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Patterns, Parallels, and Poetics in Genesis 1

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Abstract:

Debates over the purpose and propositions of Genesis 1 continue to be concerned with its poetic nature. This issue is related to how “poetry” is defined, formally in terms of forms or patterns or informally in terms of function and powerful, persuasive language. This article is focused on the more structural aspects of poetry in Genesis 1 (i.e., *parallelismus membrorum* and other structural patterns and parallels). The purpose is to demonstrate that this chapter, while not a poem per se, contains poetic features not previously emphasized. While the text remains in its present form elevated prose, the nature of this elevation is greater than often admitted. Some evidence exists for speculation of an original poem on which the extant Hebrew version is based. What is suggested is a text with repetitions that remind one of a song with stanzas. That a rigid, literal hermeneutic is not the only valid option for reading this text becomes clear. The answer to *why* the author employed a normal week of seven days (six creational ones) may be as much functional or theological as mechanical or temporal. The mere presence of *warw* consecutive or use of *yom* as a normal day does not prove that the author’s purpose was the time of creation. Also the use of numerous poetics does not prove that the purpose was non-historical or only theological or symbolic; but as shown, the text is highly poetic in style as well as substance.

Keywords: creation, day, poetry, parallelism, chiasm, beginning, cosmology

Introduction

Debates over the purpose and propositions of Genesis 1 continue to be concerned with its poetic nature.¹ Some evangelicals squirm when a poetic profile for this chapter is proposed because they fear this might undermine its historicity.² John Walton observed that some have taken a poetic interpretive and literary approach that means this creation document “should not be taken as any sort of scientific record.”³ That this text is not poetry *per se* but elevated narrative has been the scholarly consensus for some time. Von Rad concluded, “There is no trace of the hymnic element in the language.”⁴ Yet Wenham called it a hymn, not pure poetry but rather elevated prose.⁵ More recently, however, attempts have been made to characterize Genesis 1 in terms closer to pure poetry. At the SBL Annual Meeting in Boston 2008, Robert Robinson presented a paper on “The Poetry of Creation” wherein he proposed a poetic character for Gen 1:1-3. This, however, was not based on parallelism (the typical quintessential feature of Hebrew poetry) but on the presence of stylistic features such as assonance and word play.⁶ Such distinctions depend on

1. See, e.g., Kurt Willems, “Evolving Evangelicalism (part 4): Genesis 1 is MORE than poetry” (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thepeangeablog/2012/05/11/evolving-evangelicalism-part-4/>; posted 11/05/12; accessed 27/01/14).

2. See, e.g., James J. S. Johnson, “Genesis is History, Not Poetry: Exposing Hidden Assumptions about What Hebrew Poetry Is and Is Not,” *Acts & Facts* 40.6 (2011): 8-9 (<http://www.icr.org/article/6090>; posted 2011; accessed 27/01/14).

3. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009; Kindle Edition) location 974.

4. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 47.

5. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987; UK Edition, 1991), 10.

6. Robert B. Robinson “The Poetry of Creation” SBL Boston 2008 (Biblical Criticism and Literary Criticism Section). Robinson cites Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 161. Features like assonance may often be found in narrative or prose. Some kind of parallelism must be present to establish formal Hebrew poetry. Otherwise one is only talking about poetics, which can characterize much of the OT, and on that basis would make a distinction between prose and poetry impossible or vague. But if such poetic features are present *en masse* then a text might be classified as poetic, which could also distinguish a text

how poetry is defined, strictly in formal terms such a Hebrew *parallelismus membrorum* or more generally in functional terms, as just cited, wherein poetry is the presence of poetics of powerful words that move the audience to deep feelings. For the purposes of this paper Old Testament poetry is understood as the use of parallel lines.⁷ These demonstrably exist in places in Genesis 1, but have not been shown to dominate the entire creation week so as to make it a Hebrew poem. Even if it reflects a later adaptation of an original poem that, in itself, would not necessarily imply anything about an intent to inform the audience about the actual time used to form the material universe.⁸ Authors choose particular literary genres for their medium of communication that best fit their purposes and audience. The concern with Genesis 1 in the present paper is its structural patterns and the degree to which they may add poetic/structural color to the text, which may be considered elevated prose. But how elevated? A close look at the patterns that emerge reveals ignored parallels and poetic flourishes.⁹

like Gen 1 from Gen 12, even apart from parallelism. If parallelism is present then the case for Gen 1 as poetry is all the more assured.

7. However parallelism is explained it remains the most objective means of identifying the presence of poetry in Classical Hebrew. This pervasive structural feature is a, or the, major distinction between books like Proverbs/Psalms and Pentateuchal/Historical ones, chapters like Jonah 2 and 1, 3, 4, and prose and verse portions of the Prophets. Per n. 6 above poetry today can be viewed as a passionate as opposed to a factual presentation of information, yet if applied too generally and subjectively to the OT then all becomes poetic making nothing poetic.

8. See John Walton and D. Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic Press, 2013). Here the authors demonstrate that biblical communication was originally and principally oral in nature. The need to maintain Scripture mentally rather than in written form indicates why texts with poetic or musical memory “hooks” were the concerns of ancient communicators. The question of the text’s purpose to present a six-day creation literally is not answered by appeals to poetry or prose or the meaning of *וַיַּבְרָא* but more likely by culturally contextualized readings as investigated by Walton (*The Lost World*; see n. 3 above) or John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011). In these books Walton argues for a functional rather than material cognitive context of the OT author in line with his ancient Near Eastern setting.

9. “Poetics” refers to the various kinds of word plays or rhetorical devices (phonetic, morphological, or structural, e.g. chiasmus) which are applied to any text of the Hebrew Bible. Lowth notwithstanding (the father of the renewal of modern parallelism study in the Church; Bishop Robert Lowth, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum* [1753] in which he postulated three major categories: symmetrical, antithetical, and synthetical), O’Connor observed the absence of specificity in

Neither a complete hymn, poem nor historical narrative emerges. What is suggested is a text with repetitions reminiscent of a song with stanzas.

