

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 Two¹

4. Potential Problems in the Functional Analysis of Literary Form

No study of literary form is satisfactory or complete in and of itself. It must always be accompanied by—or better, integrated with—a study of the specific communicative *functions* which the formal features—in this case, recursion and variation (cf. Part One of this article)—were selected to carry out in the discourse.

In his extensive treatment of the poetics of Biblical Hebrew narrative, Meir Sternberg periodically emphasizes "the limited value of the formal typologies that so often pass for the business of literary theory and analysis."² He goes on to point out the need for an integrated methodology, one that combines a careful description of form—and, we should add, content as well—together with a related discussion of authorial intent:

This two-way divorce [i.e., between form and function] establishes the need for a properly communicative approach, one that will accommodate the interplay of means and ends in sophisticated art and relate the principle of repetition to the working of the narrative whole.³

But the domain of function is considerably more difficult to handle with certainty during the process of text linguistic-literary investigation. Five noteworthy problem areas that may arise in this endeavor pertain to

¹Part One of this article appeared in *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35 (Spring 1997): 67-98.

²Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), 392.

³Sternberg, 393.

methodology: genre, perspective, setting, and the mode or medium of message composition. Each of these factors, operating alone or in conjunction with one or more of the others, can seriously affect one's assessment of role or purpose in the case of any given stylistic technique, whether major or minor, in terms of the overall development of a particular plot or story.

Methodology

The matter of general methodology is the first issue that comes to the fore in connection with the functional analysis of biblical literature. Should the Scriptures be regarded and treated as ordinary written (literary) discourse in terms of analytical and evaluative procedure? Or is there a *qualitative* difference between the Bible and any other text or corpus—whether religious or secular, historical or fictional, informational or aesthetic—which would call for a different approach to the task of investigation and interpretation? Obviously, one's particular theological presuppositions (with specific reference to the "Word of God") will determine any decision made in this regard. That issue cannot be taken up here.⁴ Suffice it to say that my basic assumption concerning the reality of divine *inspiration* and the consequent unifying influence of divine *purpose* in the composition of the OT and NT inclusively governs my perspective on both the nature of the original text and my mode of hermeneutical inquiry with respect to it. Accordingly, I view the fundamental nature of biblical narrative as being definable in terms of the following four characteristics, in descending order of importance, but carefully integrated all the same:

- (a) *theological* in relation to overall content, i.e., thoroughly YHWH/Christ-centered, directed, fulfilled, and empowered;
- (b) *historical* in relation to quality, i.e., on the whole (except for clearly marked and included subgenres, such as parables) a reliable, factual representation (including author-determined selection, sequencing, shaping, summarization, shading, and stylization) of the events reported as having taken place;
- (c) *rhetorical* in relation to purpose, i.e., aimed at "persuading" receptors to accept an all-governing divine perspective and imperative on their prevailing worldview and way-of-life; and
- (d) *artistic* in relation to means, i.e., utilizing a wide range of literary-poetic devices and compositional techniques according to the specific

⁴See the valuable discussion in chaps. 2 and 3 of V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

context and cotext to generate the appropriate volitional motivation, emotive involvement, cognitive impact, and esthetic appeal with regard to the essential salvific message being conveyed.

Some more conservative scholars might object to the relative importance attached to—or even the inclusion of—features (c) and (d) in my analysis of biblical discourse. But in general I think the abundant textual evidence speaks for itself in this regard. To be sure, one must always guard against the danger of "overinterpretation,"⁵ that is, rhetorical "overreading" and/or creative artistic "enhancement" with respect to the original text and the author's intended objectives. An uncritical adoption of the subjective approach of so-called "reception theory" must similarly be firmly resisted. But one must not go too far in the other direction either and discourage, discount, or disparage attempts to probe the depths of communicative potential in these areas. To conclude, for example, as Douglas Stuart does in relation to Jonah, that "most of the repetition of vocabulary that does exist in the chapter [one] and in the book as a whole is due to a single factor: the desire for simplicity," or that "the narrative bears no hint of humor,"⁶ would appear to be contradicted by an honest and open analysis and assessment of the text itself. Such an evaluation is also countered by his own characterization of Jonah as being "*sensational literature*," that is, "composed with a high concentration of elements designed to arouse the imagination and emotion of the audience."⁷

Genre

The importance of genre to the functional analysis of literature is aptly summarized by David Clines: "Literary works . . . generate meaning [over and above lexical and grammatical means] through their overall shape, their structure, and their dominant tendencies, that is, through their identity as wholes."⁸ The identification of a work's overall macrogenre and constituent subgenres enables one to better understand not only *how* a story is told (in terms of its stylistic features) and *what* it tells (i.e., the nature of its content in relation to reality), but also *why* the story is told (i.e., its interactional purpose in relation to the assumed intended audience). I have elsewhere described Jonah as being generically and uniquely complex: a dramatic, didactic, factual, typological narrative

⁵Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 456.

⁶Stuart, 457, 485.

⁷Stuart, 435, original emphasis.

⁸Cited in Long, 47.

with a significant underlying hortatory "prophetic" bent.⁹ Such a comprehensive perspective on the text helps to define the principal parameters within which one might carry out the manifold hermeneutical process of analysis, interpretation, and contemporary application—including idiomatic, but accurate, Bible translation.

