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SAYING GRACE AFTER THE MEAL: A LITERARY
EXAMINATION OF EATING AND DRINKING IN GENESIS 1–11

by
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Introduction

“To be sure, food keeps us alive, but that is only its smallest and most temporary work. Its eternal purpose is to furnish our sensibilities against the day when we shall sit down at the heavenly banquet and see how gracious the Lord is. Nourishment is necessary only for a while; what we shall need forever is taste.”

–Robert Farrar Capon¹

Food is one of the richest metaphors, and eating and drinking is one of the richest symbolic actions, in all of Christian Scripture. It can vividly ignite the imagination of the reader, as in Ezekiel:

And he said to me, “Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. (Ezekiel 3:1–3)

It can confuse and repel the hearer, as in the Gospel according to John:

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53.)

And it can be a declaration of hope and longing for the better world to come, as in 1 Corinthians:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:26)

¹ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection*, Reprint edition, Modern Library Food (Random House Inc, 2002), 40.

In the opening pages of Genesis food is also one of the most central elements, symbolic, metaphorical, or otherwise. Adam and Eve's eating resulted in their expulsion from paradise, and in our ongoing struggle against sin that now sub-naturally reigns in us. Noah's drinking wine to drunkenness left him vulnerable to violation, the fruit of which is centuries — millennia, even — of national and ethnic strife. And those two examples are just the appetizers for the rest of Genesis.

The centrality of food in Genesis could be explained in one of at least three ways. 1) It is merely a historical record of what happened. 2) It is an ahistorical narrative invention to serve a literary purpose. Or 3) it is an artful, literary representation of a true event. This study takes the third perspective. We believe that Genesis is literature, and true. Both, without compromise. If an artist were to paint a tree in her backyard, she may want to paint it as it really seems to be. She could point to the finished painting and say, "This is the tree in my backyard." In one sense, that is untrue. It is not the tree in question, but only a painting. Yet in another sense, it is true. It is a representation of that tree, and no one would really be confused by her saying that it is the tree. Even if she was accurately representing that tree, she has still made artistic decisions. The artist determines the angle, the perspective, the lighting, the nuance of colours and shades, and so forth.² Such seems to be the way of the author's portrayal of eating and drinking in Genesis. There is an artful, literary, purposeful expression of truth, and it was shaped by the author to take the form of eating and drinking that we see in, for instance, Genesis 3 and 9.

Therefore, we approach this text as both true, and artful — literary. To honour the text, and the God whose Spirit-inspired word it is, we will examine the literary nuance and purpose of eating and drinking in the narrative of Genesis 1–11. It may be that through the lens of eating and drinking, the unfolding of the narrative, and the unfolding of God's self-revelation in the text and through redemptive history, will take on a new, piquant character to us.

² I am indebted to John Sailhamer for this illustration. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2013), 9.

In this study we will suggest that whenever eating or drinking occurs within certain parameters in Genesis 1–11, it is meant to signal to the reader that God is, in the flow of the narrative, about to make progress toward the fulfillment of his plans for human flourishing, in spite of, and even through, human foolishness, weakness, and rebellion. To put it more simply, meals are a narrative tool in the author’s arsenal to teach us of the sheer grace of God, and his relentless commitment to our ultimate good for his glory.

Since we are engaging Genesis as literature, it is the approach of narrative criticism which is best-suited to this endeavour. However, it is our aim to remember that this is not Homer or Shakespeare, but the word of God. Therefore, our narrative criticism is rooted in a confessional, canonical conviction and hermeneutic which tends to be foreign to historical criticism, and methodologically conducive to the grammatical-historical method. It really is our aim to uncover what the author and/or editors intended for us to learn from the text as we have received it, and not to uncover the significance of the historical or socio-religious settings of the events portrayed in the text. To that end, while our framework is that of narrative criticism, or narratology, we will engage readily with biblical theology, semiotics, and structuralism. Though the author of this study may have personal convictions leaning one way or the other, it must be quickly acknowledged that much of the high-calibre scholarship concerning food, eating and drinking, and narrative criticism comes from scholars of different convictions and schools of thought.

To progress toward establishing the thesis of this study, the first chapter will seek to determine which instances of eating and drinking qualify to be considered in light of our thesis. This must be done, since there are allusions to meals in Genesis 1–11 that must either be included or ruled out. Once the relevant passages have been established, we will briefly examine them through the lens of three different methodologies, for the sake of being methodical. The second chapter will seek to determine the shape of the plot in Genesis as a whole, and of the sub-plots within Genesis 1–11. Once the main thrust of the plot has been established, the third chapter will specifically look at the relevant passages, selected in chapter one, in light of

that plot. The aim will be to answer the question, “What is the role of these eating and drinking passages in the narrative?” We will examine eating and drinking as a *leitmotif*, a specific kind of literary device, and reflect on how much meaning, or what theological implications, can be derived from such a device. The fourth and final chapter will suggest a few topics for further study, including the possibility of a type-scene, biblical eating and drinking in relation to other Ancient Near Eastern texts, and further narratological possibilities with eating and drinking in the rest of the Pentateuch.

1. Establishing Eating and Drinking Actions

The aim of this first chapter is to establish for further study a set of passages which involve eating and drinking. To accomplish this, it is appropriate to examine the author's inclusion of eating and drinking episodes in Genesis 1–11, and whether they are incidental or have a deeper function and significance in the narrative. To that end, we will discuss the nature of biblical Hebrew narrative, the kind of literature that best seems to fit Genesis, and what qualifies as a narratively significant Action.³ A number of criteria and methods will then be used to examine several passages within Genesis 1–11 to see which eating and drinking Actions warrant more detailed consideration in the rest of this study.

1.1 Do Eating and Drinking Actions Have Narrative Purpose in Genesis?

Perhaps it is the very ordinariness of eating and drinking that has caused the topic to be widely-overlooked in biblical studies. Nathan MacDonald, speaking facetiously, says, “Food is a natural consequence of our physicality that requires little comment.”⁴ If this is true, then such a study as this — itself an elaborated comment on food — would be irrelevant. But MacDonald,⁵ Abernethy,⁶ Knierim,⁷ and other scholars⁸ have recently argued that food deserves a

³ In our usage, an “Action” is when the character(s) does something, rather than an “Event,” in which the something happens to the character(s). To set apart such an action in its more technical use, hereafter it will be capitalised (“Action”), as will “Event.”

⁴ Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford; New York: OUP Oxford, 2008) 2.

⁵ MacDonald notes the biblical authors' awareness of food's importance, both for sustenance and as a central element to the Bible's stories from Genesis 1–11 and radiating into the New Testament (MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 2, 219). Echoing Lévi-Strauss, he suggests that, in the Bible, food is both “good to eat” and “good to think” (Ibid, 7). “[A]cts of eating and drinking are always more than simply feeding a physical body” (Ibid, 219).

⁶ Andrew T. Abernethy *Eating in Isaiah: Approaching the Role of Food and Drink in Isaiah's Structure and Message* (Brill, 2014), 10.

⁷ R. P. Knierim, “Food, Land and Justice,” in *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Methods and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 226.

⁸ Semeia devoted an issue of the journal (86) to food, eating and drinking, and cooking. Its contents read as a menu of hors d'oeuvres to whet the appetite of biblical scholars, suggesting many possible paths for future study.

place at the table in biblical and theological studies.⁹ Diane Sharon comments, “Eating and drinking . . . are all commonly performed human activities necessary to sustain life, but when they occur in biblical stories, their function moves beyond the mundane.”¹⁰ For such a study as this to move beyond the mundane it must be determined that the inclusion of eating and drinking Actions in the narratives of Genesis has literary purpose: whether they are intended by the author to advance, retard, or complicate the plot.

We cannot talk about “plot” in relation to Genesis without asking, Is Genesis a work of literature? That is, are we dealing with the sort of text which has a plot? The remarkably intricate structure of Genesis, its wordplays,¹¹ pace, and development of settings and characters¹² all points to a commonality with literature, namely that it is “self-consciously structured and expressed.”¹³ This self-conscious artistry is another way of saying: this is a narrative work of literature; the story has an author, with something to say and a particular way of saying it.

⁹ Rolf Knierim suggests that the absence of attention to food in biblical theology is an oversight: “Despite the biblical evidence, the issues of food has never received attention worthy of a chapter in a theology, let alone the issues of its function in the whole of biblical theology—as if it were theologically irrelevant!” (Knierim, “Food, Land and Justice,” 226).

¹⁰ Diane M. Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible* (Eisenbrauns, 2002), 41.

¹¹ Edward Greenstein suggests that the instances of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible far surpasses the estimate of 502 occurrences made by Casanowicz, Edward Greenstein, “Hebrew Wordplay” in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. Beck, Astrid et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 6, 968. Greenstein suggests that a number of types of wordplay are employed, including the relation of proper and common nouns to each other (e.g. יִצְחָק, Isaac, and צְחָק, laughter), seemingly-coincidental polysemy (וַיּוּן in Genesis 4:13 with its dual possibilities of meaning, Cain’s sin either being too great to bear, or too great to forgive; c.f. *Ibid.*, 969), and audible paronomasia (in Judges 15:16 note the assonance between הַמֹּר, ass, and הַמֹּר, “mass”; cf. *Ibid.*, 969).

¹² Leland Ryken, *How Bible Stories Work: A Guided Study of Biblical Narrative* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 14. Ryken employs a literary approach which suggests a compositional unity, and thus a utilisation of setting and characterisation which is ubiquitous to all narrative literature, even suggesting that “[t]echniques of characterization are the same in the book of Genesis and the novels of Charles Dickens.”

¹³ Tremper Longman III, “The Literary Approach to the Study of the Old Testament: Promise and Pitfalls,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 394.

Inherent in the authorial (or perhaps editorial) artistry of Genesis lies a great deal of selectivity. A word was chosen at the expense of its synonym.¹⁴ A story's pace¹⁵ was quickened here, and slowed there; selectivity and design in action. But were these literary selections arbitrary, sub-conscious, or purposeful? This study is concerned with the purposeful, and will use the tools of literary criticism to attempt to arrive at a degree of certainty about such claims. Intuition alone may alert the reader to those narrative elements which are purposeful. For example, to even the beginning reader of the Hebrew language it is may be observed that "Adam" and "ground" (אָדָם and אֲדָמָה) are paronomastic, a pun whose punchline is ironically delivered when God curses the אֲדָמָה because of אָדָם. He is taken from it, is meant to rule it, and it now will rule him as he is put back into it. Reading Genesis involves art and science, and we would do well to not over-rely on either. When it comes to food, and more narrowly to eating and drinking, our intuition may note that it plays a crucial and central role in the narrative. However, we must apply a more scientific approach to this art, in order to ascertain how consciously the author may have selected and portrayed eating and drinking Actions for the narrative. In other words, is there literary purpose in the eating and drinking of Genesis 1–11? If so, what is that purpose?

It is customary in any literary examination to ascertain what is the genre of the text at hand. Identifying the genre of a text has two chief uses: to trace the history of the text's development (as Shimon Bar-Efrat accuses Hermann Gunkel of doing¹⁶), and to understand the nature and purpose of the text itself. The former is beyond the consideration of this study; we

¹⁴ Scott Noegel, ed. *Puns and Pundits: Word Play in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Eisenbrauns, 2018), 138. Wordplay implies word choice. In the development of a pun an author may consider several words to suit the occasion, choosing the one which best accomplishes his or her purposes. Thus, "When a choice of synonyms was available, the writers typically chose the word that produced the greater alliterative effect."

¹⁵ The pace and rhythm we have in mind here is not the meter of modern poetry, but a compositional sense of proportion and narrative pace. As one example, Ronald Hendel notes the different pace of the Joseph Cycle to other narratives (Ronald Hendel, "Book of Genesis," in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. Astrid Beck et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 2, 936). Another commentator, interacting with Josephus' *Antiquities*, sums up the sense of rhythm and proportion nicely: "The pace of Genesis now slackens abruptly and quite noticeably. After covering (according to the more conservative estimate) close on two millennia in the first eleven chapters, we now spend the rest of the thirtynine in leisurely chronicling the events of but some 280 odd years." Thomas W. Franxman, *Genesis and the Jewish Antiquities of Flavius Josephus*, vol. 35 of *Biblica et Orientalia* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 125.

¹⁶ Shimeon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 9.

are concerned here with the text as we have it, not how we came to have it. The study of the nature and purpose of the text then, is more relevant. However, many scholars disagree when it comes to the genre of Genesis.¹⁷ The book of Genesis is widely understood not as a stand-alone text, but as part of the Pentateuch,¹⁸ and itself made up of smaller literary units.¹⁹ The Pentateuch is unique²⁰ amid ancient literature and, while perhaps having a broad theme,²¹ seems to defy being pinned down to a particular genre.²² To claim one genre for Genesis as a whole, without attention to its composite parts and its place in the Pentateuch, would seem both reductionistic and anachronistic, a forcing of modern categories on an ancient text.²³

¹⁷ Waltke claims “Narrative Theology” as the appropriate genre, while denying myth, saga, or legend (Waltke, *Genesis*, 29). Other critics are quite comfortable calling Genesis “mythic” (for example, Detweiler, “Speaking of Believing in Genesis 2–3,” 136). Brodie prefers “antiquarian historiography” (Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, xi) and Alter provocatively refers to “prose fiction” (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 25). Source critics may find the genre an irrelevant question, based on the assumption of each source adhering to strict rules from within its own inherent genre. The result, then, would be a jumble of various genres and a text marked more by discord than unity. On this, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xxx. Other scholars focused more on exegesis of the text have also observed not one unifying genre for the whole of Genesis, but a composite of several different genres within its various narratives. See Kenneth Mathews for example (Mathews, “Treading the Winepress,” 54), as well as John Scullion’s detailed discussion of literary forms in Genesis in AYBD (Scullion, “The Genesis Narrative,” 956). For a helpful discussion on the genre of Genesis— and the genres within Genesis — see David Damrosch’s *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature*.

¹⁸ See, for example: Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 1 and Waltke, *Genesis*, 21. Waltke states this in the most unequivocal terms (“...the Pentateuch, which all agree has been edited as a unity”), though perhaps a tad too strong. There is a minority view of a “Hexateuch,” such as posited by von Rad (von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch*, 2).

¹⁹ For example, see Dorsey’s *toledoth*-based structure of Genesis: D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 55, 60.

²⁰ The Pentateuch may have kinship with ancient biography (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 63) ancient law code (Waltke, *Genesis*, 23), etc. But it shares only a limited commonality with these, and is in many ways distinctly set apart.

²¹ cf. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 81, and David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 86.

²² See Sailhamer’s discussion of whether the Pentateuch fits in the genre of “biography,” which he finds a convincing proposal. However, in his qualifying of this proposal (originally from Rolf Knierim), he seems to move so far from the proposed genre and breaks it down into so many sub-genres that perhaps it is best to say that “biography” is not the best fit after all (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 63ff).

²³ Since Gunkel’s work on the *Gattungsgeschichte* of Genesis and the Psalms there has been a broad tendency, particularly among source critics, to find many genres within the text of Genesis. Just in Westermann’s commentary alone he identifies at least eleven different genres within Genesis 1–11: myths of creation and origin (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 21), conflict of occupation (293), family trees and genealogies (352), chronicles and lists of kings (352), poem and narrative poem (435), apodictic law (467), lists (503), chronicles composed in royal courts (595), and flood story (596), to start. This approach to genre does not fit in the methodology of this study, which treats Genesis as one over-arching, coherent narrative. If Genesis is made up of various “sources or layers” (581), wherein J or P etc. have collected, arranged, and made their own contributions to the text, then it would perhaps follow that various genres have been pulled in, in a disparate fashion. But in our approach, we are consciously treating the text as a unified whole, as the received text. This study not being concerned with the history of the development of religion or genres, the usefulness of such an approach is diminished. However it is worth noting that to entirely dismiss the genre-complexity of the text would be to rob it of much of its historically-contextual richness, inasmuch as portions of the text share similarities with its ANE cousins.

Philo of Alexandria, without the modern vernacular of genre, nonetheless placed Genesis and the creation account(s) in the context of the Pentateuch, and thus under the category of “law.”²⁴ Nonetheless, even with this genre-like categorization he notes that while some laws are presented “unadorned,” and others bury “the truth under a heap of fabulous inventions,” Moses did neither.²⁵ Philo notes the beauty intrinsic to Moses’ law, such that for him, the six days of creation serve neither to speak literalistic fact, nor to confuse and bewilder, but to gesture toward divine orderliness and perfection.²⁶ Consequently, constraining this study to an imposed genre may limit our interaction with the features of the text itself to those only expected or looked-for within a genre. It seems better, here, to focus on the observable features of the text, to see what purpose the features serve, and to observe how the features hold together.

Sternberg and Waltke²⁷ observe several key features: that Genesis is historical, didactic, and aesthetic in nature. Both of these scholars ascribe a different label to a strikingly-similar set of features observed. Putting another option on the table, Sailhamer suggests “Historical Narrative,” which fits with Sternberg and Waltke’s observations, and, as Sailhamer notes, is a useful framework for much of the Old Testament’s narrative portions.²⁸ Viewing Genesis as Historical Narrative emphasises its didactic nature, and its rootedness in historical events. Historical events are selected, arranged and expressed with tremendous artistry — and all with a didactic purpose in mind. “The narrator uses words not as a stick but as a web. He teaches by telling stories.”²⁹ The purpose is more than simply to “tell it like it is,” that is, to report the events. A bullet-pointed list would be a more effective way of communicating facts in an ordered manner. The artistry involved indicates that we are not only to gain knowledge,

²⁴ Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), I.1–3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.2, III.13

²⁷ See Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 156 and Waltke, *Genesis*, 31.

²⁸ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 12.

²⁹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 31.

but to be moved into action or persuaded of something by this knowledge. The text is our teacher, and we are the student. We are to know, and we are to change or be changed by that knowing. Yet Genesis is not merely didactic; it is theological. If myth is primarily cosmological, Genesis as “historical narrative” stands apart as being primarily theological. In the narrative, God is not merely a plot device to help us understand ourselves and our world. Rather, stories of humans and the world are written in such a way as to help us understand God. While historical narrative is a didactic portrayal of history, the content of this particular lesson is not chiefly history itself, but the God who enacted it.

If Genesis were an ancient myth, we would expect the author to creatively invent events to explain phenomena. The emphasis of historical narrative, however, is not on such creativity, but on historical selectivity.³⁰ This selectivity takes on two main dimensions: *what* is portrayed, and *how* it is portrayed. The author of historical narrative must choose which historical events to write about, and he must choose how to write about them. I suggest that the Genesis narrative is artfully expressed in such a way as to draw special attention to the acts of eating and drinking. This expression includes selective inclusion and exclusion. Adam and Eve lived long lives, but we are only told a very small sliver of their story, and only one instance, surely out of thousands, of them eating. Something like a dim picture of their day-to-day life could be vaguely reconstructed or guessed at from clues in the text, but the details have been excluded. On the other side of the coin, the author could have written in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve simply disobeyed a command. Why is it important that we know what the means of their disobedience was? Yet the author did not leave us to wonder. He included the episode so commonly known now as “The Fall.” These inclusions and exclusions indicate selectivity, and suggest literary purpose.

³⁰ Alter, whose views on Genesis are unsurprisingly less conservative than those of Waltke et al, also speaks of the Pentateuch’s historical rootedness and artful re-presentation of the events. He suggests that the narratives in the Pentateuch are “the imaginative reenactment of history by a gifted writer who organises his materials along certain thematic biases...” (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 40). While the term “imaginative” may carry negative connotations, his point remains: there at least must be an historical event to reenact.

In light of the nature of biblical Hebrew narrative, the sparseness of which is well-attested,³¹ any selective inclusion becomes even more meaningful. Hebrew narratives are told in a laconic, but not minimalist, fashion. A minimalist narrative may indeed be sparse, but it also would be marked by a lack of complexity. However, it is biblical narrative's very sparseness that allows for greater complexity and subtlety. Like poetry, each word, image, and phrase takes on a weightiness, or bears a load in some way. The implication is that every selection of the author for his stories is intentional and meaningful. Even though eating and drinking are experiences common to all humanity, and thus common to at least the conceptual sub-strata of stories involving humans, their explicit inclusion in the narratives themselves attests to their importance³². "Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely."³³ We are not told of eating and drinking every time it must have happened — we are not given insight into Rebekah's breakfast on Tuesday the 8th of *Kislev*. But we are told that she carefully prepares a meal for Isaac, a meal which will deceive him into blessing his second-born unintentionally. Thus, eating and drinking Actions seem to occur with intentionality — a selective inclusion — rather than as merely ancillary human function, which would be contrary to the very nature of biblical Hebrew narrative.

1.1.a Food-related Literary Devices

Having suggested the importance of selective inclusivity to this literary study, let us consider which selections are here in view. While the scope of this study is to consider eating and drinking Actions, this is certainly a subset under the broader category of "food." We will begin by thinking about the selective inclusivity of food in Genesis and its possible use as a motif,³⁴ then narrowing it down eating and drinking Actions. We must establish the former before having firm ground to consider the latter.

³¹ E.g. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 22; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 180ff; and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 48ff.

³² Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 41, 108.

³³ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 45.

³⁴ Used here in its plainest sense, namely a recurring image which plays a role in a "dominant idea" in a piece of literature (Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 448).

Food-related words occur frequently in the narratives of Genesis, with 254 instances of 47 lemmas, clustered around a few “scenes” or “acts.”³⁵ We will come back to the clustering, but let us consider first the sheer number of occurrences. The repetition of a limited set of words, while foreign to a Western ear, is an aesthetic feature of biblical Hebrew narrative.³⁶ We can expect, then, that not only will the 47 food-related lemmas begin to take on new colour in their repetitions, but they also will prove to be significant to the narrative (as frequent repetition often signifies).³⁷ Clearly, food is a theme which is utilised throughout the narratives of Genesis in some way.

Another device alongside word frequency which points to literary purpose is phrasal repetition. What can at first appear to be verbatim repetition of a phrase throughout a biblical story may actually be a literary device, through which small changes are introduced at the phrase level to communicate many of the artful and meaningful elements of a story.³⁸ With repeated use, these phrases often begin to accumulate a technical meaning³⁹ or usage beyond what was originally clear from the first iteration.

One of the clearest instances of phrasal repetition in Genesis, which is incidentally relevant to this study, is the phrase “be fruitful and multiply” in Genesis 1:28 (פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ). Its plain meaning seems to indicate God’s desire, expressed through imperatives, for the two humans to engage in reproductive activity. Is it possible that this phrase, repeated in various iterations numerous times throughout Genesis, signifies the introduction of key themes in the book — not merely of human reproductive action, but also of food?

Perhaps the use of פָּרָה is stylistic, a rhetorical flourish. However, there are at least three factors which may render this improbable. First, the seemingly arbitrary inclusion of “be fruit-

³⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 32.

³⁶ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 1. (3 vols.), (W. W. Norton, 2018), xxvii.

³⁷ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 16.

³⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 97.

³⁹ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 11.

ful” when “multiply” would have sufficed. Second, the juxtaposition of the concepts of fruit tree reproduction and human reproduction with what immediately follows in 1:29⁴⁰ and 30, namely, God’s explicit provision of food for the humans. Third, when the apposition of the metaphor of fruitfulness alongside the more concrete “multiply” is considered alongside the oracle of destiny⁴¹ in 3:16 there seems to be an intentional (as opposed to coincidental) thematic irony at play. The humans were meant to be fruitful and multiply, but instead they ate the forbidden fruit, and introduced a multiplication of pain to their fruitfulness.

