perspective in M.J. WILLIAMS, *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon*, Peter Lang, New York 2001 and P.J. WILLIAMS, *Lying Spirits Sent by God? The Case of Micaiah’s Prophecy*, in P. HELM and C.R. TRUEMAN (eds.), *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2002, pp. 58-66. Differently, D.A. NICHOLAS, *The Trickster Revisited: Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch*, Peter Lang, New York 2009; J.E. ANDERSON, *Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster? The Covenantal Framework of God’s Deception in the Theology of the Jacob Cycle*, «Perspectives in Religious Studies» 36 (2009), pp. 3-23; ID., *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and YHWH’s Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake 2011, approach the issue from the historical-religious and anthropological category of the Trickster, also present in other ancient Near Eastern texts.

<sup>3</sup> I will discuss Gen 27,6-27; 1Sam 18,15-30; 1Sam 19,11-17; Gen 34; Gios 2,4-5; 2Sam 16,3-5.

*Deception as a communicative phenomenon*

Deception and lying are widely discussed concepts from various of areas of philosophy and linguistics.<sup>4</sup> However, despite the different methodological approaches of different disciplines, most scholars agree that to deceive, one must at least say something one believes to be false.<sup>5</sup> But deceiving is not just that. Of course, an actor who claims to be a character during a play cannot be called a deceiver. So, there must be some additional condition that lies must meet. According to the standard philosophical definition, the additional condition is the *intention to deceive* the listener.<sup>6</sup>

Addressing the issue at the communicative level, one way to delineate the process of deception is to think about how deceptive messages are generated in terms of how the information that interactants possess is manipulated within the messages they produce.<sup>7</sup> This process can occur within a conversational exchange between two or more interacting elements. The one who wants to perpetuate the deception must insert his deceptive information into this interaction.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious, however, that the deceptive in-

formation must not be revealed in its status as manipulated information during the exchange. Having to do with the purposes and intentions of one (or more) of the interactants, deception is a phenomenon that has to do with communicative pragmatics.

To understand what kind of pragmatic processes are implicated during a deceptive interaction, an appropriate model is provided by Herbert Paul Grice in his studies on communicative cooperation. One of Grice's most celebrated reflections is in the insight that in inferring a meaning conveyed by a speaker, the listener is guided by certain expectations about the speaker's communicative behavior. According to Grice, the conversation is a particular collaborative activity between speaker and listener, governed by what he calls the "principle of cooperation".<sup>9</sup> According to this principle, the interlocutors, during a communicative exchange, share – even partially – a minimum purpose established at the beginning or negotiated during the exchange. This purpose is defined through four categories that Grice calls "maxims".<sup>10</sup> Following the scholar, the breaking of this shared goal produces effects on communi-

<sup>4</sup> The topic of deception has been widely discussed by philosophers who have dealt with moral issues. More recently, theoretical approaches such as those proposed by P. FAULKNER, *What is Wrong With Lying?* «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research» 75 (2007), pp. 535-557, and J. KACKEY, *Learning From Words*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, the topic has attracted the interest of those concerned with the philosophy of law. For an overview see FALLIS, *Lying and Deception*, cit., pp. 1-22. Differently, J. MEIBAUER, *Lying at the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface*, De Gruyter Mouton, Boston-Berlin 2014, proposes a linguistic analysis of lying and deception.

<sup>5</sup> Most of those who have defined a deceptive action require that a liar believe that what they are saying is false. For discussion and bibliography, see R.M. RODERICK and T.D. FEEHAN, *The Intent to Deceive*, «The Journal of Philosophy» 74/3 (1977), pp. 143-159; J. MAHON, *The Definition of Lying and Deception*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lying-definition>, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> There is broad scholarly consensus on this condition. See S. BOK, *Lying*, Random House, New York 1978; J. KUPFER, *The Moral Presumption*

*Against Lying*, «Review of Metaphysics» 36 (1982), pp. 103-126; B. WILLIAMS, *Truth and Truthfulness*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2002; M. DEYNEL, *Intention to Deceive, Bald Faces Lies, and Deceptive Implicature*, «Intercultural Pragmatics» 12/3 (2015), pp. 309-332. Nevertheless, some scholars challenge this assumption. See e.g., T.R. LEVINE and S.A. MCCORNACK, *Theorizing About Deception*, «Journal of Language and Social Psychology» (2014), pp. 1-10.

<sup>7</sup> For a critical overview of the information manipulation theory, see S.A. MCCORNACK, *Information Manipulation Theory*, «Communication Monographs» 59/1 (1992), pp. 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> LEVINE and MCCORNACK, *Theorizing About Deception*, cit., pp. 1-10.

