

A SHATTERED PRISM
THE POLYPHONOUS AND EVANESCENT STRUCTURE OF GENESIS 1

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“Non-identical repetition is everything. Everything is non-identical repetition.”

--Ryan Handermann

Recent decades have seen a renaissance of a literary approach to Scripture, using careful and detailed analysis of literary structures to gain greater insight into the messages and rhetorical techniques of the Biblical authors. Given the prevalence of this approach, it is surprising how comparatively little attention has been paid to the first chapter of Genesis. Scholars such as Robert Altar and James Jordan have proven that the book of Genesis is the product of careful and refined literary technique, molding the story into an ornate tapestry of chiasms, parallel structures, motifs, and symbols. Naturally, then, we should expect the author of Genesis to have paid particular attention to his rendering of the Creation account, standing as it does at the beginning of Scripture, indeed, at the beginning of time, and providing, as it does, the model for so many other literary structures and motifs throughout Scripture. Indeed, I think it would be no exaggeration to say that we ought to expect, in such a crucial chapter as Genesis 1, that thought has been given to the choice and placement of every word and phrase.

However, there has been very little scholarly analysis on such a detailed level. Thanks to the “literary framework” hypothesis of creation, the three-panel structure of Genesis 1 has received much attention and debate, while others (Jordan, notably), have suggested chiastic structures. The repeating parallel structure of the Creation account has of course also received some attention, but it generally seems to be taken for granted and given little detailed attention. The great Jewish exegete Umberto Cassuto wrote a magisterial commentary on Genesis, devoting 300 pages to the first six chapters, but literary structures are not his particular concern, so, though he has some fabulous literary insights, they tend to be incidental and not part of a systematic structural analysis. This paper will attempt to fill in the gaps where detailed analysis of the parallel structure of Genesis 1 has been lacking. My purpose here will be more to provoke questions than to provide conclusive answers, though, wherever possible, I will suggest potential solutions to the difficulties raised by the structure.

First, though, I think it is important to establish that we ought, indeed, to expect to find very detailed use of literary structure, with importance given to individual word choice and phrase placement.

The easiest way to do this is simply to summarize Cassuto's fascinating analysis of the heptamerous patterns in Genesis 1.

Heptamerous structures are of course a commonplace of literary criticism of the Bible. It is often claimed that this preference for seven-fold structures on the part of the Biblical writers is to echo the structure of Creation, though those adhering to the framework hypothesis would argue that the Creation account is structured this way on account of an already existing predilection for sevens. Whichever of these is true, it is clear that this preference for sevens extends much further than merely the number of days. Umberto Cassuto has uncovered no less than thirteen persuasive heptamerous structures in the account:

a) There are seven paragraphs, marked by the "and there was evening, and there was morning, such-and-such a day."

b) The word *Elohim*, "God," is repeated 35 (5X7) times in the creation account.

c) The word *'erets*, "earth," is repeated 21 (3X7) times

d) The word *shamayim*, "heavens" is repeated 21 (3X7) times

e) There are seven divine fiat's enjoining the creation, that is, seven "Let there be's."

f) The terms "light" and "day" appear seven times in the first paragraph, while the word "light" appears seven times in the fourth.

g) "Water" is mentioned seven times in the course of paragraphs two and three.

h) A form of the word *chayyah* ("living beast") appears seven times in paragraphs five and six.

i) The expression "it was good" appears seven times (the seventh time "very good").

j) The first verse has seven words.

k) The second verse has fourteen words.

l) In the seventh paragraph, regarding the seventh day, there are three consecutive sentences, each containing seven words and each centered on the word "on the seventh day"

m) There are a total of 35 (5X7) words in the seventh paragraph.¹

¹ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1989), 13-15.

All this is, of course, fascinating, but is not merely a curiosity. Cassuto summarizes,

“To suppose that all this is a mere coincidence is not possible. This numerical symmetry is, as it were the golden thread that binds together all the parts of this section and serves as a convincing proof of its unity against the view of those—and they comprise the majority of modern commentators—who consider that our section is not a unity but was formed by the fusion of two different accounts, or as the result of the adaptation and elaboration of a shorter earlier version.”²

This attention to detail on the part of the author, even to the point of counting how many times each word is used, will lend credence to my thesis about the variations in the parallel structure.

