

RECURSION AND VARIATION IN THE "PROPHECY" OF JONAH: ON THE RHETORICAL IMPACT OF STYLISTIC TECHNIQUE IN HEBREW NARRATIVE DISCOURSE, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO IRONY AND ENIGMA

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Part One

1. Methodology:

The Interaction of Rhetorical and Stylistic Analysis

This study is based on a prior "text-analytical" study and translation of the entire book of Jonah.¹ The methodology involves a systematic investigation of such macrostructural properties as "demarkation" (an internal segmentation of the text), "conjunction" (textual cohesion and coherence), "projection" (the foregrounding or highlighting of focal information), "progression" (the development of syntagmatic sequences and paradigmatic sets), and "inclusion" (the hierarchical integration of all discourse constituents into a unified whole).² The result provides an overview or exposition of a biblical text's larger organizational framework and, perhaps more important, its associated (albeit assumed) functional operation as a unique instance of theological *and* literary communication, whether in the original event or during subsequent oral and written rehearsals in different contextual settings.

I now wish to build upon the previously applied discourse examination by concentrating on the form and function of what appear to be the two most prominent stylistic techniques in the Jonah text: recursion and variation. These are related by mutual complementation. Both similarity (recursion) and difference (variation) are necessary for the production of verbal meaning in general and poetic effect in particular.

¹Ernst R. Wendland, "Text Analysis and the Genre of Jonah: What can the Discourse Structure Tell Us About a Unique Prophetic 'Word of the LORD'?" *JETS* 39 (1996): 191-206.

²For a detailed exposition and application of this methodology in relation to prophetic texts, see Ernst R. Wendland, *Demarcating the Compositional Units of Hebrew Prophetic Discourse: A Rhetorical-Structural Approach, as Exemplified in the Oracles of Hosea and Joel*, Text and Studies Series (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press), 1995.

"Style" concerns the *how* (or manner/means) of transmitting the content (the *what*) of a certain message. It refers to the sum total of literary and linguistic characteristics that serve either to distinguish one text *from* another, or to relate one text *to* another. Two other important, and closely related, artistic devices in Jonah involve the use of "quotation" (intertextual as well as intratextual citation) and "interrogation" (real and rhetorical questions), but these will be treated under the more general categories of recursion and variation. The use of any given stylistic feature will normally not be textually distinctive in and of itself. But the selection and arrangement of such items, within a single composition and situational context, to convey a particular message to an intended audience, will inevitably be text-specific in terms of both form and function.

Any consideration of functional significance will normally engage an analyst with the rhetorical dimension of discourse. A study of "rhetoric" investigates the aim or intention of a certain text in relation to both the primary and secondary receptor groups. Rhetoric is the art of argumentation; it takes up where stylistics leaves off and examines the utilization of a specially shaped and organized verbal composition for the purposes of receptor persuasion. How did the original Hebrew author endeavor to employ content coupled with a skillful manipulation of form to marshal the thinking, mold the opinion, move the emotions, and motivate the will of his audience—in short, to adopt a divinely-shaped ideology and point of view? Following this discussion of function, I will focus upon the diverse operation of two prominent rhetorical techniques in Jonah, namely, irony and enigma. These effects are frequently generated by or embodied in the pair of stylistic means mentioned above, recursion and variation.

In this article I propose to survey the major formal and functional features which distinguish the text of Jonah, with special reference to recursion, variation, irony, and enigma. The first two topics pertain largely to narrative style and are considered in Part One. Part Two will then take up the wider functional dimension of this discourse, though it is impossible to separate form and function completely in any meaningful analysis. In Part Three irony and enigma are described and illustrated from the text of Jonah. These four poetic and rhetorical resources are crucial components of the "artistic code" in which the book was first written and hence are also keys to its contemporary interpretation.³ In the course of this investigation I hope to demonstrate why the short narrative

³V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 35.

work of Jonah has often been characterized as a "masterpiece of rhetoric," an excellent example of artful, affective religious communication.⁴ The principal reason for paying such careful attention to artistic form has been well stated by V. Philips Long: "An increased appreciation of the literary mechanisms of a text—*how* a story is told—often becomes the avenue of greater insight into the theological, religious and even historical significance of the text—*what* the story means."⁵ A brief overview of Jonah's main theme(s) or "message" validates in turn the book's classification as a "prophetic" discourse; that is, it manifests a hortatory purpose to other texts found among minor prophets. In a subsequent article, I present some thoughts on the practical implications of this study in relation to both the theory and the practice of Bible translation, communicating the "word of the LORD" persuasively (i.e., rhetorically) to God's people today in an appropriate *genre* and an idiomatic style of language.⁶

2. Recursion in Biblical Hebrew Narrative Discourse

The extraordinary recursion of linguistic form in terms of both quantity (amount/variety) and variety and quality (elegantly constructed patterns and combinations) is perhaps *the* most important attribute of artistic rhetorical discourse in literary traditions, both oral and written. In biblical Hebrew poetry such restatement is manifested most clearly and distinctly in the multifaceted technique known as "parallelism," which normally permeates all verbal levels of a text. Formal recursion is not quite so obvious in biblical works that are more prosaic in nature, but this difference is, in the final analysis, more a matter of degree than of kind, for beneath the apparent surface of most narrative discourse, for example, an elaborate virtual edifice of iterative construction waits to be concretely realized or activated by the attentive ear or eye, and profitably applied to the message at hand.

The superficially simple story of Jonah's mission to Nineveh furnishes an outstanding instance of this, as has been noted in a number of recent commentaries and monographs.⁷ In the following discussion I

⁴Herbert Chanan Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 68.

⁵Long, 43.

⁶This article, "On the 'Relevance' of Jonahic Rhetoric and Style for Bible Translation," will appear in *The Bible Translator* (New York: United Bible Societies).

⁷Three prominent examples are: Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Technique in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation, AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); and Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of*

will summarize and develop some of the principal insights of these studies, with particular emphasis on those features of recursion that are of special significance in conveying the book's essential meaning (semantic content plus pragmatic intent). This presentation is arranged according to an eclectic set of primary analytical distinctions made in the study of recursion in any literary discourse, and Hebrew "theological-prophetic" narrative in particular.

Linguistic Nature

The linguistic nature of recursion is most evident in the reiteration of phonological or lexical material. Lexical reiteration always includes some degree of phonological reiteration with morphosyntactic reduplication as well, which is not nearly as apparent to the listener unless it actually incorporates some prominent similarity of sound or corresponding vocabulary, as in the "cognate accusative" (better, "adverbial complement") construction. For example, "And *it was evil* to Jonah a great *evil*" (4:1), is balanced by a similar form having the opposite meaning near the onset of the next narrative subunit: "And Jonah *was happy* over the castor plant a great *happiness*," for it helped to ameliorate his "evil" (i.e., discomfort, 4:6; cf. also 1:10, 16; 3:2).⁸ Since there is so much extended lexical recursion in Jonah, it is not necessary to point out instances of the less conspicuous morphosyntactic variety. It is sufficient simply to note that this stylistic resource is also present to augment the overall repetitive nature of the text as a whole and to enhance its larger rhetorical function.

A number of examples of *phonological* recursion appear to operate either independently or in conjunction with instances of lexical correspondence. Most subtle, and hence easy to miss, are the occasional rhythmic-accentual patterns which serve to reinforce the content being conveyed. Sasson, for example, points out that in addition to a repetition of vocabulary, Jonah's "angry" reiterative reply to God's question in 4:9 reproduces its basic "punctuation" (accentuation) as well, thus highlighting the ironic contrast between the two utterance-final phrases, "over the castor plant" and "unto death."⁹ Wolff observes that Jonah's psalm of chapter two "consists exclusively of five-stress lines," thus rhythmically unifying the entire piece.¹⁰ The repetition of selected vowels (assonance)

Jonah, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

⁸Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are my own rather literal renderings.

⁹Sasson, 307.

¹⁰Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Joel: A Commentary*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 129. Ironically, this so-called *qinah* meter [3+2] is often found in psalmic laments.

or consonants (alliteration) in certain words functions to place the concepts concerned in the foreground. For example, a sequence of /ā/ vowels in 1:2b seems to extend from the initial command *qērā* "cry out," intensifying the solemn import of the LORD's message. In 4:6 a string of //s/ is intertwined with /ô/ vowels to reflect the "shade" (*šēl*) of "deliverance" (*lēhassil*) that Yahweh "caused to grow over" (*wayya' al mē'āl*) his irate messenger. A little later, however, a renewal of Jonah's feeling of "anger" (*hārāb*; 4:9) is preauditioned, as it were, by a series of terms that feature the sounds /h/ and /r/: "dawn," "on the next day," "at its rising," "wind," "scorching" (vv. 7, 8).

