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TEXT ANALYSIS AND THE GENRE OF JONAH (PART 1)

ERNST R. WENDLAND*

I. INTRODUCTION: JONAH AS A GENERIC *CRUX INTERPRETUM*

The little book of Jonah confronts Bible commentators and critics alike with a rather large hermeneutical crux. This problem does not directly concern certain constituent passages (though there are also several difficulties in this regard) but rather the text as a whole: How are we to interpret it? The answer to this question is dependent upon how we respond to another, related query: What literary genre does the book of Jonah exhibit or exemplify? That question will be addressed in the following section. But why all the fuss? Is it not obvious to even the most unsophisticated reader that the text is a simple story? Maybe so—but the answer becomes increasingly cloudy the more one reads in commentaries, scholarly essays, text notes, Bible guides, and other studies that deal with this book. Here one discovers a wide range of opinion expressed with regard to the literary classification of Jonah—from symbolical allegory to historical biography and just about everything else in between.[1]

Then when one starts to examine this work more carefully some of the reasons for the diversity of opinion concerning genre categorization become apparent. First of all, the book seems to begin like a normal prophetic discourse: "And the word of Yahweh came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying" (1:1; cf. Mic 1:1). But instead of a largely poetic, oracular pronouncement from the Lord, we have in the case of Jonah a narrative about the Lord—that is, concerning his dealings with a prophet and two isolated groups of pagans. Thus on the surface the text is really a prophetic narrative such as we have in the book of Kings (e.g. Elijah, 1 Kings 17–18; this is also suggested by the form of the Hebrew verb).[2] But instead of obeying the command of God as is usually the case in such accounts (e.g. 1 Kgs 17:10), we hear that Jonah does just the opposite: He runs away from the Lord's commission. Then there is

* Ernst Wendland is an associate translation consultant for the United Bible Societies at Lusaka Translation Center (UBS), P.O. Box 310091, Chelstone 15301, Lusaka, Zambia.

[1] See for example the full listing and bibliography in D. Alexander, D. W. Baker and B. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988) 70–71.

[2] The text-initial "presentative formula" (R. E. Longacre and S. J. Hwang, "A Textlinguistic Approach to the Biblical Narrative of Jonah," *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* [ed. R. D. Bergen; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994] 341) or "prophetic word formula" (P. Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994] 124), "And the word of the Lord was/came to Jonah," is introduced by *waw* only in Jonah among the prophetic books. But this is normal in Hebrew narrative (e.g. 1 Kgs 17:8).

the part about the big fish swallowing Jonah (1:17) and later about a miraculously growing plant that shelters him (4:6). Such events lead the reader (or listener) to wonder what sort of story this may be. Upon reaching chap. 2, one really becomes confused because it now sounds as if one is reading somewhere in the Psalter. Later, after Jonah has been unceremoniously disembarked back upon shore, the account seems to start all over again—with the important difference that this time Jonah obeys. This and many other stylistic features of this unique composition tend to call the familiar literary categories into question and result in the book's being classified in various—sometimes mutually contradictory—ways. What effect then does this all have upon one's understanding of the discourse?

In this study I intend to use some of the techniques of text analysis, specifically those pertaining to the larger structural organization of a given composition, to explore once again (following the lead of many others in the field) the issue of genre and how it relates to the assumed principal message of Jonah. A text-analytical approach is a linguistic and literary method that views any complete verbal discourse, whether oral or written, as being an integral unit, one that functions communicatively as a whole even though it consists of a variable number of distinct but closely interrelated parts. The parts, each of which may manifest a particular interactional purpose or illocutionary function on its own, are studied both individually and in relation to one another within the hierarchically arranged structural framework of the complete work. Thus text analysis is carried out with a special emphasis on the broader aspects of literary composition, such as genre classification (text-typing), discourse organization (structural architecture), stylistic (poetic) description, rhetorical intention, intertextuality, and all relevant situational factors (text-in-context)—those that pertained to the original event of communication (to the extent that valid inferences can be made) and those that apply to a transmission of the same essential message today. Can such an approach tell us anything new about this much-studied story? We will try it and see, beginning with the issue of the generic crux itself (part 1 of this article) and then with reference to the larger nature and purpose of the text of Jonah (part 2).

II. ON THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF LITERARY GENRE

The first problem that presents itself concerns the notion of genre itself: How can one best define this often loosely used term? Such an exercise may be carried out from two distinct viewpoints—namely, using an etic (universal, nonlanguage-specific) or an emic (language-culture-specific) framework, and also with respect to several possible levels of specificity. Which point of view should we adopt for best results?