Perspective

The issue of message perspective, including the associated factor of degree of pragmatic intentionality, is crucial in contemporary literary and theological hermeneutics. It is particularly relevant in any discussion of literary or communicative function. Four basic stances are possible—with many different modifications and combinations in between:¹⁰ an orientation from the point of view of the *source* (or "implied author") of the work; from that of the intended *receptors* ("implied audience") of the initial communicative event or, alternatively, the "real audience" today;¹¹ and from that of the linguistic *text* itself (i.e., in such a way that it supposedly "speaks" for itself without being tied to the original author or any particular audience).¹² It is not possible in this essay to consider the relative pros and cons of these diverse positions. I will simply concur with Sternberg who stresses the need for adopting the standpoint of the assumed authorial source when undertaking the initial phases of any

⁹Support for my rather complex generic characterization of Jonah is provided in my article: "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.

¹⁰For an overview of these different methodologies, see Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), chap. 1; also Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), chap. 6.

¹¹The two "receptor-oriented" settings and associated hermeneutical approaches need to be distinguished because of the radical differences between them. A concern for the original audience and context will often manifest itself in a study that has great affinities to one in which the "author" is the focus of attention, as in traditional evangelical biblical criticism or, by way of contrast, typical "source criticism." In the case of modern reader-centered theories, on the other hand, the situational context is largely irrelevant, for "the reader creates the meaning of the text" or "in interaction with the text," an approach that ultimately leads to a "deconstruction" of the discourse (Longman, 38, 41).

¹²Since a completely "neutral," unbiased interpretation is impossible, the fourth, supposedly "text-oriented" approach often merges in practice with the third, which is sometimes termed "reader-response" criticism. On the other hand, a focus on textual form in relation to the postulated original setting of use and composition is characteristic of traditional "form criticism." Thus the overlapping nature of any proposed system of hermeneutical classification is evident.

exegetical and/or literary study of the Scriptures.¹³ I do so despite the likelihood of being accused by some of committing the alleged hermeneutical error known as "the intentional fallacy."¹⁴

My reason for choosing this perspective is simply, but significantly, that "communication presupposes a speaker who resorts to certain linguistic and structural tools in order to produce certain effects on the addressee"¹⁵—and, it may be added, to most effectively convey the full extent of the desired message. Such tools may be overt (we might term them "cues") or covert ("clues") in relation to the textual surface, and they are situated on both the macro- and the microstructure of discourse organization. Explicit statements of a writer's attitude and intent are comparatively rare in Hebrew narrative, but not entirely absent (Judg 21:25; 2 Kgs 17:7-23; 2 Chron 36:14-21). Other comments that presuppose authorial purpose and perspective are less direct, such as the epilogues of Deuteronomy (34:10-12) and Joshua (especially 34:21), the genealogy of Ruth (4:17-22), the autobiographical report of Ezra (9:1-2), and the prayer of Nehemiah (1:4-11). At any rate, the principal guide in any attempted functional "reconstruction" must always be the text itself, that is, how it is rhetorically and artistically shaped through formal means such as recursion or variation (plus interrogation, the use of intensifiers, etc.) and semantic techniques like irony and enigma (plus figuration, hyperbole, etc.) to effect certain basic communicative objectives within its setting. This may sound rather subjective, but the alternative is much more so, for as far as procedure and perspective are concerned, "the choice turns out to lie between reconstructing the author's intention and licensing the reader's invention."¹⁶ Advocates of the latter option would include notably "the rhetorical critic [who] can find structures and meanings in the biblical text apart from the intention of the implied much less the real author."¹⁷ To be sure, "author intentionality cannot be assured," but at least it is a reasonable goal to help "control interpretation of the text"¹⁸—its originally intended meaning, that is, but not necessarily also, its contemporary application and contextualized extension.

¹³Sternberg, 69.

¹⁴This supposed "fallacy" is outlined (and its validity partially supported) by Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah*, Old Testament Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 96. A good refutation of the misuse of this criterion is found in Osborne, 405-406, 414-415.

¹⁵Sternberg, 9.

¹⁶Sternberg, 10.

¹⁷Trible, 229.

¹⁸Contra Trible, 230.

Setting

The problem of interpretive viewpoint is integrally related to that of the original situational setting, for the question of "who?" cannot be satisfactorily determined in isolation from others, such as "where?" and "when?" (i.e., "what?" then pertains to content, "how?" to form, and "why?" to function). Sternberg offers several important observations in this regard:¹⁹ "The text has no meaning, or may assume every kind of meaning, outside those coordinates of discourse that we usually bundle into the term 'context'." And having decided in favor of a source-oriented perspective, one must vigorously pursue every analytical means and resource available for ascertaining the closest possible approximation of the original compositional milieu, for: "the more complete and reliable our knowledge of the world from which the Bible sprang, the sharper our insight into its working and meaning as text."²⁰

The problem is that the bare text of Jonah does not give us a great deal of information concerning the background of its literary origin. No dates are mentioned, and the general geographical references to "Nineveh," "Tarshish," and "Joppa" (1:2-3) do not help much to fix a precise historical setting. About the best we can do is to adopt that which is suggested—intertextually—by the Scriptures themselves: the only other passage where a "prophet" named "Jonah, son of Amittai" is mentioned. This textual "setting" is found in 2 Kgs 14:25, where there is a rather cryptic reference a seer who ministered in the land of Israel during the relatively prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. This passage says nothing about the city of Nineveh and its "king," but obviously the nation of Assyria was a subject of considerable current concern since it was either the dominant force or at least a major threatening world power in the Middle East at that time.²¹ Therefore, the book about the prophet Jonah must be set and is best interpreted in light of the tragic events that overtook Israel in the eighth century B.C., just a few short decades before the ruthless Assyrian armies overran the Northern Kingdom, destroyed its capital Samaria, and deported its people en masse (cf. 2 Kgs 17). Additional support for such an approach comes from the wider canonical context and the editorial fact that a "linking of Jonah with Hosea, Amos, and Micah in the Book of the Twelve indicates that Jonah ought to be understood as a story about a person from the eighth century B.C."²²

¹⁹Sternberg, 11.