The Creation Week, 1:1-31

The Creation Week narrative *per se* will be viewed as Gen 1:1-31. Technically, the end of the entire Creation Narrative (including the final day of rest from creation) is debated as either 2:3, 2:4, or 2:4a.¹⁰ Genesis 1:1-2 is proposed as part of the first day because the beginning of 1:3 (“then/so he said/commanded”) makes little sense apart from its direct connection to what is described in v. 2 (the state of disorder and darkness).

defining OT parallelism based on the absence of a single identifying feature (M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 89). His title seems to exhibit how some restrict “poetry” to verse only (rather than prose) if it merits enough literary beauty and power. Caution received, still his attempt to base parallelism on syntax has not become consensus, so I will approach parallelism as multidimensional (contra James L. Kugel’s assertion, against Lowth’s three, of only one type, A then B). I applaud D. Clines’ criticism of this as too limiting for the possible diversity between lines A and B. See Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and D. J. A. Clines, “The Parallelism of Greater Precision,” in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Elaine R. Follis, JSOTSup 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 95. A clear difference in style exists between a text like Gen 1 and a historical narrative like Gen 12. For a detailed discussion of the various features of Hebrew poetry, see Lynell Zogbo and Ernst R. Wendland, *Hebrew Poetry in the Bible: A Guide for Understanding and for Translating*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 11-60.

10. The 1:1–2:4a section is supported, e.g., by these interpreters: J. Alberto Soggin, *Das Buch Genesis: Kommentar* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 15; and C. Westermann, *Genesis I: Een praktische bijbelverklaring, Tekst en Toelichting* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. J. Kok, 1986), 16, 21-28. See also Ron Pirson, *Belichting van het Bijbelboek Genesis* (Leuven: Vlaamse Bijbelstichting, 2005), 28. Gen 2:4 is separated from 2:3 in NIV, NRSV, and NASB. In KJV (as Latin Vulgate), 1:31 is separated from 2:1. In LXX and ESV 1:31 is separate from 2:1 and 2:3 from 2:4. For one who offers an argument against delimitation after 2:4a or 2:4, see H. Nobel *Gods gedachten tellen: Numerieke structuuranalyse en de elf gedachten Gods in Genesis – 2 Koningen* (Groningen, NL: Rijksuniversiteit, 1993); see also Walter Hilbrands, *Zehn Thesen zum biblischen Schöpfungsbericht (Gen 1,1-2,3) aus exegetischer Sicht*. Jahrbuch für Evangelikale Theologie 18 (Wuppertal e.a.: R. Brockhaus, 2004), 7-26. For the unit 1:1–2:3, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 27 and C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 39-43.

The statement in 2:4a provides an inclusio with 1:1 (making of “heavens and earth”—perhaps better understood as “sky and land”—started [1:1] and ended [2:4a], leaving 1:2-5 for the 1st day). These opening verses deal with the initial state of creation.¹¹ Whether one says “When God began to create” or “In the beginning God created” (but beginning of what? v. 1), the concern seems to be with the first phase of creation (1:1/2-5), which is focused on the condition of the land: unfinished, unfilled (תהו ובהו), disordered, dark, and stormy (v. 2)¹²—hence, the need for light (vv. 3-5). The MT places a sign (פ) for a major paragraph break at the end of v. 5 but also at the end of 2:3. The probable presence of a striking parallelism in v. 2 is significant: “and the land was unformed and unfilled” (2a):

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------|----------|
| A [| B] | [C] | D | E |
| and-darkness [from <i>Elohim</i>] | [hovered] | over-the-surface-of | the-deep-[water] | (2bi) // |
| A' | B | C | D' | E' |
| and-a-wind[storm]-from <i>Elohim</i> | hovered | over the-surface-of | the-[deep]-water. | (2bii). |

The inclusio in 1:1 and 2:4a does not require 1:1 or 2:4a to be an independent sentence, it merely marks the beginning and end of the complete creation story of seven days (1:1-5, 1:6-8, 1:9-13, 1:14-19, 1:20-23, 1:24-31, 2:1-4a), which includes the creation week or event of six days.¹³ The author

11. Whether the expression “and the earth was” in v. 2 means immediate or subsequent (“became”) action is a conclusion dependent on decisions made about the nature of 1:1 as independent or dependent on v. 2. The grammatical form itself does not dictate the answer but rather is interpreted in light of larger issues of the purpose of 1:1 or 1:1-2 in light of 1:3-2:4. Even if “then the land became תהו ובהו” is chosen, nothing need be read into that other than the creation of sky and land was initiated and out of that process (however long and via whatever means) an incomplete and un-illuminated condition emerged. If the first “day” involved only the command for light and its instantaneous appearance and then naming it “day” and the darkness “night” (which already existed in v. 2), then even a day of 24-hours is quite empty (since these actions would have taken only seconds or minutes).

12. This appears to be a standard bi-colon, so it parallels darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ) and spirit/wind (רוּחַ). This genitive construct (“wind/spirit of God”) has to be interpreted. Is it possessive (“spirit belonging to God”), appositional (“spirit that is God”) or agent (“spirit from or by God”)?: Also רוּחַ can be spirit, wind, or breath. If this is a case of restatement in parallel lines, then the darkness over the deep water is best restated as a windstorm over the seas. So the best interpretation in context is a wind sent by God, not the (Holy) Spirit belonging to God.

