

GENESIS 15: A NON-GENETIC APPROACH

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Ever since M. Noth's famous note 85 of his *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*⁽¹⁾ wherein he declared that notwithstanding the presence of different strata "gehören daher beide Szenen literarisch zusammen und können nicht voneinander getrennt werden," the unity of Gen 15 has remained a matter of controversy.⁽²⁾ On the one hand we encounter scholars who sustain the substantial unity of the two halves of the chapter: vv. 1–6. 7–21. J. Hoftijzer does not consider as possible "Eine Scheidung des Kapitels in zwei selbständige Teile",⁽³⁾ and passes on to refute the various arguments advanced in favour of such division. L.A. Snijders follows Hoftijzer in reading Gen 15 as a unity; he bases his thesis upon the text's "logical coherence": "This account... has been presented to us as a coherent and connected whole. One can understand why promises about a son, posterity and the land are bound together. The subject shows essential connection".⁽⁴⁾ N. Lohfink distinguishes not between the two 'traditional' parts of the periscope, but between "einem einziger literarischen (Oder vorliterarischen) Schöpfungsakt entstammender Haupttext" consisting of vv. 1–2. 4–12. 17–21 and "zwei Zusätze, ein den Text erklärender in 15,3, und ein den Inhalt interpretierenden in 15, 13–16".⁽⁵⁾ J. Van Seters stresses that Gen 15 is organically one unit notwithstanding the multiplicity of genres employed. These literary genres "are drawn from the royal court, the cult, prophetic narrative conventions, and legal spheres. Yet in spite of this variety there is no reason form-critically why any particular verse should be separated from the basic account and considered as secondary or why there should be a general source division into more than one source".⁽⁶⁾

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1. (Stuttgart 1948) 29.
2. Cfr. E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984) 377.
3. *Die Verheissungen an die drei Erzväter* (Leiden 1956) 17.
4. "Genesis XV. The Covenant with Abraham", *OTS* 12 (1958) 265.
5. *Die Landverheissung als Eid* (SBS 28; Stuttgart 1967) 40. Read also Blum's discussion on these presumed additions, *Komposition*, 377-381.
6. *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven/London 1975) 260.

There follows a brief presentation of the text's structure as reconstructed by Westermann and Lohfink.⁽⁷⁾ Van Seters concludes that "The balanced structuring of the whole as well as of the two parts and the interconnections between the two are such that they could not have resulted from a series of fortuitous additions and reworkings. The plan of the whole chapter is far too deliberate for that".⁽⁸⁾

On the other hand we meet scholars who posit separate origins for the two halves of Gen 15; methodologically this requires the discussion of the two parts as different units. O. Kaiser considers as a sure result of literary criticism to date "das die beiden Abschnitte vv. 1-6 und vv. 7-21 nicht ursprünglich zusammengehörten"⁽⁹⁾, and attempts to trace back the history of the traditions that have crystallized into the present text. Basically Kaiser identifies one original tradition that concerned the establishment of a covenant with Abraham; this tradition has by time flowered into a narrative that now stands beneath vv. 7-21. It was only later that vv. 1-6 were written as an introduction and as literary context to this original narrative.

C. Westermann states that in Gen 15 "zwei zentrale Verheissungserzählungen zusammengestellt worden sind, die die in späteren Zeit entscheidend wichtigen Verheissungen zum Gegenstand haben."⁽¹⁰⁾ These basic promises developed into two narratives which a redactor artificially combined simply by altering the introduction of one (that coincides with vv. 7-21) in the sense that one narrative seems to be a continuation of the other. "Diese Änderung kann aber an der Tatsache nichts ändern, dass es sich um zwei Verheissungserzählungen von annähernd gleichen Aufbau . . . handelt, deren eine die Mehrungs -, deren andere die Landverheissung zum Gegenstand hat".⁽¹¹⁾ In his 1964 essay Westermann has treated the two sections of our chapter separately. Gen 15, 1-6, 18 classified with the "Familien-geschichten"⁽¹²⁾ but is discussed with those texts that carry the "Verheissung des Sohnes mit Mehrungsverheissung".⁽¹³⁾ We have here a "sekundäre Kombination" of the two promises and one may ask if behind our text there stood a narrative in which the two promises existed separately. "Man könnte fragen, ob sich hinter der jetzigen, sicher späten Fassung von 15, 1-6 eine ältere Erzählung erschliessen lässt, deren Grundelemente Abrahams Klage (in erzählter Form) und Gottes Verheissung eines Sohnes waren".⁽¹⁴⁾ Gen 15, 7-21 is discussed together with texts which treat the

7. *Abraham*, 260-261. Cfr. C. Westermann, "Arten der Erzählung in der Genesis", *Forschung am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien* (Munich 1964) 22; Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 45-49.

8. *Abraham*, 261.

9. "Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung von Genesis 15", *ZAW* 70 (1958) 109.

10. *Genesis* (BKAT s/2; Düsseldorf 1981) 255.

11. *ibid.*

12. "Arten", 61.

13. "Arten", 19-24.

14. "Arten", 24.

“Landverheissung allein”.⁽¹⁵⁾ Here again he posits a long history of tradition: “Man kann dann annehmen, das hinter Gen 15, 7–21 eine alte Erzählung von der Verheissung des Landes steht, die aber stark verändert und stark überarbeitet wurde.”⁽¹⁶⁾

Westermann’s hypothesis, further elaborated by Lohfink,⁽¹⁷⁾ that behind our text there stands an ancient narrative tradition about *Yhwh*’s theophany and promise to Abraham, has been strongly contested by Van Seters.⁽¹⁸⁾ Westermann’s influence on subsequent scholarship, however, has been decisive. Notwithstanding the formal structure said to run through the “Haupttext” verse 6 does constitute for Lohfink “den Abschluss des ersten Teils, in dem sich der Erzähler etwas Abstand begibt und zusammenschaut”.⁽¹⁹⁾ To wit “von der Formalstruktur her ist V.6 das Bindeglied zwischen den beiden Hälften Abrams Glaubens zur Gerechtigkeit, die nicht nur im Geiste Gottes zu denken ist, sondern sich als ein Tun Gottes zeigen muss, verwirklicht sich in der Konkretisierung der anfänglichen Lohnverheissung als Landverheissung – und das ist der Inhalt der zweiten Hälfte”.⁽²⁰⁾ For all his emphasis on the organic unity of Gen 15 Van Seters too considers verse 6 as a “most appropriate conclusion, form-critically, to a unit that contains a salvation oracle and lament.”⁽²¹⁾ Another form-critic whose “form-critical analysis of OT narrative calls. . . for evaluation of the narrative for itself. . .”⁽²²⁾ is G.W. Coats who describes Gen 15 as an isolated unit composed entirely of speeches. These speeches are moreover “arranged in a rather loose order. Nevertheless, one can recognise two segments of speeches that hang together, each as a dialogue between Yahweh and Abram. The two segments develop parallel lines and, though embracing quite diverse traditions, qualify as complements.”⁽²³⁾ Concerning verse 6, Coats writes that it stands as a conclusion: Abram now accepts the sign and the promise(s) given by *Yhwh* (vv. 1–5). In other words Gen 15 is not discussed as a unit but as a conglomeration of promise speeches that somehow combine two traditions, originally independent into a single crux.

These approaches to Gen 15 are all diachronical, that is, they attempt to understand the present text by reconstructing its prehistory. The interpretative dynamics are similar whether the starting point is presumed to be one basic tradition that grew through successive re-interpretations and elaborations (Kaiser) or several traditions that flowered into narratives that

15. “Arten”, 27-34.

16. “Arten”, 29.

17. *Landverheissung*, chs 6 and 7.

18. *Abraham*, 261-263.

19. *Landverheissung*, 46.

20. *Landverheissung*, 46-47.

21. *Abraham*, 256.

22. *Genesis. With an Introduction to Narrative Literature. The Forms of OT Literature*, 1 (Michigan 1983) 3.

23. *Genesis*, 123.

became the basis for the present text (Westermann), or still several traditions that offered material to the one writer responsible for Gen 15 in its actual form (Van Seters). These diachronical approaches constantly introduce a caesura between vv. 1–6 and 7–21. This caesura is at times considered to be substantial in the sense that the two parts constitute separate materials of tradition artificially put together; at other times it is taken as simply structural, that is, the two halves of the chapter are said to constitute sub-units of the same unity.⁽²⁴⁾

Is it possible to arrive at an evaluation of Gen 15 for its narrative qualities and for its message without resorting to its prehistory? In other words, is a synchronic rather than a diachronic approach to this chapter viable? The present author believes that a positive answer to this query may be given. Yet before passing out to review how our text is functioning, two important clarifications are due: the first concerns the relationship of the individual(s) responsible for the definitive form of the text to the material of tradition he/they received; the second touches the problem of the wider context of our pericope, a context which it somehow echoes and influences.

Some Methodological Considerations

Two basic intuitions of Hermann Gunkel into the nature of biblical narrative seem to have greatly influenced subsequent research on Gen 15. The first takes the form of a principle of literary interpretation: "... jede Einzelsage zuerst immer aus sich zu erklären. Je selbständiger eine Erzählung ist je sicheren ist sie in alte Form erhalten"⁽²⁵⁾; consequently critics must start with the identification of these small individual units. "From this point of view the combination of stories would appear always to be a misguided enterprise – a botching of a smaller perfection in an attempt to create a larger literary unit."⁽²⁶⁾ This principle led scholarship to study Gen

24. We have not mentioned here the approach of source criticism. J. Wellhausen considered the two halves of Gen 15 as two autonomous texts; he attributed one text to J and the other to E. Cfr. *Die Composition des Hexateuch und der historischen Bücher des AT* (Berlin⁴ 1963) 21-22. H. Cazelles, "Connexions et structure de Gen XV", *RB* 69 (1962) 321-349 does not accept the division of the text in two parts; but he posits the presence of two sources, J, which in our text he calls "texte de posterité" and E, which he describes as 'texte guerrier'. These two sources were put together with minor touches here and there "par un théologien proche au Deutéronome mais non deuteronomiste" (325). This approach of source criticism entered a cul-de-sac when attribution of the text to separate sources become difficult in detail. "The chapter shows unmistakable signs of composition but the analysis is beset with peculiar and perhaps insurmountable difficulties", J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC: Edinburgh 1910) 276. "Umstritten und fraglich ist das Zugehören von v.1–6 und 7-21 zu Joder E. . Die Zurechnung von v.1-6 oder eines aus Einzelversen zusammengesetzten Stranges aus 15, 1-21 zu E ist in der Vorsehung fast völlig aufgegeben; sie ist auf jeden Fall "äusserst fraglich", Westermann, *Genesis*, 256.

25. *Genesis* (HKAT 11; Göttingen 1901) XXI. Cfr. W. McKane, *Studies in the Patriarchal Narratives* (Edinburgh 1979) 27-28.

26. McKane, *Studies*, 28 Cfr. also pp. 37-41. "Der 'Zusammenhang' aber der zwischenden einzelnen Sagen besteht, ist in vielen Fällen späterer Herkunft, wenn nicht einfach eine Illusion der Exegeten", Gunkel, *Genesis*, XXI.

15 in sheer isolation from the present literary context even though lately some tribute has been paid to the connections of our pericope with Gen 14.⁽²⁷⁾ The contacts of Gen 15 with the rest of the Abraham narrative was considered to be secondary and recent redaction-history-wise; one should never forget the tendency among modern scholars to posit a late datation for the pericope as a whole.⁽²⁸⁾

The second intuition of Gunkel which seems to have influenced modern scholarship is that in the development of characterization, action has priority over speech. "Dringt man aber weiter in diese Sagen ein, so erkennt man, das diese eigentümliche Kargheit im Reden in dem Stil der Erzähler begründet ist. Die Erzähler haben Alles der Handlung untergeordnet. Sie haben solche Reden nicht aufgenommen, die die Handlung selbst nicht weiter fördern."⁽²⁹⁾ This led to a depreciation of the narrative form employed in Gen 15. Lohfink's description of this form has been adopted by subsequent works: "So werden wir es hier nicht mit einer ursprünglichen Erzählung im strengen Sinn, sondern mit einer *nachgeahmten Erzählung* zu tun haben".⁽³⁰⁾ The supposition stands that this text "composed entirely of speeches. . . . arranged in a rather loose order,"⁽³¹⁾ constitutes an inferior product from the point of view of narrative art; this may explain how this chapter was hardly appreciated for its expressive qualities.

