

COMPOSITION AND PARONOMASIA IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

By

BARUCH HALPERN AND RICHARD ELLIOTT FRIEDMAN

York University

*University of California,
San Diego*

LITERARY STUDY OF THE BIBLE has traditionally centered on theme and the strategies of narrative construction. In the 1960's and 1970's, however, scholars lent considerable dimension to their enterprise by focussing increasingly upon compositional techniques, including word-play, *inclusio*, chiasm, and the whole gamut of rhetorical, structural and generic devices available to the Israelite author. What has long been familiar to the scholar of Dante or Shakespeare has only of late assumed general interest for the biblical critic, namely, that artistry is manifest no less in the structure that houses meaning and content than in the meanings themselves. As a result, scholars have begun to explore the interaction between the formal, literary characteristics and the content of the materials they study.¹ This interrelationship—between intended content (which must be distinguished from meaning) on the one hand, and the dictates of form on the other, of plot-element or message, and genre, seems in much of biblical literature to have determined the final presentation of the work (note Hirsch, 1978, pp. 68–126).

Replete with word-play, the book of Jonah affords a unique example of the contribution that formal artistry makes to the impact of the final work. Jonah's

1. See recently Blackmur (1954; 1956, pp. 97–144 *passim*), and Wellek and Warren (1963, esp. pp. 139–141); in biblical studies, Jackson and Kessler (1974), Fokkelman (1975), Alter (1975), Gevirtz (1975), Talmon and Fishbane (1976), Anderson (1977 and 1978), Talmon (1978), and Levenson (1978). This is not meant to be an inclusive list (which would require something on the order of a bibliographical monograph), but only a general sampling of the sorts of stylistic studies now being undertaken in the field.

thematic integration is evident, as commentators regularly observe. At the same time, the book is a rich, almost baroque sampler of paronomastic techniques.

Foremost among these, and most readily apparent to the reader, is the repetition of key-words. These stand out either by their quantity, or by their anomalous nature, over the course of the presentation of the tale. One need only call to mind the recurring *Leitwort*, “And God saw that it was good,” of Genesis 1 (or, for that matter, the recurring phrases of any classical symphony) to recognize the power of the device as a vehicle to structure the text. In Jonah, the words ‘go up’ (*lh*) and ‘go down’ (*yrđ*)—along with the concepts they convey—are repeated and intertwined from the outset of the book. Thus, Jonah’s flight from YHWH involves a sequence of descents: he goes down to Jaffa, goes down into a ship (1:3), and goes into the hold (1:6), in a progressive effort to escape. Though the relationship of the poem in chapter 2 to the rest of the narrative is complex,² it is worth noting that the term surfaces again in Jonah’s metaphor for his restraint in the fish’s belly (“I went down to the bases of the mountains”—2:7); this represents both his deliberate and his enforced alienation from the deity, a fact that is intuitively obvious from the sequence, but can be drawn out more objectively from a structural analysis of the book.³

The same verse (Jonah 2:7) provides, curiously enough, the converse term. It describes YHWH’s rescue of Jonah proleptically in the words, “You brought up my life from the pit.” The book in fact begins on the note that Nineveh’s wickedness has gone up before God (1:2); and in the concluding chapter, the gourd goes up over Jonah (*wy’l m’l lywnh*—4:6) and dies in turn at the “going up” of the dawn (4:7). It would be erroneous to detach this usage, however

2. See, e.g., Johnson (1950) and Eissfeldt (1965, p. 406). The psalm in Jonah 2 probably stems from an author other than that of the prose account. Nevertheless, it is only a single exemplar of a whole genre of poems dealing with what McCarter has called “the river ordeal” (1973, pp. 403–412), but which is really a stock metaphor for danger (cf. English “drowning in . . .”, “completely at sea”; cf. Knudtzon, 1915, #288:33). The prose author chose it consciously. Note *btñ* and *š’wl* (2:3) with 2:1 (*m’y hdg*); *yrđ’lh* (2:7) with the texts cited above, and *hrym yrđt* (the opposite of a cognate accusative?) in 2:7a; *ndr* (2:10) with 1:16; *zbh* (2:10) with 1:16 (Jonah now undertakes to behave like the seamen); *hšlk mšwlh* (2:4) with 1:15; the water imagery generally with Jonah’s plight. In our view, the author selected this particular psalm both because of its water imagery — which was available in other poems as well — and because of its specific vocabulary (note 2:8, *ht’tp* and 4:8 *wyt’tp*, both unusual), which he also shaped his prose to accommodate.

3. For the thematic and structural bearings of the usage, see below. We have attempted to isolate repeated words separately from the structure of the book here in order to avoid theological or interpretative contamination of stylistic judgments. In other words, it is our view that the examination of style should precede judgment on message or plot content, particularly in the case of ancient literature, the conventions of whose communication are now lost. The existence of key-words can be tested, admittedly, only against the background of narrative structure. But relation of style to structure should be a test, not a prejudged conclusion.

pedestrian,⁴ from the idea of descent that characterizes Jonah's alienation from the deity.