13. For the more traditional view, Stipp has made a careful syntactical study of 1:1 in light of related OT determinatives and concluded that בְּרֵאשִׁית (“in the

seems to establish theologically the Sabbath and its observance as a regular rhythm of created human life (which might explain his *functional* purpose in using a week to picture the creation of all things).¹⁴ A chiasm may be constructed not around six or seven days but around ten stages or phases that comprise the six creational days in light of the respective length of each of 5 steps:

| | | | |
|----|--|---|----------|
| A | light + sky, land (days 1-2; 90 words) | 2 phases | |
| | B | seas + land and plants (day 3; 69 words) | 2 phases |
| | C | sun, moon, and stars (day 4; 69 words) | 1 phase |
| | B' | fish and birds + blessing (day 5; 57 words) | 2 phases |
| A' | animals + humans + blessing (day 6; 149 words) | 2/3 phases | |
| | (2 phases could be seen if animals and humans are grouped as "land animals") | | |

If this is, in fact, the case, why would the planets/stars be central? It may be in the ancient Near East religious context it would align nicely with the importance of establishing that those things worshiped as gods by the Canaanites and others are, in fact, cited as mere creations distinct from to the true Creator God, *Elohim*. A more satisfying analysis might be made between two different types of creation: non-*nephesh material* and *nephesh material* ("spiritual" or "spirited") each with five phases:¹⁵

beginning") is inherently determinative, needing no morphological indication, and that 1:1 is an independent motto verse. He argues the Tiberian text is not consistent with the nature of the conditions in Gen 1:1. See Hermann-Josef Stipp, "Anfang und Ende: Nochmals zur Syntax von Gen 1,1" *ZAH* 17-20 (2004-2007): 188-96.

14. The number of words (Hebrew) used for each day (disregarding *maqfeh* and counting the direct object marker) by this scheme are: 52, 38, 69 [or 25/44], 69, 57 [or 38/19], 149 [or 32/54/63 (animals/humans/blessings)], and 39 (but 34 if 2:3 is taken as the end of the narrative). Within the six days ten stages may be seen (days 3 and 5 each have two stages and day 6 has three); see Appendices A-C. The framework hypothesis (days 1-3 are forms and days 4-6 are respective fillings, 1//4, 2//5, 3//6) does not work because the sky/expanse is named on day 2 but fish created on day 5, yet the seas are created and named on day 3. Sky/heavens is day 2 but sun, moon, and stars are day 4 not 5 as expected, although day 5 has birds to fill the sky. If 1:1-5 is day 1 then land, sky, and light are involved on that day. On day 3 land appears when the seas are formed and then vegetation, which means a form and a filling are on the same day. The lines marking forms and what fills them are blurred and dotted, fluid not solid or categorical.

15. For the lack of better terminology this distinction is between material (living and non-living) things (without a *נֶפֶשׁ*) and "spiritual" beings (living "souls")

Creation of the material world (Days 1-4) 228 words

- A sky + land + light day 1
- B sky day 2
- C land + seas day 3
- D plants day 3
- E sun, moon, stars day 4

Creation of the “spiritual” world (Days 5-6) 95 words

- A fish and birds day 5
- B blessing day 5
- C animals day 6
- D humans day 6
- E blessing day 6

Days 1, 2, and 4 have one part while days 3, 5, and 6 have 2-3 parts (see Appendices B and C), totaling 10 parts or movements. Framework theory (see n. 15 above) notwithstanding, the proper division comes not between days 3 and 4 but 4 and 5, between the creation of inanimate (material) objects and animate (spiritual) beings. The latter are described as “living” (חיה) and “moving” (רמש) or as “soulish” or breathing beings (נפש). Plant life is not so designated (third day) and is food for both animals and humans (1:29-30). A well-known chiasm occurs at 2:4, which explains the reversal (earth and heavens) that some question:¹⁶

- a of the heavens
- b and the earth
- c when they were created

[נפש חיה] as describes animals in Gen 1:20, 24 and humans in 2:7). “Spiritual” is better than “soulish” since it avoids the problem of mistranslating נפש (which speaks of a living being) as the immaterial being separate from its body. In Lev 2:1 נפש is translated “someone.” These creatures unlike plants are animated by God and in that sense are material and “inspired.” The influence of God’s spirit (רוח) would be another stage of spirituality. It is interesting that this *nephesh* nature of humans is not mentioned in Genesis 1. נפש can mean “neck” (see Jonah 2:6) and both humans and many animals breath in life through a mouth/neck/lung system.

16. See Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 41. This chiasm shows that such structures have been recognized previously and points to the possibility if not probability of others. Some who oppose this chiasm as an editorial intention conjecture that the “heaven and earth” expression could be a scribal error.

c' in the time when Yahweh God made
 b' the earth
 a' and the heavens

The Use of *Waw* Consecutive

Some have appealed to the use of the *waw* consecutive in Genesis 1 as evidence of historical narrative.¹⁷ Hebrew grammars have long recognized that this form expresses “succession in time,” temporal or logical.¹⁸ At the same time subsequent past actions (e.g. subsequent yet oppositional action) resort to the *qatal* (see 1 Kgs 2:8).¹⁹ The *wayyiqtol* (inverted form, or more popularly the *waw* consecutive + *yiqtol*) also finds a place in Hebrew poetry (e.g., Ps 3:5 [3:4 English], וַיַּעֲנֵנִי (“and then he answered me”). While not strictly historical prose, poetic genre can contain historical references. Consequently a creation document such as found in Gen 1 may present sequential actions. Poetry by definition does not necessarily exclude the use of past events in space and time. The information the author conveys can be discovered within his ancient literary and religious context more than appeals to OT lexicography and verbal syntax.²⁰

17. See, e.g., Robert McCabe, “Theologian: Genesis means what it says!”, <http://creation.com/robert-mccabe-old-testament-scholar-genesis> (posted: n.d.; accessed 28/01/14) n.p.; article taken from *Creation* 32:3 (July 2010): 16-19, see specifically p. 19.

