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What is This?

MAN, SOIL, GARDEN: BASIC PLOT IN GENESIS 2–3 RECONSIDERED

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I

'What is Genesis 2–3 about?' Derek Beattie was neither first nor last to pose that question.[1] In fact his note intermediated between two decades in which this theological puzzle was answered in a more prolific way than ever before. In addition to traditional investigations of sources and symbols of the story, we have seen attempts to read Genesis 2–3 as a diachronic record of the redactional history of the Pentateuch, as J's comment upon the politics of his contemporaries, as a reflection of Hebrew wisdom traditions, of king ideology, land ideology or temple ideology. We have read new religio-historical, social, psychoanalytical and feminist approaches, and several 'structuralist' and semiotic approaches.[2] Despite this host of attempts at answers, the

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1. D.R.G. Beattie, 'What is Genesis 2–3 about?', *ExpTim* 92 (1980–81), pp. 8-10.

2. I offer some recent examples only. Redaction history: J. Vermeylen, 'Le récit du paradis et la question des origines du pentateuque', *Bijdragen Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie* 41 (1980), pp. 230-50. Contemporary comments: K. Holter, 'The Serpent in Eden as a Symbol of Israel's Political Enemies: A Yahwistic Criticism of the Solomonic Foreign Policy?', *SJOT* 1 (1990), pp. 106-12; A. Gardener, 'Genesis 2.4b–3: A Mythological Paradigm of Sexual Equality of the Religious History of Pre-Exilic Israel?', *SJT* 43 (1990), pp. 1-18. Wisdom: G.E. Mendenhall, 'The Shady Side of Wisdom: The Date and Purpose of Genesis 3', in H.N. Bream *et al.* (eds.), *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of J.M. Myers* (Gettysburg Theological Studies, 4; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 319-34; F. Festirazzi, 'Gen. 1–3 e la sapienza di

question is far from closed, which is of course partly due to the rich-
ness of the story—and to the astounding reception it has experienced
throughout the Jewish and Christian ages. I believe Beattie himself
pointed out an important additional reason for the diversity of inter-
pretation, when, some years after his first note, he argued that there
has been too much *derash* and too little *peshat* in the modern interpre-
tation of Genesis 2–3.[1] If that is the case, then we need a new close

Israele', *RivB* 27 (1979), pp. 41-51. King ideology: W. Brueggemann, 'From
Dust to Kingship', *ZAW* 84 (1972), pp. 1-18; M. Hutter, 'Adam als Gärtner und
König (Gen. 2,8.15)', *BZ* 30 (1986), pp. 258-62. Land ideology: M. Ottosson,
'Eden and the Land of Promise', in *Congress Volume, Jerusalem 1986* (ed.
J.A. Emerton *et al.*; VTSup, 40; Leiden: Brill, 1988), pp. 177-88. Temple ideol-
ogy: G.J. Wenham, 'Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story', in
Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies (A) (Jerusalem: World
Union of Jewish Studies at Jerusalem Academic Press, 1986), pp. 19-25. Religio-
historical readings: I.M. Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity
of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), see pp. 31-82 (more Mesopo-
tamian and Hellenistic material); H.N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (HSM, 32;
Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) (more Ugaritic material); K. Jaros, 'Die Motive der
heiligen Bäume und der Schlange in Gen 2–3', *ZAW* 92 (1980), pp. 204-15
(archaeological material). Social approach: J. Guichard, 'Approche "matérialiste" du
récit de la chute: Genèse 3', *Lumière et Vie* 131 (1977), pp. 57-90; J. Oosten and
D. Moyer, 'De mytische omkering: Een analyse van de sociale code van de schep-
pingsmythen van Genesis 2.4b-11', *Anthropologische verkenningen* 1 (1982),
pp. 75-91. Political: J.M. Kennedy, 'Peasants in Revolt: Political Allegory in
Genesis 2–3', *JSOT* 47 (1990), pp. 3-14. Psychoanalytical approach:
E. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen: Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetis-
cher, psychoanalytischer und philosophischer Sicht* (Paderborn theologische
Studien, 4; Munich: Schöninghaus, 1977). Feminist reading has been rich after
P. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978),
see pp. 72-143; cf. M. Bal, 'Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the
Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1–3)', *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), pp. 21-42;
S. Lanser, '(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2–3', *Semeia* 41
(1988), pp. 67-84. Different structural and semiotic studies: R. Couffignal, 'Guides
pour l'Eden: Approches nouvelles de Genèse II,4–III', *RevThom* 80 (1980),
pp. 613-27; D. Patte and J.F. Parker, 'A Structural Exegesis of Genesis 2 and 3',
Semeia 18 (1980), pp. 55-75; O. Davidsen, 'The Mythical Foundation of History: A
Religio-Semiotic Analysis of the Story of the Fall', *LB* 51 (1982), pp. 23-36;
W. Vogels: 'L'être humain appartient au sol: Gn 2.4b–3.24', *NRT* 105 (1983),
pp. 515-34; E.J. van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2–3* (Studia Semitica
Neerlandica, 25; Assen: van Gorcum, 1989).

   1.   '*Peshat* and *Derash* in the Garden of Eden', *IBS* 7 (1985), pp. 62-75.

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reading of Genesis 2–3, with due attention to language and literary characteristics.

To that reading, traditional questions for (literary or oral) sources do not apply. I do not of course deny that this apparently well composed story may have gone through a literary process with several 'sources' or 'redactions'. Since, however, the final text is the only non-hypothetical object, our primary obligation should be to read that text. Now, genetic methods are not designed for simply reading text, and basically they do not occupy themselves with text as literary communication.

