DEUTERONOMY AS DIDACTIC POETRY? A CRITIQUE OF D. L. CHRISTENSEN'S VIEW

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For years, a minority voice has asserted that Deuteronomy is best characterized as didactic poetry rather than prose, falling on the more heightened side of the Hebrew Bible's continuum of elevated style. In contrast, through rigorous comparative statistical analysis, this study argues that Deuteronomy, while including instances of embedded poetry (e.g., chs. 32–33), is as a whole literary didactic prose. *Specifically, the book's frequent employment of the* waw + *verb-first clause pattern, its tendency to precede a verb by no more than one constituent, and its high appropriation of prose particles all point toward a prosaic rather than poetic nature for the book.*

Key Words: Deuteronomy, Hebrew language, genre, poetry, prose, mainline, syntax, word-order, prose particles, literary analysis, linguistic analysis

1. Introduction

In his revised 2001–02 two-volume study on Deuteronomy for the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, Duane L. Christensen continues to proffer that Deuteronomy is poetry over prose—"a didactic poem, composed to be recited publicly to music in ancient Israel within a liturgical setting."[1] While he affirms that the book is far from "the lyric poetry of the Psalter," he observes that it is highly liturgical,[2] bears an "epic style," and has "poetic fea-

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[1] Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9* (rev. ed.; WBC 6A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), lvii–lviii, lxxx–lxxxvii, quote from lxxxiv; see idem, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (rev. ed.; WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002). For some of his earlier discussions of the issue, see idem, "Prose and Poetry in the Bible: The Narrative Poetics of Deuteronomy 1,9–18," *ZAW* 97 (1985): 170–89; idem, "Form and Structure in Deuteronomy 1–11," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (ed. Norbert Lohfink; BETL 68; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 135–44; idem, "The Numeruswechsel in Deuteronomy 12," in *Proceedings from the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 61–68; repr. in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ed. Duane L. Christensen; SBTS 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993); idem, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (WBC 6A; Dallas: Word, 1991), xli, lv–lxii.

[2] Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lxxx, cites J. van Goudoever, who observes that Deuteronomy is "the most liturgical book of the Bible" ("The Liturgical Significance of the Date in Dt 1,3," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* [ed. Norbert Lohfink; BETL 68; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985], 148). Compare von

tures such as inclusio, concentric framing devices, and inversion."[3] The presence of such literary artistry causes Christensen to conclude that Deuteronomy is poetry, landing on the more heightened side of what James Kugel has termed a "middle ground" on the Hebrew Bible's continuum of elevated style.[4]

While few scholars have affirmed Christensen's designation of Deuteronomy as poetry, no study to date has provided a formal evaluation of his conclusions. This paper attempts to fill this gap, but the critique is posited principally through the lens of *linguistic* rather than literary features—a perspective from which few in the field have approached the question. Traditionally, in order to distinguish poetry from prose, scholars have sought to identify in a given text multiple "poetic" features like repetition, inclusio, parallelism as a structuring feature, and terseness/conciseness.[5] Christensen's conclusions about Deuteronomy predominantly derive from this type of analysis. In contrast, a number of scholars like Kugel have legitimately shown how texts traditionally identified as prose regularly contain the same "poetic" indicators as those commonly designated as poetry. As such, Sue E. Gillingham has legitimately suggested that the distinction between prose and poetry is "more one of degree than kind."[6]

While affirming that there is a continuum of elevated style, I believe that a predominance of literary features like those mentioned above does at least help to mark certain texts as poetic. Indeed, my argument below will focus

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Rad's assertion that the arrangement of material in Deut 4–30 must be understood to be "following a traditional cultic pattern, probably that of the liturgy of a cultic festival". Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy* (trans. D. Barton; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 12; German original: *Das fünfte Buch Mose: Deuteronomium* (ATD 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964).

[3] Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lxxxiv.

[4] Ibid. For comment regarding this "continuum" and the "middle ground" related to it, see James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981; repr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 59–95, esp. 85–87, 94–95.

[5] W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Technique* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 46–54, argues for at least nineteen different "indicators" of the poetic genre, most of which are literary as opposed to linguistic. *Broad indicators:* presence of established line forms, ellipsis (gapping), unusual vocabulary, conciseness (terseness), unusual word order, archaisms, use of meter, regularity and symmetry; *structural indicators:* parallelism, word pairs, chiastic patterns, envelope figure (inclusio), break-up of stereotyped phrases, repetition, gender-matched parallelism, tricolon, rhyme and other sound patterns, absence or rarity of prose elements. Significantly, all these elements are at times present in prose.