18. Paul Joüon - T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. Eng. ed.; 2 vols. in 1 vol.; SubBi 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 357, 361, 363. I concur with Muraoka’s preference for the title “*waw* inversive” (rather than “converted”) for the *wayyiqtol* and *w-qatalti* due to inversion of meaning (succession instead of future) and syllable stress (final), respectively. See p. 357.

19. *Ibid.*, 363.

20. Such grammatical issues are vital for proper translation, which is interpretation, yet they have to be evaluated in light of the cultural and communicative contexts. A word or phrase does not dictate the meaning of its larger context, to the contrary how a verb or noun or clause is understood is decided in light of the immediate contexts (pericope or book section, audience, cultural setting, etc.). One does not begin an essay based on a word but on a topic, which theme or purpose dictates the content, and then words are chosen to best introduce and develop the chosen subject. A writer first decides *how* to begin a text. That determines what word or sentence to use. Exegesis can be deceptive because it begins in reverse of how communication works. A text is broken into pieces to

In Genesis 1 the consecutive verbs (with God as subject) are distributed as follows: The *wayyiqtol* (“then God said”) appears 10 times, but these do not align with the 10 phases (see n. 23 below).²¹ These stages are initialized with “then God said” (וַיֹּאמֶר) or “then God blessed [וַיְבָרֵךְ] and said [וַיֹּאמֶר]” or “then God blessed by saying” (לֵאמֹר).²² On Day One God commanded (said), then saw, then separated, and then named (the day begins with “he created” if 1:1-2 is included). The *w . . . qatal* form in verse 2 (וַהָאֲרֶז הָיְתָה) “and the land was”) could better have been a *wayyiqtol* followed by the subject (“and it was, the land”) if the intention was “and then the land became.”²³ On Day Two He commanded, then made, then separated, and then named.²⁴ On Day Three He commanded, then named,

be studied but the exegete may forget that the pieces individually did not create the text, rather the text and its contexts dictated what pieces to use to obtain the author’s intended ideas. A word only has a meaning in a context. Yom unarguably is used in Genesis 1 as a “day of a week” (a normal day) but *why* the author used a week to portray the creation enables us to decide if he intended to teach a literal 144-hour creation or if his purpose was function (rather than mechanical) or theological (rather than historical). See, e.g., James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (New York: Oxford, 1961; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004) and Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

21. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, and 29.

22. 1:3 (day 1); 1:6 (day 2); 1:9 (day 3); 1:11 (day 3); 1:14 (day 4); 1:20 (day 5); 1:22 (day 5); 1:24 (day 6); 1:26 (day 6); and 1:28 (day 6). Another *wayyomer* comes in 1:29 as part of the extended blessing. The blessing on day 5 is *wayyiqtol* + inf. const. (blessed by saying) but on day 6 is *wayyiqtol* + *wayyiqtol* (blessed and then said). Regardless of form, the movement from command creation to blessing breaks days 5 and 6 into parts. Day six has three parts based on movement from animal creation (1:24) to human (1:26) to blessing (1:28). Day three has two parts based on movement from developmental command for water and then land. Here creation by divine word is not seen; rather God calls material already created to act. In fact jussive verbs are used with the sense “allow the waters/land to be gathered/produce vegetation” respectively. The creational activity is set in motion by God (not spoken into existence from nothing) and allowed to finish in its own time.

23. Consequently consecution is not in view here (cf. the gap theory that the completed creation in 1:1 later fell into chaos, 1:2). The land created in 1:1 was in an incomplete state initially (1:1-2).

24. God “made” is Hebrew עָשָׂה, which is used interchangeably with בָּרָא here in Genesis 1-2. The sense “create from nothing” is not a meaning of בָּרָא but is communicated if the context describes creation from nothing (ex nihilo). That בָּרָא only has God as a subject in the OT is not determinative because in written or oral

then saw/realized, then commanded, and then realized. On Day Four God commanded, then made, then separated, then saw/realized. On Day Five He commanded, then created, then saw, and then blessed by saying. On Day Six God commanded, then made, then saw, then commanded, then created, then blessed and said, then commanded, and then saw/concluded all was good (see Appendix B and C2). No doubt the narrative presents the week of creation in logical or temporal order of consecution. Whether the author intended this to be historical or theological, the same verbs could have been used. That chronology or the age of the earth was his concern depends on much more than verb forms and functions.

The Use of Thematic and Structural Features

Each creation “day” is subdivided into six creational acts and a closing formula, although all six are not always present or in the same order. What is consistent is the opening “God said/commanded” for each day and each of the ten stages, as well as the closing formula (“evening and morning” for each day). The six creational activities are: (1) God said/commanded or said/blessed, (2) saw/concluded, (3) separated/distinguished, (4) gathered, (5) called/named, and (6) made/created.²⁵ On no day do all of these appear. Day Four has the most with five: commanded/blessed, separated, made/created, named, and concluded/saw. Notably this day may be a fulcrum for a chiasmic structure (see above pp. 12 - 13). Four of these six acts, but not the same four, appear on Days 1, 2, and 3. After that, except for Day Four, only three, the same three, appear on Days 5 and 6 (although days 3, 5 and, 6 have multiple stages; cf. Appendix B). Speaking to create or bless appears first on each day or phase of a day. God’s “seeing” or approval or recognition of good appears on every day except the second (when sky is created). Separation/distinguishing (בדל) occurs only three times: light and dark on Day One, waters above and below on Day Two, and then light from dark on Day Four. The fact that light and dark are separated twice might suggest an inclusion for the first four days (the period of inanimate creation).²⁶ Both Day One and Day Four describe a separation of light

language outside of the OT in the ancient Jewish world the term likely was used with different subjects. The OT only offers us a slice of Hebrew usage overall. In Psalm 51:10 (12 MT) ברא is used in the sense of re-creation or renewal (making something new out of existing material).

