

The Garden Narrative (Gen 2:4b-3:25) – Perspectives on Gender Equality¹

PIETER DOREY (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA)

ABSTRACT

The Garden Narrative's ideological function is not to construct reality and gender from a patriarchal perspective and to confirm and handle these concepts as a natural creation phenomenon (Stratton 1995:209). Man is not portrayed as the norm for God's creatures. He should not be seen as the centre of creation and of God's attention alone. It is a one-sided endeavour to utilize Genesis 2-3 in order to devalue women to a submissive and inferior creature in creation. A literary-historical reading of the Garden Narrative (Gen 2:4b-3:25) is helpful to determine a balanced view and meaning of the text with regard to gender equality.

A INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Genesis 2-3 and gender issues, especially paradigms for female roles, has already been vehemently debated in the scholarly community (Meyers 1988:72-121). A statement has been made that it is one of the Garden Narrative's ideological functions to construct reality and gender perspectives from a patriarchal point of view and to confirm and handle these concepts as a natural creation phenomenon (Stratton 1995:209).

From such a perspective Adam as man is then portrayed as the norm for God's creatures. Because he was created first Adam is viewed by many (male) Bible readers as the centre of creation and of God's attention. He is portrayed as co-creator with God, who brings order to creation by giving names to the animals and the woman. Women are then defined in terms of man and have no independent calling other than to be man's helper. She is the 'affirmative action' for the man's loneliness and needs and has been taken out of man, for the man.

Some exegetes are therefore reading Gen 2-3 one-sided in order to devalue women to a submissive and inferior creature (Stratton 1995:11). The Garden Narrative (Gen 2:4b-3-25) has often been used to confirm this subordinate place and role of women in marriage and in society. This presentation has

¹ This paper was read at the conference of the OTSSA 2006 held at Unisa. Dr. Dorey is a research associate of the Department of Old Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria.

the intention to argue for a different viewpoint. It has the intention to underscore perspectives in the narrative that man and woman are equally created beings, dependent on one another.

By taking aspects like the *Sitz im Leben* of the text, the *genre*, the use of irony, and the comparison with 2 Esdras seriously, it becomes clear that the author(s) / redactor(s) did not compose the Garden Narrative to devalue woman as such. The story has probably a focus to call man to humbleness. Man should recognize his place before God as creature. This narrative rather shows man's dependence upon God and the woman. Aspects of a literary historical reading² will help us to determine a responsible and balanced view and meaning of the text. It is unnecessary to read the text from a feminist perspective to aim and restore women's rightful status as one of God's creatures.

B GENRE AND SITZ IM LEBEN

Genesis 2 and 3 constitute a narrative or story and should be read and interpreted as such (Gowan 1988:35; Westermann 1984:190-196; Vosloo 1988:159; Waltke 2001:80). It contains all the basic elements of a narrative, such as characters, time, place, events, plot, author's viewpoint etcetera. By taking these elements of a story seriously, it seems that the story does not want to make a fuss of man alone. Although man is created carefully and has received authority from God, his position becomes clear from the fact the he was created from the dust of the earth (Westermann 1974:77-78). Man's dependence and weakness is underlined by the statement that 'the Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' (Gen 2:18). Man's ironic position as bearer of authority is underscored when he listens to and obeys the woman and accuses her of his disobedience.

The woman was created to correct the only shortcoming in the creation narrative, namely the loneliness of man. The woman was also created different from animals. She was equal to man (Gen 2:23) and got involved in a conversation with the snake. After she first debated the snake's statements, she was persuaded to eat the forbidden fruit. According to our narrative she easily persuaded the man to eat without any conversation. This is an indication that she was not weak, but had the ability to influence the man. When she discovered her own behaviour, however, she did the same as the man: she wanted to hide and excuse herself from her guilt by accusing the snake. She strove to be 'like God' (Gen 3:5), but now she was ironically dominated by man.