The Repeating Parallel Structure

Most anyone with any basic Bible knowledge could tell you that Genesis 1 is organized in some kind of repeating parallel structure; at the very least, they would know that seven distinct days are identified, and the creation that takes place in each day is described in fairly similar terms. But of course it is much more complicated.

In fact, we hit a complicating factor right off the bat—it’s not really a sevenfold parallel structure. The seventh day of creation, aside from the closing formula, “and there was evening, and there was morning, the seventh day,” does not share any of the other repeated elements, and ought not to be considered part of the parallel structure. This is of course appropriate, since the structure is a structure organizing and characterizing God’s *working*, and the seventh day stands apart as one of *non-working*. But nor do we then have a six-fold structure, since there are two distinct acts of creation on the third day and on the sixth day. So what we really have to reckon with here is a parallel structure repeated eight times. Or do we? As we will discover, this is not so clear either.

But first, let us examine two ways in which the repeating structure has been characterized.

First, there is James Jordan’s organization, which he outlines in *Through New Eyes*, and apparently sees as paradigmatic for God’s pattern of working throughout Scripture. He characterizes it as the “Five-Fold Pattern of God’s Work,” and it consists of the following elements:

² Cassuto 15.

1)First, God takes hold of creation. This is expressed in the text in the words “And God said.”

2)Second, God restructures the creation. This would, I suppose, include the “And God made such-and-such” phrases, though as Jordan says, “This is particularly in focus in the first three days of creation, during which God *separated* light from darkness, waters above from waters below, and land from sea.”³

3)Third, God distributes his work. Where Jordan identifies this in the creation account is somewhat harder to find, though he does say, “This is particularly in view in the last three days during which God gave the firmament to the sun, moon, stars, and birds, the sea to fishes, and the land to animals and men.”

4)Fourth, God evaluates his work. This appears in the Creation account in the phrase “God saw what he had made and it was good.”

5)Fifth, God enjoys his work. We see this only on the seventh day of creation, and so this is not really part of the repeating parallel structure.

As a generic structure to characterize God’s work in the world I have no particular complaints with this, especially if it is just being used as a didactic tool. However, if this is meant to be a representation of the actual structure of Genesis 1, it is more eisegetical than exegetical, since the verbal pattern of the passage does not divide neatly along these lines.

Waltke, in his commentary on Genesis, attempts something a bit more precise, claiming that Genesis 1 follows a sevenfold pattern:⁴

1)First is the *announcement*: “And God said.” Waltke expounds on the significance of this, saying “The hero of creation is God. Each event occurs according to God’s expressed will and through the agency of his word. Speech signifies that God is intimately bonded to his creation.”⁵

³ James Jordan, *Through New Eyes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988), 119.

⁴ Bruce Waltke, with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 56-7.

⁵ *Ibid.* 56.

2)Then comes the *commandment*: “Let there be...” Waltke says of this, “God’s word in conjunction with his Spirit is irresistible and creative; consequently, it overcomes chaos and emptiness.”⁶

3)Third, God brings about *separation*. “Boundaries are important in both the created and social orders. When everything keeps to its allotted place and does not transgress its limits, there is order, not chaos.”⁷

4)Then the narrator *reports* what God has done: “And so God made...” or some such.

5)Next comes God’s *naming* of his creation: “And he called...” Waltke elaborates, “Naming, an indication of dominion, reveals God as the supreme ruler.”⁸

6)Then God offers his *evaluation*: “God saw that it was good.” Accompanying this, Waltke points out, is God’s blessing of his creation, which we see during the last few days of creation.

7)Finally, the narrator provides the *chronological framework*: “And there was evening and there was morning.”

As a way of distinguishing the various elements of the passage, Waltke’s pattern is fairly accurate, though it does not quite represent the order accurately (of course, as we are about to discuss, this complaint could be leveled to some degree against any pattern). My own preliminary reconstruction (to be modified at the end of a full discussion) is as follows:

1)Declarative: “And God said...”

2)Stative: “And there was...”

3)Enactive: “And God made...”

4)Evaluative: “And God saw that the such and such was good.”

5)Partitive: “And God divided...”

6)Nominative: “And God called...” (note that I include the blessings under this rather than under *report*, contra Waltke)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

7)Conclusive: “And there was evening, and there was morning...”