²⁰Sternberg, 16.

²¹For a summary of the political situation of this age, see *The NIV Study Bible*, 550-551).

²²James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 22.

The "prophetic" surroundings (i.e., wider "cotext") of the book of Jonah also has an important bearing on the nature of its message, as was suggested earlier. It is not merely the history of a particular prophet, it is "prophetic history," that is, paraenetic (admonitory and hortatory) as well as hagiographic. Thus "Scripture interprets Scripture" also with regard to its larger compositional organization and constitution.

Mode/Medium of Composition

This factor is presented last because it is probably the most nebulous and open to serious debate. The pertinent issues revolve around various efforts to identify the particular manner of message production in the original event. Did the complete text exist initially only in *oral* form, was it first presented as a *written* document, or did some *combination* of influences characterize a longer compositional process in relation to a particular biblical book? It would seem that the third possibility is the most likely in the case of Jonah, at least. In other words, the text was probably formulated in the final instance on the basis of one or more spoken (recited ?) versions already in circulation. The precise degree of influence of the oral upon the written is of course indeterminable, but the audio medium has clearly left its mark on the discourse in the form of such devices as recursion (the large amount of exact repetition in particular), phonological accentuation (e.g., paronomasia, alliteration), direct speech, sharp character contrasts, and graphic diction—to mention some of the more obvious features—and of course the distinct thanksgiving prayer of chapter 2.

What influence then does the medium of composition have upon the message and its interpretation? In the case of Jonah, an extended oral "pre-history," in addition to helping to account for the stylistic devices listed above, would lend credence to the supposition (to be explored in Part Three) that the techniques of *irony* (creation of an implicit level of critical underlying significance) and *enigma* (deliberate introduction of rhetorically motivated "gaps" and queries) also play an important role in the hortatory development of the account—yet without *necessarily* compromising its basic historicity, which I strongly affirm. Literary-narrative strategies of such relative sophistication as irony and enigma would tend to be more effective—and indeed perceptible—in the case of a well-known story and context, that is, in contrast to one which had been newly created (if fictitious) or was being reported or recorded for the first time.

A traditional oral-based text also frequently manifests the device of hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical effect), but since the effect of this particular feature would detract from the fundamental

facticity of the narrative, I do not see it as being operative to a significant (content-altering) degree in Jonah, for example, with regard to the account of the "great storm" (chap. 1), the "great fish" (chap. 2), the great conversion of the "great city" of Nineveh" (chap. 3), or the "great anger" of this prophet of the LORD (chap. 4).²³ This is a rather controversial issue in past and present Jonahic studies and obviously one that is very closely connected to any consideration of genre (see above).

A final point to note in this connection is the mode (intended medium) of *performance*. All factors being considered, there can be little doubt that the narrative of Jonah was set down in writing in such a way as to preserve its essential orality. In other words, it was composed in a natural style that would make it relatively easy to "re-oralize" the discourse in dramatic fashion during any subsequent public reading or recital. This important feature will be further considered under the topic of "text presentation" in section 5 below.

In the discussion that follows I will present a brief (and incomplete) overview of seven generic (macro) communicative purposes that pertain to the functioning of recursion and variation in narrative. Several additional examples are included to show how these principles apply to Jonah in particular. More specific (micro) poetic motifs and moves are presented in association with the treatment of selected illustratory passages, especially in my survey of the rhetorical operation of irony and enigma in Part Three.

5. *The Functional-Rhetorical Significance of Recursion and Variation in Hebrew Narrative Discourse*

Seven interactive rhetorical aspects of a "discourse"-based functional approach are posited, namely, those that relate to a text's larger organization, demarcation, conjunction, projection (accentuation), characterization, presentation, and pluri-signification, i.e., semantic/thematic diversity.²⁴

Text Organization

Repetition and variation play an important role in the overall organization of narrative discourse, with specific reference to the creation of a design that renders a certain text attractive and hence appealing in

²³My approach contrasts in this regard with that of Edwin Good, for example, who feels that "everything about Nineveh is exaggerated . . . to highlight the irony of the peevish prophet's totally unexpected success" (*Irony in the Old Testament*, Bible and Literature Series [Sheffield: Almond, 1981], 49).

²⁴For a more detailed description and illustration of most of these, see Wendland, "Text Analysis."

terms of its artistic form and aesthetic effect. These features include such compositional features as temporal ordering, content proportioning (i.e., scene vs. summary), and information selection. Why should this be a factor of note where religious—yes, strongly theological—and what is assumed to be "historical" literature is concerned? Are these crucial notions not mutually exclusive or at least quite unrelated, i.e., artistry, theology, morality, and history?

In short, I would say no—not necessarily, at least not with regard to the diverse narratives found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that the four aspects stand or fall together, that is, in the case of a corpus of texts that is believed to be divinely "inspired" (in the narrower, theological sense of that much-maligned, but necessary term). Thus inspiration obviously (according to present perspective) controls the *factuality* of biblical history, the *truth* of its theology, and the *validity* of its morality, but I would add that it also makes possible the *excellence* of its literary artistry. Thus the Bible is literature that stands supreme in every respect, not only in terms of its multiple divine purpose (expressed in relation to many different authors and settings)—that is, in comparison with any other religious book or corpus—but also with regard to its compositional quality and "poetic" craft.²⁵ This fact does not contradict or detract from its historical character; rather, it only enhances it. To this point, J. Philips Long writes in his helpful survey of "the art of biblical history": "To be sure, there is often an element of *patterning* in the Bible's portrayal of people and events, but this does not disprove the essential historicity of those portrayals."²⁶

A number of examples have already been cited in Part One to demonstrate that Jonah, like any other biblical work, evinces a text that is highly organized according to its genre and permeated with manifold literary patterns. Sternberg refers to this as its "analogical design" and mentions such typical instances as "parallelism, contrast, variation, recurrence, symmetry, [and] chiasm."²⁷ Undoubtedly a texture so obviously, yet also skillfully, structured was more easily and effectively conveyed (articulated, apprehended, and remembered) in an oral-aural setting of communication—which was, and still is, the principal mode of Scripture transmission throughout the world.