Certainly, evidence to this effect is to be found in the case of a third repeated word. Associated with the notion of 'going up' and 'going down' is that of 'arising' (*qwm*). The book opens with YHWH's command to Jonah, "Arise, go!" (1:2). Jonah does arise, but only to flee (go down—1:3). The pattern recurs in Jonah 3:2–3: "Arise, go . . ." And Jonah arose and went." The ship's captain similarly urges the prophet, "Arise, call out to your god" (1:6); and, touched by the divine message, Nineveh's king "arose from his throne" to "sit down upon the ash" (3:6). "Arising" to address the deity is much like "going up" in the book (except in 1:3). The conception is curiously spacial, imminent, and non-transcendent.

Key-words involving motion up and down are thus prominent throughout the book. A fourth example is the verb *twl* (C), 'to cast down.' Precisely because of its rarity (elsewhere only 1 Sam 18:11; 20:33; Jer 16:13; 22:26, 28; Ps 37:24; Prov 16:33; Job 41:1; cf. Isa 22:17), this lexeme can hardly fail to catch the reader's notice. YHWH casts down the windstorm at sea (1:4). The sailors cast down the ship's wares into the sea (1:5). Jonah tells them to lift him up (motion up) and cast him down (motion down) into the sea (1:12), and they comply (1:15). Lexically, then, it is as though descent represents distance from YHWH, ascent movement toward him. YHWH's "casting down," however, precipitates an involuntary "descent," the most meaningful descent—away from YHWH, and into the fish's gut.

Similarly, the term *gd* 'big' occurs thirteen times, and describes no fewer than nine elements in the story. A big wind⁵ precipitates a big storm (1:4 *bis*, 12), causing a big fear (1:10,16) to seize the sailors; a big fish swallows Jonah (2:1). Jonah's subsequent prophecy produces repentance in big and small (3:5), inspiring in turn big displeasure in Jonah (4:1). Thereafter comes Jonah's big pleasure over the gourd which has gone up over him (4:6). The gourd's death affords YHWH the opportunity to remind Jonah that "you did not raise it (*gdltw*)" (4:10). And the action throughout revolves around the condition of Nineveh, referred to four times (including the opening and concluding sentences) as the "big city" (1:2; 3:2,3; 4:11). This repetition could be viewed as the result of simple-minded narration. If not, however, one can treat it as a transom from form to message. Everything that is "big" in the story is produced by YHWH, or by YHWH's deeds.⁶ The implication is that Nineveh's

4. Note the pun on the worm, however, below.

5. G^B omits 'big,' probably correctly.

6. The apparent exception is 'big' in the merismus of 3:5, which is common usage (but far from the only way to express the idea there). We suggest that the author selected the expression because of his concern with growth/ascent as evidence of movement toward (or caused by) YHWH.

grandeur stems from YHWH as well, a point made directly in 4:10–11. YHWH raises; YHWH enlarges. This dovetails so fully with the use of ascent/descent terminology in the story that it becomes difficult to regard the pattern as accidental.

Words that are not involved in the language of ascent and descent in evidence above also serve the message and form of Jonah. This is clearest in the context of a study of Jonah's structure (below). However, it is possible also to discern their import from their repetition and immediate contexts. The first of these is the verb *mnh*, here with the sense 'arrange for, designate' (elsewhere only Isa 65:3; Ps 90:12; Dan 1:5,10,11; 1 Chr 9:29; perhaps Job 7:3; Ps 61:8). The lexeme appears four times—in connection with the big fish (2:1), the gourd (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the east wind (4:8). It thus describes and underlines YHWH's manipulation of phenomena in the account. More common is the verb 'bd 'perish,' which appears four times. Ordinarily, one would hardly remark its appearance; and, it is only in the context of an examination of theme and structure in Jonah that the function of the repetition emerges. Still, preliminary observations do imply the verb's significance. Thus, 'bd occurs twice in the crew's expressions of distress (1:6,14), once in the king's similar remarks (3:9), and last, to describe the gourd's destruction (4:10). It refers consistently to perishing at YHWH's hand. Much like that of *mnh* and *gd(w) l*, the term's repetition serves subliminally to reinforce the important theme of YHWH's control of objects and events, his mastery of fate.

One could make similar cases for other roots repeated in Jonah, and centrally related to the action. *r'h* '(the) evil, (the) bad,' for example, occurs in concentration in chapters 1 (vv. 2,7,8)⁷ and 4 (vv. 1,2,6). In a work whose action is motivated by human wickedness (1:2), the author's protean use of the word—it is the state of the sailors (1:7,8), of Jonah at Nineveh's reprieve (4:1,6), as well as representing the punishment from which repentance redeems Nineveh (4:2)—is probably of some significance. But it must be admitted that cast loose from their thematic moorings, these instances cannot suffice to establish the point.