As you will note, it comes fairly close to Waltke’s, and also contains seven elements. However, it differs in that I treat Waltke’s *announcement* and *commandment* as one element, the *declarative*, and I distinguish between two different forms of the *report*, the *stative* and the *enactive*. Of course, note that, at this point, I only set down this provisional pattern as a starting-point from which to show the variations. And, as we will see, there are many of these. The following is my translation of the chapter, arranged according to these seven elements.

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

2 And the earth was without form and void and darkness upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered upon the face of the waters.

I.

A. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,”

B. and there was light.

D. 4 And God saw the light to be good.

E. And God divided between the light and between the darkness.

F. 5 And God addressed the light as “day” and the darkness he addressed as “night.”

G. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

II.

A. 6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it be dividing between waters upon waters.”

C.. 7 And God made the expanse

E. and divided between the waters which were beneath the expanse and between the waters which were over the expanse;

B. and it was so.

F. 8 And God addressed the expanse as “heavens,”

G. and there was evening, and there was morning, a second day.

III.

A. 9 And God said, “Let be gathered the waters beneath the heavens into one place, and let be seen dry ground”;

B. and it was so.

F. 10 And God addressed the dry ground as “earth,” and the gathering of waters as “seas”;

D. and God saw it to be good.

A. 11 And God said "Make the earth sprout a sprout, and herbage seeding seed, a tree of fruit bearing fruit, according to its kind, the seed of which is in itself, upon the earth";

B. and it was so. 12 And the earth brought forth the sprout and the herb seeding seed according to its kind, and the tree bearing fruit, the seed of which is in itself, according to its kind,

D. and God saw it to be good.

G. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning, a third day.

IV.

A. 14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to divide between the day and between the night, and let them be for signals for seasons and for days and for years.

15 And let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth";

B. and it was so.

C. 16 And God made two great lights, the great light to rule the day, and the small light to rule the night, and the stars. 17 And God gave them in the expanse of heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule in the day and in the night, 18 and to divide between light and darkness.

D. And God saw it to be good.

G. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

V.

20 And God said, "Let the waters teem with the teeming thing having the breath of life, and the flying thing fly upon the earth in the open expanse of the heavens."

C. 21 And God created great sea monsters, all living creatures moving with which the waters teemed according to their kind, and all winged flying things according their kind.

D. And God saw it to be good.

F. 22 And them God blessed, saying, "Make fruit and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the land."

G. 23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

VI.

A. 24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind, the cattle and the creeping thing and creature of the earth, according to their kinds";

B. and it was so.

C. 25 And God made the creature of the earth according to their kind and the cattle according to its kind and every creeping thing of the earth according to its kind,

D. and God saw it to be good.

A. 26 And God said, "Let us make man in our image, like our likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flying things of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creeping things which creep on the earth.

C. 27 And God created man in his image; in the image of God he created ; male and female he created them.

F. 28 And God blessed them and God said to them, "make fruit and multiply and fill the earth and subdue and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens, and

over the creatures which creep upon the earth. 29 And God said, "I have given to you all the herbage seeding seed which is on the face of the whole earth and all the trees which are in it; the fruit of the tree seeding seed, will be for you for eating, 30 and to every creature of the earth and to every flying thing of the heavens and to every creeping thing upon the earth in which is a living soul; every green herbage for eating."

B. And it was so.

D. 31 And God saw all that he had made and behold! it was very good.

G. And there was evening and there was morning, sixth day.

2

1 And so were finally completed the heavens and the earth, and all their host.

2 And God completed in the seventh his work which he did and he rested in the seventh day from all the work which he did.

3 And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it he rested from all the work which God created, making.

From this structure, it is apparent that in this "repeating parallel structure" consisting of seven elements, very little is fixed and constant, neither the number of elements, nor their particular order, nor the exact form of each element. Assuming that one agrees with my divisions above, we see that the order and number of structural elements present on each day can be summarized as follows:

Light:

Declarative—Stative—Evaluative—Partitive—Nominative—Conclusive (1-3-4-5-6-7)

Lacks Enactive

Expanse:

Declarative—Enactive--Partitive—Stative—Nominative—Conclusive (1-2-5-3-6-7)

Lacks Evaluative

Earth:

Declarative—Stative—Nominative—Evaluative (1-3-6-4)

Lacks Enactive, Partitive, Conclusive

Herbage:

