Chapter 2

THE CHARACTERS

Many of the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters, and more specifically, through their speech and fate. Not only do the characters serve as the narrator's mouthpiece, but also what is and is not related about them, which of their characteristics are emphasized and which are not, which of their conversations and actions in the past are recorded and which are not, all reveal the values and norms within the narrative, and in this respect it makes no difference whether the characters are imaginary or whether they actually existed. The decisions they are called upon to make when confronted with different alternatives, and the results of these decisions, provide undisputable evidence of the narrative's ethical dimension.

The characters can also transmit the significance and values of the narrative to the reader, since they usually constitute the focal point of interest. Their personalities and histories attract the reader's attention to a greater extent than do other components of the narrative (explanations, settings, etc.). They generally arouse considerable emotional involvement; we feel what they feel, rejoice in their gladness, grieve at their sorrow and participate in their fate and experiences. Sometimes the characters arouse our sympathy, sometimes our revulsion, but we are never indifferent to them. We want to know them, to see how they act within their environment, and to understand their motives and desires. We follow their struggles to fulfil their aspirations and pay particular attention to everything they say, for when they speak to one another they are also addressing us.

When discussing individuals who are considered to have existed in the past, like those in biblical narrative, it should be emphasized that we know them only as they are presented in the narratives, and it is to this alone that we can refer. We know nothing whatsoever about

the real nature of the biblical characters, and we have no way of examining how accurately they are represented in biblical narrative. Although we can judge whether a particular character is convincing as a human being, we cannot know whether he or she is an accurate representation of a specific historical person. We cannot tell, for example, if the way David is portrayed in the book of Samuel and at the beginning of the book of Kings, is a more or less faithful description of David as he really was. All we can say is that his character, as it emerges from the narratives in these books, is not uniform, but, because of its complexity and many-faceted nature, is more convincing than the ideal person depicted in Chronicles (where the embarrassing episode of Bathsheba and Uriah is omitted altogether).

Moreover, a character in a work of literature is merely the sum of the means used in the description. Whereas in real life an individual exists whether or not someone bothers to describe him or her, in a work of literature it is the portrayal which creates the character.

The principal techniques used in moulding characters in the Bible will be presented below, encompassing first the direct and then the indirect ways of shaping the characters.

1. *The Direct Shaping of the Characters*

A. *Outward Appearance*

There is no precise, detailed description of the physical appearance of the characters in biblical narratives. Nothing at all is said about the looks of most of the characters in the Bible, and only in a few instances is a brief mention made of the characters' outward appearance. Even in those cases where an account of this kind is given, this is done only in very general terms without mentioning unique features.

The few details which are given about the external appearance of characters are not intended to enable us to visualize them clearly. Neither does the outer aspect of a character give us any indication of the personality, for there is no connection between appearance and nature (in contrast to many works of literature, where the good person is handsome and the bad one ugly, or the reverse). In biblical narrative information about someone's outward aspect serves solely as a means of advancing the plot or explaining its course.

Esau is a hairy man, while Jacob is a smooth man (Gen. 27.11).

These facts are very important for the plot of the narrative, since Jacob impersonates Esau in order to obtain the blessing intended for his older brother.

'Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful and lovely' (Gen. 29.17). Naturally, this information is intended to explain why Jacob loves Rachel and not Leah. Laban wishes to give Leah first, and therefore deceives Jacob. Jacob's love for Rachel also explains his special feelings for her sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

Saul was more than a head taller than any of the people (1 Sam. 9.2; 10.23), and this, it seems, won their affection and loyalty. An indirect reference to Saul's height is to be found in God's words to Samuel, when the latter is in the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite to anoint one of his sons king instead of Saul. When Samuel sees Eliab he thinks that he is the man destined to become king, but God says (1 Sam. 16.7): 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as a man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'. The indirect allusion to Saul is unmistakable, because only a few verses before God also says of him: 'I have rejected him' (16.1). Thus we find it stated in quite explicit terms, that there is no connection between a person's external appearance and internal qualities. The absence of this connection may well explain why so few references are made to the outer aspect of characters in the Bible.

It is said of Bathsheba, in a cursory, undetailed way, that she is 'very beautiful' (2 Sam. 11.2), and of Tamar, the daughter of David, even more briefly, that she is 'beautiful' (2 Sam. 13.1). In both these instances the woman's beauty is mentioned solely because it plays a central role in the course of events, providing the motivation for David's and Amnon's licentious behaviour.

Abishag the Shunammite is described as being 'very beautiful' (1 Kgs 1.4). The description of her beauty serves, contrary to the instances of Bathsheba and Tamar, to emphasize David's abstinence from sexual intercourse in his old age: 'The maiden was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and ministered to him; but the king knew her not'. This indicates David's weakness and impotence, and this picture of an old and ailing king is supported by additional details in this narrative of Adonijah's attempt to take over the reins of government before David's death. David's advanced age (1 Kgs 1.1, 15) limits his ability and desire to act, and is a significant

factor in Adonijah's plan to proclaim himself king. Not only does the king's weakness make the question of the succession more urgent, but Adonijah can also assume that the king's lassitude and negligence will prevent him from reacting vigorously to his usurpation of the throne. While Adonijah is basing his plans on his father's weakness and indifference, the prophet Nathan mobilizes all the forces at his disposal in order to overcome the aged king's apathy and force him to make a decision and act to have Solomon appointed his successor.

Absalom's beauty is described in relative detail: 'Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him' (2 Sam. 14.25). The text extols his beauty, stating explicitly that he was the handsomest man in all Israel. In the next verse we are told about his hair, but here the narrator uses a narrative rather than a description. He relates what Absalom used to *do* with his hair: 'For when he cut the hair of his head, as he did at the end of every year, when it was heavy on him, he weighed it and it weighed two hundred shekels by the king's weight' (v. 26). The information about Absalom's beauty and hair is intended both to present him as someone who has been blessed by fate and is admired by everyone ('there was no one so much to be praised'), and also, which is the main point, to indicate his vanity and self-love, traits which play an important part in the course of events leading to his revolt against his father. In addition, Absalom's abundant hair causes his death in the final event.

Mephibosheth the son of Saul was a cripple and for that reason had been unable to go with David when he fled from Absalom (2 Sam. 19.26). In verse 24 of that chapter we read that: 'He had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety'. Here, too, we learn how Mephibosheth grieved over David's flight from what he *did*, or rather did not do, concerning his external appearance.

There are also exceptions, however. David is described as being: 'ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome' (1 Sam. 16.12), without these details about his outward appearance playing any defined part in the development of the events associated with him. We should remember, however, that this refers not to just any biblical character but to the person who is one day to be considered the ideal king. It is natural that details will be given about him which

are not usually provided concerning other characters. His external beauty may have been one of the reasons for his popularity with the people, though not the principal one. It should be noted that Goliath the Philistine disdained David just because he was: 'but a youth, ruddy and comely in appearance' (17.42).

In some cases the expression on the faces of characters at a certain time is mentioned because it reflects their emotions. After Hannah heard Eli's encouraging words we read: 'and her countenance was no longer sad' (1 Sam. 1.18). Jonadab asks Amnon, who is tortured by his love for Tamar: 'O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning?' (2 Sam. 13.4). The king of Persia asks Nehemiah, who has heard very sad news about the plight of his brethren in Judah: 'Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick?' (Neh. 2.2).

As is the case with physical appearances, the clothes worn by characters in the Bible are never described in detail. In a few isolated cases one item or another of clothing is mentioned, and this is done solely to advance the plot or indicate the individual's emotional state. In most of the instances in which clothing is specified, we are told what is *done* with it.

We read about Tamar, Judah's daughter in law: 'She put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up' (Gen. 38.14). The object of changing her clothes is clear: Tamar does not want Judah to recognize her, and even wants him to think she is a harlot. We hear about special mourning clothes also when Joab addresses the wise woman of Tekoa: 'Pretend to be a mourner, and put on mourning garments' (2 Sam. 14.2). Both for Tamar and for the woman of Tekoa clothes play an important part in the 'show' they put on. The same applies to the Gibeonites, 'with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet and worn-out clothes' (Josh. 9.5).

The equipment worn by Goliath the Philistine is described in greater detail than is customary in the Bible: 'He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. And he had greaves of bronze upon his legs, and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron' (1 Sam. 17.5-7). Obviously this account of Goliath's heavy and terrifying armour is not an end in itself but a way of emphasizing the astounding victory obtained by David, who went to battle unarmed,

in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel. 'Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied"' (17.45). In order to stress this concept of victory with the help of the Lord and not because of armour, the episode of David's attempt to wear Saul's coat of mail, bronze helmet and sword is related, ending in David's abandoning all the implements of war (vv. 38-39).

Mention is often made in the Bible of the tearing of clothes to signify mourning and sorrow, for example: 'And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes rent and earth upon his head' (2 Sam. 1.2), or, 'Then David took hold of his clothes, and rent them; and so did all the men who were with him' (v. 11).

We read about Tamar, the daughter of David: 'Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for thus were the virgin daughters of the king clad in garments... And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent the long robe which she wore...' (2 Sam. 13.18-19). In this case the tearing of the robe has another function in addition to the expression of grief and sorrow. Tamar's long robe also fulfils a symbolic role, indicating, as the narrator states in no uncertain terms, that Tamar is a virgin and the daughter of the king, someone with a very high rank. The tear symbolizes the drastic change which has taken place in her situation: she is no longer a virgin and has also been cast out by Amnon and his servant, in contrast to the treatment which should be accorded a king's daughter.

Elijah's casting of his mantle upon Elisha (1 Kgs 19.19) should also be regarded as a symbolic act. Elisha immediately abandons his work, runs after Elijah and serves him. When Elijah ascends to heaven, Elisha picks up the mantle which has fallen from him and strikes the Jordan with it, just as Elijah had done: 'And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other'. When the sons of the prophets see this they say: 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha' (2 Kgs 2.15). Thus, Elijah's spirit is transferred symbolically by means of the mantle, both at the first meeting between the two prophets and at their final parting.

Finally, it is said of Mordecai: 'Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple' (Esth. 8.15). The apparel described here in considerable detail expresses the heights which Mordecai had reached and symbolizes his victory over his enemy, Haman (who had already been obliged to dress him in royal robes in order to honour him on a previous occasion).

B. *Inner Personality*

There are two kinds of direct statement about an individual's inner personality: one that refers to character traits and one that relates to mental states. The first kind is what is customarily called direct characterization (in the narrow and precise sense of the word).