So we are thrown upon various semantic and literary approaches, which have of course long been applied to Genesis 2–3.[1] Special recognition is due to Bruce Naidoff's paper, to Casalis's article, to the Proppian part of Couffignal's study, to the main part of Vogels' article, and, most notably, to David Jobling's work, which in part runs parallel to this paper.[2] My own approach will probably be regarded as

1. Some examples: general literary and/or rhetorical models: H.C. White, 'Direct and Third Person Discourse in the Narrative of the Fall', *Semeia* 18 (1980), pp. 91-106; T.E. Boomershine, 'The Structure of Narrative Rhetoric in Genesis 2–3', *Semeia* 18 (1980), pp. 113-29. Sequences: J.T. Walsh, 'Genesis 2.4b–3.23: A Synchronic Approach', *JBL* 96 (1972), pp. 161-77; R.C. Culley, 'Action Sequences in Genesis 2–3', *Semeia* 18 (1980), pp. 25-34. Themes: G.W. Coats, 'The God of Death: Power and Obedience in the Primeval History', *Int* 29 (1975), pp. 227-39; D.J.A. Clines, 'Theme in Genesis 1–11', *CBQ* 38 (1976), pp. 483-507; P.D. Miller, *Genesis 1–11: Studies in Structure and Theme* (JSOTSup, 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); D.S. Moyer and J.G. Oosten, 'The Ambivalent Gardener: The Animal and Vegetable Codes of Genesis 2.4 to 9.9', *Bijdragen tot de taal land- en volkenkunde*, 135.1; Anthropologica, 21 (1979), pp. 118-27; A.J. Hauser, 'Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation', in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (ed. D.J.A. Clines *et al.*; JSOTSup, 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), pp. 20-36; I.M. Kikawada, 'A Quantitative Analysis of the "Adam and Eve", "Cain and Abel" and "Noah" Stories', in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of F.I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28. 1985* (ed. E.W. Conrad and E.G. Newing; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 195-203.

2. B.D. Naidoff, 'A Man to Work the Soil: A New Interpretation of Genesis 2–3', *JSOT* 5 (1978), pp. 2-14; M. Casalis, 'The Dry and the Wet: A Semiological Analysis of Flood and Creation Myths', *Semiotica* 17 (1976), pp. 35-67; Couffignal, 'Guides pour l'Eden', esp. pp. 21-23; Vogels, 'L'être humain'; D. Jobling: 'Myth and its Limits in Genesis 2.4b–3.24', in *idem, The Sense of Biblical Narrative. II. Structural Studies in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 39;

more historical-philologically oriented than these. Any interpreter's hope to use fully adequate models will of course remain illusory. In my view, however, this fact does not dispense with the obligation of the biblical scholar to give historical and textual arguments for the preferred methodological illusion. So I shall attempt to do something of the kind here. For those who prefer more synchronous argumentation, my paper will perhaps indicate a tiny but promising progress in the historically oriented camp. Those who prefer the traditional genetic approach, on the other hand, will hopefully be further alarmed.

II

Focus on 'Plot'

A basic approach to Genesis 2–3 is preferably taken through its narrative plot. Many would perhaps (like Joel Rosenberg[1]) hold that 'rhetorical purpose'—expressed in themes or structures—is more fundamental than the plot. I of course agree that involved in a story are names, symbols, transformations and so on, all of which are indeed 'non-narrative'. As long as we deal with single stories, however, the plot does seem to be more fundamental. The reader of a story must certainly recognize the 'non-narrative' paradigms (*langue*). But one's comprehension of their specific interrelation is based on the syntagmatic context (*parole*). Therefore, plot seems to be the more basic vehicle for reading stories.

Concise defining of 'plot' is, however, far from easy. As plots are syntagmatic, they are not properly defined simply by grouping paradigmatic elements like themes or symbols. Such elements may appear in different syntagms of the text. (And yet, themes and symbols are not irrelevant for identifying the plot.) Neither can this be done by purely formal criteria, like dramatic shifts (scenery, actors, etc.). A coherent plot may well start in one dramatic sphere and conclude in another, or new characters may be introduced to transform or accelerate the plot.

Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), esp. pp. 22-24; see also *idem*, 'A Structural Analysis of Genesis 2.4b–3.24', *SBLSP* 1 (1978), pp. 61-69; and 'The Myth Semantics of Genesis 2.4b–3.24', *Semeia* 18 (1980), pp. 41-59.

1. 'The Garden Story Forward and Backward: The Non-Narrative Dimension of Gen. 2–3', *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish History* 1 (1981), pp. 1-27 (9-10).

In forming a view of 'plot' in Genesis 2–3, I have been profoundly influenced by Robert Culley and his use of Vladimir Propp's studies.[1] As for Genesis 2–3, my relation to Culley is as general as his relation to Propp—I have simply had his approach in mind, while attempting to recognize any signal of plot given in the Hebrew text. Even at first glance it appears that there are several such signals in Genesis 2–3. Indeed, the *story* Genesis 2–3 seems to connect several *plots*—possibly one reason why this relatively short text is rather more complex than most other narratives in the Hebrew Bible.

A 'method' as rough as this will demand careful demonstration for each plot, a task too extensive to be fulfilled here. I shall restrict myself to following one single narrative line only. As this line both begins and concludes the story, I shall name it 'the basic plot'. Hence large parts of the story will for now be left practically unconsidered, as will many non-narrative elements. Thus it is obvious that I intend to give only certain elements of an answer to 'what Genesis 2–3 is about'.

Plot Signal: 'As Not Yet'

We turn now to the question of 'plot signals' in Genesis 2–3. Ever since Hermann Gunkel, one particular parallel between Genesis 2–3 and other Near Eastern creation texts has occupied much interest, namely the description of a negative *Urzustand* in Gen. 2.5.[2] The use of this parallel reached a peak in Claus Westermann's monumental commentary.[3] Westermann asserted that, in mythologies from all around the world, creation is apprehended as an *einmaliges* event, and that therefore 'before' creation there was thought to be 'nothing' (p. 60). He established '*Als noch nicht. . .war*' as a *Stilform* occurring in several creation stories. Reading his text, we realize that Westermann actually held it to be more than a form. In his view this formula even encloses ideological aspects of creation, and it is in fact taken to be a hallmark of creation stories (pp. 61-64). Thus, while

1. Culley, 'Action Sequences', esp. pp. 26-28.

2. H. Gunkel, *Genesis: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament, 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901). One must refer, however, to the third, revised, edition from the same editor in 1910. See there p. 5. (The book was reprinted in several unchanged editions. I use the 9th edn of 1977.)

3. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (BKAT, 1.1; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), pp. 59-64.

rejecting the common view of Genesis 3 as a story of original sin, Westermann was quite traditional in his opinion of Genesis 2 as a story of *creation*.[1] The main part of Westermann's argument was recently followed by Howard Wallace, he himself also reading Gen. 2.4b-5 as a signal that 'creation' is a central theme in Genesis 2.[2]

A review of relevant Oriental parallels indicates that the 'when not yet' scheme can hardly have been a significant signal of *creation* stories. While many proper creation myths lack this introduction,[3] the formula does occur in other myths of beginnings, like 'Cattle and Grain', *Lugal-e*,[4] or *The Sumerian Flood Story*.[5] A positively formulated version—stating not the deficiency, but the problem—seems to occur in *Atrahasis* and in Hesiod.[6] Most of these texts do contain creation episodes, and yet none of them should be classified as 'creation myth'. The same seems to be the case even for several Egyptian and other texts used by Westermann.[7] The formula does of course occur even in creation texts, like *Enuma Elish*, in the so called *Eridu Story of Creation*, or in Philo of Byblos.[8] Today, however, *Enuma Elish*—vital to both Gunkel and Westermann at this point—has lost its status as the standard measure for Mesopotamian concepts of creation.[9] The occurrence of the 'when not yet' scheme in this epic certainly does not

1.   Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 269-70 (cf. 261-62).