More frequent still are the appearances of the verb *qr* 'to call.' YHWH's commission that Jonah "call out" against Nineveh (1:2), reiterated after Jonah's return from the sea (with cognate accusative—3:2), has been mentioned above. Jonah executes the command in 3:4. At the same time, the captain orders Jonah to "call out" during the storm (1:6). And ironically, the first word from Jonah's mouth in the fish's belly is "I called out" (2:3); though this is

7. NAB omits *b' sr lmy hr' h hz' t lnw* from v. 8 with G^B as a dittography from v. 7. But G^B may reflect haplography by homoioteleuton (*lnw . . . lnw*), so that despite the discomfort of MT, it is difficult to adjudicate the issue.

perhaps not the product of the prose author's pen, it is sufficiently apposite to deserve note.⁸ The sailors call to God (1:14); the people of Nineveh are to call to God (3:8); at Jonah's stern warning, they have already called a fast (3:6). Plainly, the word 'to call' is used in its standard meaning by the author. But at the same time, he uses it with thematic consequence. Thus, the issue in chapter 1 is whether Jonah will 'call' for YHWH. He refuses once (1:2–3), deliberately descending to evade the commission. He will not do so a second time (1:6ff), despite the fact that the sailors, correctly, do (1:14). But having offered himself up in abject defeat (descent—1:12,15), Jonah relents when the issue comes up for the third time (2:3). Given this sequence, the Ninevites' appropriate 'callings' (3:6,8), and the fact that as a prophet Jonah's whole function is 'to call,' it is difficult indeed to refrain from remarking the repetition.

The author's repetition of words—and particularly of such key-words as 'go down,' 'arrange for' and 'call'—is sufficiently prominent in the narrative to demonstrate a conscious concern with the use of language. Of still greater interest in this regard are his various experiments in word-play. Examples of the phenomenon, of course, run like Ariadne's thread through the prophetic books. The parade instance may well be Isa 11:11,16—*š' r 'mw 'šr yš' r m' šwr* ('the remainder of his people that remains from Asshur')—a dextrous interweaving of plays on the name Asshur. Jonah, in this respect, stands out among biblical narratives. The book is an ornate tapestry of paronomastic techniques.

Some of the plays, while clever, seem thematically inconsequential. Thus, the king's *t'm* 'decree' orders *'l y't'mw*, 'Let them (the people and livestock) not taste . . . ' (3:7).⁹ The sailors, in chapter 1, strive to 'return (the ship) to the dry land,' *lhšyb 'l hybšh* (v. 13). Here, the author plays on the repeated root *ybš* 'dry (up, land)' (1:9,13; 2:11; 4:7), and the repeated root *šwb* 'return' (1:13), 'repent' (3:8,10), 'relent' (3:9 *bis*) (cf. *yšb* 'sit'—3:6; 4:5 *bis*—note here the contrast between the king's sitting in repentance and Jonah's in petulance), by placing them in juxtaposition.

By the same token, chapter 4 is oriented about the root *qdm*: Jonah 'fled preemptively' (*qiddamî librōāh*—4:2); he seats himself east (*miqqedem*—4:5) of the town; and, for his carping, he suffers the heat of a blistering easterly wind (*rūāh qādîm*—4:8). Here, the author reaches a bit, for though YHWH 'arranges for' (*wymn*) the wind, and though the khamsin is an authentic enough element, it is the sun, and not the wind, that beats down on Jonah's head (4:8). Similarly, only in Jonah 4:2 does the verb *qdm* mean 'to act preemptively,' as distinct from its common nuances, 'approach, come into the presence of' and 'precede (physically).'

8. See above, note 2.

9. Note the play *t'm m't* in Sam 14:30 (cf. 14:43) on *t'm* 'taste.'

These instances should, if nothing else, serve to indicate that the undercurrent of verbal frolic is not fortuitous. This is likely to be an issue in any discussion of the larger complexes of play that characterize the text. For example, after Jonah goes down to Jaffa (*yrd*—1:3), to go down to the ship (*yrd*—1:3), to whose hold he goes down (*yrd*—1:5), he falls asleep (*way-yiškab wayyērādēm*—1:5). The captain asks him, *ma lākā nirdām* (“What’s with you, sleeper?” 1:6). The question arises, does this represent a deliberate play on the consonant sequence (*y*)*rd* (and especially *wayyērādēm* on the imperfect *wayyēred*—1:3 *bis*)? On the one hand, it might be urged that the author had only the root *rdm* to express the notion of ‘going to sleep, falling asleep.’ If this were so (it is not),¹⁰ one could note conversely that Jonah 1:5 presents the only instance of the verb with a *y*-prefix (indeed, the single *yaqtul* or *yaqtulu* form of the verb) in all of HB; that the usage *trdmh nplh ‘l* (Gen 2:21; 15:12; 1 Sam 26:12; Isa 29:10; Job 4:13; 22:15; Prov 19:15) is as common as the verbal form—but was discarded by the author, quite possibly because it did not mimic the desired consonant sequence as well. Moreover, since Jonah’s slumber serves no noticeable purpose in the plot, it is altogether fitting to wonder whether the very action has not been introduced as a device to express again the notion of descent (it provides the excuse for the descent into the hold), and as an excuse to play on the key-word *yrd* ‘go down.’ Certainly, this is as sound as speculating that the author intended “sleep” to represent “death” or oblivion to the deity’s will. In the event, both of these suggestions probably have much to commend them:¹¹ the critic should not be too hasty to tar the author with the stigma of one-track motivation.¹² Precisely the same questions intrude when one notes that the chapter ends with the sailors ‘vowing vows’—*wayyiddārû nādārîm* (1:16; note 2:10)—a reversal of the cluster (*y*)*rd* following Jonah’s final descent—into the sea—and the resultant buoying

