

THE LITERARY ART OF JONAH*

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In studying the interpretive treatment of the Book of Jonah in modern times, one may discern two major divisions. The first is the "traditional" approach which accepts the story of Jonah as a factual history.¹ The other is the literary approach, which, in the main, stresses the imaginative, creative aspect of the book. This school of thought does not take the Book of Jonah literally. Scholars in this group approach Jonah as parable, allegory, poetical myth, dream, vision, legend, didactic work and the like.² My own interest lies primarily in the literary, creative and imaginative aspects of the book as an artistic expression of human experience.

A comprehensive literary evaluation of the book as a work of art through a detailed analysis of the text had not been published until the end of the 1960's. It was Gabriel Cohn's fine literary analysis, *Das Buch Jona*, published in 1969,³ which did present a comprehensive view of the literary aspects of Jonah as a work of art. Other recent works, including an unpublished dissertation on Jonah, are cited in the notes.

In addition, there appeared a number of studies which employ literary analysis. However, most of them concentrate on the hypothesis that the Book of Jonah is a work of satire or irony (perhaps both), and parody. Thus, they propose a completely revised reading of the text.⁴ The contribution of these studies to the understanding of the narrative art of the author is, in my mind, unquestionable. Nevertheless, I tend to reject the proposed concept that the Book of Jonah is a work of satire *in toto*. The psalm prayer, for one, is a strong argument against the interpretation of this work as a total satire. Use of irony in the book, nonetheless, is acknowledged.

While the following discussion does not purport to be a comprehensive literary analysis of the book, it offers a partial analysis which nevertheless has bearing upon the overall story.⁵ The analysis presupposes an artistic author or editor as composer of the Book of Jonah in its final form. The artistic devices used and the structure of the story attest to the correctness of this presupposition.

A close reading of the text reveals several significant repetitions and patterns which should draw our attention to the centrality of Chapter One within the story. The first chapter is so structured as to contain, in subtle forms, some of the most important aspects of the story. While the parallel structure of the book has already been probed in depth by Cohn and others,⁶ it is my purpose here to point out a different structure in the book which has its basis in Chapter One.

From the very beginning of the book, the sensitive reader notes the repetition of certain words and phrases used in such a way as to arouse his attention. Indeed, these repetitions are intended to serve as clues for the understanding of the story and its message.

In this regard, the third verse is quite puzzling: "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord; and he went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord" (1:3).

The Biblical narrator is almost always laconic and concise, limiting his words to that which is significant and informative. Yet in this verse, he repeats the name Tarshish, Jonah's desired place of escape, three times. Clearly, from a technical, geographical point of view, nothing is added to the story by this repetition. However, it creates a rhythm in the story of Jonah's escape and is intended to reveal his emotions. By this technique, the narrator externalizes Jonah's spiritual and emotional state. We may hear his heart beat, if we so desire, or the tempo of escape. The imaginative reader may even find in these words an echo of a terse dialogue (which is omitted in the text) between Jonah and a mariner as to the destination of the ship.

Whether Tarshish refers to Tartessus in Spain or to Tunis⁷ concerns us less than the notion of Tarshish as "a faraway place," the end of the world, so to speak.⁸ This notion is alluded to here as well as elsewhere in the Bible.

Similarly, we must pay attention to another repetition. The first word in the phrase which commissions Jonah is: Arise, אֲרִיז . It is very often used in the Bible as a preparatory phrase which calls for action. One does not actually have to arise in order to act, although originally that is what the word meant.⁹ The narrator, however, utilizes this linguistic convention of expression for ironic purposes in order to build some tension between the divine directive and Jonah's act. God commands him "arise," (1:2), so Jonah "rose" (1:3). The reader is full of expectations. The narrator indeed wants him, by use of the identical verb "to rise," to assume that Jonah is about to undertake the mission. But Jonah rises in order to escape.¹⁰ That very word, "arise," is utilized in Chapter Three in the second mission. It also appears in the shipmaster's instruction: "What meanest thou that thou sleepest? arise, call upon thy God" (1:6).

Apart from the ironic function of the word "arise," it is intended to relate cycles within the story to one another. These cycles form an intrinsic structure or underlying pattern in the book which serves to unify and solidify the story. This overall structure is of closing in, somewhat resembling an entrapment.¹¹ Jonah is portrayed as being selected by God to be His messenger; he is hand-picked as one individual from among the many, and there is no way that the prophet may evade his mission.

During the storm, while everyone else is looking to alleviate the situation, Jonah goes down into the innermost parts of the ship (which parallels his act of going down to Joppa).¹² And he is "fast asleep" (1:5). The shipmaster, the omnipotent authority on board the ship, is a reminder of the divine mission imposed on Jonah.¹³ He calls on Jonah, as God does: "arise," and his message is "call upon thy God." In this cycle of the story, we note the structural pattern of the book: The authority selects Jonah for a mission, and the latter is constantly reminded of it.

Jonah's reaction is known only from his very eloquent silence. Indeed, this silence characterizes Jonah throughout the book. This lacuna in the story demands some explanation from the reader: What does Jonah answer the shipmaster? If he does not speak, why doesn't he?¹⁴ Interestingly, the narrator's silence and apparent omission is skillfully planned. It is intended to build expectations in the reader and to open the story for a number of possible future developments. More significantly, this silence manifests the principal *movement* in the story: fleeing, running away. Jonah, in effect,

continues his escape in this part of the story, and the narrator adheres to his characterization of Jonah as a silent escapist and not as a fighter.