[6] Sue E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (The Oxford Bible Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36.

on one key *literary* (specifically, lexical) feature that sets Deuteronomy apart from poetic discourse. More telling than style, however, are certain key *linguistic* elements that distinguish poetry from prose. And, as will be shown below, Christensen's contention that Deuteronomy is poetry falters at just this point.[7]

2. Christensen's Case

Along with noting the presence of the above "poetic" elements, Christensen supports his claim that Deuteronomy is poetry with the following arguments: First, while the book contains some formal features characteristic of ancient Near Eastern law codes and treaties and while it may rightly be termed a "legal document" or "national constitution," Deuteronomy as it comes to us is neither a law code nor a treaty text but a religious teaching tool.[8] This fact, however, does not mean that the book should be viewed merely as an "archive" of hortatory addresses.[9] Indeed, the book's "extraordinary literary coherence, poetic beauty, and political sophistication" require that the work be understood not as a mere collection of sermons but as an artful composition, comparable to ancient and modern works of epic poetry and music.[10] Second, in accordance with the arguments of French musicologist Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura,[11] Christensen contends that the Masoretic accentual system recorded in Deuteronomy (and the Bible as a whole) is not a medieval construct imposed on the text but is a sophisticated cantillation system that represents an ancient tradition of musical in-

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[7]   Perhaps overstating the case, Raphael Sappan, *The Typical Features of the Syntax of Biblical Poetry in its Classical Period* (Jerusalem: Kiryat-Sefer, 1981), p. iv, has asserted: "The language of Biblical Poetry has a sufficient number of distinctive features both in the grammar and the lexicon, to justify considering it as a special dialect of Biblical Hebrew, 'Dialectus Poetica' […] as distinct from the ordinary ('standard') language of Biblical prose."

[8]   Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lvii.

[9]   Duane L. Christensen, "Deuteronomy in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues," in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ed. Duane L. Christensen; SBTS 3; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 3. Christensen points to Lohfink as one who characterized the repository of ancient Israelite tradition found in Deuteronomy as an "archive." See Lohfink's "Lectures in Deuteronomy" (paper presented at the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 1968), 7; acquired at the Graduate Theological Union Library, Berkley, Calif.; cf. Daniel I. Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy," *JETS* 44 (2001): 400 n. 72, 401.

[10] Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lvii–lviii, quote from lvii.

[11] Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed* (ed. J. Wheeler; trans. D. Weber; Berkley: BIBAL, 1990).

terpretation that predates the Masoretes by at least a millennium.[12] Third, nearly two centuries ago Bishop Robert Lowth observed that in antiquity throughout the Mediterranean world the ancient law codes were sung at festivals.[13] With this, the biblical text asserts that the Torah of Deuteronomy was placed in the hands of the Levites (Deut 17:18), who were commanded by Moses to "proclaim" it at the Feast of Booths (31:9–10). Thus Christensen concludes, "Though we do not know the precise nature of this proclamation of the law, which was handed down within levitical circles, it is likely that it was sung and that this greater 'song of Moses' (i.e., the entire book of Deuteronomy) was taught to the people."[14]

What are we to do with Christensen's contention that Deuteronomy is didactic *poetry*? He is certainly correct in his assertion that the book shows a high level of literary coherence and, I would argue, cohesion.[15] He is also justified in seeing a higher literary style at work in Deuteronomy than, say, in the prose history of the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2). But to designate Deuteronomy as "didactic *poetry*" goes too far, for while many *literary* features present in the poetry of Psalms and Proverbs can be posited for Deuteronomy (e.g., inclusio, concentric framing devices, and inversion), there are certain lexical features present in Deuteronomy that clearly distinguish it from the poetic genre and none of the *linguistic* fea-

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[12] Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lxxxi, states that the Masoretes simply "fixed a once living tradition in written form in order to preserve it for all time" and that the cantillation tradition accurately preserves "the original performance of the text during the period of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and perhaps earlier" (p. lxxxv). In support of the view that the masoretic cantillation system preserves an earlier tradition, E. J. Revell has posited the oldest evidence for the Hebrew accent system in the spacing of an early LXX manuscript (2nd century B.C.E.), along with clues in various Qumran materials. Cf. E. J. Revell, "The Oldest Evidence for the Hebrew Accent System," *BJRL* 54 (1971–72): 214–22. He also suggested that the punctuation was the first feature after the consonantal text to become standardized in the Jewish biblical tradition. See idem, "Biblical Punctuation and Chant in the Second Temple Period," *JSJ* (1976): 181–98, esp. 181; also I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (trans. E. J. Revell; SBL Masoretic Studies 5; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1980), 163–64.

[13] R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (trans. G. Gregory from the 2nd Latin edition [1763]; London: Chadwick, 1815), 54–55; followed in Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, lxxx.

[14] Christensen, "Deuteronomy in Modern Research," 8.