Direct characterization often embodies an element of judgment. If a person is defined as being righteous, wicked, wise or foolish, this constitutes both characterization and judgment. Thus, direct characterization, particularly when it refers to the individual's entire personality, can serve simultaneously as a way of evaluating it (though it can also fulfil other functions).

Direct characterization may be voiced by the narrator or by one of the characters. There are not many instances of direct characterization by the narrator in biblical narratives. What is evident is that the trait noted by the narrator is always extremely important in the development of the plot. Furthermore, the quality denoted through direct characterization almost always emerges indirectly, too, through either the actions or speech of the character involved or through both of them.

We read about Noah: 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God' (Gen. 6.9). The men of Sodom are characterized as being: 'wicked, great sinners against the Lord' (Gen. 13.13). The sons of Eli are described as follows: 'they were worthless men; they had no regard for the Lord' (1 Sam. 2.12). Sheba the son of Bichri is also described as: 'a worthless fellow' (2 Sam. 20.1). Nabal is presented as being: 'churlish and ill-behaved' (1 Sam. 25.3), Obadiah is described as a person who: 'revered the Lord greatly' (1 Kgs 18.3), while Job was: 'blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil' (Job 1.1).

Apart from these characterizations, which refer to the moral aspects of the individuals involved, there are also accounts of their mental traits and other facets of their personalities.

The narrator tells us that the serpent in the garden of Eden was: 'more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made' (Gen. 3.1). Jonadab the son of Shimeah, Amnon's friend, is

described as: 'a very crafty man' (2 Sam. 13.3), while the woman from Tekoa (14.2) and the woman from Abel of Beth-maacah (20.16) are both said to be wise. Esau is portrayed as being: 'a skilful hunter, a man of the field', while Jacob was considered: 'a quiet man, dwelling in tents' (Gen. 25.27). The narrator tells us that the man Moses was: 'very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth' (Num. 12.3). Saul is described as being: '. . . choice and fine. There was not a man among the people of Israel finer than he' (1 Sam. 9.2).

Amongst the instances of direct characterization uttered by the protagonists, particular attention should be paid to those attributed to God. Characterization voiced by God has absolute validity, like that pronounced by the narrator, or perhaps even more so.

God says to Noah: 'For I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation' (Gen. 7.1). The angel of the Lord says to Abraham: 'For now I know that you fear God' (Gen. 22.12). God says to Solomon: 'Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you' (1 Kgs 3.12). God says to Satan: 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil' (Job 1.8).

When characterization derives from human beings the question arises whether it reflects the author's 'objective' view or only the character's subjective one. The author can portray any one character by putting a description in the mouth of any other, but this does not mean that whenever this occurs it necessarily reflects the author's opinion. It will not always be easy to decide whether or not the author identifies with what the characters say in describing each other.

There is an additional difficulty in this respect, arising from the fact that in many instances when one of the persons appears to be characterizing another, there is in fact no characterization at all. What one person says about another often does not refer to the real features, but merely expresses the state of mind, emotions or attitudes of the speaker. On occasions these statements of 'characterization' are made solely to serve the speaker's ends, thus revealing more about the individual who says them than about the one they purport to describe. The following examples will illustrate this.

One of Saul's young men says: 'Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him' (1 Sam. 16.18). In this case it can be assumed that the long description of David given by one of Saul's young men conforms with the author's view. All the qualities mentioned here emerge in the stories about David, and Hushai cites some of them as recognized characteristics of David (2 Sam. 17.8, 10). Although Hushai's intention is purely to use his description of David's nature to instil fear into Absalom's heart, thereby causing him to reject Ahithophel's advice, there is no reason to assume that Hushai does not believe what he is saying about David, nor is there any cause to suppose that the author does not concur with Hushai's opinion.

Saul says to David: 'You are more righteous than I' (1 Sam. 24.17). There is no doubt that this positive description is believed by Saul, and from the context it is evident that the author endorses it too.

Several characterizations are given by various individuals in the narrative of Abigail (1 Samuel 25). One of Nabal's servants says of David and his men: 'Yet the men were very good to us' (v. 15) while the same servant says of Nabal: 'he is ill-natured' (v. 17). Abigail herself says about her husband: 'Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal (fool) is his name, and folly is with him' (v. 25). The statements made by the servant and Abigail—although intended to dissuade David from killing Nabal and all his household—are undoubtedly considered reliable and accurate by the author.

We can also concur with what David says about the sons of Zeruiah: 'And I am this day weak, though anointed king; these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me. The Lord requite the evildoer according to his wickedness' (2 Sam. 3.39). Similarly, what David says about Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, and his murderers, can be accepted: 'How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous man in his own house' (4.11).

Tamar says to Amnon: 'And as for you, you would be as one of the wanton fools in Israel' (2 Sam. 13.13). Her object in giving this description is to deter Amnon from raping her, but there can be scarcely any doubt that by placing this statement in Tamar's mouth the narrator's opinion of Amnon is being expressed and conveyed to the reader. Tamar serves as the author's mouthpiece in condemning Amnon. Tamar's definition of Amnon is dependent upon his implementing his threat, but since he does so and torments his sister, her statement is ratified.

In addressing Solomon, David says: 'For you are a wise man' (1 Kgs 2.9), and the Queen of Sheba says to him: 'The report was true which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom. . . . and, behold, the half was not told me; your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report which I heard' (10.6-7). These accounts of Solomon's wisdom clearly accord with the narrator's statements, God's words and Solomon's acts revealing his sagacity.

When, however, Shimei the son of Gera calls David, 'man of blood, worthless fellow' (2 Sam. 16.7) this does not reflect the author's view. On the contrary, by defining Shimei's words as a curse—the author does not write: 'And Shimei said', but: 'And Shimei said as he cursed'—the narrator hints that they should not be regarded as a balanced pronouncement. Shimei, who is a member of Saul's family, expresses resentment and anger with David for supplanting the previous royal house. His statement makes it clear how low David had fallen at the time he fled from Absalom, while at the same time indicating that not only Absalom opposed his rule but other groups, loyal to the house of Saul, were antagonistic towards him too. In contrast to these words of hate uttered by Shimei, many episodes in the books of Samuel reveal David's fair and just treatment of Saul and his descendants.

David says of Ahimaaz: 'He is a good man, and comes with good tidings' (2 Sam. 18.27). Adonijah says to Jonathan: 'Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news' (1 Kgs 1.42). Although both Ahimaaz and Jonathan had proved in the past that they were worthy men when they succeeded in evading their pursuers and bringing important information from the city of Jerusalem to David in the desert, the intention here is not to characterize the two messengers, who play merely a secondary role in the narrative. What is reflected in these two instances is the speaker's high hopes of hearing good news, while through their words the author creates a sharply ironic contrast between the expectations (of David and Adonijah) and the actual content of the information, which is disastrous for the recipient: Absalom's death (in the case of David) and the anointing of Solomon (in the case of Adonijah).

A special kind of 'characterization' uttered by an individual (which in actual fact is a pseudo-characterization) is that phrased as a metaphor or a simile. In this case the object is not to describe but to arouse or express a particular attitude. Metaphors and similes often serve not only to clarify a particular matter by comparing it with

something else (in a simile the comparison is overt, while in a metaphor it is covert), but also to express or arouse an emotional stance vis à vis the matter in hand. The emotions which exist with regard to one side of the comparison are transferred to the other, thus filling the second sphere with the emotions associated with the first.

Abishai the son of Zeruiah calls Shimei the son of Gera, 'this dead dog' (2 Sam. 16.9). This metaphor serves merely to express contempt and scorn, reflecting the speaker's emotional stance and his attempt to arouse the same feelings in David so that he will permit Abishai to execute Shimei.

The same metaphor, in conjunction with another one, is used by David to refer to himself. When Saul is chasing him David says: 'After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea!' (1 Sam. 24.14). His object is to indicate his unimportance in no uncertain terms, and thus dissuade Saul from continuing to hunt him.

David is 'characterized' four times by means of the phrase, 'as an angel of God' (this simile is not used in connection with anyone else in the Bible). Achish the king of Gath, says to him: 'I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, "He shall not go up with us to the battle"' (1 Sam. 29.9). The wise woman of Tekoa uses the simile twice when addressing David: 'For my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil'. 'But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth' (2 Sam. 14.17, 20). Mephibosheth says to David: 'But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you' (19.27).

A common element can be discerned, as in all four cases the speaker who uses the simile 'as an angel of God', wants to flatter David. The sycophantic aspect is particularly evident in the case of Mephibosheth. Even at the best of times he is dependent on the king's mercy, and even more so now, after Ziba has accused him of being disloyal to the king and David believes Ziba. His position is extremely precarious, his life is in the balance and all he can do is to praise and extol the king, reminding him of a previous act of mercy he has shown him and hoping that the king will be equally forgiving this time.

The element of fawning is obvious in the words of the woman of Tekoa too. She uses the simile twice because she has two aims; first of

all, she wishes to influence the king to allow Absalom to come back, as she desires (or, more precisely, in accordance with the wishes of Joab, in whose service she is acting); and secondly, she wants to avert the king's anger against her and Joab for deceiving him. She believes that she will achieve both these objectives by using a little flattery, thus obtaining the king's goodwill and inducing him to grant her request.

Achish's flattery is less obvious, but it exists nevertheless. He wants to placate David because of the demand made by the commanders of the Philistines that he be removed from the area of the battle and sent back whence he came. The Philistine commanders fear that David will turn against them in their war with Saul, while Achish reiterates that it is they alone who do not trust David, and as far as he, Achish, is concerned David is as honest and upright as the angel of God. In other words, he wants to prevent David from taking offence at the fact that he is not allowed to participate in the battle against Israel and to stop him leaving Achish's service.

The element of flattery explains the exaggeration in the simile. It is no small matter to compare someone to an angel of God. The simile has no basis in reality, there is a vast chasm between humanity and the divine creatures called angels, and each belongs to a very different sphere. The use of the simile is comprehensible, however, if the object is to ingratiate oneself.

Be that as it may, it is clear that the simile used here does not teach us anything about the king's true nature or about qualities really attributed to him. Like metaphors, similes show more about the person using them than the person they purportedly describe.

In addition to statements about characteristics (which are more or less constant), information about moods (which are transient) serves to create the personality of characters in the narrative. As is the case with traits, moods can also be conveyed by both direct and indirect means. Direct information about characters' moods may be transmitted by the narrator, other characters, or the subjects themselves.