The repetition of אָדָם and אֶרֶץ is evident. Many verses include one or both of these descriptions of 'man' and 'earth. These thematic markers indicate

² By a literary historical reading is meant that literary and historical aspects of the text are examined... Synchronic and diachronic aspects of the text are analysed. For a more detailed explanation, see Human (1999:354-368).

that the narrative deals with man אָדָם and earth אֶרֶץ from which Adam was made and whereto he will return again (Scullion 1992:35).

By focusing on these thematic markers, it becomes clear that יהוה אלהים is the main character in the narrative, that אִישׁ (man) and אִשָּׁה (woman) are closely related and that man is not depicted as a hero, but as dust (עֶפֶר) from the earth whereto he shall return.

Genesis 2:4b-3:25 probably stems from J material dating from the time of the united kingdom of David and Solomon (Hiebert 1996:24; Spangenberg 2000:88). Although I still use the language of the Wellhausen J, E, D, P source hypothesis, I am aware that this theory has been refined and is, to some extent, outdated. Nevertheless, its language still helps scholars to distinguish tradition and redaction layers (Deist 1987:31) or tradition circles in the text. The final redactional work of the Pentateuch was probably done in a post-exilic time period after a long history of text growth (Deist 1987:35; Brett 2000:85). Here I only take the exilic, and post-exilic Sitz im Leben of the Garden Narrative into consideration.

Genesis 1-11 was probably composed and understood in retrospect from this exilic, post-exilic context. It served as interpretation and presented answers for the Israelites' expectations and historical development of the nation (Scheffler 2000:155).

Important rulers during this time period were Cyrus (550), Cambyses (529), Darius (522), Xerxes (486), Artaxerxes (465), Darius II (423), Artaxerxes II and III (404), (358) and Darius III (336). The Persian Empire was large, well-managed and coordinated, and known for its humanity (Brodie 2001:53; Briant 2002:73). Borders of the Persian Empire reached from ancient India in the West to Northern Greece, past Phoenicia, Damascus, Jerusalem to Egypt and Libya. This empire surpassed all other empires before it and was the biggest political formation of its time ever. Aramaic was the official language. Standardization of weights, measures and money was implemented. Networks of roads were excellent and made the whole empire accessible.

An exceptional cultural blossoming occurred during the Persian and later Greek Empires. Due to their political influence cultural expansion extended. Various cultural activities and disciplines bloomed, namely literature, cartography, historiography, drama, poetry, science, medicine, philosophy, democracy, rhetoric, politics, painting, sculpture and architecture. During the Greek period (from 333 BC) the following influential people are noted: Archimedes, Hippocrates, Pythagoras, Herodotus, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Through a process of Hellenization, the Greek people exported their culture throughout the ancient world.

A leader like Cyrus made such an impression on ancients in the Persian Empire (Brodie 2001:54). Also, a king like Darius was honoured as an exceptional man. Darius was never seen as a god, but was honoured as a man above men who achieved victories and governed by the power of the god Ahura-Mazda (Briant 2002:241). Ahura-Mazda was their great god who created heaven and earth. This god made Darius king and gave him power and abilities. Darius 'was situated at the intersection between the world below and the divine world, which communicated through his intercession' (Briant 2002:241). According to Herodotus (Briant 2002:241), worshippers were forbidden to pray for personal and private blessings and prosperity, or for the well-being, prosperity and blessing of the king.

The post-exilic era (538-400) was therefore one of the Israelite nation's most productive literary times (Smith: 1971:100). During this era canonization of the Holy Scriptures began and the temple became the centre of religious life. The Second Temple was ruled by the priests and became the symbol of unity and the most important economic factor in the Jewish society (Albertz 1994:461). The establishment of the Torah as canon and the study of the Law became very important for Israelites, because it served as their constitution from Persian times onward. The Torah was for them the Word of God to be obeyed very strictly. Most of the Jews interpreted the Torah literally. An eschatological expectation originated and reached further than political history and human existence (Albertz 1994:438).