Declarative—Stative—Evaluative—Conclusive (1-3-4-7)

Lacks Enactive, Partitive, Nominative

Sun and Moon:

Declarative—Stative—Enactive—Evaluative—Conclusive (1-3-2-4-7)

Lacks Partitive, Nominative

Fish and Birds:

Declarative—Enactive—Evaluative—Nominative (blessing)—Conclusive (1-2-4-6-7)

Lacks Stative, Partitive

Animals:

Declarative—Stative—Enactive—Evaluative (1-3-2-4)

Lacks Partitive, Nominative, Conclusive

Man:

Declarative—Enactive—Nominative (blessing)—Stative—Evaluative—Conclusive (1-3-4-2-6-7)

Lacks Partitive

There are two ways of approaching the problem of all these anomalies, or three. The first is to attribute all these simply to a desire for variety on the part of the author, with no further significance.⁹ The second is to go through, verse by verse, attempting to explain each anomaly on its own as it arises. The third is to focus on a particular element (as the declarative or the stative) and try to discern a pattern to its variations throughout the passage. Based on the points made above regarding the detailed care the author seems to have shown in the arrangement of the text, we will rule out the first option, at least, taken absolutely. The second, taken absolutely, may fail to recognize larger patterns that the author displays in the variations. In general, I shall follow the third approach, though this ends up being closely intertwined with the second.

First, are there any general patterns that can be observed in the anomalies above? Well, first of all, to simplify things a bit, we may bracket out the first and last elements of the structure, the declarative and the conclusive, since these two at least are consistently repeated in the same place¹⁰ (incidentally, this fact may reassure any who were beginning to doubt the existence of a parallel structure at all!). This leaves us with five variable elements. Of these, four appear in the first pattern, four in the second, three in the third, two in the fourth, three in the fifth, three in the sixth, two in the seventh, and four in the eighth. So we have rather rough pattern moving from more complete accounts to less complete and back to more complete. But there is little conclusive to be found in this direction.

⁹ Cassuto suggests something like this in his introduction, saying, “in contrast to the style of epic poetry, which is prone to word-for-word repetition, it is a basic principle of biblical narrative prose not to repeat a statement in identical terms; with fine artistic sense, the narrator likes to alter the wording or to shorten it or to change the order of the words when reverting to any subject,” and he uses this principle to explain several oddities in Genesis 1. However, I think the first part of this statement is quite questionable (indeed, Cassuto goes on to add some important qualifiers shortly afterward), and that thus, where alterations are present, often part of the “fine artistic sense” is at work in seeking to bring out nuances or emphases (Robert Alter has done fine work on variations of repetition in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*). Nevertheless, certainly a few of the variations of this sort are purely stylistic.

¹⁰ Except, of course, for days three and six, when there are two creation patterns within the same day—naturally, we have an omission of the conclusive here. But I shall leave to the side here the question of why these two days are unique in this way.

Looking over the list above, we find that the most frequently omitted element is the partitive, which indeed only appears in the first two creation sequences.¹¹ The fact that the only two uses occur at the beginning indicate that whatever the significance of the omission or inclusion of this element, it is not part of a larger structural pattern, but can be attributed in some way to the meaning of the relevant sections. So we might suggest the following interpretation: God's work of dividing his creation into its key categories, as it were, is restricted to the first two days of creation. This seems odd, since, traditionally, the third day is also taken as one of "forming" rather than "filling." This objection could be answered by reading an implicit *partitive* into the section regarding the creation of dry land, since it is clearly being separated out from the waters. Alternatively, we could take this to mean that there are really only two crucial separations in creation: light from darkness and heaven (that is, in the sense of what is above the firmament) from earth (what is below the firmament). This might make sense in terms of the later metaphorical use of these terms in Scripture: light, symbolizing good, is diametrically opposed to darkness, symbolizing evil; likewise, an indissoluble gap exists between the heavens, where God dwells, and the earth, where man dwells.