But performance-related factors provide only part of the answer as far

²⁵"Poetics" is "the science of literature," especially with regard to its artistic qualities and rhetorical effects (Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983], 15).

²⁶Long, 114.

²⁷Sternberg, 39.

as the Bible's popularity is concerned. The structural symmetry inherent in Jonah—not only as expected in the enclosed "psalm," but throughout the book—also contributes to a more effective (informative, affective, and imperative) conveying of the diverse aspects of its theme. Thus we move from the problem of how to deal with the gross sinfulness of a thoroughly pagan society, which is emphasized in the point-for-point panelling of the first three verses of chapters 1 and 3, to the contrastive and critical "from minor to major" (*qal wachomer*) manner of reasoning in the book's final two verses, which foregrounds the prophet's introspective moral and spiritual problem in relation to his LORD. Throughout this development, the reiteration of linguistic and literary form plays an indispensable part in the multifaceted transmission of a multifarious message centered upon divine mercy. But complementing this overarching theological perspective are periodic, carefully placed ruptures of the anticipated cause-effect progression of the narrative surface, each of which acts as a subtle reminder that the grace of God does not operate according to human norms, mores, desires, or goals.

Text Demarcation

From the larger organizational design of discourse we move to its internal demarcation, in which recursion and variation also perform a leading role. This comes about through the application of a number of important text-defining principles, as noted in Part One. The obvious lexical correspondence at the respective *beginnings* of chapters 1 and 3 (i.e., "anaphora"), for example, signals the onset of these two major divisions of the book and also delimits the extent of their initial episodes (1:1-3 and 3:1-3). Similarly, the two halves are each divided by means of the "prayers" (*p-l-l*) that initiate and set the tone for chapters 2 and 4 (2:1; 4:2). Jonah's promise to "offer sacrifices (*z-b-h*)" and "fulfill vows" (*n-d-r*) at the close of his psalm (2:9) ironically echoes the analogous actions that the sailors are reported to have actually carried out at the *ending* of chapter 1 (1:16; i.e., "epiphora"). The subsequent report of Yahweh's providing "a great fish to swallow Jonah" (1:17) is neatly paralleled by Yahweh's telling "the fish to vomit Jonah out" in 2:10. Thus the prophet's song of thanksgiving is completely *enclosed* by its occasion, namely, the LORD's protective action (i.e., "inclusio"). The book's last major transition, that is, between chapters 3 and 4 (3:10-4:1), is marked by extensive verbal *overlap* (i.e., "anadiplosis") involving both similarity (a play on the root "evil," *r'-h*) and a striking contrast, i.e., YHWH's all-embracing "compassion" (*n-h-m*) versus Jonah's inveterate, prejudicial "anger" (*h-r-h*). These two chapters are segmented internally by the prophet's contrastive movements, i.e. into

the city (3:4) and later out of (4:5, i.e., anaphora). Finally, the divine-human disputation of chapter 4 is "bounded" by a pair of important "position statements" which are strangely synonymous. Jonah's reluctant and perfunctory enumeration of the merciful attributes of the LORD (4:2) is applied specifically by YHWH himself to the case at hand, namely, the needy inhabitants of Nineveh (4:11). In this way all of the text's principal boundaries may be established, appropriately dividing the narrative into a "perfect" sequence of seven episodes or "scenes": 1:1-3; 1:4-16; 1:17-2:10; 3:1-3; 3:4-10; 4:1-4; 4:5-11.²⁸

Text Conjunction

Hand in hand with the syntagmatic demarcation of a given discourse goes its internal conjunction, that is, a consideration of those devices that contribute to its essential characteristics of unity and harmony. Such a conjoining is of two principal kinds, namely, that based upon textual *form* (i.e., "cohesion"), and that which pertains to its overall *sense* and significance (i.e., "coherence"). These two types of linkage are often, but not necessarily, effected together, and their primary purpose is to interrelate the principal parts of the composition both to one another and also to the complete text as an independent unit of literary communication. All types of lexical recursion, whether exact or synonymous (more or less deliberate variation or direct semantic contrast), naturally contribute to this quality of connectivity, but some sets are thematically more important than others. Of the terms reiterated in all four chapters, for example, *g-d-l* "[be] great" (15 occurrences) is clearly more significant than *'m-r* "say" (21 times). As Wilt observes, "a thing is spoken of as *gdool* only because of its direct relationship to God."²⁹ Similarly, the different references to Israel's deity (39 times in 48 verses), especially YHWH as distinct from *'ēlōhîm*, are far more consequential for the message than the recurrence of Jonah's name. Some iterative sequences are much more restricted in scope and thereby serve to unify smaller segments of the discourse, e.g., "fear" (*y-r'*) in 1:4-16 (scene two) or "[re]turn" (*š-w-b*) in the king's proclamation and the LORD's response of 3:8-10.