The third cycle takes place as the sailors cast lots. Again, Jonah is the selected one; he is, in a way, entrapped. The verse reads "and the lot fell upon Jonah."¹⁵ The lot falls upon him first as he is commissioned by God, and this motif intensifies as he is entrapped by the shipmaster.

In the fourth cycle of entrapment, Jonah is physically captured, once admitting his responsibility, as the sailors "cast him forth into the sea" (1:15). This act, I submit, should not be regarded too lightly. It covertly reflects one of the messages of the book. This act foreshadows, at this preliminary stage, the fate of the individual who seems to be more inclined to see his own narrow and limited interests than the well-being of society. At a later stage of the story, this characterization of Jonah is given an intensification: Jonah appears to have acted or refrained from action as a result of deep theological conviction. Only at a later development in the story do we note that in the core of the Book of Jonah there lies a basic theological dispute regarding the attributes of God and his relation to man.

Let us note that this inner rhythm of the story, that movement of enclosure which continuously zeros in on Jonah, does not end in the act of the sailors casting him into the sea. The swallowing of Jonah by the great fish continues this movement of entrapment in a physical sense. Yet this entrapment is also a spiritual one, for it puts Jonah for the first time since his escape, *vis-à-vis* his God. Indeed, now Jonah is at the mercy of God.¹⁶

What appears to be an act of rescue through the fish may in effect become Jonah's final trap. It is not death which is the final trap of the prophet escaping from his mission. The final entrapment of the prophet is the renewed commission. That Jonah is still not content with the mission is apparent in Chapter Four.

The cyclical movement is now completed. Jonah is no further from his God or from his mission than he is in the beginning of the book. The Biblical narrator endeavors to let the reader know of this by using identical phrases in both missions. "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying: Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and make unto it the proclamation that I bid thee" (3:1-2).

The significance of Chapter One, the scenes it depicts and the characters it portrays, to the understanding of the book is overlooked by most scholars dealing with the book. With very few exceptions, the role of the sailors, for example, does not appear to merit much attention in the literature on Jonah.¹⁷ Thus the traditional reading of the book loses so much of its artistic qualities.

In my interpretation of the book, the sailors play a vital role through their actions as well as in their words. The narrator has very cleverly foreshadowed the theological and spiritual message of the book, as enunciated in the last chapter, already in its first chapter.

As noted before, by casting Jonah into the sea, the sailors enact or concretize the divine concern for society in contrast to the interests of the individual. The phrases uttered by the sailors function as the missing argument of the people of Nineveh pleading for their lives *vis-à-vis* the prophet who desires their destruction. "We beseech Thee, O Lord," the sailors cry, "we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life." Listening carefully

to the inner echoes of the text is thus very rewarding. For the conflict between the people of Nineveh and Jonah is thus intensified beyond the one-sided conflict as reported overtly by the narrator. God appears in the last chapter as a judge, deciding between two arguments in a theological discussion on which I shall elaborate below.

The mariners' pleading "lay not upon us innocent blood," refers, of course, to Jonah who is about to be cast into the sea so as to save the ship and its crew. However, from the correspondence established between the sailors and the Ninevites in the context of our reading, we may also hear an echo of the people of Nineveh continuing to plead for their own lives *vis-à-vis* Jonah's: Do not hold us responsible for this man's death.

More significant is the latter part of the sentence: "For Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee" (1:14). This phrase establishes, at this early stage of the story, the epitome of the idea which is about to be uttered by God, and to be enacted by him. Namely, the utter subjugation of man to the omnipotent God.¹⁸

It should be noted that the author of the book establishes many similarities between the sailors and the people of Nineveh. Both are portrayed as heathens who undergo the act of repentance; both are delineated in contrast with Jonah. The last verse in Chapter One, which refers to the sailors, may foreshadow the actions taken by the people of Nineveh: "Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly" (1:16). In the same vein, the saving of the mariners by God in Chapter One foreshadows God's saving the people of Nineveh in Chapter Three.

Another action of the mariners serves a purpose which transcends the scope of the overt plot in the first chapter and extends beyond the boundaries of the textual information it contains. The mariners, we are told, "offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows" (1:16). This act helps explain a textual omission in Chapter Two. While Chapter Three begins with Jonah being told again to go on the mission to Nineveh, nowhere does the narrator reveal an overt change in Jonah's mind to undertake this mission. Only in the last verse of Jonah's thanksgiving psalm do we have a vague allusion as follows: "I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving; that which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is of the Lord" (2:10).¹⁹ This phrase by itself does not declare Jonah's change of heart nor his intention to undertake the mission to Nineveh.

The narrator, however, subtly relates Jonah's phrase to the last act of the mariners, namely, sacrifices and vows. Both sacrifices and vows signify the mariners' fearing "the Lord exceedingly"; thus, the parallel indirectly establishes Jonah's fear of the Lord. Moreover, through the structural parallel between the mariners and the people of Nineveh, we have concluded that the mariners are characterized as fearing the Lord exceedingly, foreshadowing perhaps the repentance of the people of Nineveh. Thus, their act of sacrifices and vows is not only related to Jonah's fear of the Lord but also to his inferred repentance.