10. Heb. *rdm* actually means ‘to slumber.’ For verbal uses, see in HB only Judg 4:21; Jonah 1:5.6; Ps 76:7; Prov 10:5; Dan 8:18; 10:9. Second, with preparatory “X lay down” (as Jonah 1:5), *wayyīšān* ‘he slept, fell asleep’ is actually more common—see Ps 3:6; 4:9; 1 Kgs 19:5; and cf. also Gen 41:5 and the other uses of *yšn*. Note that the use of *rdm* in Jonah 1:6 is wholly supererogatory. If we may be forgiven a reference to non-biblical puns, to argue that Jonah 1:5 is only coincidentally paronomastic is equivalent to arguing that Shakespeare wrote, “O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason” in Antony’s funeral oration (*Julius Caesar* III.2) only coincidentally, because “brutish” was the only word with which he could express his idea.

11. Note the expression *yarkātê hassapînâ* (1:5), which calls to mind nothing so much as the more common *yarkātê sâpôn* (as Ps 48:3 [note v. 8]; Isa 14:13, cf. v. 15; Ezek 38:6, 15; 39:2)—the locus of the divine council and the source of the double-deep (see Cross, 1973, pp. 36–39). This is both paronomastic and thematic, anticipating chapter 2.

12. See Blackmur (1956, pp. 79–212) and Halpern (1978, pp. 185–190), e.g., and the case cited above, note 10. Shakespeare had a conceit (“brutish”) about which he framed an idea. The result is a good pun, and a thematically integrated statement.

of the ship's fortunes. Here, there can be little doubt that the root *ndr* was the appropriate one to use. But the whole element may have entered the story only as a result of 2:10, or because the verb appealed to the author in this location. Certainly, the author could have expressed the sailors' gratitude or awe in other terms and by other actions. Thus, the presence of the *ydr* sequence is piquing.

The same chapter presents another, similar case. Here, the author begins to play on the root *r'h*. In 1:2, as has been noted, YHWH speaks of Nineveh's 'wickedness' (*rā'ātām*) coming up before him. In 1:7, to explain the *rā'ā* that has come upon them, the sailors cry 'each to the other' (*'iš 'el rē'ēhū*); the proximity of the expression (which could have been dispensed with altogether or replaced by *'iš 'el 'āhūw*) to the root *r'h* is worth remarking. If it was not so located consciously, it documents nevertheless a rhetorical and linguistic intuition to which the rest of the book bears witness. Similarly, the king orders by royal *r'm* that Ninevites and their cattle neither taste (*yr'mw*) nor graze (*yir'ū*—3:7); they thus repent of their wickedness (*rā'ā*—3:8,10). That YHWH then relents of the destruction he had planned for Nineveh (*rā'ā*—3:10; 4:2)¹³ indicates that the consonantal play is intentional. Jonah then registers profound displeasure (4:1—*wayyēra' 'el yōnāh rā'ā gādōlā*). He in turn must be saved from his *rā'ā* in 4:6.¹⁴ This whole complex is not accidental.

Still another play—this one both more interesting and less certain—appears in 1:14. The text reads, 'They (the sailors) said, 'Please, YHWH, let us not perish for the life of this man; and do not lay upon us innocent blood . . .'' Here, the adjective *nāqī* 'innocent' has been transmitted textually as *nāqī* 'let us vomit,' or (as *nip'al* participle) 'vomited.' Whether the orthographic foreshadowing to 2:11, *wāyyāqē' 'et yōnā* 'he vomited Jonah' is scribal (note Joel 4:19) or authorial, the phonetic play remains (the glottal stop being indistinct at the end of the word). Particularly here, one might be inclined to question the intentionality of the coincidence. But even this apparently fortuitous frolic has its intentional correlative: the author designates Jonah's arboreal parasol a *qīqāyōn* (4:6 *bis*, 7,9,10); the term, though witnessed in Mesopotamia,¹⁵ appears nowhere else in biblical literature. It has cropped up here because of its phonetic resemblance to the verb *qy'* 'vomit.' In fact, the

13. The list of adjectives in 4:2 is shared only with Joel (2:13). Note further Joel 2:14 with Jonah 3:9 and the role of the fast in both chapters.