Part of the confusion arising in many discussions of genre is occasioned by a certain lack of clarity concerning the particular perspective, scope and level that is under consideration during a given analysis. One possible way of solving these difficulties is to decide upon a more precise definition of our

subject, such as the following: "Genre" refers to a widely-recognized etic type of literature that manifests at least three prominent features pertaining either to expected form (whether structural or stylistic), typical content (subject matter—topics/motifs), preferred usage (i.e. the rhetorical, sociocultural function), the normal medium of communication (oral/written, audio/visual, etc.), and/or the usual setting of message reception (especially the social-religious context)—characteristics that, taken together, serve to distinguish one representative literary type on the same basic level of compositional specificity from another.[3]

The problem is that most of the terms commonly employed in Biblical criticism are not so closely defined, and this results in usage that is both overlapping and inconsistent. But since the argument of this essay does not require such precision, I will not attempt to provide a rigorous definition of all of the generic terms cited below (for which one may consult the accompanying references). Instead I will simply focus upon a few of the diagnostic criteria that may help to distinguish one macro-/micro-genre from the other in relation to the task at hand—namely, to discern the literary nature and purpose of the composition of Hebrew Scripture known as Jonah.

As already noted, this deceptively simple text has elicited a host of generic (etic) classificatory designations ranging from the broadest possible distinction in literature to those that are highly specific in literary-critical terms. Some scholars, for example, feel that rather than prose, Jonah is better analyzed as an instance of poetry throughout—that is, in addition to chap. 2, which all regard as a distinct poetic passage.[4] While recognizing the existence of a variable prose-poetry gradient of possible text types in the Hebrew Bible, I feel nevertheless that Jonah 1, 3 and 4 definitely belong on the prose side of the continuum.[5] One common form (a macro-genre) of prose discourse then is narrative—that is, a literary type distinct from alternatives such as procedural, hortatory, expository, descriptive, predictive, and judicial discourse. Thus a Hebrew narrative text is one that is characterized by a central storyline featuring the *waw*-consecutive with the "imperfect" verb (*wayyiqtōl*) to convey a particular agent/action orientation in past time.[6]

Another broad generic dichotomy that is sometimes applied in the modern literary-critical analysis of Biblical narrative is that of tragedy and

[3] This definition is an attempt to include some of the possible diagnostic criteria that are missing in descriptions such as the following: "By 'literary genre' we mean a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing" (J. J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 [1979] 1).

[4] Two examples of the all-poetry approach are found in J. A. Bewer, *Jonah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1912); D. L. Christensen, "Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (ed. E. Follis; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 29–48.

[5] I discuss this issue in "The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry: A Procedural Outline," *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures* (ed. E. Wendland; UBS Monograph 7; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994) 3–5.

[6] For a more precise definition see R. E. Longacre, "Discourse Perspective on the Hebrew Verb: Affirmation and Restatement," *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (ed. W. Bodine; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 177–189.

comedy. These terms, however, are not to be understood primarily in their popular sense as referring respectively to a sad as opposed to a humorous narrative text. Rather, a more technical literary definition is implied, as summarized in the table below:[7]

	PLOT	CHARACTERIZATION	STYLE
TRAGEDY	inverted U-shaped plot; a fallen hero or pathetic failure; catastrophic ending involving suffering, deprivation and death	individualistic; centered on main character of high rank; focus on fatal flaw and self-destructive choice; God is withdrawn	emphasis on events; elevated literary style, especially in diction; lesser density of surface stylistic features; overall pessimistic tone colors the text
COMEDY	fully U-shaped plot; exalted or redeemed hero; joyous/blessed ending: life, liberation, love—after crisis or conflict is overcome	social orientation; characters of low status or satirized noble persons; God is active in events; flat characters	various types of artifice and literary play; exploitation of incongruity; often humorous, optimistic tone, especially at end

Figure 1

Of course there is not a sharp line of demarcation between these two general types of discourse, especially in Biblical literature where any analysis is always biased in favor of one's particular point of view—theoretical, religious, moral, and otherwise. Perhaps most contemporary scholars would agree with the conclusion that "the dominant vision of the Bible is comic, a vision highlighted by the presence of tragedy such as we find in its most radical form in the story of Saul."[8] But the issue is debatable and probably not all that critical to basic exegetical study. In any case, Jonah presents us with a problem because our evaluation will depend upon what we see as being the book's central theme and purpose: Does this involve the pagan cast, the sailors and residents of Nineveh, in which case we are clearly dealing with comedy, or is the main spotlight upon the prophet's experience, in which case tragedy would appear to be a more accurate description? Perhaps in this instance (as in many other aspects of this brief but complex

[7] For a discussion of some of these distinctions see J. C. Exum and J. W. Whedbee, "Isaac, Samson, and Saul: Reflections on the Comic and Tragic Visions," *Semeia* 32 (1984) 5–40; M. J. Buss, "Tragedy and Comedy in Hosea," *Semeia* 32 (1984) 71–82.