Noting these patterns in the story, we may now examine the protagonist, Jonah. The author of the book clearly intends to delineate an acute irony that characterizes Jonah's personality.²⁰ Jonah is made to undergo a preliminary process that is later to take place with the people of Nineveh, namely,

sin, repentance, and deliverance from punishment (or rescue).²¹ For, indeed, Jonah is held as a transgressor in his attempt to evade the prophetic mission. Upon his consent to undertake the mission again, he is being rescued (God instructing the fish to vomit Jonah upon the dry land).

It appears that Jonah is ready to accept God's compassion as directed at himself. Yet he is unwilling to accept a similar treatment by God regarding the people of Nineveh.

This apparent enigma about Jonah, coupled with the very notion of his attempt to escape from the presence of the Lord, has perplexed readers of the book since time immemorial. Numerous attempts have been made to explain this phenomenon. There is a theory which is predominantly Christian that Jonah represents a narrow, rather parochial view of God, and a limited concept of His providence over the Israelite nation alone. By contrast, the author of the book views God as a universal God, whose providence is over the heathens as well. Thus, according to this theory, the author criticizes Jonah and his limited, nationalistic view. Others attribute Jonah's refusal to prophesy to Nineveh and his desire to evade the prophetic mission as resulting from his love for Israel, knowing that Nineveh, or Assyria, is to destroy Israel. The Midrash portrays Jonah as being apprehensive lest his prophecy would not materialize, upon the Ninevites' repentance, and he would appear to be a liar and a false prophet to the heathens.²²

This delineation of Jonah is rather negative. Accordingly, he is made to look a complete fool when he flees from God into the sea, which is ostensibly beyond the realm of the providence of God. Yet Jonah is the one who openly declares the reign of God as reaching the sea: "I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). This apparent inconsistency makes him more than just a fool and would also reveal a weak characterization on the part of the author.²³ Indeed, this concept of Jonah is epitomized in one scholar's portrayal of him as a *Shlumiel*.²⁴

I believe this negative portrayal of Jonah indicates an inability to fathom the text and a lack of sensitivity to discern the literary techniques employed by the author of the book. It is inconceivable that the author would be insensitive to the unique situation he created, or that he would utilize it to portray a stupid prophet. For the act of fleeing from the presence of God and evading the prophetic mission is indeed unique.²⁵ Against the background of the Biblical set of values and *Weltanschauung*, Jonah is made to perform an exceptionally extraordinary act which requires courage, decisiveness, and a great deal of *Hutzpah*. I am referring to Jonah, but, of course, this is true of the author of the book who has characterized the prophet as such. Furthermore, it is far-fetched that the editor who included the Book of Jonah in the Biblical canon would have the above-mentioned, superficial view of the spiritual traits of Jonah.

A thorough examination of the book should reveal that we are confronting a central theological problem around which the narrative is structured. Let us examine Jonah's own explanation as to his position: "I pray Thee, O Lord," he says in the last chapter, "was not this my saying, when I was yet in mine own country? Therefore I fled beforehand to Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repentest Thee of the evil" (4:2).

To paraphrase Jonah: I know that you tend to apply *Midat Haraḥamim* (that is, merciful justice, or leniency), that you are inclined to forgive the transgressor upon his repentance, and not apply *Midat Hadin* (strict justice, or severity). I know it, yet I, Jonah, tend to disagree with Thee.

The sensitive and knowledgeable reader should not fail to discern that the kernel of Jonah's argument is a quotation from Joel 2:13, as follows: "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for He is gracious and compassionate, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil."²⁶

Jonah obviously alludes to Joel's stand regarding God's merciful justice, *Midat Haraḥamim*, which he, Jonah, opposes.²⁷ It is eye-opening and of utmost importance to discover that the King of Nineveh, too, employs a partial quotation from the verse immediately following the one cited by Jonah. His goal, as planned by a skillful author, is to plead for God's mercy and for the employment of *Midat Haraḥamim* upon their repentance, against Jonah's expressed plea for *Midat Hadin*. The King says: "Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" (3:9). The verse in Joel reads: "Who knoweth whether He will not turn and repent" (2:14).

The author of the Book of Jonah has the King of Nineveh employ a quotation taken from Joel in order to plead for leniency. Joel, although a prophet of doom, allows nevertheless a last-minute repentance (2:12).

Jonah is portrayed by the author as adhering to the concept of *Midat Hadin* as the true attribute of God. This concept is manifested in the well-known verses in Exodus 34:6-7, as follows:

The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation.

I may add that the affinity between Joel and Jonah may explain the Rabbinic suggestion²⁸ that the Ninevites have not repented whole-heartedly, and that Jonah is aware of it. Accordingly, by use of the quotation from Joel, the author could have alluded to Joel's criterion for authentic repentance which appears in that verse in Joel: "And rend your heart, and not your garment" (2:13). Thus Jonah, in effect, accuses the people of Nineveh of a false or partial repentance.

The author of the Book of Jonah appears to have taken a stand which is contrary to the one expressed by his protagonist. We have previously noted that the author had arranged the plot in such a way as to portray Jonah as desiring *Midat Haraḥamim* for himself, yet demanding the severity of judgment upon his fellow-men.