Similar examples serve to punctuate selected moods and meanings throughout the book. In addition, several instances of evocative onomatopoeia, for example, *hiššēbāh lēhiššābēr* in 1:4, "captures the sound of planks cracking when tortured by raging waters."¹¹ There is also some rhyming, such as the commonly co-occurring pair *hannūn wērahūm*, "gracious and compassionate" (4:2, cf. the subsequent *wēnihām* "and relenting"). The presence of rhyme in Hebrew is a debatable issue due to its ubiquitous pronominal suffixes, but certain concentrations seem more than fortuitous. As Jonah and the sailors dialogue in 1:10-13, for example, "the sounds, positions, juxtapositions, and preponderance of twelve pronominal objects dot the wordscape as they interrelate the characters."¹² Just the opposite is the case in Jonah's complaint of 4:2-3, however, where only a single pronoun reference is devoted to God ("you"), whose merciful attributes—now so obnoxious to Jonah—are surrounded by two strings of self-centered personal references (*-î* "I/me/my"). A similar denotative disparity characterizes Jonah's song of thanksgiving in the second chapter, e.g., v. 3: "I called out (*-tî*) in [the] distress of mine (*lî*) unto YHWH, and he answered me (*-nî*); from the belly of Sheol I cried (*-tî*), and you heard my cry (*-lî*)."

Various passages utilize significant sound patterns to play one sense against another, to rhetorically heighten the discourse. Such punning, or paronomasia, periodically appears to artistically unify the account and to accent its essential content. For example, the sudden and unexpected "believing" of the people of Nineveh (*wayya' āmînū*) in 3:5 calls to mind what in 1:1 seemed to be the extraneous name of Jonah's father (*'āmittay*). Thus, "the unstable 'calling' of the son of Belief (Amittai) elicits belief in God."¹³ Much more elaborate phonological linkage helps to bridge the transition from Jonah 3 (scene 5) to chapter 4 (scene 6):

¹¹Sasson, 96.

¹²Trible, 145.

¹³Trible, 181.

When God saw (*wayyar'*) their *deeds*, that they turned from their wicked way (*hārā'āh*), God had compassion concerning the disaster (*hārā'āh*) that he said [he would] *do* to them, and he did not *do* it. And it was displeasing (*wayyēra'*) to Jonah a great displeasure (*rā'āh*), and it burned (*wayyihar*) to him. (3:10-4:1)

Another prominent play on words at the end of the book spotlights the contrast between Jonah's incongruous, "pitiful" attitude towards the castor plant, which he did "not cause to become great" (to grow, *lō' giddaltō*, 4:10), as compared with the "great" (*haggēdōlāh*) city of Nineveh (4:11). To be sure, "Nineveh the great city" is much "greater" now in the ears of the listener than it was, either at the beginning of the story or at the onset of its second "cycle" (1:2/3:2—a double *inclusio*), for a strongly favorable divine perspective has been superimposed (cf. 3:3). In addition to underscoring key aspects of the message, such deliberate phonic enhancement, a feature that pervades the Jonah text, also acts to augment the dramatic impact or the ironic effect that is being created.

Degree of Formal Correspondence

The degree of formal correspondence that is involved in any instance of recursion ranges between the two poles of verbatim repetition and the loosest type of synonymous paraphrase. In Jonah the *exact* form of reiteration is predominant, especially in the sets of corresponding verbs and related qualities that carry the action forward from beginning to end.¹⁴ A skeletal summary of the entire narrative plot may be derived from this sizable corpus of lexical duplicates alone; for example: arise, go, call out, [be] great, descend, fear, perish, throw, appoint, say, know, [be] angry, turn, do, have pity, [be] evil, be good, die. As the three main paradigmatic participant groupings (i.e., YHWH < = Jonah = > pagans) interact via these concepts, the crucial twofold conflict of the central story line is developed, and the book's thematic nucleus is correspondingly formulated: Merciful YHWH judges/delivers pagan peoples through his unwilling messenger, Jonah.

The feature of *lexical* synonymy is foregrounded most notably and noticeably in expressions used to refer to the Deity: god[s], [the] God, YHWH, and YHWH God. The variation here appears significant in terms of the divine relationship to Jonah as well as to the heathen peoples with whom this reluctant prophet comes into contact. By means of these designations the narrator would suggest, on the one hand, different degrees of knowing the true YHWH, and on the other (especially in chap. 4), God's manifestation of mercy coupled with discipline in relation to his offended (and offensive) ambassador. The most concentrated instance of

¹⁴Magonet provides a sorted listing of these verbs in Hebrew (14).

synonymy in the book is realized in the "covenantal catalogue" of 4:2, where Jonah finally acknowledges the divine attributes which apparently drove him to distraction upon receiving the call of the LORD to Nineveh: "gracious, and compassionate, slow of anger, and abundant [in] steadfast love, and relenting over evil [i.e., a just punishment]." In this case, a collection of significant theological designations that fall within the same semantic domain are utilized in concert by way of analogy to give the fullest possible description of a personal Being who is fundamentally indescribable in human language and categories of thought. Coming from the lips of Jonah, however, this apparently admirable profession of faith is contradicted by the incredible irony of his present situation: He could simply not bring himself to apply these wonderful words to the willing masses all around him.

Size and Scope

The category of size and scope concerns the relative amount and the extent of lexical material reiterated. This may range from a single root, such as *g-d-l* "[be] great," to full clauses or even complete utterances, "And the word of the LORD came to Jonah." The former appears in all four chapters (a total of 15 times), while the latter is found only twice (1:1 and 3:1). As Timothy Wilt points out in his helpful study of lexical repetition in Jonah, which focuses on the individual word level of recursion (verbs and adjectives): "The repetition of phrases and clauses is [a] feature that has not been given much attention."¹⁵ In my own examination of discourse-level restatement in Jonah, I draw attention to the several specific, compositionally-related functions that these larger sequences perform in the narrative.¹⁶ I will not go into detail on this aspect of recursion, but will mention a few interesting features associated with it.

As far as the repetition of individual words is concerned, one observes a number of distinctive *triadic* occurrences, that is, lexical and syntactic reiteration in closely spaced sets of three. Such patterning, like all of the recursion in Jonah, does not appear to be especially symbolical in import ("three days and three nights," 1:17; cf. "a journey of three days," 3:3), nor is it some stylistic quirk or merely a literary embellishment. Rather, the device is purposeful; in other words, on one level of the discourse and its telling, the several clearly functional examples suggest a specific rhetorical intent. A triple reference to "Tarshish" within the single sentence of 1:3, for example, progressively heightens the disjunction between Jonah's

¹⁵Timothy L. Wilt, "Lexical Repetition in Jonah," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 5 (1992): 260. Magonet and Sasson include considerable treatment of this subject.

¹⁶Wendland, "Text Analysis."

intended destination and where the LORD actually wanted him to be. An opening parallel set of three *waw*-initial action clauses in 1:5a reinforces the contrast between the sailors' strenuous activity (cf. that of the Ninevites in 3:5) and Jonah's seemingly oblivious lack of it, summarized by a closing trio of verbs (5b). Somewhat later, three *ki* ("because/that/indeed") clauses at the end of 1:10 serve to emphasize the *cause-effect* relationship uppermost in the mariners' minds as they interrogate their suspicious shipmate.¹⁷ A triad of verbs extolling Jonah's acts of "thanksgiving" (2:9) ironically echoes three adverbial complement constructions that recount the pagan crew's pious acts of devotion (1:16). The antanaclastic use of a lexical triad occurs at the close of the king of Nineveh's proclamation (3:8b-9). Here the verbal root *šûb* ("turn") is first employed with reference to the people's repentance and then in terms of the hoped-for response from the LORD, a "turning" towards "compassion" and away from "anger." These outstanding divine attributes, as ruefully recalled by Jonah, are typical of YHWH, whom Jonah bitterly addresses three times in his confessional complaint of 4:2-3. A threefold mention of "city" (*'ir*) in 4:5 no doubt reflects the chagrined prophet's obsessive preoccupation with Nineveh's fate. A threesome of divine "appointments" triggers the temporary rise and subsequent fall of Jonah's spirit (4:6-8) and leads up to the LORD's final lesson for him, expressed, appropriately, in two syntactic sets of three (4:10-11). These are only some of the more obvious examples of meaningful recursion in terms of three, over and above possible numerical signification in the Scriptures, i.e., "to enhance [some noteworthy act] or to bring it to full effect."¹⁸

Another important effect of such exact lexical recursion may be seen in the diachronic bands of *resonance* that develop synchronically as one "repetend" echoes off another during the story's forward progression in plot and time. This is not a matter of deficiency, of lacking an adequate vocabulary either with regard to the language as a whole or the author of this particular narrative. Rather, it is the product of deliberate choice and the adoption of a rhetorical strategy best suited for accomplishing his didactic-hortatory purposes. The scope of this cohesive reiterative technique may be limited to a single verse, as we see in the threefold use of the verb root *n-p-l* in 1:7. The first two instances (in the causative *hiphil*) refer to the mantic practice of casting lots. On the third

¹⁷A similar sequence motivates Jonah's lament in 4:2-3. Causal relationships, both fulfilled and frustrated, permeate the discourse and give it a progressive, but not necessarily predictable, character.

