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This volume collects essays developed from papers given at a joint session of the “Stylistics and the Hebrew Bible Section” of the ISBL and the “Literary Figures: Fact or Fiction” section of the EABS at the 2014 meeting in Vienna. The joint session dealt with the stylistics of Genesis, and for the purposes of this volume the stylistic features of doubling and duplicating are highlighted as a means of providing a unifying framework for the collected essays.

In a helpful introductory essay coeditor Karolien Vermeulen explains the rationale for adoption of the label *stylistics*. She writes that understandings of the term *literary reading* have become unnecessarily restrictive. *Stylistics*, she argues, allows for the bringing together of synchronic with diachronic approaches, narratological analysis with cognitive framework, linguistics with literature, and a literary focus on characters, perspectives, themes, and motives with the fruit of social-scientific or economic inquiry. “In all cases the central question is why the text takes the form, shape or formulation as we have it. Stylistics is concerned with this: the why of the form and its impact on the reading process and the consequent interpretation(s) of a text” (2) The most successful essays in this collection address both elements of this definition: the *why* of the form and its impact upon the reading process and consequent interpretation.
The book presents eleven essays grouped together into three sections: “Formal Doubles and the Whole,” “Thematic Pairs,” and “Doubling Plots and Duplicating Stories.” The first section focuses on the doubling of smaller elements—“letters, syllables, words and word strings”—and the impact of this doubling upon the meaning of the larger work. The second section foregrounds what the editors term “thematic pairs.” The third section takes as its focus “duplicates on the level of the plot of the story.” How the editors understand the distinction between the latter two sections of the book, and why essays were assigned to each, is not made clear. Why, for example, do sections 2 and 3 each contain an essay addressing ambiguity in the garden of Eden story? Surely this could have been an opportunity to showcase some doubling and duplicating? But this is a minor quibble.

The opening essay, George Savran’s “Doubled Request and Doubled Refusal: The Verb רצפ in Biblical Narrative,” considers doubled requests and refusals in Genesis and elsewhere that are connected with use of the verb “to urge.” Savran argues that patterns of urgings and response convey information to the reader about the character being urged. An eventual acceptance following an initial refusal can indicate “a shift in the character’s understanding,” while a double refusal appears to be something of a “bait and switch” tactic on the part of the narrator—whereas readers expect a change of mind they are presented with a response that is consistent but that tends to foreshadow some negative event that can be understood as a consequence of undue adamance.

Jonathan Grossman’s “The Expulsion of Ishmael Narrative: Boundaries, Structure and Meaning” reconsiders Gen 21:1–21. Rejecting an approach that explains the passage as an amalgam of sources, Grossman sees a single whole with a chiastic structure. The whole story, argues Grossman, highlights the parallel and opposing movements of Abraham’s two sons—Ishmael is sent away from Abraham’s household while Isaac is admitted into it—while also conveying the surprising message that God cares for both sons.

In “The Proof-and-Play of Quoted Speech in the Joseph Story (Genesis 37–50),” Samuel Hildebrandt focuses on dialogue in which characters quote the words of other characters and sets out to demonstrate that, through the use of quotations, characters aim to achieve two goals: to harness the authority of the original speaker and to add or change some elements in order to support or further the quoting speaker’s own agenda.

Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Jacobus A. Naudé’s “The Intersection of Orality and Style in Biblical Hebrew: Metapragmatic Representations of Dialogue in Genesis 34” highlights an oral-written binary within the text of Gen 34. They take as their starting point the proposition that the biblical text is the product of a hearing-dominant environment.
The final essay in the first section of the book is Gary Rendsburg’s “Alliteration in the Book of Genesis,” which argues that alliteration is a feature of biblical prose no less than biblical poetry and that this holds true for narrative. Attention to alliteration as a feature of the text, Rendsburg maintains, can help the reader to explain word choices that might otherwise appear obscure, to identify interconnections between even distantly located passages of text, and also simply to enjoy the artistry and “pleasure” of the text.

Opening section 2, “Thematic Pairs,” is Michaela Bauks’s “One, Two or Three…? The Confusion of Trees in Genesis 2–3 and its Hermeneutical Background.” Bauks challenges readings of the Eden story that rely on proposals concerning different literary strata to explain ambiguities surrounding the two primary trees, their position in the garden, and their properties. Instead, she proposes that the story introduces deliberate ambiguities as a stylistic element that serves to foster a sense of fluidity in its treatment of issues connected with immortality and access of the human creatures to the divine realm.

Karolien Vermuelen’s contribution is “The Art of Blessing and Cursing in Genesis 1–11: Stylistic Patterns and their Ideological Motivation.” Vermuelen argues that, although both blessings and curses are connected with and proceed from God, stylistic elements serve to distinguish their presentation. Blessings are represented as closely connected to the divine by use of series of imperfect consecutives. Curses, however, are presented as more distant from the divine by syntactical means, including use of the passive voice.

Completing part 2 is Zvi Shimon’s “Distinguishing Abraham from the ‘Terahides’: The Ideology of Separation behind Etiology.” Shimon’s “thematic pair” is the pair of journeys of Terah and his son Abram. Shimon points out striking literary similarities between the two journey reports but also highlights differences, which he argues point to fundamentally different motivations for the two journeys: while Terah’s is “a mundane economically motivated migration,” Abraham’s is ideological. The purpose of the presentation of the two itineraries is to distinguish between Abraham (and his descendants—“Israel”) and the Terahides.

Coeditor Elizabeth R. Hayes opens part 3 with “Whose World? Whose Time? A Text World Theory Examination of the Style and Message of Genesis 1:1–2:25.” Hayes compares the two creation narratives in Gen 1–2:4a and 2:4b–25 from the perspective of text-world theory, concluding that the two are complementary.

In her compelling essay “Double-Plotting in the Garden: Stylistics of Ambiguity in Genesis 2–3,” Karalina Matskevich returns to consideration of ambiguity in the garden of Eden narrative. She suggests that ambiguity is not merely a stylistic technique here but a key guiding principle: “God’s fundamental ambivalence toward human beings unfolds
here as two plots that simultaneously oppose and resonate with each other and in the end give rise to a world that integrates contradictory perspectives.

In the final essay of the section and the book, “Inclusio in Genesis 28 and 32: Synchronically and Diachronically,” Urmas Nõmmick takes a direct approach, deliberately opposing synchronic and diachronic reading methods. Nõmmick discusses two examples of inclusio, in Gen 28 and 32, which he understands as “substantial correlation of textual building blocks that are divided from each other by any other part of the text with altering content.”

The expressed hopes of the editors for the book are quite generalized: that the essays “offer the reader, scholarly or otherwise, another glimpse into the richness of the book of Genesis” and that “a more inclusive approach to the text, a stylistic one in this case, furthers our understanding of ancient meaning-making through text and language.” In fact, the audience for this book is likely to be almost exclusively scholarly. The essays are relatively technical and unlikely to be accessible to more generalized readers. They are likely to appeal most to scholars of Genesis and of stylistics of narrative but will also be of assistance to advanced students.

The collection’s primary contribution will likely be in the field of stylistics, particularly within narrative. While the essays viewed as a whole do not substantially advance our understanding of Genesis, those working with Genesis will want to engage with them individually, and perhaps particularly with those of Rendsburg, Bauks, Vermuelen, Hayes, and Matskevich, each of which offers something particularly new and insightful. Overall, the essays could perhaps be seen as displaying some residual reticence to engage fully with diachronic approaches, but the move toward more methodically inclusive reading being championed here is definitely to be welcomed, and the collection deserves to enjoy a wide readership.