2.   Wallace, *Eden Narrative*, pp. 67-69.

3.   Absent in 'Enki and Ninmah' and KAR 4; G. Pettinato, *Das altorientalische Menschenbild und die sumerischen und akkadischen Schöpfungsmythen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1971), pp. 69-73, 74-81, and even in several minor texts included in A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); two texts on pp. 52-54, four more texts on pp. 60-64.

4.   Here as introductions, see Pettinato, *Menschenbild*, pp. 86-90 and 91-96.

5.   Lines 47-50, introducing a new subsection. See M. Civil in W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 141.

6.   For *Atrahasis*, see Lambert and Millard, *Atra-hasis*, pp. 42-43. In Hesiod, see H.G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod: The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* (repr. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 497; cf. Kikawada and Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, p. 37.

7.   See Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 60-62.

8.   For all texts conveniently set out, cf. Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, pp. 8, 50, 66.

9.   W.G. Lambert, 'A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis', *JTS* NS 16 (1965), pp. 287-300 (291).

indicate that originally it was a characteristic of creation stories only.[1] The evidence rather suggests that this simply was a narrative technique applied in different texts—often in stories of primaeval times.

On the other hand, the *literary function* of this artifact seems to be rather fixed. Stating a negative situation, it defines certain deficiencies (problems) that are going to be filled (solved) in the following narrative. This literary function is so firm that expressions from the formula may reappear verbatim in the subsequent story. Thus, at least in several Oriental texts, the 'when not yet' formula gives specific information about direction and theme in the following narrative.

Moving from the Oriental literature into Genesis, one first question is whether the 'when not yet...' in Gen. 2.5 does indeed occur at the *beginning* of the story. One will remember that traditional source criticism holds the 'J' source to start in 2.4b. I have elsewhere argued rather extensively that (the entire verse) Gen. 2.4 is to be read as an editorial note, bridging Genesis 2–3 and Genesis 1.[2] In that case Genesis 2–3 starts with the negative statements in 2.5. It seems conventional, however, to reach a similar view even when accepting the traditional source theory. Reading 2.4b as dependant upon 2.7, one may take the proper story as starting in 2.5.[3] Either way, we may take it for granted that 'when not yet' in Gen. 2.5 occurs at the beginning of Genesis 2–3.

The next question is whether the Hebrew טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה, constituting the 'not yet...' here, does conform to those literary artifacts studied above. There are only four instances in narratives of the Hebrew Bible where טֶרֶם accompanied by כִי is applied to a negative condition.[4] Those four instances do however all refer to something yet to take place. In the two Exodus instances, the foreshadowed event seems actually to be reported: Exod. 9.30; 10.7 (cf. Exod. 12.30-33).[5] These examples are far from parallel to the formulaic 'when not yet'

1. The same may be said on Hebrew grounds concerning Ps. 90.2; Prov. 8.23-26; *4 Ezra* 5.56–6.6.

2. T. Stordalen, 'Genesis 2.4: Restudying a *locus classicus*', forthcoming in *ZAW*.

3. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 269-71.

4. טֶרֶם usually means simply 'before', referring to a time prior to incidents or conditions reported in the context.

5. This is not the case in Isa. 7.16 and 8.4. As prophecies we could perhaps say that they imply a coming fulfilment.

discussed above. Still they confirm that such use of מֶרֶם would at least
not be impossible. A more distant argument for reading Gen. 2.5 as
narrative 'program' for Genesis 2–3 lies in the fact that similar con-
structions are common in the Bible.[1] Indeed, this may be said to be a
cross-cultural literary technique, coinciding with the nature of narra-
tive rather than with cultural-linguistic conventions.[2]

In view not only of this general narrative tendency, but also of the
semantic possibilities in Gen. 2.5, and of the literary conventions in
more or less similar stories throughout the ancient Near East, we are
on reasonably firm ground when assuming that the plot of Genesis 2–3
is initiated in Gen. 2.5.

III

It is vital first to identify exactly what plot is indicated. Later we will
see whether and how this narrative program is actually carried out in
the story. In both cases careful semantic reading will be essential.

The Nature of the Deficiencies

שִׂיחַ is a rare noun, with only three occurrences outside Gen. 2.5:
Gen. 21.15; Job 30.4, 7. In all three places it designates plants outside
the cultivated sphere. The kinds of vegetation occurring in the paral-
lelism in Job 30 are equally non-cultured plants, and the setting in
Genesis 21 is the desert. So שִׂיחַ also most probably designates wild
plants and scrub in Gen. 2.5.

עֵשֶׂב usually designates plants used in the Hebrew economy as food
either for cattle or for people. Among the 33 occurrences, there are
two (or three) that seem to designate wild plants.[3] There are also
several indeterminable cases. In some of these, however, lack or
destruction of עֵשֶׂב illustrates catastrophe. This would indicate that the
vegetation in question is part of the human economy and not totally
'wild'.[4] More frequently עֵשֶׂב simply means cultivated plants, food for

1. S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Bible and Literature Series, 17;
Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989 [trans. from the Hebrew edn, 1984 (1979)]); see
pp. 111-17.

2. Cf. Vogels, 'L'être humain', p. 523.

3. Jer. 14.6; 2 Kgs 19.26; possibly even Isa. 37.27 (cf. parallelism).

4. Exod. 9.22, 25; 10.12, 15; similarly Deut. 9.22; Isa. 37.27; 42.15;
Jer. 12.4; Amos 7.2.

domesticated animals,[1] and sometimes even food for humans.[2] Most significant for our purpose is Ps. 104.14-15:

> (14) Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
> and plants (עֵשֶׂב) for man to cultivate,
> that he may bring forth food from the earth,
> (15) and wine to gladden the heart of man,
> oil to make his face shine,
> and bread to strengthen man's heart (RSV).