¹⁸Sasson, 153.

occurrence, however, the chosen form¹⁹ shifts to *qal* and the climactic outcome is reported: "The lot *fell* upon Jonah!" Several other key verbs having a special theological significance, but a relatively restricted spatial range, appear in peak positions in the second half of the book, e.g., *n-h-m*, "have mercy on" (3:9-10; 4:2), *šûb*, "[re]turn, repent" (3:8-10), and finally *hûs*, "have pity on" (4:10-11), to underscore the correspondence between Nineveh's hope (as expressed by her king) and the LORD's response. Thus the dynamic interaction among the narrative's major participants is highlighted as they are brought into syntactic contact via such marked sets of verbal likeness.

The Jonah text is permeated by several, much longer, single-word sequences as well. Naturally, these have a proportionately greater semantic (if not always corresponding thematic) effect in terms of the "meaning field" that is thereby generated. Such a resonant string of signifiers is created because every time the term in question appears, it is cumulatively imbued with additional semantic overtones which accrue from its new lexical collocation and plot-related context. The scope of a word like *q-r'*, "cry/call out," for example, extends through the first three chapters and accentuates the contrast between Jonah's two missions—the first undone, the second undertaken, but both having ironically similar results as far as the surrounding heathen were concerned.

Thus Jonah is sent by YHWH to "call out" against Nineveh (1:2). He flees on a ship destined for Tarshish, but is discovered by its captain during a severe storm and is told to "cry out" to his God (1:6). Before casting the peccant prophet into the raging sea, the sailors "cry out" to YHWH for forgiveness (1:14). Later, in the belly of the great fish (and in the midst of the two panels of penitentially-oriented repetition), Jonah too "calls out" to the LORD for help (2:2). The second series occurs in chap. 3: once again YHWH sends Jonah to "call out"—now *unto* Nineveh (3:2). This time he obeys and "cries out" his short sermon of doom (3:4). The conscience-stricken Ninevites "call" for a fast (3:5) and their king commands them all to "cry out" to God for mercy (3:8). In this transparent but highly effective manner, the divinely initiated means-result process, which underlies the overt side of the central message of Jonah, is both unified and foregrounded: Sinners invariably verbalize their repentance in prayer as they respond to a prophetic testimony and proclamation of judgment, no matter how grudgingly delivered.

A number of recursive phrases and constructions of larger scope also play an important part in the author's rhetorical strategy. In the first chapter, for instance, the incongruity, impropriety, and impossibility of

¹⁹These possibilities are surveyed in Wilt, 253.

Jonah's flight is tacitly stressed by means of the repeated expression, "away from the face of YHWH" (1:3). It is only fitting, therefore, that this phrase should figure prominently in the judicial-religious "case" of the ship's crew against Jonah. In fact, the guilty prophet indicted and clearly condemned himself by these very words (1:10). Jonah's persistently ambiguous relationship to the LORD comes to the fore in the closing stages of the story through the emphasis created by another sequence, this one exhibiting a mixed (exact plus synonymous) sort of iteration. In 4:6 it is reported that "YHWH-God provided [*mnh*]" some welcome relief for Jonah in the form of a castor plant. Shortly thereafter, however, "[*tbe*] God provided" a worm to destroy that same plant (4:7). Then, to add insult to injury, as it were, "God provided" a scorching sirocco corresponding to the psychological "heat" that his prophet was feeling (4:8). These variations in the divine name may reflect the decreasing relative proximity in their personal relationship and/or the nature of God's dealing with Jonah, whether in compassion (as YHWH, cf. also 2:1) or in chastisement (as 'ēšîm).²⁰

Another interesting instance of mixed (mostly synonymous) recursion occurs in chap. 1 with reference to the increasing intensity of the life-threatening storm. First, we hear of YHWH hurling "a great wind upon the sea" (1:4). This terrifying phenomenon is later described in personified terms as "the sea getting rougher and rougher" (1:11, NIV; lit., "the sea walking and raging"), and then when almost all hope was lost, as "the sea getting rougher and rougher *against them*" (1:13). The ultimate instance is paradoxically used for contrastive effect when all of a sudden it is reported that "the sea ceased from its furious raging" (1:15, *z'p* being more graphic than *s'r* [vv. 11,13]) as it receives the body of Jonah in apparent appeasement. In this example of the so-called "growing phrase" in Jonah,²¹ the effect of the iteration is probably both qualitative (intensive) and quantitative (augmentative) in character.

As is stylistically typical of this narrative, the repetitive sequence just described is complemented by another, diachronically parallel pattern which serves to enrich its thematic implications. Thus in a progressively perceptive response to the LORD's revelation of himself by means of the storm and also the words of his prophet, the sailors are said to manifest a growing reverential "fear" (*y'r*): First, "they feared" (and proceeded to "cry out" to their god; 1:5); then "they feared with a great fear" (upon hearing about "YHWH" from Jonah; 1:11); and finally, "they feared YHWH with a great fear" (as they observed the word of his prophet come

²⁰For further discussion on this issue, see Sasson, 291, and Magonet, 37.

²¹Magonet, 31.

true before their very eyes; 1:16). All this stands in ironic contrast to the pious, but perfunctory "fear" that is professed by Jonah himself (1:9) after being indicted by lot. A second, less overt parallel to the raging storm sequence occurs in the final chapter, where we hear about the increasing "anger" (*hrh*) and "evil" (*r'h*) of Jonah (the former is a visible manifestation of the latter) in reaction to the LORD's compassionate sparing of Nineveh (4:1, 4, 6, 9).

Distribution Pattern

The distribution of any set of recursive items may be either "significant" or "random." A *significant* mode of repetition develops when the various repetends are positioned in such a way that a key spatial pattern or focal point in the discourse is highlighted. A structural pattern results from a placement of the reiterated words on two or more boundaries such that a larger compositional unit is demarcated. The most obvious instance of this device is the division of the text into two "halves" by means of the extensive lexical recursion found in 3:1-3a (cf. 1:1-3), a pericope which accordingly leads off the second portion with a "re-commissioning" of Jonah by the LORD. Emphasis upon a particular "point" in the text is the product of a special concentration of repeated elements which thereby helps to distinguish a thematic and/or emotive peak of some type. The climax of chap. 1 (scene two), for example, occurs near its close in v. 16, a passage that is marked by four pairs of exact reduplication that links "YHWH" (2x) with the "fear" (2x), "sacrifices" (2x), and "vows" (2x) of the heathen, foreign sailors. The latter are referred to simply as "the men" (*hā' anāšim*), and the collocation of this word with "fear" (*yr'*) in turn forms a structural *inclusio* with v. 10, thus delimiting the second half of scene two. Similarly, the high point of chap. 3 is reinforced as God "repents" (*nḥm*, 3:10) in terms that echo the king of Nineveh's indirect appeal for forgiveness (3:8-9; cf. also 1:6).

A *random* dispersion of repetends includes all those that do not give evidence of performing any special demarcative purpose in the discourse, though they do contribute greatly to its overall cohesive quality. Their importance is thus primarily thematic in nature, that is, they cumulatively outline or underscore a certain theological or moral point which the author is trying to make. We have seen several instances of this already (the sharp contrast between the sailors' "fear" of YHWH in chapter 1 and Jonah's "anger" against God in chapter 4), but it may be helpful to mention another noteworthy example. The prophet's professional and spiritual "descent" from the LORD is metaphorically reflected in a deliberate repetition of the verb *y-r-d*, "go down," at the beginning of the account. Thus after receiving the initial command from YHWH, Jonah

immediately "goes down" (and in the opposite direction) to the port of Joppa (v. 3b) and, upon finding a suitable vessel, proceeds to "go down" on board it (v. 3c). Sometime later he "went down" into the very bottom of the boat, perhaps so that he would not attract undue attention to himself (v. 5c), and soon thereafter "fell [down?] into a deep sleep" (*YēRāDam*; v. 5d).

The *y-r-d* lexical set is artistically overlapped with another random sequence in chap. 1: a fourfold reiteration of the verb *tūl*, "throw, hurl." This may be regarded as semantically supplementary to the preceding in that it further stresses the prophet's continual downward descent. Accordingly, YHWH "hurls" a storm down (from "heaven"; cf. 1:9) upon the sea (v. 4), and the sailors try to save their ship by "hurling" its wares overboard (v. 5). Later, after the "falling" (*n-p-l*) of the lots has "fallen" upon him (v. 7), Jonah reveals that the only way to ensure deliverance is to "hurl" him down into the raging waters (v. 12). Finally, when all else has failed, the crew acquiesces and prayerfully "hurls" the LORD's prophet into the sea (v. 15). Jonah ultimately (but now figuratively) "bottoms out" on the ocean floor, and his pathetic plight—internal as well as external—is accentuated in the words of his psalm by yet one more occurrence of *y-r-d* (2:6)—an appearance that stands out by virtue of its contrastive juxtaposition with the word "bring up" (*'l-h*, 2:7).