Literary criticism, understood as the study of literature for literature's sake⁽³²⁾ puts into the limelight three factors:

(a) A biblical text may have had a long form-tradition redactional history behind its current form; yet in its present shape it has its own narrative dynamics and is conceived of by the last narrator/redactor as a unity. These narrative dynamics cannot be ignored, while the concept of literary unity that subsists beneath the text has to be discovered perhaps even at the expense of having to suspend our own way of conceiving this unity. "The composite texts of the Bible sometimes confront us with discontinuities, duplications and contradictions which cannot be so readily accommodated to our own assumptions about literary unity. What I should like to propose here is that the biblical writers and redactors . . . had certain notions of unity rather different from our own, and that the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence. The biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patch-work

27. Cfr. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 84-86; Coats, *Genesis*, 123.

28. Cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 256; Blum, *Komposition*, 367-383.

29. *Genesis*, XXX. Cfr. McKane, *Studies*, 35-36.

30. *Landverheissung*, 33. Cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 255-256; Coats, *Genesis*, 123-125.

31. Coats, *Genesis*, 123.

32. Cfr. D. Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Philadelphia 1977) 1-15; K.R.R. Gros Louis, "Some methodological Considerations" *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, II (Nashville 1982) 11-24 for this approach.

that scholarship has often found to displace such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be purposeful pattern."⁽³³⁾

A synchronic approach to a biblical narrative may offer a different explanation to what source criticism used to identify as proofs of separate sources and strata. "There are gaps, inconsistencies, retelling and changes in vocabulary in biblical narrative, but these can be viewed as part of a literary technique and are not necessarily signs of different source."⁽³⁴⁾ One may concede that behind Gen 15 there subsists various promise traditions (Lohfink) and that we have here the amalgamation of two narratives (Westermann); yet the text as it stands has clearly been conceived as a unity. The formulation of verse 7 proves this; this verse introduces a new theme but not a new unit.⁽³⁵⁾

(b) Far from accepting Gunkel's statement that the connections between the various individual narratives are secondary and hence dispensable for an understanding of the narratives themselves, if not "einfach eine Illusion der Exegeten,"⁽³⁶⁾ we consider the present literary context as essential for the proper understanding of the single narratives.

What is probably happening in modern scholarship is that the concept of "biblical narrative" is changing. By 'biblical narrative' we no longer mean Gunkel's "Einzelerszählung" but wider unities made up of a series of stories one may term 'episodes'⁽³⁷⁾ that must be read together in order to grasp the complexity of the human reality they purport to describe. "Old Testament stories are all rather short, especially when compared with narratives in other literatures. Most of them can be read by themselves, with a little background information remembered from the context. In other words, long and complex chains of events are presented in loose sequences of independent, rather than in long, closely knit narratives consisting of interconnected episodes. Each story is about a single main event. . . ."⁽³⁸⁾ The

33. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York 1981) 133.

34. A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield 1983) 121. "The whole thrust of source criticism is toward the fragmenting of the narrative into sources, while at the same time it ignores the rhetorical and poetic features which bind the narrative together." 121 "Synchronic poetics of biblical narrative can have a bearing on the historical criticism of biblical narrative; at the very least it can prevent historical-criticism from mistaking as proof of earlier sources those features which can be better explained as compositional or rhetorical features of the present text." (112).

35. Verse 7 "cannot be regarded on the literary level as an entirely new beginning, because both the subject and indirect object of the opening verb have their antecedents in the previous unit", Van Seters, *Abraham*, 257. Westermann understands that here a slight change into the original text has been artificially introduced by a redactor in order to transform two "Verheissungserzählungen" into one "Erzählzusammenhang" *Genesis*, 255.

36. *Genesis*, XXI.

37. As O.L. Petersen chooses to label Gen 12, 10-20; 20, 1-18 and 26, 6-11 in "A thrice-Told-Tale: Genre, Theme and Motif" *BR* 8 (1973) 34.

38. J. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem 1978) 27-28. "What Licht means by 'independent stories' is not what form critics mean. Licht means that biblical narrative is composed of short, discrete parts, each roughly equivalent to a major episode, and that this discreteness of parts is characteristic of biblical narrative", Berlin, *Poetics*, 125.

important point to underline here is that while the individual stories of these “loose sequences” are rather autonomous where their internal narrative dynamics are concerned they depend upon their context for complete significance. “To give an analogy, the stories in the Bible are like the frames from which films are made. Each one exists separately, and they are combined in a certain order to make the greater narrative, but an individual frame has no life of its own outside the film as a whole”.⁽³⁹⁾ Consequently it is not enough to study the narrative dynamics of the single episode to grasp its richness; one must read it as part of a larger whole which is its literary context, conceived of at least by the final narrator/redactor as a unity. To neglect this literary context is to neglect an essential factor for exegesis.

In a comment over E. Auerbach’s analysis of Gen 22, 1 – 19,⁽⁴⁰⁾ Gros Louis laments that “Auerbach, who is so concerned with the context of the Eurycleia-Odysseus episode and who contrasts the Homeric style with the Old Testament style by drawing examples from other scenes in the Odyssey (and indeed from a few scenes in *The Iliad*) says so little about the narrative context of the Abraham and Isaac story. Auerbach does not deal with the entire narrative; his discussion concerns what happens from the moment of God’s commands to the time of Abraham’s arrival at the appointed place of sacrifice.”⁽⁴¹⁾ In leaving out this literary context Auerbach risked to advance “certain interpretations of the narrative that have no textual justification”⁽⁴²⁾; Gros Louis quotes Auerbach’s assertions about Abraham’s “bitterness” on receiving God’s command as a nuance which cannot be read in the text. And what holds for Gen 22 may be said to apply to Gen 15.

This episode presupposes at least three elements mentioned in the Abraham episodes that precede Gen 15: (i). It takes for granted childlessness a basic problem for Abraham. One should note how in the sketchy presentation of the principal characters at the opening of the Abraham narrative (11,27 – 31) enormous emphasis is put on Sarah’s infertility: *watt’hi saray aqārāh ʔēn lāh wālād* (v.30); this contrasts sharply with *Yhwh*’s initial communication to Abraham, characterized by the promise of increase and by the root BRK (12, 1 – 3). The text says nothing explicitly about how the couple coped with this existential problem; however, there are two interesting details that may throw some light on this hushed aspect: if we compare the two lists of persons and property items “taken” by Terah (11, 31) and Abraham (12, 5) respectively we notice that Lot appears ahead of Saray in that of the former and after Saray in that of the latter. This may indicate the degree of relatedness and importance Lot and Saray enjoyed

39. Berlin, *Poetics*, 125.

40. *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der Abendländischen Literatur* (Bern 1946).

41. “Abraham II”, *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives II* (Nashville 1982) 73.

42. Ibid. O. Eissfeldt has long written that the single episodes have to be read as parts of a larger unit; but it seems that he identifies this wider context with the sources that may have been used during the slow reduction process that gave birth to the text. Cfr. “Die kleinste Literarische Einheit in den Erzählungsbüchern des Alten Testament.” *TB* 6(1927) 333-337.

with the leaders of the caravans.⁽⁴³⁾ If Saray was that close to Abraham her infertility must have been a burden to him as well. Incidentally, we read in Gen 16, 1 that Saray, Abraham's wife, *lō' yalēdāh lō*. We can understand then how Abraham's first explicit speech to *Yhwh* consists of a 'lament'⁽⁴⁴⁾ about having no natural heir: *hēn lī lō' nātattāh zara'* (15, 3). This outburst of insatisfaction has not come from naught. It points back to antecedents.

(ii) The text assumes that *Yhwh* has already promised Abraham a son. As a matter of fact in the preceding episodes *Yhwh* promises the patriarch to make him a great nation (12, 2), to make him a 'blessing' of universal significance (12, 35), to give 'this land' *l'zar'ākā* (12,7; 13,15) and to increase his *zera'* exceedingly (13, 16). In other words, even though *Yhwh* has never explicitly promised a son to the patriarch, Abraham could have understood that his becoming a nation involved physical fatherhood. Under the pressure of difficult circumstances this fatherhood has now become dire need: one should note how in the reiteration of his promise of a natural son to inherit Abraham *Yhwh* underlines the physicality of his son's sonhood: *kī'im' āšer yešē' mimme' ekā* (v. 4).

(iii) There is then the land promise made to Abraham to *Yhwh*. This theme is present within the Abraham narrative from the very beginning. *Yhwh*'s first communication to the patriarch (12, 1–3) opens with his command to leave his whereabouts and to travel *'el hā' areš' āšer' arekā* (12, 1). The second intervention of *Yhwh* (12, 7) helps to identify this unqualified destination with 'this land' which is promised to Abraham's *zara'*. The patriarch remains "emotionally uninvolved" with this promise, maybe because the land was still occupied (12, 6); this explains his departure from the 'land of the promise' as the first difficulty crops up (12,10–13,1).⁽⁴⁵⁾ On his return from Egypt Abraham receives the promised land as addressed to himself as well: *kī'et kol hā' areš' āšer' āttah rō'eh l'kā' etnennah* (13,15. cfr v. 17). This tied him to the land: he settled in Hebron (13, 18) where we meet him in the next episode (14, 13). Gen 14 informs us also that the patriarch started building relationships with the local community (v.13). In Gen 15, 7 *Yhwh* does not promise Abraham to give him 'this land', but expresses his original plan of giving it as an inheritance.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In the remaining verses of this second half of the chapter (vv. 8–17) *Yhwh* swears solemnly that this plan will be carried through; he also explains the modality and the

43. Cfr. the comments of U. Cassuto on 11, 31 in *A Commentary on the Books of Genesis*, 11, *From Noah to Abraham (Genesis VI, 9-XI, 32)* (Jerusalem 1964) 277-279.

44. Cfr. Westermann, "Arten" 22-23; *Genesis*, 259-261; Van Seters, *Abraham*, 255. Coats, *Genesis*, 124 reads verse 2 as a "request for surety or a sign related to the promise," while verse 3 he interpretes as 'complaint'.

45. Read the comments on Abraham in Gen 12 by P.O. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative* (Philadelphia 1983) 11-46.

46. Gen 15, 7 is usually labelled by form critics and historians of tradition as a formulation of a promise. But R. Rendtorff has marked the difference in formulation between this verse and others which carry the nuance of promise. Cfr. *Das Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (Berlin/New York 1977) 43. 63-64.

'timing' of Abraham's descendants' taking the land in possession (vv. 13–16).

One may interpret this material diachronically, of course, in the sense that Gen 15 constitutes a chronologically more recent reflection, mostly in dialogue form, which is based upon earlier written material of tradition as found in Gen 12–13 (14). But the other (synchronic) explanation is not to be excluded: that the author/narrator composed Gen 12–15 together using as source written and/or oral elements of tradition which he moulds into a coherent literary creation. This literary entity is made up of a series of apparently loose episodes which play particular roles in the economy of the unity as a whole. The possibility of the synchronic explanation illuminates the several indirect contacts of Gen 15 with the preceding episodes of the Abraham narrative.