<sup>9</sup> See P. GRICE, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London 1989, pp. 24-26.

<sup>10</sup> Following GRICE, *Studies in the Way of Words*, cit., pp. 27-31, these 'maxims' are called Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. For a critical discussion on this topic, see S. CHAPMAN, *Paul Grice, Philosopher and Linguist*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005, pp. 88-90. See also, C. BIANCHI, *Implicating*, in M. SBISÀ and K. TURNER (eds.), *Prag-*

cation.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, the scholar points out that every conversation presupposes that both parties involved respecting a tacit agreement on the veracity of the information exchanged.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, a misleading message violates the principle of cooperation between those who interact. Of course, not all false messages violate cooperation: Grice also postulates intentionality as a necessary requirement for deception.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there can be no deception if the speaker conveys false information despite having good intentions. By communicating what he believes to be true, the speaker is not deceiving his interlocutor.<sup>14</sup> To take one example, in the episode of Jacob's escape from Laban, Jacob is not deceiving his father-in-law when he claims that the idols of the are not in his tents (Gen 31:32). He, as the narrator reminds us, "did not know that Rachel had stolen them" (v. 32) and, therefore, is stating what he believes to be true.

However, not all willful violations are for the purpose of deception. A manipulation of information may also be performed to create an ironic effect. What creates a distinction between a violation for the purpose of deception and a violation for ironic purposes is the secrecy of the intentionality.<sup>15</sup> While an ironic violation becomes ironic only as the listener becomes aware of the manipulation of reality, the deceiver will

try to keep his manipulation hidden from his interlocutor.

To sum up, deceptive messages function deceptively because they covertly violate the cooperative principles that govern conversational exchanges. A lie is such when the one who utters it does so with the specific intention of deceiving his or her listener. Moreover, deception, to be such, must be operated in secret. Therefore, in order to investigate from a structural point of view the episodes of deception within biblical prose, the narrative dynamics will have to indicate the presence of these characteristics.

### Structure as characterization device

In the past decades, research has emphasized the importance that the structural organization of texts held in ancient literature.<sup>16</sup> Particular attention was given to symmetrically reversed structures<sup>17</sup> that, as scholars points out, are among the most common device for building ancient texts.<sup>18</sup> Among this kind of structures, since the work of Jebb, Boys, and Forbes, and thanks to Lund's systematization, the rhetorical device of chiasmus has been investigated by biblical scholars, especially in connection with the school of rhetorical criticism.<sup>19</sup> Although several

*matic of Speech Action*, De Gruyter, Boston 2013, pp. 107-142.

<sup>11</sup> GRICE, *Studies in the Way of Words*, cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>12</sup> This assumption involves the maxim of Quality. This principle assumes that during a communicative exchange, the speaker contributes information to the discussions that he or she believes to be true. Specifically, Grice formulates this category by basing it on two assumptions: (a) do not say what you believe to be false, and (b) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. See GRICE, *Studies in the Way of Words*, cit., pp. 27-31.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> On this point, see D. WILSON, *Is there a maxim of truthfulness?*, «UCL Working Papers in Linguistics» 7 (1995), pp. 197-212; D. WILSON and D. SPERBER, *Truthfulness and relevance*, «Mind» 111 (2002), pp. 583-632; Z. LIVNAT, *Quantity, truthfulness and ironic effect*, «Language Science» 33/2 (2011), pp. 305-315.

<sup>15</sup> On the relationship between Grice's categories, deception, and irony, see M. DYNEL, *Compar-*

*ing and Combining Covert and Overt Untruthfulness. On Lying, Deception, Irony and Metaphor*, «Pragmatic & Cognition» 23/1 (2016), pp. 174-208.

<sup>16</sup> In this regard, the contributions contained in J. GRETHLEIN and A. RENGAKOS (eds.), *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature. Vol. 4*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2009, explore structural approaches to ancient texts.

<sup>17</sup> In this context, clarification of terminology is necessary. Following J.T. WALSH, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 2001, pp. 13-15, both "concentric" (e.g. ABCB<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup>) and "chiastic" (e.g. ABB<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup>) constitute two varieties of a structural construction characterized by reversed symmetry.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview see J. WELCH, *Chiasmus in antiquity: structures, analyses, exegesis*, Gerstenberg, Hildesheim 1981.