The same verb is used with the sense “multiply” in 1:28 and 3:16 (רבה), while פרה (fruitful) and הרה (childbearing) are relating not semantically, but at the sense level, in which “fruitful” stands in apposition to “childbearing,” which is the target of the metaphor.⁴²

From Genesis 1:28:

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply [רבה] ...”

From Genesis 3:16:

I will surely multiply [רבה] your pain in childbearing...

This phrase (“fruitful and multiply”) is repeated throughout the narratives of Genesis,⁴³ but with meaningful variation each time.⁴⁴ The clue to its significance may lie in the repetition’s

⁴⁰ McKinlay (“To Eat or Not to Eat,” 74) observes how seamlessly Genesis 1:29 follows after 1:28, and concludes that the implication is the necessity of food for the tasks prescribed in 1:28. McKinlay relates this to dependence and a “power differential.” Food and power have been further discussed by several scholars, such as Heffelfinger (“From Bane to Blessing,” 319) and Nicholson (“Food and Power,” 37–55).

⁴¹ I use this phrase because, though it is commonly called “the curse,” not every element of this section of poetry is, in fact, a curse. It is, however, an oracle from God; and it is destiny-shaping, whether for good or ill.

⁴² I am following here Stordalen’s usage of “target” and metaphor (Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 52). The “source” of the metaphor is fruitfulness, the “target” of the metaphor is “childbearing,” and the “tenor” is seeing childbearing as fruitfulness.

⁴³ Genesis 1:22, 28, 8:17, 9:1, 7, 17:6, 20, 26:22, 28:3, 35:11, 41:52, 47:27, 48:4, and 49:22.

⁴⁴ Many of the phrasal repetitions could be categorised as a blessing (1:28, “And God blessed them . . . ‘Be fruitful and multiply...’”), whereas others may be categorised as a promise (17:6, “I will make you exceedingly fruitful...”), a foreshadow (26:22, “...the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land”), or a fulfilment (47:27, “Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly”).

difference from the original phrase. There are many nuances to this phrase, but let us pay attention to one aspect, namely, who will bring about the fruitfulness and multiplication? In all the repetitions of this phrase in Genesis 1–11, God is commanding someone (whether creatures or humans) to fulfil this mandate. “Be fruitful [second person imperative] and multiply” — *you* do it. But in the two repetitions of this phrase in the Abraham Cycle (11:26–22:24) the agent of accomplishment shifts from the recipient to God himself.⁴⁵ “I ... will make him fruitful and multiply him.”⁴⁶ *I* will do it.

Sarna takes the blessing of 1:28 to be an example of the imperative used in a blessing without the force of duty or prescription.⁴⁷

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*⁴⁸

The prescriptive repetition of this phrase in 9:7⁴⁹ (“And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it”) and the frustration of the divine imperative in 3:16 seems to suggest that 1:28 does indeed carry the force of an imperative. The apparent failure of humans in Genesis 1–11 to fully bring about the fruitfulness and multiplication commanded by God seems to result in a shift in Genesis 12–22, where God takes it upon himself to bring about the fruitfulness.

We have already noted the possible literary irony of “be fruitful” in light of the transgression of Eve and Adam, and that “fruitful” and “multiply” are in metaphorical apposition. Why, then, the inclusion of the former, when the latter would have sufficed? The repetition of this

⁴⁵ In Westermann’s view, the blessing of 1:28 shifts from a promise to a report by Exodus 1:7 (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 140). This can be seen to progressively unfold throughout the story of Genesis.

⁴⁶ Genesis 17:20. See also 17:6.

⁴⁷ Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 13.

⁴⁸ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 1:28.

⁴⁹ Sarna notes the prescriptive nature in this instance, (Sarna, *Genesis*, 13).

phrase — the propagation of this metaphor — seems to indicate a high level of intentional shaping of this story and this phrase. It is possible that this metaphor in apposition, to “be fruitful and multiply,” was selected and repeated throughout the narratives of Genesis to link the motif of food with human progeny. This is not to say that all instances of food-related words must necessarily advance a food-related motif; regardless, I find it compelling that the method of fruit-tree reproduction is used as a metaphor for human reproduction, and almost immediately human reproduction is affected because of eating forbidden fruit. This seems to add up to more than mere coincidence.

An additional nuance to this literary device of phrasal repetition is its placement, or clustering.⁵⁰ The “fruitful and multiply” phrase is clearly clustered in the main acts of Genesis; it seems to be by design that, following this initial key phrase in 1:28, the occurrences of food-related words (the 47 lemmas) are similarly clustered. For instance, of the 48 occurrences in the Primeval History (1:1–11:26), 30 (more than 62%) occur in chapters 2 and 3, which represents perhaps the most catastrophic moment of the Bible’s narratives, second only to the crucifixion of the promised seed himself. When food-related images are densely grouped around destiny-altering narrative occurrences, and as they become an “organising standard”⁵¹ by which destinies are altered (plot complication) then they become all the more significant.

These observations we have made may add up to literary devices such as *motif*, *leitwort*, *theme*, and *typescene*. Various scholars have identified (or implicitly treated) food as one of these devices. Waltke briefly demonstrates that food (specifically מִטְעַם, “tasty morsel”) functions as a leitwort in the Jacob and Esau narrative⁵², and also notes (although only im-

⁵⁰ Rolf Knierim observes that eating and drinking actions are rather evenly distributed throughout the Old Testament (Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology*, 229). Far from negating the significance of “clustering,” and far from making eating and drinking un-noteworthy, the constant attention to eating and drinking in the Old Testament testifies to its importance. Knierim, after positing a staggering number of food-related events and words, claims that food, alongside the concept of “life,” stands “in the center of the biblical doctrine of the creation and sustenance of the world through God” (Ibid, 232).

⁵¹ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 11.

⁵² Waltke, *Genesis*, 34.

plicity) the motif of a shortage of food in the narrative of Joseph and his brothers, calling it “the focal point for the movement toward reconciliation.”⁵³

McKinlay and Heffelfinger have specifically named food as a motif⁵⁴ or leitmotif,⁵⁵ while MacDonald and Brodie have treated it as such.⁵⁶ MacDonald writes about the theme of “judgment at the table,” which is a food-related theme in itself; but food, more specifically, plays the role of motif within that theme.⁵⁷ Wenham⁵⁸ and Clemens (in his article relating Ecclesiastes and Genesis⁵⁹) treat and refer (respectively) to food as a theme within Genesis. It may be noted that scholarly works which specifically examine food in the Old Testament (McKinlay, MacDonald, Heffelfinger) have the most to offer when it comes to analysing such devices. Commentaries are remarkably silent on food as a motif, leitmotif, or theme.⁶⁰ This may be, in part, because of the only recent acceptance of literary critical methodology in biblical and theological studies; not many commentaries have embraced this methodology, and fewer still have, I assume, the space available to treat every motif or theme which may grace the pages of Genesis. In light of Wenham’s observation of food as a central topic in Genesis 2–3, it is surprising that he does not examine the topic at any length in his commentary on

⁵³ Ibid, 551.

⁵⁴ McKinlay, “To Eat or Not to Eat,” 74.

⁵⁵ Heffelfinger, “From Bane to Blessing,” 298.

⁵⁶ See MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 184 and Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 304 and 382.

⁵⁷ Alter’s proposed scale of conventions is useful, and fits the common usage by most scholars whose works I have consulted. Alter organises his proposed scale from the narrowest to the broadest concepts: *leitwort*, *motif*, *theme*, *sequence of actions*, and *type-scene*, respectively (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 120–121). This scale allows for a motif to include a leitwort, a theme to include a motif, etc.

⁵⁸ Wenham cites food, dominion, and sex as the three central topics of Genesis 2–3. Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 28.

⁵⁹ David M. Clemens, “The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–3,” *Themelios* 19, no. 3 (1994): 6.

⁶⁰ For instance, Waltke uses “game” and “tasty food” in the Jacob Cycle to illustrate the concept of a *leitwort* (“key word”, Waltke, *Genesis*, 34). Although identifying and exploring key words is a prominent feature of his commentary, he surprisingly does not interact with food as a *leitwort* in key passages such as the garden narrative in chapter 3, or the Joseph Cycle. Similarly, Wenham makes use of the “key word” concept, and he even identifies “land” (*adamah*) as one such key word in the first three chapters of Genesis (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 82). Yet he does not apply the same criteria to “food” or “to eat” as he does to “land.”

Genesis 1–15, and only notes in passing that the divine provision of food for man runs as a leitmotif throughout the early chapters of Genesis.⁶¹

Alter defines a motif somewhat broadly, with two specific criteria:

*Motif: A concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object recurs through a particular narrative ... it has no meaning in itself without the defining context of the narrative ...*⁶²

The first criterion is easily met by food in Genesis. Food functions as a “concrete image” which recurs in a narrative — or more specifically, across connected narratives (being a predominant aspect of the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers). More specifically, the actions of eating and drinking also fit this criterion. But what of the second criterion? Does food, or eating and drinking, have meaning in itself, or does it only take meaning from the narrative context? Some of Alter’s examples of motif, such as the colour red in the Joseph story, are abstract enough to be fairly void of meaning outside of the narrative context; yet some of his examples, such as water in the Moses story — which corresponds more closely to food than does a colour — could certainly be said to have meaning in and of itself. To what people or cultures are the ideas of food and water void of meaning? It is transcultural across history that food and water mean life. Perhaps that is what Lévi-Strauss meant by claiming that food is not only good to eat, but good to think.⁶³ Therefore, perhaps Alter’s own description of motif, alongside his chosen examples, is not perfectly consistent.

All of this demonstrates not that food only functions as one device or another, but rather that many have noted its multi-faceted role in driving forward the narrative and adding nuance to the story through the use of leitwort, motif/leitmotif, and theme. It would be reductionistic to

⁶¹ See Wenham (*Genesis 1–15*, 176) on Genesis 6:21, where he relates God’s instructions for Noah (to take some edible food onto the ark) back to the divinely provided and permitted food in the garden of Eden.

⁶² Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 120.

⁶³ “bonnes à manger” and “bonnes à penser”, Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Le Totémisme Aujourd’hui*. Paris: PUF, 1962.

claim that food must only be a motif, or a leitwort. The conclusions of which devices are in use must be based on exegesis of the relevant passages, and an examination of the possible intratextuality of those passages within Genesis. Before moving on, it should be noted here that I have found no scholarly suggestions that food plays a major role in type-scenes within Genesis, though that does not rule out the possibility, as we will see in Chapter Four.

In summary, the concept of food has been introduced into the narrative with literary purpose, which is evident by its inclusive selectivity, frequency, repetition, and by clustering food-related words and phrases around crucial moments in the narrative. The selective inclusions of food as a narrative element seem to have been utilised by the author of Genesis within one or more literary conventions which serve to drive the narratives forward and even to link the narratives together (for instance, the shortage of food in Genesis 37–50 compared with the bountiful availability of food in Genesis 2–3). As previously mentioned, food is a broad category, an umbrella, as it were, under which events of eating and drinking should be considered. Let us now narrow our consideration to eating and drinking Actions specifically.

1.2 What is a Narratively Significant Eating or Drinking Action?

We follow Shimeon Bar-Efrat by considering a distinction between “Actions” and “Events.” An Action is when a character *does* something. An Event is when something is done *to* a character.⁶⁴ Consider Genesis 2:1–2:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

⁶⁴ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 93.

The Event was the completion of the heavens and the earth. The Actions are God finishing his work, and resting. The emphasis of the former is on what is done to the heavens and earth; the emphasis on the latter is on what God did, actively.

In this study, an “eating or drinking Action” refers to when the act of eating or drinking is reported in the text’s narration. By turning our attention to what is here called narrative Action,⁶⁵ we are concerning ourselves with the text’s *report* of the Action, and not with the historical action itself. We are limiting our study of Actions to those verbs which occur in narration because they are the parts of the narrative which cause or warrant the effects. Though eating or drinking-related verbs occur in dialogue, they are not the incident of eating or drinking itself; they are referring forward or backward to the incident. Thus, we are studying the Actions, occurring in narration, like a bomb squad investigates a detonation. The blast radius and damage inflicted is a direct result of the detonation itself. What we are interested in here is, as it were, Why was that particular explosive used? Or to put it back in our categories, Why was eating and drinking used in the narrative in this way? Once we make some headway on that question, then we can investigate the blast radius of the explosion. A literary Action in historical narrative has two chains of cause-and-effect: the first is throughout history itself. The second is an intentional chain of causality crafted into the narrative.⁶⁶ Perhaps the two overlap in sacred literature, yet the primary task of a literary critical examiner is not to listen for echoes of the *historical* action, but to observe the ripples of the narrative Action.⁶⁷ Our ultimate aim then is first to determine what is an eating or drinking Action, and, perhaps, more importantly, which of those Actions have narrative significance.

⁶⁵ This is not opposed to Alter’s use of “narrative event,” though Alter goes further than we are ready to at this point in the study. Our usage of the phrase has more in common with Alter’s “summary.” He writes, “The term ‘event’ as I shall be using it is a significant junction in the narrative continuum that is different in kind from summary, which is a form of narrative abundantly used in the Bible both to provide links between events and for the independent presentation of material not deemed suitable for concrete rendering as discreet events” (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79).

⁶⁶ “Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention.’ The sense of intentionality or causation is what propels the story forward toward its conclusion and makes the conclusion feel, in some sense, inevitable.” Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels as Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 25.

⁶⁷ For more on this, see the opening chapters of Sailhamer’s *An Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, specifically his discussion on the difference between an historical critical and canonical approach to the text.

1.2.a Considering Genesis 3, 4, and 9

In Genesis 1–11 the verb form of אכל (“to eat”) occurs 28 times, and the verb form of שתה (“to drink”) only once.⁶⁸ Of these combined 29 occurrences, 26 are used in dialogue, leaving three in the narration: the first two in Genesis 3:6:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate [אכל], and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate [אכל].⁶⁹

And the last is found in Genesis 9:21:

He drank [שתה] of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.⁷⁰

Dialogue-bound verbs are either potential or referential in nature. They point to a potential action, whether prohibited or commanded (e.g. Eve’s “we may eat,” נאֲכַל, in 3:2), or they refer backward or forward to an action reported via narration (God’s “Because you...have eaten” in 3:17). Such verbs in dialogue⁷¹ are indicative of the centrality of the event which is reported in the narration. To these we must turn our attention.

⁶⁸ For this study I analysed 255 instances, throughout Genesis, of 44 lemmas in the semantic range of אכל and שתה. The density of occurrences increases throughout Genesis, so that the Joseph cycle has far more than the Prologue. For our purposes, establishing eating and drinking Actions with as much clarity as possible, we have opted for simplicity in our semantic engagement. If we can make the case for אכל and שתה as vital criterion in these Actions, it only expands options for further study involving the broader semantic range.

⁶⁹ Gen 3:6, ESV.

⁷⁰ 9:21.

⁷¹ Some of these dialogue-bound referents would fall into John Searle’s illocutionary classification, in which a “potential Action” may be classified as a Directive. An illocutionary Directive, in Searle’s terminology, is “an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, “A Classification of Illocutionary Acts,” 11), which would include *not* doing something (which is, in some sense, doing something: abstaining or refraining). While this aspect of speech-act theory has overlaps with our study and can be useful in literary criticism, it may be an unhelpful constraint on the bounds of our study, as it imposes restrictions on what “speech-acts” are an illocution — that is, when a speech-act is related directly to the result or effect of the utterance.

Figure 1.1



The fratricide in Genesis 4 does not contain any eating or drinking verbs within narration, but it should be up for consideration as an eating or drinking Action regardless. In Genesis 4, Cain kills his brother Abel, and after receiving Cain's weak answer as to the whereabouts of his brother, the Lord levels at him this decimating reply:

And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."⁷²

The ground's "mouth" (פֶּה) may be an impersonal term better rendered as "opening," which would simply describe something like a hole opening up and the blood of Abel falling into it. This seems unlikely. If פֶּה is used anthropomorphically ("mouth" rather than "opening") then this is a vibrant image which portrays the ground (אֲדָמָה) as *taking* (from the root לָקַח) the blood from Cain's hand, and implicitly, swallowing it like food or drink. Indeed, Bandstra translates the pronoun as personal, "the ground opened *her* mouth..."⁷³

These two words, אֲדָמָה and לָקַח, have already taken on notable significance in Genesis 3. First, we must remember the wordplay of "ground" and "man." Second, we have already seen לָקַח play a role in an eating Action. In 3:6 Eve "took" (תָּקַח, from the root לָקַח) the forbidden fruit and ate it, then giving it to the man from whom she was "taken" (again, לָקַח). They are then expelled from the garden lest they "take" (לָקַח) and eat from the tree of life as well.

⁷² Gen 4:10–11, ESV.

⁷³ Barry L. Bandstra, *Genesis 1–11: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008), 251.

Wenham notes⁷⁴ that the story of fratricide in Genesis is structurally and thematically parallel to Eve and Adam’s transgression in Genesis 3.⁷⁵ Structurally, both stories are centred on a “terse description of the sin”, followed by a divine questioning, and oracle(s) of destiny resulting in man moving east.⁷⁶ Thematically, words such as “desire” (תְּשׁוּקָה), “voice” (קוֹל), and “drove” (גָּרַשׁ) feature prominently in both narratives. Eve’s תְּשׁוּקָה is contrary to her husband in 3:16, and sin’s תְּשׁוּקָה is contrary to Cain in 4:7. Between the two parallel stories there are only three elements which have a קוֹל, or make a sound:

1. the sound of YHWH walking in the garden (3:8, 10)
2. the voice of the woman which the man heeded (3:17)
3. the blood of Abel (4:10)

These parallel features, when considered in relation to the metaphorical language of the ground and the blood, may strongly link to Genesis 3 both in terms of the transgression, and by its eating- or drinking-related language. When commenting on verses 10 and 11, Wenham pays due attention to the ethical dimensions of innocent blood polluting the ground,⁷⁷ but gives no attention to the ground’s metaphorical act of taking the blood from Cain. Waltke notes a link with Genesis 3:14, but also chooses not address the metaphorical act of 4:11, nor does Kidner, Mathews, and others. Yet other commentators have addressed the metaphor quite directly. Calvin does not shy away from the metaphor, but interprets it as the ground’s act of personified decency to “[open] its mouth to cover the blood.”⁷⁸ As mentioned earlier, Bandstra prefers a highly-personified translation⁷⁹ similar to Alter’s “the soil ... gaped with its mouth to take your brother’s blood”⁸⁰ and Fry and Reyburn agree that the author of Gene-

⁷⁴ See also Coats (*Genesis*, 65) and Waltke (*Genesis*, 98), who comment on the parallel nature of 4:11 to 3:17 and on the link to the serpent in 3:14, respectively.

⁷⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Vol. 1. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 99-100.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 107.

⁷⁸ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 208–209.

⁷⁹ Bandstra, *Genesis 1–11*, 251.

⁸⁰ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 1 (3 vols. W. W. Norton, 2018), 20.

sis used a forceful metaphor,⁸¹ even suggesting possible translations such as “...that has drunk the blood of the brother you killed.”⁸²

The parallels, taken alone, only demonstrate that the fratricide episode is another paradigmatic image of sin, as is the forbidden eating of Genesis 3. Yet, when considered alongside the eating imagery employed, it becomes strongly suggestive that Genesis 4:10–11 ought to be considered alongside 3:6 and 9:21 as an eating or drinking Action. Whether or not the use of the image has narrative significance is yet to be determined. This leaves us with three eating or drinking Actions to now analyse for significance: Adam and Eve’s eating in Genesis 3:6, the ground’s eating or drinking in Genesis 4:10, and Noah’s drinking in 9:21.

Before moving on to look at these passages through the methodology of Kaiser, Sailhamer, and Sharon, we should first apply the simplest of criteria: whether these three passages contain an eating or drinking Action in narration (see Fig. 1.1) as opposed to a potential or referential Action. It is a far more complicated question when it comes to Genesis 4:10 than 3:6 and 9:21, which are rather straightforward.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.⁸³

Here **אכל** occurs twice as a verb:

וּתְקַח מִפְּרִיו וְתֹאכַל וְתִתֶּן גַּם-לְאִשָּׁה עִמָּה וַיֹּאכַל

As this is inside narration, it qualifies as a narrative Action. There are also potential (e.g. verse 5’s “when you eat of it”) and referential Actions (e.g. verse 12’s “and I ate”), which gesture forward or back toward this narrative action. The two apparent eating actions, that is,

⁸¹ William David Reayburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1998), 115. They state plainly, “‘Its mouth’ refers to the mouth of the ground.”

⁸² *Ibid*, 115.

⁸³ Gen 3:6, ESV.

Eve's and Adam's individual consumption of the fruit, seem to be treated narratively as one Action, or two parts of the same Action. Adam and Eve are not questioned separately, but one following another, in reverse order of their eating. There is one prohibition from God, not two (see Genesis 3:11b), and the consequences of their eating culminate in one destiny-altering turn of events: their expulsion from the garden of Eden.

Noah's drinking in 9:21 is similarly straightforward:

And he drank [שָׁתַּה] of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.⁸⁴

Once again, the drinking verb (שָׁתַּה) occurs in the narration, qualifying this as a narrative Action. It has no obvious potential or referential Actions; there is no divine "Because you drank. . ." Instead, there are immediate, non-mediated repercussions: drunkenness, nakedness, gazing and gossiping, cursing and blessing. Yet the lack of potential and referential Actions still leaves this narrative Action intact. In summary, the narrative of Genesis 4:10 seems to be ruled out as an eating or drinking Action due to its lack of required vocabulary in accordance with our criteria, and Genesis 3:6 and 9:21 remain as options, both of them containing our eating or drinking words within the narrative.

1.3 Three Methods and Criteria Applied

We have, then, two clear narrative eating or drinking Actions (Genesis 3:6 and 9:21), and one possible narrative drinking (or eating?) Action (Genesis 4:10). I propose to now briefly examine these three passages in light of three different, but complementary, approaches to the text. If an overlap is found in the results of these approaches, then there may be solid ground on which to base claims of significance and further study. The approaches of Kaiser, Sailhamer, and Sharon all have some common ground with each other: all three are text-centred, literarily sensitive (in regard to an intentional structure of the text), and have an emphasis on literary devices in the narrative, such as motif.

⁸⁴ Gen 9:21.

1.3.a Method One: Applying the Principles of Centrality and Selectivity

Kaiser utilises an accumulative and diachronic approach⁸⁵ to identify the “indigenous”⁸⁶ centre of a text, from which a motif “epigenetically” grows, accumulating a richer meaning for the rest of text. He proposes six criteria⁸⁷ for identifying central points or themes in the text, a few of which are directly relevant to our study: the proximity of interpretive statements, phrasal repetition and developed nuance, and a standard of organisation by which something is marked for inclusion/exclusion or significance.⁸⁸ All of these criteria may be relevant to our study, but if we consider the last criterion it may prove to be illustrated most succinctly.