[8] Exum and Whedbee, *Reflections* 5.

composition) it is better to allow for both possibilities—that is, tragicomedy. The dominant emphasis does seem to be on Jonah, the central (human) character. But his pathetic case, which really comes to the fore only in the climactic fourth chapter through dialogue with the Lord, is made to stand out more sharply by being juxtaposed with the two comic conversion accounts (chaps. 1, 3).

Turning now to a more specific categorization of genre, we observe that commentators and literary analysts present us with a wide range of possibilities as far as the book as a whole is concerned (which does incorporate a number of minor subgenres, e.g.: creedal confession [1:9], thanksgiving psalm [2:2–9], hortatory royal proclamation [3:7–9], personal prayer of complaint [4:2–3], disputation [4:8b–11]). The importance of trying to come to grips with the issue of genre is simply that "genre recognition, whether on a conscious or subconscious level, plays a vital role in all forms of successful communication."[9] "To recognize what for a longer work of literature would be called its 'genre' is necessary for valid interpretation."[10] This is because "upper levels of text organization, such as genre, place broad constraints on all lower levels, including paragraph and word choice"[11] — that is, in terms of discourse form, content and intent. After noting this concern with regard to a given book's purpose W. A. VanGemeren goes on to ask with specific reference to Jonah: "Is the genre historical, didactic, allegorical, satiric, midrashic, or parabolic?"[12] The difficulty, however, with catalogues of this nature is that they often confuse or merge the distinct categories of form, or genre *per se* (e.g. parable), purpose (e.g. didactic), tone (e.g. satiric), and—for want of a better term—quality (i.e. degree of historicity). A somewhat purer inventory in formal terms would be that of H. C. Brichto: "fable, didactic novel, prophetic legend and parable . . . a midrash . . . an allegory . . . narrated dogmatics . . . mixed genre with the presence of many eclectic elements."[13] In any case, the problem is evident: How can a single, short, seemingly straightforward book such as Jonah generate so much diversity of opinion? This is not a moot point, for "the modern reader can read it aright only if he understands it as it was originally intended."[14]

It is not possible within the confines of this essay to debate and assess each one of the generic possibilities mentioned above (and others frequently cited in the literature). It may be useful, however, to summarize several of the major alternatives with respect to Jonah and Biblical literature in

[9] V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 40–41.

[10] C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1987) 22.

[11] R. Bergen makes a number of other useful comments on genre in relation to what he terms "discourse criticism" ("Text as a Guide to Authorial Intention: An Introduction to Discourse Criticism," *JETS* 30/3 [1987] 328–330). See also Long, *Biblical History* 43–50.

[12] W. A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 146–147.

[13] H. C. Brichto, *Towards a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (New York: Oxford University, 1992) 67.

[14] L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 175.

general by means of an etic framework that organizes the possibilities according to two interactive continua of literary types—that is, factive versus fictive (i.e. involving the relative degree of historicity with respect to the events being reported) and literal versus figurative (i.e. the relative extent to which the text manifests a second [or third] level of meaning/significance):

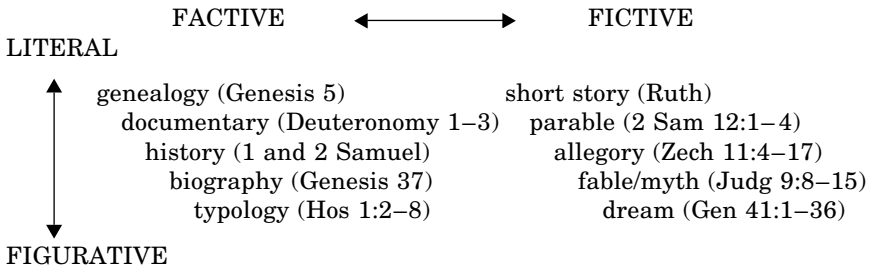

Figure 2

While the preceding figure may be used as a rough guide in helping readers today to understand some of the hermeneutical difficulties that are presented by a book like Jonah, it must not be pushed too far. It is important not to attempt to impose an alien theoretical grid upon an ancient text in an effort to classify and define what in the original is left largely or completely unspecified. For example, a number of the types listed in the figure above would probably fall under the single Hebrew generic term *māšāl*.[15] The Biblical authors were not particularly interested in literary categorization, and therefore they usually did not explicitly label their works. For them the important thing was the divine origin of their message ("And the word of the Lord came to Jonah" [1:1]) along with its consequent theological content ("[Nineveh's] wickedness has come up before me") and religious intent ("go . . . preach against it"). Thus it is highly likely that our catalogue of strictly defined etic types will not work, and therefore some hybrid, descriptive combination will have to be resorted to in order to determine the closest generic equivalent. Of course, one's own literary sensitivity and theological presuppositions inevitably enter in to complicate the matter with regard to any designation that is ultimately offered.