In the final encounter with God, the author shapes the situation to highlight the intense contradiction found in Jonah's image, personality and outlook. God is made, through the use of the gourd and the worm, to prove a major point to Jonah. It is not, as suggested, that Jonah is selfish and petty, and that he is interested in his own well-being or reputation. Would this kind

of proof necessitate the utilization of an almighty God? God is brought down, so to speak, in order to clarify to Jonah that he, Jonah, is inconsistent in his theological doctrine; that he has a double standard; that his argument for severity in justice lacks authenticity, and that he, Jonah, lacks integrity. Who but God should be the best choice for expressing the divine attributes?

The proverbial gourd used by God to concretize the contradictions within Jonah is quite problematic. For, as Professor Goitein has shown, it does not directly answer Jonah's argument; it appears to be completely detached from the line of logic presented by Jonah.²⁹

It is here, as elsewhere in the book, that we must search for the author's narrative art. I submit that the fable of the gourd and the worm, too, is intrinsically bound to the Book of Joel. Jonah employs an argument extracted from Joel, and God is made to answer in kind. The gourd and the worm are supposed to exemplify to Jonah the realization of Joel's prophecy which has some bearing on the theological question of God's attributes, namely, whether *Midat Hadin* or *Midat Haraḥamim* prevails in regards to repentance.

Joel presents a very powerful apocalyptic prophecy of the coming of the mighty and numberless locust which destroys all growing things:

Be ashamed, O ye husbandmen, wail, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is withered, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate-tree, the palm-tree also, and the apple-tree, even all the trees of the field are withered (Joel, 1:11-12).

Joel's prophecy emphasizes the verb "wither" repeatedly as a most terrible catastrophe. Let us note that the Hebrew for "be ashamed" is *Hovish*,

הוֹנִיֵּשׁ, which is etymologically related to *Yavesh*, יָבֵשׁ, wither. Not only do they sound alike, but in fact *Hovish* could be both "be ashamed" and "wither." We note also that the verb "perish," אָבַד, appears in Joel's prophecy. Significantly, the author of the fable of the gourd and the worm capitalizes on these two verbs: וַיִּבֹשׁ, אָבַד.

Jonah, who disagrees with Joel's viewpoint, must, in our story, undergo the experience of which he is talking in theological terms, very much like the experience of his repentance. The worm-locust destroy the gourd, thus paralleling the catastrophe prophesied by Joel. The author of the Book of Jonah makes the point that the theological discussion is far from being a metaphysical question. It is, rather, a down-to-earth problem involving the fate of human beings.

Against the background of the prophecy of Joel, we fully understand the meaning and the message of the fable of the gourd which puzzled many scholars and readers. One must bear in mind that Joel's prophecy of doom provides a solution for repentance. Jonah, advocating the severity in justice, demands the complete annihilation of the vine, the fig-tree, the apple-tree (appearing in the prophecy of Joel) — and the gourd and the people of Nineveh.

Yet Jonah discovers quite surprisingly (and the reader shares the surprise with him) that he, Jonah, has pity [חָסַד = to be sparing of] on the gourd and that his demand for *Midat Hadin* contains a destructive contradiction. Upon his discovery, God being instrumental in this insight, Jonah can do nothing but remain quiet. The last verse of the Book of Jonah, verse

12, a verse which has not been written in our text, is the thundering silence of Jonah.

NOTES

*The kernel of this paper was originally conceived and written without the apparatus of the footnotes. As I became interested in the subject, I began to probe the vast literature, and I found references to similar approaches to the book. They are acknowledged in the footnotes. The growing interest in the Bible as literature has produced some meritorious articles, which are not cited in my article because they do not deal with the Book of Jonah. Among them I would like to mention the works of Isaac Rabinowitz, especially "Toward a Valid Theory of Biblical Hebrew Literature," *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan*, (Ithaca, 1968); Perry and Steinberg in *Hasifrut* (Summer, 1968, 1970), and Robert Alter in *Commentary*, (December, 1975). An earlier version of this paper was published in Hebrew in *Hadoar*, LVII (No. 39, October 13, 1978), pp. 682-684; a review of the literary approach to Jonah in modern times was published in *Hadoar*, LIX (No. 17, March 7, 1980), p. 267, and (No. 18, March 14, 1980), p. 282. The latter review has been omitted from the present article for lack of space.

¹A list of some of the scholars belonging to this school and their summarized arguments may be found in Samuel Davidson, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Edinburgh, 1863), III, pp. 269-271. Similar listings appear also in Wilhelm Martin Leberech de Wette, *A Critical and Historical Introduction of the Old Testament*, (New York, 1864), II, p. 452. Frederick Carl Eiselen cites the historical arguments as suggested by Keil, in his *Commentary on the Old Testament, The Minor Prophets*, (New York, 1907), IX, pp. 315-316. D.E. Hart-Davies adheres to the historical school, rejecting those who "treat the narrative as a fiction" (*Jonah: Prophet and Patriot*, [London, 1925], pp. 5-6). T.E. Bird, while admitting that the "literal, parabolic, dream" interpretations "have each something attractive," concludes: "But maybe the most probable after all is the simple historical interpretation" (*The Old Testament, The Book of Jonah*, [London, 1938], p. xxxiii). R.K. Harrison surveys the historical interpretation in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1969), pp. 905-911. See also, G.C. Aalders, *The Problem of the Book of Jonah* (London, 1948), pp. 7, 27 & 28. A survey of the historical narrative school may be found in a Columbia University dissertation (1963) by Phyllis Lou Tribble, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, pp. 127-130.