The flora in question are subjected to determined agricultural activity (cf. the verb עבד). They seem to supply different kinds of food, possibly even bread (לֶחֶם). Both the general ideas and the terminology of Psalm 104 appear to be paralleled in Genesis 2–3, where at the end of the story the human couple is to eat those plants (עֵשֶׂב), and to earn bread (לחם) with hard labour (3.18-19). So, presumably עֵשֶׂב in Gen. 2.5 means some kind of cultivated plants, probably used for human nutrition.

This difference between the two types of vegetation (wild versus cultivated) is not obscured by their common link to שָׂדֶה. This term means cultivated field (Gen. 37.7; 2 Sam. 9.7; Mic. 2.2) as well as open, even unfrequented, land (Gen. 24.63; Exod. 22.30). The basic meaning of the term seems to be simply a field with vegetation.

אֶרֶץ, of course extremely frequent, has a broad range of meaning. Basically it means 'ground' or 'land', whether a piece of land, a land territory (land of a nation) or even all land—the earth. This latter meaning prevails in Genesis 1–11,[3] giving אֶרֶץ connotations of wide space. From such a spatial point of view, the 'field' is 'smaller', and will be located within the 'land'. Qualitatively seen, however, the field is 'greater'. This term exposes one specific feature of the land: its capability to supply conditions for vegetation. That capability is not emphasized here, but is clearly implicit in the concept of אֶרֶץ.

In Genesis 1–11 the word אֲדָמָה focuses this same capacity of the field. In the major part of the so called 'Yahwistic' stratum of Genesis 1–11, this word simply means cultivable ground, 'soil'.[4] In this usage, אֲדָמָה is practically 'non-geographic'. The soil will, however, by

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1. Deut. 11.15; Amos 7.2; Ps. 106.20; Prov. 27.25.
2. Gen. 1.29; 3.18; Pss. 104.14; 105.35.
3. Miller, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 37.
4. Miller, *Genesis 1–11*, pp. 37-42.

implication, be situated in the fields, especially in the cultivated ones.

Thus the spatial matrix is dominated by the land. The soil (אֲדָמָה) is in the field (שָׂדֶה), located in the land (אֶרֶץ). The qualitative matrix, on the other hand, is exactly inverse: the fertile potential of the land is exposed in the field and most notably in the soil. Since Genesis 2–3 is characterized by an artful vocabulary, this spatial–qualitative chiasm is not likely to be accidental. The literary canopy between soil and land appears to include spatial as well as qualitative dimensions. The main emphasis is qualitative; the land is not *vegetated*, not fertile. This lack, however, is presented even in the spatial dimension: vegetation is missing in *the land*, the entire earth.

One last term needs comment: הִמְטִיר. The root means 'rain'. Used intransitively with the preposition עַל, it designates normal rain.[1] The fertilizing element of that rain may be emphasized, as in Job 38.26. This section of Job offers motifs and vocabulary related to Gen. 2.5. The case is similar in Isa. 5.6 and Amos 4.7. So the point of YHWH Elohim's not raining upon the land in Gen. 2.5 seems to be the lack of fertilizing water.

Reading Gen. 2.5, it is clear that the sentence falls into two halves, each again divided in two. Emphasizing the semantic connotations elaborated above, we read like this:

וְכֹל שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ
וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טֶרֶם יִצְמָח
כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יהוה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ
וְאָדָם אַיִן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה

A[1] No wild plant of the field was yet in the land
A[2] and no field plant of culture had yet sprung up.
B[1] For YHWH God had not yet fecundated the land with rain,
B[2] and there was no human being to till the soil.

The first half of the verse (A) describes the initial *situation*, the second (B) the *reasons* for the poor state. The first part of the second half (B[1]) corresponds to the first part of the first half (A[1]). So we may assume that the relation will be similar between the two remaining quarters of the verse.[2] Lack of culture plants (A[2]) is due to absence of a human being to till the soil (B[2]). A tiller of the soil

1.   Gen. 7.4; Job 38.26; Isa. 5.6; Amos 4.7 (4×).
2.   A similar assumption on a more general basis is to be found in Vogels, 'L'être humain', pp. 524-25.

is necessary for the *cultured* vegetation of the land.

In sum, Gen. 2.5 initiates a plot where the aim is to bring vegetation (wild plants and cultured plants) to the entire land (cultivated and non-cultivated fields, respectively). In order to achieve this, fecundating water must be supplied, and there must be someone to till the soil.

First improvement: 'adam
This plot may be said to lie at the very core of Genesis 2–3. It is admittedly somewhat unevenly distributed throughout the story, but does—as we shall see—enclose the whole story.

> (6)   And a source (אד) went up from the land
>   and watered (הִשְׁקָה) the whole surface of the soil.

אד is a much debated noun, attested only here and in Job 36.27. Its etymology is notoriously difficult. I follow Magne Sæbø, who argued that the word is cognate with Sumerian/Akkadian *ÍD/id*, meaning a source, a surfacing underground river (thus LXX in this verse, but not in Job 36.27). This river is 'going up' from the sea located under the earth, which, as Sæbø pointed out, harmonizes with Gen. 2.6.[1] We might add, with Francis Andersen, that if the same translation be allowed even in Job 36.27, this is the river of God himself, surfacing from the subterranean reservoir of sweet water.[2]

This river is watering the face of the earth. The semantic connotations of הִשְׁקָה are not identical with those of the rain in v. 5. The root means 'drink', and is used for human drinking. When applied to land or vegetation, this verb may imply either a proper soak (Ezek. 17.7-8; Joel 4.18), or it may express the life-giving potential of such rich watering (Deut. 11.10; Isa. 27.3; Qoh. 2.6). This latter meaning is explicit in Gen. 2.10. Here in 2.6, however, the case may be slightly different.

Since the lack of irrigating water in the land is a specific deficiency within this plot, we would expect a removal of that problem to be

1.   M. Sæbø, 'Die hebräischen Nomina *'ed* und *'ēd*—Zwei sumerisch-akkadische Fremdwörter?', *ST* 24 (1970), pp. 130-41 (repr. in *idem, Ordene og Ordet: Gammeltestamentlige studier* [Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1979], pp. 111-22, esp. pp. 111-17).

2.   F.I. Andersen, 'On Reading Genesis 1–3', in *Backgrounds for the Bible* (ed. M.P. O'Connor and D.N. Freedman; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 137-50, esp. pp. 137-40.

emphasized. But this is certainly not the case in Gen. 2.6. The story
reports neither the blessing potential, nor any subsequent emergence
of vegetation. We learn simply that 'the face of the soil' becomes wet.
This is even more striking, for, a few verses later, we read again that
land is watered: 2.10-14. That watering seems to be accompanied by
the expected signs of richness and blessing in the lands (אֶרֶץ) as well
as in the garden. So we should perhaps allow for different significance
in 2.6.