Overlapping the issue of literary type or genre are the two interrelated continua of discourse tone and technique as shown below:

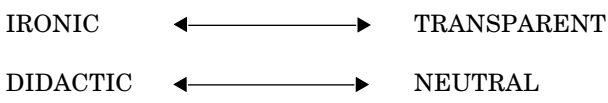

Figure 3

[15] For further discussion on this point see J. M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1990) 335.

Thus a narrative account may manifest an ironic overlay to varying degrees and in different places. The presence of irony does not help us to classify Jonah as being either tragic/comic or factive/fictive, for virtually any type of composition may be ironic in nature, at least in part.[16] Irony thus crosscuts the "literal–figurative" continuum of text types. Analysts have posited a number of kinds of irony but, as E. M. Good points out, these are "more readily recognized than defined."[17] In short, irony always involves some conceptual (often also emotive) conflict that is occasioned by one's "perception of the distance [or disparity] between pretense and reality"[18] —or, simply, between what is said and what is meant, which is typically quite the opposite. The aim of irony as a rhetorical device is to implicitly criticize some apparent incongruity or discrepancy in the attitude, thinking, speech or behavior of another person or group. Especially bitter or biting irony is called sarcasm. When personal ridicule (vice or folly) is prominent, the term used is satire. And when the irony is based on obvious exaggeration it is known as a parody (the object being a literary work) or a caricature (i.e. of some person or thing).[19] On the other hand, the less irony that is present in a given text the more transparent it is—namely, in terms of its connotative tone—though it may not necessarily be "literal" with respect to its semantic content.

The didactic–neutral continuum of technique is relatively straightforward: The more overtly a text aims to make a moral point or to teach a practical lesson, the more didactic it is. Such explicitness is normally manifested by certain literature-specific rhetorical devices—for example, questions, imperatives, prohibitions, modal verbs, authorial asides, proverbs, riddles, dramatic dialogue, the use of illustrative examples, repetition and, indeed, the use of irony itself. A text that does not have some manner of exhortation or instruction as its goal is termed neutral. It would perhaps be preferable to employ a more generic term to designate the contrast to a neutral discourse—affective, for example. This broader category would include various kinds of pragmatically-heightened compositions that are distinguished, first by the inventory of formal literary features used in each, but primarily on the basis of the chief communicative subfunction each performs. That is, in addition to didactic there would be edificational, consolatory, condemnatory, inspirational, moralistic, propagandistic texts, and so forth (note: these are not neatly differentiated types).

An application of the various distinctions noted above with specific reference to Jonah leads me to classify the book not in terms of a single genre

[16] E. M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond, reprint 1981) 21. Good's classic study is still one of the best available general treatments of irony in the Hebrew Scriptures. L. Ryken gives a good if much shorter "evangelical" perspective on the subject, which he terms "satire" (*Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], chap. 14). I also deal with irony in some detail in *The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Prophetic Literature: Determining the Larger Textual Units of Hosea and Joel* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1995) 172–221.

[17] Good, *Irony* 13.

[18] Ibid. 14.

[19] Ibid. 25–31.

but in compound fashion as a dramatic (due to its clear-cut scenic structure and large proportion of dialogue), didactic, typological, tragicomic narrative. In other words, for various reasons (to be discussed more fully below) I consider it to be essentially an historical (factive), plot-oriented text, but one that is artistically patterned both to maintain interest and also to highlight or reinforce key aspects of the hortatory message. It is a prophetic "word of the Lord" to his people, then and now. Furthermore the discourse is rhetorically shaped by means of a heavy overlay of irony that borders on the satiric in order to teach a lesson.[20] One may actually discern several primary as well as secondary theological messages, depending on the perspective adopted, which tend to mutually reinforce each other—hence the book's classification as a form of typology. The polysemic nature of this text also contributes to its overall tragicomic character. It is tragic (condemnatory) in relation to Jonah and all those (of any age or nationality) who think like him in willful opposition to the gracious purpose and plan of God. But it is comic (confirmatory) with reference to any individual or group (e.g. the sailors and Ninevites) who willingly and trustingly commit themselves to the mercy of Yahweh, overtly manifesting their faith in concrete acts of religious piety and devotion.

One final generic comment: In a sense, as far as the book of Jonah as a whole is concerned we are faced with a classificatory conundrum. In overall form it is obviously a narrative story (i.e. embodying a tension-producing plot). In terms of underlying function, however, Jonah is arguably an instance of parenesis or directive discourse (i.e. aimed at motivating moral/spiritual reinforcement and/or change).[21] Like the other Hebrew prophetic books it is intended to persuade its intended audience by means of encouragement (+) and admonition (−). Which is primary, then—the story or the hortatory? A strong case could probably be made either way, but the canonical inclusion of Jonah among the Latter rather than the Former Prophets certainly lends support to the less explicit, motivational perspective. In any case, the apparent contradiction between form and function on the discourse level only serves to increase the captivating literary character of this text and of course its associated hermeneutical possibilities. A recognition of the complex compositional (generic) nature of Jonah certainly affects one's reading (hearing) and understanding of "the word of the Lord" that it conveys: It is not just an interesting if ancient (and, according to many, antiquated) Bible story. It is divinely inspired history with a theological sting—that is, its multifaceted message demands a moral and spiritual response either for or against the life-changing will of Yahweh (cf. 4:11).