(c) On approaching the present text of Gen 15 in its actual wider context synchronically, one cannot escape the question about the extensive use of dialogue and direct speech in this episode. "In any given narrative event, and especially, at the beginning of any new story, the point at which dialogue first emerges, will be worthy of special attention, and in most instances, the initial words spoken by a personage will be revelatory, perhaps more in manner than in matter, constituting an important moment in the exposition of character".⁽⁴⁷⁾ It is of some interest to note that here we have the first real dialogue between *Yhwh* and Abraham and that this rather prolonged dialogue happens after a series of episodes where (i) Abraham speaks to other human characters like Saray, Lot and the king of Sodom; in his speeches⁽⁴⁸⁾ Abraham expresses important ideas which throw light on the action being narrated;

(ii) *Yhwh* regularly intervenes to communicate to Abraham particular messages which will have a bearing on the events: during the settlement of *Terah's* clan in Haran *Yhwh* enters into communication (*wayyōmer Yhwh ʔel ʔabrām*) with Abraham to urge his departure from this environment and his emigration *ʔel-hāʔāreš ʔāšer ʔarʔekā* (12, 1). *Yhwh* intervenes again when Abraham arrives *ʔad meqōmšekem* (12, 7) and promises to give 'this land' as a gift to the patriarch's descendants; this information serves to identify the destination of Abraham's journey from Haran.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Abraham's subsequent movements occur mostly within Canaan. Then comes the patriarch's sojourn in Egypt: we are told of a *Yhwh's* intervention *ʔal dʔbar saray ʔešet ʔabrām* (12, 17), but it seems that the Divinity does not address his protégé in Egypt. Back in Canaan (13, 1–2) Abraham receives a new message from *Yhwh*, this time inviting him to travel the land through and through (that

47. Alter, *Art*, 74.

48. Only Gen 14, 21–23 may qualify as 'dialogue'. "Direct speech is a common vehicle for conveying a character's point of view", Berlin, *Poetics*, 72.

49. Cfr. E. Ruprecht, "Vorgegebene Tradition und Theologische Gestaltung in Gen XII 1–3" *VT* 29 (1929) 179.

is, to settle down) as God intends to give the land as a gift to himself (**kā*) and to his numerous progeny in the future (13, 14–17). Thereupon Abraham moves from the Bethel area and settles “among the Oaks of Mamre” (13, 8).

In Gen 15 we do not find a simple communication of God expressing his intentions about Abraham and his future, but also demands from Abraham for explanation (vv. 2.8) and bitter statements about *Yhwh*'s past promises (v.3).⁽⁵⁰⁾ Why has the narrator resorted to dialogue to express “the changing relationship between Abraham and God”,⁽⁵¹⁾ supposing this is the theme of the Abraham narrative as a whole (Gen 12–25)? One has probably to study this Abraham narrative in its entirety to be able to grasp the motivation for the use of dialogue here. One should note, however, that the episodes that precede that of Gen 15 ignore completely the time factor. We find in them no explicit chronological annotations. Yet one gets the impression that for the narrator the time continuum must have been of considerable length. We are not told how long it took Abraham to decide to go (*wayyelek*: 12,4) to the land to be shown by *Yhwh*, how long his journey was in terms of time; one may presume that if the expression *hālōk wēnāšōa*^c “to journey by stages”⁽⁵²⁾ indicates Abraham's normal way of travelling, his journey from Hanan to the neighbourhood of Shechem (12, 5–6) must have been rather long.

Again we are not told how long do Abraham and his caravan stay in Canaan before *wayhî raʿab būʿares* (12,10); but if one accepts U. Cassuto's reading of the clause *ûlʿ ʾabrām hêtîb* as a natural increase of livestock owing also to favourable conditions⁽⁵³⁾ one may consider Abraham's sojourn in Egypt to be rather of long duration. On their return to the Bethel area some time must elapse before Abraham's household splits because the land proves to be inadequate to feed their flocks (13, 6). The narrator informs us that Lot chooses the Jordan Valley for settlement, settles (*yšb*) among the cities of the valley, but moves his tents up to Sodom (13, 12). When we meet him next Lot *yōšeb bisdōm* (14, 12).

Even though the narrator refrains from reporting explicitly the time element involved, the details he drops here and there hint that the lapse

50. Cfr. G. von Rod's comments on vv. 2-3 in *Das Erste Buch Mose, Genesis* (ATD 2-4; Göttingen 1972) 142.

51. K.R.R. Gros Louis, “Abraham I”, *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, II (Nashville 1982) 59.

52. S.R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London 1913) 148. Cfr. *La Bible de Jerusalem; La Bibbia* (Nuovissima Versione dai Testi Originali) (Edizione Paoline; Rome 1983) ad hoc.

53. Gen 12,16 is usually interpreted as referring to Pharaoh's favours to Abraham in view of Sarah. The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible translates *ûlʿ ʾabrām hêtîb ba ʾābûrāh* as “He treated Abraham well because of her.” Cfr. R. Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge 1979) 24. Cassuto instead viewed *hêtîb* as referring to the natural increase of Abraham's cattle possessions which would require this sojourn in Egypt to last for some time, cfr *Genesis II*, 355.

between *Yhwh*'s initial call and promises (12, 1–4) and Abraham's situation in Gen 15 has been considerable. This would justify the narrator's choice of dialogue to explain *Yhwh*'s and Abraham's perspective concerning their mutual relationship.

A Synchronic Approach

In this section of the essay we shall first identify those elements of structuralization which would allow an understanding into the organization of the text as a whole. We shall then move to examine in particular how the various parts interweave into one whole.

(A) Elements of Structuralization

(i) *A bridge-phrase.* Gen 15 opens with the formula *ʾahar hadd*ḅārîm hāʾelleh* (v.1a) that serves as a "quite indefinite temporal connection"⁽⁵⁴⁾ between this episode and the previous ones of the Abraham narrative. This formula not only introduces the section under study,⁽⁵⁵⁾ but marks its boundary as an episode⁽⁵⁶⁾ and builds the literary context for the episode itself⁽⁵⁷⁾ by linking it both to the immediate episode that precedes it (Gen 14)⁽⁵⁸⁾ as well as to all that has been told so far of the Abraham narrative.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The formula "after these events" is structurally relevant, therefore, because it indicates the beginning of a new episode, gives the episode a loosely determined time setting,⁽⁶⁰⁾ and hints that we should read the on-coming unit in the light of Abraham's experiences narrated so far.

54. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 253.

55. C. Conroy, *Absalom Absalom!* (AnBib 81; Rome 1978) 42. The author includes 15,1 among instances where the formula introduces *pericopes*; he adds that the formula(s) may "serve as transitions to new episodes within pericopes." This note is important for a synchronic approach which sees Gen 15 as an episode within the larger 'pericope' which is the Abraham narrative as a whole.

56. Cfr. D.W. Baker "Diversity and Unity in the Literary Structure of Genesis" in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (eds A.R. Millard and D.J. Wiseman) (Leicester 1980) 192.

57. Coats, *Genesis*, 123.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Commenting on the use of the formula in Gen 37-50 Westermann writes: "Das jetzt zu Erzählende soll an das vorher Erzählte anschliessen. Aber es markiert nie die Einfache Fortsetzung, sondern überbrückt immer einen Abstand zum Vorhergehenden, besonders deutlich Gen 40,1. Im Abrahamkreis (Gen 15, 1; 22, 1; 22,20) setzt die Formel schon eine zusammenhängende Abrahamerzählung voraus", *Genesis*, 257. The same scholar traced its origin to the redactional activity involved. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 253, cautions against an unqualified labelling of the formula as redactional or editorial: "To describe it as 'editorial' maybe a little misleading if this suggests that it does not belong to the author of what follows. But it is certainly the mark of written prose style of an extended prose work."

60. From what we have said about Gen 12-14 it seems that this loosely determined time factor reflects the narrator's manner of narrating.

(ii) *Quotation Formulas*.^(60a) Another characteristic feature of this episode is the rather elevated number of quotation formulas. One should note:

(a) How they are concentrated mostly in the first nine verses of the chapter; there are only two other instances of formulas introducing speech after verse nine: in verse 13 and perhaps in verse 18.

(b) Their variety in formulation; they range from the simple *wayyō³mer* of verse 5, the subject and indirect object of which have to be gleaned from the context, to the solemn *hayah dēbar Yhwh el abram bamahazeh lē mor* (v.1) and again to the explicative *le mor* of verse 18 which combines the technical phrase *karat bērit* to the direct speech in verse 18b meant to convey the contents of this *bērit*.⁽⁶¹⁾

(c) The alternation of subject of the verbs of saying in the formulas; there are here two who speak, talk to each other. We have in this episode dialogue not a communication of a message. This dialogue takes place within the first nine verses which carry no report of change of location, time or personages. These nine verses, therefore, are to be considered as depicting *one* dialogue scene.

(d) In only two cases for the two personages, *Yhwh* and Abraham, is the subject explicitly indicated; we meet these cases in the initial stages of the dialogue, and in all of them there seems to exist an element of the impersonal. We do not read at the scene's opening that *Yhwh* spoke to Abraham but that "the word of *Yhwh* came to Abram".⁽⁶²⁾ Likewise, although we know from the context who the addressee is, we are told simply twice *wayyō³mer ʾabrām* (vv.2.3) which may also be translated "And Abram thought"⁽⁶³⁾ as if the whole experience to be narrated is essentially internal and spiritual.⁽⁶⁴⁾ In the other instances it is the context which guides us to identify the speakers. In verse 5 we read that after promising Abraham a natural son to inherit him *wayyōšē³ōtō hahûsāh wayyō³mer* to look towards heaven and count the stars if he could. There follows a second *wayyō³mer* without specifications as regards speaker and addressee. But from the contents of the speech we can deduce that it is

60a. For a discussion on the hypothesis that in the Pentateuch divine speech formulas are used according to a symmetrical pattern, cfr. C.J. Labuschagne "The pattern of the divine speech formulas in the Pentateuch" *VT* 32 (1982) 268-296; "Additional Remarks on the Pattern of the Divine Speech Formulas in the Pentateuch" *VT* 34 (1984) 91-95; P.R. Davies and D.M. Gunn, "Pentateuchal Patterns. An Examination of C.J. Labuschagne's theory." *VT* 34 (1984) 399-406; C.J. Labuschagne, "Pentateuchal Patterns: A Reply to P.R. Davies and D.M. Gunn" *VT* 34 (1984) 407-413.

61. Westermann, *Genesis*, 272.

62. According to scholarship this formula is the terminus technicus for the report of divine speech to prophets. Cfr. Kaiser "Traditionsgeschichtliche", 110; Van Seters, Abraham, 253; Westermann, *Genesis*, 25-7; Coats, *Genesis*, 124. Readers should have noted that for the sake of simplicity we have preferred to use in this essay the full name *ʾabrāham* even though in Gen 15 the patriarch's name is still *ʾabrām*.

63. Cfr. Alter, *Art*, 67-68.

64. Cfr. B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora. Genesis* (Berlin 1934) 392.

Yhwh who promises Abraham a progeny as numerous as the stars. In the same manner addresser and interlocutor of *wayyōmer ʿēlāw* in verse 7 may be identified only from the contents of the speech itself: *ʾānī Yhwh ʾāšer hōšē ʾtikā mē ʾūr kaśdīm*. Abraham's reaction to *Yhwh*'s declaration of intention in leading Abraham to 'this land' follows immediately: *wayyōmar adonay Yhwh* (v.8). In verse 9 *Yhwh* answers Abraham's plea for a sign⁽⁶⁵⁾ and gives him instructions about a rite. In verse 13 the subject is again not specified; but as the only speaking characters in the episode are *Yhwh* and Abraham we can easily deduce who the subject of *wayyōmer ʿēlāw* which introduces a prophecy about Abraham and his progeny (vv. 13 – 16) could be. The gerundial *le mor* of verse 18 can hardly be described as a quotation formula since it only introduces the narrator's interpretation of the rite just performed by *Yhwh* (v. 17) as a *bʿrīt* the contents of which are given in vv. 18 – 21.