It has long been assumed that the function of the אֵד is to moisten the
dry (2.5) dust (2.7) so that YHWH may fashion it.[1] This would
correspond to the potter-like activity in 2.7. If so, the water in ques-
tion is more directed towards creation of a human being than towards
fertilizing the soil, and the connotation of the verb is more that of
'soaking' than that of 'fertilizing'. There are additional arguments for
this interpretation.

In Job 36.28 the water in question is directed towards humanity, *not*
towards the soil: the drops of the אֵד fall on 'many people'. This may
be significant, given the fact that Job 38.25-28 (using הִמְטִיר as in
Gen. 2.5, but otherwise rather similar to Job 36.28) speaks about rain
falling on the earth 'where there is no one'. Now Mesopotamian texts
suggest that the subterranean water does have qualities other than
fertilization. The Akkadian subterranean sea is named *apsu* (Sumerian
abzu). This is the abode for the god Enki (Ea). Enki (with a female
counterpart) is regularly presented as having formed humankind in a
way very similar to that in Gen. 2.7. And in some of those instances
the human beings are made from 'the clay that covers *apsu*'.[2]

Turning to the Hebrew context, we realize first that the subter-
ranean ocean, from which the river of God emerges, would be *tehôm*.[3]
In Prov. 3.20 YHWH is credited for having created this ocean 'with
knowledge', and even in Ps. 36.7 the *tehôm* seems to have some 'wise'

1.   Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 6.
2.   On 'Enki and Ninmah', see S.N. Kramer and J. Maier, *Myths of Enki: The
Crafty God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 32-34; cf. 'When Anu
had Created Heaven', in Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, pp. 53-54.
3.   This term has several meanings: cf. Westermann, *Theologisches Handwörter-
buch zum Alten Testament*, II (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1976), cols. 1028-30. A crite-
rion for identifying it with the subterranean ocean is that in this sense *tehôm* is often
linked to the clouds of the heaven, like אֵד in Job 36.28; Pss. 135.6; 71.20; Prov.
3.20; 8.28. (Cf. a possibly similar meaning in Deut. 8.7; Ezek. 31.15; Amos 7.4.)

connotations. Thus the Hebrew *tehôm*, from which the river flows, is perhaps not entirely unlike the Akkadian *apsu*. Therefore, one may assume that YHWH soaked dust in the אֵד rising from *tehôm* in order to create a human being. In that case Gen. 2.6 is not directed to supply the missing water, but the missing tiller of the soil.

This could explain why the watering in 2.6 is connected not to the land (as required in 2.5), but towards 'the whole face of the soil'. That phrase is not easy to interpret. It could for once give אֲדָמָה a dimension of space; the soaked area has a 'face'. The significance of that space would however be far from eloquent, and this interpretation would disturb the spatial matrix elsewhere identified in Genesis 2–3. A better interpretation seems to be that the *top stratum* of the soil becomes wet all over. So when YHWH forms dust from אֲדָמָה into אָדָם, his material is all soaked in אֵד. Whatever be the case, the noun (אֵד) and the verb (הִמְטִיר), as well as the context, suggest that the purpose in Gen. 2.6 is to prepare for the creation of the human being. Any watering of the 'land' is, so to speak, accidental, and in any case it is not explicitly recorded.

The actual creation takes place in 2.7. This incident is loaded with symbolism, a symbolism in which several levels of this story are integrated.[1] For the purpose of following the basic plot, however, the verse is simple. One deficiency is fulfilled: now there *is* a human being, taken and named from the soil, hence (by understatement) well fit to till it.

The Garden: A Spatial Twist
But the narrator makes a twist, thereby transforming the tension of the story.

> (8) YHWH God planted a garden in Eden, in the east;
>   and there he placed the man whom he had formed.
> (9) And YHWH God caused all trees to spring (צמח) from the soil,
>   trees pleasant for the sight and good for food.
>   The Tree of Life was in the midst of the garden,
>   as well as the Tree for Knowledge of Good and Evil.
>   . . .
> (15) And YHWH God removed (יִקַּח) the man
>   and put him in the garden of Eden
>   to till it and to guard it (לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ).

1. See Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 6-7, for a learned view of the motives.

Gen. 2.9 takes up themes from 2.5. The trees for food are cultured plants like the herbs in 2.5, here more explicitly cultivable (or already cultivated?) and more explicitly nourishing. Whatever meaning we read into the two mythical trees of the garden (additional levels of meaning play here), they must by far supersede any 'herb of the field'. So the qualitative lack experienced by the land is overwhelmingly fulfilled in the garden. Also according to 2.5, the man is ordained to tilling (עבד). That he is also to 'keep' or 'guard' seems to be part of regular garden procedures (cf. Isa. 27.3; 5.2).

But there are discrepancies with regards to 2.5 as well: the human being is not doing agricultural work as prescribed in 2.5, but horticultural work. Furthermore, the *'adam* is not to till the soil, but the *garden*.[1] This is an obviously more restricted area than 'the land' that lacks vegetation in 2.5.[2] In 2.15, a transportation is reported in two sequences. The verb in the first sequence, לקח, explicitly indicates a removal (cf. Gen. 5.24). By reasonable interpretation, this is a removal from the 'land', where the *'adam* was modelled. That assumption is possibly confirmed in 3.23 (see below). Later on we shall read that YHWH curses the soil (3.18). This curse does not seem to influence the soil within the garden, for the trees there will still need to be guarded (3.24). Furthermore, there are reasons to assume that the name עֵדֶן means 'abundance', and that it has a symbolic significance exactly opposite to the situation reported in Gen. 2.5.[3] If so, the difference between this life-giving garden and the scanty land outside is obvious. Then the description of the land and the garden respectively adds to the spatial matrix of the story, suggesting that these two are different areas.

1.   There is a problem here, as both suffixes in 2.15 are fem., whereas גַּן is masc. GKC §122, 3b holds גַּן to be fem. at this place alone, although the noun has a synonymous feminine form, גַּנָּה. More reasonable seems the suggestion of Brockelmann (*Hebräische Syntaks*, §16g), that גַּן alone is masculine, while the expression גַּן־עֵדֶן is feminine. We note that in Ezek. 36.35 and Joel 2.3, גַּן־עֵדֶן is a positive prototype to fem. אֶרֶץ. Similarly both גַּן and עֵדֶן appear in Isa. 51.3 as prototypes of Zion (fem.) to come. I therefore assume that גַּן־עֵדֶן was indeed a concept with feminine connotations.