After a summary of three general interpretive guidelines, I will present a further seven principles that pertain more specifically to my method of carrying out the discourse analysis of a Biblical text. This will serve as an

[20] T. Jemielity observes that "with the exception of the Book of Jonah, Hebrew prophecy is mostly in the first person. . . . No other prophetic text offers narrative satire from beginning to end" (*Satire and the Hebrew Prophets* [Louisville: Westminster, 1992] 16).

[21] R. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976) 123.

introduction to a subsequent overview of several prominent features of the larger organizational framework of Jonah (presented in part 2 of this article). The aim there will be to determine the extent to which the structural style of this book—that is, its distinct mode and manner of literary composition—may serve as evidence in support of (or in contrast to) my generic categorization of the discourse as outlined above. I will conclude the present study with several pertinent observations that seek to draw out some of its major implications with regard to the exegetical interpretation and meaningful formatting of this fascinating, but at times also frustrating, text of Scripture.

III. THREE DISCOURSE-ORIENTED PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

In the case of any text that has occasioned as much diversity of opinion as Jonah it is important to clarify the underlying hermeneutical presuppositions that one brings to the task, for these will naturally both inform and influence one's entire approach—from the analytical methodology that is applied, to the various conclusions that are drawn from the exercise. It is not necessary (or possible) to go into detail in this regard,[22] but a few remarks on the particular perspective adopted in this study may be helpful both to clarify my chosen mode of operation and also to permit other competent readers (or hearers) to make a more accurate evaluation of the results obtained. The following summary may also serve to foreground some of the key issues involved in the wider interpretation of Scripture, each of which may then be debated (refuted, confirmed or modified) on its own, though to a considerable degree they are all closely interrelated and hence mutually influential.

1. *A given Biblical composition must first be allowed to speak for itself in terms of genre (the nature and purpose of the discourse along with any special hermeneutical expectations that are associated with it, e.g. on the issue of historicity), truth (what the text itself explicitly or implicitly claims [or does not claim] to say) and authority (how seriously any receptor, ancient or modern, is encouraged to regard its expressed or implied imperatives and/or prohibitions).* What "generic signals,"[23] for example, are found in the book of Jonah to indicate its essentially factive as opposed to fictive character? How did the original author more specifically mark the text to suggest how he intended for it to be interpreted—that is, having both a literal historical as well as a prophetic typological (an implicit analogical) level of significance? Closely related to the preceding is the matter of how the work

[22] I describe and apply my method of narrative text analysis in "Biblical Hebrew Narrative Structure (Genesis 37)," *Selected Technical Articles Related to Translation* (*START*; Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics 10/2 [1984]) 3–36; "Structural Symmetry and Its Significance in the Book of Ruth," *Issues in Bible Translation* (UBS Monograph 3; ed. P. Stine; New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 30–63.

[23] Long, *Biblical History*.

under consideration is to be construed with respect to its internal setting. As far as Jonah is concerned, "canonical context and the reference to 2 Kings [14:25] both suggest that no matter when the story may have been written, we need to understand it in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world of the eighth century BC, when Assyria was the rising power and Nineveh was a great world city."[24]

2. *No passage, or even a complete book, of Scripture is an island unto itself.* It cannot be adequately treated in isolation. Rather, the hermeneutical task will be influenced to varying degrees (depending on the text itself) by both the textual cotext and also the situational context. The former deals with the crucial issue of intertextuality with respect to related texts of a Biblical as well as an extra-Biblical nature, whether sacred or secular. This would include the consideration of a given book's canonical placement in the Hebrew textual tradition.[25] Primary emphasis will of course be placed on literary relationships (in terms of quotation, paraphrase or allusion) of an antecedent type—that is, relating to works that were presumably composed (or extant) earlier in time. But the factor of subsequent citation within the full canon (including the NT) cannot be entirely discounted, especially where certain controversial aspects of interpretation are concerned. Context then refers to the total extratextual milieu in which a book was first composed, conveyed and responded to. This encompasses such influential variables as the initial medium of transmission (oral and/or written), the historical era, the ecological environment, and the sociocultural (political, economic, educational, artistic, religious) setting. All of these factors, independently and in conjunction with one another, influence the accuracy of the exegetical process for better or for worse, depending upon the quality and quantity of information at one's disposal and how it is handled by the analyst.