<sup>19</sup> In N.W. LUND, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1942, the author begins with the idea of tracing the influence of the Hebrew literary tradition on the New Testament

explanations have been offered as to why ancient authors arranged material in chiasmic form, the answer considered most comprehensive by research is that this particular arrangement of elements is useful in focusing the reader's attention at the center of the textual unit.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, textual structures, including chiasmus, become a communicative tool capable of establishing a bridge between the author and the user of the text. Through this bridge, authors build their readers, cooperating and directing them to themes, sections, or terms that he considers central to the narrative.<sup>21</sup> Exploiting an awareness of this connection, which builds cooperation through textual structure, biblical authors also use structures as a means of conveying elements of a character's characterization. As E. Assis states: "Awareness of the reader's response led biblical authors to employ chiasmus to reflect the inner world of a character".<sup>22</sup> In particular, Assis, who conducts his study on chiasmic structures in biblical narratives, argues that this kind of structure can be applied in those cases where

the author wanted to present the character's actions or speech as premeditated and deliberate. Thus, in these situations, the text was built around the center, where the characters' deliberate action was placed.<sup>23</sup>

Used in this sense, Assis's study is significant because it shows how the textual structure of a narrative unit can be a vehicle for precise elements that contribute, along with other narratological criteria, to a character's characterization.<sup>24</sup>

This specific use of rhetorical structures can be taken as a starting point for analysing the structural forms of the communicative phenomenon of deception in biblical accounts. In the following pages, I will show how chiasmatically organized concentric structures (e.g., ABCB<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup>) can be used by the authors of the narratives not only as a stylistic model but also as a literary device indicating deception. Such a device can be useful in helping to trace a characterization of the characters involved in the scene.

text. In his study, Lund discusses symmetrical inverted, chiasmic, and concentric form extensively. Incorporating the work of J. JEBB, *Sacred Literature*, T. CADELL and W. DAVIES, London 1820, T. BOYS, *Tactica Sacra. An Attempt to Develop, and to Exhibit to Eye by Tabular Arrangements a General Rule of Composition Prevailing in the Holy Scriptures*, T. HAMILTON, London 1824, and J. FORBES, *The Symmetrical Structure of Scripture, or the Principles of Scripture Parallelism Exemplified in an Analysis of the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and Other Passages of the Sacred Writings*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1854, on prose and poetry, Lund considers reversed symmetry a typical form of textual elaboration of the Hebrew literature and the Jewish thought. a renewed interest in analysing the forms and textual structures of the biblical text began with Meynet's studies that emphasized the specificities of semitic and biblical rhetorical forms. For a comprehensive bibliography on Biblical Rhetorical Criticism, see D.F. WATSON and A.J. HAUSTER, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography With Note on History & Method*, Brill, Leiden 1994; For the main analyses of R. MEYNET see, *Rhetorical analysis: an introduction to biblical rhetoric*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1998; Id., *Treatise on biblical rhetoric*, Brill, Leiden 2012.

<sup>20</sup> To explain the phenomenon of chiasmus, JEBB *Sacred Literature*, cit., p. 60 proposed considering

liturgical usage. LUND, *The Presence of Chiasmus in Old Testament*, cit., p. 112, on the other hand, proposed that such a structured text would promote memorization. T.W. MANSON, *Review of Lund, Chiasmus*, «Journal of Theological Studies» 45 (1944), pp. 81-84, argues that the chiasmic structure responds only to an aesthetic need. For an overview and bibliography of chiasmus as a rhetorical structure that focuses the reader's attention, see WALSH, *Style and Structure*, cit., pp. 7-31.

<sup>21</sup> On reading as a cooperative act between author and reader, see the excellent U. ECO, *Lector in Fabula*, Bompiani, Milano 1979, pp. 27-84.

<sup>22</sup> E. ASSIS, *Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization*, «Proof texts» 22/3 (2002), pp. 273-304. For an application of Assis' structural theory to the Gen 19 episode, see, in this volume, A. SURIANO, *Why Have you Deceived? Lot's Daughters in Gen 19*.

<sup>23</sup> Through a long series of textual examples, ASSIS, *Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative*, cit., pp. 275-304 concludes that "the chiasmic structure gives an impression of carefully contemplated planning and thus is meant to illustrate the character or his discourse in such a manner".

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of the narratological criteria for characterization, see MIEKE BAL, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2017, pp. 104-124.



Before proceeding with the analysis, it is worth noting two aspects. The first concerns the structures. The organization of the structures is not fixed but can vary depending on the criteria used to divide the text. In the narrative units, I will present below, the structures are based on the repetition of significant roots within the sections that make up the narrative unit. The second aspect to highlight is related to the literary use of structures as a tool for characterization. Although in this study I to show how the internal rhetorical organization of a text is a useful device for characterization, structural argumentation is not exhaustive in the analysis of a character but is to be combined with other narratological and critical tools. In other words, the presence of a chiasmically organized concentric structure in a speech is not enough to label the character as a liar. The literary analysis must always be conducted through the methodologies of criticism. However, alongside these methodologies, structural analysis can constitute one aspect.

