

○ **REVIEW OF CAROLINE VANDER STICHELE AND ALASDAIR G. HUNTER (EDS), *CREATION AND CREATIVITY: FROM GENESIS TO GENETICS AND BACK***

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The subtitle of this volume describes it better than the title does. Eleven essays by mostly Dutch and Scottish contributors cover a remarkable variety of topics, all somehow connected to either ‘creation’ or ‘creativity,’ but so diverse in their use of these terms that while there probably is an essay or two worth reading for almost anyone with interests in concepts denoted by these words, it is hard to imagine a single person who would want to read all of them (except a reviewer, of course!). While that is probably true of a great many conference volumes, it is particularly strikingly in the present case.

In a brief ‘Series Editor’s Preface,’ Athalya Brenner situates the volume as the product of an ongoing collaborative research project between biblical studies departments at the Universities of Amsterdam and Glasgow, and the volume’s editors then provide an introduction surveying the volume’s specific contents. Also included are a descriptive list of contributors, a volume bibliography, and indexes of names and of biblical (and related) citations.

In their introduction, editors Vander Stichele and Hunter hint at a tension between ‘creation’ and ‘creativity,’ but they immediately reject this as a ‘simple binary formulation’ (2). Unfortunately, it is not until one gets to the very last essay, by Jonneke Bekkenkamp, that serious consideration is given to the ambiguous relation, which turns out to be neither simple nor binary, between these concepts. This contributes to the lack of focus that disturbs this book. Each of the book’s essays is valuable in its own right, but they frequently are not talking about the same thing.

The essays are arranged into three divisions. Part One, ‘Creation,’ begins with Brenner’s essay, ‘Recreating the Biblical Creation for Western Children: Personal Reflections on Some Case Studies’. She examines five short animated videos for children in which Genesis 1-3 is depicted. Much of her essay is given to detailed descriptions of the videos, and I wish that she had given

more space to her own comparisons between them and critical reflections on those differences. Particularly intriguing are the criteria or codes that she identifies as the basis for her comparisons (11-13). Unfortunately, she does little more than list these. The second essay is David Jasper, “‘Down Through All Christian Minstrelsy’: Genesis, James Joyce, and Contemporary Vocabularies of Creation Studies,” which is dedicated to the theologian Thomas J.J. Altizer. The essay focuses on Joyce’s use of the biblical creation story and Christian theological appropriations of that story, especially in *Finnegan’s Wake*, with its analogues to the magically creative divine words (‘a poetics of silence and total presence,’ 37) in Genesis 1. The third essay is Richard van Leeuwen, ‘Creation and Revelation in Naguib Mahfouz’s Novel *Children of Gebelawi*’. Van Leeuwen explores how Mahfouz’s story transforms Muslim beliefs about divine creation and the relation between Allah and the world in ways that raise profound and perhaps blasphemous questions about traditional beliefs and values and their relation to those of modern secularity.

Already the extreme divergence of these essays is apparent. Part Two, ‘Creators,’ moves off in yet other directions. Lloyd Ridgeon, ‘Is the God of Islam an Evil Creator?’, is a fascinating study of medieval Islamic arguments about theodicy and their repercussions in contemporary Muslim thought, which however seems out of place in this volume. Of course the problem of evil is closely related to any concept of divine creation, especially in a monotheistic religion, and one could argue that Genesis 2-3 (or 1-11 for that matter) is an attempt to address that problem (an alternative to Job, as it were), but at the risk of seeming simplistically binary, theodicy as such is neither creation nor creativity. The following essay is Hunter’s ‘Creation Out of Almost Nothing or Does G\*d [sic] Wear Genes?’ This is where we get to genetics. Hunter wants to retain meaningful language about divine creation in a way that is consistent with properly scientific concepts of genetics, but his conclusion seems to be that both religious and scientific formulations are finite and flawed and need to be deconstructed. Willem B. Drees, ‘Vocabularies of Creation and Creativity in Debates on Genetics and Ecology,’ is much more precise and helpful in clarifying the discourse of ‘religion vs. science’ disputes (or seeming disputes, 101–102), and particularly theological discourse about the relations between humans and ‘the world’. The questions of humans as God’s partners or co-creators (100), and of ‘playing God’ (105), which reappear significantly in Part Three, are introduced here.