The question is whether our three eating and drinking Actions are an “organising standard by which people, places, and ideas were marked for approval, contrast, inclusion, and future and present significance.”⁸⁹ Let us consider approval and inclusion. In a feature analysis matrix (see Fig. 1.2) the three Actions are displayed in relation to the approval and inclusion features, which are given with a negative or positive assertion (- or +, respectively). A negative assertion of “approval” would be “disapproval,” and likewise for “inclusion” and “exclusion.” Statements of disapproval through divine questioning or new knowledge of a transgression⁹⁰ are common to all three Actions, as are statements of exclusion, as Adam and Eve and Cain are all removed further east, and as separation between them and the ground and its fruit is increased. Only in the drinking Actions of chapter 9 do any positive assertions emerge. This brief look at the Actions as an organising principle by which some are approved or included (or the reverse) suggests that all of our Actions do indeed meet Kaiser’s criteria as a centre which is indigenous to the text.

⁸⁵ Sailhamer, *An Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 184ff.

⁸⁶ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ See Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 144, Table 17.1 for a helpful examination of the complementarity between the “crime and punishment” episodes of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, particularly as it relates to divine questioning or new knowledge of a transgression.

Figure 1.2

Person	Action	Approval	Inclusion
Adam and Eve	Eating (3:6)	-	-
Cain/Ground	Eating/drinking (4:10)	-	-
Noah	Drinking (9:21)	- / +	- / +

1.3.b Method Two: Examining Compositional Seams

We now turn to Sailhamer’s concept of “compositional seams.”⁹¹ Sailhamer observes in the Pentateuch a structural device to mark the transitional “seams” between significant portions of narrative, namely the pattern of Narrative, Poetic Discourse, Epilogue.⁹² Sailhamer suggests that this structural device may lie “behind the final shaping of the Pentateuch,”⁹³ and thus has something to say about the Pentateuch’s authorial intent or compositional purpose. This pattern can be succinctly observed in 9:18–28, in which occurs Narrative (Noah’s drinking and Ham’s transgression, 9:18–24), Poetic discourse (Ham’s curse and the oracles of blessing regarding God, Shem, and Japheth, 9:25–27), and Epilogue (a summary of Noah’s days, 9:28).⁹⁴

The Narration in verses 18–24 opens with an introduction to the story’s characters, and their importance to the overall narrative:

*The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.*⁹⁵

⁹¹ John H. Sailhamer, “The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 3 (September 1987): 307–15.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 309.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Other compositional seams within Genesis 1–11 have been identified by Sailhamer (“The Canonical Approach to the OT,” 309ff) and Waltke (*Genesis*, 83), including: Genesis 1:1–2:24, 2:25–3:24, 4:1–26, and 6:1–9:17.

⁹⁵ Gen 9:18–19, ESV.

The narration then focuses on Noah, the chief figure (though certainly not the chief antagonist), and the situation unfolds: from soil to vineyard, vineyard to cup, cup to tent; rising action.⁹⁶

*Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.*⁹⁷

Ham (and here the author is careful to remind us that Ham is the father of Canaan, a poignant note for the early readers of Genesis, who would likely have been very familiar with the Canaanites) is at the centre of the climactic action, and plays the role of antagonist. Shem and Japheth step in, and Noah awakes covered, and gains new knowledge (similarly to how Adam and Eve are naked, then covered, and their eyes are opened in Genesis 3).

*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him ...*⁹⁸

Thus ends the Narration, and the Poetry section begins, containing a curse (similar to Genesis 3:14ff) and a blessing (a new development, the first blessing from a human):

“Cursed be Canaan;

a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”

. . .

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem;

and let Canaan be his servant.

⁹⁶ “Rising action refers to the early stages of narrative activity, which signal the direction the plot will take and build its tension. Rising action introduces the central conflict(s) of the story, often stemming from decisions and actions of key characters” (Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 27).

⁹⁷ Ibid, 9:20–21.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 9:22–24.

*May God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of Shem,
and let Canaan be his servant.”*

That marks the end of the short Poetry section, and the even more brief Epilogue follows:

After the flood Noah lived 350 years. All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.⁹⁹

This entire section is one example of a Compositional Seam. Taken altogether, we find that this short story is like the stitching between what precedes (God’s judgment on the world via flood) and what follows (the special selection of Abram and the development of this new family).

If eating and drinking Actions are an “indigenous centre” to the text, we would expect them to line up with some of the text’s compositional seams. There are noted compositional seams, such as 6:1–9:17 which do not seem to include eating or drinking Actions in any way, so we are not suggesting that all compositional seams are food-related. However, of the five seams within Genesis 1–11 noted by Sailhamer and Waltke, our possible eating and drinking Actions fall within three (see Figure 1.2). As earlier noted, we can expect the eating or drinking Actions to always fall within the Narrative portion of the composition.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 9:28–29.

Figure 1.3

<i>Compositional Seams</i>	Narrative	Poetic Discourse	Epilogue
2:25–3:24	2:25–3:13 Temptation and fall; eating the forbidden fruit	3:14–19 Oracles of destiny (curse and consequence)	3:20–24 Adam and Eve clothed and driven out of the garden
4:1–26	4:1–22 Cain, Abel, and fratricide (the ground “ eating ” Abel’s blood)	4:23–24 Lamech’s poem of depravity	4:25–26 Adam and Eve “replace” Abel with Seth
9:18–29	9:18–24 Noah’s drinking and Ham’s transgression	9:25–27 Oracles of curse and blessing	9:28–29 A summary of Noah’s days

1.3.c Method Three: Proppian Analysis (Structuralism)

Thus far we have seen that the use of Kaiser’s and Sailhamer’s approaches has affirmed the importance of these three Actions. Perhaps that is to be expected with those two scholars in such general agreement on a theological approach to the Old Testament. We now turn to Sharon’s Proppian¹⁰⁰ analysis, which is a subset of a structuralist approach.

Structuralism is intrinsically concerned with the shape of the text, a concern also demonstrated in the canonical and theological approaches of Kaiser and Sailhamer, though perhaps more explicitly displayed in Sharon’s work. “Flushed with triumph, the structuralist rearranges his [or her] rulers and reaches for the next story.”¹⁰¹ As the name implies, the structuralist priori-

¹⁰⁰ Vladimir Propp has made remarkable contributions to the literary criticism of folktales, and his work methodology has been utilised, adapted, or critically engaged with by biblical scholars such as Stordalen (2000), Sasson (1979), Blenkinsopp (1981), Crossan (1974), and Detweiler (1976). For a critical and constructive look at Propp and his legacy for biblical scholarship, see Pamela J. Milne, “Folktales and Fairy Tales: an Evaluation of Two Proppian Analyses of Biblical Narratives,” *JSOT*.

¹⁰¹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction, Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 83.

tises the structure of a text over its meaning; form over content.¹⁰² The scholar of Old Testament Theology, even one utilising literary criticism, bolsters and discovers meaning out of its structure; content from form. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that when Diane Sharon studies Old Testament eating and drinking Actions¹⁰³ in *Patterns of Destiny* she delivers no substantial theological reflection, as Sharon herself notes.¹⁰⁴

Sharon's work is a notable contribution to the literary study of food in the Old Testament. Using the analytical approach of Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp she concludes that eating and drinking Actions occurring in a certain predictable pattern with other elements of a narrative may serve as a Pattern of Destiny, either establishing or condemning a "cultural entity."¹⁰⁵ It is worth observing the similarity between Sharon's conclusion and Kaiser's "organising standard," by which is expressed approval and inclusion or disapproval and exclusion. MacDonald suggests that Sharon's methodology is perhaps needlessly involved, a criticism somewhat frequently levelled at Structuralism.¹⁰⁶ It seems a fair criticism, though a particular strength of Sharon's methodology is her careful analyses of relevant Ancient Near Eastern myths, which adds solidity to her conclusions.

Sharon looks for eating or drinking Actions in Old Testament narrative, and determines when they are a "Constant," in contrast to a "Variable." Not to oversimplify her impressive methodology, she suggests that eating and drinking are Constants when they occur in a predictable sequence in relation to other stable elements in the text.¹⁰⁷ There is an expectedness, a pattern to it. To put it another way, Sharon is looking for when eating or drinking is narratively consequential in several stories, and the astute reader is alerted to these by familiar patterns, or structures. These Constants are consequential in such a way that the Actions cannot

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ The terminology varies between this study and Sharon's work. What she refers to as an "event" we are calling an "Action." The word differs, but the target intended remains the same.

¹⁰⁴ Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 207.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 205.

¹⁰⁶ MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 29.

be swapped for a different set of Actions without significantly altering the shape of the narrative.

This predictable pattern she identifies as Eating/Drinking Event, Encounter, Oracle, and Affirmation (of the Oracle).¹⁰⁸ This she calls a Pattern of Destiny. The eating or drinking Action is here a Constant, irreplaceable, steady, and predictable. The other Constants (Encounter, Oracle, Affirmation) fall in the same sequence, together making up the whole of the pattern. It is the reliability of this pattern across not only the biblical text but other Ancient Near Eastern texts which establishes its credentials. This is worthy of our consideration. Considering the narrative of Genesis 3, all the Constants appear in their place. Here it seems that we have a clear Pattern of Destiny. We have noted the similarity between Sharon's establishment of a cultural identity¹⁰⁹ and Kaiser's sixth criterion, which is that an Event or Action in the text may be an "organising standard by which people, places, and ideas were marked for approval, contrast, inclusion, and future and present significance."¹¹⁰ Both approaches mark an Event or Action in the text as significant in part because of its role in the subsequent inclusion or exclusion of the people or persons involved therein. We may also note the similarity of the results of this pattern to Sailhamer's compositional seams. Sailhamer's approach examines instances of Narrative, Poetic Discourse, and Epilogue — three aspects of the text which map neatly onto Sharon's Event and Encounter (Narrative), Oracle (Poetic Discourse), and Affirmation (Epilogue).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 171–172.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 205.

¹¹⁰ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 11.

Figure 1.4

Constant	Reference	Summary
<i>Eating</i>	Gen 3:1–7	Eating the forbidden fruit
<i>Encounter</i>	Gen 3:8–13	Adam, Eve, and God meet in the garden
<i>Oracle</i>	Gen 3:14–19	Destiny-shaping oracles for the serpent, ground, and humans
<i>Affirmation</i>	Gen 3:22–24	Expulsion from the garden affirms the oracles

Applying this pattern of Constants to our three passages in question (Genesis 3, 4, and 9) may prove enlightening. Sharon has already noted the Pattern of Destiny in Genesis 3; she also alludes to a similar pattern in the story of fratricide in Genesis 4, but without going into any depth.¹¹¹ She identifies the drinking Action in Genesis 9 as having most of the major elements, but with the Affirmation notably absent.¹¹² She concludes that enough of the elements of a Pattern of Destiny are present in this episode that it may be included, or at least be a strong allusion to prior patterns.¹¹³

Figure 1.5

Constant	Reference	Summary
<i>Eating</i>	Gen 9:21	Noah drinks the wine
<i>Encounter</i>	Gen 9:24–25a	Noah encounters and confronts his sons about the incident
<i>Oracle</i>	Gen 9:25–26	Noah delivers an oracle of curse and blessing
<i>Affirmation</i>	Absent	Absent in Genesis 9

¹¹¹ Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 167 footnote 18.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 178.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 177.

That leaves Genesis 4 to be considered with more depth. If we are to consider the ground receiving the blood of Abel into its mouth as an eating or drinking Action, then we must look for an Encounter and an Oracle, if not also an Affirmation, to follow. We readily find all these Constants, including an Affirmation from Cain’s own lips (4:14), though the Constants are not in the expected order. The Eating Constant is, perhaps significantly, only implied within the dialogue of the Oracle in 4:11. It does not occur as an Action in narration.

Figure 1.6

Constant	Reference	Summary
<i>Eating</i>	Implied in 4:11	The ground “swallows” the blood of Abel
<i>Encounter</i>	Gen 4:6	The Lord questions Cain
<i>Oracle</i>	Gen 4:11–12	Cain is cursed from the ground
<i>Affirmation</i>	Gen 4:14	Cain affirms the oracle and bemoans the punishment

1.4 Eating and Drinking Actions: Genesis 3:6 and 9:21

The fratricide episode now has two marks against its meeting our criteria: it does not meet the standards of Sharon’s methodology as a Pattern of Destiny, and it only includes a possible referential inclusion in the dialogue, without an Action within the narration, thus not qualifying by our standards as a “narrative Action.” To measure our three passages in question up to the three approaches we have examined so far (Kaiser’s, Sailhamer’s, and Sharon’s), and considering Actions occurring within narration, only the eating and drinking Actions in Genesis 3:6 and 9:21 meet all the criteria. Sharon notes that the “unexpected absence of eating and drinking”¹¹⁴ is itself worth studying; perhaps the absence of the expected pattern in Genesis 4 is itself an intentional allusion to a Pattern of Destiny, but we must first deal with the clear patterns before moving to the less clear.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 108.

We have suggested in this chapter that eating and drinking Actions are a selective choice and artful design by its author which plays a role in the narrative. A set of criteria was established for determining eating and drinking Actions, which includes a relevant dialogue-bound verb, as well as overlaps the criteria for significance from three different scholars, Kaiser, Sailhamer, and Sharon in three different fields. From applying these criteria, Genesis 3:6 and 9:21 have emerged as directly relevant to our study, while Genesis 4:11 was a contender, but failed to meet enough of our criteria (scoring “two out of four”) to consider an eating or drinking Action. We now have a set of two passages which should be examined in regard to how they affect the plot of the larger narrative.

Figure 1.7

Action	Narrative Action	Epigenetic Centre	Compositional Seams	Proppian Analysis
Gen 3:6	+	+	+	+
Gen 4:11	-	+	+	-
Gen 9:21	+	+	+	+

2. The Plot of Genesis 1–11

In Chapter One we identified Genesis 3:6 and 9:21 as the two eating and drinking Actions with narrative significance in the Primeval History. The task of this chapter is not to determine *that* these two Actions have narrative significance, but *how*. What is the role of these two Actions within the plot, and what purpose do they serve? To accomplish this task, we must determine what a plot is, broadly, and what the plot of Genesis 1–11 is, more specifically. Once an overview of the plot has been established, we will analyse how the two eating and drinking Actions serve to advance, complicate, or retard the plot, and so determine their function and significance within the narrative.

In Genesis 1:28 God gave humans three commands, nested in a blessing, by which he intended mankind to reflect his image in creation: to multiply and fill the earth (which indicates to what extent humans should reproduce), to subdue the earth, and and to have dominion over the realm of the beasts. This is God’s plan for human flourishing.

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*¹¹⁵

By the end of the Primeval History, we find each of these three commands — that is, the purpose that God intends his created people to fulfil — fulfilled, but only partially,¹¹⁶ and subversively. The kind of subversion we have in mind here is not the undermining of authority, but rather a “turn from below” (*subvertere*). The subversive fulfilment of the *telos* in this usage is the unexpected means and methods by which God’s intention for his creation is fulfilled. I suggest, therefore, that Genesis 1–11, or the “Primeval History,” is the story of God’s plan for human flourishing, and its subversive, progressive fulfilment.

¹¹⁵ Gen 1:28, ESV.

¹¹⁶ David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, vol. 94, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 55. “What all this means to say is that the initial programme [the *signal* in 1:28] of Genesis is very inefficiently executed.”

When it comes to the central thrust of Genesis 1–11 Rendtorff links creation to “covenant.”¹¹⁷ He suggests that the covenant with Noah in Genesis 9 — which flows out of the statement in Genesis 6 that the earth is corrupt (6:12) — is perhaps the central passage to understanding the message or plot of the Primeval History,¹¹⁸ since God seeing that his creation is very good (Gen 1:31) is contrasted with seeing that the earth is very corrupt (Gen 6:12). Rendtorff seems to be circling the idea that the plot of Genesis 1–11, perhaps of the whole Pentateuch, has “covenant” as its theme. He keeps good company with von Rad and others who arrive at this conclusion, or something very near it.¹¹⁹ Yet our conclusion here as to the plot of Genesis is not at odds with this conclusion, though it be framed differently. An emphasis on the promises to the patriarchs or covenant leads the reader to see God’s commitment to bless his people and cause them to flourish. An emphasis on the *plot signal* of Genesis 1:28 leads to the same conclusion, yet precedes clear covenantal language. The idea of promise is merely hinted at through setting the imperative “be fruitful” in the context of blessing (“God blessed them”), as this blessing seems to imply a commitment on God’s part to ensure that the imperative which follows comes to fruition. Baden comes to a similar conclusion as Rendtorff, that the “story of the promise [to the patriarchs] is not one among many in the Pentateuch. It is the sole story of the Pentateuch.”¹²⁰ Yet he excludes from this conclusion Genesis 1–11, implicitly treating it as mere *hors d’oeuvre* to the meal, rather than the first tastes of the main dish. But similarly to how we are here viewing Rendtorff’s conclusions, the *signal* of Genesis 1:28 is, in our view, entirely compatible with this conclusion, though it necessarily broadens the scope. Instead of focusing on the means, we are focusing on the effect. That is, whether it is

¹¹⁷ Rolf Rendtorff, “Covenant” as a Structuring Concept in Genesis and Exodus’, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 108:3 (Autumn 1989): 390.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 388.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Wenham, *Reading the Old Testament Ethically*, 24; Waltke, *Genesis*, 601; von Rad, who argues for “promise to the patriarchs” (which relates very closely to the covenant) as the theme of the Hexateuch, Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al., trans. John H. Marks, Revised Edition., The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1972), 13–14, 22, and Clines, who argues that the patriarchal promises “read in conjunction with Genesis 1 ... as a re-affirmation of the divine intentions for humanity.” (*The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 85).

¹²⁰ Joel S. Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 85.

promise or covenant or blessing-mandate, the results are the same: God's people will flourish in God's world through God's commitment — God's grace.

The narrative role of eating and drinking Actions within this plot context is to signal to the reader that this subversion is about to occur.¹²¹ God's plan for human flourishing, rather than being thwarted by the eating or drinking Actions in Genesis 3:6 or 9:21, will be advanced, but indirectly, by God's sovereignty and kindness, rather than directly, by human obedience. To that end, we must first examine what a plot is, and how the text indicates the expectations of the plot to the reader.

I suggest that the plot of Genesis 1–11 may be described, broadly, as the story of how it came about that humans filled, subdued, and ruled.¹²² If Genesis were a modern novel its full title might be “Genesis: The Surprising Story of Human Flourishing.” As we will see, this plot is anchored in the divine blessing given to humans in Genesis 1:28, and how it reveals God's plan for human flourishing and sets the stage for a suspense-filled drama of how that plan begins to be accomplished.

A plot can be summarised any number of ways, and contains many details, such as characterisation and setting. Most fundamentally, as Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics*, a plot has a beginning, middle, and end.¹²³ Leland Ryken has called these first and last points the *initial situation* and *final situation*,¹²⁴ which will be a useful set of terms for us to utilise in later sections.¹²⁵ A story moves from the *initial situation* to the *final situation*, and the *action* of the

¹²¹ Claus Westermann notes that “the provision of food is an element often found in stories of the creation of humanity together with the role for which human beings were created, as also in Gen 2” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 162). The *telos* of humanity being narratively tied to eating and drinking, then, should not surprise us.

¹²² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 24. Wenham attributes a similar plot-line, in relation to Genesis 1:28, to the whole of Genesis: “Genesis may be described as the story of the fulfilment of the divine promises of blessing. The earth is filled with animals and man and filled a second time following the flood. The patriarchs, despite initial infertility, have many children and in spite of many foolish acts enjoy great prosperity.”

¹²³ Aristotle, *Poetics*.

¹²⁴ Ryken, *How Bible Stories Work*, 69–70.

¹²⁵ Henceforth the terms will be italicised to set apart for technical usage.

story is the “meaningful chain of interconnected events”¹²⁶ which takes the reader from the first point to the last. It is not a simple record of all the incidents which have happened to a certain person, or during a certain period of time. Rather, incidents are selected (as noted in Chapter One in the discussion on selectivity, inclusion, and exclusion), and these selections are arranged. This becomes the plot.¹²⁷

Since the movement from the *initial* to *final situations* is somewhat linear, a plot needs some *unifying action*.¹²⁸ When a scientist wishes to purify a solution, one method is to encourage it to crystallise.¹²⁹ Among other factors, crystals need some nucleus around which to form. The solution’s molecules, which are all of the same shape, begin to take shape around the nucleus, building together in symmetry. Any impurities, which ought to have a different shape than the solution at the molecular level, have no place in the crystal’s structure, and are thus discarded by the process of crystallisation itself. Similarly, for a plot to be built up in symmetry, to go from the “pure solution” of the *initial situation* to the full plotted structure, it needs a “nucleus” around which to form. The *unifying action* is the nucleus which allows the story to come into a cohesive whole.

Considering the nature of plot requires some thought about the relationship between causality and the *unifying action*. How does one narrative scene or episode in some sense “cause” the next? How does an arrangement of narrative selections linked by causality come together as a *unifying action* in the plot? Robert Farrar Capon’s infamous meditation on an onion¹³⁰ gives us a useful illustration. If the reader of *The Supper of the Lamb* takes the author’s advice to

¹²⁶ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 93.

¹²⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*.

¹²⁸ Italicised for technical usage, and to set it apart from Actions.

¹²⁹ Gustav Freytag, *Freytag’s Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (BiblioLife, 2008), 9. Freytag likens the development of a plot to the “secret power of crystallisation.” It’s possible that Freytag, like Caiaphus, spoke even better than he knew.

¹³⁰ See chapter two of *The Supper of the Lamb*.

spend an hour “holding session” with an onion,¹³¹ then he or she would notice that an onion’s layers are not simply spheres within spheres. Instead, it is “a nested set of fingers within fingers, each thrust up from the base through the center of the one before it... their sphericity is incidental to the linear motion of flame intrusting flame.”¹³² This provides us with a beautiful example of a narrative’s plot (the whole onion), sub-plots (the layers), and its *unifying action*, in the linear, upward thrust through each layer. Each onion’s layer grows and takes its shape from the previous layer (akin to a narrative’s causality, including its chronology), and both have the same unifying, upward-reaching motion.

A plot, then, is a selection of Actions and Events arranged in order of causality,¹³³ and unified around its movement (*action*) from the *initial situation* to the *final situation*. It is the details of the *unifying action* which we will be examining later in this chapter — particularly, what role our eating and drinking Actions (Genesis 3:6, 9:21) have in moving the plot toward its *final situation*. We turn our attention now to how the *initial situation* of the Primeval History may be identified, what it is, and how it informs our reading of the *final situation*.

2.1 How Can the Initial Situation in Genesis 1–11 be Identified?

It seems good to note here that Genesis does seem to have a plot, and that its plot is one composite piece of the plot of the Pentateuch.¹³⁴ For our purposes, we are primarily concerned with the Primeval History of Genesis 1–11, and concerned with the beginning, middle, and end of that literary unit. The plot which we will identify is therefore something like a sub-plot within the larger body of literature. But as a plot has a linear movement and *unifying action*,

¹³¹ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection*, Reprint edition, Modern Library Food (Random House Inc, 2002), 11.

¹³² *Ibid*, 14.

¹³³ I consider chronology to be a subset of causality, something akin to “temporal causality.”

¹³⁴ Morales, in his excellent treatment of Leviticus *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, frequently treats individual books within the Pentateuch as a part of a narrative whole. See, for example, L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 37 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, n.d.), 106. In *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, Sailhamer insists on the unity of the Pentateuch, and on its existence as a single book (see “The Pentateuch is a single book,” page 1). This seems to be a common view among scholars who treat the text as we have it, rather than foraging into source criticism.

it is therefore contingent on its smaller parts to achieve the gestalt (where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts) of the whole piece of literature. Identifying the plot and *unifying action* of Genesis 1–11 will help us suggest a way forward for interacting with the same concepts at a broader level, from Genesis to the whole Pentateuch.