(iii) *Narration Sections*. Since this episode consists essentially of speeches, the few elements of narration, visible at its structure's surface, must be of extreme importance for an evaluation of the episode itself. The truth of this statement comes out clearly from the functions of narration that is woven around dialogue: to carry the narrator's point of view⁽⁶⁶⁾ and to convey actions deemed essential to the unfolding of the plot "which could not be easily or adequately indicated in dialogue."⁽⁶⁷⁾ We may classify these narration elements into (a) quotation formulas; (b) interpretative sections; (c) pure narration of facts.

We have seen how quotation formulas are concentrated in the first part of the episode. One may detect the narrator's perspective in the choice of some of the formulas and the variations in their formulation. On linking the present episode with the previous ones through the indefinite *ʾahar haddēbārīm hā ʿēlleh*, the narrator opens the unit with a solemn formula of quotation said to belong to the prophetic milieu:⁽⁶⁸⁾ *hāyāh dēbar Yhwh ʿel ʾabrām bamaḥāzeh le ʾmōr*. The formula qualifies the ensuing dialogue as a dream; but this dialogue is experienced by Abraham as a particular event (*hāyāh*). The exceptional character of this experience is underlined by the solemnity of the formula which is rarely adoperated in the pentateuch as a whole.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Yhwh's intervention which opens the dialogue is succeeded by two laments of Abraham, both introduced by the formula *wayyōmer ʾabrām* (vv. 2 – 3), in the first Abraham comments on *Yhwh*'s assurance of *sēkārkā harbēh mē ʾōd*; in the second he complains for *Yhwh*'s failure to provide him

65. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 258.

66. Berlin, *Poetics*, 64.

67. Alter, *Art*, 76-77.

68. Kaiser, "Traditionsgeschichtlich", 110; Cazelles, "Connexions", 325; Van Seters, *Abraham*, 253; Westermann, *Genesis*, 257-258.

69. Coats, *Genesis*, 124.

with *zara^c*. The addressee is not mentioned in the formula itself; but we can easily understand that it is *Yhwh* from what Abraham says. *Yhwh*'s answer to Abraham's provocative complaint is introduced by the same formula of the beginning but with two significant variations: the phrase ²*el ʾabrām* of verse 1 logically becomes ²*elāw* in verse 4 as by now we know who *Yhwh*'s interlocutor is. This change functions as a cohesive element. Another variation concerns the replacement in verse 4 of the verbal form *hāyāh* of verse 1 by the particle *w^ehinneh*. This particle often carries the nuance of surprise and astonishment when it is preceded by verbs of perception;⁽⁷⁰⁾ it is often used, even without the verb of perception, to indicate a shift in point of view.⁽⁷¹⁾ This *w^ehinneh* in verse 4, which contains basically the same formula as verse 1, seems to mark the narrator's reaction of astonishment and marvel that *Yhwh* should answer Abraham's lament at all. The basis for this reaction may have been the narrator's own experience of divine transcendence which would not tolerate Abraham's daring criticism of *Yhwh*'s behaviour.⁽⁷²⁾

The next speech of *Yhwh* follows the report of an action: *wayyôṣēʾōtō hahūṣah* presumably of the tent in order to look at the starlit sky. According to Van Seters⁽⁷³⁾ *Yhwh*'s "bringing someone out" belongs to the category of visionary experience so that verse 5 recalls verse 1. It is evident that "this first dramatic element of the chapter" (Van Seters) is auxiliary to *Yhwh*'s second speech about the numberlessness of the stars of heaven (v. 5a), as it is clear that the simile of the stars points to the climax of God's intervention in v.5b where he declares to Abraham: *kōh yihyeh zar^c ʾākā*. One should notice how this climax is separated from *Yhwh*'s second speech about the stars by the quotation formula *wayyō²mer lô*; here we have an example of the use of quotation formula being used for dramatic emphasis.⁽⁷⁴⁾ One presumes that as *Yhwh* utters his speech and indicates the stars Abraham meditates in silence on his future fulfilment as a large community.

The narrator avails himself of this silent meditation to wedge in his own comment on Abraham's internal reaction to *Yhwh*'s promises: *w^ehe² ʾemin bāYhwh*. One should notice the grammatical inversion⁽⁷⁵⁾ to signal the interruption of the narrative flow, as well as the hapax form of the verb *w^ehe² ʾemin* to spotlight the extraordinary character of what is happening in

70. Cfr. Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Uses of *w^ehinneh* in Biblical Hebrew", *Bib* 61 (1980) 332-333.

71. Berlin, *Poetics*, 62.

72. Contra Westermann, *Genesis*, 262, who reads this *w^ehinnēh* simply as a formal element to balance the *hēn-hinnēh* of verse 3.

73. *Abraham*, 256.

74. "A strictly logical choice of formula would prescribe the use of the longer and more explicit variations at the beginning of dialogues and wherever misunderstanding is to be avoided. The actual choices made by the storytellers are quite independent of this logic; aesthetic considerations of time manipulation and dramatic emphasis are the determining factor", Licht, *Storytelling*, 104.

75. Cfr. Lohfink, *Landverherrschung*, 33.

Abraham's spirit: "Now Abraham believed *Yhwh*".⁽⁷⁶⁾ But the omniscient narrator is informed too of how *Yhwh* considers this trust on the part of the patriarch: *wayyaḥs̄behā lō šdāqāh* (v.6b). *Yhwh* looks favourably on Abraham's putting his trust in God's promises.

This comment by the narrator should not be judged as the conclusion to which the dialogue between *Yhwh* and Abraham has been leading⁽⁷⁷⁾ for in that case another grammatical form (*wayyiqtol*) would have probably been used.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Instead we have here an aside intervention of the narrator who attempts to lead us into Abraham's life of the spirit since after all he is narrating a spiritual experience presented as a vision.⁽⁷⁹⁾ The narrative role of this comment, expressive of the narrator's perspective, determined the grammatical form of *w^ehe²ēmin*. Besides, this interruption of the narrative flow by the narrator serves another purpose: that of slowing down the 'tempo' and of creating the illusion of a long period of silent reflection on Abraham's part.⁽⁸⁰⁾

For the narrator the dialogue between *Yhwh* and Abraham does not stop with the promise of numerous progeny (v.5), but continues. To introduce *Yhwh*'s next speech he employs a quotation formula in which neither addresser nor addressee are specified: *wayyō²mer ēlāw* (v.7a). It is from the contents of the direct speech that we understand who the speaker is: *Yhwh*; he introduces a new theme, that of Abraham inheriting 'this land'. The revelation of *Yhwh*'s intention of granting (*lātef*) the possession of Canaan to Abraham evokes in the latter a demand for assurance: *bammāh ēda² kī²īrasennāh* (v.8).⁽⁸¹⁾ The dialogue here moves swiftly: the quotation formula for Abraham's request for a sign is made up of only *wayyō²mar*, while *Yhwh*'s answer is opened simply by *wayyō²mer ēlāw*

76. It is the context which determines the temporal value of this unique *w^ehe²ēmin* – cfr *GHB*, 119u. One should still find out whether this verb is referring here to a particular act of faith (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 162) or to a state of belief (*GHC*, 112ss; R. Kilian, *Die vorpriesterlichen Abrahamsüberlieferungen literarkritisch und traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht*" (BBB24; Bonn 1966) 45. The use of the weqatalti form would point to this second explanation.

77. "V. 1-6 ist ein in sich abgeschlossener Text der in V. 6 seinen Abschluss hat", Westermann, *Genesis*, 263. "Das Zeilwort dieser ersten Szene von Kap 15 aber wird unverkennbar in V.6 erreicht", W. Zimmerli, *1 Mose 12-25: Abraham*, (ZBk 1.2; Zurich 1976) 51. Cfr. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 256-257; Coats, *Genesis*, 124...

78. Consult the suggestion of BHK to read *wayyā²āmen* instead of *w^ehe²ēmin*. Jacob considers this suggestion as a "Überlieferungsfehler", *Genesis*, 394. He parses *w^ehe²ēmin* as consecutive perfect.

79. Concerning vv.6 and 8 Lohfink writes: "Während ferner in ursprünglichen biblischen Erzählungen der Erzähler hartan den erzählten Einzelvorgängen bleibt, zeigt sich durch die am Enden der beiden 'Szenen' vollzogene Distanzierung des Erzählers vom Geschehen eine eigene Erzählerperspektive: der Erzähler fasst mehrfaches Verhalten Abrams zusammen, wenn er in V.6 feststellt, Abram habe auf Jahwe, vertraut, und der habe ihm das al Gerechtigkeit anerkannt "*Landverheissung*, 32-33.

80. "Passages of description and comment take up telling time without corresponding action time, and are drastic slowing down devices." Licht, *Storytelling*, 97.

81. "Die Frage Abrahams ist eigentlich eine Bitte; sie bittet um ein bestätigendes Zeichen", Westermann, *Genesis*, 266; Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 48-49; Van Seters, *Abraham*, 257-258.

(v.9).⁽⁸²⁾ In this reply *Yhwh* instructs Abraham to ‘take for him’ a number of animals and fowls.

With God’s instructions about the things to prepare (v.9) the dialogue scene comes to a close. What rests of the episode in Gen 15 consists of narration and speeches (but not dialogue). There are four elements here which play important structural roles:

(a) we have the link phrase *wayyiqqah lō* (v.10) which recalls the imperative *q̄hah lī* in verse 9.⁽⁸³⁾ This is a case of what we may call a command – execution sequence in which the same verb is employed in both elements of the sequence (Gen 1,3; 6,14,22; 12,1,4; 22,2–3). In our text the sequence serves a cohesive function although it also creates the problem of deciding whether vv.10–11 belong to the same scene as vv. 1–9. These two vv. differ in character from the first nine vv. of the episode because, while in the dialogue scene nearly no action takes place, in vv. 10–11 one counts no less than six action verbs with Abraham as the subject of five of them. This raises the problem of whether Abraham actually carries out the described activity; or is he still having his vision experience wherein he dialogued with *Yhwh*? Jacob answers this question in the affirmative: “Auch dies ist nur Vision . . . in Wirklichkeit hat sich die Situation nicht geändert”.⁽⁸⁴⁾ One should remember, however, that the narrator employs no special technique here, as he will in verse 17, to distinguish his own perspective from that of the character, Abraham.

In verse 11 we are told how birds of prey (*hā^cayit*) swooped down upon the carcasses and how Abraham drove them away (*wayyaššeb ʾotām*). We have here pure narration that depicts what the narrator himself has seen. If verse 11 reflects only the narrator’s perspective we may detect a narrative technique that has a double function. The narrator includes this curious detail of the birds as a retardation device,⁽⁸⁵⁾ probably to create suspense by prolonging his telling time; but this detail may be intended as a discreet time indicator just like the simile of the stars in verse 5. Birds can swoop down on carcasses only in daytime. During the night Abraham dialogues with *Yhwh* and receives instructions concerning a particular rite; the following morning Abraham carries out these instructions and awaits for the requested sign (v.8) to be given. But a whole day passes before anything happens (v.12). During daytime the incident of the birds occurs, but Abraham defends the carcasses. Verses 10–11, therefore, constitute a distinct scenic unit⁽⁸⁶⁾

82. For this use of quotation formulas cfr. Licht, *Storytelling*, 104.

83. The verb LQH “is commonly used when preparation of animals for sacrifices is spoken of”, Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 73. But do *Yhwh*’s instructions in verse 9 involve sacrifice? On the real significance of the rite described here we refer to S.E. Loewenstamm “Zur Traditions-geschichte des Bundes Zwischen den Stücken,” *VT* 18(1968) 500-506.

84. *Genesis*, 397.

85. Cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 268.

86. Cfr. A. Abela, *Reading the Abraham Narrative in Gen 11, 27-25, 18 as a Literary Unit* (Dissertation presented to the Pontifical Biblical Institute; Rome 1985; still unpublished) 48-49. For change of time as indication of discontinuity cfr. Baker, “Diversity and Unity”, 190-192.

narrating a separate action, but which is closely knit to the dialogue scene through the command execution sequence (vv. 9–10).

(b) Verses 12.17 contain two slightly different time indications:

v. 12 *wayhî haššemeš lābōʾ*

v. 17 *wayhî haššemeš bāʾāh*

Together with their respective verses these phrases constitute essential structural elements within the narrative. (1) The *wayhî* of verse 12 is an element of discontinuity in that it introduces a new scene:⁽⁸⁷⁾ Abraham has been waiting all day for the desired sign; only just before sunset does something happen. The time indication in verse 17, again introduced by *wayhî*, does not open as a new scene but a new action for which we have been prepared since verse 12.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Verse 17 constitutes the climax of the scene, perhaps of the entire episode (Zimmerli).^(88a) (2) The fact that the time indication in verse 17 is not meant to open a new scenic unit leaves unanswered the question about its structural role in the narrative. The position of the sun in the two chronological expressions of vv. 12.17 is significant; in verse 12 the sun is not yet set but it is about to do so (*lābōʾ*);⁽⁸⁹⁾ in verse 17 sunset has already taken place:

wayhî haššemeš bāʾāh⁽⁹⁰⁾
wā ʾlātāh hayāh

The two chronological details, therefore, enframe the experience narrated within a definite time span. This inclusio⁽⁹¹⁾ defines the length of the scenic unit and at the same time distinguishes this scene from the ensuing concluding section which we have identified as the narrator's interpretative comment. (3) A stylistic analysis of both vv. 12.17 would confirm the intuition expressed above concerning the presence of an inclusio in this text. On the level of syntax a number of parallels can easily be detected; (α) Both start with *wayhî* which has *haššemeš* for subject. (β) There follows a verb form of root BW². (γ) Next came two clauses introduced by a noun

87. For this use of *wayhî* cfr. *GHC*, 111 f-h; Baker "Diversity and Unity", 191-192. This imperfect consecutive of *hayāh* introduces not only new narratives or episodes but also scenic units, cfr. G.W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt* (Washington 1976) 21; Berlin; *Poetics*, 125-126.

88. Contra Van Seters, *Abraham*, 259 who stated "The two temporal introductions only make sense if they set off two different events." Westermann considered v.12 as a doublet of v.17, entered into the text to introduce vv. 13-16, *Genesis*, 268. This may be diachronically true; however, in the present text v.12 plays roles which are essential to the proper functioning of the episode.

88a. Cfr. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 33.

89. *GHB*, 124f.

90. "Après un wayyiqtol si l'on veut exprimer l'action comme durative, au lieu d'un simple wayyiqtol on emploie *wayhî* avec le participe", *GHB*, 121f.

91. On inclusio cfr. D. Minguez, *Pentecosté's. Ensayo de Semiótica Narrativa en Hch 2* (AnBib 75; Rome 1976) 24-25.

linked to what precedes through *waw*; the verb in both clauses is in perfect tense. (8) In the two verses we then meet the particle *w^hhinnēh* which opens the final clause. These parallels alone already point to some structural role of the two syntactical complexes.

But on further scrutiny one finds other interesting details. In v. 12 we read that while the sun has not yet *w^ttardēmāh naplāh ^{al} ^{ab}brām*;⁽⁹²⁾ Abraham is being prepared for some awesome experience. The *w^hhinnēh* clause contains very queer syntax, may be, consciously chosen by the narrator to convey the strangeness of Abraham's experience. We have two words in a syndeton, *^{em}ēmāh ḥašēkāh*, both subjects of the principle *nōpelet* which agrees, however, only with the nearest subject *ḥašēkāh*.⁽⁹³⁾ In this verse we are not told explicitly where did this 'terror' falling upon Abraham came from; but the unspecified subject of *wayyō^{mer} k^{ab}brām* in v. 13 gives us to understand that Abraham's fear is due to the presence of the numinous.⁽⁹⁴⁾ What is stylistically more important here is Abraham's experience of darkness with the sun still in the sky. In v. 17 the narrator emphasizes that it was dark indeed when the event to be narrated took place: *wayhī ḥašsemēs bā^{ah} wā^{al}ālā^{ah} ḥayāh*. The use of the rare term *^{al}ālā^{ah}*⁽⁹⁵⁾ seems intended to attract attention; one should notice also the inclusio *wayhī – ḥayāh* in order to indicate that these two opening clauses play the same role of describing the external circumstances of Abraham's experience. The reason for the stress on external darkness appears to be the wish to create contrast with what is going to happen.⁽⁹⁶⁾ Through the particle *w^hhinnēh* the narrator adopts in v. 17 Abraham's perspective: it is through his eyes that the narrator beholds *tannūr ^{as}āsān w^llappīd ^{es}es* passing across the carcasses. Fire and smoke are "Zeichen, die gott repräsentieren".⁽⁹⁷⁾

92. This *tardēmāh* offers "the condition most favourable for the reception of visions... The bloody ceremony just described was no perfunctory piece of symbolism; it touched the mind below the level of consciousness; and that impression (heightened in this case by the growing darkness) induced a susceptibility to physical influences readily culminating in ecstasy or vision", Skinner, *Genesis*, 281. On *tardēmāh* cfr. Snijders, "Genesis XV", 275-277.

93. The phrase *ḥašēkāh g^ddōlāh* (v.12) is usually dismissed as a gloss in both older and recent exegetical works. It is supposed to have been introduced into the text to explain the provenance of Abraham's fear – cfr. A. Clamer *La Sainte Bible: Genèse-Exode*, 1/1-2 (Paris 1953) 266; Kaiser, "Traditionsgeschichte", 118; Kilian, *Abrahams*, 50. This mysterious fear and darkness do not derive from 'historical' circumstances: the narrator emphasizes that at the beginning of this experience the sun was about to set (*lābō*) – contra Cazelles, "Connexions et structure"; 340. This darkness is spiritual just as the *^{em}ēmāh*, and supernatural in origin. So that, notwithstanding the queer grammar involved both terms are to be retained as essential. The standard exegesis of the verse, which would label this phrase as additional, may have influenced grammarians not to quote *^{em}ēmāh ḥašēkāh* as an asyndeton case. The combination of the two nouns cannot be viewed as impossible syntax: "Die Substantiva stehen unverbunden nebeneinander, das zweite erklärt das erste. Es war ein tiefer angstvoller Schlaf im schwersten Duster, da Gott dem Abraham das Folgende ins Ohr flüstert", Jacob, *Genesis*, 398.

94. Cfr. Zimmerli, *Abraham*, 54.

95. Cfr. Cazelles, "Connexions et Structure", 342.

96. Jacob, *Genesis*, 401.

97. Westermann, *Genesis*, 271.

And this would bring us back to verse 12. There, with the sun still on the horizon, Abraham experiences darkness; here, with thick darkness all around Abraham sees fire, symbol of light.

(c) The episode comes to a close with an intervention (vv. 18–21) from the narrator who steps in to interpret what has just been interpreted in verse 17. Great stress is put on the time dimension of the experience: *bayyôm hāhûʔ*, “on that day”. The phrase may also be an indice of an overarching temporal structure: the experience being narrated started as a nightly vision (v.5), went through the entire following day (vv. 10–11) and reached its climax towards late evening at sunset (v. 17). This structure contributes to the unity of the episode as a whole. The narrator interprets what has happened that day as covenant making (v.18a) the clauses of this covenant (*bʿrît*) are given in direct speech, even though we can understand from gerundial *lēʔmōr* that Abraham heard no such words ‘on that day’.⁽⁹⁸⁾ The narrator has as is customary avoided indirect speech to describe the terms of what in his mind was a *bʿrît*.⁽⁹⁹⁾

Interweaving Structures

In this final section of the essay we shall offer a re-reading of Gen 15 as one unit; the observations made so far in our discussion will be taken in consideration; but comments shall be added on minute interweaving structures that have not yet been mentioned.

The episode’s introduction is quite formulaic in character; yet it does not constitute an ‘exposition’, “which has the normal function of describing the initial situation.”⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

This may appear to be supporting the thesis of the poetic character of the episode as a “nachgeahmte Erzählung” (Lohfink); but it adds further weight to what we have been saying about Gen 15’s logical links with the preceding episodes of the Abraham narrative. This dialogue between *Yhwh* and Abraham could have taken place only *ʔaḥar haddʔ bārîm hā ʔēlleh*. The close succession of *dʔbar* to *haddʔbārîm* tends to bring to light the ambivalence of the latter as simple ‘events’⁽¹⁰¹⁾ or as “events brought about by *Yhwh*’s word.” The experience to be narrated in Gen 15 presupposes an indefinite time continuum (Van Seters) from what has already been told (12–14). According to the narrator this experience of Abraham was essentially an event of *Yhwh*’s word which came (*hāyāh*) to the patriarch *bammahāzeh*.

It has become an accepted datum among scholars that *hāyāh dʔbar*

98. Cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 272.

99. Cfr. Alter, *Art*, 67 for this tendency in biblical narrative to avoid indirect speech.

100. Licht, *Storytelling*, 71; cfr. Alter, *Art*, 80-81.

101. Cfr. G. Rouiller, “Le Sacrifice d’Isaac (Genèse 22, 1–19)” *Exegesis, Problemes de méthode et exercice de lecture (Genèse 22 et Luc 15)*, (eds F. Bovon/G. Rouiller) (Neuchâtel-Paris 1975) 17.

Yhwh ²*el* together with *bammaḥāzeh* derives from the prophetic milieu. This already hints to the narrator's wish of underlining the importance of the episode. It remains to be seen whether *bammaḥāzeh* qualifies the entire episode (Jacob) or simply the 'dialogue scene' (vv. 1 – 9); besides it is not easy to decide whether this reference to a vision "is meant to suggest a nocturnal experience and thus anticipate v.5 or not."⁽¹⁰²⁾

The contents (*lē² mōr*) of this 'word of *Yhwh*' is contained in a tripartite sentence that consists of an exhortation not to be afraid (this "derives entirely from the sacred context of the revelation (Ex 3,5 – 6)",⁽¹⁰³⁾ and two parallel noun clauses that probably mean to provide the motivation for Abraham's encouragement. In the first *Yhwh* presents himself as Abraham's *māgēn* "sovereign"⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ while in the second he promises that the patriarch's 'reward' (*š^ckarkā*)⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ will be very great. Reference to the preceding episode in Gen 14 is impossible to deny:⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ *Yhwh*'s self-presentation as *māgēn* recalls Melchizedek's *miggēn* in the blessing formula (14,20), while the ŠKR motif cannot but remind us of Abraham's refusal to be paid by Sodom for his service to the Canaanite population (14,21 – 24). Abraham need not be afraid since his sovereign is *Yhwh* himself who promises a rich reward to his protégé.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Yhwh leaves unspecified his promise of rich ŠKR; yet it is this promise of great recompense which generates in Abraham a profound reaction defined by form critics as a 'lament'.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ The narrator represents the patriarch as 'answering back' (*wayyō²mer ḥabram*) his divine interlocutor concerning this promise of ŠKR. This answer of Abraham takes the form of two interventions, each endowed with its respective quotation formula, that are structurally intertwined. Abraham actually develops two ideas. The quotation formulas indicate where the development of each idea begins.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

102. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 253-254.

103. Coats, *Genesis*, 124. Formcritics identify this ²*al ḥra* with the formulation of the 'Heilsorakel' cfr. Westermann *Genesis*, 258. For a discussion consult A. de Pury *Promesse Divine et Légende Culturelle dans le cycle de Jacob. Gen 28 et les traditions patriarcale* (Paris 1975) 295-317.