²See the works listed by Davidson, *An Introduction*, p. 270. For example, see Eichhorn's treatment of Jonah as a fable: Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, (Reutlingen, 1790), III, ss. 259-263. Also: de Wette, pp. 252-253; Friedrich Bleek, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (London, 1875), II, p. 185. Harrison surveys both allegorical and parabolic schools of interpretation in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 911-914. Some of the exponents of this school are discussed in my article in *Hadoar*, No. 17, 18, March 1980, cited above. See also Tribble, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, pp. 130-176.

A mystical interpretation of Jonah can be found in the *Zohar*. Jonah's going down to the boat is said to allude to the soul descending to the lower world to be within the body; the shipmaster is said to be *yezer hatov*, the good inclination (*Midreshei Hazohar, Leqet Shemuel, Nevi'im*, [Jerusalem, 1967], VI, comp., Shemuel Kipnis, p. 193). A similar concept was suggested by Elijah ben Solomon [Gaon of Vilna] in his *Perush 'Al Yonah* (Prag, 1810), p. 2.

³Gabriel H. Cohn, *Das Buch Jona*, (Assen, 1969). It should be pointed out that the above statements do not intend to treat lightly previous studies on the Book of Jonah. Following the completion of this study I received Jonathan Magonet's *Form and Meaning [:] Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah*, (Bern & Frankfurt/M, 1976), which contains significant insights.

⁴The term "revised" is used here in relation to the traditional reading of Jonah.

The suggestion that the Book of Jonah is a satire was proposed by Thomas Paine in 1793 in his "The Age of Reason," *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine*, (Boston, 1875), II, p. 122: "As a satire, it strikes against the character of all the Bible-prophets [. . .] It satirizes also the supposed partiality of the Creator, for one nation more than for another." Arnold Ehrlich, too, presented the notion that the author's intention was satiric ("hitul," *Mikra Ki-Peschuto*, III, (Berlin, 1901; New York, 1969), pp. 422, 423). Konig maintained that the repentance of the city of Nineveh was depicted with grotesque features having didactic tendency (*A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings, [New York, 1902], II, p. 750). Some scholars discerned humor in the book. Bewer writes: "A kindly humor without sting or bitterness runs through the rest of the tale" (*The Literature of the Old Testament*, [New York, 1962], p. 423). See also Tribble, *Studies*, pp. 253, 256; Leslie C. Allen, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Michah*, (Grand Rapids, 1976), p. 178.

A caricature interpretation of the book was offered by Ludwig Schwerin, in his *Die Denkwürdigkeiten des Widerspenstigen Jona*, (Berlin, 1934). Jonah as a comedy is the concept of Paul Goodman in his *The Facts of Life*, (New York, 1945), p. 203. Edwin M. Good, too, regarded it as a satire in his book *Irony in the Old Testament*, (Philadelphia, 1965), p. 41.

Millar Burrows discussed the various attempts to classify the Book of Jonah and concluded it is a satire. He, too, regards the story as "a work of consummate artistry, told with a restraint and economy of language characteristic of the best biblical narratives" (p. 87), in his study "The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah," *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament, Essays in Honor of H.G. May*, (Nashville &

New York, 1970), pp. 80-107. Thayer S. Warshaw, "The Book of Jonah," *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. K.R.R. Gros Louis (Nashville & New York, 1974), pp. 191-207, considers it a satire, and discusses its literary merits. The same attitude, although more popular in its approach, was manifested by D.F. Rauber, "Jonah — the Prophet as Shleimel," *The Bible Today*, 49 (October, 1970), pp. 29-38. John A. Miles, Jr. offered a view of the Book of Jonah as a parody, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, LXV (No. 3, January, 1975), pp. 168-181. See Adele Berlin's rejoinder, *JQR*, LXVI (No. 4, April, 1976), pp. 227-235. Cf. George A. Smith's remark on the notion of humor in the book (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, [London, 1898], II, p. 495).

This writer believes that some of the arguments advocating the satiric interpretation of the Book of Jonah are not convincing in the context of the book, its contents and its structure, as well as in the Biblical context. One major argument against this concept of Jonah is cited in the text. Yet the scope of this article does not allow me to elaborate on this point.

⁵The scope of this paper necessitates this limitation. Thus I shall not deal here with the psalm-prayer. Cf. the view of Meir Weiss in his *Hamiqra Kidmuto* [The Bible and Modern Theory], (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 22. (Hebrew).

⁶Cohn, *Das Buch Jona*, iv. T.T. Perowne discerned "three acts [. . .] in a drama, three movements [. . .] in an oratorio": 1. Jonah; 2. Nineveh; 3. Jonah and the gourd. He concludes: "The three acts make one drama, the three movements form one composition" (*Obdiah and Jonah, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, [Cambridge, 1887], pp. 53, 55).

Ernst Simon also noticed that "A rigorous architectonic movement organizes the Book of Jonah [. . .] in the polar opposites of Fall and Ascent, Flight and Return. The same organizing movement presides over the repentance of Nineveh [. . .]" ("Flight from God — and Return," *Commentary*, XVI [No. 3, September, 1953], p. 217). Simon sees seven stations in Jonah's plight.

⁷Isaac Abravanel, "*Sefer Yonah*," *Perush 'Al Nevi'im Uchtuvim* [Commentary on the Prophets and the Writings], (Tel Aviv, 1960), p. 121. See also Ibn Ezra's commentary, *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, (Jerusalem & Tel Aviv, 1959), IV, p. 311b.