### *Jacob's deception and Isaac's blessing (Gen 27,6-27)*

The episode in Gen 27, which recounts the blessing of Jacob by his old father Isaac, consists of an excellently articulated textual unit. Already von Rad recognized in this story a precise structural composition:

Das dramatische Geschehen ist in Szenen aufgeteilt, die deutlich voneinander abgegrenzt sind, so daß das Ganze klar aufgebaut ist und jeder störenden Undurchsichtigkeit ermangelt. 1. Jakob und Esau V. 1-5, 2. Rebekka und Jakob V. 6-17, 3. Isaak und Jakob V. 18-29, 4. Isaak und Esau V. 30-40, 5. Abschluß und Überleitung zu den folgenden Ereignissen V. 41-45.<sup>25</sup>

It is noteworthy that the entire narrative section, which, according to von Rad's division, concerns the scenes involving Rebecca and Jacob and Isaac and Jacob (vv. 6-27), is organized in a concentric manner, on the basis of repeated elements:<sup>26</sup>

A	<p>6 Rebecca said to her son Jacob, «Behold, I heard your father say to your brother Esau:</p> <p>7 “Bring me some wild game (ציד) and make me a meal, and I will eat it (ואכלה), and then I will bless you (ואברככה) in the presence of the Lord before I die”.</p> <p>8 Now, my son (בני), listen to what I command you.</p> <p>9 Go now to the flock and get me from there two fine young goats; I will prepare a dish for your father, according to his taste.</p> <p>10 So you will take it to your father, who will eat of it, that he may bless you (יברכך) before he dies».</p>
B	<p>11 Jacob said to Rebekah, his mother, «You know very well that my brother Esau (עשו אחי) is a hairy man (איש שער) while I am a smooth man.</p> <p>12 Maybe my father will touch me and see that I am making fun of him, and I will draw a curse on myself and not a blessing (ברכה)».</p> <p>13 And his mother said to him, «On me is your curse, my son! You obey me and go and get me the young goats».</p> <p>14 And he went and fetched them and brought them to his mother. And he made his mother tasty dishes as his father liked them.</p>
C	<p>15 And took Rebekah the clothes most of Esau (עשו) her elder son, which were in the house by her, and put them on Jacob (יעקב) her younger son;</p> <p>16 With the skins of young goats she covered his arms (ידי) and the smooth part of his neck.</p> <p>17 Then she put into her son Jacob's hand (ביד יעקב) the dish and the bread which she had prepared</p>

<sup>25</sup> G. VON RAD, *Das erste Buch Mose (Genesis)*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1972, p. 222.

<sup>26</sup> The structures that will be analyzed are mainly based on the presence of repetitions in the corresponding sub-units into which the narrative will be divided. In theory, repetition can involve any element, from phonemes to large, thematically co-

herent units. Nevertheless, it is more common in Biblical Hebrew prose to find repeated roots, word pairs, and whole phrases to appear as structuring elements. Moreover, repetition can occur on any text level, from the smallest sound patterns to a large thematic units. See WALSH, *Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative*, cit., pp. 8-10.

<b>D</b>	18 So he came to his father (אֶל־אָבִיו) and said, «My father» (אָבִי). He answered, «Here I am; who are you, my son? (בְּנִי)».
<b>E</b>	19 <i>Jacob answered his father, «I am Esau, your firstborn son. I have done as you commanded me. Go, sit down and eat my wild game, that you may bless me».</i>
<b>D<sup>1</sup></b>	20 Isaac said to his son (אֶל־בְּנֹו), «How quickly you found it, my son! (בְּנִי)» He answered, «The Lord your God made it come before me».
<b>C<sup>1</sup></b>	21 But Isaac said to him, «Come near and let me touch you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau (עֵשָׂו) or not». 22 Jacob (יַעֲקֹב) approached Isaac his father, who touched him and said, «The voice is Jacob's voice, but the arms are Esau's arms (וְהַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו)».
<b>B<sup>1</sup></b>	23 And he did not recognize him, for his arms were hairy (שַׁעֲרָת) like the arms of his brother Esau (עֵשָׂו אָחִיו), and he blessed him (וַיְבָרֲכֵהוּ).
<b>A<sup>1</sup></b>	24 He said to him, «Are you my son Esau?» He answered, «I am». 25 Then he said, «Serve me, that I may eat of my son's wild game (מִצִּיד), and bless you (תְּבָרֲכֶנּוּ)». He served him and he ate (וַיֹּאכַל), and he brought him wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, «Come near and kiss me, my son! (בְּנִי)». 27 He approached him and kissed him. Isaac inhaled the smell of his clothes and blessed him.