In the previous chapter, several instances were quoted in which the narrator indicated characters' inner states. Such items as: 'And David was angry' (2 Sam. 6.8), 'Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man' (12.5), and 'He was angry' (13.21), make a considerable contribution to building David's personality, even though they relate to passing emotions. By putting together pieces of

information about people's feelings a general picture of their character, or at least of significant aspects of their character, can be formed, particularly if the information relates to the same kind of mood, as is the case with the items about David cited above. If the items relate to different kinds of emotional states, we may discern varying aspects of the individual's character. For example, information reflecting additional sides of David's personality is conveyed, in connection with reports of his moods: 'And afterwards David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt' (1 Sam. 24.5), 'And David was greatly distressed... But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God' (30.6), 'And David was afraid of the Lord that day' (2 Sam. 6.9), 'And David mourned for his son day after day' (13.37), 'And the spirit of the king longed to go forth to Absalom; for he was comforted about Amnon, seeing he was dead' (13.39), 'But the king had compassion on Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan' (21.7). The importance of information of this kind in creating the characters lies in the fact that it reveals to us what is happening in their hearts.

Information is also given about the inner states of characters by one of the other protagonists. There is an important difference here, however, for unlike the omniscient narrator, the other character cannot be absolutely certain about the feelings of others. He can draw conclusions about them from such external signs as speech and behaviour, but cannot go beyond (subjective) interpretation. The character who is doing the interpreting usually notes the final conclusion without describing what it is that has led up to it. In some cases, however, the narrator transmits this information, enabling the reader to check the individual's conclusions. What Joab says to David at the bitter moment when the king is overcome by grief for the death of his son, Absalom, carries a strong flavour of personal interpretation, which is difficult to accept as it stands: 'Loving those who hate you and hating those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you; for today I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased' (2 Sam. 19.6). Although there is an element of truth in Joab's claim—David loved his son and enemy, Absalom, and did not like his devoted servant and associate, Joab—there is no doubt that it is highly exaggerated and does not reflect the situation as it really was. Joab's biting words were intended to bring David out of the mental depression into which he had sunk as a

result of his son's death, since Joab feared that David's human weakness could completely undermine the basis of his rule, which was anyway rather uncertain at that moment. It seems, however, that Joab's speech does reflect his true opinion of the king, though phrased in extravagant terms.

What Joab says is an obvious attempt to reverse the state of affairs, and this is evident in both form and content. The clauses 'Loving those who hate you and hating those who love you' reflect the attempt to stand things on their heads by using an opposing construction (loving—hating; who hate you—who love you), which is intensified by the identity of the syntactical-grammatical structure. In addition to the opposing structure of the two clauses, there is also opposition within each one, between its predicate and object (between 'loving' and 'who hate you' and between 'hating' and 'who love you'). Joab means to say that David's reaction is diametrically opposed to what he should be feeling.

Joab's exaggeration is also manifested in his generalizations. He uses the plural (those who hate you, those who love you) and the verbal noun (hating, loving) instead of a conjugated verb (which focuses more on the specific case as regards time and place, while the verbal noun is more general and amorphous).

The generalization that David loves those who hate him and hates those who love him is undoubtedly unjust. Joab's contention that David's grief for his son is tantamount to declaring that his commanders and servants are of no importance to him is not accurate either. And Joab's 'perception' that 'if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased' (which is what he deduced from David's behaviour), is only partly correct. It is true that David would be happy were Absalom alive, but it is false to state that he would be happy were all his commanders and servants dead.

Joab's interpretations comprise half-truths, according with David's feelings only in part, and reflecting Joab's own feelings to a considerable extent. His feelings of guilt, or at least unease, at having deliberately disobeyed David's order not to harm Absalom are reflected in his aggressive tone and in the accusations he hurls at David. Behind what he says are his feelings of resentment at the fact that David does not like him despite his devotion and the many services Joab has done him (when he speaks of 'those who love you' and 'commanders and servants' Joab is naturally thinking of himself). His words, therefore, reflect his own feelings rather than being an accurate representation of David's.

In some cases, however, the assertions made about the characters' emotional states by other characters are not so tendentious and subjective.

'And why is your heart sad?' (1 Sam. 1.8), Elkanah asks his wife, Hannah. This question provides reliable evidence of Hannah's mood. The same applies to the question Jezebel asks her husband: 'Why is your spirit so vexed?' (1 Kgs 21.5), and to the question God asks Jonah: 'Do you do well to be angry?' (Jon. 4.4).

Someone tells Solomon: 'Behold Adonijah fears king Solomon' (1 Kgs 1.51). The prophet Elisha tells Gehazi in connection with the Shunnamite: 'Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress' (2 Kgs 4.27). All these statements are confirmed by the context.

In addition to the above examples concerning the emotions and moods of the characters, there are instances relating to their knowledge and intentions.

Jonathan, Saul's son, says to David: 'You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you; Saul my father also knows this' (1 Sam. 23.17). Nathan says to Bathsheba: 'Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king and David our lord does not know it?' (1 Kgs 1.11). Solomon says to Benaiah: 'The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds upon his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and slew with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself' (1 Kgs 2.32).

The character's knowledge or lack of it is important either for the characterization or for the development of the plot. In the last example, for instance, David's lack of knowledge is extremely significant as regards his morality: his ignorance absolves him of all blame in the murder of the two commanders of the army; at the same time David's lack of knowledge places the full responsibility on Joab (characterization of Joab), which is the reason for his assassination at Solomon's order (plot).

When one character notes the intentions of another the former's interpretation may be correct or totally mistaken. For example, the king of Jericho receives a report informing him that two men have come to search out all the land (Josh. 2.2). The princes of the Ammonites tell Hanun their lord their assumption: 'Do you think because David has sent comforters to you, that he is honouring your

father? Has not David sent his servants to you to search the city, and spy it out, and to overthrow it?' (2 Sam. 10.3).

In the first example, the intentions of the men who penetrated Jericho, as assumed in the report to the king, accord with Joshua's orders: 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho' (Josh. 2.1). While in the second, the interpretation given by the princes of the Ammonites does not conform with David's purpose, as he himself testifies: 'I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me' (2 Sam. 10.2). Noting intentions may contribute to moulding the characters, but is no less important in accounting for the plot. In the last example, the inaccurate interpretation leads to anger (first of Hanun and later of David), and, in consequence, even to a bitter war between Israel and the Ammonites.

The evidence given by a character about his or her own emotions or knowledge is of particular interest, because, through introspection, people can know only the inner workings of their own heart and mind. It is, of course, possible for individuals to be mistaken about themselves too, or even to distort things deliberately, but even so, independent evidence of this kind should be accorded the respect it deserves, since in every instance it reveals something of the way people see themselves or want others to see them.

On occasions characters speak about their emotions. Jacob says to Laban: 'Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force' (Gen. 31.31). Hannah explains to Eli: 'For all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation' (1 Sam. 1.16). Amnon says of himself: 'I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister' (2 Sam. 13.4). Jonah answers God's question by saying: 'I do well to be angry, angry enough to die' (Jon. 4.9).

Sometimes characters refer to their knowledge. Cain answers God's question about his brother Abel by saying: 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen. 4.9). When David asks if all is well with the young man Absalom, Ahimaaz replies: 'When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I do not know what it was' (2 Sam. 18.29). Jonah says to the sailors: 'For I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you' (Jon. 1.12).

As has been mentioned above, the statements characters make about themselves are not always reliable. The declarations of lack of knowledge made by Cain and Ahimaaz are clearly evasive; for a variety of reasons they do not want to reply to the question put to them, though they know the answer perfectly well. In other cases, however, we can place full reliance on the evidence given by the characters themselves.

A different technique of presenting the inner life of characters directly is by giving their thoughts, calculations and intentions. The narrator usually precedes the characters' thoughts by the verb 'said', and sometimes by the phrase 'he said in his heart', since in ancient times thought was considered to be inner, soundless speech. Although the presentation of the thoughts of characters in the Bible does not reach the dimensions of interior monologue, in some cases their considerations and motivations are given at considerable length. It is true that no internal argument or discussion is given, but on occasions one gains the impression that characters wish to convince themselves that the action they are taking, rather than an alternative course, is the right one.

> And the Lord *said in his heart*, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done' (Gen. 8.21).
>
> Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and *said in his heart*, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?' (Gen. 17.17).
>
> The Lord *said*, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?' (Gen. 18.17).
>
> Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you for a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles'. For Saul *said*, 'Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him' (1 Sam. 18.17).
>
> Now David *had said*, 'Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him' (1 Sam. 25.21-22).
>
> And David *said in his heart*, 'I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines; then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand' (1 Sam. 27.1).
>
> Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the

pillar which is in the King's Valley, for he *said*, 'I have no son to keep my name in remembrance' (2 Sam. 18.18).

It can be said in conclusion that in biblical narrative information referring directly to the inner feelings of the characters is often supplied by either the narrator, other characters or the subjects themselves. If this information is provided by one of the other characters rather than the narrator, however, it is not always of real value for shaping those characters to which it refers (and in this case fulfils a different function). Even if it does have value of this kind, direct information does not constitute a continual account of internal processes, but rather illuminates selected aspects of the inner workings of the individuals. It undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to the shaping of the characters, but this object is served far more effectively by those features of the narrative which cast indirect light on the nature of the characters.

2. *The Indirect Shaping of the Characters*

Whereas the importance of the direct ways of shaping the characters lies in their quality (the fact that they are clear and unequivocal), that of the indirect ways lies in their quantity. This means that there is more indirect than direct shaping of characters in biblical narrative and therefore the burden of characterization falls primarily on this method.

Indirect ways of shaping the characters are to be found in all those external features, like speech or actions, which indicate something about the individual's inner state. The reader has to interpret these details and construct the character's mental and emotional make-up accordingly, a task which is not undertaken for the reader by the narrator. Thus, indirect characterization requires a mental effort on the part of the reader, thereby increasing the active participation in the narrated events.

A. *Speech*

In the previous section we discussed several instances in which one person characterizes another directly through speech. Speech is also an important way of characterizing individuals indirectly. Traits of both the speaker and the interlocutor are expressed through speech, or to be more precise, all speech reflects and exposes the speaker,

while it sometimes also brings to light qualities of the person being addressed (or reveals the speaker's opinion of that person). What people say witnesses not only to their thoughts, feelings, etc., but is often slanted to accord with the character, mood, interests and status of their interlocutor.