In 1990 Laurence Turner published work on the “announcements of plot” in Genesis, as did his doctoral supervisor, David Clines. Clines introduces us to that idea as an answer to the question, “How do we know there’s a plot in Genesis — and what is it?” He says that Genesis has three main ways of indicating plot: headlines,¹³⁵ punchlines,¹³⁶ and announcements. It is with the third that we are chiefly concerned. Clines writes that an announcement of plot indicates “how the story may be expected to develop.”¹³⁷ Likewise, Turner notes:

*Each of the four major narrative blocks which comprise the book (i.e. the primaeval history and the stories of Abraham, Jacob and Jacob's family) is prefaced by statements which either explicitly state what will happen, or which suggest to the reader what the major elements of the plot are likely to be.*¹³⁸

Terje Stordalen interacts with this idea (though not with Clines and Turner), but calls it a “plot signal”¹³⁹ instead of an announcement. Clines and Turner chiefly interact with divine commands, which narratively has to do with characterisation,¹⁴⁰ to determine the announcements. Stordalen turns to setting rather than character in his article on the basic plot of Gene-

¹³⁵ Clines cites 22:1 as an example: “After these things God tested Abraham” (Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, 50).

¹³⁶ One of Cline’s examples is Joseph’s revelation to his brothers in 45:8 that God, and not they, sent him to Egypt (Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, 50).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, Reprint (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 13.

¹³⁹ Terje Stordalen, ‘Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, 53 (1 February 1992): 18.

¹⁴⁰ Commands have to do with characterisation inasmuch as what a person desires, as expressed in a command, reveals something about the person themselves. We are led to understand God’s role in the narrative as, for instance, the one who desires human flourishing, and not, for instance, to be served and fed by humans (as some ANE creation myths).

sis 2–3.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, whether characterisation or setting is the chief means of the announcement or signal, it is helpful to see that the text indicates to its reader something of its plot’s direction. While Turner and Clines’ usage of “announcement” is consistent with their intention, the term could possibly be misconstrued. An announcement may imply a definitive statement of what is to come — or that it is *the* definitive statement. However, as Turner himself explores widely in his book, there may be many such announcements of plot throughout the whole of Genesis, as various scenes and episodes develop sub-plots. Additionally, Clines uses announcements in tandem with headlines and punchlines, as discussed earlier; all three of those fit in the category of “clues about plot or meaning.”¹⁴² I prefer Stordalen’s term, “plot signal.”¹⁴³ *Plot signals* capture the essence of the plot-related aspects of all three, headlines, punchlines, and announcements, and thus may be both more useful and more flexible as we proceed through the narrative.

Jane Austen’s opening lines to *Pride and Prejudice* illustrates this idea nicely:

*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.*¹⁴⁴

Not all books’ opening lines are a *plot signal*, of course. Yet in Austen’s masterpiece the reader is immediately given a hint of what is to come: surely this is a story involving a wealthy man who will either get, or get denied, a wife. The opening line, functioning as a *plot signal*, leaves no room for a plot to develop from there which has primarily to do with fish or mountains or revenge. It must be wealth and romance.

Clines and Turner direct our attention to Genesis 1:28, which functions much the same as Austen’s example above.

¹⁴¹ Stordalen, “Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered,” 10.

¹⁴² Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help?*, 50.

¹⁴³ From here it will be italicised as *plot signal* to set it aside for its technical usage.

¹⁴⁴ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (C. Scribner’s sons, 1918), 1.

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*¹⁴⁵

From this *plot signal* we can now expect a story of humanity either multiplying, filling, subduing, and ruling — or not. But whatever the actions of the humans from this point on, they are either in fulfilment or abrogation of this *signal*. The divine mandate given to them in the form of both blessing and imperative cannot now be ignored in the narrative. This first command discourse from God to humans must function as a *plot signal*, for it leaves no room for a plot to develop which primarily has to do with fish or mountains or revenge. It must be multiplying, filling, subduing, and ruling.¹⁴⁶

Any discourse of God in the narrative similarly affects the plot, whether it is blessing or oracle or command. But this first one in Genesis 1:28 stands out in several ways, aside from being the first divine discourse to humans. First, the command in 1:28 is universal in its scope. Though it must have been addressed to Adam and Eve, it is implicit in the command that the work of multiplying, filling, subduing, and ruling must be carried out by the first couple and their progeny. If Adam and Eve alone multiply, then they cannot fill. Subduing the earth, exercising dominion over creatures — these are worldwide tasks for all of humanity to accom-

¹⁴⁵ Gen 1:28, ESV.

¹⁴⁶ David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, vol. 94, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 52. “[...]if those are the three things that God tells humans to do on the first page of Genesis, the rest of the pages ought to be telling us how the humans carried out the commands, or—at the very least—how they failed to carry out the commands.”

plish.¹⁴⁷ Second, the command in 1:28 is introduced as a blessing. It is not just a task to do; it comes with a divine commitment¹⁴⁸ as well. As Wenham writes,

*The word of blessing, whether pronounced by God or man, guarantees and effects the hoped-for success. So here the words of command “be fruitful and multiply” carry with them the divine promise that they can be carried out.*¹⁴⁹

The implications of this are at least that if humans fail to fulfil the commands, the story is still not over.

The *plot signal* is not equal to the *initial situation*, but it lays the groundwork for us to understand the characters and settings in their plotted context. After the *signal*, we cannot do otherwise but to view mankind in light of their blessing-mandate to fill, subdue, and rule. The *initial situation*, then, is the understanding of their initial circumstances in relation to 1:28. God has provided humans with all they need to accomplish his plan for them. For reproductive fruitfulness, God created them male and female (1:27). He provided them with plentiful food (1:29), access to unending life (2:9, 3:22), and guidance for flourishing (2:16, 17). He provided them with an earth pliable to their cultivating efforts (a conclusion by the implications of 3:17–19), and animals in clear submission to man’s authority (2:19, with the exception of the serpent, whom presumably Adam failed to exercise dominion over).

If we are right in joining Turner and Clines in recognising the *plot signal* (announcement of plot) in Genesis 1:28, then we can summarise the *initial situation* of Genesis 1–11 in this way: *God’s provision for mankind to be fruitful, by multiplying, until the earth is filled, to*

¹⁴⁷ Westermann notes, “The blessing is effective for all living creatures...” Just as all the animals, present and future in the chronology of the narrative, were blessed in 1:22, so with all humans (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 160).

¹⁴⁸ Approaching this text from a speech-act theory perspective would force us to reckon with whether to classify the utterance of 1:28 as a Directive or a Commissive speech-act. If it is Directive, the relationship of the speaker to the resulting action would be: the speaker has a desire, and the hearer performs the action to fulfil that desire. If it is Commissive, the speaker has an intention (a stronger force than a desire), and commits him- or herself to performing the action required to fulfil the intention (Searle, “A Classification of Illocutionary Acts,” 11). Theologically, only YHWH can give an utterance that is both Directive and Commissive — we are to bring about his desire, and he will also, through our actions, bring about the intended effect.

¹⁴⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 24.

subdue the earth by cultivating and guarding it, and to have dominion over the beasts. It remains for us to explore the commands nested within the blessing, and to trace their movement throughout the “middle” of the plot, as it moves toward the *final situation*. As we do so, our understanding of the *initial situation* will develop and pick up additional nuance.

2.2 How does the Initial Situation relate to the Middle?

To understand the relationship between the *initial situation* and *middle* — that is, how the *plot signal* has significant implications for the progression of the plot and demonstrates a unifying action— we must understand the nuances and implications of the *plot signal*, starting with the nature of this blessing-mandate. How many commands are there in 1:28? While there are five imperatives, we may reasonably consider that some of those are subsets of others — thus we are treating “command” as something related to, but different from, the simple grammatical imperative.

We may divide the five imperatives into three commands, the first one having two sub-commands.

1. Be fruitful
 - 1a. *By what means?* By multiplying.
 - 2a. *To what extent?* Until the earth is filled to capacity.
2. Subdue the earth
3. Have dominion over the beasts

This division is not without precedent. Turner divides the commands into three, but without explanation.¹⁵⁰ Brodie groups them into three, showing how the first command (the threefold command of “be fruitful, multiply, fill”) is the same as the command to the fish and birds, but humans are given two additional commands, to subdue and to rule.¹⁵¹ Waltke splits this blessing into two over-arching commands: “to fill the earth and to rule creation as benevolent

¹⁵⁰ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 22.

¹⁵¹ Brodie, Thomas L., *Genesis As Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 136.

kings.”¹⁵² While I am sympathetic with Waltke’s summary and re-portrayal of the commands,¹⁵³ I do not see the link between subduing the earth and having dominion over beasts such as exists logically between being fruitful, multiplying, and filling — namely, the relationship of *means* and *extent*. Additionally, there are not two domains being interacted with in the blessing, but three: humans, earth, and beasts.

1. Be fruitful (domain: humans)
 - 1.a. *By what means?* By multiplying.
 - 2.a. *To what extent?* Until the earth is filled to capacity.
2. Subdue the earth (domain: earth)
3. Have dominion over the beasts¹⁵⁴ (domain: beasts)

The Russian playwright Anton Chekhov was famous for employing a literary technique which came to be known as “Chekhov’s gun.” In a letter Chekhov wrote,

*Remove everything that has no relevance to the story. If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off. If it's not going to be fired, it shouldn't be hanging there.*¹⁵⁵

In Genesis 1:28 the author has hung a rifle on the wall. It remains for us to see how and when that gun is fired in subsequent chapters. As the narrative progresses, we may trace these three commands as they develop, like the layers of the onion, “flame intrusting flame,” to the *final situation* (of the Primeval History) near the end of Genesis 11. The *unifying action* of this narrative must be “progressive fulfilment.” Progressive, because there is no point in the narrative where we can see the complete fulfilment of any of the three commands in 1:28, yet there is a momentum toward fulfilment in the narrative.

¹⁵² Waltke, *Genesis*, 67.

¹⁵³ I should note that there is clear semantic overlap between “subdue” (כבש) and “have dominion” (רדה). The usage of these words in the rest of Hebrew Bible tend toward a nearly-synonymous employment of authority over another party, whether for good or ill.

¹⁵⁴ It may not refer technically to dominion over the beasts themselves, but over the whole domain of animals (Bandstra, *Genesis 1–11*, 100).

¹⁵⁵ Valentine T. Bill (1987), *Chekhov: The Silent Voice of Freedom*, Philosophical Library

2.2.a The *Toledoth* of the Heavens and the Earth (Genesis 2:4–4:26)

In 2:4–4:26¹⁵⁶ The clearest advancement of the plot in relation to the *plot signal* comes in the oracles of destiny in 3:14–19. The Lord commanded fruitfulness (by multiplying and filling), subduing of the earth, and dominion over the beasts. The consequences of Adam and Eve eating from the forbidden tree affect each of these three commands.

*To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”*¹⁵⁷

Human fruitfulness and multiplication rely on two primary things: sexual intercourse between man and woman, and subsequently giving birth to children. The first is frustrated (but not completely) as a dimension of relational tension is introduced — a striving against, between the woman and the man. “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband.” When compared with 4:7 (וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ), the noun תְּשׁוּקָה clearly takes on a tone of not merely appetite-like desire, but a desire to rule or master, such as sin’s desire for Cain. Thus the relationship, which should result in intimate sexual union, will be fraught with tension.

It is to be assumed that childbirth prior to 3:6 would have had some pain involved, otherwise, the coupled line of the poetry in verse 16 could have stood alone: “in pain you shall bring forth children.” But the first line of that couplet places an emphasis on not the mere presence of pain, but the multiplication of it: “I will surely multiply (רַבֵּה) your pain in childbearing.” Just like humans were to multiply not from *nothing* but from *something* (the two humans who existed), so the pain will be multiplied not from zero pain, but from a lower amount of

¹⁵⁶ The sections are here divided according to Waltke’s divisions in his commentary on Genesis.

¹⁵⁷ Gen 3:16, ESV.

pain.¹⁵⁸ This use of רבה is the only other occurrence of this word in 2:4–4:26, and the first use following the *plot signal* in 1:28: “Be fruitful and multiply (רבה).” God’s plan for humans to be fruitful and multiply is not halted or diverted altogether, but it is complicated by Adam and Eve’s disobedience. They were to multiply by bearing children, and now in their childbearing her pain will multiply.

In 1:28 the earth is not only to be filled, but also subdued (כבש):

וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּכְבֹּשׁוּהָ

The narrator’s note in 2:5 that “there was no man to work the ground” links the mandate of Adam in 2:15 to work the ground (אֲדָמָה) to the command to subdue the earth (אָרֶץ) in 1:28. We have ample reason to see “ground” in some semantic overlap with “earth.”¹⁵⁹ Stordalen writes of a “spatial matrix” in which the ground (אֲדָמָה) is a subset of the field (שָׂדֶה), which is in turn a subset of the earth (אָרֶץ).¹⁶⁰ This link is important, and helps us see the connection between the oracle of God to Adam in 3:17–19 and the *plot signal* in 1:28.

When discussing the ironic subduing of אֲדָמָה over אָדָם, Clines writes:

What this goes to show for the plot of Genesis is that God’s commands, even when accompanied by a blessing, do not easily shape themselves into reality, especially because one can never be sure that God himself is not going to sabotage them.¹⁶¹

Was Clines being tongue-in-cheek? Perhaps. Nevertheless, I must insist on a nuance which leads to a different conclusion. In 1:22 God blessed (with a three-fold command) the sea and

¹⁵⁸ The semantic domain of רבה is made clear in numerous passages in the Pentateuch (and slightly less clear in others, such as Exodus 7:3). For example, in Exodus 30:15 we see the positive assertion alongside its negative counterpart מעט and the middle ground between them.

הַעֲשִׂיר לֹא־יִרְבֶּה וְהַדֶּלֶל לֹא יִמְעֹט מִמַּחְצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל

The half shekel is “something” which one can “multiply” or “diminish.”

¹⁵⁹ Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, Reprint (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 35.

¹⁶⁰ Stordalen, “Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered,” 12.

¹⁶¹ Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help?*, 53.

sky creatures to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth; the narrative leaves no room for us to wonder whether or not they complied with his wishes.¹⁶² They surely did. But the very first tension introduced in the plot of Genesis comes from the fact that, whereas the sea and sky creatures simply comply, man has, narratively-speaking, to say the least, the faculty to comply or to disregard the commands. Whatever complications are introduced to the plot, it is not due to divine “sabotage,” but to human disobedience. Whatever Eve and Adam suffer in terms of consequences, they have brought it on themselves.

Eve suffers in relation to her husband and to childbearing; Adam suffers in relation to the ground. There is something derivative¹⁶³ about all this: Eve was taken *from* Adam, and a new tension is introduced between the two. Adam was taken *from* the ground, and a new tension is introduced between them, too. Eve will try in futility to “subdue” אָדָם, and אָדָם will try with frustration to subdue אֲדָמָה.

*...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*¹⁶⁴

Adam was meant to subdue the earth, primarily by “working the ground” (2:15). He will still labour to subdue it, but now his efforts at taming the soil will be toil. Rather than being a gardener nurturing fruitful crops, he is a soil-toiler, who will have to wrestle with thorns and thistles in his food-producing efforts. And finally, the ultimate reversal (or so it seems) of the humans’ charge to subdue the earth is when the ground subdues them in death: “...till you return to the ground.”

¹⁶² Westermann argues that the blessing carries power of fulfilment in itself, and thus God was bestowing on sea and sky creatures the power and potential to be fruitful, multiply, and fill (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 138).

¹⁶³ Westermann clarifies that the derivation of אָדָם from אֲדָמָה is a lexical one. The words, he argues, are not linked in reality, but by their shared root. “One can derive neither the person from earth ... nor earth from the person (= land of man); rather the same word is at the root of both, a word originally meaning skin or surface” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 206). He goes on to suggest that the lexical relationship suggests not derivation, but kinship, or complementarity: “human beings and earth belong together . . . the earth is there for humanity and human beings are there to populate it” (Ibid).

¹⁶⁴ Gen 3:17d–19, ESV.

The last aspect of the three-fold command in 1:28 is to have dominion over beasts, and this aspect is not left out of the oracles of destiny:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*¹⁶⁵

The serpent was introduced to us in 3:1 as a “beast of the field,” which (particularly in light of Stordalen’s “spatial matrix”) squarely places the serpent among the beasts included in the command in 1:28, “have dominion . . . over every living thing that moves on the earth.” But through the serpent’s craftiness, he seems to have dominion over the humans, rather than the other way around.¹⁶⁶ Enmity between the beast of the field and the woman introduces a new dynamic which competes against the intended dominion of humans.¹⁶⁷ But this enmity is not without an end. There will be a seed of the woman who will ultimately end this conflict, and truly have the intended dominion over “beasts.”¹⁶⁸

What is the nature of this dominion? The word רדה is only used seven times in the Pentateuch, and only its first two uses in Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 speak of humans in relation to beasts. All other uses of the word are used to describe human-to-human relationships.¹⁶⁹ Westermann calls this imperative anthropocentric, as it elevates mankind to the position of subjugating the beasts to serve them¹⁷⁰ (as later people and nations will do to one another). Similarly, Turner takes the view that רדה has primarily to do with the subjugation of animals to humans, but with the “severe limitation” that humans not kill animals for food.¹⁷¹ I believe

¹⁶⁵ 3:15.

¹⁶⁶ Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help?*, 54.

¹⁶⁷ Westermann notes that this word bears the connotation of “never-ending or perpetual enmity from long ago” (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 259).

¹⁶⁸ Disciples of Jesus are to rejoice not that snakes and scorpions are subject to them, but that the Seed has crushed the head of the serpent and conquered sin and death!

¹⁶⁹ Lev 25:43, 46, 53; 26:17, Num 24:19.

¹⁷⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 161.

¹⁷¹ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 42.

this perspective is too limited to the semantics, and perhaps unnecessarily disconnected from the narrative context.

Perhaps some clarity will come from examining 1:30 alongside 2:5–7. After declaring what the humans will have for food (1:29) God likewise gives food to the beasts:

“And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant (בְּלִיֶּרֶק עֵשֶׂב) for food.” And it was so.¹⁷²

The beasts of the earth are to have every green plant for their food — but when we encounter the “when not yet” formula¹⁷³ in 2:5ff, we find that no small עֵשֶׂב had yet grown in the fields, and therefore the beasts would have had little-to-no food. The reasons for the lack of vegetation are explicitly stated:

“for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground” (2:5)

Lack of rain and lack of a ground-tiller are the two deficits which must be overcome for vegetation, and therefore beasts, to flourish. What follows from 2:5 is an account of the creation of man with a mandate to work the ground¹⁷⁴ (2:7, 8) and a somewhat lengthy excursus on the plentiful sources of water which flowed out of Eden (2:10–14). The two deficits of irrigation and tillers begin to be narratively resolved. Consequently, human efforts to work and till the ground have a direct relation to the wellbeing of the beasts, inasmuch as the tilled (and irrigated) ground produces food (עֵשֶׂב) for the beasts to eat.

Steffen Jenkins, building from the foundations Katie Heffelfinger laid in her article on food in the Joseph narrative, comes to this conclusion:

¹⁷² Gen 1:30, ESV.

¹⁷³ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 43.

¹⁷⁴ Stordalen, “Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered,” 11.

Humanity is thus a steward of the ground for the sake of the living things. This is what it means to rule over them (1:26–28): to farm them, by feeding them so that they are fruitful and so that they fill the earth. Food clarifies an aspect of the imago Dei here: God uses dominion to provide for others, and so must humankind.¹⁷⁵

Far from taking an anthropocentric approach to 1:28, Jenkins sees humanity's dominion as what we might call "servant leadership," rather than subjugation. His logic is grounded in exegesis, but also in conceptual connections: God relates to creation a specific way, and he instructs his image-bearers to relate to creation in a similar way. God fills the earth with life, and humans are to do likewise. God subdued the earth to bring order, and humans are to continue that work. And most relevantly, God exercised his dominion over all creatures by providing them with food; humans are to go and do likewise.¹⁷⁶

By the end of Genesis 3 it becomes clear: God's purpose for human flourishing will not cease altogether, but human disobedience has introduced all sorts of complications¹⁷⁷ to the fulfillment of that purpose. Genesis 4 begins by introducing us to the fruitfulness (Cain and Abel) of Adam and Eve, proof that human fruitfulness has not been halted completely. Cain is a "worker of the ground" (Genesis 4:2), an earth-subduer.¹⁷⁸ Abel is a "keeper of sheep," having dominion over beasts (albeit a rather domesticated kind of beast). God's purposes for humanity continue.

¹⁷⁵ Steffen Jenkins, "Served to Serve: Why Food Is Central to the Anthropology of Creation in Genesis 1–3 and to the Plot of Genesis," *Ecclesia Reformanda* 3 (2011): 15.

¹⁷⁶ Turner begins to follow a similar train of thought by noting that both God and humans are in the business of "naming," and he connects that to the idea of having dominion (Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 43). But he does not follow that thought through to what I believe is its logical conclusion: that God also in that immediate context provides food to his creatures, and so must we.

¹⁷⁷ "...the two crime-and-punishment panels [Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel] show humans as increasingly alienated from the ground (3:17–19; 4:11–12). And relationships between the humans, instead of moving toward joyful union (2: 21–24), move from intimacy toward alienation (Gen. 2–3; Hauser, 1982), even toward domination and murder (3:16; 4:8)." Brodie, *Genesis As Dialogue*, 143.

¹⁷⁸ "...Adam's son Cain pursues his father's vocation, and attempts to play his part in obeying the command." He also notes that U. Cassuto sees the connection with Abel and sheep, but not with Cain and the earth. Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, Reprint (Wipf & Stock, 2008), 37.

The theme of human fruitfulness continues throughout the end of this *toledoth*, as generations multiply through the lines of Cain and Seth (Abel’s “replacement”). The earth continues to be subdued, particularly through the line of Cain, who are the city-builders, the tent-dwelling-beast-keepers, and artisans who not only use the earth’s resources for the development of musical instruments, but who also heat and bend the earth’s metals into the implements of war (Genesis 4:20–22). This “progress” in subduing the earth is tainted with blood. When Cain kills Abel and the ground swallows up his blood, God’s words in 3:19 begin to be fulfilled. The ground has subdued Abel in death. And Cain’s line continues to be marked by such violence (4:23–24). This is in sharp relief to Adam’s mandate (2:15) to be a cultivator of the ground. It seems that the ordered, fertile nature of the garden in Eden was not to be an isolated phenomenon; it would be man’s task to spread that realm of cultivation outward as they filled the earth.