25. This analysis was made before I had ever read the commentary by Kenneth Mathews, whose previous analysis is similar. See Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 115.

26. Suggesting no animate life in the universe?

and dark (also named day and night).²⁷ Only days 1-4 use 4-5 of the six possible creational acts. The only difference between days 1 and 4 is that the latter names the lights as sun, moon, and stars. The order for light to exist on each day differs only in the change from singular light (אֹר) in 1:3a) to plural lights (מְאֹרֹת in 1:14a). On Day One the light merely distinguishes day and night but on Day Four it also marks time (seasons of days and years). Read literally, a “day” could not be marked off in hours until the 4th day. All this could indicate a rhetorical purpose:

Day One (1:1-5) heavens and earth created (planets and stars implied) sky and land enlightened (day and night)

Day Two (1:6-8) sky (waters above) named

Day Three I (1:9-10) earth: land and seas (waters below) named

Day Three II (1:11-13) land: vegetation called to grow

Day Four (1:13-19) heaven and earth enlightened (planets and stars added) times calculated (day and night)

This fits with the emphasis throughout the Creation Story on the land and its principal inhabitant, humanity. After announcing the initial creation of land and sky (1:1) the text moves immediately to the land’s darkness and need of light (1:2-5). Then there is the sky over the land with rain clouds (waters above) to make the land fertile (1:6-8), followed by the organization of the earth into areas of dry land and seas (waters below). A result was that the land could now produce vegetation to sustain life. Then finally on Day Four seasons (related to planting and harvesting to sustain life) are regulated. So it seems the movement is from day and night being established (Day One) to day and night being effective (Day Four). The

27. This un-chronological depiction of creation points to a theological rather than technical purpose of the creation account. Consequently Bruce K. Waltke calls for a literary reading of Genesis 1 (“The First Seven Days: What is the Creation Account Trying to Tell Us?” *Christianity Today* 222.11 [12 August 1988]: 46). Theological purposes have led to chronological rearrangements elsewhere in the OT, e.g. Genesis 10–11, where ch.10 seems to belong after ch.11 since ch.11 has one language in use and ch.10 has many; however, the absolute one language theory of Gen 11:1-9 is highly debatable; see W. Creighton Marlowe, “The Sin of Shinar (Genesis 11:4),” *European Journal of Theology* 20.1 (2011): 29-39. See also Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis: An Introductory Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000); and David J. A. Clines, “The Significance of the ‘Sons of God’ Episode (Gen. 6.1-4) in the Context of the ‘Primaeval History’ (Gen. 1-11),” *JSOT* 13 (1979): 9.

stars existed from 1:1 (*Elohim* created the heavens and earth).²⁸ After Day Four the narrative is mainly concerned with the emergence of animate life, the pinnacle of which is human life, man and woman, who are to rule the other animals and eat from the plants.²⁹ Days Five and Six exclusively focus on God creating creatures and commanding their multiplication through procreation, and deeming this good³⁰ (see Appendix D). Man and woman are distinguished equally as bearing God's image, which in the immediate context is defined solely as mastering (הרה) and subduing (כבש) the animal world of fish, fowl, and all else (1:26-28). The text does not say animals cannot be food, only that plants are food.³¹ Chapter One could be framed as humanity's World (1:1-19) and humanity's Work (1:20-31). Semantic support for this formation is found as follows:

28. The deep and waters of 1:2 also represent what we know as the oceans, technically not created until Day 3. So "waters below" already existed when ostensibly formed in 1:7. This reasoning naturally fails if it can be shown conclusively that 1:1-2 is an introduction or topic statement and not part of the literary creation sequence.

29. It could be argued that this rule assumed using the animals as well for food. Perhaps the plant life is fronted as food because the man and woman (*Adam* and "his woman" later named *Chavvah*) are allowed seed-bearing plants for food (fruits, nuts/berries, and vegetables?) and the other animals every green plant (1:29-30). Later the man and woman will be disallowed (on pain of death) to eat from a certain tree (moral knowledge tree) in the garden in Eden where they live (2:15-17). The author of Genesis explains the central location of two trees in 2:9b. The tempter of 3:1 asks if they were forbidden to eat from *any tree*; but the woman replies (3:2-3) that they can eat *the fruit* (not mentioned previously) from any tree but *cannot eat the fruit from or touch the tree in the middle* (which God did not mention to Adam) of the garden without dying as a result. It can be assumed that the tree in 2:15-17 was a fruit tree although that is not stated in those verses. Or did the tempter and woman add that detail improperly? Regardless, it seems 1:29-30 anticipates chs. 2-3.

30. Not to be missed is the use of jussive verbs by which God allows the land to "produce" (יצא) "living beings" (נפשים) (1:24) which suggests a lengthy process as opposed to an instantaneous act of creation by divine fiat. Cf. the previous day when God says "allow the land to sprout green" (1:11) and 1:20, where God calls on creation to "allow the waters to swarm" (ישׁרצו) [with] "a swarm of living being[s]" (שׂרץ נפש חיה).