[15] "Coherence" relates to a text's functional connectedness or deep structure, whereas "cohesion" points to the syntactic or semantic connectedness of linguistic forms in the surface structure (D. Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* [5th ed.; The Language Library; Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 2003], 81). For the argument that Deut 5–11 expresses a high level of linguistic cohesion, see chapter 5 of Jason S. DeRouchie, *A Call to Covenant Love: Text Grammar and Literary Structure in Deuteronomy 5–11* (Piscataway: Gorgias, forthcoming in 2007).

tures necessary to designate a work as poetry predominates in the book. This study will focus on three of these characteristics that point to Deuteronomy's nature as prose rather than poetry. The first two are linguistic features and the last is lexical: (1) the predominance of *waw* + verb-initial clauses; (2) the preponderance of prosaic as opposed to poetic word order; and (3) the high frequency of prose particles.[16]

3. Predominance of *waw* + Verb-Initial Clauses

First, Alviero Niccacci has justifiably argued that Hebrew prose distinguishes itself from poetry by its "linear" as opposed to "segmented" communication.[17] This communicative feature is represented linguistically by the dominant presence of the *waw* + (finite) verb-first clause pattern (V[x]), which frequently marks mainline development in Hebrew discourse.[18] For

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[16] A further point of inquiry that is beyond the scope of this study would be to analyze the sermonic material of Deuteronomy against Michael O'Connor's constraints for a poetic line (*Hebrew Verse Structure* [2nd ed.; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 87): (1) Every line has from 0 to 3 clause predicators (i.e., finite verbs, participles functioning as verbs, etc.); (2) every line has from 1 to 4 constituents (i.e., phrases filling a grammatical slot, e.g., verb, prepositional phrase, etc.); (3) every line has from 2 to 5 units (i.e., basically a word, though not including many small particles); (4) a constituent has no more than 4 units; (5) if a line has three predicators, it will have nothing else; if a line has two predicators, only one may have a dependent nominal phrase (whether noun, adjective, etc.); (6) a line must have syntactical integrity (i.e., a line with predicators can only contain nominal phrases dependent on them). For a helpful summary and evaluation of O'Connor's line constraints, see William L. Holladay, "Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (I): Which Words 'Count'?" *JBL* 118 (1999): 19–32; and idem, "Hebrew Verse Structure Revisited (II): Conjoint Cola, and Further Suggestions" *JBL* 118 (1999): 401–16.

[17] Alviero Niccacci, "Analyzing Biblical Poetry," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 77. See also Francis Landy, "Poetics and Parallelism: Some Comments on James Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*," *JSOT* 28 (1984): 71.

[18] "Mainline development" refers to those events or actions in discourse that the reader perceives as most structurally salient and that carry the discourse along (see John A. Cook, "The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics: Clarifying the roles of *Wayyiqtol* and *Weqatal* in Biblical Hebrew Prose," *JSS* 49 [2004]: 254; Crystal, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, 184). In the past, scholars were prone to view *waw* + verb-first clause patterns as marking temporal succession, often unhelpfully termed "sequencing" (e.g., Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971], 162–63; Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" [Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985], 64–96, 265; Randall Buth, "Functional Grammar, Hebrew and Aramaic: An Integrated, Textlinguistic Approach to Syntax," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers* [ed. Walter R. Bodine; SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 84–89; Yoshinobu Endo, *The Verbal System of Classical Hebrew in the Joseph Story: An Approach from Discourse Analysis* [SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996], 321–22; P. J. Gentry, "The System of the Finite Verb in Classical Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 39

example, in his 1985 doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto, Stephen G. Dempster's analysis of the 3,657 independent, non-embedded prose clauses in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20 + 1 Kgs 1–2), the Joseph Story (Gen 37–50), the Siloam Inscription, the Moabite Stone Inscription, and the Synchronistic History (1 Kgs 12:1–2 Kgs 18:12) uncovered the following percentage relationships between the mainline (V[x]) and offline ([x]V) structures: Succession Narrative = V[x] (90.07%) / [x]V (9.93%); Joseph Story = V[x] (93.17%) / [x]V (6.83%); Synchronistic History = V[x] (87.79%) / [x]V (12.21%).[19] More recently, in his analysis of 1,190 prose clauses, Nicholas P. Lunn observed that 1,017 were verb-first (V[x] = 85.5%), leaving only 173 without the verb in initial position ([x]V = 14.5%).[20] Clearly, the statistics suggest that prose material contains significantly more *waw* + verb-initial clauses than non-verb-first clauses.