Two other, less obvious types of conjunction need to be mentioned in closing this section. The one, "intertextuality," has already been illustrated (Part One). Its importance lies in tying the book of Jonah as a whole into the textual tradition as well as the canon of the Hebrew

²⁸For a detailed discussion of these text divisions, see Wendland, "Text Analysis."

²⁹Timothy L. Wilt, "Lexical Repetition in Jonah," *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* 5 (1992): 259.

Scriptures. The many varied, seemingly deliberately positioned and/or modified citations, paraphrases, and allusions present would suggest a rather late (postexilic) date for the work's composition. But on the other hand, all these references firmly situate this story within the mainstream of traditional Yahwistic theology (e.g., 4:2, 10), with special reference to his compassionate regard for all those, including foreigners, who penitently and devotedly enter into a covenantal relationship with him by grace (cf. Deut 10:18-19; 24:14-22; 26:10-13; Isa 2:2-4; 42:1-9; 56:1-8). The fact that Jonah ministered (albeit grudgingly) on behalf of YHWH to pagan peoples strikes a strong resonant chord with many prophetic oracles (e.g., Amos 9:11-12; Obad 20-21; Mic 4:1-4; 7:15-17; Zeph 3:9-10; Zech 8:20-23; 9:9-10; 14:16-19; Mal 1:11; 4:1-3), and indeed, the lyric-liturgical tradition of Judah as well (e.g., Pss 22:27; 47:9; 67:2; 72:8-11; 86:9). This ancient corpus of divine truth needed (and still needs) to be recalled and reinforced within the prevailing setting of a lukewarm religious society and a threatening world age when most of the people of God had either forgotten or were determined to ignore the fact that YHWH had ordained that a regenerated "Israel" and his chosen "servant," the Messiah, were to be "a light to the nations—so that all the world may be saved . . . and praise [him]" (Isa 49:1-7).

There is another important kind of formal cohesion which recursion, usually coupled with variation, effects (along with demarcation) in Hebrew literary discourse; that is by means of a chiasmic construction—or as it is more commonly known when extended beyond the typical four terms (A:B::B:A), an *introversion* or *palistrophe*. In this case the principle of deviation is actually built into the compositional pattern as the second half of the structure reverses the sequential order of significant elements found in the first. Jonah incorporates several good examples of this symmetrical sort of inverted formation, all of which have been documented elsewhere.³⁰ They serve by way of literary analogy to underscore the predilection of the LORD to "turn" (*š-w-b*; 3:9-10) whenever possible—even in the most unexpected of human circumstances—in order to exercise his manifold "compassion" (*h-w-s*; 4:10-11).

As a partial illustration of this device, I might draw attention to the key junctures of the elaborate introversion that unifies the form and highlights the semantic significance of the narrative's second scene (1:4-16): At the beginning (vv. 4-5) we are told of the vague but powerful "fear" (*y-r-'*) that the mariners felt when YHWH "hurled" (*tûl*) the great wind against them on the sea. They reacted appropriately (that is, for pagans) by "crying out" (*z-'-q*) in disparate and desperate prayer to their various

³⁰Some of the major introversions that have been posited in Jonah are outlined in Wendland, "Text Analysis."

tribal "gods" (*'ēlōhîm*). At the end of this pericope (vv. 14,16), on the other hand, having heard and believed Jonah's revelation, the sailors "called out" (*q-r'*) for forgiveness for "hurling" the LORD's prophet overboard. Here they experienced a specific kind of religious "fear," one directed solely towards "YHWH" (as named now by them) and which motivated them to perform very focused types of reverential ritual action. At the foregrounded central core of this introverted structure then (vv. 9-10a), we have Jonah's surprising and somewhat strange profession of faith (literally, his "fear")—verbally pointed with reference to "YHWH," and yet at the same time rather vague (perhaps deliberately so!) in terms how the LORD actually related to the serious situation at hand. The theologically perceptive sailors, however, immediately realized what was going on and were struck with an overwhelming sense of "fear"—a sacred awe that Jonah himself should have experienced if he had really believed the words he had just uttered.

Text Projection

The preceding passage also illustrates the role of recursion and variation in effecting discourse projection, that is, in helping to distinguish and to display the diverse areas of special semantic importance within the narrative. Obviously, not all persons, places, objects, events, and circumstances in an account are of equal prominence. Therefore, a good narrator will always verbally "spotlight" the selected items that he wants his audience to pay special attention to if they wish to perceive the point of his message—*why* he is telling them this particular story. Reiteration is one of the most common and effective literary tools in this regard. In chapter one it serves to highlight the "peak" in the *narrative* action that occurs in the final verses of the second scene, for example, through the mention of "YHWH" (5 times in vv. 14-16). As suggested above, the repetition of key theological terms also functions to emphasize the *thematic* "nucleus" situated in the center of this pericope (v. 9), a proposition that is significantly amplified later in 4:2. One more locus of special significance that is sometimes distinguished in literary discourse (whether prosaic or poetic) is that of "climax." This refers to a certain apex of *emotive* intensity and/or dramatic tension that appears to be marked in the text. Again in chapter 1, we might note the battery of /*m*-/-initial questions with which the sailors bombard Jonah, both before and after the nucleus of v. 9. The climactic query is rhetorical in nature (as is often the case) and is set off by itself: "What have you done?!" (v. 10a).