3. *A given textual examination must be carried out on the macro- as well as the micro-levels of discourse organization*, both independently and also in relation to one another (the *Gestalt* principle). The macro-analysis will normally begin with a study of the generic features of a given composition, whether in its entirety or with respect to any incorporated subgenres. It will proceed from top to bottom (i.e. from larger to smaller textual units) with an investigation of four principal aspects of the discourse as manifested by various types of phonological, lexical and morphosyntactic repetition: its demarcation (how the text is segmented and integrated into a hierarchy of included and including portions); its connectivity (how the text is made to cohere semantically and also to exhibit formal cohesion); its points or areas of projection (foregrounding and prominence—whether thematic [focus/peak] or emotive [emphasis/climax]); and its patterning (how the text is constructed in terms of larger parallel, terraced, chiastic or other artistic arrangements of a broad syntagmatic or paradigmatic nature).

[24] J. Limburg, *Jonah* (OTL; Louisville: John Knox/Westminster, 1993).
[25] On this particular issue see Sasson, *Jonah* 13–15, and esp. Limburg, *Jonah* 19–22.

The existence and credibility of these macro-structures must be confirmed and/or corrected by a corresponding study of prominent stylistic features on the micro-level of the text. This is especially evident at points of convergence, where poetic devices such as rhetorical question, exclamation, hyperbole, figurative language, reiteration, unit expansion, contraction, intensification, temporal displacement, syntactic movement or any other sort of unusual/unexpected construction are concentrated to highlight a boundary, peak or compositional pattern of some kind. Such quantitative or qualitative deviation from either inter- or intra-textual norms is likely to have a special thematic or pragmatic (functional) significance in relation to the overall synchronic or diachronic development of the work as a whole. Through these means an author indicates which information he considers to be especially important within a text even as he also guides his listeners/readers along the path of a desired interpretation of its meaning and significance.[26]

The three general principles of discourse analysis outlined above were systematically applied in detail to the entire Hebrew text of Jonah. The results of this investigation are summarized and evaluated in part 2 of this article.

IV. STRUCTURAL PATTERNING IN BIBLICAL DISCOURSE

As noted by just about everyone who has ever commented on Jonah, the book as a whole features an elaborate interweaving of a number of intricately patterned and interrelated constructions from beginning to end. These complex structures are created largely by various types of lexical recursion (especially exact repetition, but also by synonymous reiteration) that coincide, overlap and enclose one another to form the text's varied paradigmatic sets and syntagmatic sequences. But they all mutually reinforce and complement each other to convey a manifold message that, due to its diversity and urgency, has great relevance to receptors of every age and cultural background—provided that they are aware of the chief aspects of both the compositional style and also the situational setting in which the narrative is cast. The crucial importance therefore of carrying out a careful total-text analysis is this:

> Structure is not simply artificial device or literary elegance. It is a key to meaning. Oversight of structure may result in failure to grasp the true theme.[27]

A further point is that the preceding observation applies just as much (if not more) to Biblical literature (both OT and NT) as it does to any other secular or religious text.

Before presenting what is essentially an annotated, diagrammatic summary of some (not all) of the major architectonic constituents of the Jonah

[26] For another perspective on how to determine the author-intended significance of a given text see Bergen, "Discourse Criticism" 331–334.

[27] B. Porten, as quoted in C. J. Collins, "From Literary Analysis to Theological Exposition: The Book of Jonah" (unpublished paper, SIL Old Testament Workshop, Dallas [1993] 1).

text, it is necessary to draw attention briefly to several factors that suggest how the relative credibility of these abstract constructs may be assessed. Such methods of control are needed on account of certain excesses, arbitrariness, subjectivity and outright distortion that have appeared in far too many structural displays of this nature. Chiasms in particular tend to be posited in every conceivable portion of a given composition, often with little or no concrete corroboration evident within the text itself or supplied by the proponent. The result has been that a number of excellent commentators have become extremely skeptical of such putative schemata and tend to shy away from using them in their own analyses. D. Stuart, for example, concludes:

> [Such] usage patterns . . . have proved less than entirely convincing, the "patterns" turning out ultimately to reflect the flow of the story rather than demonstrating either a conscious or unconscious structuring of the story according to its vocabulary.[28]

Now there is certainly some truth in the preceding observation, and yet structural patterns of this nature have been reliably documented by various commentators throughout the Scriptures—both Hebrew and Greek—to such an extent that there must be something to them. These constructs do not in every instance simply reflect the creative, perhaps misguided, imagination of an alien external analyst. What then constitutes a valid or credible structure? Here again one's interpretation is not so much a matter of either-or, right-or-wrong. Rather, it lies somewhere in between (definitely, probably, possibly, doubtfully, hardly so). In other words, another variable hermeneutical continuum is involved. The relative strength of any given structural proposal and a hypothesis concerning its possible significance may be evaluated according to the following seven criteria, considered in cumulative conjunction with one another.