14. One may wonder whether the author is not playing also on *r'h* by his use of *yr'* (as 1:9, 10 *bis*, 16 *bis*, etc.; one could then draw in *qr'*) and *r'h* (as 3:10; 4:5). The phonetic similarity of *Aleph* to *Ayin*, however, though witnessed on occasion already in OG interchanges between *'al* and *'el*, etc., is moot for an earlier period. More appealing, therefore, is the possibility that *s'r* (1:4,11,12,13; note esp. v. 12b against vv. 7b, 8a *r'h*) and *'yr* (1:2; 3:2, 3,4; 4:5 *bis*, 11) play on *r'h* by reversal to *'r*. Still another possibility is that *brh* (1:3,10; 4,2), *rwh* (1:4; 4:8) and the whole *r-h* alliterative sequence in chapter 4 (below) play on the *Resh*-guttural sequence of *r'h*, *r'*, etc.

15. Cf. SB, NB *kukkānūtu* (*Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* K 498a).

name of the “gourd” resembles nothing so much as the sound of the words, “the vomiting of Jonah.”

Nor is the fourth chapter devoid of word-play in this respect. Verses 2 (*lbrh*, *rhwm*), 3 (*hrh*), 7 (*hšhr*, *lmhrt*), 8 (*bzrh*, *rwh*, *hryšyt*) and 9 (*hrh* twice) play on the sounds *r* and *h*, components of the repeated words *rwh* ‘wind’ and *hrh* ‘to be angry, hot.’ Verses 5–6 concern themselves with shade for Jonah, who camps outside Nineveh, waiting for the city’s downfall. First, Jonah sits in the shade (*sēl*) of a booth; thereafter, though, YHWH raises the *qîqāyôn* for shade (*sēl*) “to save (*ləhaššil*, from *nsl*) him from his wickedness/displeasure (*r’tw*)” (4:6). By the same token, the curious occurrence of the phrase, “who don’t know right from left,” which seals the account in 4:11, permits the supposition that the author meant to play, with the term *yəminô* ‘his right hand’, on his key-word, *wymn* ‘(YHWH) arranged for, designated’ (2:1; 4:6,7,8). The line might then imply, if the pun is not purely gratuitous, the importance of human cognition of divine intervention.

These are not the sole plays in the chapter. It is important to note that the “worm (*tôla’at*)” selected by the author to wither the tree (4:7) has crept into the tale for its phonetic similarity to the root *’lh*. One can see this particularly in the word-order of 4:7, *wayəman hā’ēlōhîm tôla’at ba’ālôt haššaḥar*. “The deity arranged for a worm at the going up of the dawn . . .” a formulation reflecting also the bursting rays of the play on going up and going down that illuminates the book. The paronomastic use to which the worm is put holds special interest in that three of the four items with which YHWH baits Jonah — the worm, the east wind, and the *qîqāyôn* — pun on other words (*’lh*, *qdm*, *qy*) prominent in the story. Paronomasia pervades the book so patently, in fact, that one is intrigued even by the tie of the name of the primary setting, Nineveh, to the name of the central character, Jonah (*nynwh/ywnh*). Possibly, the choice of Nineveh as a locus is anchored in this consideration, or in the resemblance of the town’s name to Semitic *nun* ‘fish’ (Akk. *nūnu*, Aram. *nūnā*).¹⁶ At any rate, it should be clear that the author spars verbally by his choice of words for his props (*tôla’at*, e.g.) on notions (going up and down) centrally located in the tale.

The author engages also in a third level of word-play—a semantic level. Examples in the Bible are somewhat rare, but not altogether lacking. Jeremiah, for instance, tackles Egypt (*mšrym*) with the remark, “That day is for my lord YHWH of Hosts a day of acquittal, to be acquitted of his foes (*mšryw*)” (Jer 46:10; cf. Ps 105:24). The author of Jonah, however, in a mere 48 verses,

16. Note also the word ‘ship’, *nyh*, in 1:3. Professor M. Lockshin calls to our attention the fact that Targum Jonathan renders Heb. *dag* (Jon 2:1, etc.) with Aram. *nūnā*. Though this is to skate on thin ice indeed, it may be that the translator recognized that he was bridging a paronomastic gap.

exploits the ambiguity of words at least three times. He rigs his usage in such a way that the acute reader can perceive meanings that Jonah himself does not. Thus, Jonah believes he has proclaimed a message that has not been realized—he has grunted, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown (*nḥpkt*),” and the city has weathered the crisis. But Jonah does not fathom the delphic nature of his oracle. Nineveh is *nḥpkt*: apart from meaning ‘physical overthrow,’ the verb *ḥpk* denotes a change of character (1 Sam 10:6.9; cf. Exod 14:5; Hos 11:8; Lam 1:20; and the nuance of transformation in Deut 23:6; Jer 31:13; Amos 5:7; Ps 30:12; Neh 13:2, e.g.). Nineveh’s transformation fulfills profoundly Jonah’s prophecy (see Rashi on 3:4).