31. These humans seemingly have to have witnessed animal death to understand the warning about death resulting from disobedience. Animals are not directly forbidden as food; the comment is that ALL seed-bearing plants are edible (save one later on). Eventually people will sacrifice animals in worship as to offer them as food to God or the gods.

| A-B STATEMENT | | CLIMAX C | B'-A' RE-STATEMENT | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| DAY 1 heaven-earth light-dark Day-Night separated [expanse implied] | | | | DAY 4 expanse light-dark Day-Night separated heaven-earth |
| | DAY 2 Sky = expanse separating waters above and waters below | | DAY 3b Land [under the expanse] produces vegetation with waters below | |
| | <i>seas anticipated</i> | | <i>dry ground activated</i> | |
| | | DAY 3a Lands (dry ground) & Seas g athered (= Earth) | | |

In addition to the previous six structural but random themes plus closing formula for each of ten stages (or five themes with standard opening and closing formulae for each of six days),³² one can observe six structural features in a near-standard order: command, result, evaluation, disunity/unity, naming, and numbering/closing formula for a week day (see Appendices B and C). Command and result are always 1st and 2nd in order and numbering is always last. Evaluation and naming are usually in 3rd or 5th position. Disunity/unity (separating “or gathering”) is almost always 4th. Days 1 and 2 are almost identical in this regard, only “evaluation and disunity/unity are reversed. Again Days 1-4 use all six

32. “Then God said/commanded/blessed . . . And there was evening and morning,” leaving five other medial options of seeing, separating, gathering, calling, and making/creating. See Appendix B.

features and in a similar though not exact order. Days 5-6 use only the first three features and always in the same order (as Day 1) in addition to the numbering or typical closing statement (“evening and morning”). The days involving the creation of animate life do not involve things being separated/gathered or named. Later the human names the animals (2:19-20).³³ A significant shift is again clear between Days 4 and 5, as has been seen between 3 and 4.”

Metric and chiasmic symmetry is found in a place like verse 9:

- | | | |
|----|--|------------------------------|
| A | Creative Act Introduced: God said (v. 9a) | <i>wayyiqtol</i> (preterite) |
| | B Command for the sea to form: Let gather! (v. 9b) | jussive |
| | B' Command for the land to form: Let appear! (v. 9c) | jussive |
| A' | Creative Act Concluded: And it was (v. 9d) | <i>wayyiqtol</i> (preterite) |

Another kind of tri-colon could be suggested, but regardless of whatever pattern we accept, the obvious nature of this text is purposeful patterns:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| And God said “let the waters be gathered // | (12 syllables) |
| Under the skies into one place // | (12 syllables) |
| And let dry land appear [likewise]”; and it was so. | (12 syllables) |

Verses 11-12 have a bi-colon followed by a tri-colon, creating an a-b-c-d // a'-b'-c'-d' structure:³⁴

33. “God named the parts of creation, which showed His authority over them (ch. 1); then Adam named the” “line with his delegated dominion over them (ch. 2); and then Adam named the woman (3:20), which” “animals in” “contextually in terms of text and tradition posits Adam as having some authority over the woman in line with ANE conventions. Such information is accurate in relation to history, but hermeneutically is not required to be read as an authoritative proposition regarding the nature of women for all ages. Mathews believes God naming the animals defined their existence and gave signification, based on ancient customs (per Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation texts where there was no name before something came to be); and in light of Gen 2:19-20 and other passages in Genesis as well as the naming of the stars (Ps 147:4 and Isa 40:26), naming demonstrated superiority (*Genesis 1-11:26*,” 120, nn. 29-30). Does this apply in full to Adam naming the woman? “

34. Plus tag: “and it was so” in v. 11 and “God declares it ‘good’” in v. 12. Verse 12 simply reaffirms verse eleven, also chiasmatically (with bi-colon followed by tri-colon), and adds God’s approval (which substitutes for the 11d tag), with the statement about seeds “on the earth” assumed from v. 11d.

| STAGE VERSES | KEY VERBS & NOUNS | THEME | | STAGE VERSES | KEY VERBS & NOUNS |
|--------------|---|---------------------|------------|--------------|---|
| A 11a | (Jussive) let the land produce (אֲדַשָּׂא) [God's desire] | Vegetation on earth | | A' 12a | (Preterite) and the land produced (אֲדַשָּׂא) [the earth's cooperation] |
| | | Plan | Production | | |
| B 11b | (Participle) yielding (זָרַע) seed | Plants on earth | | B' 12b | (Participle) yielding (זָרַע) seed |
| | | Result | | | |
| C 11c | (Participle) making (עָשָׂה) fruit with seeds | Trees on earth | | C' 12c | (Participle) making (עָשָׂה) fruit with seeds |
| | | Result | | | |
| D | And it came to be | Confirmation | | D' | And God "saw" good |
| 11d | (wayyiqtol/preterite) [the earth's result] | | | 12d | (wayyiqtol/preterite) [God's commendation] |
| | | Realization | Evaluation | | |

Verse thirteen ends Day Three with the same sort of bi-colon as Day Two in v. 8b. Another chiasmus is present in vv. 26-28:

- A God's decision to make humans co-managers of the animals (26)
Wishing through cohortative/jussive verbs
- B God's creation of humans as co-managers (poem as fulcrum; 27)
Acting through *wayyiqtol/qatal/qatal* (past-tense) verbs
- A' God's decree that humans be co-managers of the animals (28)
Transition with 2 *wayyiqtol* (preterite or past-tense) verbs
Demanding through 5 imperative verbs (jussive verbs are used with an imperative force in Genesis 1; e.g., "let light exist!")

"The first bi-colon of v. 28 is highly symmetrical:

a b c a' b c
and-he-blessed them *Elohim* // and-he-said to-them *Elohim*.

He “favors” (ברך) them by speaking to them and revealing his will that they prosper and have” “purpose. This bi-colon (28b) is also likely a conceptual chiasmus of four imperatives:

| | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| a | b | b' | a' |
| Bear fruit! | Become many! | // Fill the-land! | And-subdue-it! |
| [be productive] | [multiply] | [multiply] | [be productive] |

1:28c tells how they are to do this: “rule” (the fifth imperative) over all creatures.