The announcement that the Babylonian exiles could return to Judah was greeted with mixed feelings. The Jews who did not go into exile expected problems with the returnees who would claim back their inheritance, jobs and land. Some of the exiles prospered so much that they did not want to return to Judah (Albertz 1994:444). A relatively small group of Jews ultimately returned to Judah (Briant 2002:47). Because of a long time of political instability and drought, the economy in Judah was bad (Albertz 1994:451). Judah became a Persian province that was governed by Jewish governors appointed by the Persians (Briant 2002:79).

The Jews' history was from the origin until the late post-exilic time interwoven with that of the nations of the Ancient Near East. Israel's position and place among the nations were a burden on them. Continual contact, intermarriage, war, alliances, negotiations and subjection to foreign leaders were part of Israel's existence.

A final redaction of Genesis 1-11 and the Pentateuch was done in retrospect, to give answers about the exilic crisis. Amongst foreign nations and religions and away from their own religious symbols, the exiles employed Gen 1:1 to 2:4a as a polemic document to claim that there is only one, Almighty God and creator, namely Yahweh.

In a post-exilic context, Gen 2:4b-3:24 served as a warning to the hierarchy, the priests, men, and also the king (Brett 2000:85). In a context where the Persian king had great power and status and claimed his power and victories from Ahura-Mazda, Gen 2-3 was a reminder that all men are fallible. They should be humble and remain dependent on Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Within this historical context it is evident that the author(s) / redactor(s) intended to depict man as fallible and to state simultaneously that woman has power to influence him and lead him to his downfall. But, man needs woman. In the growth of the text at large Gen 2:24 is probably the work of a (later?) redactor who inserted it (see discussion of Westermann 1984:233ff.). This verse accentuates the dependence of man upon woman. Similarly, Gen 2-3 served to warn against human arrogance or hubris. The Babylonian Exile confirmed that disobedience and independence from God lead to a fall and setback.

C MAN CREATED AS SERVANT (GEN 2:4b-7) AND WOMAN AS HELPER (GEN 2:18-23... עֵזֶר)

Man's role is announced at the beginning of the narrative. He was created to serve and work in the garden. Although it is correct to translate לַעֲבֹד with 'till' or to 'work', one should not forget the service motif inherent in this text. Man was created as servant or worker from the earth for the earth. The meaning of עָבַד in its Qal form is to work, to serve, to labour, to work for another, serve another by labour and to serve as subjects (Holladay 1971:261).

I support the arguments of Brett (2000:30) and Hiebert (1996:61, 97) who suggest that the man's role was to serve the created land. The context suggests that 'serve' is a more precise indication of man's role in the garden.

The close relation between man and earth becomes clear from the word-play אִתְּהָאָדָם (the man) and מִן־הָאָדָמָה (from the earth). The wordplay between אִתְּהָאָדָם and אִתְּהָאָדָמָה suggests both man's origin and his destination (Simkins 1998:40). Because of his origin from the earth, man is dependant on the earth from which he was made. In return, earth is dependant on man to be לַעֲבֹד worked/served.

The way God formed man (וַיִּצְרֶה Gen 2:7) could indicate the work of a potter (2 Sam 17:28a; Isa 29:16 ; Jer 18:2,3,4). The verb is mostly used to indicate the creating work of God. God created animals (Gen 2:19), light (Isa 45:7) the mountains (Amos 4:13), earth (Isa 45:8), the land (Ps 95:5), the Leviathan (Ps 104:26), and the seasons (Ps 74:17) in the same way (יִצַר), from the same substance, namely dust or ground (אִדָּמָה). The context of this story indicates that man has nothing to boast about. He was created from the earth in the same way as the earth. Hubris or arrogance against any fellow creature is a transgression of God's creation intention, according to the Garden Narrative.

The narrative states further in Genesis 2:18: ‘The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper (עֵזֶר), suitable for him’, ‘somebody alongside or corresponding to him’, not less or inferior and not a servant worker. This helper is created to complement a shortcoming of man. In 15 out of the 20 contexts where עֵזֶר is utilized in the Old Testament, it refers to God as the ‘עֵזֶר’ (Holladay 1971:270). ‘Ezer’ was not meant to be an inferior creature to serve the man. She was somebody alongside or corresponding to him, to complement a shortcoming. In gender terms there is no indication that man is superior to the woman.