Jonah is also unresponsive to the irony of the sailors’ first question, “What is your vocation (*ml’kṭk*, from *ml’kh*)?” (1:8). Jonah’s vocation? He is a *ml’k*—a prophet, a messenger of YHWH (Hag 1:13; 2 Chr 36:15–16; cf. Isa 42:19; Malachi).

Third, the author plays on Jonah’s ordeal in the heat outside Nineveh. Before and after the experience, YHWH asks Jonah, “Is it right that you should be angry?” (4:4,9). In the latter case Jonah barks, “It is right that I should be angry enough to die!” (4:9). Ironically in point here is the root *ḥrh*, whose semantic range embraces both anger and heat. The statement at the start of the chapter, “Jonah was greatly displeased, and he was angry (or ‘hot’)” likewise plays on the double meaning of the root *ḥrh* and its alloform *ḥrr* ‘scorch.’ It serves as a fitting introduction to the pericope.

Chapter 4 puns again with regard to the heat. YHWH raises the *qîqāyôn* over Jonah first to provide shade (*šēl*) and second, to rescue (*lḥaššîl*) the wretched prophet from his emotional straits. This is not the simple paronomasia noted above. Rather, the verb *lḥsyl* has a double meaning to match the deity’s twin purpose: first, to rescue; second, to provide shade. The author underscores the second meaning by interposing the preposition *l-*between the verb and its object (Jonah; so, *lḥsyl lw*—4:6).

The same verse plays on the reason for the “shade, rescue,” Jonah’s *r’h*. At first glance, this seems to be the displeasure of 4:1 (*wyr’ r’h*). It also brings into point Jonah’s discomfort because of the heat. On a third level, however, Jonah’s *r’h* is his “wickedness,” his intractability, the source of his row with the deity. The author has thus hatched a line, *lḥsyl lw mr’tw*, replete with semantic possibilities and tantalizing ambiguities.

From the instances of word-repetition and word-play adduced above, it should be clear that the art of sound and language characterizes the book of Jonah. Beyond the intrinsic worth of the concentrated verbal play, further, lies a significant functional value: the author’s artifice creates a bulwark on which the book’s thematic structures lean. Clearest in this regard is the deliberate parallel

drawn between the account of Jonah's experience at sea and the account of his experience at Nineveh. Thus, YHWH commands Jonah at the outset, "'Arise, go to Nineveh, the big city, and cry out against it. . . .'" (1:2). He repeats the order in 3:2 (compare also 1:1 with 3:1), after Jonah's release from the fish.¹⁷ The next verses in chapter 1 have Jonah locating a ship "coming (*b'h*) to Tarshish" (1:3). Verse 3:4 has him "coming (*lbw'*)" into Nineveh. At the storm's approach, the sailors aboard ship "wailed out (*wyz'qw*) each man to his god" (1:5). Nineveh's king arranges for a proclamation to the city (*wyz'q*) regarding the fast (3:7).

What follows at Nineveh, the calling upon god (*wyqr'w 'l'lhym*—3:8), recapitulates two formulations in the sea segment of the narrative.¹⁸ The captain of the ship tells Jonah, "Call upon your god" (*qr' 'l'lyk*—1:6); and the sailors, before casting Jonah to the waters, again "called on YHWH"¹⁹ (*wyqr'w 'l'yhwh*—1:14). The objective of calling on God at Nineveh—"that we not perish" (*wl' n'bd*—3:9)—similarly recapitulates the object in calling upon God at sea—in the captain's words to Jonah, "that we not perish" (*wl' n'bd*—1:6); in the sailors' words, "let us not perish" (*'l n' n'bdh*—1:14).

Further verbal correspondences emphasize the relationship between the events at sea and those at Nineveh. After being jettisoned, Jonah prays to YHWH (*wytpll 'l'yhwh*) from the fish's belly (2:2). After Nineveh's reprieve, the now resentful prophet prays again (*wytpll 'l'yhwh*—4:2). The portrayal of YHWH's response in the latter instance employs the term *wymn* 'he arranged for' three times in rapid succession, referring to the three instruments involved—the *qîqâyôn* (4:6), the worm (4:7) and the wind (4:8). This calls to mind God's preparation (*wymn*) of his earlier instrument, the fish (2:1).