The episode in Gen 27 masterfully stages a deception carried out by Jacob towards his father Isaac, who was now blind. As noted through the structure, the text is constructed in parallel sub-sections that revolve around Jacob's false statement (v. 19). By placing deception at the center of the narrative, the text emphasizes this aspect. The structure here characterizes Jacob's deceptive action as a well-planned one. The author has constructed the action in a neat, clean form to characterize it as a well-planned action. The concentric structure expresses the idea that

Jacob's action is entirely voluntary, rather than the result of his mother manipulation.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, using this kind of structure, the text guides the reader to characterize the patriarch as a deceiver.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Saul, David and Deception (1Sam 18,15-30)*

In vv. 15-30 of 1Sam 18, we usher in a new phase in the relationship between Saul and David marked primarily by resentment and hostility.

<sup>27</sup> Some scholars strongly condemned Rebecca's role in Gen 27. For example, A.S. HERBERT, *Genesis*, SCM Press, London 1969, p. 69, states: "Jacob's fraudulent acquisition of the Blessing... is one of the most unpleasant stories of the book of Genesis... Again, the conduct of Rebekah was such as to arouse the most vigorous condemnation in ancient Israel. For not only did she instigate this deception; she was, by her conduct, acting against her husband and so destroying the unity of the family". These positions have been strongly criticized by feminist exegesis. For an overview, see O.H. PROUSER, *The Truth About Women and Lying*, «JSOT» 61 (1994), pp. 15-28. That Jacob has the precise and planned will to deceive is already underlined by C. WESTERMANN, *Genesis 12-36. A Commentary*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis 1981 p. 438 that states: "Jacob's objection is directed not against his

mother's plan as such but only against its feasibility; rather it implies consent. The narrator thereby perplexes his listeners by saying that Jacob does not object to the deception; he goes along with it. Rebekah does not deal with Jacob's objection but shows him her own firm determination and readiness to incur any risk, even the curse of her husband. The objection is thus met, and nothing remains but for Jacob to carry out the commission".

<sup>28</sup> Based on narratological criteria, scholars have pointed out that the character of Jacob is repeatedly characterized as a deceiver and that, in some ways, he can be associated with the historical-religious category of the Trickster. Cf. ANDERSON, *Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster*, cit., pp. 3-23; ID., *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: a Theology of Deception and YHWH's Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*, Penn State Press,

ity between the two.<sup>29</sup> Envy and fear of David's success lead the king to use his daughters to try to eliminate what is now in the king's eyes a pos-

sible competitor to the throne. The structure of the text is organized in a concentric manner based on words and roots repetition:

<b>A</b>	15 And when Saul saw that he had great success (משכיל מאד), he stood in fearful awe of him (יגיר מפניו). 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David (כל־ישראל ויהודה אהב את דוד), for he went out and came in before them.
<b>B</b>	17 Then Saul (שאול) said to David, "Here is my elder daughter (בתי) Merab. I will give her to you for a wife (אתה אתן לך לאשה) . Only be valiant for me and fight the LORD's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."
<b>C</b>	18 And David said to Saul, «Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king (כי אהיה חתן למלך)?» 19 But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.
<b>D</b>	20 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him (וישר הדבר בעיניו).
<b>E</b>	21a Saul thought, «Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him (ותהי בו יד פלשתים)».
<b>F</b>	21b Therefore Saul said to David (דוד) a second time, «You shall now be my son-in-law (תתחתן בי)». 22a And Saul commanded his servants (ויצו שאול את־עבדו), «Speak to David (דוד) in private and say:
<b>G</b>	22b "Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law".
<b>F<sup>1</sup></b>	23 And Saul's servants spoke (וידברו עבדי שאול) those words in the ears of David (דוד). And David said, «Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law (להתחתן במלך), since I am a poor man and have no reputation?».
<b>E<sup>1</sup></b>	24 And the servants of Saul told him, «Thus and so did David speak». 25 Then Saul said, «Thus shall you say to David, "The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies"». Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines (ביד־פלשתים).
<b>D<sup>1</sup></b>	26 And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well (וישר הדבר בעיני דוד) to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired,
<b>C<sup>1</sup></b>	27a David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law (להתחתן במלך).
<b>B<sup>1</sup></b>	27b And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife (יתן לו שאול את מיכל בתו לאשה).
<b>A<sup>1</sup></b>	28 But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, 29 Saul was even more afraid of David (ויאסף שאול לרא מפני דוד עוד). So Saul was David's enemy continually. 30 Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success (שכל דוד) than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

Philadelphia 2011; Y. ZAKOVITCH, "He should cheat me twice? He took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing!": Jacob the Deceiver", in *Jacob*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2012, pp. 28-45.