In contrast, Lunn's analysis of 1,243 poetic clauses revealed 821 verb-initial clauses (V[x] = 66%) to 422 non-verb-first clauses ([x]V = 34%).[21] Similarly, Terrence Collins observed that the V[x] and [x]V patterns occur with almost equal regularity in the poetry of the prophets, so that one is hard

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[1998]: 13–14). Recently, however, John A. Cook has persuasively argued for the need to distinguish the mainline function of certain predicate patterns and the temporal succession that often is implied in the context (see Cook, "The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics," 247–73). For a full discussion of the relationship between mainline or foreground predicate patterns and temporal or logical succession, see DeRouchie, *A Call to Covenant Love*, ch. 4.

[19]   Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative," 64, 152, 224. At least two other studies using Dempster's model have been performed in other parts of the canon to confirm the statistical conclusions. Peter J. Gentry' analyzed Exod 1–14 under the same constraints, and he also discovered similar patterns: V[x] (92.78%) / [x]V (7.8%). See here Peter J. Gentry, "Macrosyntax of Hebrew Narrative" (unpublished paper presented before the OT Ph.D. colloquium, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, fall 1999), 10. Similarly, Jason S. DeRouchie and Miles V. Van Pelt evaluated all of the 843 prose clauses in the Joseph Story not evaluated by Dempster (i.e., all the reported direct speech + clauses marked by a subordinate conjunction in non-embedded speech), and again similar percentages were discovered: V[x] (71.6%) / [x]V (28.4%). Cf. Jason S. DeRouchie and Miles V. Van Pelt, "A Macrosyntactical Analysis of Rank-shifted Clauses in the Narrative Material of Genesis 37–50: A Framework for Further Study" (unpublished Ph.D. seminar paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 29 April 2002), 21.

[20]   Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (Paternoster Biblical Monograph Series; Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2006), 8, 291.

[21]   Ibid. Lunn further distinguishes among the non-verb-first clauses those that are pragmatically marked and those in which the word-order is altered merely for poetic variation ("defamiliarisation") (pp. 277–78).

pressed to determine which pattern is more dominant.[22] Years ago Dempster posited that the higher rate of non-verb-initial clauses in poetry was due to poetry's frequent topic shifts and lack of thematic or temporal development.[23] More recently, Lunn has concluded similarly, asserting that "the lack of linearity in poetic discourse" is most likely one of the key factors contributing to the statistical phenomenon.[24]

As for Deuteronomy, L. J. de Regt's computer generated study of clause patterns in the book noted that 2,019 of the 2,255 clauses in Deut 1–30 containing a finite verb are verb-first (V[x]) (89.534%), a figure that aligns perfectly with the patterns found in prose rather than in poetry.[25] These statistics clearly point to the prosaic nature of the book as a whole.

4. Predominance of Prosaic Word Order

Related to the syntactic argument above is the fact that whereas prose texts only rarely prepose a verb with more than one constituent, poetry fre-

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[22] Terence Collins, *Line-Forms in Hebrew Poetry: A Grammatical Approach to the Stylistic Study of the Hebrew Prophets* (Studia Pohl: Series Maior 7; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 77, 202–6; cf. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative," 205. As I tally them, Collins' totals include 552 V[x] clauses against 696 [x]V clauses.

[23] Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative," 265, 271 note 6. If indeed all of Isa 40–55 is regarded as poetry, Michael Rosenbaum's more recent study reveals a somewhat less balanced pattern: 662 V[x] clauses (62.63%) / 395 [x]V (37.37%) clauses. Cf. Michael Rosenbaum, *Word-Order Variation in Isaiah 40–55: A Functional Perspective* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997), 221–23.

[24] Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, 277. He continues: "By this we mean that the text is not organized along the lines of its chronological development as is apparent in the case of narrative. In poetry the movement from one episode to another on the basis of spatial or temporal shifts, prominent in prose, is hardly to be found. Instead the organization is thematic or even spontaneous, as the expression of praise to God. Such being the case, marked clauses presenting new topics may be expected to occur more frequently." Lunn also notes that when the first of two parallel lines bears a V[x] pattern, the second line will often be non-verb-initial for poetic variation alone, with no particular pragmatic concerns dominating the shift (ch. 5 with pp. 269, 275). In contrast, where the A-line is marked ([x]V), the B-line will almost always be marked (ch. 7 with 275).