Frequently, of course, one or another of these three areas of projection will coincide, with consequently greater import in relation to

the author's main message. The thematic "nucleus" and emotive "climax" of Jonah's psalm, for example, converge in the final two Heb. words: "Salvation [belongs] to-the-LORD!" (2:10). Its contrastive, action-centered "peak," on the other hand (indeed, many psalms give evidence of such a semi-"narrative" progression), occurs a few lines earlier in the sudden shift from downward (death) to upward motion (life) in relation to the sea (and psychologically, if not spiritually, to YHWH as well): "And you, O LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit!" (2:6b). In these two passages a repetition of the divine name (in Heb.) helps mark the crucial points of projection, thus continuing an emphasis that was initiated in the introduction and first line of the song (i.e., 2:2-3a). Intratextual recursion also functions to spotlight the close of the book where culminating repeated references to both the size ("more than two hundred thousand," cf. 3:3b) and the nature ("humans," "those who do not know . . .," "beasts"; cf. 3:5b, 8; 4:11) of those living in "the great [now saved] city of Nineveh" (cf. 1:2; 3:2), coupled with a semantically reduplicative, ascensive manner of argumentation on the part of the LORD (4:10-11), would seem to indicate a final grand convergence of peak, climax, and nucleus.

The notion of discourse projection may be associated with that of semantic "accentuation," a term that is normally applied to text segments of a more restricted cotextual range or scope. Thus the author utilizes some form of repetition, deviation, and/or defamiliarization to *foreground*, to *emphasize*, or to *intensify* specific aspects of the message that happen to be uppermost in his thinking—or narrating—at any given stage of the story's development. These three notions are very closely related, of course, and it is not always possible to differentiate among them in relation to a particular passage. Nevertheless, the distinction does seem to be valid, for it is one that has some basis, at least in the way in which we prepare and "process" narrative texts, and probably other types of discourse as well.

"Foregrounding" (highlighting) involves the use of repetition to focus upon and/or to attract the listener/reader's attention to certain noteworthy aspects of the narrative event progression (*plot*). One of the most diagnostic ways of marking (hence also of recognizing) the central "story line" in Hebrew narration, for example, is to string together a series of verbs in the so-called "*waw*-consecutive" (*wayyiqtol*) construction. We see an instance of this sort of sequence immediately after the LORD's initial command to Jonah: "and he arose . . . and he went down . . . and he found . . . and he gave [paid] . . . and he went down . . ." (1:3—all in the space of a single verse, so quick was Jonah to leave the scene!). This would

be a type of "low-grade" foregrounding, for though important to the development of the story, it constitutes the "default mode" of Hebrew narrative style and consequently is not a very prominent or attention-grabbing focusing technique.

Other poetic devices capitalize upon some form of variation to create a more "conspicuous" sort of foregrounding, such as the introduction of syntactic front-shifting, a full noun phrase, a rhetorical question, or a segment of direct speech. Nominal advancement to first place in an utterance (before the verb) is often employed, for example, to indicate the onset of a new compositional unit, i.e., paragraph/episode/section/etc. (e.g., "And YHWH . . ." in 1:4) or the insertion of a parenthetical remark and/or temporal displacement (e.g., "And Jonah . . ." in 1:5b). General repetition is also used to spotlight the central character(s) of a story or a given episode/scene in the account. The different references to the deity, for example, clearly designate "YHWH-God" as the chief participant in the book as a whole (occurring almost three times more often than "Jonah"). On the other hand, the multitude of personal references in the psalm of chapter 2 suggests that the prophet was overly preoccupied with himself, despite the fact that the text was ostensibly addressed to the LORD. A similar personal bias is evident in his complaint-prayer of 4:2-3. Characters that are foregrounded over the span of a paragraph unit are normally introduced by a full subject noun phrase in the first clause (not necessarily in sentence-initial position) and thereafter continue to occupy "center-stage" in the subject slot (usually in bound pronominal form) for a majority of the action utterances that follow. Alternatively, or conjunctively, they provide most of the direct speech within a particular segment of discourse., e.g., "the sailors" in 1:7-8 and "the men" in 1:13-16.

"Emphasis" in verbal discourse (narrative or otherwise) is generated through the use of recursion to accentuate some particular aspect of a text's *theme*. The different semantic facets of greatness (*g-d-l*), for example, tend to merge and resonate with respect to one another as they reappear in different settings throughout the text as a way of emphasizing the book's main *hesed*-centered message, which is concentrated in passages such as 3:9-10, 4:2, and 4:11: Whatever (or whoever) is "great" in the eyes of YHWH with regard to the need for merciful "deliverance" (2:9) ought to be equally important in the thinking of his people, and this realization should govern their behavior. The scope of this gracious concern includes everyone, even Israel's "great" heinous, implacable foe, Nineveh (3:3; 4:11). That was the crucial theological point which an ardent, ethnocentric nationalist like Jonah could not seem to grasp in spite of the LORD's patient instruction, indirectly (chap. 1) or overtly (chap. 4),

whether by way of physical chastisement (4:8) or verbal rebuke (4:4, 9-11). As a result he fell, and his "descent"—psychological (in relation to himself, what he knew to be right), moral (in relation to the ship's crew), and spiritual (in relation to YHWH)—is aptly emphasized by the repetition of *y-r-d* "go down" in chapter 1 (and once more for good measure in 2:7). Similarly, but on a much smaller scale, certain reiterated terms are utilized to suggest what is topically central, either wholly or in part, within the scope of a specific subparagraph: Jonah's "flight to Tarshish away from the presence of the LORD" in 1:3, the unknown "god[s]" in 1:5-6, the "casting of lots" in relation to "the cause of this calamity" in 1:7-8, or the "calming down of the sea over against" the mariners in 1:11-12.