If our *plot signal* did not emphasise human multiplication, then a genealogical section may be considered insignificant. However, the *plot signal* raises human multiplication to a high level of importance. Therefore, when we have extensive sections of the narrative devoted to tracing descendants, the fruit of multiplication, we should note its relevance to the signaled plot. Rather than devoting a section to *toledoth* of Adam’s descendants (5:1–6:8, which lacks overt textual links to 1:28), let it suffice to say that the mere presence of descendants, of continuing human multiplication, flows out of the theme of human fruitfulness introduced in the *plot signal*.¹⁷⁹

The literary unit of Genesis 2:5–3:24 introduces a series of *plot signals* nested within each other which seem to work together in service to the initial situation’s *plot signal* in 1:28. The narrative strategy of 2:5–3:24 has two overarching techniques, and one main goal. The first narrative technique is simplicity. There is simplicity in the voice of the narrator. Rather than displaying a sort of omniscience, the narrator plays the role more of an observer. The mo-

¹⁷⁹ The language of “likeness” in 5:1, 3 links this section thematically to the establishment of man as the image of God in 1:27, and the subsequent Announcement of how man is to image God in 1:28 (Waltke, *Genesis*, 113). The emphasis of this genealogy is on establishing links with the characters to whom we have been introduced before (Adam, Seth, etc.) and, I suggest, to demonstrate the continued fruitfulness of humanity.

ments of omniscience are limited mainly to speech and actions. This invites the reader into the story to come to their own conclusions on motivations and attitudes of the various characters.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, characterization is limited to speech and actions rather than description, and setting is relegated to bare fact.¹⁸¹ The technique of simplicity extends also to the chronology. The timeline of events in this unit is relatively uncomplicated, moving from the formation of man (2:7) to the planting of the garden and the placement of the man in the garden (2:8, 15) to the building of the woman (2:21ff) to the entrance of the serpent (3:1), the eating Action (3:6), the oracles of destiny (3:14ff), to expulsion of man and woman from the garden (3:22ff). No complications are introduced to the timeline, while no description of the timeline is given either. Between the formation of the man and the woman could be an hour or a century. In nearly every aspect of the narrative, simplicity reigns.

The narrative in 2:5–3:24 may be simple, but it is not simplistic. Three *plot signals*¹⁸² are introduced which work on several layers of the narrative to complicate the plot and add colour to the characters. Working from Stordalen’s concept of “deficiency,”¹⁸³ we can identify the following *plot signals*, all of which the reader can expect to be advanced or resolved within the literary unit:

1. The need for a human tiller of the earth (2:5)
2. The need for obedience to God (2:16–17)
3. The need for a helper for the human (2:18)

¹⁸⁰ The three exceptions to this kind of narrative omniscience are two instances of God’s internal dialogue, in 2:18 and 3:22, and an awareness of the woman’s internal judgments and desires in 3:6.

¹⁸¹ Compare, for instance, with the colourful and numerous descriptions of the mountain of God and its inhabitant in Ezekiel 28.

¹⁸² See Stordalen’s related comments on “plot segments,” *Echoes of Eden*, 221.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

These three *plot signals* are explored through seven scenes,¹⁸⁴ with the eating Action of 3:6 in the center. It is noteworthy that, when the scenes are viewed from this perspective, God is the primary agent in every scene but the centre, where the spotlight is on the action of the woman and the man:

1. God creates the human (2:5–7)
2. God plants the garden and puts the human in it (2:8–17)
3. God creates animals and the woman (2:18–24)
4. The man and woman eat from the forbidden tree (2:25–3:7)
5. God “conducts a hearing”¹⁸⁵ (3:8–13)
6. God announces oracles of destiny (3:14—19)
7. God expels the man and woman from the garden (3:22–24)

These *plot signals* and scenes relate in the narrative strategy to the initial situation’s *plot signal*. The blessing-mandate was for man to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and to accomplish this he would need a woman (“the need for a helper,” 2:18). Man was to subdue the earth, and to accomplish this he would need to become a tiller (“the need for a human tiller of the earth,” 2:5). The progress on this aspect of the blessing-mandate comes through irony. Adam’s role as tiller of the earth comes not through faithful obedience but through God’s sentence on him and on the ground as a consequence of his transgression (3:17–19). The most surprising twist perhaps comes to the reader through the second *plot signal*, “the need for obedience to God” (2:16–17). The narrative in 2:5–3:24 introduces us, through the theme of testing, to the idea that humankind can only flourish and fulfil its blessing-mandate by obedience to God; working alongside the Creator, rather than against him. This idea, rein-

¹⁸⁴ I agree with Mettinger’s criteria for a scene and his and Stordalen’s arrangement/recognition of the scenes. See Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 16; Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 219–220.

¹⁸⁵ Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 220.

forced by the complication of each element of the *plot signal* in 1:28 in the oracles of destiny (3:14ff), sets the table for us to see the profound grace of God in moving toward accomplishing his purposes for human flourishing in spite of human disobedience. God's plans will not be thwarted.¹⁸⁶

When examining this narrative unit, several issues come to the service which deserve some comment, though we can far from settle the issues here. We will only address a couple of these issues here, for a wise counselor once suggested I not breed more snakes than I can kill. First, if the test of obedience regarding not eating from a tree is at the centre of this narrative (as the occurrence of the *plot signals* and the centrality of the human agency in the seven scenes suggests), then we must ask: How many trees are there in the midst of the garden? Three main solutions have been suggested by scholars: that there are two trees (the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), one tree (that the Tree of Life *is* the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), or that the narrative allows a tension between passages which consider there to be two trees, one tree, then two trees. The last option, as suggested by Makowiecki, is the most nuanced but perhaps the most intriguing.

The first option, that is, the classical view of two distinct trees, is perhaps the most simple, and needs no comment or defense. The burden of proof is on the other suggestions. The second option, that the two trees mentioned are in fact one tree, deserves some explanation. In summary, it seems that this is a grammatical possibility. In Genesis 2:9b the narrator states,

וַעֲץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע

The argument for this perspective rests on the second *waw* in 2:9b being a *waw explicativum*.¹⁸⁷ The result would be:

¹⁸⁶ Where Stordalen sees "a certain amount of divine failure or helplessness," others may see a gracious God both allowing free choice and subversively fulfilling his good intentions for them through his power. *Ibid*, 233.

¹⁸⁷ For more on this, see David W. Baker, "Further examples of the *waw explicativum*," *Vetus Testamentum*, 30, no. 2 (1980).

*“And the Tree of Life was in the midst of the garden, that is, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.”*¹⁸⁸

This would seem an unlikely reading of this text, unless the reader takes into account the apparent absence of the Tree of Life as a tree distinct from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in 3:1–21. In 3:3 the woman responds to the serpent by saying that God had banned them from eating from *the* tree in the midst of the garden — as though there were only one. So we see that this rendering is a grammatical possibility. This option is furthered by 3:22, in which the key words to this debate are. It has been demonstrated by Stordalen that לָאֵלֹהִים can mean “lest one continue to do what one has been doing,”¹⁸⁹ even though that is not its most common usage. And rarely בְּעוֹלָם may be used to mean “again,” rather than “also.”¹⁹⁰ Although these all seem to be grammatical possibilities, I find arguing from the rarest examples somewhat unconvincing. It is not impossible that the definite article is employed by the woman in 3:3 in a contextual sense, gesturing verbally toward *the* tree in question.

The third option, a resignation to the tension of two-trees-and-one-tree, is championed, albeit somewhat abstractly, by Makowiecki in “Untangling Branches.” Makowiecki identifies some difficulties with both ends of the debate, and suggests a third way: namely, that there is an intentional narrative strategy at work which holds a tension between a single and a plurality of trees. He lets the tension stand, as a literary technique. Without defending or summarising his whole article, we can say here that if Makowiecki is correct it heightens what the narrative already hints at: a nuanced relationship between life and knowledge.

Stordalen suggests that the conflict between life and knowledge — which God is not apparently willing to grant simultaneously — “was not brought to the surface previously” (before 3:22ff).¹⁹¹ He then cites the juxtaposition of knowledge and life, “Behold, the man has be-

¹⁸⁸ Mark Makowiecki, “Untangled branches: The edenic tree(s) and the multivocal waw,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 17, no. 2 (2020): 446–447.

¹⁸⁹ Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 231.

¹⁹⁰ See also von Rad’s comments on this word. *Genesis*, 97, and Makowiecki, *Untangled Branches*, 448.

¹⁹¹ Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 229.

come like one of us in knowing good and evil” (3:22a) with “Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—” (3:22b), but seems to not consider the similar and parallel juxtaposition of life and knowledge in 2:16–17. Perhaps it evaded his consideration because the word “life” does not appear in the passage. Death, however, does. Consequently, knowledge and life — or lack thereof — are still juxtaposed in this earlier scene. Nonetheless, we can agree with Stordalen that life and knowledge stand in some relationship to each other, and that God is unwilling in the narrative that humans should have unlimited access to both. They are, from the divine perspective in this narrative, mutually exclusive.

Lest we reach out our hand and take for ourselves an argument larger than the scope of this study, we should hasten to note that the narrative does not seem to lead us to the question, “What does the fruit *do*?” The emphasis is on the tree, not the fruit. This emphasis on the tree(s) is not limited to the tree apart from its fruit, but rather allows the fruit to enter into the narrative as clearly derivative of the tree. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and evil, and not some magical fruit, is the focus of the prohibition in 2:17. And likewise, trees and not fruit are the focus of the serpent’s crafty speech in 3:1b:

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

There is a concern with the thing in relation to the thing’s source. We can observe a similar concern for such a relationship between characters in the garden as well. The man (thing) is taken from the ground (the thing’s source), and the source is cursed (3:17c). The woman (thing) is taken from the man (thing’s source), and the relationship between the thing and the source is complicated (3:16b). Noting that such a conceptual relationship exists does little to untangle the knot of its meaning. Suffice to say, the narrative does not insist that we delve into what the fruit is capable of doing, but rather what humans are capable of doing. It is not the fruit and its qualities and characteristics which lies at the heart of this narrative, but hu-

man action: an eating Action¹⁹² which demonstrates a casual dismissal of a gracious God’s prohibition. Yet because the scenes shift their focus back to God’s actions, rather than the humans’ actions, we can see that God has graciously positioned the humans in spite of, and even through, their disobedience to progress toward fulfilling the blessing-mandate for human flourishing.

We have posited that Genesis 1:28 serves as a *plot signal*, and consequently we should expect that subsequent portions of the narrative relate back to 1:28, developing or complicating its themes. In this section we have examined the first major narrative unit after the *plot signal*, that is, the *toledoth* of the heavens and the earth, Genesis 2:4–4:26. We have seen the themes of fruitful multiplication, subduing the land, and ruling develop throughout this section in relation to the initial *plot signal*, such that humans have multiplied, the land has been partially subdued as humans have spread and cultivated the ground, albeit through much toil and bloodshed, and human rule over creation has been complicated.

2.2.b The *Toledoth* of Noah and His Family (Genesis 6:9–9:29)

In this larger portion of the narrative the keywords “fruitful” (פֶּרֶה), “multiply” (רָבָה), and “fill” (מָלֵא) occur with some regularity (and perhaps notably, each in groups of three).

God instructs Noah to release from the ark the beasts, “that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Genesis 8:17). This surely corresponds to God’s blessing of the beasts in 1:22. He then gives man the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” both in 9:1 and again in 9:7. This reinforces our earlier observation that the command in 1:28 must be universal in scope, and not limited to Adam and Eve alone. This began as the mandate of all humans, and remains so even after the flood. The subsequent genealogies of Noah and his family shows that this work of fruitful multiplication does indeed continue.

¹⁹² While the LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch render “they ate” in place of “he ate” at the end of 3:6, such text critical issues are beyond the scope of this study, and do not substantially change the trajectory of our thesis.

In 1:28 mankind was to fill the earth: **וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ**. In 6:11, the earth *was* filled, but with violence: **וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס** — it is this violence which incurs the judgment of the flood. Wenham sees violence as almost personified,¹⁹³ made a character which is capable of “filling the earth” in lieu of the humans and animals that God originally intended. The violent earth-fillers are so corrupt that they cease to be “Human” and become merely “Violence.” The narrative puts “righteousness” and “walking with God” (6:9) in juxtaposition to violence (6:11). God did not want humans to fill the earth indiscriminately, in any manner they so choose: God desired to fill the earth with righteous humans. But by chapter 6, he finds only violence, with Noah as the sole exception.

The subduing of the earth may be seen in Noah’s post-diluvian occupation:

Noah began to be a man of the soil [וַיַּחֲלֵ נֹחַ אִישׁ הָאֲדָמָה], and he planted a vineyard.¹⁹⁴

The juxtaposition of **אִישׁ** and **אֲדָמָה** hearkens back that same juxtaposition in 3:16, 17. Noah has a relationship with the ground like that of Adam. Yet Westermann suggests that “[v]iticulture and its produce is regarded as an advance on agriculture.” He continues,

Over and above the toil and labor of the farmer to produce the necessities of life, it yields a product that brings joy and relaxation. The rhythm of work and celebration demands that the celebration be the high point; festivity supercedes daily drudgery. The production of wine opens the way to festal drinking; there is more than the mere prolongation of life from the fruits of the field.¹⁹⁵

If viticulture is a positive development of agriculture (and who could argue with that?), then it follows that it is likewise a progressive step toward fulfilment of the mandate to subdue the earth.

¹⁹³ “‘The earth was filled with violence.’ Animals and men had been intended to fill the earth (1:22, 28); instead, “violence” (חָמָס) fills it” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 171).

¹⁹⁴ Gen 9:20, ESV.

¹⁹⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 487.

The theme of dominion over the beasts is not left untouched in this portion of the narrative, though it is without direct textual reference by use of רדה. However, just as man's relationship to the serpent (a beast of the field) changed in Genesis 3, so now his relationship to all beasts has changed. Humans may indeed continue to have dominion over the beasts, but now this relationship will be marked by fear. And as plants and fruit trees were provided to Adam and Eve for food, so now the animals are also included in God's provision for mankind.

*"The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered."*¹⁹⁶

The narrative section which begins at 9:20 is the climax of this larger literary unit. Despite its similarities with Genesis 2–3 it omits features which the reader may expect. There is no announcement of deficiency such as the three *plot signals* of Genesis 2. Rather than a need for a human tiller, we immediately encounter one. In Genesis 2 God plants a garden; in Genesis 9:20, Noah plants a vineyard. Rather than a need for obedience via a specific divine command recorded by the narrator, Ham's transgression in 9:22 is seemingly without precedent or referent. There is no preceding "Thou shalt not gaze upon the nakedness of thy father." And rather than an explicit need for human companionship we find Noah and his sons paired off with their respective wives already. Yet it is these three conspicuous omissions which may signal to the reader that these two passages, Genesis 2–3 and 9, are inextricably related. Noah is a human tiller of the earth; he has already shown obedience to God's commands; and while he and his sons have female companionship¹⁹⁷ it seems that it is the idea of companionship or sexual intimacy that Ham's transgression relates to, in some way.

¹⁹⁶ Gen 9:2, ESV.

¹⁹⁷ In his commentary on this passage von Rad states unequivocally that, while in an earlier text the sons of Noah were married, the text of 9:21 now portrays them as unmarried and living in their father's tent (von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 136). This seems to be an unnecessary leap from the idea that the sons were outside Noah's tent. A plainer reading of the narrative, where Noah's sons were and remain married and are nearby his tent for one reason or another, is preferable.

The narrative strategy of this section, then, seems to employ similar techniques of simplicity as Genesis 2:5–3:24, but an omission of *plot signals*. What then is its narrative goal? I suggest that it is in direct relation to the initial situation's *plot signal*, to advance the story of how humans will flourish under God's blessing-mandate in 1:28. The lack of indictment of Noah's drinking or drunkenness deflects the reader's attention *away* from the act of drinking itself, or its physical and psychological consequences, and *toward* God's response mediated through Noah's oracle to the transgression of Ham. Similar to the deflection of emphasis on the fruit and its inherent effects in 3:6, the drinking in 9:21 puts the spotlight squarely on human moral choice and culpability.

One may ask, Why was Ham's son Canaan cursed instead of Ham himself? And what, exactly, was Ham's transgression? And these are valid questions, and ones over which many scholars have spilled much ink. Bergsma and Hahn present four of the possible views on Ham's transgression: voyeurism, castration, paternal incest, or maternal incest.¹⁹⁸ While voyeurism is probably the most common assertion from modern commentators¹⁹⁹ it does nothing to untangle the dilemma of why Canaan was cursed instead of Ham. Other solutions to the question of the transgression may provide more satisfactory answers which fit into the narrative, such as the idea that if Ham committed maternal incest, Canaan may be the offspring of Ham and his mother, making Shem and Japheth half-brothers to Canaan (Genesis 9:25b, "a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers"). In our view, von Rad's assertion of two stories redacted together, such that "Ham" as the original transgressor became edited into "Canaan" to suit a more Palestinian concern on the text,²⁰⁰ is an unnecessary act of textual gymnastics which the narrative itself does not demand.

Suffice to say that the transgression of Ham is at least indirectly related to sexuality and, thus, reproduction, and so carries forward and complicates the theme of human fruitfulness. The

¹⁹⁸ John Sietze Bergsma and Scott Walker Hahn, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 124 no. 1 (2005), 26ff.

¹⁹⁹ See, for instance: Waltke, *Genesis*, 149; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 198; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 488.

²⁰⁰ von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 135.

fact that the son of Ham was cursed rather than Ham himself could either be a direct response to the violation (e.g. if the transgression was incest with his mother, making Canaan the half-brother of Shem and Japheth) or a further complication of the “fruitful and multiply” motif in which human disobedience makes a messy situation out of their own progeny.²⁰¹ Regardless of how one interprets the transgression and punishment, we may observe in this narrative interplay with the *plot signal* of 1:28 through a complication to fruitfulness and multiplication, and consequently filling the earth (9:19 states that it was through these three sons of Noah that the whole earth was repopulated), subduing it, and having dominion over the beasts.

2.2.c The *Toledoth* of Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their Descendants (Genesis 10:1–11:9)

In Genesis 11:1–9 where humans have indeed multiplied, and people settled in the plains of Shinar, congregating together rather than filling the earth.²⁰²

*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.*²⁰³

Though we are using the English Standard Version in our Scripture citations, it should be noted that the choice of “people” in verse 2 minimises the severity of the refusal of God’s mandate in 1:28 and 9:1 to fill the earth. Verse 1 introduces us to “the whole earth”

(כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) as the focus of this scene, where כָּל־הָאָרֶץ stands in as a metonymic term for “the people of the earth,” with כָּל־ appended to emphasise that we are dealing with *all* the people of the earth. With the contextual emphasis on *peoples*,²⁰⁴ that is, people groups rather than individuals, כָּל־הָאָרֶץ seems most likely to refer to all the people groups of the earth as one synecdotal whole. Verse 2 continues addressing that group in full. Where the ESV translators

²⁰¹ Gen 11:1, “one language,” 10:32, “the nations”

²⁰² Waltke, *Genesis*, 178.

²⁰³ Gen 11:1–2

²⁰⁴ We acknowledge that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive options. The focus of this study, however, is not on the historical events portrayed, but on the literary actions and events, and how they are portrayed. The fact that Noah drank to drunkenness without prior prohibition to do either action gestures toward the concept of eating and drinking Actions as plot devices to advance the narrative, rather than a bare historical record or thinly-veiled theological mandate or moral judgment.

chose to insert “people” there is, in Hebrew, only a Qal wayyiqtol third person masculine construct of the word for “to find” (וַיִּמְצְאוּ). It seems a clearer translation would be “they” instead of “people”:

*Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as **they** migrated from the east ...*

Understood this way, it escalates the situation; it was not merely a group of people or a small band that decided to congregate and build a tower, but it was the whole earth (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ) to which the wayyiqtol third person verb points. Nahum Sarna notes the importance of this: “The reiterated emphasis on the involvement of the totality of humankind in the offence is crucial to the understanding of the episode as the climactic event in the universal history of the Book of Genesis.”²⁰⁵ This can be further illustrated by the chiasmic structure²⁰⁶ of this passage:

A: The language of **all the earth** (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ)

B: They settled

C: They said to each other

D: “Come now, let us make bricks...”

E: The city and the tower

F: The Lord came down

E’: The city and the tower

D’: “Come now ... let us confuse ...”

C’: They could not understand each other

B’: They were dispersed

A’: The language of **all the earth** (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ)

²⁰⁵ Sarna, *Genesis*, 81.

²⁰⁶ Adapted from Waltke (*Genesis*, 178) and Kikawada (“The Shape of Genesis 11:1–9,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, 18–32).

Viewed in this structure, we find the subject of this passage echoed at the beginning and end: “all the earth.” And B and B’, the settling and dispersing, refer to “all the earth.” Therefore, just as all humanity is made in the image of God, as is abundantly clear in 9:1, so now all humanity has refused to image God and take advantage of God’s blessing to accomplish that aim. The rule laid down as imperatives in 1:28 and 9:1 provides the means of accomplishing the aim, which is most clearly revealed in the judgment of dispersion of humanity in 11:8.

- **The Command:** Fill the earth
- **The Disobedience:** Congregating rather than filling
- **The Subversive Fulfilment:** Dispersion of humanity to fill the earth

Turner states in his conclusion to *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* that “the Announcements²⁰⁷ are misleading indicators of how the plot in Genesis will develop.”²⁰⁸ Ronald Hendel critiques him on this point:

*This admission brings the whole study into question: If these passages do not really ‘announce the plot,’ then what is their purpose in the text, and what is the purpose of this study?*²⁰⁹

Perhaps Turner’s words were slightly self-indicting. However, I think I see his point: the *signal* in 1:28 does not indicate how the plot will develop, inasmuch as the ends are achieved by surprising means. Turner has in mind the subversive *action* of the “tense middle,” and not the *final situation*.

We return to the idea that the commands to multiply and fill the earth are wrapped in a blessing, carrying with it both divine expectation and divine commitment. And so we find in Genesis 11 what we may expect: judgment for a failure to meet the expectation, and grace as God fulfils his commitment to fill the earth with or without human compliance.

²⁰⁷ Including Genesis 1:28

²⁰⁸ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 181.

²⁰⁹ Ronald S. Hendel, “Review of Announcements of Plot in Genesis by Turner, Laurence A.,” *Critical Review of Books in Religion* (1992): 171.

The remaining *toledoth*, of Shem's descendants in 11:10–26, is entirely comprised of a genealogy. It is a short but profound note on which to end the Primeval History. It bears many similarities to *toledoth* of Adam in Genesis 5, but with one notable exception. In Genesis 5, there is a constant refrain: "...and he died." In 11:10–26, the record of their deaths is omitted.²¹⁰ The ending note sounded is of life and fruitfulness, which ends the Primeval History with the sound of hope, rather than despair. "God's program to save humanity cannot be stopped."²¹¹

2.3 What is the Final Situation?

In the *final situation*, we find that humans have multiplied, the earth is partially filled and partially subdued, and humans exercise some dominion over the beasts. Yet all of this has come about in subversive ways, through and in spite of human disobedience and evil. This is notably complementary to Clines' statement on the theme of the Pentateuch:

*The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity.*²¹²

The complementarity between my assessment of the *final situation* of Genesis 1–11 and Clines' statement on the theme of the Pentateuch is not in-and-of-itself a confirmation of my findings; however, as my methodology is similar to that of Clines, treating the whole Pentateuch as a received body of literature which belongs together, it is encouraging to see such similar conclusions.

When my family goes out for an evening walk, my youngest daughter stoops every few minutes to pick up a small stone which she finds lovely, and she puts it in her coat pocket. By the

²¹⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 187.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 185.

²¹² Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 30.

end of each evening walk, her pockets are full of her accumulated treasure. Similarly, the *plot signal* of 1:28 accumulates nuance and meaning as the narrative progresses. By the end of Genesis 11, our pockets are full of treasure. We understood the commands simply, at the beginning: to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to have dominion in the realm of the beasts. Each of those commands now takes on more nuance.