<sup>29</sup> See B. GREEN, *How Are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1Samuel*, Sheffield University Press, Sheffield, 2003, p. 302.

With the aim of eliminating David he involves his servants and daughters in an action that drives David into a trap. For the trap to succeed, however, the king must deceive David. Just before it was said that the king would promise his daughter in marriage to the one who defeated Goliath (cf. 1Sam 17:25), now Saul adds a new clause. David will face a dangerous mission.<sup>30</sup> The deception is to make David believe that the king and all his servants love him and have confidence in his abilities. In reality, it is quite the opposite. The structure indicates Saul's precise machination and characterizes the character with a characteristic that will accompany him for the rest of his life: hostility with David.

*Michal's deception and David's escape (1Sam 19,11-17)*

In the chapter following Saul's deception of David, the roles are reversed. this time it is Saul who is deceived. The passage narrated in 1Sam 19,11-17 constitutes a well-defined scene within the narrative unit of chapter 19.<sup>31</sup> The scene focuses on Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife. After having helped David to escape Saul's ambushes, in vv. 11-17, a scene with both comic and tragic traits takes place. Michal in fact, in an attempt to hide her husband's escape from her father's envoys, puts some domestic idols in his place in her bed. The scene is organized by the author following the concentric structure:

<b>A</b>	11 Saul (שָׁאֹל) sent messengers to David's house to watch over him and kill him the next morning. Michal (מִיכָל), his wife, warned David, saying, «If you do not save your life tonight, you will be killed (מוֹמֶת) tomorrow». 12 Michal lowered David through the window, and he ran off and saved (וַיִּמָּלֵט) himself.
<b>B</b>	13 Michal then took the terafim (הַתְּרָפִים) and placed them on the bed (אֶל־הַמֶּטֶה). He put a cloth of goat's hair (כִּבְרִי־הָעִזִּים) on the side of the head (מִרְאשְׁתּוֹ) and covered them with a blanket.
<b>C</b>	14a Saul therefore sent messengers to take David (וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׁאֹל מַלְאָכִים לִקְחַת אֶת־דָּוִד)
<b>D</b>	14b and she said, «He is sick».
<b>C<sup>1</sup></b>	15a Saul sent messengers to see David (וַיִּשְׁלַח שָׁאֹל אֶת־הַמַּלְאָכִים לִרְאוֹת אֶת־דָּוִד), saying
<b>B<sup>1</sup></b>	15b «Bring him here to me in the bed (בַּמֶּטֶה), that I may make him die» 16 The messengers returned, and behold, on the bed were the terafim (הַתְּרָפִים) and the goat's hair cloth on the side of the head (וּכְבִּיר־הָעִזִּים מִרְאשְׁתּוֹ).
<b>A<sup>1</sup></b>	17 Saul (שָׁאֹל) said to Michal (מִיכָל), «Why have you deceived me in this way and allowed my enemy to save himself (וַיִּמָּלֵט)?» Michal answered Saul, «He said to me, “Let me go, or I will kill you (אֲמִיתֶךָ)”».

Also in this scene, as in the previous one, it is a father who is deceived by one of his sons. This narrative occurs at a time when Saul is already in his downward phase. Read in context, the scene is highly dramatic: Michal, whose love for David had been exploited by Saul for his

own political purposes,<sup>32</sup> through her deception plunges Saul further and further into tragedy.<sup>33</sup> Deception is placed at the center of the structure to emphasize the solitude in which the king rediscovers himself. The structure indicates Michal's absolute intentionality to deceive his father, and

<sup>30</sup> It seems remarkable to me that the same strategy will be used by David to eliminate another “competitor”, Uriah (cf. 2Sam 11,14-17).

<sup>31</sup> That 1Sam 19:11-17 constitutes a textual sub-unit with clear boundaries within the framework of chapter 19 is confirmed by several commentators. See H.W. HERTZBERG, *I libri di Samuele*, Paideia,

Brescia 2003, pp. 204-205; K. BODNER, *1Samuel. A Narrative Commentary*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield 2009, pp. 205-208; M. GARGIULO, *1Samuele. Introduzione, traduzione e commento*, San Paolo, Milano 2016, p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. 1Sam 18:20-21.