[25] These calculations include only finite verbs (+ infinitive absolute where standing as a free, uninflected verb form) and are derived after separating the predicating non-finite verbal forms from de Regt's statistics. See L. J. de Regt, *A Parametric Model for Syntactic Studies of a Textual Corpus, Demonstrated on the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 1–30 and Supplement* (2 vols.; SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 2:32–34 with 82–84. This distinction was necessary because de Regt included both participles and infinitives construct as clause predicators (1:13–17) whereas the comparable data noted above treated both as nominals.

quently places two and even three constituents before the verb.[26] With reference to prose texts, a number of studies have been conducted. Dempster's analysis of the independent, non-embedded clause material in his varied historical narrative corpuses revealed no occurrences of a finite verb preceded by more than two constituents and only 5 instances of a finite verb in third position.[27] Similarly, Walter Groß' examination of the entire Hebrew canon, though by no means exhaustive, found merely 135 instances in prose of a verb preceded by two constituents and only 12 by three, though after examination of his 12 texts I would limit the number to 6 or 7.[28]

[26] Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative, 264; Walter Groß, "Is There Really a Compound Nominal Clause in Biblical Hebrew?" in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. Cynthia L. Miller; LSAWS 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 45; idem, *Doppelt besetztes Vorfeld: Syntaktische, pragmatische und übersetzungstechnische Studien zum althebräischen Verbalsatz* (BZAW 305; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), esp. 22–24 for statistics.

[27] Dempster's data included 3,349 clauses containing a finite verb (including the free, uninflected verb form—i.e., infinitive absolute). The five occurrences of a verb preposed by two constituents were Gen 39:22b; 2 Sam 17:27b–29; 1 Kgs 16:7; 2 Kgs 16:11b; Moabite Stone Inscription, line 10 (see Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative," 275–81). On the absence of any examples with more than two constituents preposing the verb, see pp. 66, 153, 184, 202, 224–25. Gentry's ("Macrosyntax of Hebrew Narrative") follow-up study of Exod 1–14 found no examples of a verb preposed by more than two slots. Similarly, the study by DeRouchie and Van Pelt uncovered no instances of three or more constituents preposing a verb and only 8 occurrences of a verb preposed by two ("A Macrosyntactical Analysis of Rank-shifted Clauses in the Narrative Material of Genesis 37–50," appendix C.). Due to their clearly poetic nature, clauses in Gen 48:15c–16d and 49:1c–27 were not analyzed in the latter study. The eight instances where two constituents preposed a verb were in Gen 40:10b; 41:11b; 43:20b; 44:5c; 48:5b, 6a; 48:7a; 50:24c.

[28] Groß, *Doppelt besetztes Vorfeld*, 23–24; cf. his more provisional analysis in, "Is There Really a Compound Nominal Clause in Biblical Hebrew?" 45 n. 95. The 135 prose instances with two constituents preposing the verb are: Gen 5:1b; 7:8–9; 8:19; 14:10d; 17:6c; 23:6d; 31:29b; 31:42b; 35:11f; 41:11b; Exod 12:4c; 12:10b; 16:18d; 18:23d; Lev 17:11c; 19:8a; Num 22:33d; 30:9a; 36:7b; 36:9b; Deut 2:10; 2:28a; 2:28c; 12:22c; 18:14a; 24:16c; Judg 17:6b; 21:25b; 2 Kgs 5:13d; 8:12g; 14:6d; 16:15c; 25:10a; 25:30; Isa 17:7b; Jer 18:12d; 19:8b; 19:9b; 26:18d; 31:30a; 32:4d; 32:44a; 32:24b; 34:3d; 34:3e; 37:10c; 42:16b; 42:16c; Ezek 1:9b; 1:12a; 1:17a; 3:18e; 3:19c; 3:19d; 3:20g; 3:21e; 4:11a; 4:16d; 5:2a; 5:4a; 5:12a; 5:12c; 5:12d; 6:6a; 6:10b; 6:12a; 6:12b; 6:12c; 9:10c; 10:11a; 10:22b; 11:21b; 12:6a; 12:18a; 12:18b; 12:19c; 12:19d; 14:14b; 14:20d; 16:51a; 17:21b; 18:7d; 18:11a; 18:16d; 18:19c; 18:30a; 20:7b; 20:8c; 20:39a; 22:11a; 22:11b; 22:11c; 22:31c; 23:10c; 23:25d; 23:25e; 23:38a; 23:47d; 24:21d; 25:13e; 26:6a; 26:11b; 26:11c; 26:12e; 27:14; 27:19a; 30:17a; 30:17b; 30:18d; 31:17a; 32:29b; 33:6f; 33:6g; 33:8e; 33:20c; 33:26c; 34:18e; 34:19a; 36:7c; 36:37b; 38:8c; 38:20d; 39:3b; 44:26; 45:21b; 45:24a; 46:8a; Zech 1:12c; Esth 4:3c; Neh 2:3b; 1 Chr 17:18b; 19:13c; 2 Chr 25:4e; 31:6a; 35:8b. The proposed 12 prose instances with three constituents preposing the verb are: Lev 7:17; Num 28:15; 1 Sam 9:9a; 1 Kgs 10:29d; 20:40d; Jer 48:36a; 48:36b; Ezek 16:43c; 30:5; Zech 5:3c; 5:3d; 2 Chr 35:8a. Upon my own evaluation, I would move Num 28:15; 1 Kgs 10:29d; Ezek 16:43c; 30:5; and perhaps 2