D NAMING OF THE WOMAN (GEN 2:21-22)

The formation of the woman from the rib (צִלְעַת) of man should not be understood as a description of an actual historical event accessible to us. תְּרִדָּהּ points to a deep sleep or state of unconsciousness (Vawter 1977:35). Man knew nothing about it and he had no part in it whatsoever.

Any attempt to derive the superiority of man or woman from this text should be rejected. Sexist interpretations that claim that the man was created first and the woman as an afterthought or that the man was an experiment and the woman was the improvement must be rejected. If the chronology of the created beings should be an indication of status, then both man and woman have a lower status than the earth. Man was created from the earth. The fact that the woman was created after the man does not mean that she is inferior to him. The emphasis should be rather on the fact that the woman is from the same material or substance as the man, equal to man (Gen 2:23). Man had no part in the creation of the woman. God, the Creator made the woman and therefore she is not inferior.

Some exegetes (Leupold 1942:135) are convinced that the rib motif reflect the intention that the woman was not taken from the head so that she had no reason to be superior. She was also not taken from the feet so that she could not be considered inferior. She was taken from the side of man because they are the same and equal. These are not arguments based on the text and should not be considered seriously.

The Garden Narrative uses the rib motif to present answers to the question about the relationship and attraction between man and woman. The rib motif focuses on the equality and sameness of man and woman that enables them to become or to be one. In poetic language the man acknowledged that the woman was part of him (Alter 1996:9). זָאת הַפֶּעַם (Gen 2:19 ‘this time / at last’) is the opposite of the act where animals were brought to man. זָאת - ‘It / she’ is repeated three times in verse 23. With this repetition of זָאת the man’s need for the woman is further accentuated. The man’s announcement that she will be called אִשָּׁה is not the same as the naming of animals in 1:5 and 2:19-20 (Brodie

2001:141; Walton 2001:178). This governing act of man is rather the result of the broken man-woman relationship and is not a divine command for man to rule over woman. Adam did not announce a new name, but confirmed the name that was already mentioned in Genesis 2:22 where we read that God created אִשָּׁה, the woman. By calling her אִשָּׁה he is identifying with her, connecting with her and distinguishing her from all other animals and creatures.

‘Bone taken from my bone and flesh from my flesh’ in Genesis 2:23 was a traditional expression to indicate blood relationship (Gen 29:14; 2 Sam 19:13) or family relationships (Richter 1966:96-102). This expression therefore indicates that man and woman are equally created creatures (Scullion 1992:37).

If the phrase ‘and he (Yahweh) brought her to the man)’ indicates marriage (Leupold 1942:135; Gowan 1988:49; Waltke 2001:89), it is significant that God is the one who is the father of this bride who is given to Adam (Von Rad 1972:84). The fact that God brought her to Adam supports the argument that this text was not meant to devalue the woman. It is rather an elaboration on her value as fellow creature of man.

E THE ETIOLOGICAL FORMULA IN GEN 2:24

Verse 24 is probably the work of a redactor.³ Contrary to the contemporary patriarchal cultural customs or context where women left their houses to become part of the father-in-law’s house, verse 24 states the opposite. Genesis 2:24 was probably a later insertion to accentuate the man’s dependence upon a woman.

In a patriarchal context the text probably announced a fundamental truth about the man-woman relationship. Without women, men cannot live, multiply and survive. Without women there can be no offspring and multiplication. Man’s need for woman is greater than blood relationships. Man finds fulfilment in a relationship with a woman and not primarily with his parents. The need for woman is so strong that man will leave his father and mother to be one with his wife. This etiological formula emphasizes the importance of the woman and the human need of man. In this sense any devaluation of women seems to be countered by their important place in creation.

F COMPARISON WITH ESDRAS

The Garden Narrative also reflects correspondences with 1 Esdras 3-4, which calls the king tactfully to be humble, submissive and obedient to Yahweh. The resemblance between Gen 2:24 and 1 Esd 4:20-21 is significant.