It is customary today to delineate characters in a narrative by the style of their speech and not only by the content of what they say. A person's style of speaking (or pronunciation) reveals social class and even character or emotional state. Is this means used in biblical narrative too?

Biblical narratives do not contain personal speech styles distinguishing one character from another. The characters' speech is more or less identical with the narrator's style, and, apart from a few exceptions, is marked by its matter-of-fact, restrained and unembellished tone. It reaches us through the author's mediation and is subject to the same stylistic principles which govern the work as a whole, giving it unity.

In addition, it is not customary in biblical narrative to make characters speak haltingly or awkwardly in an attempt to imitate natural speech rhythms precisely. Biblical narrative preserves a distance between polished literary style and imprecise colloquial speech, avoiding broken sentences, meaningless words and incorrect structures.

Nevertheless, it is possible to find disjointed sentences spoken by characters in biblical narrative which can be considered to reflect mental or emotional states. For example, when Ahimaaz is asked by David if all is well with Absalom, he answers: 'I saw the great tumult at sending the king's servant, by Joab, and your servant, and I do not know what' (2 Sam. 18.29). It is obvious that this sentence is not constructed correctly. The lack of fluency may be explained by Ahimaaz's confusion at having to answer an uncomfortable question. He wants to tell the king about the victory in battle but does not want to inform him of his son's death, and does not know how to extricate himself from this predicament. This explanation is not necessarily correct, however, since the confusion in the sentence may simply derive from textual inaccuracy. There are several disjointed or defective sentences in the Bible which have no connection with confusion or any other psychological state.

A rare instance in which agitation is reflected in speech may perhaps be found in 1 Sam. 4.16-17, where the messenger has to

inform Eli of Israel's defeat in battle by the Philistines, the death of Eli's two sons and the capture of the ark of God. The messenger begins hesitantly: 'I am he who has come from the battle and from the battle I fled today'. Eli encourages him to continue: 'What has happened, my son?' Only then does the man summon up the courage to go on and deliver his dreadful news.

In some cases the style of speech reflects the individual's wisdom. What Abigail says to David (1 Sam. 25.24-31) is distinguished by its figurative language. The words of the woman of Tekoa (2 Sam. 14.4-20) are peppered with a great many similes. Hushai the Archite also uses numerous similes and metaphors in giving his advice to Absalom (17.7-13). Abigail is characterized as being of good understanding, while the woman of Tekoa and Hushai are wise, and high-flown speech is appropriate for wise people. This kind of speech was useful and necessary for attaining the objectives which these speakers desired, and all three were gifted with the ability to express themselves eloquently, using an abundance of vivid images.

The speaker's or the interlocutor's social standing is often reflected in speech. For example, the style of the wise woman of Tekoa when she addresses the king is unlike that used by the king when he speaks to her. When the woman comes before the king in order to submit her request, he speaks to her abruptly, saying: 'What is it?' (2 Sam. 14.5), but when the king wishes to ask her something she says politely: 'Pray let my lord the king speak' (v. 18). The same difference in the style of speech is found in verse 12. The woman asks politely: 'Pray let your handmaid speak a word to my lord the king'. And he answers her curtly: 'Speak'. Throughout the long dialogue between the woman of Tekoa and the king she adopts polite forms of speech, addressing him as 'my lord the king', and referring to herself as 'your handmaid' or 'your servant'.

Other characters also adopt the same polite style when addressing the king, even if they themselves are from a high social class. They use the third person form, address the king as 'my lord the king', and refer to themselves as 'your servant'. Ittai the Gittite says to David: 'As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be' (2 Sam. 15.21). Joab expresses himself as follows: 'Today your servant knows that I have found favour in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant' (or according to the *qᵉrê*, 'your servant') (14.22). Even the king's sons

and wife take care to adopt a respectful tone: 'And Absalom came to the king, and said, "Behold, your servant has sheepshearers; pray let the king and his servants go with your servant"' (13.24). 'Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, "What is it?" She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your maidservant by the Lord your God. . . . although you, my lord the king, do not know it. . . . And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are upon you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. . . . when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers"' (1 Kgs 1.16-21).

The peak of respectfulness is embodied in the phrase: 'Let the king live for ever', which occurs in the Bible principally in addressing foreign kings (Dan. 2.4; 3.9; 5.10; Neh. 2.3). Bathsheba also says to David: 'May my lord king David live for ever' (1 Kgs 1.31), but her speech reflects not only customary court style but also a considerable degree of tact and refinement. For after David has promised her that 'Solomon your son shall reign *after me*', that is, after his death, she expresses the wish that her son Solomon should not rule, but rather that king David should live for ever.

Speech reflects the speakers' standing not only when they address royalty. For example, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, says: 'See, my lord has spared. . . Your servant went. . . ' (2 Kgs 5.20, 25). The Shunnamite also uses the same style in speaking to Elisha: 'No, my lord, O man of God; do not lie to your maidservant' (4.16).

Deviations from accepted style are of particular importance. There are two kinds: the polite style, like that described above, used by a speaker whose status is equal to that of the interlocutor; the absence of the polite style when the speaker's status is inferior to that of the interlocutor.

Brothers and sisters tend to address one another with the term, 'my brother', or 'my sister' (Gen. 33.9; 2 Sam. 13.11). During the encounter between Jacob and Esau, however, after the former's return from his extended sojourn in Laban's house, Jacob addresses his brother as 'my lord' and refers to himself as 'his servant': 'Let my lord pass on before his servant' (Gen. 33.14, and many times in chs. 32 and 33). When Moses chides Aaron for making the golden calf his brother replies: 'Let not the anger of my lord burn hot' (Exod. 32.22). In both cases the polite speech indubitably reflects the speaker's feelings of guilt towards his brother and the desire to appease him.

Kings also use the term 'my brother' when addressing one another

(1 Kgs 9.13). Nevertheless, Ahab, the king of Israel, says to the messengers of Ben-hadad the king of Syria: 'Tell my lord the king, "All that you first demanded of your servant I will do; but this thing I cannot do"' (1 Kgs 20.9). Here the polite form of speech reflects Ahab's political inferiority and dependence on Ben-hadad.

As has been noted above, Joab uses the polite forms of the court in addressing the king in 2 Sam. 14.22. He uses a very different tone, however, when he upbraids David for succumbing to his personal grief over the death of his son Absalom: 'Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now' (2 Sam. 19.7). There is nothing in this vehement speech, full of orders and threats, to indicate that it is addressed to the king.

The same applies to the prophet Nathan, whose form of speech also accords with its content. Nathan addresses the king according to all the rules of the court in 1 Kgs 1.24-27, using the term 'my lord the king' when speaking to him and 'your servant' when referring to himself, but he employs a very different tone when he rebukes David in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam. 12.1-14).

The correspondence between the style and content of speech reinforces the impact of what is said. In addition, the combination of form and content in deviations from accepted court style carries considerable weight in characterizing the speakers: Joab chides David who is mourning for his son, thus revealing his insensitivity; Nathan rebukes David for sinning, thus indicating his courage and high moral standards.

The content of speech is closely connected with its function, whether this is to express emotion, establish an attitude, spur someone to action or provide information.

The type of speech which is particularly effective in disclosing a person's psychological state is the emotive one. A classic example of this kind of speech, revealing quite clearly what is going on in the speaker's mind, is found in 2 Sam. 18.33 and 19.4 containing David's cry on hearing of the death of his son Absalom. The narrator says: 'And the king cried with a loud voice', that is, he specifies the intensity of the cry, thereby heightening its effect on the reader. Furthermore, the content of the cry is given in detail and at length, without flinching from 'unnecessary' repetition. This cry is extremely

moving, conveying the depths of emotional shock endured by the bereaved father. The tremendous impact is achieved primarily by the numerous repetitions: the same cry is given both in 18.33 and in 19.4 and within each verse the words 'my son' and 'Absalom' recur frequently. In 19.4 David's entire cry consists of only these three words, and in 18.33 they constitute most of it: 'My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom. Would that I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son'.

These repetitions, which do not form a complete sentence, indicate David's groans and his inability to think logically during those moments. All his thoughts are focused on only one subject, and he is incapable of concentrating on anything else. He is able only to repeat over and over again the name which fills his heart, 'Absalom', and the words which express more than anything else his biological and emotional attachment to him, 'my son'. The term 'my son' recurs more often than the name 'Absalom', and also begins and ends both cries. This indicates that despite all that Absalom had done to his father and would undoubtedly have done to him had he been victorious, he remained David's son and David loved him 'as a father the son in whom he delights' (Prov. 3.12).

Amongst all the short exclamations, 'my son Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son', there is one complete sentence: 'Would that I had died instead of you'. This expression is shocking not because the father expresses his desire to die in his son's place, but because of the remoteness from reality it reveals: first of all, David expresses a desire which cannot be fulfilled, and secondly, he addresses Absalom in the second person, ignoring the fact that his son is not there nor will he ever be. David speaks to Absalom as if he were still alive and able to hear what he is saying in the same sentence in which he asks to die in Absalom's stead! This lack of logic undoubtedly shows David's emotional confusion. This sentence also indicates that the short exclamations, 'my son, Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son', which come before and after it, do not refer to Absalom in the third person, but address him directly. If this is so, they embody deep within them the tragic and touching illusion that if David calls his son's name often and loudly enough Absalom might hear... But whereas direct address usually serves to establish interpersonal relations, here its sole function is to convey the feelings locked in David's heart which must find an outlet.

Attention should also be paid to the fact that because of the

morpheme '*ab*' (father) in the name Absalom, the phrase 'my *son Ab*salom' establishes a stylistic connection between son and father. The numerous repetitions of the elements 'son' and '*ab*' echo continually in our minds, thus highlighting the bond between father and son as well as the preceding conflict between the two. This resulted from an unfortunate relationship, full of contradictions, in which the father's attitude to the son vacillated between weakness and firmness, while the son treated his father with unbridled aggression.

Speech which is intended solely to express emotions and is not addressed to anyone is rare (this does not refer to inner speech, which is in fact thought). On the other hand, speech which is addressed to someone and which often develops into a dialogue is very common.