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth: God's intention for humanity was to reproduce and spread out over the earth, filling it with righteous offspring. To our earlier analysis of these three imperatives, taken here as one command, we can add further detail:

1. Be fruitful
 - 1.a. *By what means?* By multiplying.
 - 2.a. *To what extent?* Until the earth is filled to capacity.
 - 2.a.i. *Filled with what kind of people?* The text has yet to specify, though later, Genesis 6:9 and 6:11 will suggest that righteous, peaceful people are the goal.

...and subdue it: God's intention, as righteous humanity fills the earth, is for them to cultivate the less-ordered land into an ordered, habitable land which yields its produce to the benefit of mankind and beast.²¹³

2. Subdue the earth
 - 2.a. *By what means?* The work of cultivation and guarding.²¹⁴
 - 2.b. *To what end?* For the production of food to benefit mankind and beasts.

...and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth: God's intention was for this righteous,

²¹³ The command to subdue the earth (1:28) and the description of Adam's mandate in the garden (2:15) both stand in close relation to God's provision of food for his creatures (1:29, 2:16).

²¹⁴ Gen 2:15, "to work and keep it."

multiplying, ground-cultivating humanity to exercise rule in the domain of the beasts so that mankind might flourish, presumably without being overrun or subdued by wild beasts.²¹⁵

1. Be fruitful
 - 1.a. *By what means?* By multiplying.
 - 2.a. *To what extent?* Until the earth is filled to capacity.
 - 2.a.i. *Filled with what kind of people?* With righteous, peaceful people.²¹⁶
2. Subdue the earth
 - 2.a. *By what means?* The work of cultivation and guarding.²¹⁷
 - 2.b. *To what end?* For the production of food to benefit mankind.
3. Have dominion over the beasts
 - 3.a. *To what end?* To the flourishing of mankind and beasts in plenty and safety.

Regarding subduing the earth and having dominion in the domain of the beasts, Turner writes in his conclusion to *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, he says that the “two remaining elements do not fare so well. The command to 'subdue' the earth is effectively eliminated altogether... The absence of this element from the post-Deluge edict (8.21-9.7) suggests that Yahweh has eliminated it as a requirement.”²¹⁸ His reasoning is that the earth has proved impossible to subdue, the relationship to animals has been complicated, and those two commands seem to have faded from view entirely.²¹⁹ By his own reasoning, however, the Announcement (or *plot signal*) in 1:28 could not stand on its own feet as such if such a large portion of it is abrogated in the ensuing narrative. It would be like Jane Austen signalling wealth and romance, and then ignoring wealth altogether in the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. Perhaps he has set his scope too narrowly and limited the semantic domain of *plot signal*, and is perhaps missing the forest for the trees. While subduing the earth and dominion over beasts

²¹⁵ Westermann notes the anthropocentric view of this verse, as it elevates mankind to the position of subjugating the beasts to serve them (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 161).

²¹⁶ Gen 6:9, 11

²¹⁷ 2:15, “to work and keep it.”

²¹⁸ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 175.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

has been complicated, it seems clear that they are still valid and thematic elements of the plot, throughout the whole of Genesis.

This fuller understanding of 1:28, which I hope is clearly derived from chapters 2–11, can help us see more clearly what the Initial Situation is (and thus the Final Situation, as well): God’s provision²²⁰ for mankind to be fruitful, by multiplying, until the earth is filled to capacity with righteous, peaceful people, and to subdue the earth by cultivating and guarding it for the production of food to benefit mankind and beast, and to have dominion over the beasts so that mankind and beast may flourish in safety. In the *plot signal*, God gave a Blessing-mandate to man, which implies that it ought to be, and will be, fulfilled. The question then becomes: is it fulfilled in the narrative? We have suggested that eating and drinking Actions mark pivotal moments in the plot which carry it forward, and develop these Blessing-mandate categories or themes in significant ways by fulfilling, or rather *partially* fulfilling, these categories, thus functioning as narratively significant Actions. By the end of Genesis 11 we now sum up the *final situation* as “partial fulfilment.”

Figure 2.1

<i>Command 1</i>	Have humans been fruitful, multiplied, and filled the earth?	Yes
	...with righteous, peaceful people?	No
<i>Command 2</i>	Have humans subdued the earth?	Yes
	...by cultivating and guarding it for the production of food?	No
<i>Command 3</i>	Have humans exercised dominion over the beasts?	Yes

²²⁰ For reproductive fruitfulness, God created them male and female (1:27). He provided them with plentiful food (1:29), access to unending life (2:9, 3:22), and guidance for flourishing (2:16, 17). He provided them with an earth pliable to their cultivating efforts (a conclusion by the implications of 3:17–19), and animals in clear submission to man’s authority (2:19, with the exception of the serpent, whom presumably Adam failed to have dominion over).

...so that mankind and beast may flourish in safety? No

3. The Role of Eating and Drinking Actions in the Plot

In the initial situation mankind is provided all they need to accomplish God's intentions for them, in God's way. There are many variables in the ensuing story which factor into why and how humans failed at this task and how God's purposes begin to be accomplished nonetheless. Our task here is to reflect on how the eating and drinking Actions play a role in the action of the story. As we have found, subversion is the means or method of moving toward the final situation, which is partial fulfilment of God's intention for mankind as stated in the *plot signal* of 1:28.

3.1 Are Eating and Drinking Actions a Leitmotif in Genesis?

Eating or drinking Actions seems to function as a *leitmotif*, which alerts the reader of this impending subversive, progressive fulfilment. An iconic scene early in *Star Wars: Episode IV* has Luke Skywalker standing on the sands of Tatooine, gazing out at two setting suns. During that scene, before any mention or use of the Force has been made, a solo horn plays a G-minor melody which, for Star Wars fans, has become an iconic and recognisable tune. That melody line is known as the Force *leitmotif*.²²¹ John Williams composed the score for Star Wars films using Wagnerian-style *leitmotif*.²²² A certain melody is played, suggested at, or modified in association with a certain character, concept, event, or action. The Force *leitmotif* is heard in that aforementioned scene, and in subsequent scenes where Luke learns of the Force, and uses the Force. It is reprised in *Star Wars: Episode VIII* when Luke dies, gazing once again at the setting of twin suns. But it is that first instance of the Force *leitmotif* which interests me here. Before ever the Force was introduced, the melody raises a signal to the viewer.²²³ The Force is foreshadowed by its melody, and later uses of that same melody bring

²²¹ Alex Ross, "A Field Guide to the Musical Leitmotifs of 'Star Wars,'" *New Yorker*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/a-field-guide-to-the-musical-leitmotifs-of-star-wars>.

²²² James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema* (University Press of New England, 2000), 41.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 44.

to the viewer's mind earlier scenes where the concept of the Force was "invoked" without us having realised it at the time.

I am suggesting that eating and drinking Actions function as a *leitmotif* very similar to the Force melody. Eating and drinking Actions are like the melody that is played, foreshadowing the not-yet-revealed, or the not-yet-clear. After all, in Genesis 3 we do not yet know that God will cause his people to flourish in spite of themselves; at the end of Genesis this becomes clear. Yet that solo horn melody is playing even in Genesis 3, signalling the subversive fulfilment of God's plan for human flourishing. If Skywalker's *leitmotif* is titled creatively "the Force *leitmotif*," perhaps we can call our motif "Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment." A helpful shorthand, though less descriptive, will be the Subversive Meal *leitmotif*. To establish the possibility of this pattern of subversion, we must broaden our study beyond the confines of the Primeval History. Generally, two of anything is insufficient to establish the existence of a pattern. We will look now to see if there are other eating or drinking Actions in Genesis, and whether or not what follows each of them is subversive progressive fulfilment of the blessing-mandate. Another dissertation could be devoted to this task if we were to apply the same rigour as in Chapter One of this study, so I intend here to establish two criteria for quickly identifying relevant Actions in Genesis 12–50.

The first criterion is whether the eating- or drinking-related verbs occur in narration, rather than in dialogue.²²⁴ The second criterion is to compare potential Actions with Sailhamer's compositional seams. These seams are employed as a compositional strategy to "stitch" together sections of the narrative,²²⁵ and therein lies their relevance; if eating and drinking Actions signal impending subversion in relation to the first *plot signal* in Genesis 1:28, then we can expect it to happen in the seams between two major narrative sections. The Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment *leitmotif* has taught us to look for the subversion in the episode that follows, as the *unifying action* of the story develops, the layers of the onion

²²⁴ See the discussion in 1.2.a "Considering Genesis 3, 4, and 9".

²²⁵ Sailhamer, "The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," 309.

thrusting upward. If, in applying these criteria to Genesis 12–50, we find a pattern of subversion around eating and drinking Actions, we will have stronger grounds for asserting the role of these Actions in the plot.

Eating and drinking verbs occur in narration seventeen times²²⁶ from Genesis 12–50. Of those occurrences, three of them squarely fit within compositional seams: one in the Jacob Cycle, and two in the Joseph Cycle.

3.1.a An Eating and Drinking Action in the Jacob Cycle: 27:1–27:45

Compositional seams are made up of Narrative, Poetry, and Epilogue, in that order. Some seams are short and follow a simple 1, 2, 3 pattern, while others alternate Narrative and Poetry sections and vary in length. Sailhamer notes the divisions of this complex compositional seam in the Jacob cycle,²²⁷ with alternating sections of Narrative and Poetry, which spans a full chapter:

- Narrative A: 27:1–26
- Poetry A: 27:27–29
- Narrative B: 27:30–38
- Poetry B: 27:39–40
- Epilogue: 27:41–45

The verbs **אכל** and **שתה** each occur once (in narration) in verse 25:

*So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.*²²⁸

²²⁶ Gen 24:22, 54 (twice), 25:28, 34, 26:30, 27:25 (twice), 30:38 (twice), 32:32 (twice), 39:6, 41:4, 20, 43:34, and 47:22.

²²⁷ Sailhamer, “The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy,” 309 footnote 15.

²²⁸ Gen 27:25, ESV.

In this Narrative section (Narrative A) Isaac eats and drinks the meal presented to him by Jacob, disguised as Esau (Gen 27:15–16). This eating and drinking Action is followed by Poetry A, which is the blessing (originally intended for Esau) delivered by Isaac to Jacob (27:27–29). The second Narrative section (Narrative B), incidentally, is comprised of the conspicuous — and narratively-important — lack of an eating or drinking Action (27:30–38). Esau prepares a meal for Isaac and presents it to him, but Isaac realises the deception, and he neither eats nor drinks. This anti-Action is followed by the second Poetry section (Poetry B), in which Esau’s subjugation to his brother is given, in poetry form, rather than the blessing Esau had hoped to receive (27:39–40). Consequently, there is only one eating and drinking Action in this seam, in verse 25.

As Jacob, by means of a deceptive meal served to his father, receives the blessing of the firstborn, he is subsequently blessed a second time by Isaac and sent out to find a wife. This second blessing is a phrasal repetition of the *plot signal* initially found in 1:28.

*God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.*²²⁹

The promise of fruitfulness to Abram, made by God in Genesis 15:1–6, is expanded and tied more explicitly to the *plot signal* in Genesis 17:1ff.²³⁰ And now Abraham’s son gives this “fresh expression of the covenant with Abraham”²³¹ to his second-born, Jacob. The relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and this new extension of it to Jacob is evident by the invocation of אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי, the name for God given in 17:1 and again here, in 28:3. Additionally, in 28:4 Isaac explicitly names the blessing of Abraham, with the name “Abraham” as a small *inclusio* around the phrase.

²²⁹ Gen 28:3, ESV.

²³⁰ The link is clearest in the use of פָּרָה in verse 6: “I will make you [Abraham] exceedingly fruitful.”

²³¹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 383.

“... *May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!*”²³²

The shape of the narrative in this episode links the blessing and covenant of Abraham with the blessing of the firstborn. The readerly expectation would perhaps be for Esau to not only receive the blessing of his father but to become the recipient of the Abrahamic covenant and blessing as well. And therein lies the subversion. Not only the subversion of our expectations for how this episode will turn out, but a subversive, progressive fulfilment of how God intends to make humanity fruitful and multiply them. His means of doing so is in spite of, and even through, the deception of Jacob. Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last time, God’s ends will be accomplished through humanity’s sin, disobedience, and deception. We have in mind still the *final situation*, in which Jacob’s family is not merely commanded to be fruitful, or promised that they will be fruitful, but they are fruitful (49:22, for instance).

3.1.b Eating and Drinking Actions in the Joseph Cycle: 37:1–48:22

This seam is a much larger portion of Narrative²³³ than the seams previously mentioned, and consequently is more complex to analyse with any brevity. Within these chapters are two relevant Actions, neither of which may fit in Sharon’s “Patterns of Destiny,” but both of which meet our criteria for being confined to the narration rather than dialogue, and falling within a compositional seam, albeit a large one. The eating Action occurs in 37:25, and the drinking Action in 43:34. Both of those fall within the Narrative section in the following seam:

- Narrative: 37:1–48:14
- Poetry: 48:15–16, 20
- Epilogue: 48:21–22

²³² Gen 28:4, ESV.

²³³ It is worth recalling that Sailhamer identifies these seams as broad compositional strategies across the whole of the Pentateuch, and consequently is looking at broader swaths of the text than is typical.

The first eating or drinking Action in this seam occurs in Genesis 37:25, the eating perpetrated by Joseph's brothers. In the familiar story, Joseph's brothers conspire against him and throw him into a pit, intending to say to their father that he was eaten by an animal (37:20). Their very next act in the narrative is to eat.

*And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. Then they sat down to eat.*²³⁴

This meal, eaten by Joseph's brothers at the side of the pit, has been called the indicator of the brothers' "callous indifference."²³⁵ Mathews says that it "reveals how impervious they were to Joseph's plight,"²³⁶ and so on.²³⁷ Such "nefarious coldness"²³⁸ may be precisely the point — or it may not be going far enough. This meal is used in the narrative to present Joseph's brothers not as merely indifferent, but as wild, beastly. They are, in a stunning metaphor, fierce animals who have devoured their brother. Consider 37:25 alongside the brothers' report to their father about Joseph's fate (37:33):

A — "...we will say a fierce animal has devoured (אכל) him!" (Gen 37:20)

B — "Then they sat down to eat (אכל-לחם)." (Gen 37:25)

A' — "A fierce animal has devoured (אכל) him!" (Gen 37:33)

In light of Genesis 4's account of the first fratricide, the reader may now anticipate that Joseph will be "devoured" by the ground similar to how Abel's blood was "swallowed" by it. Surely this attempt at fratricide will succeed. Yet their plans are foiled, both by short-term

²³⁴ Gen 37:24–25a, ESV.

²³⁵ Sarna, *Genesis*, 260.

²³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 697.

²³⁷ Heffelfinger ("From Bane to Blessing," 303) notes similar attitudes from Brodie and Von Rad.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

amelioration (selling Joseph into slavery rather than killing him), and long-term reversal of fortune (as Joseph becomes the master of Egypt and flourishes).

The power dynamic, as Heffelfinger would point out, is imbalanced; all power lies with Joseph's brothers, and Joseph is powerless and at their mercy. Sarna notes,

*There is something portentous about this meal, as there is about the merchandise of the caravaneers, for later in the narrative both reappear, and in the same language, as symbols of the reversal of fortunes between Joseph and his brothers.*²³⁹

Waltke notes, drawing heavily from Sarna, that “[t]heir next meal in Joseph’s presence will be with Joseph at the head table.”²⁴⁰ Joseph at the head of the table is the reversal of fortunes augured by the meal in 37:25. The power dynamic has shifted.²⁴¹ And it is in the rising action of that moment, specifically in Genesis 43:34, that we find the drinking Action — the second Action in this seam:

*Portions were taken to them from Joseph’s table, but Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.*²⁴²

As we may have come to expect that the second-born will receive the blessing, it seems that an intensification of that subversive plot-line should not be unexpected. In the Joseph cycle it is not the second-born, but the runt of a litter, as it were. Joseph is the recipient of his father’s favour, and thus of his brothers’ envy and malicious plans. Where they intended to snuff out

²³⁹ Sarna, *Genesis*, 260.

²⁴⁰ Waltke, *Genesis*, 503.

²⁴¹ Heffelfinger sees the *leitmotif* of liquid, whether water or wine, as one of a power dynamic — specifically, of relational restoration or separation. Thus when Joseph is in a waterless pit, there is relational separation from his brothers; when they feast together with enough wine to get drunk on, it augers relational restoration. Heffelfinger, “From Bane to Blessing,” 311.

²⁴² Gen 43:34, ESV.

their brother (and thus any opportunity he might have of fruitfulness, let alone dominion of anything), their actions resulted in precisely the opposite. The chiasm noted earlier from Genesis 37:20–33 hints at a sophisticated relationship with the *plot signal*. Mankind is to have dominion over the beasts, not to *become* the beasts. So as the brothers seek to put an end to their brother (and consequently, his progeny) they metaphorically become the very beasts over which they are meant to have dominion. From that point, and from the brothers' perspective, the chief conflict is with the land and its lack of fruitfulness, rather than with a human. There is famine, **בָּעָרְבָה**, a hunger of the land. For all mankind's toil, the land is not subdued and will not, for several years, yield its produce for the benefit of man or beast.

In the eating Action of 37:25 the brothers eat in the presence of Joseph as they betray him. In the drinking Action of 43:34 they drink in the presence of Joseph as he deceives them.

And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.²⁴³

Joseph's deception of planting his divination cup in Benjamin's sack and accusing of theft will lead to Judah standing up for his brothers as redeemer. Ultimately, this meal leads to the reconciliation of the brothers — grace from God, as Joseph signifies in Genesis 50:20 — and the emergence of a new leader among the house of Israel. As many other meals in Genesis, this meal signals to us that something is about to shift dramatically, for the better, although it is an undeserved shift. The complicated web of deception and power plays is about to unravel in a surprising way.

There is, in the immediate proximity of this episode, a tremendous amount of subversion at every level. But is there Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment? The three domains of the

²⁴³ Gen 43:33–34, ESV.

plot signal — humans, earth, and beasts — have all been interacted with, each one with subversive, partial fulfilment. In those three domains I believe we will clearly find Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment.

Be fruitful (domain: humans). As we have seen, God’s intent for human fruitfulness is not merely numeric, but also moral. And both numeric fruitfulness and righteousness is evident in this particular story. Abraham’s family has grown, as promised, into a large family of seventy people.²⁴⁴ Joseph’s shrewd actions did not just save those seventy relations, but “all the earth”²⁴⁵ was fed and sustained by his careful management, just as they gathered together at Babel and were scattered, as though Joseph’s story hints textually at an inversion of Babel. Moreover, Joseph enjoyed the nearness of the Lord, as did Noah before him, as opposed to the distance of the Lord from Babel, (“Come, let us *go down*,” Genesis 11:7). “The Lord was with Joseph.”²⁴⁶ The narrative surrounding the eating Action in 37:25 led to Joseph’s presence in Egypt, divinely and strategically positioned to provide food for the people of the earth. Without that subversion, neither the nations nor the family of Abraham could enjoy fruitfulness and multiplication.²⁴⁷

Stephen Chapman, interacting with Bruce Dahblberg from a Brevard Childs-like canonical perspective, examines food and famine across the Genesis narratives and comes to the conclusion that “Joseph fulfills the creation mandate that Adam had been given but betrayed.”²⁴⁸ While his brief article does not probe much further than this into the creation

²⁴⁴ Gen 46:27.

²⁴⁵ 39:2, 3, 21, 23.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Waltke observes, “the motifs of God’s promises to Abraham to multiply his offspring, give them the land of Canaan, and bless the earth through them (Gen. 12:1–3) and God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah to bring forth kings through them (17:6, 16) escalate significantly in this account” (Waltke, *Genesis*, 491). The motifs he is picking up on begin with the *plot signal* in 1:28 and grows like a snowball gathering girth. Fruitfulness grows from “many” to “many nations,” and indeed surges into blessing for all nations through Abraham’s family.

²⁴⁸ Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill, eds., “Food, Famine, and the Nations: A Canonical Approach,” in *Genesis and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 329.

mandate, it is nonetheless a profound insight, particularly given the contrasting situations of abundance and scarcity. Adam was told to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) in the *abundance* of the garden, but “the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7) only through the *scarcity* of famine. Chapman’s article concludes that Genesis demonstrates a rich literary relationship between food and election,²⁴⁹ yet the article seems to deal less with election and more with two main ideas: the unity of Genesis and the advancement of the patriarchal promises through Joseph.²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Chapman helps us see that the fruitfulness of God’s is related, however surprisingly and subversively, to the abundance (or lack thereof) of the land. For Adam, the land was abundant but his fruitfulness was thwarted. For Joseph, there was famine in the land and yet “Joseph is a fruitful bough” (Genesis 49:22). The aforementioned drinking Action in 43:34 is a pivotal moment in the story of Joseph and his brothers. From that moment the narrative picks up speed with a series of causal links that lead to the family of Israel moving into Egypt. And there, planted in Goshen in the midst of famine, is where they will be fruitful and multiply — like a garden in the midst of a famine.

*Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.*²⁵¹

Subdue the earth (domain: earth). The earth is a major theme within this compositional seam, with ninety-nine occurrences of אָרֶץ — nearly one-third of all instances of the word in Genesis occur in these twelve chapters. Jacob and his family live in the אָרֶץ promised to

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 333.

²⁵⁰ Chapman helpfully traces the phrase “sand of the sea” through patriarchal and Joseph narratives. Abraham was promised that his progeny would be as numerous as the sand of the sea (Genesis 22:17), Jacob later claims this promise as relevant to himself while praying for deliverance from Esau (32:12), and the narrator of Genesis uses the same phrase of Joseph, but in relation to grain, not people (41:49). Consequently the conceptual link is established and reinforced between the fruitfulness and multiplication of God’s people and the abundance of the land. (“Food, Famine, and the Nations,” 327.)

²⁵¹ Gen 47:27.

Abraham,²⁵² but in the אֶרֶץ there is famine.²⁵³ Joseph comes into a position of power in Egypt, and over all the אֶרֶץ he rules.²⁵⁴ Because of his ascension to power, Joseph subdues the אֶרֶץ so that, though famine rages in the אֶרֶץ, in the אֶרֶץ of Egypt there was bread²⁵⁵ — so much bread that all the אֶרֶץ came to Egypt to buy grain. If ever there was a subduer of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis, it was Joseph.

Have dominion over the beasts (domain: beasts). Although the plague in the land would undoubtedly affect the beasts, and although there are dreams of birds and cows, there is very little language regarding beasts, חַיָּה, in the Joseph cycle. In fact, only two instances of חַיָּה (as a reference to animals) occur in Genesis 37–50:

They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him [וְאָמַרְנוּ חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהוּ], and we will see what will become of his dreams.”²⁵⁶

And he identified it and said, “It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him [חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָּהוּ]. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.”²⁵⁷

To recall the chiasm we noted earlier, Joseph’s brothers are being portrayed as רָעָה חַיָּה.

²⁵² Gen 37:1.

²⁵³ 41:30.

²⁵⁴ 41:43, 44.

²⁵⁵ 41:54.

²⁵⁶ 37:19–20.

²⁵⁷ 37:33.