Textual Relationships

The final set of recursive distinctions involves pertinent textual relationships which may be either "intratextual" or "intertextual." All of the previous examples, as well as most of those which follow, are instances of the *intratextual* variety, so nothing more needs to be said about them, except to call attention to one further qualification made by Meir Sternberg, namely, the difference between "verbal" and "non-verbal" repetition:²² *Verbal* recursion, as the term suggests, is constructed out of actual speech acts, direct or indirect, external or internal ("cognitive" discourse), individual (a monologue) or dialogic. *Nonverbal* recursion, on the other hand, consists of repeated references to some object, entity, event, happening, situation, or circumstance. This category includes the occurrence of "significant silence," where no report of speech or action is given when it might reasonably be expected (e.g., Jonah's lack of a verbal response to God in 1:2-3, 3:2-3, and 4:4-5; cf. 4:2, 9b). "Mixed" discourse forms are also possible where, for example, a certain segment of direct speech is later reflected in the corresponding narrative action (e.g., God's reaction to the king of Nineveh's prayer, 3:8-9/10), or vice-versa (e.g.,

²² Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), 402.

Jonah's subsequent complaint about YHWH's compassionate and forgiving behavior, 4:2). The significance of this twofold form, according to Sternberg, concerns the expectation about the nature of the recursion that follows: a verbatim repetend in the case of human speech but a variable one elsewhere.²³ Any variation that occurs, especially in direct discourse, usually introduces the additional important hermeneutical factors of a different thematic perspective and possible personal bias.

Divergencies or "variations" from the verbal/nonverbal principle may also be utilized as a means of creating some special literary effect. For example, a shift in character viewpoint and/or the narrative tone or point of view may be intensified by the appropriate form of recursion or the lack of it. Normally, when a "real" (as opposed to "rhetorical") question is asked, a certain amount of reiteration is expected or desired in the reply to fully explain the answer required. In his response to the anxious queries of the sailors (1:8; note the insistent *mab* + /*m-*/ alliterative alternation), Jonah seems to evade the issues on which they demanded clarification (1:9). He directly answers only their last question, concerning his ethnic origin. His subsequent formulaic credal confession sounds somewhat out of place, although it is in fact an indirect way of replying to their first question, regarding who was responsible for causing the storm. Jonah's solemn invocation of "YHWH," the "God of heaven" (*haššāmayim*), "maker of the sea" ('*āsāh 'et-hayyām*), whom he "feared," however, reflects back ironically upon the last mention of the divine personal name, a nonverbal narrative statement of Jonah's plan to flee (by sea) to Tarshish (*taršīšāh*), far away from YHWH (1:3d).

Intertextual recursion is a stylistic feature of paramount exegetical importance throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. In form, such text-amplifying and illuminating reiteration ranges along a continuum from a more or less exact reproduction of direct speech (citation), through a partial reduplication of either verbal or nonverbal material (paraphrase), to a covert, but still recognizable, reference to some important event or situation (allusion). In Jonah 1:9, for example, Jonah paraphrases a number of passages that laud the LORD's creation of and sovereign control over the "heaven," the "earth" (or "dry land"), and the "sea" (cf. Pss 69:34; 95:4-5; 146:6). In a similar coerced confession after the Ninevite episode, Jonah utters a more extensive listing, this time of YHWH's gracious attributes (4:2). While not an exact citation of any specific biblical text, this passage does pull together many of the items included in similar covenantal catalogues (cf. Ps 86:5, 15; Exod 34:6-7; Deut 4:31; Neh 9:17).²⁴

²³ Sternberg, 402, 406.

²⁴ Sasson, 280; the Jonahic wording in turn appears to provide the basis for Joel 2:13 (cf.

The various allusions—or “reminiscences,” as Magonet terms them²⁵—are much less conspicuous (hence often debatable), but a number are rather obvious instances. The predicted “overturning” (*b-p-k*) of Nineveh (3:4) for its “evil” (*rā'āh*) and “violence” (*hāmās*, 3:8), for example, harks back to Genesis and the “evil” coupled with “violence” of the wicked preflood generation (Gen 6:6, 11, 13) and the later archetypal “overturning” of a corrupt Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:25). The LORD’s subsequent “relenting [*n-h-m*] from the evil he said he would do” to Nineveh (3:10) is strongly and ironically reminiscent of YHWH’s similar “relenting” in relation to “his own people,” Israel (Exod 32:14). The point of the correspondence here underscores a basic similarity in the lost human condition and a universal spiritual need that Jonah, as a man of God and representative of the people of God, should have been keenly aware of and sensitive to, but which he (also they) was apparently not the least bit interested in or concerned about.

The “mother lode” of intertextual citation and paraphrase is found in the psalm of Jonah.²⁶ Just about every verse (except for v. 6) incorporates a key reference with varying degrees of precision, to create an interwoven poetic tapestry of panegyric theological language. The very first line, for example, finds close and noteworthy parallels in two different psalms:²⁷:

“I called in my distress unto YHWH, and he answered me” (Jonah 2:3a).

“In my distress I called YHWH, and unto my God I cried” (Ps 18:7).

“Unto YHWH in my distress I called, and he answered me” (Ps 120:1).

“Jonah”—or whoever composed/compiled this song—was certainly familiar with his Psalter. Most modern commentators no longer doubt the appropriateness (or even the genuineness) of the psalm,²⁸ either in its cotextual (literary) or contextual (situational) setting. However, current hermeneutical interest centers not so much on such likenesses, the many cross-textual echoes and verbal recurrences, but upon the crucial disparities, both great and small, that are often manifested in this Jonahic psalm. Is there any significance, for example, to the fact that Jonah begins with a personal reference to his own petitionary action—“I called”—thus inverting the order of Psalm 120? One reason may be intratextual: a closer

Wendland, *Demarcating the Compositional Units*, 326-327).

²⁵Magonet, 65.

²⁶This psalm also contains many intratextual correspondences; cf. Trible, 166-171.

²⁷For a full listing of citations, paraphrases, and allusions, see Magonet, 44-49; Sasson, 168-215; also James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 63-64.

²⁸Excluding one of the more recent studies, that of Trible, e.g., 172-173.

contrastive parallel is thereby formed with the introduction to the sailors' prayer in 1:14, "And they called unto YHWH" (cf. the king's decree in 3:8b). The two passages are very different, of course: the latter is a passionate appeal for help and forgiveness, with a special focus upon the fate of poor Jonah and a pervading emphasis upon the pity of YHWH. Jonah, on the other hand, and incongruously perhaps, utters a song of happy thanksgiving that highlights a distinctly personal perspective on his rapidly changing fortunes and what he piously intends to eventually do for God. There is a tangible irony here in the pitting of pagan versus prophet. Further aspects of this vital rhetorical dimension will be more fully explored in Part Three, along with a number of additional important intertextual "deviations" with respect to citation, paraphrase, and allusion that make this psalm semantically unique and emotively compelling.

Plot Dynamics

Several other distinctions that Sternberg makes in his important study of "the structure of repetition" in Hebrew narrative discourse may enable one to make an even more detailed analysis of the form and function of recursion in Jonah and other biblical texts.²⁹ The categorization of such iterative instances in terms of "plot dynamics" is particularly useful. A "forecast" stimulates an "expectation about the narrative future," an "enactment" involves a "focus on the narrative present," and a "report" produces a "retrospection on the narrative past."³⁰ An example from Jonah, based on general intratextual synonymy, concerns the eventual fate of the "great city" of Nineveh. The sequence begins with this command of the LORD: "Cry out against it because its evil has come up before me!" (1:2; cf. 3:2, "forecast"). We hear about its delayed "enactment" in 3:4: "He [Jonah] cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned!'" A summary "report" of what eventually took place is given in 3:5: "And the people of Nineveh believed in God," and more specifically in the king's command: "Let them cry out unto God" (3:8). The ultimate report is found in 3:10: "And the LORD saw their doings, how they turned from their evil way; then he relented from the evil that he said he would bring upon them." Extensive recursion of this nature provides fertile ground for the creation of message-enhancing irony and enigma (see Part Three).

Degree of Subjectivity

Another distinction that allows for these and other rhetorical effects to be more fully explored concerns the particular "source" of any given

²⁹See especially Sternberg, chap. 11.

³⁰Sternberg, 376.

instance of recursion (a repetend) and the degree of subjectivity or objectivity represented.³¹ The thoroughly objective and omniscient narrator reports, for example, that "Jonah arose to run away to Tarshish away from YHWH" (1:3). As readers, we have no cause to doubt that this was the man's precise intention. Later, however, it comes as somewhat of a surprise that "the men [sailors] knew" Jonah was running away from YHWH" (1:10). In this case the transmitter of the information was the prophet himself. Consequently, considering the source, we may be excused for at least a little suspicion, as well as curiosity about how much and how accurately the situation was presented to these foreign mariners and why this news had caused such fear in those who did not even "know" YHWH. No doubt the "great wind" (1:4) that was growing in intensity ("raging," 1:11) upon the sea, coupled with Jonah's own theological testimony (1:9), exerted considerable influence upon their response.

In the preceding discussion I have merely been able to scratch the surface of repetition, a feature whose manifold complexity not only enriches the depth and diversity of Hebrew narrative, but which also taxes the insight and ingenuity of those who endeavor to probe its inspired artistry and message.