Parallels and Parallelism

The most objective evidence of Hebrew poetry or a poem is the pervasive presence of *parallelismus membrorum*. This does seem obvious in at least one if not a few places in Genesis 1. But it does not characterize the entire account, although proposals can be made for parallels and parallelisms not previously accepted. At least one attempt has been made to reconstruct the remains of an ancient poetic text from Genesis 1.³⁵ The case of 1:2 has already been discussed (see above pp. 11-12). As noted the consecutive verb at the beginning of v. 3 is linked to the previous verses (“so [then] God said”). As a unit vv. 1-5 could be translated:³⁶

35. Frank H. Polak, “Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Genesis 1.1-2.3),” pages 2-31 in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 5, n. 13 citing O. Loretz, “Wortbericht-Vorlage und Tatbericht-Interpretation im Schöpfungsbericht Gn 1,1-2, 4a,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 11 (1977): 279-87. Polak looks not so much at reconstructed parallelisms per se (although he notes some parallelisms between consecutive lines [pp. 23-26]), but at syntactic, semantic (lexical registers, fixed phrases or word pairs typical of poetry elsewhere in the OT), and rhythmic repetitions, also in light of source criticism. He speaks of something less than full parallelism, which he calls “balanced coupling” (p. 22), and emphasizes the need to recognize informal characteristics, which he sees neglected in previous works, such as J. C. de Moor, “Narrative Poetry in Canaan,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 20 (1988): 149-71; and J. C. de Moor and W. G. E. Watson, eds., *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993). See Polak, “Poetic Style,” 4, n. 11.”

36. Waltke noted that in favor of this grouping is the classic grammar by Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley. See Waltke, “The First Seven Days,” 42. Yet he thinks the presence of syntagmes like “heaven and earth” present an insurmountable obstacle to this approach. He argues that this hendiadys means “the entire organized universe” and as such is at odds with v. 2, where the earth is now chaotic. But the author of Genesis 1:1 could observe that God created everything and not necessarily mean that it was all finished and perfected, Childs’ observation

| | |
|--|------|
| First <i>Elohim</i> created [<i>bara</i>] the sky and the land // | 1 |
| And this land was [initially] an unfilled/unfinished form. | 2a |
| And darkness was [covering] the surface of the deep [seas] // | 2bi |
| While a wind from <i>Elohim</i> was blowing over the waters. | 2bii |
| So [then] <i>Elohim</i> commanded, “Let light come into existence!” // | 3a |
| And light then came into existence. | 3b |
| Then <i>Elohim</i> recognized the light as good // | 4a |
| So <i>Elohim</i> distinguished the light from the darkness. | 4b |
| And <i>Elohim</i> named the light “Day” // | 5ai |
| And the darkness [<i>Elohim</i>] named “Night. | 5aii |
| And then evening arrived, // | 5bi |
| And then morning arrived; // | 5bii |
| the first day [ended]. ³⁷ | 5c |

(quoted by Waltke) notwithstanding that this word pair can only speak of an ordered world. Still the sky and the land could be begun and remain unfinished without being necessarily disordered or chaotic in some negative sense. Again the dependent nature of 1:1 is suggested in that such problems disappear with the reading “When God began to create everything, the land was unformed/unfinished.” 1:1-2a makes a pleasing initial statement before the introduction of the parallelism in 1:2b. That “heavens and earth” should be “sky and land” is also further supported by these data. The narrative turns to a focus on the land *per se* in v. 2a. See also Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory,” *BSac* 132 (1975): 216-28. Waltke therein convincingly sets aside the so-called “Gap Theory” (that the initial verb of 1:2 is a pluperfect, “then it became”) noting (1) the stative nature of *hayah* in 2:5 and 3:1 (having parallel circumstantial clauses); (2) the “was” meaning of similar structures in Jonah 3:3; Zech 3:2-2; and Judges 8:11; (3) no ancient or modern versions translate הָיָה as “became” in 1:2; and (4) the unlikely beginning of a narrative with a pluperfect (p. 228). However, one must admit that this last reason is based on the assumption that 1:2 and not 1:1 begins the narrative *per se*. Also the argument about versions historically is weak in view of the reality that translators have been typically conservative (tending to be literal, leaving interpretation to the reader).

37. The verb בָּרָא is used in this narrative at 1:1, 21a, and 27. It initiates the creation of inanimate and then animate things (again suggesting an intentional structure of Days 1-4 then 5-6). *Elohim* created the sky and land (the empty forms needing filling) and then made/fashioned (עָשָׂה) things to fill them in Stage I; and then in Stage II He created sea life, but this had already been explained as God calling on the water and then the air to allow fish and birds to fill them (v. 20). Everything multiplied according to its kind (v. 21b). The same process occurs with humanity in vv. 26-27 (“Let us make [עָשָׂה] humans . . . so God created humans [בָּרָא]”). However, בָּרָא also initiates Days 5 and 6 (animal then human creation). So God creates (1) inanimate things then (2) animate non-human life and (3)

Already well-known and undisputed is 1:27,

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|------------|--------------|----|
| A | B | C | D | |
| so-he-created | <i>Elohim</i> | the-man | in-his-image | // |
| | | | | |
| D | B | A | C' | |
| in-the-image-of | <i>Elohim</i> | he-created | him. | |

A fairly obvious bi-colon and tri-colon can be proposed for both verse 6 and 7, respectively:"

a b c d e f
 (6) And-he-said *Elohim* "be an-expanse in-the-midst-of the-waters" //

[a] [b] c d' e' f f'
 [And-he-said] [*Elohim*] "be a-division between waters from-waters."

a b c d
 (7) So-he-made *Elohim* the-expanse and-he-separated, /
 e f g h i
 between the-waters which (were) under the-expanse //

e f g h' i
 and-between the-waters which (were) above the-expanse.

animate human life. But why is ברא used just for sea life? Also Day 6 divides animate life on land further into non-human and human creatures. Perhaps to make a stronger break between animal life on land, the non-human life is "brought forth [יעא] from the land" while humans were "created" (ברא). This verb could be applied to sea life at the beginning of the animate section (Days 5-6) because human life could not be confused with fish as with other land animals; but of the land animals it needed to be stressed that humans were distinct, especially because of God's image (while all had the breath of life or *nephesb*, which is better "life" than "soul" since the latter evokes thoughts of dis-embodied spirits; by the same token "Holy Ghost" needs to be discontinued). The sea life "swarmed" from the water (v. 20) and then was created (v. 21; ברא); the land animals (non-human) were "produced" by the land (v. 24) and "made" (v. 25; עשה). Humans are "made" (עשה) by God (1:26; ["let us make" is a rhetorical device like the royal "we"]) then poetically "created" as human (v. 27a) and as male and female (v. 27b). The non-human sea and land life emerges from the water or land and are created and made, but humans are just created or made (although in Genesis 2 the male is fashioned from the mud and the female from the side of the male). See "Appendix D."