In significant contrast, Collins catalogued 156 examples of clauses in his poetic corpus with the verb in third position and 2 examples in fourth position.[29] Similarly, O'Connor listed 32 examples in his poetic corpus of a verb preposed by two constituents, 9 of which occur in Deut 32:1–43 and 33:2–29.[30] Finally, Groß has found 698 instances in poetry where verbs are preposed by two constituents and 17 instances where verbs are preceded by three.[31] These types of figures cause Groß to conclude: "Although this type of clause [i.e., one with two or three different constituents before the finite verb] occurs very rarely in prose, it is so frequent in poetry that without hesitation we may consider it viable for the syntactic system of rules for Hebrew."[32]

Now, with reference to Deuteronomy, de Regt's study noted that out of the 3,076 non-elliptical clauses in the corpus, none precedes a verbal form (whether finite or non-finite) with three constituents and only 12 (.004%) prepose with two.[33] From the perspective of syntax and word order, therefore, there are no grounds for viewing the whole of Deuteronomy as poetry.

Chr 35:8a up to the "two constituent" section. Furthermore, on my assessment, 1 Kgs 20:40d includes only a connector plus pendent construction and thus only preposes the verb with one constituent.

[29]   Collins, *Line-Forms in Hebrew Poetry*, 77, 202–6. In his assessment of Collins' work, Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative," 271 n. 4, arrived at 306 examples of clauses with the verb in third position but I cannot account for this in my reading of Collins' study.

[30]   O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 342–44. Those listed with two constituents preposing the verb are Gen 49:9d, 13a, 19a; Num 23:9c, 24a; Deut 32:12a, 17c; 33:2a, 3b, 7e, 11d, 17c, 19a, 29f; Jdg 5:17a, 24c; 2 Sam 1:25b; Hab 3:3a, 4a, 11b, 16f, 18a; Zeph 2:4c, 7b, 9d, 14c, 15f; 3:5c; Ps 78:50c, 64a; 106:11b; 107:26c. On the flexibility of Hebrew poetic word order and syntax, see most recently Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, along with Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 49 and Patrick D. Miller, "The Theological Significance of Biblical Poetry," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Festschrift for James Barr* (ed. Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 220–22.

[31]   Groß, *Doppelt besetztes Vorfeld*, 22–23. The 698 instances of two constituents in front of the verb will not all be listed here, but the 17 occurrences of 3 constituents before the verb are as follows: Isa 10:14b; 11:8b; 13:14b; 16:11a; Jer 50:16b; Ezek 7:13e; Mic 3:12a; Hab 2:6a; Zeph 3:10; Ps 4:9c; 29:11a; 56:4a; 74:6; 99:4d; Job 19:24; 33:3b; Prov 28:23.

[32]   Groß, "Is There Really a Compound Nominal Clause in Biblical Hebrew?" 45.

[33]   De Regt, *A Parametric Model for Syntactic Studies of a Textual Corpus*, 1:109; 2:22–23, 82–84. Of the 3,076 total clauses, 173 are nominal and 2,903 are verbal (i.e., contain a finite verb). While de Regt fails to catalogue most of the data behind the statistics, he does offer the following examples of a verbal form preposed by two constituents (1:109–10): with *yiqtol* = 2:28a, 28c; 12:22c; 24:16c; with *qatal* = 2:10a; with participle = 4:12b; 10:12a; 29:14a. My own preliminary investigation has uncovered what appear to be two of the four remaining instances (i.e., *yiqtol* = 18:14a; participle = 18:12b); de Regt's calculations

5. Predominance of Prose Particles

A feature of lexical distribution is the focus of my third argument for Deuteronomy's prosaic nature. Specifically, Deuteronomy contains some of the highest, most consistent "prose particle" counts (i.e., אֶת־, אֲשֶׁר, הַ) in all of Scripture,[34] a fact that strongly indicates the prosaic nature of the book.[35] Specifically, building off of the work of Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes,[36] David N. Freedman has plausibly posited that texts with a prose particle count of 5.0% or less are poetry, whereas those with 15.0% or higher are prose; those between 5.0 and 10.0% are probably poetry, and those between 10.0 and 15.0% are most likely prose.[37] When the chapters in Deuteronomy are analyzed, only the ancient blessing of ch. 33 contains a count lower than 5.0% (3.274%), whereas 28 of Deuteronomy's total 34 chapters contain a prose particle frequency over 15.0%.[38] Chapters 15, 24, and 25 contain counts ranging from 10.0–15.0%, which in Freedman's analysis means they are probably prose.[39] Chapters 23 and 32 contain counts between 5.0 and 10.0%,[40] but when the embedded song in 32:1–43 is set apart from its context, the song itself shows a frequency well below 5.0% and the rest of

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[ ] suggest the additional texts should contain two *yiqtols* and two participles (see his 2:84–86).