3. *Variation in Literary Discourse: The Flip Side of Recursion*

As has been suggested above, large-scale or extended recursion in literary discourse normally appears in exact form only in a limited number of cases in order to achieve certain special aesthetic, rhetorical, or structural effects. In fact, along with the formal sameness or similarity (synonymy) there will always occur a definite difference to some degree—certainly so with respect to the literary cotext and situational (often including the "locutionary" or "speech-event"-related) context in which the reiterated items are placed. Furthermore, all of these differences, large and small, are somehow significant, for:

There is no randomness or free variation in the [narrative] surface structure. Any morphosyntactic form in a text represents the author's choice whether conscious or automatic; we may not know the whys of all such choices, but we may speculate on them as implementations of differing discourse strategies.³²

Even more basic is the fact that meaning in any conventional system of signs, language in particular, is generated as the product of both

³¹Sternberg, 380.

³²Robert E. Longacre and Shin Ja J. Hwang, "A Textlinguistic Approach to the Biblical Hebrew Narrative of Jonah," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 336-358.

similarity and difference, continuity and discontinuity, recursion and variation. This principle is the fundamental basis for productive signification on both the paradigmatic (selectional) and the syntagmatic (combinatorial) axes of verbal organization—from the phonological (i.e., distinctive sonic features) to the highest generic levels of composition (i.e., "prose" vs. "poetry"). In "literary" (artistic, poetic) works, additional meaningful types of likeness-with-contrast in the form of varied sequences and patterns are typically incorporated to augment the total signaling potential of the discourse in both denotative (referential) and connotative (associative) terms.

In many cases where some distinctive intratextual poetic effect is created in a literary composition, a basic structure of recursion is utilized to establish the necessary backdrop ("ground") against which, or a fixed frame of reference within which, a certain *deviation* ("figure") can be introduced. This sort of variation is occasioned by a marked deflection from a norm that has been either deliberately or unconsciously built into the text, notably by means of some form of repetition, or which is inherent in the language code itself (the order of syntactic elements). Such a disjunction—whether subtle or pronounced, overt or inconspicuous—serves to highlight specific aspects of the overall organization of the discourse and/or its central theme (motifs, subtopics, etc.). Any departure from some recursive pattern then would be one way in which an author more or less "defamiliarizes" his account to force listeners (or readers) to take notice. According to the Russian Formalist school of literary criticism, such *defamiliarization* functions to "transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception—that is, to make a unique semantic modification" and thereby "to create the vision which results from that deautomatized perception."³³ However, as far as the Scriptures are concerned, the purpose of this technique is not merely "an aesthetic end in itself."³⁴ Rather, it is invariably connected with a more effective communication of the intended message, whether that be primarily informative, emotive, volitional, and/or mixed in nature.

The best example of pointedly contrastive deviation within a framework of recursion in Jonah occurs at the beginning of the second half of the narrative, namely, 3:1-3a. The adverb *šēnît*, "a second time," formally announces the pattern and a likely parallel to 1:1-3. The wording

³³Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), 21-22.

³⁴Shklovsky, 12.

of these two opening pericopes is largely the same, a fact which is significant in itself. YHWH gives his prophet another chance to fulfill his office according to divine expectation. But the real impact of the second episode is conveyed by its several key differences from the first. At that time Jonah was told simply to "call out *against* [Nineveh]" ('*āleyha*); now the LORD commands him to "call out *unto* [Nineveh]" ('*ēleyha*) "a calling [proclamation] which I am giving unto you." In chap. 3 the assignment to Nineveh is given in more personal terms, that is, with respect to Yahweh in relation to Jonah. In addition, there is no explicit mention of Nineveh's flagrant "wickedness" (*rā'āb*), though this might reasonably be assumed. From the plot perspective too, the outcome is drastically different. This second time Jonah "arises" and does not try to run away "from the face of YHWH," but rather he travels to Nineveh "according to the word of YHWH." The alteration here—along with the recursion—is carefully selected and situated to inaugurate this major recycling of the account and to suggest a change in the nature of the interpersonal dynamics now operating among the chief participants.

Variation in literary discourse may take the form of a "deviation" from some established pattern or norm as illustrated above, or it may be realized in the *diversity* that results when a paradigmatic set of synonymous or contrastive items is created within the text. The classic example of this technique in Jonah occurs in the catalogue of YHWH's covenantal attributes in 4:2, all of which complement one another (ironically so in this instance) to present the fullest possible expression of undeserved divine mercy. A similar specific, but less concise and spatially concentrated, picture is given of the "greatness" of Nineveh. This city was not just "great/large/important" (the simple adjective *gēdōlāh*, 1:2/3:2) in the abstract, but it was "great [important] to God" (3:3), "a journey of three days" in magnitude (3:3), a city consisting of both "great and small ones" socioeconomically (3:5) and of urban and rural dwellers ("man and beast, the herd and flock," 3:7), numbering "more than 120,000 people" (4:11), who in their moral-religious naivete "do not [even] know the difference between their right hand and their left" as far as YHWH is concerned (4:11). By means of such lexical diversity attached to a single referent, the odious, alien metropolis of Nineveh is given "a human face" (cf. '*ādām*, 4:11), as it were, hence every bit as worthy and needy of the "piteous concern" (*hūs*, 4:11) of Yahweh as were the original Jewish hearers of this prophetic message.

Three overlapping types of "variation," involving both *deviation* from a norm and *diversity* in form, are prominently manifested in the book of Jonah: lexical-semantic, spatial-syntactic, and temporal-pragmatic. Certain

aspects of these have already been exemplified in the previous discussion, but it may be helpful to describe and illustrate their nature and function as distinct stylistic and rhetorical categories.

Lexical-semantic Variation

Lexical-semantic variation is undoubtedly the most recognizable and commonly found type of modification, one that is used in conjunction with recursion to create some special semantic effect in relation to a given narrative plot and/or theme. This primary category can best be surveyed in terms of Sternberg's five "forms of physical deviance in repetition": "expansion or addition, . . . truncation or ellipsis, . . . change of order, . . . grammatical transformation, . . . [and] substitution."³⁵

Of these, *expansion/addition* would appear to be the most important or productive narrative technique for the book of Jonah. As was noted earlier, the growing "fury" of the storm at sea and the resultant "fear" of the sailors in chap. 1 is mirrored in the steadily augmented qualifiers that are used to describe these interlocked natural and human phenomena. There is an expansion from "a great storm on the sea" (1:4) to "the sea continued to rage [ever more] against them" (1:13) as the overt cause. As for its consequence, there is a corresponding progression from "the sailors feared" (1:5) to "the men feared YHWH with a great fear" (1:16). The final "addition" of "the LORD" highlights the awesome demonstration (1:15) of his ultimate power over what had previously been their greatest "fear." As Magonet observes, "in the form of writing is reflected its content."³⁶ We might add, also its underlying thematic (theological) implications. Perhaps the most interesting variations of this kind, not surprisingly, occur in the last chapter to dramatize the contrast between the attitudes of Jonah and YHWH over against Nineveh. When the LORD interrogates the prophet concerning his burning anger "about the plant" (4:9a; cf. 4:4, an explicit expansion) and whether this was a "good" idea, Jonah insolently replies that his ire is "good" enough even "to die for" (4:9b). YHWH goes on to point out that Jonah's indignation stems from his previously undisclosed "pity" over the passing of this transient plant (4:10; cf. 4:7). God, on the other hand, was anxious not only "about [the people of] Nineveh," but "also [its] many cattle" (4:11; an emphatic ironic "addition" in ultimate syntactic position).

Jonah 4 also contains several outstanding instances of *truncation/ellipsis*. In the very first verse, for example, it is easy to miss the fact that the construction of the original text appears to deliberately

³⁵Sternberg, 391-392.

³⁶Magonet, 32.

leave implicit the specific cause of Jonah's "great displeasure," the repentant "deeds" of the Ninevites which led to the LORD's "relenting" (3:10). Perhaps this was done to give a somewhat closer and hence more dramatic impression of what Jonah's actual perspective was. In the event, he did not even want to think about such an offensive outcome, though indeed he had already anticipated it (4:2). This indicting cause-effect connection is brought out more clearly in a rendering such as, "But *this* was very displeasing to Jonah, and" (NRSV)—in contrast to a more literal and equivocal, "But Jonah became greatly displeased and . . ." (NIV). Another self-incriminating omission occurs in Jonah's complaint when he leaves out from the revelation of "his word" (4:2; cf. YHWH's word in 1:1; 3:1) the fact that his attempted "flight to Tarshish" was directed "away from the presence of YHWH" (cf. 1:3; a truth that he had apparently revealed to the sailors, 1:10). Perhaps the prophet finally realized that this was a physical and spiritual impossibility.

Closely related to the preceding is the subtle intertextual "truncation" that also occurs in Jonah's confessional lament of 4:2, an utterance which clearly recalls the LORD's own revelation of his essential nature (name) to Moses in Exod 34:6-7. Significantly, however, Jonah leaves out the original mention of "faithfulness" ('*emet*, NRSV), perhaps because this would have reflected badly on his own name ('*amittay*, 1:1) and the committed servant he should have been.³⁷ More important, Jonah omits the last part of the divine saying: "[He] fails to cite God's rewarding of grandchildren for their ancestors' merit . . . and totally ignores the concluding note of retribution,"³⁸ the punishment that will befall the descendants of iniquitous ancestors. Instead, Jonah "substitutes" the exactly opposite idea: "ready to relent from punishing" (NRSV), which is, of course, a reinforcement of this crucial attribute of YHWH as expressed in the very words of the heathen king and the LORD alike (3:9-10). Another major omission distinguishes Jonah's earlier "prayer" of chapter 2: Although the "confession of sin" is an optional constituent element of the individual "psalm of praise and thanksgiving,"³⁹ it certainly would have been appropriate in Jonah's composition (cf. Ps 32:5), if he had recognized any personal wrongdoing in his relation to YHWH.