A — “...we will say a fierce animal has devoured (אכל) him!” (Gen 37:20)

B — “Then they sat down to eat (אכל-לחם).” (Gen 37:25)

A' — “A fierce animal has devoured (אכל) him!” (Gen 37:33)

Although they have dominion over him at the beginning of the episode, by the end of the story the tables of power have turned, and Joseph exercises full dominion over these “beasts.” Indeed, Jacob’s blessings of his sons is full of metaphorical animal language. Judah is a lion’s cub,²⁵⁸ Issachar is a strong donkey,²⁵⁹ Dan shall be a serpent,²⁶⁰ Naphtali is a doe,²⁶¹ and Benjamin is a ravenous wolf.²⁶² Not insignificantly, Joseph is בֶּן פִּרְתָּה, a son of fruitfulness.²⁶³ But clearly, considering the brothers of Joseph as חֵיהָ is perfectly reasonable in the story, and may even be insisted upon narratively. And while Judah’s house will ultimately rule over all his brothers,²⁶⁴ Joseph is the one with dominion over the “animals” in this story. Perhaps this is a portent of the ruling tensions between the Northern and Southern kingdoms, Israel (or “Ephraim”) and Judah, which will play such a major role in later books of the Old Testament.

It is valid to consider these post-Primeval History episodes still in light of Genesis 1:28, while acknowledging that it is likely that Clines and Turner are correct, and that there may well be many *plot signals* in Genesis. Nevertheless, it seems that 1:28 stands apart as being foundational, the first signal of what is to come. As discussed in 1.1.a, the particular phrase of “be fruitful and multiply” is strategically repeated with variation throughout the whole of Genesis. Indeed each of those two words seems to become a motif or *leitwort* in the narrative,

²⁵⁸ Gen 49:6.

²⁵⁹ 49:14.

²⁶⁰ 49:17.

²⁶¹ 49:21.

²⁶² 49:27.

²⁶³ 49:22.

²⁶⁴ 49:10.

standing on their own two feet as it were, but never to be entirely divorced from their initial union in 1:28.

The Abraham cycle contains two important variations on the *plot signal*, which are in 17:6 and 20. These passages signal a major shift of progressive fulfilment of the *plot signal*, moving from mandate to promise of divine fulfilment.

*I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.*²⁶⁵

*As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly.*²⁶⁶

The *plot signal* has carried forward, its significance not snuffed out at the end of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Likewise, the Jacob cycle contains three repetitions or allusions to 1:28. The first is an interpretive statement made by Isaac, as he names a freshly-dug well Rehoboth, citing the Lord as having made them “fruitful in the land”²⁶⁷ as his rationale. The second instance is a blessing from Isaac to Jacob:

*God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.*²⁶⁸

The third is a blessing-mandate from God to Jacob:

*And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you . . .”*²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Gen 17:6.

²⁶⁶ 17:20a.

²⁶⁷ 26:22.

²⁶⁸ 28:3.

²⁶⁹ 35:11.

The Joseph cycle is rife with such repetitions and variations as well. Ephraim is so-named because the Lord has made Joseph fruitful in the land of his affliction.²⁷⁰ Israel settles in Goshen, and it is reported in the narrative that they “were fruitful and multiplied greatly.”²⁷¹ In 48:4 Jacob recounts God’s blessing-mandate as reported in 28:3, and on the basis of that blessing he brings Ephraim and Mannaseh into the family’s inner circle, as evidence (and recipients) of his fruitfulness. And finally in 49:22 Jacob blesses Joseph, saying,

*Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring...*²⁷²

It seems evident that all four major narrative blocks in Genesis stand in relation to the *plot signal*, and are concerned with its fulfilment. And we get hints of its partial fulfilment, such as 49:22 cited above. In Genesis 1:28 God says “Be fruitful”; in 49:22 Israel says, “Joseph is fruitful.”

3.1.c Conspicuous Omission in the Abraham Cycle

Sometimes an omission of the expected can be as important as its inclusion. It may be so with this compositional seam in the Abraham cycle, as noted by Sailhamer.²⁷³

- Narrative: 14:1–18
- Poetry: 14:19–20
- Epilogue: 14:21–24

In the Narrative portion, we are introduced to a war, the kidnapping of Abram’s nephew Lot, and the subsequent rescue by Abram. After Abram’s victory, Melchizedek met Abram, and brings out bread and wine. The Poetry follows, in which Melchizedek blesses Abram and

²⁷⁰ Gen 41:52.

²⁷¹ 47:27.

²⁷² 49:22.

²⁷³ Sailhamer, “The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy,” 309 footnote 15.

God Most High. The Epilogue then recounts Abram’s tithing to Melchizedek, and his refusal to take any plunder from the king of Sodom.

At the high point in the narrative we are introduced to Melchizedek, and there is a strong implication of eating and drinking:

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out [הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם וַיַּיִן] bread and wine.
(He was priest of God Most High.)²⁷⁴*

This passage does not explicitly include eating- or drinking-related verbs. But there are two reasons why the verb **יצא** is still of some interest. First, the selective inclusion of Melchizedek “bringing out” bread and wine has the clear purpose of eating and drinking. He surely did not bring out bread and wine to merely look at it. Second, **יצא** has connections to food and drink in Genesis 1 and 2.

*The earth brought forth [וַתוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ] vegetation, plants yielding seed
according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed,
each according to its kind.²⁷⁵*

*A river flowed out of Eden [וַיִּצְא מִן־עֵדֶן] to water the garden, and there it
divided and became four rivers.²⁷⁶*

These instances, the first and third instances of **יצא** in Genesis, connect **יצא** with the very origins of food (vegetation, plants, fruiting trees) and drink (the life-giving waters from Eden). The second instance of **יצא**, in Genesis 1:24, also connects the verb to a later source of food: animals.

²⁷⁴ Gen 14:18, ESV.

²⁷⁵ 1:12.

²⁷⁶ 2:10.

... “Let the earth bring forth living creatures [תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה] according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so.²⁷⁷

As God provided the sources of food and drink for his creatures in the early chapters of Genesis, now Melchizedek (not insignificantly, a priest) provides food and drink for Abram. And so the narrative implies that eating and drinking followed the bringing forth.

Given the prevalence of the *leitwort* אכל in Genesis it is surprising that here, where eating certainly would have historically occurred, the word אכל does not occur in the narrative. It is possible that the absence of the word is itself a sort of subversion. Were אכל to be in the scene, we may have expected Abram to sin or be sinned against, such as in 3:6 or 9:21. But for the first time in Genesis food is consumed and the following character actions are righteous, and not a violation of some kind. Although Abram’s speech in 14:22–24 is not explicitly interpreted as righteous in the text, we have some hints. First, he invokes God in his decision to not take his share of the plunder.

*“I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours ...”*²⁷⁸

This invocation not only shows the preeminence of God in Abram’s decision-making process; it also links the priesthood of Melchizedek to the God of Abram. In 14:18 Melchizedek is introduced as כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֵלְיוֹן — a title which could be understood to belong to the priesthood

²⁷⁷ Gen 1:24, ESV.

²⁷⁸ 14:22b–23a.

of a Canaanite deity.²⁷⁹ However, Abram’s invocation of יהוה with the title “God Almighty” to the deity in whose priestly service was Melchizedek.²⁸⁰

Second, Abram takes nothing beyond what was necessary. He does not fill his hands with plunder, he does not make himself wealthy at another’s expense — he does not reach out his hand and *take* what he does not need. This stands in sharp contrast to Eve, who takes what she desires, regardless of the divine mandate to refrain from doing so. Twice in this episode, God is referred to as “the Possessor [קנה] of heaven and earth.”²⁸¹ At the heart of the semantic range of קנה lies the concept of ownership,²⁸² and that seems to be the sense here. God Most High owns heaven and earth — and it is to this creation-owning God that Abram has lifted his hand, that he would not receive anything from the king of Sodom. His rationale? “...lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’”²⁸³ Abram’s concern is to see that everyone may know that if he has any wealth or reward, it is from God, and not from man.

This episode lacks the explicit eating and drinking Action which we may expect. There are no dialogue-bound eating or drinking verbs. Sometimes the lack of an Action can be as profound as the presence of one. And here, indeed, it seems that omission is crucial to understanding the text. As much as this is a story about Abram’s victory in battle, receiving a blessing, and his upright actions, it is also a story about what Abram does *not* do. He does not take what does not belong (by his reckoning) to him. God’s concern, as it were, in Genesis 3:22 is that man might “reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” And consequently, man is ushered out of the garden in Eden. But Abram, after being

²⁷⁹ For an overview of this issue see Waltke, *Genesis*, 233.

²⁸⁰ Additionally, Melchizedek’s blessing of Abram and God in verses 19–20 invokes the name God Most High twice, as source of Abram’s blessing, and of his victory. The narrative itself leaves very little room to attribute Abram’s victory in battle to anyone but Yahweh.

²⁸¹ Gen 14:19, 22.

²⁸² Of its 85 uses in the Old Testament, at least 55 of those have the sense of “to buy,” such as in Gen 25:10, 33:19, 47:19, and so on.

²⁸³ Gen 14:23, ESV.

ushered into the land of promise, does not reach out and take what is not his for the taking; he lifts his hands to God, and does *not* take.

Third, the next episode in the narrative ties the episode with Melchizedek directly to the promise of God, which is given to Abram in Genesis 15. The use of אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, “After these things,” rather than the simpler *waw*, signals both that we are entering a new scene of the narrative, and this new scene flows in close connection from what has just occurred. Abram has taken for himself no plunder; but the Lord will himself provide a reward for his servant.

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”*²⁸⁴

Abram’s reward from God is linked immediately to his offspring. His wife is barren, and he is old. How could anyone but his servant become his heir? But God promises him a son (15:4), and then promises him not just one son, but a multitude of offspring:

*And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”*²⁸⁵

Abraham has proved himself to be the kind of upright human that God has been looking for; but his line seems doomed to die out — the opposite of being fruitful and multiplying. However, God subversively, progressively fulfils his intentions for human flourishing.

It would seem, following our brief examination of Genesis 12–50, that the whole of Genesis is indeed scattered with eating and drinking Actions, and that these Actions serve as a *leitmotif* which we could reasonably call Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment.

²⁸⁴ Gen 15:1, ESV.

²⁸⁵ 15:5.

Figure 3.1

		Gen 1–11	Gen 12–50	
<i>Command 1</i>	Have humans been fruitful, multiplied, and filled the earth?	Yes	Yes	
	...with righteous, peaceful people?	No	Yes/Partially	Joseph explicitly does no wrong, and the Lord is with him.
<i>Command 2</i>	Have humans subdued the earth?	Yes	Yes	
	...by cultivating and guarding it for the production of food?	No	Yes	Joseph provides food for the whole land.
<i>Command 3</i>	Have humans exercised dominion over the beasts?	Yes	Yes	
	...so that mankind and beast may flourish in safety?	No	Yes	The power dynamics have shifted; Joseph rules over his “beastly” brothers. They all flourish.

3.2 Can Meaning be Found through the Study of a Leitmotif?

In his 2011 article “Served to Serve: Why Food is Central to the Anthropology of Creation in Genesis 1–3 and to the Plot of Genesis,” Steffen Jenkin argues,

[F]ood is a major theme and literary device in Genesis because food is an integral concern of the theology of the book. The opening chapters of the book set out an anthropology which puts food at the centre of human activity, with the result that the rest of Genesis can use food as a literary device, precisely because of its significance for human culture.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Jenkins, “Served to Serve,” 9.

This argument is something akin to what Schökel would call “archetypal symbolism.”²⁸⁷ In the world as understood through Genesis, food has “some kind of natural matrix” which makes the symbolism that Jenkins sees possible. Because of the largely-food oriented expectations set in Genesis 1:28ff, with its emphasis on food provision and production, food can be utilised as a plot device or literary marker.²⁸⁸

Eating and drinking Actions are both a subset and an intensification of food. I believe this focuses its potential for deriving meaning and theological implication as well. A *leitmotif* is a literary device, and its immediate relation is to the narrative and not to meaning in the world outside the body of literature. To be connected to such a meaning, it must also have some sort of symbolism. To return to Star Wars for a moment, we noted that the first solo horn melody of the Force *leitmotif* was in G-minor. This sounds a more forlorn and contemplative note to the Western ear than the familiar opening four-bar fanfare. Its major key ascension is easily heard as hopeful, soaring, even cheery. These are some of the *leitmotifs* of Star Wars, and they could theoretically be entirely arbitrary sounds. Yet it made more sense for John Williams to compose them with a kind of musical symbolism, combining notes and tones and rhythms which *mean* something to the hearer — hope, adventure, triumph of good. The melodies are not only *leitmotifs*, they are symbols.²⁸⁹ Consequently, the *leitmotifs* in Star Wars *do* something — that is, they gesture to broader themes in the story, connecting individual scenes to plot-wide concepts and themes — and they *mean* something. Likewise, it is possible that eating and drinking Actions in Genesis do something and mean something.²⁹⁰ We have already suggested that they perform the action of gesturing to broader themes in the

²⁸⁷ Schökel, *A Manuel of Hebrew Poetics*, 111–112.

²⁸⁸ Jenkins, “Served to Serve,” 9.

²⁸⁹ “The opening measure of Williams’s score . . . resembles the title it accompanies: radiant but indefinite; world-defining and timeless.” Buhler, “Star Wars: Music and Myth,” in *Music and Cinema*, 35.

²⁹⁰ Alter writes that a *leitmotif* “has no meaning in itself without the defining context of the narrative . . .” (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 120). That kind of contextually-defined meaning is what I am referencing when I say that Actions may “mean something.” A *leitmotif*, apart from the plot which it complements, does not have any relevant sense of meaning from the reader can derive information, etc.

plot, connecting scenes to the *plot signal's* subversive development. But what do the eating and drinking Actions *mean*?

Narrative criticism is an exercise in heuristics, to some extent. The field suggests that significance and meaning can be discerned by observing and studying the structure of the narrative, its devices and conventions, its scaffoldings and pylons. There is value in this approach, of course, but there is also a danger of over-relying on it. It is my view that Scripture is neither fable nor fiction, and thus stands not apart from history and fact, but alongside it. The authors of the Old Testament were products of their own times and cultures, and spoke into their times and cultures. Therefore, their imagery, vocabulary, and cultural imagination all are shaped by variables outside of the text itself, yet bear fruit in the text. Consequently, it is appropriate to lay narratology alongside linguistics, semiotics, and other methods which seek to do justice to the language and socio-historical setting. And all of this, from a confessional, Christian standpoint, ought to serve the end of not just delighting in literary technique, but finding something *meaningful*.²⁹¹

Whereas narrative criticism helps the reader to make good sense ²⁹² of the text by how it hangs together, an internally-derived sense of significance, it is the nature of semiology to help the reader make good sense of the text by means of some kind of cipher. A symbol relates to a referent, a concept or group of ideas to which it gestures. The connection between symbol and referent can be either a culturally-agreed-upon set of ideas or information, or the information needed to get from A (symbol) to B (referent) may be contained within the symbol itself. Allow me to illustrate the former: the term “concrete jungle” is a modern symbol which refers to the more abstract idea of the chaotic and economically-brutal nature of life in urban areas. It is highly likely that all who read this will have the cognitive cipher

²⁹¹ “It [the Bible] is, if you like to put it that way, not merely a sacred book but a book so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. You can read it as literature only by a tour de force. You are cutting the wood against the grain, using the tool for a purpose it was not intended to serve. It demands incessantly to be taken on its own terms: it will not continue to give literary delight very long except to those who go to it for something quite different.” C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of The Authorised Version* (Fortress Press, 1963).

²⁹² Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 76.

required to connect the symbol to the referent. But would Joseph Aspdin, the early 19th century inventor of modern concrete, have the necessary information to make good sense of the symbol? To illustrate the latter, where the information needed to connect A to B is somehow “encoded” in the symbol itself, Stordalen cites the example of “mother,” which “evokes not only the sense of a particular female human being but also of typical qualities in relationships between mother and child.”²⁹³ Stordalen would classify the “concrete jungle” symbol as a “Particular symbol” and the second example he calls an “innate symbol.”²⁹⁴ His category for particular symbols is perhaps unhelpfully broad, and seems almost a catch-all for everything which is not an innate symbol. Alonso Schökel in *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, whom Stordalen draws on and interacts with, provides a fuller catalogue of symbols.²⁹⁵ Schökel also seems to reject the idea that any symbol may be innate, and he prefers the term “Archetypal symbol.”

*We should not consider them to be innate, but they certainly do have some kind of natural matrix which makes them possible. The heavens and the earth, light and darkness, water and fire, home and road, the dream, the mountain ... It is not the objects themselves which are symbols, but our experience of them, which begins as soon as we are born and is deposited even in subliminal form.*²⁹⁶

Schökel’s point is well taken. There is always human experience and intelligence required to make sense of anything which someone might classify as an innate symbol. But in this study we are taking the existence of the reader — the one encountering the symbol-rich world that the text points to through the text — for granted, and therefore the reader is a given in the interpretation and making-good-sense process.

²⁹³ Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 50.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁹⁵ Schökel provides four categories of symbols: archetypal, cultural, historical, and literary. For a brief discussion of each, see Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 111ff.

²⁹⁶ Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 111–112.

Food may be used as an archetypal symbol in Genesis. Its own “natural matrix” is ripe for such symbolic use. Food inherently contains nutrients in it which can sustain human (and animal) life. Indeed, “fruitful” and “seed” seemed to be used in just such a way in Genesis. “Fruitful” can stand in apposition to “multiply” in 1:28 because fruit, which contains seed, is self-propagating — in the right conditions it multiplies itself, just as humans were meant to do. Even the Hebrew word for semen (זרע) is “seed.”²⁹⁷ If food can be used in such a way, it seems that eating and drinking might as well. The very act of ingesting food and drink deeply connects humans, the eaters and drinkers, to all the rich archetypal symbolism of food and drink. If fruit, for instance, is a symbol for multiplication and the sustenance of life, it seems meaningful that the Action of eating fruit is the means of the complication of human multiplication (Genesis 3:16) and the occasion for death (2:17).

Could eating and drinking Actions function both as archetypal (or innate) and particular symbols? As an archetypal symbol we may consider eating and drinking, the acts of ingesting food or drink and assimilating its nutrients or obtaining its blessings (such as may be the case particularly with wine), as a way of taking or receiving these benefits, sustained life and blessing or enjoyment, for ourselves. As a particular symbol, perhaps in the cultural or literary categories of Schökel,²⁹⁸ eating and drinking Actions may stand in relation to not only their quasi-innate symbolism, but also more specifically to the broader themes in Genesis of life and death, obedience and disobedience (or “crime and punishment”²⁹⁹). The Actions may also relate specifically to *leitwort* such as ראה and לקח. A sophisticated combination of these elements seems likely to be the case: eating and drinking Actions function as a complex symbol, drawing on both the innate properties of food and drink, the inherent implications of ingesting them, and the contextual literary implications of choosing to do so.

²⁹⁷ See, for instance, Leviticus 15:16, as well as the clever omission of זרע in Genesis 38:9. In the latter passage, Onan knew that any offspring (זרע) he gave his brother’s widow would not be his, so he wastes his semen on the ground. The text wraps the action of Onan with the repetition of the זרע not belonging to him, but the wasting of semen is only implied, where we would expect the word זרע to occur as well.

²⁹⁸ Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 112.

²⁹⁹ Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 144.

If they do function as a symbol, what is the referent? This is different from the Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment in the same way that the Star Wars Force *leitmotif*, which signals that the Force is at work shaping Luke's destiny, is different from the details of whether the Force is good or evil, the "light side" or the "dark side." One is a function, the other is "making good sense" of a symbol: doing and meaning. If our eating and drinking Actions gesture to Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment, it seems that as they do so perhaps they also make a nuanced theological statement. Humans could have chosen to adhere to God's way as their source of life, but instead they ate themselves to death. We, as partakers in this story of God and humanity, ingested and assimilated wrong-eating and wrong-drinking into ourselves as it were, and sin became a part of our internal makeup. There was no serpent in the vineyard to tempt Ham, yet he perpetrated a violation none-the-less. This internal sinfulness means that humans cannot fulfil the blessing-mandate ourselves, for God intends for us to fill the earth with peaceful, righteous humans. We seem to be incapable of this — the several occurrences of eating and drinking Actions throughout Genesis seem to barrage the reader with reminders of this. Yet for all that, the *plot signal* was not just a mandate, but a blessing-mandate. It carried a divine commitment to his intentions for us. Despite our internal sinfulness, our dogged stubbornness to *take* what we *see*, even if it is forbidden or foolish, God is constantly using our own violation of his ways as the subversive means of bringing about his good intentions for us. This eating and drinking *leitmotif* seems to both draw the reader's attention back to the *plot signal* to remind us where the story is going and what it is all about, and also gestures toward the God of the story, who works good despite, and through, our sinful tendencies, limitations, and our violations. Perhaps Genesis is helping us form biblical connection between Meal and Grace.

4. Suggestions for Further Study in Genesis and beyond

I have undertaken in this study to lay a few stones on a previously-set foundation, not to build a tower. I hope it is clear that eating and drinking Actions are a formal literary convention in Genesis 1–11 and beyond, and that the Subversive Meal *leitmotif* is apparent from the text in light of contemporary scholarship. Yet there is more work to be done, many more stones to set in place. The field of semiotics has feasted on food already, particularly in the pages of *Semeia*, and I hope it continues to yield fruit. More work is needed in this field, particularly in relation to reader response and archetypal and literary symbolism. We will suggest here further avenues for study, such as type-scenes and intertextuality. While there is a smorgasbord of eating and drinking Actions to study in the Old Testament, not only confined to narrative but perhaps in poetry and the Prophets as well, there is also much to explore in the New Testament. Much of our Christian story from Matthew to Revelation, after all, revolves around meals: Passover, the Lord's Supper, the marriage feast of the Lamb. While sufficient work must first be done in the Old Testament, it is my hope that scholars will carry that work forward into the New Testament. The connection between Meal and Grace may yet pay further exegetical and theological dividends.

4.1 Could This *Leitmotif* be a Used in a Previously-Undefined Type-scene?

Many biblical scholars have written about various typescenes in Hebrew narrative, but few have undertaken to describe what precisely a type-scene is, how it came to be,³⁰⁰ and whether this seemingly-modern literary device was intentionally deployed in ancient works of narrative.³⁰¹ Robert Alter's contribution on these three points is rather unique, and seems to

³⁰⁰ Alter notes, in light of Homeric scholarship, that "the type-scene has been plausibly connected with the special needs of oral composition" (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 59).

³⁰¹ Robert E. Morosco states that, while form-critics would categorise a repeated and predictable sequence of events and actions as a type of form or *Gattung*, he considers it "a conscious attempt to conform to a common literary convention." Robert E. Morosco, "Matthew's Formation of a Commissioning Type-Scene out of the Story OF Jesus' Commissioning of the Twelve," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 555.

have become something of a standard in the field ³⁰² after the initial publication of *The Art of Biblical Narrative* in 1981.³⁰³

Type-scenes have their roots in repetition, a kind of “recurrent stammer in the process of transmission.”³⁰⁴ For years it seemed to have been the norm, particularly among form- and text-critical scholars, to consider this stammer as a knot to be untied by source criticism.