What about the nominative? This is omitted in three of the sequences: the 4th, 5th, and 7th. This, is, of course, if you accept the blessings of the sea creatures and of man as forms of the nominative.¹² If you do not treat the blessing as a variation on the nominative, then the nominative is omitted in the 4th-8th. This systematic omission reminds us of what we just observed with the partitive, and suggests that perhaps a) the blessings comprise a distinct element (could we call it the "beatitive"?) and b) we should interpret the nominative along similar lines as the partitive. Moreover, this may suggest that we were right above in proposing an implicit partitive in sequence 3, such that we then have three consecutive partitive/nominative sequences, followed by five sequences lacking either. On this interpretation, then, naming plays the particular role of distinguishing between separated things, of designating different

¹¹ This fact makes Waltke's unqualified remarks on the *separation* part of the structure look rather naïve or sloppy.

¹² Arguments for this identification: the act of naming is God's exercise of dominion over the newly-created thing; so is the act of blessing. The act of naming is God's identification of the nature and function of the newly-created thing; so is the act of blessing. The act of naming is a covenant act between God and the newly-created thing; so is the act of blessing.

categories. That is to say, naming is more a negative definition than a positive definition, or, to put it another way, naming tells not so much what a thing is in itself as what it is in relation to other things, what it is not—so “light” is “not-darkness” and “earth” is “not-sea,” etc. Whether this take on naming stands up in the light of other Biblical uses of naming is a matter for further study. Admittedly, this interpretation seems to work against what was just suggested about the priority of the first two separations, but perhaps it need not, since those are still the only two explicit uses of the partitive.

Beyond these, the main systemic variations we see concern the primacy of the *enactive* and the *stative*. It may be, as Waltke seems to think, that these are simply two ways of saying the exact same thing, though the fact that both phrases occur in several of the patterns (and non-consecutively in the 2nd and 8th). If they are different, then, is there any pattern of which is emphasized? It does not appear so:

1: S 2: E/S 3: S 4: S 5: S/E 6: E 7: S/E 8: E/S

Unless perhaps you just focus on which comes first

1: S 2: E 3: S 4: S 5: S 6: E 7: S 8: E

This leaves us with an attractive chiastic pattern of reversal: S→E, E→S, E→S, S→E, with two statives at the center. And, while it would be lovely if we could make something of this, frankly, I’m probably just playing around at this point. So let’s try a more fruitful approach: working through on a case-by-case basis to see if we can divine any reason for the author’s decision on each occasion. But first let us propose a hypothesis¹³:

a) where the stative and enactive are consecutive, they are to be treated, essentially, as one unit (as Waltke does), a unit which recapitulates God’s declaration, and demonstrates its effectiveness, and their order is thus insignificant (representing a merely stylistic variation). B) The addition of the enactive, then, in these cases, serves to elaborate and embellish this recapitulation, even using precisely the same words and phrases, whenever God’s creative act is complex. C) When the stative alone is used with no enactive embellishment, it is because God’s creative act is simple and requires no elaboration. D) There remain two cases, however, in which the enactive appears essentially alone (the 6th and 8th patterns), but these, I will suggest, are fundamentally different.

¹³ Lest this be misleading, I will clarify that this is not of course literally an *a priori* hypothesis, subsequently evaluated by looking at the evidence, but is an *a posteriori* conclusion I have already gained from synthesizing the evidence, which I will then use as illustration.

This hypothesis is admittedly tenuous, but, I believe, holds up better than any alternative, and will be borne out by a careful examination of each of the eight patterns, a task to which we now turn.

In sequence one, we have declarative “Let there be light,” followed immediately by stative, “And there was light,” with no enactive. This “tersest form . . . show[s] the precision and celerity with which the injunction was carried out: as he commanded, and as soon as he commanded,”¹⁴ according to Cassuto. Cassuto also seems to consider this *stative* as a short form of the *enactive* (though of course he does not use these terms), a fair point since every other *stative* takes the precise form “and it was so.” I chose to classify it as a stative, at least on the first analysis, due to the presence of the linking verb. Based on the hypothesis above, though, this becomes a less significant distinction, since the stative and enactive are essentially one. Here, though, I would suggest, the terseness and lack of embellishment reflects the simplicity and unity of this creative act, as mentioned in c) of the hypothesis.

In sequence two, we have a more lengthy, two-fold declaration, followed by an enactive, partitive, and stative. The identification of enactive and stative might be challenged here because of the intervening partitive. However, this could be answered by pointing out that the partitive here is really more of a subset of the enactive, since it forms a compound verb within the same sentence (rather than forming a separate sentence, as in sequence 1) and functioning as it does to help recapitulate the declarative. Thus we have a reflection of b) of the hypothesis here, as the enactive-stative combination serves to recapitulate God’s more complex creation act.