<sup>33</sup> The tragic character of Saul's story has long



deception, placed at the center of the structure, becomes a means of characterizing the character of Saul now abandoned even by his family. By emphasizing through structure Michal's willingness to deceive her father, the text also underscores the distance now between daughter and father. This distance will be a narrative step towards the loneliness and abandonment that will also characterize this character's story.<sup>34</sup>

### *The rape of Dina and the revenge of Simeon and Levi (Gen 34)*

The entire episode of Gen 34, which narrates the rape of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, is organized in a concentric form. This structure is constructed primarily on the basis of thematic correspondence between mirrored subsections – although repetitions and lexical correspondences are also present – and can be schematized as follows:

A/A<sup>1</sup>: The sin of Shechem and the vengeance of Simeon and Levi;<sup>35</sup>

B/B<sup>1</sup>: The negotiation of Camor;<sup>36</sup>

C: Simeon and Levi's Deception.<sup>37</sup>

been emphasized by scholars. See for example, D.M. GUNN, *The fate of King Saul: an interpretation of a biblical story*, Sheffield University Press, Sheffield 1980; J.C. EXUM, *Tragedy and biblical narrative: arrows of the Almighty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996; S. NICHOLSON, *Three faces of Saul: an intertextual approach to biblical tragedy*, Sheffield University Press, Sheffield 2002.

<sup>34</sup> On this topic see E. WHITE, *Michal the Misin-terpreted*, «JSOT» 31/4 (2007), pp. 451-464.

<sup>35</sup> Sub-section A (vv. 1-7), which describes Shechem's violence toward Dina, is thematically connected to section A<sup>1</sup> (vv. 25-31), which describes the brothers' revenge for the violence, but can also be defined based on lexical repetition: Cf. דִּינָה and יַעֲקֹב v. 1/v. 25; שָׁכֵם בֶּן-חָמוֹר v. 2/ v. 26; שָׁדָה v. 5/ v. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Both section B (v. 8-12) and B<sup>1</sup> (v. 18-23) describe a scene in which Camor is engaged in a negotiation. Scene B describes Camor attempting a negotiation with Jacob so that Dinah may be given in marriage to Shechem, his son. Scene B<sup>1</sup> sees Camor engaged in explanations to the men of his city. Here

The narrative begins with Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, who leaves the family house and protection to "see the girls of the country" (v.1). The narrative continues with Shechem, a Canaanite prince, who after raping Dinah (v. 3) falls in love with her and asks Jacob to marry her (v. 6). Informed of the event, Dinah's brothers decide to devise revenge. The strategy is simple. Through deception, they convince the entire population of Shechem to circumcise themselves as a precondition for marriage (v. 13-17). Taking advantage of the weakness of the entire circumcised people, the brothers – now revealed to be Simeon and Levi – attack the village of Shechem, leaving no male survivors (v. 25). Already von Rad notes that the word "deceive" (מִרְמָה), used in v. 13 by the narrator, is odd since patriarchal narratives are extremely poor in moral judgments about men's actions and words.<sup>38</sup> Also, this is the same term connected to Jacob's action in stealing the blessing (cf. Gen 27,25). By placing the brothers' deception at the center of the text's structure, the author characterizes their revenge as highly premeditated and, consequently, characterizes the two characters as conscious deceivers.<sup>39</sup> The premeditation of their violence makes their actions particularly brutal. This brutality will be remembered at the moment when Jacob pronounces his blessings.<sup>40</sup>

too lexical structural correspondences between the two mirror sections can be identified: cf. וְאֵתָנוּ תִּשְׁבֹּר v. 10/v. 21;

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. vv. 13-17.

<sup>38</sup> See G. VON RAD, *Das erste Buch Mose*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1972, p. 271. "Der Satz, daß die Brüder „mit Arglist" gesprochen hätten, fällt als ein moralisches Urteil auf, denn die meisten Vätererzählungen üben in der Bewertung menschlicher Worte oder Handlungen eine äußerste Zurückhaltung (der V.13 ist wegen seiner stilistischen Unebenheit schon lange aufgefallen; doch ist kein Grund, den Ausdruck „in Arglist" für einen Zusatz zu halten).

<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, some commentators do not see in the brothers' deception and in the narrator's statement in v. 13 a moral problem nor a premeditation of the brothers in their revenge. Cf., for example, N.M. SARNA, *Genesis*, The Jewish Publication Society, New York-Jerusalem 1989, pp. 235-238.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gen 49,5-7.

*Rahab's words to the men of the City (Jos 2,4-5)*

The examples given up to this point have shown how the author places deception at the center of his structure in order to emphasize its voluntariness and to characterize through it the characters involved in the story.

The next examples will show how this structural technique can also be used with regard to single speeches within a story.

The following example reports the words of the prostitute Rahab in Jos 2,4-5:

A	4 «True, the men (האנשים) came to me, but I did not know where (ולא ידעתי מאין) they were from.
B	5a <i>And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out.</i>
A <sup>1</sup>	5b I do not know where (לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֲנִה) the men (האנשים) went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them».