Finally, "intensification" involves the reduplication of a particular *lexical item*, whether a root, word, or phrase, to increase its particular semantic scope or force, e.g., size (large, small), quality (good, bad), diversity (many different kinds), and so forth, usually within the span of a single utterance or clause. The outstanding instance of this device in Jonah is manifested in the "verbal cognate" construction, as noted in Part One. Thus the expression "the men feared a great fear" in 1:10 means that they were utterly terrified (cf. 1:16). Similarly, in the latter verse the "sacrificing of sacrifice[s]" and the "vowing of vows" may accentuate the nature of such reverent action in terms of quality (e.g., thoroughly committed vows, the best available sacrifices) or quantity (e.g., repeated sacrifices, reiterated vows). It should be noted that repetition may also be involved with the generation of *emotive* intensity as shown, for example, in the series of interrogatives of 1:8 (indicating an extremely agitated, irritated, and impatient collective frame of mind), or in Jonah's angry reiterative response to God's probing inquiry (4:9). The phonological recursion that is characteristic of alliteration and punning may also serve an intensifying purpose, as we see (hear!) for example in the description of the amazing *qîqāyôn* plant which the LORD caused to grow so quickly over (*wayya'al mē'al*) Jonah (*yônāh*) to provide immediate shade (*lihyôt šē*) over his head (*'al-rō' šō*) and to give him some relief (*lēhassîl lô*) from his grievous physical and psychological discomfort (*mērā'ātô*; 4:6). Obviously, a certain auditory focusing effect is also active in this entire passage, namely, with regard to the troubled mental state of God's prophet.

Text Characterization

Participant characterization pertains to the manner in which the various personages (including "God!") mentioned in the story are portrayed and evaluated by the author—whether positively, negatively, or in a relatively neutral light. This feature is of course related to the overall

narrative plan and purpose as well as to the implied narrator's contextually specific point of view. In biblical literature the norm is for this general viewpoint to be "objective" (third person), "subdued" (unobtrusive), "reliable" (with regard to the facts being reported), and "omniscient" (concerning the breadth and scope of knowledge available), which is of course in keeping with its inspired authorship.

But strangely enough, despite his potentially infinite knowledge and privileged perspective, the narrator does not usually indulge in or interject much personal description, opinion, or commentary on the various characters and their actions. He prefers to allow individuals (and corporate groups, such as the "Ninevites") to reveal positive and/or negative beliefs, values, attitudes, motives, and goals of and for themselves. This may be effected both in what they actually do and by what they say, perceive (e.g., "And God saw . . .," 3:10), or think, i.e., interior monologue, which in Hebrew narrative is not always clearly distinguished from actual articulated speech (e.g., Jonah's thanksgiving "prayer" in the belly of the great fish). Moreover, what personal description there is, whether physical, psychological, or—most important—ideological, is typically provided "not to enable the reader to visualize the character, but to enable him to situate the character in terms of his place in society, . . . to tell what kind of a person he is."³¹ Such a characterization is always made, I might add, from the viewpoint of YHWH and also in relation to his divinely instituted instructions and associated covenantal obligations (*torah*), both religious and interpersonal.

In any case, the twin techniques of recursion and variation are further prominent in the development and definition of character—as far as this is allowed to go in a given account. In other words, the process of biblical characterization is highly selective in what it reveals about a person, whether "hero" or "villain," and is generally kept subordinate to the controlling plot—which, in turn, serves the larger theological purpose of the work as a whole. As far as the book of Jonah is concerned, the fickle nature of the central human character, the prophet himself, is revealed primarily through repetition and/or variation coupled with the principle of *contrast*.

According to Adele Berlin there are actually three types of contrast: (1) contrast with another character, (2) contrast with an earlier action of the same character, and (3) contrast with the expected norm.³²

All three varieties occur with respect to Jonah. The second type is most prominent in the parallelism manifested in his two commissioning

³¹Berlin, 36.

³²Berlin, 40.

accounts (chaps. 1 and 3). The second time Jonah "sets out and goes to Nineveh," that is, after doing the exact opposite on the first occasion and having experienced near disaster. Does this then suggest a change of "heart" or character? Not necessarily, for again the absence of any overt verbal response (3:3; cf. 1:3)—in contrast now to both the verbose psalm of praise to YHWH in chapter 2 and also to his vigorously expressed original objections to the LORD's mission (left implicit until 4:2)—would seem to imply that his fundamentally self-centered, antithetical attitude had not changed. The second time around he simply acquiesced, or worse, was sullenly forced along in the LORD's direction.³³

Similarly, recursion with variation highlights the contrast between Jonah's lyric promise to offer "sacrifices" and "vows" to the LORD (2:9), which to our knowledge he never fulfilled, and the pagan sailors' reverent completion of these same worshipful activities, whether right on board ship or once they finally reached safety on shore (1:16). A corresponding antithesis appears between the conspicuous penitential activities of the Ninevites (3:5-9) and Jonah's obstinate refusal even to admit that his attitude was wrong, or at least mistaken (4:9).

Finally, direct contrast with an expected prophetic norm is foregrounded intertextually in chapter 4 as Jonah angrily exclaims his fervent desire to die (4:3, 8)—all because the foreign Ninevites, including their king, thoroughly repented (at least in terms of the divine knowledge that was available to them) and were consequently spared by YHWH. The prophet Elijah also expressed such a death wish (1 Kgs 19:4), but his plea was uttered in response to widespread apostasy among God's own people, including their reigning king and queen (1 Kgs 19:1-2, 10, 14). In Part Three several suggestions will be made as to how plot-related characterization is integrally connected with the rhetorical devices of irony and enigma to enhance the expression of theme in biblical narrative and Jonah in particular.