Speech directed at someone else is sometimes intended to arouse a certain emotion or attitude in them, and can teach us about both the speaker and the interlocutor. Hushai's first words to Absalom, before the crucial occasion when he gives Absalom his advice, can serve as an example. He first has to win Absalom's confidence, and this is no easy task in view of the fact that Hushai is known to be David's friend. On entering Absalom's presence Hushai decides to demonstrate his recognition of the new king immediately and emphatically and calls out twice: 'Long live the king! Long live the king!' (2 Sam. 16.16). Absalom, quite naturally, is suspicious of him and asks in surprise: 'Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?' (v. 17). Absalom's doubts are indicated principally by his repetition of the words 'your friend'. Hushai answers Absalom's double question with a double reply, or rather, with an answer consisting of two parts. In the first part Hushai says: 'No; for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his will I be, and with him I will remain' (v. 18). He begins by categorically denying the implications of Absalom's question, that it better befitted him to accompany David, his friend. After the denial, Hushai gives his reasons for it. His cunning is indicated by the fact that he does not give his reasons for abandoning David, as the question requires, but explains why he decided to come and remain with Absalom. By emphasizing his lack of loyalty to his friend he would have damaged Absalom's opinion of him, while by stressing his choice of Absalom he enhances it and pleases the ambitious prince.

The reason given in the first part of Hushai's answer has a

religious-national background; he affirms the fact that Absalom has been chosen king by God, the people, and all the men of Israel. This triple choice makes Absalom's rule a certainty, and it is only natural that Hushai will join the person whose rule is no longer unsure. Hushai seems to imply that his loyalty was not to David the man but to David the king, and since David is no longer king it is obvious that Hushai cannot follow him. Henceforth the new king will have his loyalty.

Since Hushai does not explain precisely why he abandoned David but rather why he decided to follow Absalom, his words compliment or even flatter Absalom. It is not because of his hatred for David but because of his love of Absalom that he has done this. The element of fawning is evident in the structure of the sentence too. Instead of starting with subject-predicate, as is customary in the Bible, Hushai begins with a disjunctive clause: 'Whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen'. This disjunctive clause emphasizes the antecedent, Absalom, both because of its exceptional position at the beginning of Hushai's answer and because of its length. Absalom is made prominent at the end of the sentence too by placing the pronouns referring to him at the beginning of the two short clauses, 'his will I be, and with him I will remain'.

The same tendency to focus on Absalom is obvious in Hushai's second reason: 'And secondly, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you' (v. 19). Hushai builds his reply to Absalom in two parts, clearly marking the twofold construction by means of the phrase 'And secondly' providing evidence of careful and systematic thinking. The second reason, which is more personal in its nature, explains that the loyal service which has been given to the father is naturally transferred to the son, the implication being that the son has taken over his father's position. This is in effect the same reason David instructed Hushai to use when he told him to go to Absalom and cause Ahithophel's advice to be rejected, only in a different form: 'Say to Absalom, "Your servant, O king, I will be; I have been your father's servant in time past, and now I will be your servant"' (2 Sam. 15.34).

A comparison of the phrases David tells Hushai to use with those Hushai actually employs is illuminating (although there appear to be some minor textual errors in David's sentence). David begins and ends with the words 'your servant', and 'servant' also appears in the middle of the sentence, thus placing the emphasis on the servant,

Hushai. Hushai is also emphasized through the threefold repetition of the word 'I', which indicates that David's first thought is for Hushai and the impression he will make on Absalom. In Hushai's version, however, the emphasis is placed more on Absalom himself: both the first word, 'whom', and the last, 'you', hint at Absalom, while the phrase 'his son' in the middle of the sentence refers explicitly to him. Hushai also makes his speech more convincing by using rhetorical devices. He opens with a rhetorical question ('Whom should I serve?'), which he himself answers ('Should it not be his son?'); his comparison ('As I have served your father, so I will serve you') is also more effective than David's straightforward statement of fact ('I have been your father's servant in time past, and now I will be your servant'). David provides Hushai with the general outline, but the final formulation is Hushai's.

Hushai's speech reflects not only his own good sense, but also Absalom's personality, at least as seen by Hushai. Absalom regards himself as being more important than anyone else, and is therefore easily influenced by flattery. Hushai adapts his words to his hearer's personality, but is careful not to overdo things and to conceal his fawning.

The same features which are found in the speech of Hushai also appear in the advice he gives Absalom (discussed below, pp. 223-37). In both cases he begins with a negation, uses a clearly bi-partite structure, which is clearly marked as such by Hushai himself, employs rhetorical devices as well as carefully concealed flattery and avoids placing emphasis on himself. The parallel features in Hushai's speeches on both occasions indicate that what he says reflects characteristic and significant aspects of his personality.

Absalom's reply to Hushai is not given here. Nevertheless, the fact that he later summons Hushai to proffer his advice proves that the latter did succeed in gaining the prince's confidence.

A considerable part of what is said by characters in biblical narrative falls into the category of directive speech, intended to impel someone to action, and characterized by the imperative form. In rare cases individuals will address themselves in this form (inciting themselves to act), but it is usually directed at someone else, whether as a command or as a request (whether the speaker issues a command or attempts to persuade depends on the status of the speaker and the interlocutor). The request is sometimes directed to God (a prayer of petition).

The importance of this kind of speech lies in the fact that it reveals the speakers' intentions and aspirations and through them their characteristics.

Abraham's hospitable nature is reflected not only in his invitation to the three men who appear at the entrance to his tent but also in the language in which he couches it (Gen. 18.3-5). He phrases things in such a way that his guests gain the impression that it is not Abraham who is doing them a favour, but they who are doing him one by condescending to rest and eat with him. Abraham also minimizes the effort involved in preparing the food; he offers them just a little bread and water, though in fact he provides tasty veal, butter, milk and cakes. Abraham also uses polite terms abundantly: the Hebrew *nā'* (please) three times, 'your servant', etc.

Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away, using the blunt term 'cast out', and referring to them contemptuously as 'this slave woman and the son of this slave woman' (in contrast to the phrase she uses when she speaks of her own son, 'with my son, with Isaac'), thus shedding light on her personality (Gen. 21.10). It is true that God uses the identical terms rather than Hagar's and Ishmael's names when referring to them, thereby verifying their objective status; but God's words are devoid of the disdain evident in Sarah's, since the term 'this' is not used and He also says that He will 'make a nation' of the lowly 'son of the slave woman' (whom He also calls 'the lad') (vv. 12-13).

A valuable contribution to the shaping of the characters is made by their (verbal) reactions to things that are said to them. However, these reactions are not always recorded.

When a person issues a *command* (to someone of lower status) the speech is generally one-sided and does not develop into a dialogue. In these cases, it is usually only the implementation of the command which is recorded, for example: 'So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded' (2 Sam. 13.29). There are exceptions to this rule, however.

On the one hand, there are instances when the person who receives the order hesitates or is unwilling to implement it. This is Jacob's reaction to his mother's command that he impersonate Esau in order to obtain his brother's blessing: 'Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing' (Gen. 27.11-12). Jacob's resistance does not derive

from ethical values but rather from the fear that the deception will be discovered and the outcome be disastrous.

When God orders Moses to go to Pharaoh and bring Israel out of Egypt, Moses replies: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' (Exod. 3.11). Like many other leaders in the Bible, Moses is not overjoyed about accepting the exalted position, expressing his doubts as to his ability and suitability. This reveals his modesty, a trait which is noted explicitly in Num. 12.3: 'Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth'.

There are, on the other hand, several instances when the individual of lower status who receives the order explicitly agrees to undertake it. King Solomon forbids Shimei the son of Gera to leave the borders of Jerusalem, and Shimei answers: 'What you say is good; as my lord the king has said, so will your servant do' (1 Kgs 2.38). This clear assent is reported for the purpose of pointing up Shimei's later infringement of the order.

When a request is made (by someone who is inferior or equal to the person to whom it is addressed), the answer is usually recorded. Abigail sets out to meet David in order to ask him not to kill Nabal and all the members of his household. David replies: 'Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand! For as surely as the Lord the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had made haste and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male' (1 Sam. 25.32-34). Not only does David accede to Abigail's request, he also praises her for preventing him from shedding blood. David indirectly admits that he had been about to wrong Nabal and his household and blesses God for sending Abigail to him, as well as Abigail herself and her discretion. ('Blessed be the Lord... Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you'). David's words reveal his inherent nobility, his readiness to admit his mistake and his absolute trust in God and His supervision. These qualities are also revealed on other occasions, such as when David reacts to the rebuke of Nathan the prophet with the simple phrase: 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sam. 12.13). David is prepared to admit his error and to express his repentance, acknowledging the fact that he sinned with regard to Bathsheba and Uriah.

When the aged Barzilai says: 'Here is your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do for him whatever seems good to you' (2 Sam. 19.37), David answers: 'Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do for him whatever seems good to you' (v. 38). In his reply, David uses Barzilai's exact phrases, apart from the fact that he naturally omits the polite expression 'your servant' and 'my lord the king'. The repetition of Barzilai's expressions, without even changing the pronoun 'you' (the Hebrew expression is 'in your eyes') from the second to the first person indicates that not only will the request be granted, but Chimham will get the treatment which seems good to Barzilai himself (which is more than he has requested). In the Hebrew text the phrase 'with me' (*'ittî*) occurs at the beginning of the sentence and the pronoun 'I' is emphasized (by being given separately even though it is included in the form of the verb), indicating that David will personally attend to the matter. David is grateful to Barzilai for having helped him when he was in need. This gratitude is also evident in the instructions David gives to Solomon on his death bed: 'But deal loyally with the sons of Barzilai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother' (1 Kgs 2.7).

Much of the speech in biblical narrative is informative, that is, its object is to obtain or provide knowledge. In addition, it often contributes to the shaping of the characters.

God asks Adam: 'Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' (Gen. 3.11), and Adam answers: 'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate' (v. 12). This reply discloses Adam's tendency to absolve himself by placing the blame on others, on the woman, who gave him fruit from the tree, and on God Himself, who gave him the woman.

A far more negative light is shed on Cain when he answers God's question: 'Where is Abel your brother?' by saying: 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' (Gen. 4.9). His reply is a barefaced lie, and in addition he is brazen enough to counterattack by addressing a cynical question to God.

Abraham on the other hand, is revealed in all his fineness of soul when he answers his son's question: 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' with the evasive reply: 'God will see to the lamb for a burnt offering, my son' (Gen. 22.7-8).

This response reveals Abraham's delicacy (he tries to avoid hurting his son unnecessarily), honesty (he is reluctant to lie to his son) and deep religious feeling (he places absolute trust in God).