2.   Thus even Casalis, 'The Dry and the Wet', p. 47; Vogels, 'L'être humain', p. 526.

3.   J.C. Greenfield, 'A Touch of Eden', in *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin emerito oblata* (Hommages et opera minora, 9; Leiden: Brill, 1984), pp. 219-24. Cf. A.R. Millard, 'The Etymology of Eden', *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 103-106.

Spatial movement of characters is a conventional biblical way to shape space indirectly.[1] The double report of the transport (vv. 8 and 15) emphasizes this shaping.[2] In fact, the relocation transforms the predominantly qualitative lack in 2.5 into a predominantly spatial problem in 2.15. The qualitative deficiency of 2.5 is 'over-solved' in the garden, which enjoys both water and a working gardener. The spatial task, however, is 'under-solved' as long as the solution occurs only in the garden, and not in the 'land'.

Water to the Garden—and to the 'Lands'

As noted above, it is dubious whether the river in 2.6 is meant to fill the need for water in the land. But in any event, water to several 'lands' unquestionably flows out of the garden:

> (10) And a river goes out of Eden to water (לְהַשְׁקוֹת) the garden,
> and from there it divides and becomes four rivers. . .

For הִשְׁקָה, see above. Here the life-giving aspect of the watering is explicit. Irrigation was a common task in gardening (Deut. 11.10; Isa. 27.3; 58.11; Qoh. 2.6; Ps. 104.13). The rivers flow out of the garden and virtually into 'all lands'. There is, of course, no reason to assume that their function (fecundative watering) was different outside than inside.[3] Note that the terminology of 2.5 is taken up, when two of the regions receiving the water are named the land (אֶרֶץ) of Havilah and of Kush.

It has long been recognized that these rivers illustrate the blessing capability of the garden for the land,[4] which is possibly reflected even in the description of luxury in the land of Havilah. The garden is perhaps a mytho-symbolic 'place', but its effect is seen within normal space.

YHWH God fecundates, not by rain (2.5), but by water from the potent land Eden. Why not rain? We do record again that solving the problems stated in 2.5 does not appear to be YHWH's prime concern. The explicit role of the rivers is to water the garden, whereafter the rest of the world more or less accidentally benefits.

Having 'solved' the problem of water, we would according to 2.5 expect a report on the emergence of wild plants. This report is not

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1. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, esp. pp. 185-86, 194-96.
2. See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 116-17, 252-55.
3. This seems to solve the puzzle of Jobling, 'Myth and its Limits', pp. 23-24.
4. Gunkel, *Genesis*, pp. 8-9.

given. Conditions for wild vegetation outside the garden are at this point fulfilled, but the vegetation itself seems not to be supplied.[1] As for cultured plants outside the garden, there still is no one to till the soil.

Concluding the Basic Plot

This is where things stand as the story engages in three new plots. First comes the creation of animals and woman, 2.16-24 (apparently introduced with God's discovering a new 'lack' that is to be fulfilled). Then occurs the debate and the eating in the garden, 3.1-7 (a more dialogic plot, introduced by the lack of shame in 2.25 and the question of the snake, linking back to 2.16-17). The third plot is the divine intervention, 3.8-19 (where the 'plot signal' seems to be the 'problem' generated as God discovers the transgression). Throughout these two first plots and until the end of the third, the story initiated in 2.5 does not develop. The land has received its water, but vegetation is missing, and the need for a tiller of the ground persists.

We need not here engage in the transformations and mediations of the three additional plots, but only record that whereas they do not contribute directly to the progress of the basic plot, they are all connected to that plot and to each other.[2] The creation of the animals closely resembles the creation of the first human. In 3.1-7 the garden and the trees (reported in vv. 2, 8, 9, 15) are obviously present, together with the woman introduced in 2.18-23. In 3.8-19 all three curses link back: the curse upon the snake disturbs elements in the creation of animals; the punishment of woman distresses the man–woman relationship; finally, the cohesion of the different plots appears openly, when, in the end of the last plot, God takes up the hitherto sleeping terminology of 2.5:

> (3.17)...
>> cursed is the soil because of you.
>> In toil you shall eat (from?) her all the days of your life.
> (18) Thorns and thistles she will bring forth (תַּצְמִיחַ) to thee.
>> And you shall eat the cultured plants (עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה).

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1.   If one is to imagine any vegetation at all outside the garden, then trees would have to be thought of—cf. 2.12. I suspect, however, that this rather applies to the world of the narrator/reader.

2.   Intelligent about this interrelation is Hauser, 'Intimacy', esp. pp. 21, 29-33.

(19)   In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread,
        while you return to the soil (אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה),
        for from her you were taken (לֻקָּחְתָּ).
        For dust (עָפָר) you are, and to dust you shall return.

Both categories of vegetation are brought forth in 3.18, using the
same verb as in 2.5: thorns and thistles (קוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר) fall within the cate-
gory 'wild plants' (שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה).[1] The phrase for cultured plants is
repeated (עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה). Since none of this vegetation is mentioned earlier,
we are left to infer that this is where they are first supplied. The
tilling activity, however, is not explicitly mentioned until 3.23, where
we read a very condensed conclusion of the plot initiated in 2.5:

(23)   And YHWH God sent him forth from the garden
        to till the soil from which he was taken
        (לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לֻקַּח מִשָּׁם).