The story of the youths (1 Esd 3:1-5:6) is the most unique feature of 1 Esdras and has no parallel in the canonical literature. According to Talshir

³ See the discussion of Westermann (1984:233ff).

(1999:6) a section was deliberately cut out from the so-called Chronicler (Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah) to form a framework for the story of the youths. 1 Esdras was created in order to interpolate the story of the youths into the story of the Restoration. The point of departure for the youths' contest is the ancient universal question, 'what is the most powerful thing of all?' In this story women are depicted as having stronger characters than the king (men) and wine.

According to 1 Esd 4:20–21, the power of women over men is so strong that 'A man will leave his own father, who brought him up and leave his own country to get married. He will forget his father, his mother and his country to spend the rest of his life with his wife.' The strength of women is hereby emphasized. Both Genesis and Esdras want to humble the man, king and the patriarchal hierarchy. A superior position for them over women is strongly contested.

G FOR MAN AND WOMAN TO BECOME ONE FLESH

The expression 'to become one flesh' (Gen 2:24) should be understood in a comprehensive way. בָּשָׂר (flesh) has various meanings, like the body of animals, men, flesh for the body itself, male organ of generation (euphemism), flesh for kindred, blood relations, man over against God as frail or erring (Brown 1980:672). In a multi-thematic text a more comprehensive reading would be wise. It suggests a physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual unity, rather than just a sexual unity (Maher 1982:40; Cassuto 1989:137). For man to become one with woman therefore confirms the quality, status and importance of woman. This expression adds value to the viewpoint that man and woman are equal beings created by God.

H IRONY IN GENESIS 2-3

In the Garden Narrative irony is utilized to question the status quo of the patriarchal context in which men lived. Irony plays an important role in this narrative (Brett 2000:80; Waltke 2001:82). In contrast to Genesis 1 where man is created to rule, here he is created to serve and work the garden (Gen 2:5, 15). Adam is created to serve the 'adama' from which he was created and whereto he shall return as dust, 'עפר'. The snake shall also crawl on this 'עפר' on his belly and will eat the 'עפר' for the rest of his life (Gen 3:14). To become the 'עפר' on which the snake will crawl and eat is meant to humble man. It accentuates his dependence upon God. Man has no reason to show hubris or arrogance towards fellow creatures, especially not to the woman. Irony is used as a stylistic feature in the narrative to question the hierarchy, and the patriarchal system during the post-exilic period. It exposes man and king's vulnerability and dependence upon God.

I MONARCHICAL AND FORBIDDEN WISDOM (GEN 2:4b-3:24)

Forbidden wisdom was the man's aspiration 'to be like God' (Gen 3:4). This aspiration was alive amongst kings too. In Genesis 2-3 narrative royal motifs are found (see Rogerson 2001:53). Motifs that can be related to the royal spheres are Adam and the primeval gardener (Wyatt 1981:14), the Garden of Eden and the four rivers, one of them being Gihon. The origin of this stream or water fountain was in Jerusalem (Clifford 1972:100; Mettinger 1976:272) which was seen as the mythological centre of the world and the seat of the Davidic king (Wyatt 1981:15). Eden is described in terms of a royal park that probably existed in the time of Solomon (Richter 1966:101).

In this garden Adam and Eve met the snake. There are suggestions that the veneration of the snake did take place in Jerusalem (Richter 1966:102; Wyatt 1981:18). After the fall of man the tree of life was guarded by cherubim (Richter 1966:104).

There is a correspondence between 2 Sam 14:17, 20 and Gen 2-3 where the cunning woman from Tekoa flattered king David by referring to his godly wisdom to be able to discern between good and evil (2 Sam 14:17: 'And now your servant says, May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil'). The expression 'to discern between good and evil' was also utilized to indicate political wisdom in 1 Kgs 3:9 where Solomon in his dream asked God for wisdom (Brett 2000:34).⁴ The connection between royal motifs and divine wisdom is supported by a text in Ezekiel 28 where the king of Tyre is introduced as presuming to have godly wisdom. Pride and violence lead to his expelling from Eden. Genesis 3 therefore echoes the language of Ezek 28:13-18. The relationship between royal motifs and divine wisdom in Israel was not strange.