1. *The more overt, formal correspondences that are present, whether based on contrast (e.g. great/small, masculine/feminine, perfect/imperfect) or similarity (exact or synonymous), the more credible a given structure is.*[29] In most cases such linguistic forms are lexical in nature, but phonological and morphosyntactic analogues may also occur. These concrete markers must be based on the text itself (as presumably cued in by the original author) in order to substantiate any abstract topical or thematic construct that is posited.

[28] D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco: Word, 1987) 437–438. Stuart views the extensive lexical repetition in Jonah as being motivated by the "desire for [narrative] simplicity," without having any significant structural implications (p. 457).

[29] In her insightful rhetorical analysis of Jonah, Trible correctly emphasizes the *ipsissima verba* of the original text (*Rhetorical Criticism* 152–155). But her own symmetrical external design of the book illustrates the point that such a textual emphasis does not necessarily guarantee objectivity and nonarbitrary decision-making with regard to outlining the larger discourse structure. Certainly the criteria that I am proposing here do not offer such a guarantee either. Ultimately, credibility depends on the expertise of the analyst and his/her ability to better account "for all the parts and angles of the text" (ibid. 153)—and, I might add, to more fully and/or clearly explain its functional operation as a life-challenging "message from the Lord" (Jonah 1:1).

A creative (or novel) re-construction or semantic reinterpretation of the text in favor of a particular scheme that is being propounded must be avoided because it throws the whole enterprise into question (e.g. "1:1–2 A—YHWH told Jonah to enter the 'House of the Fish' [i.e. Nineveh]. . . . 2:1–11 A′—Yahweh appointed a great fish to house Jonah").[30] This caveat is related to the ever-present danger of a forced and/or fanciful eisegesis of a particular structure (no matter how valid) that has been identified in the discourse. An example: "As the belly lies within the fish, so the phrase 'belly-of the-fish' lies within the belly of the chiasm. The images of descent (B) and ascent (B′) [i.e. 1:17–2:1] fill the belly."[31]

2. *In addition to the quality of a given parallel or chiastic arrangement alleged to be present within a given passage, the quantity of that particular pattern also needs to be considered in relation to the text as a whole*: Is the current instance an isolated case, or are other examples of the same sort of linear or concentric structure found, whether on the macro- or the micro-level of the discourse? The fact that a tightly fashioned lexical introversion such as the following, for example, occurs within a single verse suggests at least the possibility that similar patterns might also appear over a larger span of text (1:3):

And Jonah arose
A to flee to Tarshish, away from Yahweh's presence
  B and he went down to Joppa
    C and he found a ship
      D going to Tarshish
    C′ and he paid its fare
  B′ and he went down into it
A′ to go with them to Tarshish, away from Yahweh's presence.

Figure 4

3. *If a given composition gives strong evidence of a number of these artistic structural formations, especially of a particular type, then another possible instance for which the marking is not quite so evident may be given the benefit of the doubt and considered relevant*, especially if it may then be seen to function within a certain more obvious or inclusive pattern or to

[30] D. L. Christensen, "Andrzej Panufnik and the Structure of the Book of Jonah: Icons, Music and Literary Art," *JETS* 28/2 (1985) 136.

[31] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism* 158. Of course Trible's entire argument must be read in order to make a proper evaluation of her comment here. But in my opinion it does not get any better: "Ascent bespeaks life. The belly of the fish contains the polarities of death and life without digesting them. No wonder the fish vomited" (ibid. 159). It should be stated that on the whole Trible's structure-based interpretations are considerably more valid and helpful than this.

fulfill a broader rhetorical purpose. This would merely be a discourse application of the established phonemic principle known as the pressure of symmetry within an operational system. In other words, there is a tendency (but not an inevitability) for a certain degree of stylistic consistency to be established and maintained within a larger functioning literary structure.[32]

4. *The credibility of a certain pattern is weakened in direct proportion to the amount of selectivity that is manifested in its construction.* That is, if a structure is posited on the basis of only part of the data—certain potentially significant elements being overlooked or conveniently ignored—then its reliability is thrown into serious question, the more so if the omitted evidence is adverse or even contradictory to that which has been chosen.[33] Furthermore any pattern that depends for its existence on an emendation of the original text is immediately suspect, its degree of dubiousness depending on the extent and nature of the change proposed as well as the quality and quantity of the evidence available to support it.[34]

5. *Certain flaws or quirks in the patterning are to be expected.* Data should not be manipulated in order to attain a greater degree of perfection (e.g. symmetry or inclusiveness). A patent distortion or anomaly may be deliberate—that is, intended by the author to call attention to specific material of semantic importance that does not happen to fit the pattern. Alternatively a larger compositional function may be in force, e.g. to interlock one construct within another or even to contrast one prominent formation with another. Furthermore it sometimes happens that content that falls outside of a given arrangement may be that which is intended by the original writer to be foregrounded with regard to thematic import, connotative force, and/or illocutionary function. Again, the structural organization