⁸See for example I King 10:22, II Chronicles 9:21. Cf. M. M. Kalisch, "The Book of Jonah," *Bible Studies*, II, (London, 1878), pp. 144-145; Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," *The International Critical Commentary*, (New York, 1912), pp. 29-30; Good, *Irony*, pp. 42-43, n. 6; Meir Weiss, "*Einiges Ueber die Bauformen des Erzählens in der Bibel*," *Vetus Testamentum*, XIII (No. 4, October, 1963), ss. 461-465; Norman H. Snaith, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah*, (London, 1962), p. 9: "To Tarshish' stands for 'to the farthest west,' i.e., to the ends of the earth." Allen, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 204.

⁹See for example I Samuel 16:12: "*Qum meshaḥehu ki zeh hu*"; the text does not specify that Samuel sat beforehand. As a matter of fact, in verse 11 Samuel declares that he would *noi* sit to eat before they had brought David: "*Ki lo nasov 'ad bo' o foh*." See Kimhi's comment to that verse: "*Qum 'inyan zeruz*" (*Miqra'ot Gedolot, Nevi'im Rishonim*, [Tel Aviv & Jerusalem, 1959], p. 115b). However, in I King 19:5, 7, 8, the instruction "Qum" implies physically getting up, for Elijah was lying asleep.

¹⁰The intention of the narrator by the use of the very verb "*Qum*" is discerned by E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, (London, 1883), pp. 251, 266; Bewer, *Jonah*, p. 29; Bird, *The Book of Jonah*, p. 7. The use of *Qum* for ironic purpose is discussed by Good, Rauber, and Warshaw in their respective studies. See also David Zimmermann, *Hasipur 'Al Ha'ish Yonah* [The Story on the Man Jonah], *Niv Haqevuzah*, (1964), XII, p. 707. [Hebrew]

¹¹The term "entrapment" implies the continuous inability of the prophet to escape his mission. Cohn proposed a similar notion, *Das Buch Jona*, ss. 92-93. A similar use may be found in II Kings 2:2, 4, 6. The repeated phrase, "tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to [. . .]" [*Shev na poh ki YHVH shelḥani*], intends to relate the three cycles in Elijah's attempts to rid himself of the presence of Elisha.

¹²Cf. the traditional explanation by Abravanel in his *Commentary to Jonah*, p. 121: "And he went down to Yafo, for Eretz Yisrael is higher than all other countries"; and Kalisch, *Bible Studies*, II, pp. 145-146. The idea of descent is seen by Cohn as a psychological act of withdrawal, despair and depression; see Abraham D. Cohn, "The Tragedy of Jonah," *Judaism*, XXI (No. 2 [82], Spring, 1972), p. 171. See also Zimmermann, "*Hasipur*," p. 711.

¹³Good, *Irony*, p. 44, states that the captain's "exhortation to Jonah awakens ironic echoes of the divine commission to the prophet." My interpretation, unlike Good's, sees it as part of a structural pattern. Interestingly, Abravanel alludes to an unintentional message incorporated in the captain's phrase: "*Uchevar he 'iro 'al zeh rav hahovel 'im heyoto shelo bemitkaven be'emor lo mah lecha nirdam*" (*Commentary to Jonah*, p. 120). Ernst Simon also relates God and the shipmaster: "God now resorts to a human voice, that of the shipmaster" ("Flight from God — and Return," p. 215). Pusey, too, relates the two: "God reproved [. . .] Jonah by the shipmaster" (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 269). Cf. Allen, *The New International Commentary*, pp. 207-208.

¹⁴Cf. Kalisch, *Bible Studies*, II, p. 156, and Simon, "Flight," p. 215. Many studies dwell on Jonah's silence; see, for example, Hugh Martin, *The Prophet Jonah, His Character and Mission to Nineveh*, (London & New York, 1866), p. 158.

¹⁵Abravanel explains that they cast the lots many times and every time the lot fell upon Jonah (*Commentary*, p. 122). A similar explanation is rendered by Isaac Arama, *Sefer 'Aqedat Yizḥaq* (Jerusalem, 1961, I, III;

reprint of the Presberg, 1849 edition), *Sha'ar* 63, p. 60b, (Hebrew). The same view is offered in *Mezudat David*, and by Malbim, '*Ozar Haperushim* [Treasure of Commentaries], (Jerusalem, 1956), IV, p. 204 (Hebrew). Cf. Bewer, *Jonah*, p. 35.

¹⁶Abravanel observes: "*Vegam sham lo hunaḥ lo* [. . .] '*ad shehuchraḥ yonah lehitpalel 'el hashem*" (*Commentary*, p. 120). Cf. Simon, "Flight," p. 216.