The terminology is identical to that in 2.5: וְאָדָם אַיִן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה.
3.23 is the only place in the entire story where *'adam* is said actually
to fulfil just that function. Thus the tiller requested in 2.5 is supplied
here, not earlier. Like so many other phrases in this story, however,
even 3.23 may have several levels of communication. The only place
where the man is the object of God's 'taking' (לקח) is 2.15, where he
is removed from the land and transported to the garden. As we saw
above, there is spatial and qualitative tension between the garden and
the land, a tension that plays a certain role in the intrigue. In this
closing part of the story, the human couple is to return to the soil,
which, according to 3.17, will be cursed. This curse, however, would
seem to afflict only the soil *outside* the garden. The trees sprouting
from the soil *inside* apparently will keep up their marvellous produce,
and therefore still remain in need of protection. Perhaps we read in
3.23 a statement not only that humanity is to return to soil, but that it
is to return to that very soil from which it was removed—that is, soil
outside the garden. This return appears to take place in two sequences:
first a retransport to the soil (אֲדָמָה, 3.19b with the verb לקח, hinting
at 2.15), then a retransformation into dust (עָפָר, 3.19c, hinting at 2.7).
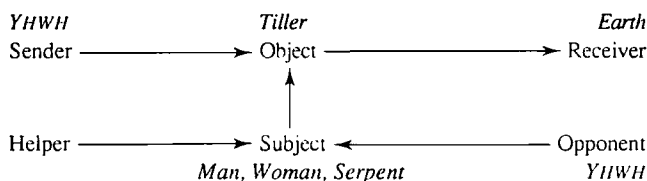
    Here the basic plot is concluded. All narrative deficiencies opened in
2.5 are restored. The water has been supplied in 2.10-14, the two

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1.   Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 360.

categories of vegetation appear in 3.18 and the tiller is finally assigned
to agricultural work upon the soil of the land in 3.19, 23.

IV

Some interesting aspects on this basic plot may be gained by reviewing
Ellen J. van Wolde's critique of David Jobling's studies. She notes that
Jobling is forced to let YHWH appear in two opposing roles within the
well known Greimasian 'actant scheme'. YHWH appears as both 'sender'
and 'opponent' in the plot, 'an *'adam* to till the earth'. In simple terms,
that means that YHWH first promotes the tilling of the earth (2.5, 7;
3.23), only later to jeopardize the whole project by snatching the
'adam away (2.8-15). Jobling's assignment of actants is given in italics:

YHWH	*Tiller*	*Earth*
Sender ⟶	Object ⟶	Receiver
	↑	
Helper ⟶	Subject ⟵	Opponent
	Man, Woman, Serpent	*YHWH*

Quoting Jobling, van Wolde writes,

> 'In sum, the same character, Yahweh, invests the Greimasian roles of
> sender and opponent, a mark of a profoundly ambiguous text' (26). This
> is a remarkable conclusion. . . it is no exaggeration to speak of an unjusti-
> fiable analysis.[1]

Now one might say in Jobling's defence that he was not the one to
invent ambiguous characters in this story. Paradoxical texts disturbing
analytical models may be a sign of honest rather than faulty interpre-
tation. Yet van Wolde's observations concerning the actant scheme
throw us back to yet another careful reading of the story. It will
appear then, that the actant scheme should in fact be further disturbed.
The basic plot in Genesis 2–3 apparently presents two 'senders' with
partly parallel and partly conflicting intentions.[2]

1.   Van Wolde, *Semiotic Analysis*, p. 82, citing Jobling, 'Myth and its Limits',
p. 26.
2.   Jobling ('Myth and its Limits') sees conflict not within the plot itself, but only
between the 'tilling' and the 'fall' models. He explains the 'ambiguity' of YHWH's
roles in the scheme (with Barthes) as a normal phenomenon of certain texts; cf.
p. 26 n. 6 (p. 136).

Scheme 1: 'A Human Being to Till the Garden'. It is never said that YHWH created the human being to till the soil. On the contrary, from his acting we may infer that YHWH made the *'adam* to till and guard the garden. His intentions apparently were that *'adam* should not eat the forbidden fruit, but stay in the garden forever. Accordingly YHWH did not 'cause it to rain upon the land', as he would presumably have done if 2.5 expressed his analysis of the situation. Rather, he watered the land incidentally, in the process of working on his own scheme—labelled 'a human being to till the garden'. In this scheme YHWH is 'sender' and 'subject', the first human is 'object' (perhaps even the woman and the water supply), while the garden is 'receiver'. This rather simple scheme has the garden as its horizon; it is the 'inside' scheme of the basic plot.

Scheme 2: 'Vegetation to the Land'. It is the *narrator*, not YHWH, who states the lack of vegetation, water and a tiller of the ground. This deficiency —the situation—is the 'sender' of that scheme, which is defined in terms of the needs *outside* the garden. Here soil and land are 'receivers'. (Since the initial situation refers to these two, they are also 'logical senders' of this scheme.) The 'object' to be supplied is vegetation, which demands the support of both water and someone to till the ground.

Fusion of Schemes. The conspiracy starts as actors from each of these two intrigues appear in the other—together with actors of other plots in Genesis 2–3. (The fact that even actors of the remaining plots appear in the actant schemes of the basic plot of course confirms that this plot is in fact the basic one.) Most profound for the fusion of actors is the fact that the two schemes of the basic plot are partly parallel, and partly opposed. YHWH, acting in his own scheme, will appear to be partly 'subject' (creation of a human being) or 'accidental subject' (watering of the land), and partly 'unaware opponent' (locating the human being in the garden) of the second scheme. Soil and land, on the other hand, will be 'opponents' to the first scheme, which favours the garden.

One major accelerator of the basic plot (both schemes) is the serpent. Being a main character in the dialogic plot in Genesis 2–3, he appears also in the basic plot, as 'helper' of the second scheme and hence as 'opponent' of the first. There are many connotations attached

to this figure. From our point of view, the important feature is that
the serpent is one of the animals created by YHWH (חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר
עָשָׂה יהוה אֱלֹהִים). Now, the animals (like the *'adam*) were probably
created from the soil *outside* the garden. The fauna in 2.19 (fields by
implication located in the land) would seem to imply open land rather
than a closed garden as living area.[1] These animals are not reported to
have been 'taken' into the garden, as has the *'adam*. In fact, their
failure to 'help' would perhaps indicate that they returned to the out-
side after having been named.[2] In daily gardening, several of these
'beasts of the field' would be the sort of creatures from which *'adam*
is supposed to protect (2.15) the garden Eden.[3]

If so, the serpent in 3.1-7 is trespassing—as serpents were possibly
considered to do in Hebrew gardening, it being impossible to keep
these creepy tricksters out. He is an actor of the *outside*, appearing
inside. In terms of scheme 2, *'vegetation to the land'*, the serpent
'helps' the 'unwilling subject' YHWH to perform his act in the second
scheme.[4] Taking advantage of one element in the garden that YHWH
does not control (the possibility that the human couple eat of both
trees and become too much like God), the serpent forces YHWH to
issue curses that eventually fulfil the 'outside' needs: a tiller of the soil
as well as the wanted vegetation. Those same curses obviously cloak
YHWH's original 'inside' scheme. No wonder that the only two actors
actually hit by YHWH's curse are the 'helper' (serpent) and the
'sender' (soil) of the 'outside' scheme.[5]

In short, therefore, the basic plot of Genesis 2–3 may be said to
have two diverging schemes on top of each other, which allows the
actors of the one to appear as 'foreign actors' in the other. This accounts
for the apparently ambiguous character of YHWH, as well as for the

1.   Cf. Ps. 104.11 (vv. 10-18).

2.   There is a similar conclusion with different argumentation in Jobling, 'Myth
and its Limits', p. 30.

3.   Cf. the fence in Isa. 5.5, the trespassing sheep in Jer. 12.10, the fox in
Cant. 2.15, and perhaps even a lion in Judg. 14.5.