104. For this reading of *magen* cfr. J. Coppens, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, XLVII (1971) 123-124; L. Viganò, *Nomi e titoli di YHWH alla luce del semitico del Nord-ovest* (Rome 1976) 23.

105. For this neutral meaning of ŠKR cfr. Abela, *Reading*, note 186.

106. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 84-86; Coats, *Genesis*, 123; Gros Louis, "Abraham I", 62.

107. The Samaritan version which alters *harbeh* to *arbeh* makes this point even more clear, cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 259.

108. Westermann, *Genesis*, 259.

109. Conroy's observation on the use of two quotation-formulas in two successive uninterrupted discourses by the same speaker is relevant here: "One should probably see these double occurrences as having a function on the level of narrative rhetoric (sharpening the reader's attention; signalling a new point of major importance within the discourse) rather than as signs of composite narrative", *Absalom*, 130. This observation would render useless the suggestions to consider verse 3 as a doublet of verse 2, introduced to smooth out some of the difficulties raised especially by verse 2b, cfr. Westermann, *Genesis*, 259-261, which offers also a bibliography of the various solutions proposed to resolve the problems of verse 2b.

In the first part (v.2) Abraham laments that *Yhwh*'s speech about ŠKR is incongruent since he is still without a son: *wē²ānōkī hōlek²ārīrī*,⁽¹¹⁰⁾ in the second part he protests with *Yhwh* that *lī lō²nātattāh zara²*. Abraham's is therefore one intervention that has two parts. Syntactically this intervention consists of two main sentences (vv. 2a.3a) and two result clauses (vv. 2b.3b). An abāb pattern may easily be detected. Elements a/á parallel in:

- both open with a quotation formula
- both have an attention caller; in (a) we have the vocative² *ādōnāy Yhwh* which recalls *Yhwh*'s self-presentation as Abraham's *māgēn* (v.1); in (á) we tend the interjection *hēn*, lo!
- both possess a statement involving verb NTN with *Yhwh* for subject and Abraham for indirect subject. But there is one important difference; in (a) the statement is interrogative in character: *mah titten lī*, in (a') is declarative. Besides, the direct object in (a) remains undetermined, *mah*, while in (a') Abraham laments that *Yhwh* has not given him *zara²*. *Yhwh*'s discourse about ŠKR is due to remain airy as long as the problem of Abraham's fatherhood is not solved. The interjection *hēn* carries the nuance of astonishment for *Yhwh*'s failure, and seems to be referring to *Yhwh*'s previous promises concerning descendants (Gen 13,16).

Verse 2a is not a perfect parallel to verse 3a since it also contains a subordinate clause *wē²ānōkī hōlek²ārīrī* that plays an explicative role. This means that the result clause of verse 2b depends thematically not only on *ādōnāy Yhwh mah titten lī* but also on this explicative clause. We suggest this translation: "My Lord *Yhwh*, what will you give me, seeing that I am dying childless, so that . . ."

Westermann⁽¹¹¹⁾ has already listed the correspondences between vv. 2b and 3b. Both stichoi express the consequences that derive from the situation described in the first halves of the two verses. Again vv. 2b and 3b carry slightly different though complementary ideas. The parsing of verse 2b has been a crux for interpreters owing to "its anomalous grammatical construction and problematic phrase *ben meseq*".⁽¹¹²⁾ With regards this latter phrase we accept F. Vattioni's suggestion to translate *ben meseq bēlī* as "he who pours libations on my grave".⁽¹¹³⁾ The pronoun *hū²* functions as a copula playing an emphatic role,⁽¹¹⁴⁾ deemed necessary to express

110. For *ārīrī* as childless cfr. Lev 20, 20-21; Jer 22, 30; Cazelles, "Connexions et Structure", 329. The participle *hōlēk* may carry the nuance 'to die', cfr. Jos 23, 14; Ps 39, 14; BDB, 234a.

111. *Genesis*, 260.

112. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 255.

113. "Ancora su Ben-Meseq in Gen 15", *RSV* 40 (1965) 9-12. Cfr. M. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology* (Rome 1965) 65.

114. Cfr. *GHB*, 154 i.j. for this use of *hū²*.

Abraham's disappointment that this service has to be done by a non-relative. Whatever the origin and earlier purpose *dammeseq* – it is usually considered as a gloss – in the present shape of the text, the word is part of a composite name: *dammeseq ʔēl ʔezer*.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The grammar in v. 3b is not complex, we have *w^ehinneh*, introducing a result clause⁽¹¹⁶⁾ then comes the compound *ben-bēti* with the meaning 'house-born slave'.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

From this passage of the single elements one can see how vv. 2b and 3b are chiasmically arranged:⁽¹¹⁸⁾

ūben-mēseq bēti hū dammeseq ʔēl ʔezer
w^ehinneh ben bēti yōrēs ʔōti

From this chiasmus results that he who performs the funeral rites for Abraham will also inherit him. The individual who will do these actions is *dammeseq ʔēl ʔezer*, Abraham's household slave.⁽¹¹⁹⁾

Yhwh does not leave Abraham's lament without an answer. To the astonishment of the narrator (*w^ehinnēh*)⁽¹²⁰⁾ Abraham receives another *d^ebar Yhwh* with a message about the theme of inheritance mentioned by Abraham himself in the second half of his intervention: *ben bēti yōrēs ʔōti* (v.3). For the sake of variety the narrator alters slightly the quotation formula by converting it into a noun clause, and replaces *ʔel ʔabrām* by *ʔēlāw*. The similarity of the two formulas contributes to the text's cohesion. The two instances of *d^ebar Yhwh ʔel* counterbalance the two *wayyōmer ʔabrām*.⁽¹²¹⁾ *Yhwh* speaks about Abraham's future heir. This speech is made up of a tricolon, with the second pivoting the rather two. Again the individual elements are concentrically disposed:⁽¹²²⁾

lō yīraškā zeh
kī im ʔāser yešē mimmē ʔēkā
hū yīrašekā

The chiasmus here brings to light the elements of a contrast: *lō yīraškā* –

115. Consult Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 293. For a short discussion on composite names cfr. *UT Grammar* 8: 61-72.

116. Cfr. McCarthy "Uses of *w^ehinneh*", 340.

117. Consult *BDB*, 120b; F. Vattioni, "Due Note sull'Ecclesiaste" *Annali XVI* (1966) 161-163.

118. Abela, *Reading*, 69. 165.

119. Cfr. Vattioni, "Ancora su Ben-Meseq", 12.

120. *W^ehinnēh* "ist jetzt eigentlich nicht recht am Platz: sie setzt etwas mehr vorangegangene Handlung und Spannung voraus", Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 52. This is an unfortunate comment because it pretends to limit the creativity of language. The narrator drops in his negative comment on what he is narrating. This *w^ehinnēh* is not there simply to balance the *hēn-hinnēh* of verse 3 (contra Westermann).

121. Jacob, *Genesis*, 392.

122. Cfr. Abela, *Reading*, 69.

yīrašēkā and *zeh-hūʔ*, that is, who is going to be Abraham's heir. From the context it is easy to deduce that *zeh* refers to the *ben bayit* indicated by Abraham as his sole heir (v.3). The demonstrative pronoun *hūʔ* points to the structure's pivot (v.4b), a relative clause introduced by the adversative *kīʔim*, rather,⁽¹²³⁾ "rather he who shall come from your loins", a technical expression to describe natural sonship/fatherhood. Abraham's heir (*hūʔ*), therefore, has to be his natural son. The term *ben* is avoided (Jacob) perhaps to spotlight the contrast between ^ʔ*āšer yēšēʔ mimmeʔēkā* and *ben bēfi*.

Yhwh gives Abraham no chance to respond; he leads him 'out' and invites the patriarch to look towards the heavenly vault and count the stars if he can (v.5a). From critics read in this *wayyōšēʔ ōtō haḥūzāh* "the first dramatic element" of the episode (Van Seters); moreover, the heavenly vault studded with innumerable stars is said to provide the sign that confirms *Yhwh*'s promise of numerous progeny (Westermann). This interpretation meets two problems:

(a) We are still in the context of a vision experience (*bammahāzeh*); and although the clause combined with *wayyōʔmer* in v.5a does have an introductory function, it is itself part of the vision experience.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Likewise the reference to the stars forms part of the literary reality of the episode and may not be taken as an "indication of a narrative tradition".⁽¹²⁵⁾ One might say that the simile of the stars used to describe the numberlessness of Abraham's progeny as well as Abraham's profound communication with *Yhwh* belong to tradition; but the scenic representation of this reality belongs to what Licht termed "the storytelling aspect" in biblical narration.⁽¹²⁶⁾

(b) Is the interpretation of verse 5 as a confirming sign a *requirement of a predetermined form*?⁽¹²⁷⁾ The answer seems to be positive. The present author has some doubt whether this verse actually describes what is to be taken as a sign. Westermann admits that the vision of the starlit vault of heaven is not meant to confirm the promise of a natural son (v.4), which promise has already been given, "sondern die Überbietung der Sohnesdurch die Mehrungsverheissung".⁽¹²⁸⁾ Besides, this scene is never again referred to in the Abraham narrative as a sign.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Rather than a sign we

123. Cfr. *BDB*, 475a.

124. We need not consider *wayyōšēʔ ōtō haḥūzāh* as "eine Variante zu bamahazeh v.1" (Jacob, *Genesis*, 393).

125. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 256. "Der Satz ist nur eine formale Einleitung, der zur Verlebendigung die Gestalt einer realen Handlung gegeben ist. Das ist die Art prophetischer Rede", Jacob, *Genesis*, 392-393.

126. Licht, *Storytelling*, 11-14.

127. Westermann, "Arten der Erzählung", 23; *Genesis*, 262.

128. *Genesis*, 262.

129. "Nicht der mit der Augen erschaute Himmel kann das Vergewissernde sein, sondern allein das angesichts dieses Himmels als Verheissung ausgesprochene Wort Gottes, das von Abraham als Versprechen Gottes anerkannt zu werden fordert", Zimmerli, *Abraham*, 51.

have here "ein schönes und stolzes Bild der unendlichen Volkszahl"⁽¹³⁰⁾ of Abraham's descendants.

What progress does the episode show in verse 5? (a) The clause *wayyôšē'ōtô* without the specification of subject and object⁽¹³¹⁾ plays the same role of *hāyāh d^ebar Yhwh el* of verse 1; both somehow render formal *Yhwh's* contacts with Abraham. The clause is combined with the verb *wayyō³mer* which carries out the same function of gerundial *lē³mor* in vv. 1.4.

(b) *Yhwh* invites (*nā³*) Abraham to look at the heavenly vault and count the stars. This invitation consists of bicolon; its second colon is concentrically patterned:

<i>ûs^epor hakkôkâbîm</i>	<i>habbet nā³haššamaymāh</i>	<i>lispôr³ōtām</i>
(a)	(b)	(a)

The central position of (b) indicates the narrator's will to stress the impossibility of counting the stars. The emphasis is on numberlessness.

(c) *Yhwh's* speech comes to a climax in his declaration (the second *wayyō³mer*): *kôh yihyeh zar^aākā*. This declaration makes it clear that the theme is Abraham's *zar^a*. The concluding word (Jacob) of *Yhwh's* speech, *zar^aākā* which attracts great attention, recalls Abraham's declarative *hēn lî lô³ nātattāh zar^a* (v.13) and reveals that in the dialogue there exists a conscious patterning of the thematic elements into a chiasmus. Abraham states that *Yhwh's* discourse about ŠKR cannot be taken seriously since the patriarch remained without *zar^a* (v.3) (A); the absence of *zar^a* gave rise to the situation where Abraham will have an adopted slave (ben-bêtî) as heir (B). *Yhwh's* answer opens with the exclusion of 'this' (zeh) adopted slave from heirdom; instead, a natural son is indicated as the would be heir (B); but *Yhwh* continues by promising that Abraham's *zar^a* shall become numerous indeed (v.5) (A). This ABBA pattern would exclude the description of v.4 as "Abschluss eines Abschnitts"⁽¹³²⁾ which would consequently isolate verse 5. Besides this chiasmus would present verses 1 – 5 as thematically coherent (Snýders).