The repeated expression, "they feared, with a great fear" (*wyyr'w yr'h gdwlh*—1:10,16), referring to the sailors, has an intriguing paronomastic counterpart in the Nineveh segment. The narrator portrays Jonah's annoyance with the words, "and he was displeased, with a great displeasure" (*wyr' r'h gdwlh*—4:1).²⁰ Apparently, word-play joins repetition in serving the bipartite narrative structure. Similarly, the play on *lhšyb/hybšh*, noted above, in the sea

17. Note 3:2 *'lyh* for 1:2 *'lyh* (probably scribal, but possibly intentional, to direct attention to the possibility of redemption), and the difference in the ensuing words. Jonah no longer needs the reason to obey. He has it in 1:16-2:2.

18. It is impossible to determine formally whether 3:8-9 are jussive or perfective. G^B adds *legomes* 'saying' between the two, reading perfective. MT reads jussive.

19. Note the earlier 1:5 ("they cried out each man to his god" and "the sailors feared") against 1:14 ("they called to YHWH"; note 2:3a) and 1:16 ("the men feared YHWH with a great fear"). The sailors' conversion is in point.

20. See above, note 14.

segment (1:13) may find a somewhat pale echo in the Nineveh segment in the fate of the *qîqāyôn* (*wyybš*—4:7).

The verbal parallels, the indicators of a structural correlation between the first and second segments of the story, flow into the thematic correspondences and contrasts that they serve. Thus, Jonah pleads with YHWH after Nineveh's reprieve, "Take my life (*npšy*)" (4:3), which is effectively equivalent to his request that the sailors cast him overboard (1:12); the sailors request that YHWH acquit them of guilt for the "life" (*npš*) of the prophet (1:14). In the sea segment, Jonah's ordeal with the fish follows (1:15; 2:1ff). In the Nineveh segment, the ordeal of the *qîqāyôn* ensues. In each case, Jonah is meant to learn the meaning of "life," by confrontation with death. In each case, he is meant to learn the proper posture toward YHWH (submission, a going down that invites intervention).

Such correlations reinforce the impact of the network of thematic correspondences between the two segments. The sea segment, for example, illustrates that YHWH's power extends beyond Israel's territory, far to the west, across the sea. The second segment again depicts YHWH in action outside Canaan—this time in the east, on land, at Nineveh (see now 1:9b). Thus both segments of the book assert YHWH's puissance outside of Israel's borders. Both develop also the themes of obedience and recognition. Jonah and the sailors in the first half, and the Ninevites in the second half learn to obey YHWH. The seamen and the Ninevites learn in turn to fear YHWH.

The author's verbal play has impact also on the theological level. The *double entendre* in the word *nhpkt*, noted above, raises first the question of the failure of Jonah's prophecy to materialize. Jonah's oracle, after all, is lapidary, a prediction rather than a warning.²¹ Here, the verb's second meaning resolves the difficulty. Nineveh is *nhpkt* after all. Nevertheless, a second problem of equal scale arises: does the prophet himself understand the message he delivers? Jonah, at least, is such a mantic bumpkin as to be oblivious to the second meaning of the words spoken to him (3:2; see Rashi; cf. Num 12:6, 8aB). Though in other cases, and perhaps in this, the prophet's character and thought participate in his formulations, Jonah, like the fish, the worm, the *qîqāyôn*, and the wind, is ultimately the implement of the deity, the vessel in which the divine word is conveyed.

Nor is theological implication restricted to instances of word-play. A case of word-repetition in 4:3,8 fleshes out the text's attitudes toward prophecy and the prophet. These are already in evidence in Jonah's refusal to assume the

21. There is, however, the option of taking the oracle as a shorthand for a call to repentance. Jonah has thus missed yet another element of his message — the implicit protasis, "unless Nineveh repents."

prophetic mantle, in his ongoing descent from YHWH, and in his reluctance to “call out” (*qr'*). The play on *ml'k* in 1:8, which passes unnoticed, clearly illustrates that Jonah is out of his depth—as, indeed, does that on *nhpkt*. But the prophet’s gaffe at the gates of Nineveh—sitting down and demanding the city’s overthrow when the whole thrust of the narrative, and of the narrative’s view of prophecy, is that YHWH intends to preserve life, to raise those descending into Sheol (2:7–11; 3:10; 4:2,10–11)—this is the climactic movement. Floundering in purposeless petulance, Jonah twice asks YHWH to “take (his) soul,” using the clause, “It is better that I die than that I live (*tôb môti mēhayyāy*).” YHWH responds first by raising and withering the *qîqāyôn* (4:6–8). When the dogged Jonah remains unbowed, YHWH explains the lesson even more plainly (4:11–12). A similar sequence occurs in 1 Kgs 19:4ff, where Elijah asks to die (19:4). On reaching Sinai, Elijah remarks “I have been terribly zealous for YHWH god of hosts, for the children of Israel abandoned your covenant, tore down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I am left, by myself, and they seek to take my life” (19:10). YHWH then exposes Elijah to a kaleidoscope of natural phenomena. He reveals himself not in a hurricane wind, nor in an earthquake, nor in fire, but in the “sound of a thin hush” (19:11–12). Yet the prophet does not assimilate the lesson, a statement about the transformation of revelation,²² and the commensurate change in prophetic affairs. He repeats, rather, his initial remark (19:14). At this point, YHWH responds with a message he grasps: Elijah must work in the mundane world, by the manipulation of people (19:15–18).²³