The way in which characters convey information often sheds light on their nature. The selection or formulation of pieces of information by one of the characters sometimes differs substantially from the actual facts as transmitted to the reader at first hand in the narrative.

When Ahab the king of Israel desires the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite he addresses him as follows: 'Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money' (1 Kgs 21.2). Naboth refuses and the king goes into his house 'vexed and sullen'. Jezebel his wife asks him why he is so angry and he tells her what happened: 'Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him: "Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it", and he answered, "I will not give you my vineyard"' (v. 6).

The two accounts are more or less alike, but there are differences and these are highly significant. In contrast to the 'law of the king' which states: 'He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards' (1 Sam. 8.14), it transpires from the conversation that the king of Israel cannot simply take a vineyard belonging to one of his subjects but must beg the subject to give it to him. Ahab justifies his request by explaining to Naboth that he wants the vineyard in order to convert it into a vegetable garden, because it is near his house. In order to persuade Naboth to agree, Ahab offers him another vineyard, and not just any vineyard but 'a better vineyard', and if Naboth prefers to receive its value in cash, Ahab will give it to him.

When he recounts all this to his wife, Ahab omits to say that he explained to Naboth for what purpose he wanted the vineyard and that he also offered him a better one. He does say that he gave Naboth the possibility of choosing either money or another vineyard, but he reverses the order (first the money, then the vineyard), and instead of the polite form 'if it seems good to you', he uses the simple phrase, 'if you wish'. These changes indicate that when Ahab spoke to Naboth he degraded himself, but when he recounted the episode to his wife, who was the daughter of the king of the Sidonians, he tried to conceal this.

There is also a difference between Naboth's actual answer to Ahab's request and the version Ahab tells Jezebel. In his answer, Naboth hints at the reasons for refusing to give up his vineyard: 'The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers' (v. 3). This points to a religious as well as an emotional element, the Lord and the bond with the land of his forefathers. Ahab fails to mention Naboth's reasons when he tells Jezebel what happened (already beforehand, when Ahab returned home 'vexed and sullen' he had obliterated the religious element from his memory: 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers'), making Naboth's refusal appear to be mere stubbornness: 'I will not give you my vineyard' (v. 6).

B. *Actions*

A person's nature is revealed by deeds; action is the implementation of character, and individuals are disclosed through their deeds no less than through their words. Since one's inner nature is embodied in external behaviour a narrator can present the characters in action rather than spelling out their traits. In biblical narrative deeds do in fact serve as the foremost means of characterization, and we know biblical characters primarily through the way they act in varying situations.

The characters' actions are also the building blocks of the plot, though the protagonists should not be regarded merely as a means for getting the story going. The narrative is concerned not only with the events which occur but also with the people involved. While the plot plays a central role in biblical narrative, the individual within it is no less important than the events.

It can be said that the actions which comprise the plot interrelate with the characters: the individuals are a function of the events, and vice versa. In other words, just as the characters serve the plot, the plot serves the characters, illuminating them and contributing to their characterization. Moreover, just as the characters' personalities influence the course of events, the course of events affects the personalities of the characters.

The technique of building a character through deeds confronts the reader with a problem, however. For it is in the nature of this technique to refrain from revealing to us what are the internal motives which give rise to the actions and as in real life, we have to build hypotheses about people's motives. These hypotheses will be

based on our knowledge of other actions and things said by the same person, as well as on our understanding of human psychology.

It is, for example, very difficult to understand the reasons for many of David's exploits. Why did he bring Michal back to him after she had become the wife of Paltiel the son of Laish? Was it because of love, because he had wed her at the price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, or perhaps because she was the daughter of the former king (2 Sam. 3.14-16)? Why did David execute Rechab and Baanah, the two men who killed Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul (4.8-12)? Was it because he was enraged at the cold-blooded murder, as he claimed, or was it for political reasons (to win over the tribes of Israel)? Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was brought by David to Jerusalem and granted the right to eat at his table (ch. 9). Was this an act of generosity for Jonathan's sake, as David said it was, or rather a way of keeping an eye on this descendant of the previous king? Why did David forgive Shimei the son of Gera, who had mocked and cursed him virulently, and why did he tell him he would not die (19.22-23)? Was this genuine magnanimity or was David guided by political considerations (improved relations with the tribe of Benjamin and Saul's family)? Why did David decide to appoint Amasa commander of his army instead of Joab, despite the fact that Amasa had previously commanded Absalom's army against David? Was this also a matter of political expediency (the support of the tribe of Judah) or was it because of his personal hatred of Joab, who had slain his son Absalom and demanded of the bereaved father in blunt and brusque terms to overcome his deep grief without further ado (ch. 19)?

We cannot answer these questions. Various motives may have combined to lead to these actions. Be that as it may, David's deeds quite often give rise to questions, his intentions are frequently ambiguous, and his character appears to be enigmatic. Despite the fact that there is more information in the Bible about David than any other figure or perhaps just because of this, it is extremely difficult to fathom the depths of his personality, though questions about intentions and motives arise with regard to other characters too.

People's actions in daily life are hardly mentioned at all in biblical narrative, and we do not usually hear about the minutiae of their day-to-day routine. We meet the biblical characters primarily in special and unusual circumstances, in times of crisis and stress, when they have to undergo severe tests.

Whenever simple, daily tasks are mentioned this is important in shedding light on the character. It is not usual to find it explicitly stated in biblical narrative that the protagonist ate or drank, but in the case of Esau we are told that after Jacob his brother gave him the mess of pottage: 'Esau ate, drank, rose, went away and despised his birthright' (Gen. 25.34); Esau is characterized by these verbs as a man of action for whom immediate pleasure and the material things of life are most important.

We read that Jehu: 'went in and ate and drank' (2 Kgs 9.34) immediately after giving the order to have queen Jezebel thrown out of the window: 'And some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her' (v. 33). Despite the gory murder and the blood splashed around Jehu goes off to eat and drink as if nothing has happened.

When it is reported that someone does not eat, this also contributes to the shaping of the character. Every year, when they went up to the house of the Lord at Shiloh, Peninnah would provoke Hannah. Hannah would not answer Peninnah but: 'wept and would not eat' (1 Sam. 1.7). Hannah's sorrow is deep, but is expressed through weeping and the failure to eat rather than by a counter-attack; in other words, it is directed inward.

After Naboth has refused to sell his vineyard, king Ahab returns to his house 'vexed and sullen. . . . And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food' (1 Kgs 21.4). The king is in a bad mood, he has been deeply wounded by the refusal, but takes no action other than lying down, turning his face away and refusing to eat.

We read that: 'the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli' (1 Sam. 3.1). When he was lying down in the temple of the Lord at Shiloh God appeared to him. After this: 'Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord' (v. 15). Why are we told that Samuel opened the doors in the morning? Ostensibly this is an unimportant fact, but in effect it is a way of characterizing Samuel. The tremendous event—the revelation of God—does not turn his head (even though 'the word of the Lord was rare in those days', 'there was no frequent vision'), he does not become conceited but continues fulfilling his duties as usual.

Every now and again we read that someone rose early in the morning. This fact is usually noted in order to show that the person concerned hastened to undertake a certain task. Thus, for example,

this is what Abraham does after God tells him to obey Sarah and drive Hagar and Ishmael away, and again after God instructs him to sacrifice his son, Isaac: 'So Abraham rose early in the morning' (Gen. 21.14; 22.3). Abraham does not postpone the unpleasant task.

As has been stated above, it is rare to find routine tasks mentioned in biblical narrative. Since only important and exceptional deeds are generally recounted, the question arises whether unusual actions, which are more or less unique occurrences by their very nature, are sufficient to indicate characteristic traits of the protagonists. Only if someone repeats the same deed or similar ones several times is it possible to learn about the disposition and, in consequence, the character, while one single action need not necessarily show anything apart from a passing impulse.

Would it be right to consider Cain an inveterate murderer, for example, because he committed one murder? Should Aaron be regarded as weak-willed because he gave in to the people and made them a golden calf? Is the nature of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, indicated by the fact that she drove a stake through Sisera's temple when he was lying tired in her tent? Does the rape of Tamar betoken Amnon's character? Does Lot's reception and protection of the two angels who came to Sodom—to take a positive example—prove that he is a hospitable person?

In real life not everything people do is characteristic of them, but this is not the case in a literary work of art, or at least in a short story. In this respect, the length of the work is of decisive importance: because there is no room in a short story to describe the various deeds and repeated actions of any one character single actions necessarily serve to define the person. The short story chooses to relate the particular action which is characteristic of the individual and can exemplify what is considered to constitute the essential nature. We remember Cain as someone who murdered his brother, and Amnon as the person who violated his sister. If the author had wanted us to see them in a different light we would have been told about other (or additional) things they did.

In a longer narrative, on the other hand—and it makes no difference whether this is one long one or several short ones in which the same character appears—it is possible to relate different actions illustrating the same tendency or characteristic.

Abraham obeys God's commands several times, even when they are extremely difficult to accept. At an advanced age he leaves his

country, his kin and his father's house in order to go to an unknown land (Gen. 12.1-5). He is circumcised when he is ninety-nine years old (17.24). He sends his son Ishmael into the desert (21.14). And he goes to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering (ch. 22).

Samson, whose strength and heroism are revealed on numerous occasions and through various deeds, is shown to be weak because he succumbs twice to the blandishments of a woman. On the first occasion, he reveals the solution of the riddle he has set the Philistines to the woman of Timnah, who 'wept before him and pressed him hard for seven days' (Judges 14); and on the second, he tells Delilah, 'who pressed him hard with her words day after day', the secret of his great strength and how he could be made weak (ch. 16).

We are also told how Joab the son of Zeruiah, twice kills the commanders of an opposing army by treachery: he first kills Abner the son of Ner (2 Sam. 3.26-27) and then Amasa (20.9-10). Joab's hard and callous character ('These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too hard for me', David says after Abner's murder) is also evinced in the slaying of Absalom even though he knows how much pain this will cause David.

The narrator occasionally uses a different method to make it clear to us that a specific deed is characteristic of a certain individual, by stating explicitly that this action was regularly performed by the person concerned. This is the case with Elkanah, who used to go '*year by year*' to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord (1 Sam. 1.3, 7), reflecting his religious devotion. It is said of Absalom that '*at the end of every year*' he cut the hair of his head and weighed it (2 Sam. 14.26), proving his exaggerated self-love. The narrator tells us that at the end of the feast which Job's sons made, 'he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts". Thus Job did *continually*' (Job 1.5), illustrating how upright and God-fearing he was.