[34] Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, "'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Festschrift for David N. Freedman* (ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael O'Connor; ASOR: Special Volume Series 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 166, 170–71 n. 29. Andersen and Forbes define "particle frequency" as "the number of consonantal articles, relatives, and *notae accusativi* divided by the number of words in the chapter" (p. 170).

[35] See David N. Freedman, "Another Look at Hebrew Poetry," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (ed. Elaine R. Follis; JSOTSup 40; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 11–18. Recognizably, because there are no apparent linguistic constraints that account for the higher density of these particular particles in prose rather than poetry, this lexical feature is more literary than linguistic. Nevertheless, the statistics strongly suggest that Deuteronomy is prose rather than poetry.

[36] Andersen and Forbes, "'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," 165–83.

[37] Freedman, "Another Look at Hebrew Poetry," 17.

[38] Andersen and Forbes, "'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," 172–73, namely Deut 1 (19.878%), 2 (17.857%), 3 (24.512%), 4 (23.386%), 5 (18.008%), 6 (19.811%), 7 (19.417%), 8 (17.747%), 9 (21.042%), 10 (22.222%), 11 (25.591%), 12 (19.808%), 13 (19.207%), 14 (22.792%), 16 (15.868%), 17 (22.283%), 18 (18.750%), 19 (18.675%), 20 (18.671%), 21 (18.644%), 22 (18.535%), 26 (19.749%), 27 (21.472%), 28 (15.292%), 29 (23.462%), 30 (20.859%), 31 (23.689%), 34 (19.886%).

[39] Ibid., 173, namely Deut 15 (13.842%), 24 (12.538%), 25 (12.308%).

[40] Ibid., namely Deut 23 (5.900%), 32 (6.829%).

the chapter aligns with the majority of the book well over 15.0%.[41] As for ch. 23, no stylistic features appear to set this chapter apart from the rest of the legislation/exhortation found in chs. 12–26. Christensen does posit a detailed concentric framing within the chapter[42] and places its various units as the central elements in a chiastic structure that stretches from 21:10–25:19.[43] However, he nowhere suggests the presence of a heightened poetic style like that found in the song of ch. 32 or the blessing of ch. 33, and there is nothing about his analysis in ch. 23 that is distinct from the way he handles the rest of the section. In the *BHS*, Johannes Hempel formats Deut 23 in paragraph form (i.e., as prose),[44] and I am aware of no other interpreters that treat any part of this text as a poem, distinct from the other Deuteronomic materials. As such, Deut 23 should probably be understood to be one of those few prose texts that retain, for whatever reason, a low particle count.[45]

6. Conclusion

Deuteronomy's frequent employment of the *waw* + verb-first clause pattern, its tendency to precede a verb by no more than one constituent, and its high appropriation of prose particles all point toward a prosaic rather than poetic nature for the book. It is likely on this basis that the narrator refers to the body of the book simply as "the words" (הַדְּבָרִים = "farewell sermons," 1:1) of Moses or "the words of the covenant" (דִּבְרֵי הַבְּרִית, 28:69 [29:1]) and

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[41] According to my count, of the 462 words in the ancient song of Deut 32:1–43, only 5 are prose particles (see 32:1, 4, 38) = 1.082%. In contrast, 32:44–52 contains 153 words, and 37 are prose particles = 24.183%. My totals of 615 words and 42 prose particles for ch. 32 align with the figures of Andersen and Forbes (ibid.).

[42] See Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, 523–56.

[43] Ibid., 465–66.

[44] Johannes Hempel, arranger, "Deuteronomomium," in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (ed. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), 326–28.

[45] Intriguingly, three of the four chapters in Deuteronomy that do not contain an embedded poem and yet bear prose particle counts between 5.0–15.0% all occur in succession: chs. 23 (5.900%), 24 (12.538%), 25 (12.308%). No features, however, appear to mark this set of chapters off from the rest of chs. 12–26, apart from the apparent miscellaneous nature of the laws included. In view of the high frequency of prose particle counts between 5.0 and 15.0% in the prophetic literature, Freedman, "Another Look at Hebrew Poetry," 15–16, has posited a third category called "prophetic discourse" that is neither prose nor poetry but that shares characteristics of each. But because the majority of Deuteronomy exhibits particle counts above 20.0% and because there are no apparent stylistic or formal features that set these chapters apart from the rest of the book, it is unlikely that chs. 23, 24 or 25 should be viewed as "prophetic discourse" in distinction from the rest of the book. Rather, they are all prose texts, though ones that employ prose particles at a remarkably low rate.

interweaves them into the narrative begun in Genesis–Numbers.[46] In contrast, it is noteworthy that the two sections of Deuteronomy usually viewed as poetry contain explicit titles setting them apart from the rest of the text: ch. 32 is a warning "song" (שִׁירָה, 31:30) and ch. 33 is a deathbed "blessing" (בְּרָכָה, 33:1). If, as Christensen asserts, the whole book is a poetic song, why was the narrator compelled to distinguish these two units?