Part Three consists of the remaining five essays and is titled ‘Creativity’. In Allison Jasper, ‘Mysteries Under Your Skin,’ she critiques the controversial exhibitions by Gunther von Hagens that feature ‘plastinated’ (petrified, only with plastic, not stone) dead human bodies. These exhibitions are presented as a point of intersection between anatomical studies and art. This is a second essay which, while worthy of publication, does not seem to belong in this volume. Jasper does not discuss the creativity (or lack of same) in von Hagens’s exhibits, but instead she focuses on ethical, socio-psychological, and perhaps metaphysical aspects of them (i.e., one’s relations to one’s body, to one’s death), drawing especially on writings by Grace Jantzen and Beverly Clack. The next essay is Jan Willem van Henten, ‘Playing God in the Movies: *Bruce Almighty* and the Preposterous History of Genesis 1:26-27,’ which is perhaps the ‘back again’ of the volume’s subtitle. Citing Mieke Bal and Alice Bach, van Henten favors an ‘intertextual’ or ‘preposterous’ reading of biblical text and film in ‘dialogue’ with one another (126–127). However, in practice his approach in this article is more ‘one-directional,’ and as a result Genesis is rarely illuminated by Tom Shadyac’s movie. The God of *Bruce Almighty* is clearly finite, always embodied (although he can apparently teleport with ease), and distinctly lonely. Van Henten describes

this as leading to God's desire for (human) partners (136–137), but it may also open the possibility that God misses other gods, suggesting yet another reading of the 'us' in Genesis 1:26 and elsewhere. Where might those pesky gods have gone?

The joint essay of Vander Stichele and Tod Penner, 'Terminatrix: Visualizing the End of Creation in *The Animatrix*,' moves from Genesis to cybernetics and back. The focus is on two short *anime* films from director Mahiro Maeda which form a single story and serve as the prequel to the popular *Matrix* film trilogy. Curiously, in the preceding essay of van Henten, he very briefly discusses David Cronenberg's movie *eXistenZ*, which offers a much more substantial interrogation of both creation and creativity than the *Matrix* films do. Despite its title and numerous attempts to relate it to the volume's themes, Louise Joy Lawrence's essay, 'Tracing Tricksters: Creation and Creativity in John's Gospel,' is the third one in this volume which seems to belong in a different collection. Surely there is a great deal about creation in the gospel of John, including strong resonances with Genesis 1. Yet this is not Lawrence's topic; indeed, she never mentions Genesis. Instead, her argument compares John's Jesus to trickster figures that appear in the mythologies of various cultures. Trickster figures are indeed clever and creative, but these characteristics are links that connect tricksters to John's Jesus; they are not the central focus of the essay.

The final essay is Bekkenkamp's 'Why on Earth? Creation and Creativity in the Vocabularies of Patricia de Martelaere, Wislawa Szymborska, and Julia Cameron'. In this exemplary 'experimental study,' Bekkenkamp contrasts ways that the Dutch philosopher Martelaere, the Polish poet Szymborska, and the American writer Cameron use these concepts, and she shows that neither of these terms denotes a fixed absolute and also that their relation to each other varies widely due to other features of the larger system of thought or ideology. Along the way she uncovers at least two distinct types of creativity (190–191, 199), one might even say two entirely different activities, which are both called 'creativity'.

Each essay in this volume is thoughtful, scholarly, and clearly written, and the text is almost entirely free of typos and grammatical awkwardnesses. As I said before, some of these essays will be of interest to almost anyone with interests in either creation or creativity, regardless of how these terms are understood.