A great deal can be learned about people from the decisions they make. Because it involves choosing between alternatives, decisions reveal a person's scale of values, showing us the outcome of the struggle between desires, emotions and spiritual values, whether ethical, religious or social. The characters in biblical narrative often have to choose between conflicting values or ethical precepts on the one hand and the desire for power, vengeance, or the pleasures of the

flesh, on the other. We learn about the characters' decisions indirectly, drawing our conclusions from the outcome (the deeds) about the reasons (the decisions) which preceded and gave rise to them.

For example, when Jonah is commanded by God to go to Nineveh and prophesy, he can decide whether to obey or not. His decision to flee to Tarshish (namely, in the opposite direction) reveals that personal prestige is more important to him than God's directives or the chance to save the lives of a great many people. While he is on board ship a great storm blows up, whereupon all the sailors pray and throw the cargo into the sea. Jonah can follow suit, but decides to go and sleep in the inner part of the ship, thus revealing his indifference to life.

When the sailors realize that Jonah is the reason for the fearful storm, they can choose to kill him in order to save their lives. They decide, however, to ask Jonah himself what should be done with him. After he tells them that they should throw him into the sea they first try to row for shore and only after they find out that they cannot and that the sea is becoming even rougher, do they decide to throw Jonah into the sea. These decisions indicate that the sailors' moral values are more powerful than their instinct for survival, that they hold such a high regard for the life of their fellow-man that they are prepared to endanger their own lives in order to save his (and only when there is no doubt that the choice is between Jonah's death and everyone's do they decide to sacrifice one man in order to save many).

When Nehemiah hears of the plight of his brethren in the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem he is faced with several alternatives. He can limit himself to expressing his regret, he can mourn and pray to God, or he can send help to the land of Judah. What Nehemiah decides to do is to ask permission of the king of Persia, whose cupbearer he is, to go to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls himself. This decision proves that Nehemiah's sense of solidarity with his people is stronger than his natural tendency to preserve his own comfort and position as well as his life (by making this request he ran the risk of enraging the king and causing his dismissal or even execution).

Both actions and inaction bear evidence of a person's character. The failure to act sometimes results from a deliberate decision to refrain from action and sometimes from weakness and passivity. It is impossible, however, to draw conclusions about someone's character

simply because no report is given of actions. The author carefully selects the incidents to be related about any individual, and what is chosen is always just a fraction of what could be revealed. If more is left out than is included in every narrative, how much more is this the case in a short story. Nevertheless, the narrative on occasions directs the reader's attention, whether overtly or covertly, to someone's inaction, and in this case it can be assumed that this is significant. This way of characterization will be illustrated by means of the figure of David.

In view of the fact that throughout his life David is active, even energetic, his inaction with regard to his children is remarkable. In connection with Adonijah we read: 'His father had never displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?"' (1 Kgs 1.6), and the Septuagint makes a similar statement in connection with Amnon (2 Sam. 13.21). These comments indicate that David was lax and negligent when it came to educating his children. The same is insinuated at the end of the episode of Amnon's rape of Tamar: 'When king David heard of all these things, he was very angry' (v. 21). The information that David heard all this and was very angry arouses the expectation that he will take action of one sort or another, but we are not told that he did anything in this respect. The narrator's silence is significant here. Because it is stated that David heard all this and was very angry, the absence of any action is conspicuous.

Absalom is permitted to return to Jerusalem from Geshur, not at David's initiative but at Joab's. Although David agrees to let Absalom return to Jerusalem he refuses to see him for a long time, which indicates that he does not know his own mind. Once again, no decision is made one way or another until Absalom takes the initiative and Joab intervenes once again (ch. 14).

David also appears to be irresolute when it comes to determining which of his sons should succeed him. He apparently never made a decision on this point, and if he did, never mentioned it in public or did anything to implement it. He would probably have accepted Adonijah's *fait accompli* had not pressure been exerted on him by Nathan and Bathsheba to appoint Solomon his heir. In this case too David is led by others (1 Kings 1).

David's attitude to his children is characterized by a lack of understanding as well as inaction, and it can be said that his relationship with them is composed of both incomprehension and

weakness. He fails to realize what Amnon is plotting when the latter feigns illness and persuades David to send Tamar to him (2 Sam. 13.5-7). David also accedes to Absalom's entreaties that Amnon accompany him to the sheepshearing, not sensing Absalom's hatred for Amnon, or if he does, ignoring the danger in letting Amnon go with Absalom (vv. 23-29). Similarly, David allows Absalom to go to Hebron and pay his vow, never imagining for a moment that Absalom plans to proclaim himself king there, despite the fact that Absalom had been preparing his revolt for a long time right under David's nose (15.1-9).

In some instances, people's gestures are mentioned. This is done because they have expressive value and indicate something about the inner state of the person involved.

After being violated by her brother Amnon, Tamar puts ashes on her head and tears her long robe, 'and she laid her hand on her head' (13.19). This gesture clearly serves as an expression of deep pain and sorrow.

After Naboth has refused to give him his vineyard, Ahab returns home, 'And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face' (1 Kgs 21.4). The movement of turning his face to the wall indicates the king's sorrow and depression.

When Ezra hears of the mixed marriages of the people of Israel he rends his garments and his mantle, pulls hair from his head and beard and sits appalled (Ezra 9.3). All these actions are clear expressions of grief and anguish.

Another way of shaping the characters is through the judgment by one of the participants of an action performed by another (as distinct from judgments relating to personality). This way of moulding the characters sheds light on both the person judged and the one making the judgment, while at the same time enabling the former to react (either by word or by deed) and thus to reveal still more.

Amongst the judgments of actions pronounced by the characters, a special place should be allotted to those made by a prophet. Because of his special standing as God's emissary, whatever a prophet says carries particular weight, and it can be assumed that the author identifies fully with the prophet. There are abundant examples of this, such as Samuel's condemnation of Saul's actions, Nathan's of David's, Elijah's of Ahab's, etc.

Even though, in the following example, the judgment of the action is not made by a prophet, there is no doubt that it reflects the

author's opinion. Before Tamar is raped by Amnon she refers to the deed as wanton folly, pleading: 'Do not do this wanton folly' (2 Sam. 13.12). Afterwards she says: 'For this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other which you did to me' (v. 16). Since she herself is the victim of the actions she is condemning, her statement is particularly effective, making a powerful impression on the reader.

Whereas the judgments made by Samuel, Nathan and Elijah occur after the actions to which they refer, those of Tamar are made beforehand with the object of preventing the deed. The same applies to what Abigail says about the act of vengeance which David intends to undertake: 'And when the Lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause' (1 Sam. 25.30-31).

The characters' personalities are revealed by their reactions to the judgments. Both Saul and David accept the condemnations made by Samuel and Nathan and confess their sins. Saul says, 'I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words' (1 Sam. 15.24), and David says, 'I have sinned against the Lord' (2 Sam. 12.13). This self-condemnation reveals both the negative and the positive aspect of the character. The admission of having sinned naturally proves that the individual has not behaved as required, but also indicates contrition and an inner change (though in Saul's case this occurred after a great many evasions).

Saul's and David's reactions cause the reader to feel sympathy for them. They sinned, but they also regretted what they had done; we feel for them in their hour of emotional need and respect them for their strength and readiness to confess. The change which occurs in their personality is, therefore, accompanied by a shift in the reader's attitude towards them. Nevertheless, this shift is not enough to obliterate completely our negative attitude towards them as a result of their sins. The duality in the character's personality, which is reflected in the admission of sin—transgression and repentance—is paralleled by duality in the reader's attitude—condemnation and sympathy.

The admission of sin does not always, however, have the same significance and effect. In the case of Shimei the son of Gera, who declares: 'For your servant knows that I have sinned' (2 Sam. 19.20), we tend to suspect that his admission is the result of cold calculation

aimed solely at advancing his interests rather than indicating any genuine inner change. The first thing Shimei says when he falls at David's feet is: 'Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem; let not the king bear it in mind' (v. 19). Despite the fact that Shimei mentions his guilt, he phrases things in such a way as to make it evident that he is not afflicted by remorse and that his prime object is to persuade the king to overlook his sins. Since Shimei's motive is not honest repentance his admission of guilt smacks of hypocrisy, adding another negative aspect to his character and making the reader even less sympathetic towards him.

C. *Minor Characters*

The ways of characterization mentioned above occur both in life and in literature. A way of characterization which occurs only in literature is that achieved through minor characters.

Subsidiary characters have a part to play in the network of interpersonal relations in both speech and acts, such as when one character conducts a dialogue with another or acts in some way towards him or her. This relationship exists in real life too, and has been discussed above. In addition, however, the minor characters play a structural role in literature, paralleling and highlighting the main ones, whether through correspondence or contrast. The positive or negative parallel between the primary and secondary characters is not enough to shape the characters, but it provides emphasis and colour. The minor characters serve as a background against which the personalities of the main ones stand out.

It is not always possible to make a clear and unequivocal distinction between a primary and a secondary character. In this context it is better to refer less to two completely different categories than to a continuum, since there are distinct disparities in the level of 'secondariness' of the subsidiary characters. On the one hand, there are such characters as the messenger or courier, who fulfil only a minor technical role in the structure of the plot, such as the anonymous person who escapes from Sodom and informs Abram that Lot has been taken captive by Ched-or-laomer and the kings who were with him (Gen. 14.13); while on the other, there are subsidiary characters who have such an important function that it is difficult to decide whether they are secondary or primary, particularly since a character who is secondary in one narrative may become

primary in another. Joshua appears as a minor character in the Pentateuch, but is the principal one in the book of Joshua. In the narrative of David and Abigail (1 Samuel 25) there is no doubt that David is the main figure. But what about Abigail? Should she be regarded as a principal or a subsidiary character? We may be able to fix criteria for deciding this, but it is more important to determine what roles the characters fulfil in relation to one another, since it is these which emphasize the various features of their personalities.

In the narrative of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) aspects of David's character are contrasted with those of Uriah, who serves as the 'normative hero', that is, as the representative of desired values. Because Uriah displays such noble characteristics as honesty and unflinching loyalty, David's treacherous, dishonest and unprincipled behaviour is accentuated. The contrasting traits of David and Uriah parallel the opposing structural roles they fulfil within the narrative, which is based on the clash between them over a woman.