Tremper Longman writes,

*There is a growing tendency in biblical scholarship to accept repetitions in biblical narrative as part of the text and not to excise them as indications of conflated texts. Indeed a close reading of passages to detect variation between doublets brings additional insight to the understanding of a passage. Particular sensitivity should be directed toward the minute variations that occur between generally repetitious lines.*³⁰⁵

This largely post-1981 trend in scholarship is, in my view, on the right track. It seems to most honour the text particularly as we have received it, as a unified whole, a collection of collated, edited texts with a high degree of unity and artistry. Alter locates type-scenes among a list of literary elements that he observes in Hebrew narrative, ascending from the most granular: *Leitwort*, *Motif*, *Theme*, *Sequence of actions*, and *Type-scene*.³⁰⁶ The broadest of

³⁰² Morosco cites Alter as the father of deploying the study of type-scenes in biblical narrative, having borrowed it from scholars of Homer (Morosco, “Matthew’s Formation of a Commissioning Type-Scene out of the Story OF Jesus’ Commissioning of the Twelve,” 541). Johanna Bos relies on Alter’s formulation of type-scenes, Johanna W. H. Bos, “Out of the Shadows,” ed. J. Cheryl Exum, *Semeia* 42 (1988): 39, as does Tremper Longman, Tremper Longman III, “Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 153. Alter’s influence on our use and understanding of type-scene cannot be overstated, though I’ve only cited a few examples here out of many.

³⁰³ Though it should here be noted that it all began with Alter’s “Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention” published in *Critical Inquiry*, 1978. The content later appeared re-worked in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, where it gained wider traction.

³⁰⁴ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 58.

³⁰⁵ Tremper III Longman, “Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 154.

³⁰⁶ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 120–121.

these, the type-scene, is “an episode occurring at a portentous moment in the career of the hero that is composed of a fixed sequence of motifs.”³⁰⁷ Probably the most well-known of these type-scenes, and the most widely-regarded in scholarship, is that of betrothal at a well. The hero, or his surrogate, travels to a foreign land; he meets a girl at a well; water is drawn; news of the man is taken home, and a betrothal occurs.³⁰⁸ This type-scene is interacted with by scholars such as T. Desmond Alexander,³⁰⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln,³¹⁰ Alan Kerr,³¹¹ Richard B. Hays,³¹² and so on. Nowhere is there a definitive list of all type-scenes in the Old or New Testaments, and this must be due in part to the fact that we have only been studying type-scenes for a handful of decades, and in part to the conjectural nature of it all.

Is it possible that the *leitmotif* of eating and drinking in Genesis could be used in a type-scene? If so, it has not been recognised as such thus far, to my knowledge. Those whom I would most expect to engage with eating and drinking as a type-scene do not. Alter makes no mention of it in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, nor does MacDonald, Sharon, Heffelfinger, Longman, etc. And it should be noted that we are not here suggesting that the *leitmotif* is a type-scene, but rather could be one of the “fixed constellation[s] of pre-determined motifs”³¹³ which may be manipulated in the formation of a type-scene. Perhaps the scholarly focus on the object and symbolism of food, rather than on the Action of eating and drinking in the narrative, can explain the absence of writing on this particular “constellation.”

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 121.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 62.

³⁰⁹ T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 669.

³¹⁰ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 134.

³¹¹ Alan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, vol. 220, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 171.

³¹² Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, “The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 128.

³¹³ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60.

If the Subversive Meal *leitmotif* we have suggested in this study is used as part of a type-scene, we would expect it to have a sequence of several elements in a fixed order which recurs at key moments in the story of our various main characters. While not all of our eating and drinking Actions would fit the mould I am about to suggest — specifically the story of Noah’s drinking in Genesis 9 — that does not rule out the possibility of this suggested type-scene, nor the importance of further study to clarify the type-scene and derive from it narrative implications.

We are tentatively referring to this suggested type-scene as The Revealing Meal. The sequence may be as follows:

1. Deception
2. Seeing
3. Eating or drinking
4. Knowing

Keeping in mind the five eating and drinking Actions we have already established (Genesis 3:6, 9:21, 27:25, 37:25, and 43:34), we will briefly examine each one in light of the above sequence.

Out of the five passages above, all except 9:21 share the element of Deception. The serpent deceives Eve, Jacob deceives Isaac, Joseph’s brothers plan to deceive Jacob about their brother’s demise, and Joseph has deceptively hidden his identity from his brothers. All these elements of deception precede the eating or drinking Action in these episodes.

Following Deception, the second element is Seeing. All five of our eating and drinking Action passages include a cluster of words which share a semantic field, all with the sense of seeing, but with an eye to seeing in order to make a judgment, or seeing to understand. These words, including עַיִן (“eye,” in 3:7, 37:25, and twice in 45:5), יָדַע (“to know,” 3:7, 9:24, 45:1), and רָאָה (“to see,” 9:22, 23, in which someone did not see, 27:27, 37:25, 29, 44:23, 26, 28, 31, 34, 45:12, 13, 27, and 28), show a recurring emphasis on the theme of sight and

understanding. There is a notable intensification as these words are increasingly repeated in later narratives. Irony comes into play when we note that Seeing usually follows Deception. Eve was deceived, but seeing, she made a judgment about the goodness of the tree and its fruit.³¹⁴ Isaac's story is slightly different, perhaps one of the meaningful "manipulations" Alter had in mind,³¹⁵ as the Seeing (or lack of sight, due to Isaac's dimmed eyes³¹⁶) precedes the Deception. His dim eyes are, in fact, the conditions which allow the Deception to take place.³¹⁷ In the Joseph cycle, Joseph's brothers *see* that he has their father's particular favour.³¹⁸ Later, just before they throw Joseph into a pit, they *see* Joseph approaching, and they say to one another, "we will see what will become of his dreams."³¹⁹ After Joseph has surprisingly risen to power in Egypt, and before he has revealed himself to his brothers, it is reported twice by his brothers that he said, "You shall not see my face, unless your brother [Benjamin] is with you."³²⁰ When all the brothers, including Benjamin, return, it is also twice-reported that Joseph sees Benjamin with them.³²¹ After all these Deception and Seeing elements, they eat or drink, or both.

Finally, in what seems to be the end of the sequence in the type-scene, there is the element of Knowing. As we have mentioned, the semantic field of seeing includes the idea of knowing and understanding. After the Deception, after the initial Seeing, and after the eating or drinking, all these stories (even Genesis 9:21ff) include this element. Eve and Adam know

³¹⁴ Gen 3:7.

³¹⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60.

³¹⁶ Gen 27:1.

³¹⁷ "Who are you, my son?" Gen 27:18.

³¹⁸ 37:4.

³¹⁹ 37:20.

³²⁰ 43:3 and 43:5, ESV.

³²¹ 43:16, 29.

they are naked.³²² Noah knows what Ham did to him.³²³ Isaac becomes aware of Jacob's deception and trembles with rage.³²⁴ After Joseph's brothers return with a false report of Joseph's demise, Jacob, significantly, does not know the truth.³²⁵ And in the final and magnificent reversal, Joseph, now in power over all of Egypt, and over his brothers, makes himself known to his brothers.³²⁶

With some variation or manipulation, it does seem that around several eating and drinking Actions there is a fixed sequence of Actions or Events, with a meal at the centre. And this sequence does occur at a "portentous moment" in our main characters' stories: the "fall" in the garden of Eden, the passing of the firstborn's blessing to Jacob, the rise of Joseph into power to save the world from famine, and the eventual movement of all the house of Israel to the land of Egypt, where they would eventually go into slavery.

As compelling as we may find the suggestion of a previously-unidentified type-scene, more study is needed. If it is a legitimate type-scene, we should expect it to play out not only in Genesis, but also throughout the Pentateuch. And if the "betrothal at the well" type-scene is any indicator, such a type-scene may be evident throughout both the Old and New Testaments.³²⁷ As an example, in the Gospel according to Luke, the disciples on the road to Emmaus do not recognise Jesus³²⁸ until after they eat bread, at which point their eyes are opened.³²⁹ One may also wish to study Genesis 9:21ff more closely as well in light of the

³²² Gen 3:7, following the opening of their eyes.

³²³ Gen 9:24, following Noah waking from his sleep, which obviously includes literally opening one's eyes.

³²⁴ Gen 27:33.

³²⁵ Gen 37:33.

³²⁶ Gen 45:1.

³²⁷ For instance, Lincoln (*The Gospel according to Saint John*, 134), Kerr (*The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 171), and Hays ("The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers," 128) suggest the betrothal type-scene is employed in John 4, with the woman at the well.

³²⁸ "But their eyes were kept from recognising him." Lk 24:16, ESV.

³²⁹ Lk 24:31.

aforementioned sequence, to discover whether Noah's drinking Action would fit into this type-scene with meaningful omissions and manipulations (as I suspect it might), or whether it has nothing to do with the type-scene at all other than some shared textual and thematic links. Lastly, if the type-scene could be verified, it would follow that one may wish to study not what it means symbolically, but what nuance it adds to the particular episodes in which it appears.³³⁰ It seems to be in the nature of type-scenes that they are used not only to shed light on the episode, but to do so in light of the previous iterations of the type-scene,³³¹ so that (for instance) we may be helped by reading Luke 24 in light of Genesis 43–45.

4.2 Do Other Ancient Near Eastern Texts Use Similar Conventions?

If Genesis was written, consciously or unconsciously, in conversation with other Ancient Near Eastern texts, then it stands to reason that such ANE texts may also utilise similar type-scenes or *leitmotifs*. Gordon J. Wenham, echoing a fairly common idea in biblical scholarship,³³² writes, “Gen 1–11 as we read it is a commentary, often highly critical, on ideas current in the ancient world about the natural and supernatural world.”³³³ It is, in other words, very likely that Genesis, and perhaps the whole Pentateuch, was written as a polemic against contemporary ideas in its time — ideas of national or cultural origin, creation myths, the desire for a return to paradise, general cosmology and theology. Samuel Kramer, a father of Sumerian studies, observes, “The most significant myths of a given culture are usually the cosmogonic, or creation myths, the sacred stories evolved and developed in an effort to

³³⁰ “... the contemporary audiences of these tales, being perfectly familiar with the convention, took particular pleasure in seeing how in each instance the convention could be, through the narrator's art, both faithfully followed and renewed for the specific needs of the hero under consideration.” Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 69.

³³¹ “The type-scene is not merely a way of formally recognising a particular kind of narrative moment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger pattern of historical and theological meaning.” Ibid, 72.

³³² See such scholars as Waltke (*Genesis*, 60), Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1: From Adam to Noah*, 7–8), Westermann (*Genesis 1–11*, 127), Longman (*How to Read Genesis*, 80), and others.

³³³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, xlvi.

explain the origin of the universe, the presence of the gods, and the existence of man.”³³⁴ We want to know where we came from, and the author of Genesis has a vested interest, as it were, in polemicising against the *zeitgeist* in order to establish Yahweh as the one true god, and Israel as his chosen people.

This apparent polemical relationship between Genesis and other Ancient Near Eastern literature provided the grounds for Diane Sharon to spend a significant and well-researched portion of *Patterns of Destiny* on eating and drinking Actions in ANE mythology. While this in-depth interaction with comparative literature is one of the greatest strengths of *Patterns of Destiny*, it is limited in its scope due to its being situated in Proppian structuralism. As Sharon interacted with ancient foundation myths she was doing so using the tools of folklore and mythology. While such an approach may not be wrong, it is inherently narrow (as is any technical methodology). Her criteria for establishing a Pattern of Destiny³³⁵ is very specific and technical. And although her Pattern shares many similarities with the idea of a type-scene, as derived from Homeric scholarship via Robert Alter, its criteria is narrower.

It requires further studying ANE myths, such as *Enki and Ninhursag*, *Gilgamesh*, *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*, to determine whether the Revealing Meal type-scene, or a variation of it, was earlier employed in literature with which the author and editors of Genesis may have been familiar. If eating and drinking Actions are central to ANE creation, paradise, and deluge myths, for example, it may provide a stronger case for an intentional literary and theological use of such events in Genesis 1–11 and beyond. And it may clarify any theological implications derived from the Subversive Meal *leitmotif* in Genesis as it picks up polemical nuance.

A brief survey of such literature reveals a centrality to eating and drinking in critical moments in the plot of many such pieces of literature. In the Babylonian creation account *Enuma Elish*,

³³⁴ Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.*, Revised edition (University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 1998), 71.

³³⁵ Such as is established in Chapter 3 of *Patterns of Destiny*, particularly page 44ff.

Marduk's fate is determined after an eating and drinking Action.³³⁶ In the Sumerian *Enki and Ninhursag*,³³⁷ food plays a crucial role. The water god provides Dilmun with sweet water for growing crops.³³⁸ Uttu is advised to not sleep with Enki until he brings food as a gift.³³⁹ Ninhursag uses Enki's semen to develop a number of plants, which Enki then decides that he must eat, though it is framed as a morally wrong violation in the narrative.³⁴⁰ In *Atrahasis*, Enlil is "disturbed by the land's uproar" and suggests to the other gods, "in their bellies let the greens be few," later adding that the land withdrew its yield, and the fig trees were cut off. As the evil of the land worsens in the sixth year, they begin to eat their children, and "one house devoured another." It ends with no plant sprouting up.³⁴¹ In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu is made heroic with food and drink, and curses a "harlot-lass" with divine food unfit for her.

"Why, O Enkidu, cursest thou the harlot-lass,

Who made thee eat food fit for divinity,

And gave thee to drink wine fit for royalty,

Who clothed thee with noble garments,

And made thee have fair Gilgamesh for a comrade?"³⁴²

³³⁶ James Bennett Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with Supplement. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 65–66.

³³⁷ Sharon notes specifically that *Enki and Ninhursag* follows her expected "EATING/ORACLE" very neatly, making it a lucid conversation partner for Genesis 2–3 (Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 133).

³³⁸ Pritchard, *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 37.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ "And now Enki commits a sinful deed" (Ibid).

³⁴¹ Ibid, 104ff.

³⁴² Ibid, 86.

Garments, divinity, food, companionship — the sharing of such themes, not to mention so many other similar elements, with Genesis make these and other selections of ANE literature ripe for further study of this kind. If eating and drinking Actions prove to be a common *leitmotif* in ANE texts, and if perhaps even a type-scene similar to the Revealing Meal type-scene is used, we may have more light shed for us on the polemical nature of the relevant passages in Genesis. One difficulty which may present itself in such a study, however, is the fragmentary nature of ANE studies. We often have broken tablets and fragments which must be pieced together, guessed at. Applying the tools of literary criticism to such a fragmented body of work may prove particularly challenge, and filled with more assumption, at times, than certainty.

4.3 How does a Canonical Approach Relate Plot Signals in Genesis to the Rest of the Pentateuch?

Brevard Childs uses the term “canonical” to encompass aspects of reception and transmission, and formation, as well as to “focus attention on the theological forces at work in its composition rather than seeking the process largely controlled by general laws of folklore, by socio-political factors, or by scribal conventions.”³⁴³ This canonical approach, while used alongside literary criticism in what has hopefully been a complementary fashion, is well-suited to theological reflection rather than merely socio-historical reflection. The canonical approach benefits thus, in part, by receiving the text as a unified whole, a text *on purpose*. Genesis fits into the Pentateuch, the Pentateuch fits into the Tanakh. So we should not be surprised to find the blessing-mandate from Genesis 1:28 causing narrative ripples, as it were, throughout the Pentateuch, and into the *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*. Even a later text like Jeremiah is rife with allusions, tying the first chapter of Genesis — indeed, the plot of Genesis — into the later story of Israel and the ark of the covenant, and into the period of exile:

³⁴³ Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 71.

*And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.”*³⁴⁴

If the *plot signal* in Genesis 1:28 is relevant to understanding later texts like Jeremiah, how much more might it be important to our understanding of the Pentateuch, and the development of the plot from Genesis to Deuteronomy?

The unity of the Pentateuch³⁴⁵ is seen even in turning the page from Genesis to Exodus. For all the progressive, partial fulfilment of the command to be fruitful in Genesis, it is Exodus 1:7 which gives us what seems to be a report of its ripe fulfilment: “But the people of Israel were fruitful [פרה] and increased greatly; they multiplied [רבה] and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled [מלא] with them.”³⁴⁶ Already Exodus is clearly linked, literarily and not just historically, to the plot of Genesis, and even seems to be a continuation of it.³⁴⁷

This is not a new or revolutionary suggestion. Joel S. Baden, for instance, in his article “The Lack of Transition between Gen 50 and Exod 1,” reasons from a source-critical perspective that what we now know as the books of Genesis and Exodus are a unified (at least in reception of not in original composition) compilation of priestly and non-priestly material. The priestly material, in his view, clearly is continuous from the story of Joseph to the story of Israel in Egypt.³⁴⁸ But analysing P’s supposed intentions is, in our view, not necessary to

³⁴⁴ Jer 3:16, ESV.

³⁴⁵ Sailhamer insists, and with good reason, that the Pentateuch is a single book. He cites reference to the so-called five books of Moses from within the rest of the Old Testament, its denotation as “the book [singular] of Moses” in the New Testament, and the second-century A.D. origins of the word “Pentateuch.” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 1).

³⁴⁶ Sailhamer notes that this is a logical end to the larger narrative unit beginning in Genesis 1:1. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 26.

³⁴⁷ Sailhamer sees Exodus 1:7 as a transitional phrase which links all that follows in Exodus back to God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 241), but given the textual links to Genesis 1:28, perhaps that’s not quite going back far enough.

³⁴⁸ Joel S. Baden, “The Lack of Transition between Gen 50 and Exod 1,” in *Book Seams in the Hexateuch I. The Literary Transitions between the Books of Genesis/Exodus and Joshua/Judges*, eds. Christoph Berner and Harald Samuel, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume 70, Issue I, April 2019, 45.

come to a compatible conclusion: that Genesis and Exodus belonged, and belong together, and flow from one into another seamlessly, without any major transition that we might expect between two separate books.³⁴⁹ The continuity is so evident, Baden argues, that the burden of proof must be on those who emphasise discontinuity.³⁵⁰ Likewise it might be suggested that if the text is continuous from Genesis to Exodus literarily, then it is not to be argued for but to be expected that the *plot signal* in Genesis 1:28 would continue to have narrative significance throughout Exodus, at least. Perhaps the burden of proof is on those who would dispute such a claim.

David Clines, being self-critical of his own work on announcements of plot in Genesis, writes,

Perhaps there is a basic flaw in the approach I have adopted. Was I right in supposing that what is announced in Genesis should be expected to be fulfilled in Genesis? It seemed to be a reasonable assumption, but let us allow that it might be more apt to regard Genesis as simply the first volume in a larger sequence of narrative works à la recherche du temps perdu, Genesis-2 Kings. It is indeed incontrovertible that the narrative begun by Genesis does not really come to a pause—as a narrative—until the end of 2 Kings; but there it does come to a full stop, and any extension of the narrative can only be possible by telling the story all over again from the beginning, starting again with Adam, Seth, Enosh (1 Chr. 1:1).³⁵¹

This one story, it seems, carries through into the Pentateuch, and perhaps even beyond, as Clines has suggested. He argues in *The Theme of the Pentateuch*,

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 53.

³⁵¹ Clines, *What Does Eve Do To Help?*, 64–65.

*The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity.*³⁵²

Clines' suggested theme complements this study on Subversive Blessing-mandate Fulfilment well. We have seen how the promise to the patriarchs has its roots in the promise to Abraham, which in turn has its feet planted firmly on the blessing-mandate of Genesis 1:28. It seems, if Clines is correct, that the *plot signal* we have here examined has narrative significance, even shapes the whole plot, all the way through the Pentateuch.³⁵³

For future study of how the *plot signal* of Genesis 1:28 affects the Pentateuch, it may be worth considering the three domains dealt with in 1:28: humans (“be fruitful and multiply”), the earth (filling and subduing), and beasts (dominion). How are each of these three domains interacted with in the ensuing narratives of Exodus–Deuteronomy? If there is intertextuality (or intratextuality perhaps, given the apparent unity of the Pentateuch), we may expect textual links, studying the occurrences from the semantic fields of words such as פרה and אָרֶץ, or conceptual allusions. In my view, given the importance in the plot of Exodus–Deuteronomy of entering the promised land (and the lack of fulfilment of that expectation within the Pentateuch), and given the possible conceptual links of beasts with nations or tribes of Israel, such as in Jacob’s blessings on his sons in the final chapters of Genesis, this field is ripe for more study.

³⁵² Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 30.

³⁵³ Though not, in my view, as far as 1–2 Kings, which lacks overt textual links to Genesis 1:28.

Conclusion

Eating and drinking Actions in Genesis 1–11 have been selectively included and have narrative significance in this rich body of literature. These Actions have repercussions in the plot, and prove to be central to the text. They occur at climactic moments of the text, and give shape to the plot at the level of characterisation, setting, and action. Genesis 3:6 and 9:21 are the clearest examples of eating or drinking Actions which seem to be an “indigenous centre” in the text which shape the fate of the characters, whether it is the curse of the ground and the complication of childbirth and human relationships, or the subjugation of one people group to another.

In the plot of Genesis 1–11, the blessing-mandate in 1:28 stands apart as being a carefully-crafted *plot signal* which sets readerly expectations for how the ensuing narrative will unfold, and what themes it will be primarily dealing with. These motifs focus on three domains: humans, the earth, and beasts. That *plot signal* helps us navigate the ups-and-downs of the plot throughout the *middle* of the story, and helps us understand the *toledoth* of Adam, of Noah, and his progeny from Genesis 2–11. The *initial situation* of the plot is God’s provision of all that humans would need to fulfil the blessing-mandate of 1:28. The *middle* maps the continued failure of humanity to fulfil the mandates relating to the three domains, humans, earth, and beasts, on their own. The *final situation* shows how, despite, or even through, humanity’s failure and inability to fulfil the blessing-mandate, God has graciously continued to progressively fulfil the mandate.

These eating and drinking Actions, as they stand in relation to the *plot signal*, seem to function as a *leitmotif* in Genesis 1–11, and in the rest of the book as well. Each eating or drinking Action seems to raise a signal to the reader, gesturing to the grace of God and his commitment to fulfil the blessing-mandate in spite of humanity’s sins. The *leitmotif* takes on a fuller meaning as the narrative progresses, and by the end we find that perhaps this literary

device is not only doing something in the narrative, but it is meaning something — forming a meaningful, readerly connection between Meal and Grace.

More work is needed on these subjects, such as to more deeply examine conspicuous omissions in the patterns, such as the lack of explicit *leitworts* in Genesis 4 and 14.

Furthermore, it seems that the Subversive Meal type-scene may be one of the predictable factors in a type-scene (tentatively called The Revealing Meal type-scene), which follows the sequence of 1) Deception, 2) Seeing, 3) Eating or Drinking, and 4) Knowing. More work is needed to establish the certainty of this suggestion, and, if established, to see whether the type-scene is utilised consciously throughout the rest of the Old and New Testaments.

Moving beyond the Christian scriptures, other Ancient Near Eastern texts should be examined in light of this potential type-scene, and other uses of the *leitworts* and *leitmotif* in question. Finally, more work should also be done from a canonical approach, and in light of the apparent unity of the Pentateuch, to further trace the *leitmotif* and conventions examined in this study.

The impetus for this study was my observation of the density of food-related words and events in Genesis. What started as a textual fascination has concluded, at least to this reader, as a meaningful exercise in seeing grace — pure, undeserved grace — in action, and to exult in God's relentless commitment to his stubborn people. My soul has feasted, and the appetite of my mind has been whetted for further study in this field.

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