Others can be proposed more or less convincingly. But this is sufficient to demonstrate that parallelism, while perhaps not comprehensive, is present in Genesis 1. An original poem could be imagined, of which the present text is a re-creation.

Conclusion

This exploration of the various structures and themes of Genesis 1 in terms of patterns and parallels has indicated several possible ways in which the narrative is characterized by intentional rhetorical and poetical devices. While not a historical narrative per se, it does present the creation event in a series of sequential or subsequent (logical or chronological) steps or stages or phases. At the same time, some of these may be chiasmic, so a linear set of steps is not necessarily presented, rather a literary means of fronting or focusing on certain key or theological perspectives seems evident. These data suggest that the nature of this story is highly stylized and structured, and does not present itself as an obvious linear movement of creational acts.³⁸ The author of Genesis 1 was principally concerned with the meaning (theology), not the mechanics (chronology) of creation. Such poetics do not disallow a text's ability to express historical and factual information (as the Psalms demonstrate); but the use of a normal work week of six days does not preclude the author from having a functional or theological or symbolic purpose for that image. A rigid, literal hermeneutic is not a truly viable option for reading this passage. Whatever its purposes or propositions, its style is sublime. Genesis 1 embodies no simple string of successive or consecutive acts, although consecutive verbs predominate. These latter show sequence consistent with the author's plan to use a week from day one to seven to encapsulate his creation theology, but do not have to be used to communicate chronological acts in history. The answer to *why* the author employed a normal week of seven days (six creational ones) may be as much functional or theological as mechanical or temporal. The mere presence of *וַיַּבְרָא* consecutive or use of *וַיַּבְרָא* as a normal day does not prove that the author's purpose was the time of creation. Similarly, the use of numerous poetics does not prove that his purpose was non-historical and only theological or symbolic. One may conclude, on the basis of what has been shown, the text combines highly poetic informality with a degree of formality.

38. Clare Amos speaks of the "song of seven days" regarding the Creation week of Gen 1:1-2:4a (*The Book of Genesis* [Peterborough, Eng.: Epworth, 2004] 1-14).

Appendix A The Days and Stages of Gen 1:1-31³⁹

| DAY | VERSES | CREATIVEWORD | CREATIVESTAGES |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 3-5 (3) | God said | 1 Light (Day) 2--- |
| 2 | 6-8 (3) | God said | 1 Sky (“dome”) 2--- |
| 3 | 9-11 (3) | God said | 3.1 Earth and Sea (Continents and Oceans) |
| | 12-13 (2) | God said | 3.2 Vegetation 3--- |
| 4 | 14-19 (6) | God said | 1 Sun, Moon, and Stars 2--- |
| 5 | 20-21 (2) | God said | 5.1 Fish and Fowl |
| | 22-23 (2) | God blessed saying | 5.2 Multiplication (be fruitful) 3--- |
| 6 | 24-25 (2) 26-27 (2) 28-31 (4) | God said | 6.1 Land Animals |
| | | God said | 6.2 Humanity |
| | | God blessed saying and said | 6.3a Multiplication (be fruitful) 6.3b All animals and plants for food |

Appendix B Order and Appearance of Thematic Features in Genesis Creation “Days”

| THEMES | YOM → | 1 | 2 | 3 | | 4 | 5 | | 6 | | |
|------------------|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | | | I | II | | I | II | I | II | III |
| God said/blessed | | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| God saw | | 2 | ---- | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | ---- | 3 | ---- | 2 |
| God separated | | 3 | 2 | ---- | ---- | 2 | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| God gathered | | ---- | ---- | 3 | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- |

39. Cf. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 117, n. 13.”

Appendix D Sequence Schematic of Things “Created” from YOM 1-6

| YOM | REF ch:vs | Created (ברא) or Made (עשה) | Commanded to be or Controlled |
|------------|--------------|--|---|
| Intro | 1:1-2 | What follows is after the creation (ברא) of the unfinished and dark sky, land and sea: | |
| 1 | 1:3-5 | | Light; Day and Night named |
| 2 | 1:6-8 | Expanse made (עשה) | Expanse named Sky |
| 3 | 1:9-10 | | Water gathered and Dry Ground exposed: named Sea and Land. |
| | 1:11-13 | | Vegetation produced by the Land |
| 4 | 1:14-19 | Sun, moon, and stars made (עשה) | Seasons signified; light for the earth provided in the Sky; day and night governed. |
| 5 | 1:20-23 | Fish and fowl created (ברא) by kind | Water and Sky to teem with life. Be fruitful and multiply. |
| 6 | 1:24-25 | Animals made (עשה) by kind | Animals produced by the Land. |
| | 1:26-30 | People made (עשה) to rule. People created (ברא) with gender. | People to rule over animals “in God’s image.” Be fruitful and multiply. Subdue earth and eat plants. |
| | 1:31 | | All made (עשה) declared good. |
| Outro 7 | 2:1-4a | What preceded was about how the Land and Sky were completed and created (ברא) | |
| | | Elohim rests from creative work. | Rested from work He did (עשה). Rested from work of creating (ברא) he had done (עשה). |