When the rumour that Absalom has killed all the king's sons reaches Jerusalem David believes it, whereas Jonadab the son of Shimeah realizes that only Amnon has been killed: 'For Amnon alone is dead, for by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day he forced his sister Tamar' (13.32). Through Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's blindness and lack of understanding of the relations between his sons, and particularly of Absalom's character, motives and intentions, is emphasized.

Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, who is astute and discerning, also appears as a foil to his friend Amnon (13.5). Amnon is tormented by his love for Tamar and cannot find a remedy for his ills. Unlike his brother Absalom, he is unable to plan matters himself and has recourse to Jonadab (who has noticed that Amnon is upset) to contrive an excuse for a private meeting between him and the object of his desire. Jonadab uses his brain, Amnon his brawn.

The negative behaviour of the prophet Jonah is emphasized by the positive conduct of the sailors, who feature as a collective minor hero (Jonah 1). Through her normal reaction ('Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die'), Job's wife stresses Job's unusual stand in maintaining his faith despite the heavy blows which have struck him (Job 1 and 2).

There is a marked correspondence between Absalom and Adonijah, who both covet the throne and express their aspirations in concrete actions. We are told that Absalom got himself a chariot and horses,

and fifty men to run before him (2 Sam. 15.1), and that Adonijah prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him (1 Kgs 1.5). Chariots, horsemen and runners were considered a distinct symbol of kingship, as is manifested by the fact that they are the first items mentioned in the 'king's law' in 1 Sam. 8.11: 'He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots"'. Both Absalom and Adonijah attempt to seize the crown, both prepare themselves adherents and establish a *fait accompli* (their proclamation as king). Both start their rebellion by sacrificing a great number of beasts in the presence of guests, and both bring disaster on themselves in the final event as the result of their lust for power. The narrator draws our attention to the parallel between the two brothers by saying of Adonijah: 'He too was a very handsome man; and he was born next after Absalom' (1 Kgs 1.6).

Sometimes several of the elements of characterization referred to above function together, emphasizing or intensifying one of the principal character's traits. The narrator portrays Abigail, for example, by stating explicitly: 'The woman was of good understanding' (1 Sam. 25.3), and David says to her: 'Blessed be your discretion' (v. 33). Her sagacity is also evinced indirectly in her speech to David, which is distinguished by both its content and its form, as well as in her actions—going out quickly to meet David and giving him a generous gift. Her wisdom is particularly apparent against the background of the foolish behaviour of her husband Nabal (who is a minor character).

Job is also characterized in a variety of ways, some of them extremely powerful. The narrator presents him as 'blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil' (Job 1.1), using *four* terms to emphasize his righteousness. God reiterates this direct characterization, even twice (1.8; 2.3), adding: 'There is none like him on the earth' (also twice) and: 'He still holds fast his integrity'. These expressions of direct characterization are uttered by the narrator, who is the supreme authority, and by God, who is above every authority.

The narrator also evaluates Job's conduct: 'In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong' (1.22), later repeating: 'In all this Job did not sin with his lips' (2.10). Job's prodigious piety is also demonstrated by what he himself says: '*It may be* that my sons have sinned, and cursed God *in their hearts*'. ('It may be', namely, it is not at all certain that they sinned; 'in their hearts', namely, only in their thoughts, not even in speech.) 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord'. 'You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' (1.5, 21; 2.10). Similarly, Job's *practice* of sacrificing burnt offerings for his sons at the end of the days of feast (1.5), is recorded to prove his righteousness. And finally, his wife serves as a foil to offset his unusual nature.

Why does the narrative use so many ways of characterization in order to illustrate one of Job's features? The answer is that this underscores the question which the narrative tackles, namely, whether everyone, even the *most righteous* man, does good only in order to receive a reward. (This is the problem of the narrative, whereas the poetic part of the book deals with another issue.)

To sum up, just as the narrator makes very few direct statements about the characters' personalities, the protagonists themselves make very few such pronouncements. In this respect there is complete coordination between the narrator and the characters. The protagonists are characterized primarily by indirect means, namely, by their speech and actions. This approach resembles the one we adopt in real life, where we usually draw conclusions about people's personalities from what they say and do. In this respect it can be said that the dominant technique used for shaping the characters in biblical narrative is 'realistic'. We should not, however, ignore the fact that a work of literature can never imitate reality precisely, neither in its content nor in its techniques of characterization, and therefore it is not surprising to find that every now and again the author deviates from the way people are characterized in real life.

It is in the nature of the indirect method that characters are not defined comprehensively, but that their personalities emerge gradually from the totality of their appearances and actions during the course of the narrative. The indirect approach cannot make it clear to us at the outset of the narrative what the character's nature is, and this will not be fully evident until the end, when we are able to review and combine all the relevant facts. The use of the indirect method entails that the individual's character is depicted dynamically. While direct characterization, which determines an individual's nature in definite terms, embodies a static view of the person,

indirect characterization, which is based on both words and deeds, tends to regard personality as being mobile. In many biblical narratives a person's character is not regarded as constant, but as something continually shifting and changing, even though stable components can be discerned. Character is existential rather than essential, since it is revealed in actual and transient real-life situations. Accordingly, epithets relating to biblical characters do not refer to aspects of their personalities but to their origin—nation, tribe, city or geographical region (Uriah the Hittite, Ehud the son of Gera the Benjaminite, Jesse the Bethlehemite, Barzilai the Gileadite, etc.). In other words, the epithets serve to identify and not to characterize people. In terms of language, this view of human nature is typified by a minimum of adjectives (illustrating aspects of personality) and a high percentage of verbs (relating to speech and deeds).

The dynamic view of personality is connected with the wider issue of types of literary characters. A distinction is usualy made between flat (one-dimensional) and round (three-dimensional) characters. There are two aspects to this distinction which often overlap one another but are by no means identical. On the one hand, a flat character is defined as having one single feature, while a round one is complex and has several traits. On the other hand, a round character is perceived changing and developing while flat ones remain static however often they may appear. There is an obvious connection between these two aspects: a changing character cannot be simple and have just one feature, but a complex character need not develop at all in the narrative.

In short stories, like most biblical narratives, there is virtually no technical possibility of gradual development. We often feel, nevertheless, that those characters who appear in many episodes change profoundly in the course of their lives. How great is the difference between the young Jacob who steals the blessing intended for Esau his brother, and the Jacob, who, after twenty years of suffering in exile, begs his brother to accept his 'blessing'; between the innocent lad Samuel, who does not realize that the voice calling him is the voice of God, and the old Samuel, who gives orders to king Saul and rebukes him angrily when Saul does not obey him; between the young David, who storms out angrily to wreak his terrible vengeance on Nabal the Carmelite, and the old king, who flees from Jerusalem on foot for fear of his son Absalom and listens to the curses of Shimei

the son of Gera with humility and acceptance.

Sometimes the change is rapid and sudden, in which case it can be presented within one short narrative. For example, Ahab, who wanted Naboth's vineyard and had him executed on false charges, hears the reprimand of the prophet Elijah and as a result repents his deed: 'And when Ahab heard those words, he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly' (1 Kgs 21.27). We cannot say that his repentance is neither deep nor genuine, for God himself provides evidence of Ahab's humility: 'Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days' (v. 29).

The other aspect of the characters, namely, their complexity, should be perceived as a continuum of possibilities extending between the two extremes rather than just two contingencies, either flat or round. The main characters are usually more complex and the minor ones simpler.

Abraham's greatness is revealed when he argues with God about the destruction of Sodom, but he does not arouse our admiration when he asks Sarah to say she is his sister, so that he may prosper and his life may be spared. Saul, the first king, is an able and admirable man (because of his modesty, amongst other things), but from various episodes we realize that he suffers from a deep emotional disturbance. The prophet Elijah is portrayed as a brave and zealous warrior of the Lord, but is, nevertheless, subject to such deep depression that he wishes to die. The Bible, as is well-known, does not obscure its heroes' weaknesses, and so even such characters as Abraham, Moses and David are depicted not as ideal people but as human beings with both good and bad in them.

There is no doubt that the most complex, deep and multi-faceted character in the Bible is David. We meet him in a large variety of situations, revealing different—and sometimes contradictory—aspects of his personality. David the statesman is entirely different from David the father. On the one hand, he appears as a balanced and calculating individual, while on the other, he reveals passionate emotions and fierce desires. He has a deep belief in God, alongside his belief in his own powers and those of his adherents. He is able to subdue his own will to God's, while nevertheless acting boldly and aggressively to get what he wants. A rich palette is used in portraying him, and because of his diverse qualities his personality is prominent

against the background of the host of characters surrounding him, all simpler than he.

Few of the characters in biblical narrative are depicted extensively and in detail, most being sketched in with only a few lines. Nevertheless, they are convincingly real and human, and have unique features.

The characteristics attributed to biblical figures are not only unique, however, but are also general human traits. The characters embody various aspects of human nature and therefore have considerable representative force and general significance. Because of the way they are portrayed, combining both universal and individual features, biblical characters can fulfil their functions within the world of the narrative as carriers of the plot as well as making their way straight to the reader's heart as the bearers of a message.

Chapter 3

THE PLOT

If the characters are the soul of the narrative, the plot is the body. It consists of an organized and orderly system of events, arranged in temporal sequence. In contrast to life—where we are invariably confronted by an endless stream of incidents occurring haphazardly and disparately—the plot of a narrative is constructed as a meaningful chain of interconnected events. This is achieved by careful selection, entailing the omission of any incident which does not fit in logically with the planned development of the plot.

The plot serves to organize events in such a way as to arouse the reader's interest and emotional involvement, while at the same time imbuing the events with meaning.

An isolated incident receives its significance from its position and role in the system as a whole. The incidents are like building blocks, each one contributing its part to the entire edifice, and hence their importance. In the building which is the plot there are no excess or meaningless blocks. The removal of one may cause the entire structure to collapse or at least damage its functional and aesthetic perfection.

The units which comprise the plot are of different kinds or, more precisely, of different sizes. The smallest narrative unit is the one which contains one incident, whether an action or an event. An action occurs when the character is the subject (the logical, not necessarily the syntactical, subject) of the incident, and an event occurs when the character is the object.

The combination of several small units of this kind creates larger ones, scenes and acts. Some narratives consist of only one act, but most are composed of several.

Various kinds of connections and relations exist between the units comprising the narrative system, thereby creating the structure of the plot. The principal relations between the various units are those of cause and effect, parallelism and contrast.