[32] Trible would counter this with the principle of "symmetrophobia: an instinctive aversion to absolute symmetry," a notion borrowed from G. A. Smith (*Rhetorical Criticism* 117). She invokes this to justify several of her own questionable compositional observations (e.g. that "the psalm [i.e. 2:3–10] disrupts the narrative structure" [ibid. 162]). But one could as well view the psalm as being artfully incorporated within the surrounding narrative structure (i.e. 2:1–2//11), just as Jonah was ingested by the great fish. In fact either one of the criteria, "symmetrophilia" (a decided attraction for composing in structural patterns) or "symmetrophobia," is an analytical double-edged sword: When skillfully and appropriately used as part of a wider explication of an author's rhetorical strategy, it can help to defend a particular interpretation; when utilized otherwise, however, it can seriously detract from the viability of one's argument.

[33] An example of significant selective exclusion is J. Magonet's elimination of the second half of 1:16 from the long introversion that he proposes for 1:4–16a in order "to maintain the pattern" (*Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* [2d ed.; Sheffield: Almond, 1983] 56).

[34] Trible for example suggests "that 4:5 has been misplaced. It belongs after 3:4, immediately following the announcement of impending disaster. . . . Moreover, the removal of 4:5 from its present location improves the symmetry" (*Rhetorical Criticism* 118–119). Such a drastic emendation sounds a bit strange coming from someone who (rightly) emphasizes the *ipsissima verba* of the Hebrew text (ibid. 92).

of the narrative in its entirety will help one to evaluate and interpret the significance of any apparently incomplete, flawed, anomalous, extraneous or excluded constituent, for the meaning of the whole is invariably greater (more significant) than either the sum, or any combination, of its individual parts.[35]

6. *A proposed structure is more tenable if it evinces a relative balance in terms of both quantity and quality with respect to any assumed matching or corresponding constituents.* Hence it is less plausible for a relatively small portion of text to be linked in the organization with one that is much larger in size[36] or even nonexistent (e.g. "3:1–2—YHWH renewed Jonah's commission to enter Nineveh. . . . A′—Jonah/Israel's response: oracle of salvation [*implied*])."[37] Qualitatively then one expects a certain cline of significance to be maintained as far as the normal points of structural foregrounding within a given pattern are concerned—that is, conclusion > center > beginning > second half > first half ([>] = "greater than"). The first two positions are often reversed in the case of an unbalanced introversion (e.g. ABCDC′B′A′, where the major emphasis would be expected at D). When rather trivial topics are posited at such usual points of prominence, one may reasonably suspect some error in the analysis and interpretation (e.g. "YHWH-God appointed a *qîqāyôn* . . . destroyed the *qîqāyôn*" in 4:6/7 [F/F′, i.e. proposed as the central core]).[38]

7. *Larger formational patterns tend to complement one another within a given text in order to present an integrated framework* in which the various constituent macro-segments (whether formal, semantic or pragmatic [e.g. illocutionary]; linear or concentric; phonological, lexical or grammatical in nature) mutually reinforce each other as well as the composition as a whole. In other words, one major discourse construct does not negate, contradict, conflict with, or displace another within the global scheme of things, but they interact to highlight the principal theme and/or certain of its associated subthemes. I would thus consider suspect a conclusion such as the following: "From a prosodic [i.e. metrical] point of view the work [of Jonah] is in five parts rather than four," as suggested by a parallel analysis of its "concentric structures."[39] It is not that skewing does not take place at all, but the norm (at least in my experience) is for such anomaly to be of a relatively minor nature and indicative rather of local areas of special

[35] A possible instance of motivated structural anomaly occurs in 2:8–9, a passage that contrastively corresponds with 1:16, not with 2:2(3) as outlined by Trible (*Rhetorical Criticism* 163–164).

[36] Another example would be the corresponding seventh constituents in Trible's external design of the book, i.e. "Sailors and Jonah (1:7–15)" and "Ninevites and God (3:10)" (*Rhetorical Criticism* 110).

[37] Christensen, "Structure" 136.

[38] Ibid. 137.

[39] Ibid. 135; Christensen's prosodic-metrical analysis of Jonah is found in *Narrative Poetics* 33–39.

foregrounding (e.g. a crucial thematic disjunction) or of compositional transition and overlapping (i.e. a structural hinge or hook).

The preceding seven principles of structural evaluation, in addition to the three discourse-oriented guidelines cited earlier, are applied in a compositional analysis of the book of Jonah that will be presented in part 2 of this article in the next issue of *JETS* (September 1996).