During the rule of king Solomon, characterized by political murders, suffering and restructuring of society, the question arises, what is really good and what is evil (Von Soden 1974:234)? According to J, the first man Adam disobeyed God when he made an attempt to distinguish between what is good and evil (Wittenberg 1988:15). The result was alienation from God. The desire 'to be like' God spells disaster.

The above-mentioned motifs suggest that the forbidden wisdom of Genesis 2 can be related to monarchical and royal wisdom. The final redactors of the Garden Narrative might have had objections against pretended and feigned wisdom of the kings and humans in general. Genesis 2-3 therefore rejects all pretence of wisdom and royal aspirations.

⁴ 1 Kgs 3:9 reads: 'So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong'.

The only power in Genesis 3 tends to be the patriarchal authority of man over woman, a symptom of alienation that corresponds to the newly found royal wisdom (Brett 2000:84).

This Garden Narrative might also offer a critique against the *pax Solomonica* – the royal wisdom (Brett 2000:34). It rejects any conceited royal aspirations. Man and king are reminded that woman is more influential and powerful than him. Men cannot live and multiply without women. They are equal creatures in their aspiration to wisdom, namely ‘to be like God’. The aspiration ‘to be like God’ poses an enormous danger to humankind. The author(s) / redactor(s) of Genesis 2-3 questioned the contemporary hierarchies. They presented a text that strives to moderate human power.

J SYNTHESIS

The so-called J material is not a complete reproduction of creation events in the beginning. Genesis 2-3 is further not a scientific historical description of creation acts, in the way modern man understands science. The Garden Narrative is a theological description of creation from a specific point of view. J deals with damage being done to the most important human relationships, of which the relationship between man and woman is vital. To interpret this narrative as real historical events will only lead to a misunderstanding of this story.

The garden Narrative has a multiple purpose and it is a text with many themes. Several important themes are taken up in this narrative, such as death, the nature of relationship, social issues, propagation, agriculture, labour, debt, suffering, and divine punishment. From the above analyses it seems possible that the author(s) / redactor(s) had a specific aim with this narrative, namely, to call upon man to bow before Yahweh his creator. The text specifically addresses authoritative people such as ‘man’ and ‘king’.

Perspectives from Gen 2:4b-3:24 probably presented answers to questions about a broken world for the monarchy. This text also gave answers to questions about various relationships like those between man and woman, between man and creator, and between man and creation. The text accentuated man’s dependence upon God. In a patriarchal world man and king were called upon to humble themselves before God.

Genesis 2:4b-3:24 probably thus became a useful text for later anti-monarchical priestly redactors, who polemicized against the hierarchy in Persian and post-exilic times. This multi-purposed text also addressed questions about suffering, human relations, labour, etcetera. It is especially useful to urge man and royalty in a patriarchal world to humble themselves and to recognize their dependence upon God. The use of irony focuses attention on man’s dependence upon woman. As a possible later insertion, Gen 2:24 served as a re-

minder to man and king of how defenceless, vulnerable and dependent they really are.

The Garden Narrative's ideological function is not to construct a reality and determine gender relationships from a patriarchal perspective. The narrative does not confirm or treat these concepts as a phenomenon of natural creation (Stratton 1995:209). Man is not portrayed as the norm for God's creatures or as the superior creature and centre of God's creation. It is therefore a mistake to utilize Gen 2-3 as biblical evidence to devalue woman to a submissive and inferior position (Stratton 1995:11). Perspectives from a literary historical reading of the text underscore the fact that man and woman were created equal.

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P. J. Dorey, c/o Prof D. J. Human, Department of Old Testament Science, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0002, South Africa.
E-mail: xyzdorey@cybertrade.co.za