Sequence three, based on our reconstruction, is most similar to the first sequence, “Let there be light”—the stative phrase follows the declarative and there is no elaboration in the form of an enactive. This should then be an example of c) of the hypothesis. It might be objected to this that this appears to be a compound creative act, like the second, rather than what we have designated a simple creative act. Perhaps so, but if we really think about it, the “let be seen dry land” might be seen as not a distinct creative action at all, but simply the result of the first clause. After all, if the waters are gathered together

¹⁴ Cassuto 26.

into one place, then the place they have vacated, the land, becomes visible. This is admittedly the most tenuous point in the hypothesis, but it is certainly not indefensible.

The fourth sequence is also interesting. We originally classified it as merely having a stative phrase, but not an enactive; however, having broken down some of the distinction between these two, we find something of a combination here. There is no “and God made...” but rather an “and the earth brought forth...”; but there is a nearly word-for-word recapitulation, characteristic of what we saw in sequence two with the enactive. And indeed, considering that the declarative here makes the earth the agent: “Make the earth sprout...” this does really parallel the enactive found in sequence two. So this fits b) of the hypothesis as well, a complex creation act recapitulated in detail by the stative and enactive phrases.

The fifth sequence follows the hypothesis (and the example of the second pattern) quite closely. We have a rather complex creative act, followed by a simple stative phrase, and a long enactive recapitulation of the declaration.

The sixth sequence is one of our two true exceptions, lacking a stative altogether. Moreover, the enactive is not a true enactive, since it uses the special word *barah* (“created”) rather than merely “made.” The significance of this will be discussed below.

The seventh sequence provides another clear example of a complex creative act followed by a stative and long enactive, nearly word-for-word, recapitulation, as per part b) of the hypothesis.

The eighth sequence also distinctively uses *barah* and so, it seems, should be grouped with pattern six as a different type of phrase altogether. One might object that the stative is in fact present here, as it is not in pattern six. However, given that the stative only comes several verses later after a long address from God to man, it can more plausibly be suggested that this last stative should be understood, along with the last evaluative (which immediately follows it), as marking a conclusion to the entire creative process, rather than merely the creation of man. Thus something like this is intended. “And God created all these things. And God created man, and God blessed man and established his relationship with man. And all this was so, it was all established as God wished. And God saw it all and it was very good.”

Before moving on to consider the unique arrangement of the 6th and 8th patterns, there is one another intriguing anomaly. The evaluative, you may have noted, appears in all but one of the patterns, and that one is the second. For some reason, after the second day of Creation, God saw no reason to say “and it was good.” Presumably this does not mean it was bad or that God thought he’d messed up; rather, it seems that, in some important way, the work of the second day was not brought to its full completion on the second day, but awaited further creation. Cassuto’s remarks here seem very helpful:

the Rabbinic Sages already noted correctly—and their view is shared by some modern exegetes—that the words *it was good* were not appropriate at this stage, in as much as the work of the water had not yet been completed. The situation was not yet *good*; for had it been good, there would have been no necessity for another separation on the third day. For the same reason, it is not stated here that God gave a name to the sea just as he had named the heavens.¹⁵

Now, what about these sixth and eighth sequences? They are clearly distinct in their use of the blessing (or beatitive), as we have already mentioned, and in their omission of the stative. But, equally significantly, they are marked as unique by their use of the word *barah* (“created”). Given the fact that the word “made” is otherwise so prevalent, we should expect that the author has something particular in mind with this usage, especially since *barah*, in the perfect tense, is used to frame the entire creation narrative, appearing only in 1:1 and 2:3. It appears twice also in the imperfect tense, only being employed at crucial points in the creation narrative. Crucial? you ask. Well, it is used to describe the creation of man, which seems obviously important and unique. But the other use is for sea monsters! “And God created great sea monsters, all living creatures with which the waters teemed according to their kind...” This seems rather odd. First of all, why do “great sea monsters” even need to be mentioned in the creation account? Certainly from our perspective this seems a rather random addition. But to single them out with the same verb used for the creation of man? This seems quite ridiculous.