³⁷Sasson, 69.

³⁸Brichto, 85.

³⁹For a further description of this particular psalmic *genre*, see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms [Part 1]: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 140-141; cf. also Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 72; Ernst R. Wendland, "Genre Criticism and the Psalms," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. Robert D. Bergen (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 394.

A *change of order* is most evident in the series of urgent questions with which the sailors ply Jonah after he has been implicated by the lot. It appears as if there has been some sort of reversal in "the normal sequence,"⁴⁰ which begins with the interrogative climax, "Who is responsible for all this?" (1:8a), and works down to the general issue of nationality. But perhaps this is merely an indication of the sailors' great distress and an anxious desire to discover the deity responsible for the calamity surrounding them so that the appropriate supplication can be made (cf. vv. 6-7). In any case, Jonah's evasive reply features another significant spatial displacement or hyperbaton: "A Hebrew [am] I and YHWH, God of the heavens *I [am] fearing*, who made." Lexically, Jonah tries to "box" his God in (by the repeated emphatic pronoun "I"), but in doing so "YHWH" is put into a syntactically prominent position and hence dominates the entire utterance.⁴¹ Such unexpected grammatical shifts (from the usual V-S-O word order) often serve a compositional function to mark a new juncture in the discourse. This may also involve lexical recursion, as we observed at the onset of the second scene: "to sail with them to Tarshish away from YHWH (1:3)—(1:4) And YHWH hurled a great wind on the sea." This stylistic transposition plus the accompanying repetition effectively highlights the theological fact that "man proposes, but God disposes."

A recursive change in order is formally characteristic of the "chiasmus" construction, which performs a number of functions on both the macro- and the microstructure of Hebrew discourse, in prose as well as poetic texts. At the beginning of the story, for example, there is an ironic reversal of events on board ship (A-B—B'-A') that serves to highlight Jonah's failure to carry out the LORD's explicit command as earlier enunciated. After receiving the divine command to "get up . . . and call out against [Nineveh]" (A: v. 2), Jonah "gets up" and "goes down" to Joppa to "go down" on board a ship bound for Tarshish (B: v. 3). But then, having "gone down" into the very heart of that vessel and lain down to sleep (B': v. 5b), Jonah is discovered by the captain and told to "get up and call out unto his god[s]" (A': v. 6) in the hope of averting the disaster that he himself had brought upon all.

Later on, after the dramatic events of chapter 1, we hear that YHWH "provides" a great fish to deliver his guilty prophet from a just drowning in the sea. In grateful response, Jonah "prays" to the LORD (2:1). The correspondence between these two verses is heightened by the reiterated phrase "from the inside of the fish." The change of order here serves to

⁴⁰Brichto, 70.

⁴¹Contra Tribble, 141.

foreground the close interrelationship between Jonah and "his God" (2:1), the God from whom he had been trying so hard to flee. The sovereign transcendence and intimate immanence of Yahweh are stylistically suggested by the fact that he stands both "outside" and "inside" a much longer double chiasmus that conjoins Jonah and the great fish that had swallowed him:

(1:17)	YHWH	fish		Jonah	
		Jonah		fish	
(2:1)		Jonah	YHWH	fish	[prayer]
(2:10)	YHWH	fish		Jonah	

However, Jonah's self-centered attitude does not seem to have changed much, as evidenced by his first-person-oriented song of thanksgiving (27 references to "I/me/my," as opposed to 15 second- and third-person references to the LORD). This predominantly personal orientation is given its cue in the reordering implicit in the prayer's very first word, "I called" (2:3). The closest psalmic parallel to this initial line begins instead with a focus upon YHWH: "To the LORD in my distress I called" (Ps 120:1; cf. Ps 18:7, "In my distress I call, O LORD!"), the vocative here placing the emphasis again upon YHWH).

Certain *grammatical transformations* (perhaps "morphosyntactic" would be a better designation so as to distinguish this from the preceding category) may be utilized in conjunction with their context to produce a wide range of interesting semantic implications. Naturally, these are not always evident in a translation, hence the importance of a thorough examination of the Hebrew text. The guilt of Jonah is revealed, for example, when the mariners decide to "cause the lots [object] to fall [*hiphil* verb]," and having done so, when "the lots [subject] fall [*qal* verb]" upon Jonah (1:8). The righteous (divinely-directed), cause-effect nature of this divinatory procedure is thereby implicitly underscored. Jonah opens his thanksgiving prayer to YHWH by referring to the latter in the third person (2:2a). In the very next line (2:2b), however, there is a transformation to the second person which remains in force throughout the rest of the poem, indicating perhaps a reapproachment between him and his God. The contrast between the past "evil doings" of the Ninevites and YHWH's present merciful activity is foregrounded in 3:10 by a reiteration of the root [' *šb*] in three different forms: a plural noun, an infinitive construct, and a perfect finite verb, the last emphasizing the LORD's decision *not* to destroy the city. After this extraordinary sparing of infamous Nineveh, Jonah complains that it is "good" (adjective) for his life to be taken away (4:3). Yahweh's rhetorically barbed response is sharpened by his ironic use of the same root [*tôb*], but now as a verbal

infinitive: "Is it good [this] anger of yours?" (4:4). The underlying correspondence here might emphasize the very fact that Jonah's "anger" could one day cost him his "life." Finally, the book's closing passage contains a prominent transformation with respect to the initial personal pronoun, set within a recursive frame begun in the preceding verse, which functions to intensify a profound "perspectival clash":⁴² "As for *you* [Jonah]," the LORD said, "*you* were concerned about that plant" (v. 10), "But as for *me*, should *I* not be concerned about Nineveh?" (v. 11). The respective objects of the verb are foregrounded at the same time by positioned parallelism and attribution for additional contrastive effect.

The category of formal *substitution* is probably second only to the expansion in importance. The effect of this device is heightened in an ancient language such as biblical Hebrew, which is characterized by overt repetition. When a synonym is used, or where there is an obvious change with respect to one element, such as placement, within a sequence of recursive constituents, this normally carries with it some special semantic (including thematic) and/or pragmatic (sociolinguistic) significance. For example, in the reiterated [verb + cognate noun] syntactic frame of 1:16, the three actions referred to typify a cause-effect (internal/external) relationship that encompasses the ultimate in religious devotion: "fear" = > "sacrifice" + "vow." A good example of lexical substitution occurs at Jonah's "recommissioning," when "the word of the LORD comes to [him]"—not as "the son of Amittai" ("faithfulness," 1:1), but simply "a second time" (3:1). In other words, the prophet's fidelity remains to be proved as he is told once more to "call out," now "unto Nineveh" (3:2), not "against [it]" (1:2). Indeed, at this stage in the narrative, one wonders who was more "evil" and accountable in the eyes of YHWH—the deliverer of the divine message or its delinquent addressees.

Does Jonah pass the LORD's overt test of his character? The issue is very much an open question at the end of the account (4:11) as we witness the man "rage with a great raging" (cf. NJB) when the teeming city of Nineveh is spared (4:1), but "rejoice with a great rejoicing" (4:6) over the appearance of a transient plant, whose demise he later mourns in trenchant anger (4:7-8). This emotive and attitudinal contrast is associated with the clearest instance of synonymic "substitution" in the book, namely, that involving the divine name: It is the "LORD God" who graciously provides the castor-bean plant (4:6) to "deliver [Jonah] of his discomfort [lit. 'evil']," just as he planted a garden for the benefit of the first humans in Eden (Gen 2:8). However, it is simply "God" who subsequently "provides" the means of the plant's destruction and then

⁴²Sternberg, 398.

reproves an unrelenting Jonah for his introverted response. All this is in obvious contrast to God's "repenting over the evil" (3:10; 4:2) he had intended for the now "transformed" Nineveh (3:8-9)—a city in which "each one [had] turned from *his* way of evil, and from the violence that was in *their* hands" (3:8b). The synonymous, complementary parallelism of the preceding expression emphasizes both the individual and the corporate guilt and responsibility of all citizens in this salvific, life-changing event.⁴³

Spatial-syntactic Variation

Spatial-syntactic variation could perhaps be classified under a "change of order" as discussed above, but in this case the crucial shift occurs, not so much in terms of a proximate group of lexical items ("diversity"—though this may still be involved), but rather with respect to the usual arrangement of syntactic elements in the Hebrew verbal clause, namely, verb = > subject = > object, especially in relation to "the sequence of *wayyiqtol* clauses that occur throughout the story from beginning to end."⁴⁴ For this reason, outside the Hebrew text, the critical movement is not perceptible in any but an interlinear translation. Such a departure from the norm is utilized to foreground the noun phrase involved to provide "focus" or "emphasis." Such an item is put into *focus* in order to mark it as the new principal topic or agent in the discourse. This construction often coincides with a major compositional boundary, especially when reinforced by some other prominent signaling device, such as those mentioned above in connection with recursion. *Emphasis*, on the other hand, is more restricted in scope; it pertains to a single clause, sentence, or utterance (if in direct speech). It serves to intensify the semantic significance of, or to call special attention (in terms of thematic and/or plot-related importance) to, the noun (or qualifier) so displaced. Most commonly the movement of the item is to the front of its regular position in the clause (i.e., "front-shift"), but on occasion the displacement goes in the other direction, that is, to the rear of the clause/sentence ("back-shift"). The operation of focus and emphasis and the distinction between these two functions are illustrated in the following examples:

The nominal "(And) YHWH" begins 1:4, but since the divine name has just been mentioned at the end of v. 3 ("from before YHWH"), this does not seem to be simply an instance of "special emphasis."⁴⁵ More precisely, we have here the onset of a new stage (episode) in the action,

⁴³Cf. Tribble, 186.