(d) The second *wayyō³mer* in *Yhwh's* speech does not serve simply to signal "a new point of major importance in the discourse" (Conroy), but functions also as pause indication⁽¹³³⁾ meant to stress the contents of *Yhwh's* declaration *kôh yihyeh zar^aākā* as Abraham ponders silently the grandeur of the starlit vault of heaven as similitude to the patriarch's fulfilment as multiplicity.

130. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 164.

131. This lack of specification is probably meant to create the impression of immediate passage from *Yhwh's* first speech (v.4) on the second (v.5).

132. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 33; Cfr. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 256 for other arguments against considering verse 4 as a conclusion.

133. Cfr. Abela, *Reading*, 70.

The narrator leaves Abraham's silence undisturbed. But he suspends (inversion) the narrative flow to usher us stealthily into the world of Abraham's relationship to *Yhwh*. Abraham's silence shades a process of change from initial scepticism (vv.2–3) to belief in *Yhwh*'s *w^ehe³emîn bā³Yhwh*.⁽¹³⁴⁾ The syntactical emphasis on Abraham's reaction is structurally and thematically important as a balance to Abraham's crisis of belief in *Yhwh*'s promises in vv.2–3.⁽¹³⁵⁾ The narrator is well informed also of *Yhwh*'s positive evaluation (*wayyahš^e behā lô š^edāqāh*)⁽¹³⁶⁾ of Abraham's *he³emîn*. This approval of God is considered in the context as essentially spiritual in character; only after this encounter of Abraham with *Yhwh* can this *wayyahš^ebehā* be transformed into a "Tun Gottes".⁽¹³⁷⁾

The dialogue continues (*wayyō³mer³elāw* (v.7)); *Yhwh* breaks the silence to comment in a rather long colon upon all his dealings with Abraham sofar: *ʾanī Yhwh ʾāšer hōšē³tikā mē³ūr kašdim latēt l^ekā ʾet hā³āreš hazzō³t l^eristāh*. This is often interpreted as a promise of the land.⁽¹³⁸⁾ But it rather consists of an "erweiterte Selbstvorstellung"⁽¹³⁹⁾ describing in a nutshell Abraham's entire travelling experience seen from *Yhwh*'s perspective.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ This self-presentation of God builds upon the previous episodes of the 'Abraham narrative', information about Abraham's travelling from Ur under divine protection, as well as the identification of 'this land' cannot be understood from the episode alone. The wider context is necessary. Besides, we may not accept the opinion that in verse 7 *Yhwh* speaks as if he was unknown to Abraham.⁽¹⁴¹⁾ The structural parallelism, for instance, between Abraham's way of addressing *Yhwh* in vv.2.8 points to the narrator's view that verse 7 continues from verse 6. If we have anything new here it is in re-reading Abraham's adventures from a different perspective, *Yhwh*'s. The patriarch's adventures were not haphazard after all, but formed part of an original plan of *Yhwh*. *Yhwh* has led Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans⁽¹⁴²⁾ to give him 'this land' for inheritance.

The verbal forms *hōšē³tikā* and *l^eristāh* recall their occurrence in vv.

134. This intuition excludes the parsing of *w^ehe³emîn* as pluperfect, cfr. Jacob, *Genesis*, 394.

135. Westermann, *Genesis*, 263.

136. For the possible historical contexts that may have influenced the terminology employed here semantically consult commentaries. For a short bibliography cfr. Abela, *Reading*, note 295.

137. *Wayyahš^e behā*: "die nicht nur im Geiste Gottes zudenken ist, sondern sich als ein Tun Gottes zeigen muss", Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 47.

138. Cfr. Rendtorff, *Problem*, 42-45.

139. Westermann, "Arten der Erzählung", 29.

140. Abela, *Reading*, 215-216.

141. Zimmerli, *Abraham*, 53.

142. On the historical problem involved in indicating Abraham's place of origin we refer to R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia 1978) 186-200.

3–5 and serve as cohesive elements within the episode as a whole.⁽¹⁴³⁾ A similar role play the two self-presentations of *Yhwh* in vv. 1 and 7 (Westermann); the use of ²*ānī* instead of ²*ānōkī* may be explained by the exigency of style (variation) rather by a different *Sitz im leben* of the language adoperated.⁽¹⁴⁴⁾

Two remarks on *Yhwh*'s self-presentation:

(1) It remains to be seen whether the similarity in formulation of the concepts of *Yhwh*'s leading Abraham and Israel out of Ur and Egypt respectively (Ex 20,2; Lev 25,38; Dt 5,6) reflects the narrator's conscious presentation of Abraham as model for later Israel.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ This would require widening the literary context of our episode to include the entire Pentateuch.

(2) Whatever the vital environment from which the language of this verse derives, we have still to discover the need for *Yhwh* to re-represent himself ²*ānī Yhwh* at this stage. On the surface it seems that a new theme is being introduced, that of the land (Van Seters). Yet one wonders whether this self-presentation is not simply a resumption of *Yhwh*'s initial discourse about ŠKR abruptly interrupted by Abraham's lament about his own childlessness. It is true that the contents of the two self-presentations do not appear to coincide; but one must grant that the two self-presentations are complementary concerning *Yhwh*'s relationship to Abraham. Another possible explanation is that the illusion of a long pause created by the narrator's intervention (v.6) required a rather formal resumption of dialogue.

Abraham reacts once more (*wayyō²mar*) to *Yhwh*'s revelation of his original intention of giving *hā²āreš hazzō²t* as possession. He prayerfully⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ asks how can he be sure of coming into possession of the land: *bammāh²ēdā² kī² ʔirašennāh*. The parallels in address indicate that we have to read this reaction as taking place *bammahāzeh* (v.1). The vision scene has not yet finished. *Yhwh* answers Abraham straightaway (*wayyō²mer ʔēlāw*) by giving instructions about a rite (v.9): *q²hah lī*; there follows a list of animals and fowls to be 'taken'. The animals have to be *m^e šullešet* which Cazelles⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ translates "divided into three parts", so that *Yhwh*'s instructions are quite specific.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ From the text we learn also that the birds are to be treated

143. "The theme of inheritance in vv. 7-8 returns to that of vv. 3-4 but with a shift of interest from the question of an heir to the question of the land", Van Seters, *Abraham*, 257-258; cfr. Jacob, *Genesis*, 395.

144. Zimmerli, *Abraham*, 53.

145. Cfr. Cassuto, *Genesis II*, 336.

146. Since Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 38-39 formcritics interpret Abraham's question for a sign as a prayer of a believer. Cfr. Westermann, *Genesis* 266-267 and Jacob's comments in *Genesis*, 396.

147. "Connexions et Structure", 336-338.

148. Contra Westermann, *Genesis*, 267 who writes, "Es ist vorausgesetzt, dass der Auftrag, die Tiere zu bringen, genügt, Abraham wissen zu lassen, was er zutun hat". This interpretation follows from his reading MSLLŠT as "dreijährig".

differently.⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

With *Yhwh*'s instructions ends the dialogue scene. We next meet Abraham faithfully carrying out these instructions: *wayyiqqah lô kol ʿellēh* (v.10). The narrator seems interested in insisting on Abraham's prompt obedience. Through the use of the link clause *wayyiqqah lô* the impression is created that we are still in the realm of vision (Jacob). The narrator avoids explicit time indications; the usual *wayyāškem . . . babbōqer* (Gen 21, 14; 22,3) employed when the character carries out divine instructions imparted in nightly visions, does not appear. But this narration section (vv. 10 – 11) is dominated by action words, mostly with Abraham for subject. Verse 10 alone has no less than four verbs: *wayyiqqah, waybattēr, wayyittēn, lôʾ bātār*. One should note how Abraham's treatment of the victims is included within the two instances of root BTR, evidently a characteristic action-word of this ceremonial.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ He divided the animals and placed the pieces in rows in front of each other. The birds were not divided.

The inclusion *waybattēr – bātār* would suggest that Abraham's preparations for the rite were the only activity to be done. But then takes place the curious incident of the birds of prey (*hā ʿayit*) swooping down upon the carcasses, with Abraham defending the victims by scaring the fowls away (v.11). Van Seters considers the incident as "unnecessary" unless one would read in it "a clue to ill omen".⁽¹⁵¹⁾ Of course, the economy of the text's representation requires a necessary role also of this detail. We take it for a retardation device as well as a discrete indication of the time factor.⁽¹⁵²⁾

With verse 12 a new scene opens. The narrator informs us that as the sun was about to set (*lābōʾ*) Abraham experienced deep sleep (*tardēmāh*) and fear together with great darkness (*ʿēmāh hašēkah gʿdōlāh*). These phenomena struck Abraham contemporaneously (*wʿhinnēh*).⁽¹⁵³⁾ The presence of sunlight (the sun has not yet set) points to the supernatural origin of the darkness phenomenon).

But verse 12 with its *wayhî* plays another essential role: its 'sauber Parallelismus' (Lohfink) with verse 17 indicates that the two verses draw an inclusion; our task now is to examine what has been thus enveloped. The contents of this inclusion consists of a speech of *Yhwh* to Abraham about his descendants' future till their definitive settlement 'here' (*hēnnāh*). This oracle (Skinner) was usually judged as diachronically secondary to the rest

149. The text does not develop the symbolic value of these animals and birds. It is the context in which the text operates that specifies further the meaning of these details as well as of the entire rite indicated here.

150. Westermann, *Genesis*, 268. This activity is further characterized by T and R alliterations.

151. *Abraham*, 258.

152. Abela, *Reading*, 61.

153. For this use of *wʿhinnēh* cfr. McCarthy, "Uses of *wʿhinneh*", 337-338.

of the episode because it presumably interrupts the oath ceremony;⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ according to this thesis *Yhwh*'s speech has been added later to account for the divergence between the promise of the land and the factual occupation of Canaan by Israel.

Although our approach to the text is synchronic and as such may take the unity of the whole and essentiality of vv. 13–16 for granted⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ we would like to offer a few considerations to show that this essentiality is not a methodological a priorism. Before coming to the matter of the speech's role within the episode as a whole one should examine whether there passes any relationship between these verses and the rest on the level of language and contents. In other words is there a discontinuity in language and thought which would justify the description of these vv. as a later insertion?

The present author believes that there is enough evidence to consider these vv. as one piece with the wider context of Gen 15. Jacob⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ has already noted that the quotation formula *wayyō³mer* is the same as the one used in v.5: in both texts it is the context to identify the subject of *wayyō³mer*; as in v.5 we encounter here *zar³ākā* to be parsed as a collective noun⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ subject of verb *yihyeh*. There is also the term *r³kūš* which appears in Gen 14, 21. One may grant that this speech of *Yhwh* deals mainly with the fortunes of Abraham's *zara^c* and not with the theme of the land which predominates in the immediate context;⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ but this does not mean that the land theme is not present in this speech. *Yhwh* mentions Abraham's descendants as future inhabitants for a determined period of a 'land not theirs'; these inhabitants will in time return 'here' which, from Abraham's perspective, coincides with *hā³āres hazzō³t*. Lastly one should include the important contact between verses 12.17 and verse 15. In the latter Abraham is promised a 'beautiful death' (Westermann): *w³attāh tābō³el³ ābōtēkā b³sālōm*. According to Cazelles this is an exceptional expression for this concept, since the usual verbs employed are ³SP and ŠKB. "Cette locution exceptionnelle a sans doute pour but de souligner le symbolisme entre le coucher (*bō³*) du soleil et la mort d'Abram"⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

The language of the oracle, therefore, and the elements of the land theme that are found in this speech, demonstrate that *Yhwh*'s speech presupposes the preceding part of the episode; naturally, vv. 13–16 are

154. Cfr. Wellhausen, *Composition*, 21-22; Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 40; Rendtorff, *Problem*, 39-40. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 259 and Blum, *Composition*, 377-379 consider vv. 13-16 original to the wider context of Gen 15; yet both consider the entire episode as late. One ought to mention as well the other hypothesis which sees in these verses the amalgamation of various sources, cfr. Cazelles, "Connexions et Structure", 340-341; H. Seebass, "Zu Genesis 15", *Wort und Dienst* 17 (1963) 138-142.