Text Presentation

Discourse presentation has to do with the presumed initial mode and medium of narrative transmission. As was suggested earlier, there can be little doubt that Jonah was specifically composed with a performative oral recital in mind. This would surely be (both then and now) the most effective way for its dramatic, didactic, declamatory, and probably also debatable point to be brought home—that is, with its diverse repetitions and its dynamic contrasts forcefully ringing in the ears of each and every

³³For this reason, the word "obeyed" (e.g., NIV, REB) may be a somewhat misleading translation in 3:3.

listener. James Limburg suggests that "the repetition of words in written material quickly becomes monotonous, but in oral discourse the speaker can play upon the repeated word or words, varying pitch, volume, and tempo for dramatic effect."³⁴

Several other prominent qualities of this text would promote its suitability for public oral performance, in particular, the proportionately large amount of direct speech (i.e., nearly half of the total number of words) which features a relatively heavy concentration of audience-engaging questions (14 in all). There is also a great deal of intensive, graphic, rhythmic, and frequently emotive diction, as expressed especially in the picturesque figurative language of the psalm and the several heartfelt prayers for mercy—or death. Would the original receptors have been able to recognize and interpret the significance of the many subtle deviations from the norms established by recursion? Certainly so, if the experience of contemporary oral-aural oriented societies, such as those found in many parts of Africa, is anything to go by. In these situations, most if not all verbal communication takes place via the spoken word, and therefore the trained ears of those addressed are able to perceive the minute distinctions and precise phonological devices (e.g., alliteration and paronomasia) that would easily escape most modern-day, video-biased listeners. The point is that more effort must be made to render the abundant, functionally significant rhetoric of the biblical message more ostensible by increasing not only a translation's level of stylistic naturalness (in local literary terms) but also the physical "readability" of the text itself (in terms of its published format).³⁵

Text Pluri-Signification

The final general function of recursion and variation that is prominently exhibited in the book of Jonah relates to what I have termed discourse "pluri-signification." This refers to a characteristic "double-articulation" of sense and/or significance that is realized in most, if not all, instances of outstanding and memorable traditional oral art. In other words, the lexical and grammatical "surface" of the text conveys an overt, obvious, or "literal" meaning and, in addition, one or more "levels" of deeper, less apparent, nonliteral meaning. The latter in turn may represent simply a more effective (dynamic, graphic, idiomatic, forceful, etc.) way of expressing the thoughts and emotions of the manifest discourse. Alternatively—more importantly and probably also more commonly—the

³⁴Limburg, 27.

³⁵For some suggestions in this latter regard, see Ernst R. Wendland, "Duplicating the Dynamics of Oral Discourse in Print," *Notes on Translation* 7 (1993): 26-44.

underlying level of semantic reference may extend throughout a given pericope (e.g., a parable), or even the composition as a whole, thereby transmitting a distinct message, one which reinforces, complements, augments, or contrasts with that of the narrative surface. This is of course the great hermeneutical question of Jonah: Is there just one "main" message, and if so, where does it "reside"—in the narrative surface, at some deeper level, or simultaneously on both planes of communication? This question will be taken up in Part Three of this article.

A more obvious and limited instance of such pluri-signification occurs where so-called "figurative language" is involved, e.g., metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, and so forth. Poetry is the preferred domain of these figures of speech—for example, "the *heart* of the seas" (v. 3) or "the *bars* of the earth" (v. 6) in chapter two. But such semantic embellishment is by no means absent from skilled prose writing, e.g., "the *ship thought/planned* (i.e., threatened—personification) to break up" (1:4), but later "the *sea stood still from its raging*" (1:15) at the covert command of YHWH.

Distinctly rhetorical figures are often comprised of a secondary level of meaning which is quite different from that which the surface textual forms would imply. In the case of a rhetorical question, for example, the intention of the utterance is not so much semantic as it is pragmatic in nature. In other words, the point is not to elicit information from the addressee, but rather to convey something in a more emphatic, yet tactfully indirect, way, e.g., "Is it right for you to be so angry?" (4:4) = "Surely you have *no* right to be so angry!" Thus the ending of the book is not as "open-ended," "incomplete," or "improperly" closed as some commentators have concluded.³⁶ Indeed, by the very nature of this sort of question, YHWH has emphatically—and we might add, convincingly—concluded his case. It remains for the obedient reader/hearer to trustingly accept the LORD's theological position and with that also to faithfully put into personal practice the implied divine evaluation and imperative. Disagreement can only lead to disaster, as evidenced by the unhappy experience of Jonah. Douglas Stuart has nicely summarized the pertinent implications on the negative side of the issue: "Anyone who replies 'Why is this such an important question?' has not understood the message. Anyone who replies 'No!' has not believed it."³⁷

In Part Three of this study I will focus upon a pair of nonliteral rhetorical devices that seem to be especially important from a functional

³⁶For example, see Walter B. Crouch, "To Question an End, To End a Question: Opening the Closure of the Book of Jonah," *JOT* 62 (1994): 106-107, 110.

³⁷Stuart, 435.

perspective in the book of Jonah and which are generated primarily by the artful interaction of the two stylistic techniques of recursion and deviation as described in Part One, namely, irony and enigma. Indeed, a major part of the enigma of Jonah lies in the many instances of irony that it manifests: Why is this particular rhetorical feature so pronounced in the text and how is it effected? On the other hand, one of the prominent ironies of this narrative is its polyvalent—hence generally enigmatic—expression of theme. In fact, a certain receptor constituency might be in total agreement with one possible expression of the book's message (e.g., the need for a universal, cross-cultural communication of the necessity of repentance before YHWH), but find themselves in either overt or implicit conflict with an important corollary (e.g., this life-saving message is for *you* too to communicate to *everyone*, even your greatest national/ethnic/religious enemy).