⁴⁴Longacre and Hwang, 345.

⁴⁵As stated, for example, in Sasson, 93.

which coincides with a dramatic revelation of (and a focusing upon) the principal divine "character" acting behind the scenes, so to speak, to control all subsequent events upon the sea. An emphatic front-shift does occur in the last clause of this verse as the narrative spotlight shifts to "the ship," which was "threatening to break up." A similar thing occurs in 1:5c. "(And) Jonah" appears at the head of the clause, but this person is not necessarily "emphasized" thereby.⁴⁶ Rather, the spotlight is shifting back to him by means of a narrative "flashback" to an earlier point in time. Thus the function of the syntactic deviation is global, not local, in nature—a product of the author's selective "staging" of crucial events in the story.

The norms of syntactic ordering are quite different in Hebrew poetry and prose, but it is apparent that the fronted pronoun "I" in 2:4 is distinguished for some special reason. Although there may be an element of "emphasis" here,⁴⁷ the introverted structure of the complete psalm, coupled with the contrastive content of this very utterance, would indicate that it may play a more important role in the poetic discourse, namely, to signal the compositional "core" of the chiasmus.⁴⁸ We observe a similar thing in 2:9, where a corresponding front-shifted emphatic pronoun is utilized to mark the close of the song as well as to suggest its singer-centered focus.

Another example of such structurally-related foregrounding—or in this case, "backgrounding"—is found in 3:3b, where the initial "(And) Nineveh" is not given any particular referential "emphasis."⁴⁹ Instead, the complete clause is marked as being an explanatory "aside," one that occurs "off" the event-line and is intended to highlight the city's great size and significance "to God." A final instance of this sort of discourse "focus" may be observed in the last verse of the text. The presence of the separable pronoun "I" is no doubt "emphatic," in contrast to the corresponding "you" (sg.) of the preceding passage. But its frontal position in "the Hebrew word order"⁵⁰ serves primarily to highlight the important shift in the LORD's argument at this stage, that is, to its climactic second half, which of course concludes the adventures of Jonah with a challenging comment by the Lord.

A good example of utterance "emphasis" was observed earlier in

⁴⁶Limburg, 50.

⁴⁷Limburg, 67.

⁴⁸Cf. Wendland, "Text Analysis."

⁴⁹Contra Limburg, 77.

⁵⁰Limburg, 97.

Jonah's "confession" of 1:9. Here a front shift of the object phrase, "Yahweh the God of heavens," though surrounded by Jonah's obtrusive references to himself, places the appropriate thematic prominence where it belongs, not only with respect to this particular juncture in the account, but also within the entire second episode, and even the book as a whole. Similar emphatic syntactic advancements appear in Jonah's song of thanksgiving, first as a series to progressively stress the depths to which he felt he had sunk ("from the belly of Sheol," 2:2b; "all your breakers," 2:3b; "the deep," 2:5b; "to the roots of the mountains," 2:6a; "the [lower] earth," 2:6b). A second set of front-shifted elements then serves to contrast the prophet himself ("I," 2:9a) and his promised ritual actions with the disparaged behavior of "those who cling to worthless [idols]" (2:8a).

The relative significance of syntactic position in nonfinite clauses is based on percentages and the usual order of components in similar expressions. For example, "by reversing the more normal phraseology [in 1:12b], *'ani yôdēā'*, the narrator stresses Jonah's awareness of his role"⁵¹ in relation to the maritime disaster that has befallen the crew. This interpretation is reinforced by the subsequent advancement, "on account of me," in the verbless object clause that follows, which is neatly balanced by "upon you [sailors]" at the end.

Back-shift displacement in the syntax is not nearly as common as front-shifting, but the impact is equally as great, as we observe in the initial clause of 1:16, literally: "And they feared, the men, with a great fear YHWH." This mimics the progressively profound realization to which these heathen sailors had been inevitably led by the awful sequence of events at sea. This gradually unfolding revelation confirms Jonah's prior (1:10b) and later (1:9) public testimony. Later, the miraculously saved singer's realization of his utter dependence upon God is reflected syntactically by a retrogressive movement of two self-references, "my life" and "my soul" in 2:6b-7a, and their juxtaposition with "YHWH." But the most obvious and dramatic example of emphatic back-shifting is found—appropriately—at the end of the discourse. In this case, the second and thematically surprising half of a compound subject is positioned as the concluding climax of the utterance and the entire book. Indeed, YHWH is concerned "*even [w-] about Nineveh's many animals*" (4:11b)! Thus "syntax has distorted a desired link between the vocabulary of God's lesson and that of the king's edict [in 3:8]"⁵²—the purpose being to accent man's inability to limit the magnitude of the LORD's mercy by humanly-based rational and religious categories.

⁵¹Sasson, 125.

⁵²Sasson, 315.

Temporal-pragmatic Variation

Temporal-pragmatic variation in Hebrew narrative discourse involves a disruption or displacement in the normally strict diachronic flow of events. In other words, the sequentially unfolding verbal event-line is interrupted, and there is a shift in time, usually backward ("flashback"), but sometimes forward (by way of prediction or a more covert "foreshadowing") to a new and distinct temporal and situational setting.⁵³ Sternberg observes, "Within his generally reticent discourse, *foretelling* would yet seem the least congenial form of telling, expository *backtelling* definitely included."⁵⁴ Such retrospective deviation may vary according to quality (perspicuity) and/or quantity (the degree of chronological separation, that is, relatively near to or far from the current setting). But due to its deliberately disjunctive effect, it is functionally significant in terms of general or specific character representation and motivation, (sub-)thematic expression, and/or the pragmatic (interpersonal/audience-related) intent of the message.

The problem confronting analysts of Hebrew narrative is that these points of temporal discontinuity are not always unambiguously marked in the original text. In an English story, for example, a flashback is often indicated by the presence of a pluperfect ("had") tense and/or the use of a temporal adverb (phrase), ("at that time," "the previous day," "the week before"). In Hebrew, however, such verbal-based differentiation is simply not available, and the adverbial cue is much less common in occurrence. The primary marker is a shift in word order (coupled with an obligatory nonnarrative verbal tense sequence (N + *qatal*⁵⁵), but this device is also used for other purposes (to indicate emphasis or to distinguish a compositional boundary), and is a rather ambiguous signal. One is left to rely upon the cotext and the structure of the narrative as a whole to make a decision with regard to any possible instance of such chronological displacement. It is in this light that I would propose chronological displacement as a feature of considerable rhetorical importance in the story of Jonah.

In order to support such a claim, it is necessary to begin with the most conspicuous, least controversial cases, simply to develop an argument that will take into consideration the greatest amount of evidence, whether strong or weak. At the top of such a "scale of certitude"

⁵³I have not yet made a study of possible "parallel," or simultaneous, event sequences, e.g., "Meanwhile back at the city, . . ."

⁵⁴Sternberg, 268 (original emphasis).

⁵⁵Longacre and Hwang, 347.

is the flashback that is found in 4:2. There can be no doubt about this instance because it is explicitly stated to be a reference backward in time, to the very beginning of the narrative: "Is not this what I said while I was still at home? For this reason I hurried to run away to Tarshish." The unambiguous presence of temporal reordering suggests the possibility that other examples of this device remain to be found.