155. Gros Louis, "Considerations", 15.

156. *Genesis*, 398.

157. Abela, *Reading*, 72.

158. Skinner, *Genesis*, 282; Abela, *Reading*, 217.

159. "Connexions et Structure", 241 note 89.

endowed with their dynamics and with peculiar elements of contents. But this is due to the thought progression. *Yhwh*'s speech is not thematically incoherent with respect to the rest of the episode. Let us examine the text in some detail.

The oracle has a general structure. Towards the centre of this structure we find the formula *w^eahārē kēn* which serves as a transition from one set of experiences (vv.13 – 14a) to another (vv.15 – 16);⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ physical movement is involved when the first situation switches into the second; Abraham's *zarā*^c are supposed to go out of this 'land not theirs' *birkuš gādōl* (v.14b). Besides a close reading of vv.13 – 14a and 16 will discover that they are parallel⁽¹⁶¹⁾ in that both sections have place and time indications qualifying some action, concentrically disposed (xyy'x'), and a 'judgement statement'. Sandwiched between these two groups of stichoi, just after *w^eahārē kēn* we encounter three statements that may be considered as the nucleus of the structure. Notice the parallelismus membrorum between

v 16b: *yēs^eū birkuš gādōl*
 v 15b: *tiqqābēr b^ešēbāh tōbāh*

We have here an action implying movement (*tiqqābēr* actually parallels *tābō^c ʾel* in v.15a), a going out, a leaving of some place. Both actions are qualified by a phrase that means success. These parallel statements revolve around the clause that describes Abraham's death:

w^eattāh tābō^c ʾel ʾābōtēkā b^ešālōm

There is the same pattern of an action qualified by a phrase that shows that the action has been positive. The presence of this movement may have determined the choice of *bō^c* for the description of Abraham's death: a verb of motion qualified by phrase *b^ešālōm*. But one cannot deny the other contacts of this *tābō^c* in verse 15 with the BW^c of verses 12.17 (Cazelles). One should note also the emphatic position of the pronoun *ʾattāh* which betrays the narrator's desire to contrast Abraham with his *zarā^c*. This becomes even clearer in the parallelism between vv. 14b and 15b. The reference to Abraham's fortune is not accidental and there exists no justification for considering v.15 as secondary.⁽¹⁶²⁾ The entire structure seems to be geared to put Abraham's successful finale at the centre: *zar^c ʾākā* will have to bear with hard experience in a land not theirs, but after God's intervention against their oppressors they shall leave this land enriched (*birkuš gōdāl*) just as you will die *b^ešālōm*, in good old age (*b^ešēbāh tōbāh*). For the patriarch himself his own positive death will constitute the sign that his descendents will return 'here' to possess the land. He himself has become a sign.

160. Cfr. Conroy, *Absalom*, 42.

161. Cfr. Abela, *Reading*, 314.

162. Contra Westermann, *Genesis*, 269-270.

A few minute details. After that in v.12 we have read about the phenomena that befell Abraham just before sunset, v.13 opens with a quotation formula which specifies who the addressee is but leaves it to the reader to guess who is the subject: *wayyō³ mer l^e ʾabrām*. The first words in *Yhwh*'s oracle are the verb *īēda^c* qualified by the infinitive absolute: *yādō^c a īēda^c*. This is meant to emphasize the solemnity of the speaker's declaration.⁽¹⁶³⁾ This YD^c recalls of course the *bammah ʾēda^c* of Abraham's last intervention (Lohfink) and functions as a cohesive element.

The message Abraham is called to know consists of a number of statements introduced by *kī*. Several of the statements have *zarā^ckā* as subject: these descendants (collective sense of *zarā^c*) is supposed to live as *ger* in a 'land not theirs' that remains unidentified; they are to live there as slaves (*wā^c ʾābādūm*). Their masters will oppress them (*we^c innū ʾōtām*) for four hundred years. There follows the divine intervention described through a participle (*dān*) that functions as finite verb with ʾānōkī for subject. The emphasis in the statement (v.14a) lies on the object *haggōy* placed at the head of the sentence. The second instance of root ^cBD suggests that for the narrator slavery was a characteristic of this first period of the history of Abraham's *zara^c*. It is possible to delineate a chiasmic disposition of the material: the experience starts with Abraham's descendants living as *ger* in a land not theirs, here they shall slave to a nation whom God shall finally judge. The turning point in this history is marked by the adverbial *wē ʾāḥārē kēn*; after this period of slavery these descendants 'will go out' with great property and return (*yāšūbū*) 'here'. The time indication which throws all these events in the future, *wēdōr rēbī³* is essential because of the second judgement statement: *kī lō³ šālēm ʾāwōn hā ʾēmōrī ʿad hēnnāh* (v.16b). The return 'here' of Abraham's descendants has to wait till this ʾāwōn of the Amorites will reach the brim (šālēm). We are not told who these Amorites are and what their ʾāwōn is. The audience is supposed to know especially if it is true that vv.13–16 are a "vaticinium ex eventu" as Van Seters has written.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾

Most of the time *Yhwh* speaks from Abraham's perspective; his descendants will return 'here', but have to wait since to 'this day' (*ʿad hēnnāh*) the Amorites' ʾāwōn is not consummated. The audience is supposed to know from tradition the length of time these 'descendants' spent into slavery and the time of their return. The two time indicators ʾarbā^c mē³ōt šānāh and *wēdōr rēbī³* (accusative of time) that created enormous difficulties for interpreters. These time phrases indicate rather an indefinite time duration. After all we have here an incubation experience⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ which allows room for vague chronological and geographical localization of this

163. Jacob, *Genesis*, 398.

164. *Abraham*, 259.

165. Cfr. Wellhausen, *Composition*, 21; de Pury, *Promesse Divine*, 320-321; Abela, *Reading*, 168.

experience – this explains why the oppressing nation remains unspecified; the same holds good for the general term *hā'ēmōrî* and their *'āwōn*.

What is the narrative role of this speech of *Yhwh* within the literary dynamics of Gen 15 as a whole? We answer this question now. The examination of the text's grammar and structure has shown the narrator's wish to read this speech intimately combined to the 'including' elements in vv. 12.17. Before performing in front of Abraham the oath rite (v.17) in order to confirm his intention of giving 'this land' as Abraham's possession (v.7), *Yhwh* explains how this land is going to pass on into the patriarch's hand. Abraham has asked how *he* was going to inherit the land (v.8). *Yhwh* combines in his oracle Abraham's future to that of his descendants: he also places Abraham himself as parable of how this future is meant to evolve. Abraham is going to inherit this land 'in his descendants', so that *Yhwh*'s oath of giving this land to *Abraham* is actually fulfilled even though this fulfilment is meant to remain a strictly future event.¹⁶⁶

The end of *Yhwh*'s oracle is followed by a chronological report enveloped within the verbal forms *wayhî-hāyāh* (v.17a). The sun has by now set (*bā'āh*) and thick darkness covered all around. This brief description of the external circumstances prepares us for the climax of the episode. The narrator adopts Abraham's perspective (*w'hinnēh*)¹⁶⁷ as he tells what actually happened. The symbols of divine presence (smoking stove and fire-brand) are seen crossing (*'ābār*) in between the animals' pieces. One should note

(i) that the word for 'pieces' (*hāgg^ezarîm*) is a hapax, perhaps chosen to enhance the unique character of the event;

(ii) the term *hagg^ezārîm* is qualified by the demonstrative pronoun *hā'ēlleh* in order to link the present moment of the experience to that of the preparations (vv.9 – 10). Abraham looks as if he knew the meaning of this passage of *Yhwh* in between the corps of the victims: he needs no explanation. What *Yhwh*'s oracle explains is how the divine solemn promise (Lohfink) is supposed to involve Abraham as well as his *zara^e*.

The episode comes to a close when the narrator steps in once more to offer an interpretation of what has just been narrated (Lohfink). To mark the presence of explicit comment the narrator resorts to a grammatical

166. Rendtorff has interpreted the variously formulated promises of the land as an indication of subsequent theological editing of the traditions, "Der 'Jahwist' als Theologe. Zur Delema der Pentateuchkritik", *Supplements to Vetus Testament* 28(1975) 158-166. Cfr. *JSOT* 3(1977) 2-60. The structure within *Yhwh*'s speech which weaves into one Abraham's future and that of his descendants seems to prove that the addressing of *Yhwh*'s promise now to Abraham now to his *zara^e* need not reflect subsequent editing. (Cfr. *JSOT* 3(1977) 14), although it has to be granted that a diachronical interpretation of Gen 15 is still possible. Without this speech of *Yhwh* in vv. 13-16 Abraham's prayer for a sign would receive only an ambiguous answer for he would still not know how he himself was involved in the dynamics of the land promise. Verse 18 gives most of all the narrator's perspective (Lohfink).

167. McCarthy, "Uses of w'hinneh", 332-333.

inversion:⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ *bayyôm hāhū?*, which interrupts the narration flow. The contribution of the narrator (vv. 18 – 21) consists of a general statement *kārat Yhwh ʔet ʔabrām bʔrīt* and the contents (*lēʔmōr*) of this *bʔrīt*, expressed in direct speech. The symmetrical disposition of the explicative statement is evident. The language of the contents is highflown (Jacob), mostly derived from the legal environment.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ According to the narrator *Yhwh* made a covenant with Abraham that involved a divine grant of land⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ with its geographical and political boundaries (Westermann) specified.

Some comments are in order:

(a) The inversion together with the fact that we haven't been prepared for the *bʔrīt* theme within the episode himself confirms that here we are in front of an interpretation by the narrator.

(b) Whatever the precise meaning of the legal phrase *kārat bʔrīt*, in the present episode it links with the ceremony described in verse 17: it probably carries the nuance of oath⁽¹⁷¹⁾ or solemn promise.⁽¹⁷²⁾

(c) The fact that these vv. carry the narrator's perspective does not justify considering them as a whole or in part secondary. This interpretation of the narrator forms part and parcel of the present text. Verse 18 is usually admitted as original by scholarship, but vv. 19 – 21 are often scissored off as secondary for reasons arising from the history of traditions.⁽¹⁷³⁾ Yet there is no firm critical reason for making any source division in vv. 18 – 21.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ Moreover, the list of peoples occupying the land is necessary because it explains Abraham's question in v.8. If there Abraham asks how he may know that he is to inherit this land it is because 'this land' is not uninhabited: there is the 'Amorite' whose guilt is not yet felt (15,16). In his answer (vv.13 – 16) *Yhwh* made Abraham's future the sign of his *zard*'s future, so that in declaring the future grant of the land *Yhwh* has to include its current inhabitants who will be given to Abraham's descendants 'together with' (*ʔet*) their land.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾

168. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 33.

169. Westermann, *Genesis*, 272-273.

170. Cfr. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East", *JAOS* 90 (1970) 184-203.

171. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 101-113.

172. Westermann, *Genesis*, 272.

173. Cfr. Lohfink, *Landverheissung*, 65-78 for a discussion.

174. Van Seters, *Abraham*, 260.

175. Cfr. Abela, *Reading*, 217 for this meaning of *ʔet*.