In both 1 Kings 19 and Jonah 4, YHWH attempts by the manipulation of nature to edify the prophet. In neither case does the prophet quite digest the point; subsequent elaboration is necessary to bridge the fissure. That is, both precopies suggest that the prophet is not fully cognizant of YHWH’s meaning. The difference in Jonah’s case is the barbarous extent of the prophet’s density: he leaves off being angry over Nineveh’s survival (4:1), and asks that he die on account of the *qîqāyôn* (4:8–9). When YHWH repeats his earlier response (4:4), “Is it good that you are angry (or hot),” adding “over the *qîqāyôn*” (4:9), Jonah in fact replies, “I am angry (or hot) enough to die” (4:9b). He has missed not just the lesson’s point, but even the lesson’s existence.

The literary level and the theological level thus combine in Jonah to draw attention to the relationship between the prophet and his god. The author has created a reluctant doomsayer who hopes for the destruction his message was meant to avert. Jonah is an envoy blinder to divine language and purpose than

22. See Cross (1973, pp. 190–194). Cross’s remarks on the repetition in the incident (and see bibliography there) seem to us unnecessary in the context of the present analysis.

23. See Friedman (1980).

those whom he addresses. An unconscious serf of the god, he nevertheless accomplishes YHWH's goals. By delineating thematic and structural associations through the repetition of words and through word-play, the author of Jonah bedecks his sardonic portrait with ornament; the ornament serves both as a beacon to interpretation, and as a beckoning to enjoyment. By exploiting the chiaroscuro of semantic ambiguity, the author delights his reader, and, at the same time, plumbs the character of prophecy. Jonah stands on its skillful interweaving of rhetoric with action. The book presents a paradigm for the symbiosis of the two.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alter, R. 1975. "A Literary Approach to the Bible." *Commentary* 60,6:70-79.
- Anderson, B. W. 1977. "A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story." *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, pp. 148-162. Ed. G. W. Coats and B. O. Long. Philadelphia.
- . 1978. "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1-11." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97:23-29.
- Blackmur, R. P. 1954. *Language as Gesture*. London.
- . 1956. *The Lion and the Honeycomb*. London.
- Cross, F. M. 1973. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. Cambridge.
- Eissfeldt, O. 1965. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. New York.
- Fokkelman, J. P. 1975. *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. Amsterdam.
- Friedman, R. E. 1980. *The Impact of Exile on the Character of Biblical Narrative*. Chico, California.
- Gevirtz, S. 1975. "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46:33-54.
- Halpern, B. 1978. "The Ritual Background of Zechariah's Temple Song." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40:167-190.
- Hirsch, E. D. 1978. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven.
- Jackson, J. J. and M. Kessler, eds. 1974. *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*. Pittsburgh.
- Johnson, A. R. 1950. "Jonah ii, 3-10. A Study in Cultic Phantasy." *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson*, pp. 82-102. Ed. H. H. Rowley. Edinburgh.
- Knudtzon, J. A. 1915. *Die El-Amarna Tafeln 1-2*. Leipzig.
- Levenson, J. D. 1978. "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and as History." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40:11-28.

- McCarter, P. K. 1973. "The River Ordeal in Israelite Literature." *Harvard Theological Review* 66:403–412.
- Talmon, S. 1978. "The Presentation of Synchronicity and Simultaneity in Biblical Narratives." *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 28:9–26.
- Talmon, S. and M. Fishbane. 1976. "The Structuring of Biblical Books — Studies in the Book of Ezekiel." *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 15:129–153.
- Wellek, R. and A. Warren 1963. *Theory of Literature*. Harmondsworth.

The book of Jonah is the fifth book in the Christian canons and the Jewish Tanakh. It is one of 'Trei Asar' (The Twelve) prophets ...
However, despite the book's small size, scholars continue to dispute its content and date of composition. Some have encountered major themes in the book that does not relate to Jonah's 8th century BCE context but beyond his time. Others have pointed out the different types of Hebrew and argue that the book has been edited by generations after Jonah. This article provides a brief discussion on these issues and where the book of Jonah now stands in modern scholarly discussion. The Name Jonah. The superscription of the book provides the prophet's full name, Jonah son of Amittai, who is Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah. Article. Jan 1980. This article aims to clarify the concept of wordplay in the Hebrew Bible. After a survey of the current opinions in defining the terms "paronomasia" and "wordplay" (I), we propose our own definition of "Hebrew wordplay" (II). Thereafter, this description will simultaneously delimit the field of Hebrew wordplay as it excludes a few linguistic figures, although they are possibly classified as wordplay in other studies (III).