¹⁷Upon examining the vast literature on the Book of Jonah, one finds a few hints of intuitive remarks on the role of the sailors. Those scholars who do relate the sailors to the Ninevites mainly stress the contrasting effect that the narrator desired to achieve. Namely, the contrast between the portrayal of the Gentiles and that of the Hebrew, Jonah. As we shall see below, my concept is indeed different. Already Joel Brill is relating the portrayal of the mariners and the Ninevites, which is highly positive, and that of Jonah, which is negative (*Jonah*, [Berlin, 1788], p. 11). Pusey, too, relates the depiction of the character of the mariners and of the Ninevites as advantageous in comparison with that of the prophet. "The Prophet brings out the awe, the humanity, the earnestness of the natural religion, and the final conversion of the sailors, and the zealous repentance of the Ninevites, while he neglects to explain his own character [. . .] The mariners were spared, the Hebrew Prophet was cast forth as guilty. The Ninevites were forgiven: the Prophet, rebuked" (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 248). Similarly, Perowne relates the positive portrayal of the sailors as contrasted with the negative depiction of Jonah (*Obadiah and Jonah*, pp. 53, 61). See also Bird, *The Book of Jonah*, p. 10. *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, too, relates the conversion of the sailors and that of the Ninevites [New York, 1965], p. 1120). Closer to my view is S. R. Driver's: "The ready homage done by the heathen sailors to the prophet's God is a significant omen of what is to follow" (*An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, [Edinburgh, 1894], p. 303). Gerhard Von Rad is, perhaps, clearer on the significance of the sailors: "That they become believers in the God of Israel means that one of God's aims has already reached its goals. Yet this was, of course, merely a prelude to what was afterwards to be repeated on a grand scale in the deliverance of Nineveh" (*The Message of the Prophets*, [London, 1968], p. 256). However, these seem to be remarked, almost casually, without proper acknowledgement of the author's intention of such a portrayal. Warshaw, who does emphasize the literary techniques in the book, relates the sailors and the Ninevites ironically: "Jonah is the cause of the 'conversion' of both the pagan sailors and the Ninevites to the fear of the true God, yet in neither case was that his intention" ("The Book of Jonah," p. 197). Warshaw does not discern the structural pattern in this relationship.

¹⁸See Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, p. 272: "Wonderful, concise confession of faith in these new converts [. . .] they resolve the whole mystery of man's agency and God's Providence into the three simple words."

¹⁹Pusey, too, relates the two verses: "The Prophet's prayer ends almost in promising the same as the mariners. They *made vows*; Jonah says, *I will pay that I have vowed* [. . .] he tacitly likens the act of the new heathen converts and that of the Prophet." Pusey's interest, however, lies in the Christian theological significance of this likeness and not in the structural function within the book as a work of literature (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 276). See also Kalisch, *Bible Studies*, II, p. 220; Cohn, *Das Buch Jona*, s. 93.

²⁰However, not for the purpose of humor as proposed by Rauber ("Jonah—the Prophet as Shlemiel"), or parody as proposed by Miles ("Laughing at the Bible").

²¹Kalisch is sensitive to this connection: "He [the author] has exhibited the power of true repentance both by the example of Jonah and the Ninevites" (*Bible Studies*, II, p. 274). However, he does not see, neither is he interested in, the structural pattern in the story. Warshaw does see the pattern in part, but his overall concept leads him to a completely different conclusion. He writes: "Its structure forces the three instances of God's compassion into interaction" ("The Book of Jonah," p. 204).

²²*Yalqut Shim'oni*, (Jerusalem, 1960), II, p. 859 (on Jonah); *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (Jerusalem, 1972), codex C. M. Horowitz, Ch. 10, p. 43; *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, ed. G. Friedlander, (New York, 1965), pp. 65-66; *Tanhuma*, III, Vayiqra, viii (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 5a; J. D. Eisenstein, '*Ozar Midrashim*, (reprint, Israel, n.d.), I, pp. 218-222. *Mechilta* has it as follows: He was solicitous for the honor of the son, but not for the honor of the father. Namely, he was anxious to spare the Israelites, yet was indifferent to the honor of God. See *Sefer Mechilta Derabi Yishma'el*, ed. Meir Ish Shalom, (Wien, 1870; facsimile edition: Isarel, 1968), pp. 1b-2a. Shlomo Yarḥi expressed a similar traditional view of the reluctance of Jonah: He knew that the non-Jews were close to repentance, thus the Israelites would be implicated, for they, by contrast, had not repented (in his commentary to Jonah [Leipzig, 1682], p. 13; this commentary appears in Rashi in the other editions of the Hebrew Bible which were cited above). The other views on Jonah are summarized in the various works cited above.

²³Scholars of the 'ironic school' of interpretation view this inconsistency as another irony in the book. See for example, Good, *Irony*, p. 43.

²⁴Rauber, "Jonah—the Prophet as Shlemiel." Parenthetically, I think *Shlimazl* would be a better characterization of Jonah.

²⁵It is quite different from Moses' or Jeremiah's, for example.

²⁶While the author of Jonah may be indebted to Exodus 36:6, Numbers 14:18, Psalms 86:5, 15; 103:8; 145:8, it is evident that his intention is, rather, to draw attention to the verse in Joel. The wording "*Hanun verahum*" appears, in addition to Joel and Jonah, only in Psalms 145:8. The other quotations have it in reverse order, namely, "*Rahum veḥanun*." However, the phrase "*Verav ḥesed veniḥam 'al hara'ah*" appears only in Joel and Jonah, thus definitely relating the two verses while excluding the other references.