4.   Jobling ('Myth and its Limits', pp. 24, 26) holds humanity to be 'subject'
(as well as 'object'). I doubt whether humanity in Gen. 2–3 is 'subject' at all. YHWH
certainly supplies what is lacking in 2.5.

5.   There is no 'marking' of man and woman by curse, as assumed by Jobling
('Myth and its Limits', p. 25).

ambivalent evaluation of the serpent's role, and for the spatial tension between 'land' and 'garden'. *Foreign* actors are given in italics:

YHWH ──────────► Man (Water, Woman) ──────────► Garden

YHWH ◄────────── *Serpent, Soil*

Scheme 1 (inside): '*a human being to till the garden*'

Situation ──────────► Vegetation, Water, '*adam* ──────────► Soil, Land

Serpent ──────────► *YHWH unwillingly* ◄────────── *YHWH heedlessly*
YHWH accidentally

Scheme 2 (outside): '*vegetation to the land*'

This shift, especially of the roles of YHWH, seems to be one major element in the intrigue of the basic plot—and indeed of the entire story. In order not to miss the point, we should be careful not to confuse the intentions of the narrator with those of YHWH. Given that the second scheme is the 'winning' one, it may be said to be the more fundamental, giving the basic direction of the entire story of Genesis 2–3. This, of course, harmonizes well with the fact that the deficiencies of this scheme are those introduced in Gen. 2.5.

VI

Following such an intricate story, we are of course bound to find a moral. A methodological one is that new analytical models may perhaps be equally effective mind-openers to the interpreter as forbidden fruit was to the naked couple in our story. On the other hand, they may also be just as deceptive. Therefore careful reading of the old text remains a constant *must*.

Additionally, there are theological points to be drawn. One is the traditional one. As YHWH is not 'sender' of the fundamental scheme in the basic plot, the outcome of that plot is not according to his intentions. The present state of humanity is a result of a struggle between the world 'outside' and the Lord 'inside'. In other words, had not soil and serpent joined forces, we would still be tilling the garden

Eden. This sheds interesting light upon the roles of narrator and reader in our text. As is well known, biblical narrators practically always associate themselves with the Hebrew God. Not so in this text. But, as the reader infers, both human beings and the earth would have been better off following God's scheme. So in this text, the reader will take the ideological position that the narrator for ironical purposes has seemingly abandoned.

Another point is that this story is not nearly so 'anthropocentric' as usually assumed. Throughout the story the human being is 'object' for other means. For example, *'adam* is made for the garden, not vice versa. In Genesis 2–3, no more than in Isa. 51.3, or Ezek. 28.13, 31.9, is the garden 'humanity's garden'. It belongs to YHWH and presumably fills some purpose of his (or his fellow beings). This purpose apparently is kept up after the expulsion of humanity, with cherubs in the human being's guarding position. Further, soil and vegetation are not made 'for humanity', but rather vice versa. The story is of course intensely preoccupied with humanity's place, function and fate in the world. But the actual ordering of the (literary as well as logical) universe is less anthropocentric in Genesis 2–3 than (for instance) in Genesis 1. As recognized above, several additional elements play in this story. The question of 'what it is about' may be answered at different levels. From the narrative point of view, however, Genesis 2–3 is basically a story about how land became vegetated and human beings became tillers of the soil. This basic point should not be obscured when moving to those other levels of the story.

Finally, if Genesis 2–3 is a story of how YHWH's scheme was frustrated through a trickster in a garden, are we here presented with a myth? It seems to me that Genesis 2–3 is not far from being a 'myth' or 'epic', as these appear to have existed in the ancient Near East. A similar plot is for instance found in *Atrahasis*: after a noisy riot from the minor gods, the chief god Enlil allows humans to be created in order to take over the work from those minor deities.[1] Unfortunately (?) the creators Enki and Nintu include in humanity a divine element,[2] which presumably accounts for the fact that, later on, Enlil is again disturbed by noise—this time from the humans.[3] By implication, the

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1. See the *ri-ig-ma*, 'noise', mentioned in *Atrahasis* I, 77, 179.
2. *Atrahasis* I, 223-26; cf. III, iii, 51.
3. *Atrahasis* I, 356; II i 7; II ii D 22, etc.

problem was that human beings were too much like the gods.[1] As we have seen, exactly this same is the problem in Gen. 3.22. At least the final hand of Genesis 1–11 saw a connection between the curses following humanity's 'divine aspirations' in Genesis 2–3 and the episode of the flood in Genesis 6–9. This is evident in Noah's name in 5.29 (cf. 3.17). That final hand—whoever it was—did write a mytho-poeic grammar in Genesis 2–3 rather similar to the one found in *Atrahasis*.[2]

Does this mean that Genesis 2–3 is a myth? Today that question has lost many of its previous theological implications. We might give an affirmative answer and still maintain that if ancient theologians could use genealogies, laws and narratives paralleling those of neighbouring people, they could certainly use a 'myth' too, especially when it was as skilfully narrated as Genesis 2–3.

ABSTRACT

Oriental and Hebrew material confirms that Gen. 2.5 is to be read as a narrative 'program' for the basic plot of the subsequent story (Gen. 2–3). Careful reading indicates that the narrative nucleus in Gen. 2–3 is the account of how (wild and culti-vated) vegetation appeared in the land, by provision of irrigation and a tilling man. Analysing the story according to a Greimasian actant scheme, it appears that YHWH himself only 'accidentally' and even 'unwillingly' supported that plot. His concern was with the garden, not with the land. The aims of the basic plot were not fulfilled until YHWH was forced to expel the human couple and issue curses upon the ground.

1. Cf. R.A. Oden, Jr, 'Divine Aspirations in Atrahasis and in Genesis 1–11', *ZAW* 93 (1981), pp. 197-216.

2. For general elaboration on this point of view, cf. I.M. Kikawada, 'Literary Convention of the Primeval History', *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 1 (1975), pp. 3-21.