Several other possible instances of a flashback construction have been noted in Jonah. This first occurs in the second half of 1:5: "As for Jonah [initial syntactic front-shift], he *had gone down* (lit., "he went down") below deck."⁵⁶ Wolff observes: "Before the narrator can bring him into the scene (v. 6) he has to catch up with what has been happening to the Hebrew ever since he went on board at Joppa (v. 3)."⁵⁷ Another likely example comes in 1:10: "because he [Jonah] *had told* them." In this case, the flashback may be marked by being the third in an unusual narrative series of three *ki* ("for, that") clauses. Once again the narrator intentionally omits "certain events from their proper chronological sequence in order to introduce them later for greater impact."⁵⁸ In other words, "Biblical narrative often withholds pieces of exposition [or in this case, conversation] until the moment in the story when they are immediately relevant."⁵⁹

An interesting and debatable instance of such "reordering" appears in 4:5. A number of commentators⁶⁰ have suggested that immediately after Jonah's climactic prediction of disaster in 3:4, "Yet forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned," there is a bifurcation, or "literary forking," in the narrative. One line reports the dramatic and turbulent events within the city itself, which ultimately lead to its receiving a saving reprieve from the LORD, vv. 5-10. The other line, beginning at 4:5, follows Jonah outside the doomed city to a place where he awaits its downfall, since he is "still not certain of the outcome of his warning."⁶¹ This is not a matter of dealing with a clumsily misplaced piece of text, as some older commentators have suggested.⁶² It is rather the display of a

⁵⁶Cf. Magonet, 116, n. 20.

⁵⁷Wolff, 112.

⁵⁸Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 185.

⁵⁹Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 66.

⁶⁰For example, Allen, 231; Brichto, 78; Wolff, 163; and Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 504.

⁶¹Stuart, 504.

⁶²This is pointed out by Wolff, 163.

deliberate, artistically fashioned (e.g., the lexical "overlay" in 3:10 and 4:1), "cut-and-paste" technique whereby the *actual* events, whether parallel or overlapping in nature, are reported in a way that best suits the author's didactic and admonitory intentions. In this instance, the prejudicial anger of Jonah, which ends the narrative proper (4:3-4), is placed in the background, while the unmitigated mercy of YHWH is highlighted and brings the story to a more positive, theologically-centered close (4:11).

However, the narrative can also be interpreted in strict chronological sequence. This indicates the potential problems involved when a temporal (versus a "textual") displacement is posited, for there is admittedly a rather large disjunctive gap involved in this instance. It also illustrates the need for a careful weighing of all available evidence for the move, both cotextual (linguistic) and contextual (situational). The "flashback" approach to 4:5, for example, "And Jonah *had gone out* from the city and established himself," is supported by: (a) the obvious emphasis upon "city" that follows the prediction of Nineveh's "overturning" in 3:4; (b) an explanation for the phrase "to see what will happen to the city" (4:5), which seems to contradict Jonah's knowledge of its deliverance and his consequent "anger" in 4:1-2; (c) the presence of less ambiguous flashbacks in the book (4:2); and (d) the rhetorical advantages of this perspective on the text as outlined above. Finally, we should take note of a probable "retrospective reference" at the onset of the LORD's concluding speech in 4:10, namely, his mention of Jonah's "pity" (*h-w-s*) in 4:10. It is not mentioned earlier in the narrative, but it seems to refer back to the powerful, but unexpressed, sorrowful reaction that Jonah experienced when his shady plant dried up and died (4:7b).⁶³

On the other hand, commentators have also proposed a number of what may be termed "false flashbacks" throughout the book. The psalm of Jonah in chapter 2, for example, is sometimes construed as a later reflection or a conceptual "flashback" upon the events recorded in 1:17 and 2:1, in support of erroneous conclusions such as these: "The *situation* of the psalm [and its language] does not fit the context";⁶⁴ or the psalm "disrupts symmetry . . . and introduces perspectives at variance with the narrative."⁶⁵ Therefore it is not necessary to use a pluperfect to translate the verbs of "descent" (recounting Jonah's predicament, v. 3), because it is supposedly "the appropriate tense in light of the logic of the chronology

⁶³This interpretation is convincingly argued by Tribble, 219-223.

⁶⁴Wolff, 129.

⁶⁵Tribble, 173.

of events."⁶⁶ Actually, this song of grateful thanksgiving is suitable where it occurs within the structural framework of the book. It could be a response to YHWH's act of delivering Jonah from death by drowning (1:17), whereas his subsequent rescue from the sea/great fish itself (2:10) goes unthanked. Furthermore, this psalmic *genre*, "an individual song of thanksgiving," does not invariably celebrate some specific personal salvation event *in the past*. Due to its functional affinity to the individual lament, the temporal orientation could possibly be *future*, namely, a strongly anticipated deliverance based upon YHWH's prior acts of preservation.⁶⁷ This would fit the setting quite well in 2:2-9 as a response to 1:17 and in confident hope of 2:10.

A few other examples of such chronological misinterpretation may be noted. A pluperfect rendering of the event of 2:1 ("had appointed"),⁶⁸ is quite unnecessary and even counters the Hebrew narrative perspective and style. There is a relatively insignificant "gap" in time involved here. Moreover, use of the "*waw*-consecutive" construction followed by an explicit noun subject would represent the least disruptive way of indicating concurrent actions being carried out by different agents, that is, "YHWH" and "the men" (1:16). It is misleading to claim that "as far as events are concerned, this goes back in time, catching up with what has already happened."⁶⁹ Similarly, it is not accurate to view 3:6-9 as "a kind of flashback."⁷⁰ This would instead be a significant example of the Hebrew narrative technique of "summary-and-scene," in which a general synoptic overview of an important pericope (v. 5) precedes a more detailed account of what happened (vv. 6-9). Having heard the divine "proclamation" (v. 2) that Jonah was currently announcing throughout the city (v. 4), the Ninevite king responds by issuing a royal edict to apply to all his subjects, including the livestock (3:7). This is similar to what happens in 1:17, a summary statement which leads to the psalm of 2:1-9, and also the "preview-and-quotation" sequence that occurs at the end of 4:8, "[Jonah] asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'"⁷¹

It is a sign of our author's considerable narrative skill that along with the several passages involving a temporal displacement backward, there are

⁶⁶Stuart, 469.

⁶⁷Wendland, "Genre Criticism," 390-394.

⁶⁸Stuart, 468.

⁶⁹Wolff, 126.

⁷⁰Wolff, for example, renders the verbs of vv. 6-7a by an awkward string of pluperfects (144-145).

⁷¹Cf. NRSV; contra Brichto, 269, n. 20.

also a few cases where a definite future orientation is suggested, again inserted for apparent rhetorical reasons. Meir Sternberg provides a useful classification of such "foreshadowing" by proposing three main types: "analogy, paradigm, and dramatic forecast."⁷² *Analogy* entails episodic similarity, that is, a series of events experienced by one biblical personage that corresponds in significant respects to what later happens to another. Such "analogical organization [is] designed to launch inductive reasoning from known precedent(s) to some present counterpart facing an uncertain future."⁷³ Thus the completely unexpected "conversion" of the Tarshish-bound mariners gives an unobtrusive hint that if and when Jonah ever reaches Nineveh with his "word of the LORD," the outcome for them might not be as bleak as first indicated (1:2). The several important parallels that materialize to link the two accounts (chaps. 1 and 3) later confirm this divinely-planted intuition. An instance of *contrastive* analogy pertaining to the *same* personage would of course be that which is played out in the resending of Jonah to Nineveh (1:1-3 and 3:1-3).⁷⁴

A *paradigm*, which operates from the principle of deduction, is the product of a recursive series of such "analogies." It is "a general rule . . . which grows in predictive determinacy and ideological force with each new successful application" to enhance a greater awareness of "God's controlling design" in biblical history.⁷⁵ The outstanding example of this phenomenon in Jonah—arguably the thematic point of the entire book—is embodied in the prophet's ironic testimony of the benevolent divine character in 4:2. In fact, the "paradigmatic" nature of this theological proposition motivated Jonah's fateful flight in the first place, and paradoxically, also made possible the gracious experience of divine "deliverance" (2:9) that his erstwhile shipmates enjoyed.

Most obvious on the continuum of revelation that ranges between implicit analogy and overt narrator prediction is what is realized by some manner of *forecast* by a character (including, most reliably, God himself). Such "deductive prospection," designed to "catch the eye [and the ear] of the most dim-sighted [and hard-of-hearing]," is normally reserved for "vital matters of doctrine."⁷⁶ Thus Jonah's capsule sermon, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned" (3:4) at first seems to be an application of the divine principle of retribution that chronic "evil" will be punished, a

⁷²Sternberg, 268.

⁷³Sternberg, 268.

⁷⁴These are not necessarily different characters, as Sternberg seems to imply, 268-269.

⁷⁵Sternberg, 269.

⁷⁶Sternberg, 270.

notion that is implicit in the words of Jonah's first commissioning (1:2). However, this forecast leads to an expectation that is counteracted both by antrospection in the analogy of the sailors' salvation and also by retrospection in the stated paradigm of God's essential goodness. The theologically-grounded punitive proposition is not thereby compromised in the process; it is simply superseded by its larger, contrarational correlate, namely, the fact that Yahweh prefers to "relent" and to respond in "compassion" to penitent hearts and concrete acts of repentance (3:9-10). This hope-generating possibility, which is undeserved and contrary to all human logic, lies semantically implicit within the key verb itself, *h-p-k* "over-turn/turn-over," a response to those who respond in repentance (cf. Hos 11:8, in which the latter verb also co-occurs with "relent" *n-h-m*).

The wider functional and theological implications of the Hebrew narrative stylistic techniques of recursion and variation, as well as their specific manifestation in the rhetorical devices of irony and enigma, will be considered in Parts Two and Three of this article.