Previous allusions to the source of Jonah's quotations are found in the literature, but I believe that none, with the exception of H. W. Wolff (*Studien zum Jonabuch*, [Neukirchen-Wluy, 1954]) and Bickerman, exhibits a meaningful relation which sheds light on the Book of Jonah. Kalisch just cites the borrowing from Joel (*Bible Studies*, II, pp. 261, 280). Pusey is aware of the borrowing; he writes: "The Ninevites use the same form of words, which God suggested by Joel to Judah." His conclusion: "Perhaps He would thereby indicate that He had Himself put it into their mouths" (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 281). Pusey is after the theological implication of this device, and not the literary or the artistic. Perowne, too, cites the identical phrases (*Obadiah and Jonah*, p. 81), and so does W. Böhme in his article "*Die Composition des Buches Jona*," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, VII (1887), s. 267.

Delitzsch does not cite the verses in Joel and Jonah at all, however, he comes out with a suggestive idea which relates the two books: "That which Joel testifies in chap. iii, that the heathen are embraced in the divine decree, this the Book of Jonah teaches and confirms through facts" (Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies in Historical Succession* [New York, 1891], trans., S. I. Curtiss, p. 126). Delitzsch, however, refers to the messianic message, as interpreted by Christian theologians, a view which he does not support by any textual proof. My interpretation differs completely with his.

Carl H. Cornill is interested in the similarities with Joel in order to establish the date of the Book of Jonah, as do most of the scholars listed below (*Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, [Freiburg, 1892], II, i, s. 181; *Introduction to the Canonical Books of the Old Testament* [New York, 1907], p. 337); Robert Dick Willson argues with Cornill about the Joel source, his interest, too, being the dating of the book ("The Authenticity of Jonah," *Princeton Theological Review*, XVI, pp. 431, 435, 444-445). Eiselen's interest in the similar verses also remain in the realm of dating the Book of Jonah (*The Minor Prophets*, pp. 335, 352). See also Bird, *The Book of Jona*, pp. 15-16; *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York, 1962), II, p. 966; A. F. Knight, *Ruth and Jonah*, (London, 1960), p. 71; M. D. Cassuto, *Sefer Trei 'Asar* [The Minor Prophets] (Tel Aviv, 1957), p. 85 [Hebrew]; Trible, *Studies in the Book of Jonah*, pp. 110, 232.

Bewer ("A Critical Exegetical Commentary," p. 13) is essentially interested in the characterization of God by Jonah and Joel in order to establish the date of the book. R. H. Pfeiffer is interested in establishing that the source of "the author's views on repentance through fasting and sackcloth, followed by divine forgiveness, are obviously derived from Joel" (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [New York, 1941], p. 588). Oesterley and Robinson minimize the importance of the quotation: "Much stress need not be laid on the fact that the author of our book seems to have known the book of Joel" (W.O.E. Oesterley & Theodore H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* [New York, 1960], p. 372). Aalders, too, is interested only in dating the book: "The author seems to have known the book of Joel [. . .] Oesterley and Robinson, however, admit that not much stress need be laid on this fact. They are right here, for the date of Joel itself is absolutely uncertain" (*The Problem of the Book of Jonah*, p. 10). Harrison is of the same opinion (*Introduction*, p. 916). Good is aware of the quotation, but utilizes it to express "the author's satiric purpose [. . .] Jonah is mouthing [. . .] a liturgical cliché, a rote theology" (*Irony*, p. 50). Wolff does relate some of the themes of the Books of Jonah and Joel (*Studien zum Jonabuch*, ss. 66-71). Closer to my view is Bickerman's. He writes: "Jonah quotes the formula in the exact wording given it by Joel (2:13). Such literary allusions served to make clear the thought of the writer" (p. 4); "Thus Joel again helps the reader to understand the book of Jonah" (Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* [New York, 1967], p. 44). The parallel is also cited by Cohn, *Das Buch Jona*, s. 99, and Allen, *The New International Commentary*, pp. 225, 228.

²¹The tension between *Midat Hadin* and *Midat Harahamim* is already suggested in the Midrash, *Yalqut Shim'oni*, "Yonah," p. 860; 'Ozar Midrashim, I, pp. 221, 222. This theological problem as manifested in Jonah has been proposed in modern times by Yehezkel Kaufman, *Toldot Ha'emunah Hayisre'elit* [The History of the Israelite Faith], (Jerusalem, 1960), II, pp. 286-287 [Hebrew]; see the English version, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960), p. 285. Kaufman, however, does not relate the problem to the Book of Joel. Kalisch and Rosenthal have already suggested the idea of repentance as the major objective of the author, Cf. Joseph Rosenthal, "*Sefer Yonah*," *Derech 'Emunah*, [The Way of Faith], (Warsaw, 1893), pp. 36-37, 40. (Hebrew).

²²*Yalqut Shim'oni*, p. 860: "After forty days they returned to their wicked ways." See E. E. Urbach's thesis explaining the negative attitude found in the ancient Palestinian sources, as contrasted with the Babylonian, toward the alleged repentance of the Ninevites, in his article "*Teshuvot 'Anshei Nineveh Vehaviku'ah Hayehudi-Notri*" [The Repentance of the Ninevites and the Judeo-Christian Dispute], *Tarbiz*, XX (1950), pp. 118-122. (Hebrew)

²³Goitein, *Iyunim Bamiqra*, pp. 85-86. See also Leah Fraenkel, "*Ha'antitezah Kisod Sifrut Bamiqra*" [Anti-thesis—A Literary Device], *Hamiqra Vetoldot Yisra'el* [Bible and Jewish History], dedicated to the memory of Jacob Liver (Tel Aviv, 1971), p. 145, (Hebrew); and Berlin, "A Rejoinder," p. 235.