

Three Examples of Literary Artistry

1. Genesis 25:29-34: Jacob takes the firstborn-right / *bechorah* from Esau.

- A Jacob was boiling boiled-stew. v. 29a
- B Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 29b
- C Esau said/ *vayomer Esav*: pray give me a gulp of the red-stuff, 30
that red-stuff [*ha-adom ha-adom*], for I am so weary!
- D Jacob said/ *vayomer Yaakov*: sell here and now your firstborn-right / 31
bechoratcha to me.
- X Esau said / *vayomer Esav*: *I/anochi* am on my way to dying, 32
so what good to me is a firstborn-right / *bechorah*?
- D' Jacob said/ *vayomer Yaakov*: Swear to me here-and-now. 33
He swore to him and sold his firstborn-right / *bechorato* to Jacob.
- C' Jacob gave Esau bread and boiled lentils; he ate and drank. 34a
- B' He arose and went off. 34a
- A' Thus did Esau despise the firstborn-right / *bechorah*. 34b

Esau is hemmed in by his brother's cunning design. D and D' flank X in order to visualize how Esau is hemmed in. Compare this with the oracle in Gen 25:23, where the struggle between Jacob and Esau rages prenatally and again Esau is hemmed in by Jacob:

tribe [Jacob] shall be mightier than tribe [Esau],
elder [Esau] shall be servant to younger [Jacob].

For more detail on this, see J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, pp. 94–97.

2. Genesis 27:36: Esau's comment on Jacob's taking the blessing / *brachah* from him.

He [Esau] said: Is that why his name was called Yaaqov / Heel-Sneak? For he has now sneaked against me / *vayaqveyni* twice: My firstborn-right / *bechorti* he took, and now he has taken my blessing / *birchati*!

Robert Alter translates the second sentence as follows. "Was his name called Jacob that he should trip me now twice by the heels?" As Alter notes, Jacob's Hebrew name, *Yaaqov*,

etymologized as “heel-grasper,” is now transformed into the verb *va-yaaqveni* having the root *aqob*, meaning “crooked” and denoting devious or deceitful dealing. In this passage Esau expresses the main theme of the Jacob-Esau struggle in the pun *bechorti / birchati*. Esau is not a dolt.

3. Genesis 28:16: Jacob’s response to the dream in Bethel.

And Jacob awoke from his sleep and he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I i did not know.”

What is the grammatical source of the extra I and how does one explain it?

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| יָדַעְתִּי. | לֹא | וְאֲנֹכִי | הַזֶּה | בַּמָּקוֹם | יְהוָה | יֵשׁ | אַכֵּן |
| <i>yadati</i> | <i>lo</i> | <i>ve-anochi</i> | <i>hazeh</i> | <i>bamaqom</i> | <i>YHWH</i> | <i>yesh</i> | <i>Achen</i> |
| I knew | not | and I | this | in the place | the LORD | there is | Surely |