Few scholars would question that Deuteronomy witnesses a high level of stylistic and structural artistry in the way both its parts and the whole are structured.[47] Indeed, such literary beauty and structure fits well in the con-

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[46] The Mosaic addresses roughly cover chs. 1–4; 5–28, 29–30. These passionate, hortatory appeals for behavioral change are characterized as "the Torah" (הַתּוֹרָה)—a term that occurs twenty-two times in the book. Probably deriving from the hiphil of the verb ירהIII "to instruct, teach," the term תּוֹרָה "Torah" is used broadly throughout the OT in cultic, civil, and familial contexts to designate a standard of conduct usually deriving from God and often with specific reference to a canonical body of materials (see *HALOT*, 1710–12; Peter Enns, "Law of God," in *NIDOTTE* 4:893–900; Martin J. Selman, "Law," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* [ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003], 497–515). In Deuteronomy, the Torah is identified with Yahweh's covenantal decrees delivered through Moses (1:5; 4:8, 44), which were written down (17:18; 31:9, 24; cf. 27:3, 8; 31:22) either before or after recitation in order to give lasting guidance to the Israelites regarding the nature and demands of covenant relationship with Yahweh (17:19; 28:58, 61; 29:20 [21]; 30:10; 31:11, 26). For more on how the closing chapters of Deuteronomy (32:48–34:12) link the book to the concluding narrative portions of Numbers, see e.g., Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 10; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 229–32; Morton S. Smith, "Matters of Space and Time in Exodus and Numbers," in *Theological Exegesis: Festschrift for Brevard S. Childs* (ed. Christopher R. Seitz and K. Greene-McKnight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 203; Block, "Recovering the Voice of Moses," 401 n. 74. Others have suggested that the arrangement of key poetic texts in the Pentateuch (Gen 49; Num 24; Deut 32) gives an eschatological / Messianic framework to the remaining historical narrative of the whole—see Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 345–47; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (LBI; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 35–37; idem, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 239–52.

[47] While numerous stylistic studies have been performed on Deuteronomy that stress its textual unity, the most noteworthy due to its groundbreaking nature is Norbert Lohfink, *Das Hauptgebot: Eine Untersuchung literarischer Einleitungsfragen zu Dtn 5–11* (AnBib 20; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963). Lohfink's meticulous examination of words, expressions, themes, speech formulas, and the "covenant form" often led him to argue for unity in the textual composition where C. Steuernagel and W. Staerk at the end of the 19th century and G. Minette de Tillesse and others in the second half of the 20th century posited redactional layering. Christensen himself has built a strong case for the textual unity of Deuteronomy's final form through his identification of

text of a prophet's final passionate appeals for godward, affection-filled living.[48] Furthermore, there is no doubt that the stylistic continuum between prose and poetry leaves room for a measure of subjective judgment.[49] Nevertheless, the linguistic and lexical features of the discourse addressed above indicate that Deuteronomy is best regarded as "literary didactic *prose*" rather than "didactic *poetry*," keeping in mind that there are instances of embedded poetry in the text itself.[50]

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thematic inclusios, concentric framing, and inversion throughout the book (see his commentary and his "Form and Structure in Deuteronomy 1–11," 135–44).

[48] DeRouchie's textlinguistic study of Deut 5–11 reveals not only the remarkable structural coherence of the Deuteronomic address but also the text's stress on Yahweh's passion for his people's affection or love (see *A Call to Covenant Love*, ch. 5).

[49] Compare Freedman, "Another Look at Biblical Hebrew Poetry," 15: "As we know from other languages and literatures, there are few if any sharp lines between prose and poetry, and there are various stages between pure poetry and pure prose which can be categorized as prose-poetry, or poetic prose, or prosaic poetry."

[50] For a helpful recent summary of scholarly viewpoints and dialogue regarding the question of distinguishing Hebrew prose and poetry, see J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part I," *CR:BS* 6 (1998): 55–57; and idem, "Biblical Hebrew Poetry in Recent Research, Part II," 7 (1999): 44–47.