Rahab's words are interesting from two perspectives. First, through the structure, the author emphasizes how the deception towards the men of Jericho is not dictated by fear or panic but, on the contrary, is the result of a conscious choice by Rahab.<sup>41</sup> The second, is that the character's characterization as deceptive through the concentric structure, is not in itself an indication of negative behavior. It is precisely through the voluntariness of the gesture that Rahab acknowledges the sovereignty of the god of Israel, lying to his fellow citizens and thus allowing the spies to save themselves.<sup>42</sup>

*The deception of Siba, servant of Mephibosheth (2Sam 16,3-5)*

A further example of how the concentric structure for identifying deception also works at the micro-structural level, involving a single speech, are the words of Ziba, servant of Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul, in 2Sam 16,3-5.

The exchange between David and Ziba is organized as follows:

A	3a And the king said (ויאמר המלך), "And where is your master's son (בן-אדניך)?" Ziba said (ויאמר ציבא) to the king
B	3b «Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, "Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father"».
A <sup>1</sup>	4 Then the king (ויאמר המלך) said to Ziba, "Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours." And Ziba said (ויאמר ציבא), "I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord (אדני) the king".

The organization of the text suggests that, to David's question, Ziba responds with a deliberate lie. Ziba's answer, cleverly placed in the center of the structure, characterizes the servant as a liar who acts deceitfully for his own personal gain. This example is interesting as it reveals a mechanism for this type of structure.

The concentric structure informs the reader of a possible deception on the part of the character who is speaking but – obviously – does not create this inferential mechanism in the characters narrated within the story. As is clear from v. 4, David believes Ziba's claim to be true, handing over all of Mephibosheth's possessions to him.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This aspect is pointed out also in D.M. GUNN, *Judges*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden 2005, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> See E. ASSIS, *The Choice to Serve God and Assist His People: Rahab and Yael*, «Biblica» 85/1

(2004), pp. 82-90.

<sup>43</sup> See R. ALTER, *The David Story. A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York-London 1999, p. 291.

However, when David returns to Jerusalem after the death of Absalom (2Sam 19,26-31), he will encounter Mephibosheth, who will reveal that Ziba had lied. In this way, the reader's intuition are confirmed. The structure with Ziba's deception at its center thus creates an intuitive mechanism in the reader and leads him to wonder why, in a case like this, David acted in such a reckless manner.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Ziba's deception, which connects the author and the reader through a structure-based inferential mechanism, serves as a device to characterize David. In fact, a case like that of 2Sam 16 is covered by the law: a single witness is not enough to condemn someone (Deut 19,15) and the reader – who thanks to the structure can suspect Ziba's bad intentions – wonders why David does not decide to scrupulously examine the case (Ex 23,1-3; Deut 1,17).<sup>45</sup>

### Conclusion

The texts provided an overview of how concentric structure in a character's speech can be used as a structural device that highlights the

presence of intentional deception within a narrative.

The organization of the text in this form gives the impression of deliberate planning of deception and therefore reveals an aspect of the character's characterization. Concentric structure can be a phenomenon that acts at several levels, both macro-structural and micro-structural: an entire text (Gen 34), a single scene (1Sam 16), or a single speech (2Sam 16:3-5).

Furthermore, belief in acting deceptively can serve to negatively characterize characters (Simeon and Levi) but, depending on the specific dynamics of the plot, can also be indicative of a detail that is not necessarily pejorative (Rahab).

As a final note, it can be emphasized that this study is clearly not intended to create a thematic association between concentric structure and falsehood but rather to illustrate an additional use of this kind of structure within biblical narratives. The attempt is to illustrate how within biblical narratives, structures are not simply stylistic accessories but elements to be considered in a more comprehensive literary analysis.

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### SUMMARY

The purpose of the article is to investigate the phenomenon of deception in some biblical narratives from a structural point of view. As several studies have shown, the arrangement of the constituent elements of a story has a central value in the construction of biblical narratives. In this sense, the narrative form becomes an invaluable aid for interpreting a text. In addition to being a stylistic device able to focus the reader's attention on a precise point of the story, the structure can become a means of characterization of the characters to be placed side by side with the other narratological tools to a more complete analysis of the characters. Thus, the goal of this study is to provide an additional tool of literary analysis useful in defining the distinctive features of biblical characters.

**KEYWORDS:** Deception; Hebrew Bible; Structure; Biblical Rhetoric.

<sup>44</sup> On this point see C. BALZARETTI, *1-2 Samuele*, Paoline, Milano 2020, p. 497.

<sup>45</sup> As in the ancient Near East, in ancient Israel, the king had to ensure the proper course of justice by issuing just sentences. On this topic and for crit-

ical bibliography, see the recent J. COLLINS, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, in J. COLLINS, *What Are Biblical Values?*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2019, pp. 171-188.