Cassuto, though, has a fascinating explanation. He explains how, in the ancient Near Eastern mythologies, sea monsters played a very important role, as primordial, apparently divine creatures that were not subject to the gods but which rather warred against the god (incidentally, echoes of this mythology appear in several places, scattered throughout the Old Testament). Says Cassuto,

¹⁵ Cassuto 34.

The Torah is entirely opposed to these myths. It voices its protest in its own quiet manner, relating: *So God created the great sea monsters*. It is as though the Torah said, in effect: Far be it from any one to suppose that the sea monsters were mythological beings opposed to God or in revolt against Hi; they were as natural as the rest of the creatures, and were formed in their proper time and in their proper place by the word of the Creator, in order that they might fulfil His will like the other created beings.¹⁶

If this part of creation was thus singled out for such special treatment, it seems quite reasonable to link this fact with the other oddities we have mentioned. Cassuto fails to draw any such link; indeed, he attributes the lack of a *stative* to the fact that there are no longer sea monsters, thus it would be inappropriate to use the phrase which, according to him, denotes that the particular creation was firmly and eternally established.¹⁷ On our explanation, though, the lack of the *stative* is explained by the fact that it was simply unnecessary. The use of *barah* already thoroughly emphasized the fact that God had brought into being what he desired to create in accordance with his word, so to add “and it was so” would seem redundant. What about the inclusion of the blessing? This is easily explained when it is employed in regard to man: the blessing is an expression of God’s unique love and care for man, and, more importantly, represents God’s entering into a relationship of unique covenant lordship (God is covenant lord of all creation, but of man in a special sense). But again, what about the sea monsters? Again, we shall suggest that, just as God wished to make absolutely clear that he was lord of the sea monsters by using *barah*, so he asserts his covenant lordship over them by pronouncing a blessing upon them, similar to the one he gives man. No doubt other explanations might be suggested for the author’s odd paralleling between sea creatures and mankind, but this seems to be at least a promising start.

With all these arguments in mind, we are in a position, for a new, more complex (yet more orderly) breakdown of the parallel structures than that found on pages 9 and 10.

Light:

Declarative—Simple Recapitulative—Evaluative—Partitive—Nominative—Conclusive

Expanse:

Declarative—Complex Recapitulative—(Partitive)—Nominative—Conclusive

Earth:

¹⁶ Ibid. 50-1.

¹⁷ Ibid. 49. This is, of course, ridiculous, because there would have been no recognition in Biblical times that the sea monsters no longer existed.

Declarative—Simple Recapitulative—(Implied Partitive)—Nominative—Evaluative

Herbage:

Declarative—Complex Recapitulative—Evaluative—Conclusive

Sun and Moon:

Declarative—Complex Recapitulative—Evaluative—Conclusive

Fish and Birds:

Declarative—Creative—Evaluative—Beatitive--Conclusive

Animals:

Declarative—Complex Recapitulative—Evaluative

Man:

Declarative—Creative—Beatitive

Summary: Simple Recapitulative—Evaluative—Conclusive

Though some of the points made here seem rather clear and have clear applications for our interpretations of the passage, others are more ambiguous and not obviously applicable. Whether or not every feature of this account will withstand further scrutiny is of course doubtful. There are many tenuous connections here, and no doubt a number of alternative approaches are possible. But inasmuch as alternative approaches uncover still more potential patterns, this will merely serve to underscore the larger point that all this complexity serves to make.

It appears that the author of Genesis, in the way he structures his account of the creation of the world, gives us an image of how God structured the actual creation. Genesis 1 manifests order and repeating patterns, just as the world that God has created. Nevertheless, “no one can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning of the end” (Ecc. 3:11) The complexity in creation defies any easy comprehension or categorization. We cannot put the world in a test tube, or fit it into a spreadsheet; any quest for a Unified Field Theory is vain, all the pretensions of modern science to the contrary. We will find patterns that turn to mist upon closer scrutiny, we will discover laws that bend and break when stretched over the uneven surface of the universe, and God will always toss a random fluke like the platypus in there just when we think we have our taxonomy worked out. All of this the author incorporates into Genesis 1. Alongside the order and repeating patterns, there are variations, and variations of variations, there are fleeting glimpses of other patterns laid over the variations, and then

there are just plain unaccountable flukes. At the end of all literary and grammatical inquiry, we have to admit that the author gives us a maddening (or delightful) juxtaposition of order and chaos, predictability and surprise, simplicity and complexity, just as God gives us in the world.

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