

***A Symphony of Satire: Elijah and Jonah***  
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Jonah is a narrative that people seem to “know,” even if they have never consciously read the Bible. They think of it a double act – “Jonah and the Whale,” like “Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers” or “Dorothy and Toto.” However, a double act that most interpreters mention<sup>1</sup> – yet none fully develop with necessary supporting discussions on genre, irony and intertextuality – might go under the title “Elijah and Jonah.”

We may compare the narrator of Jonah with that of a conductor who prompts his symphony to vary its chorus line. Just as conductors know when to introduce different instruments and new arrangements that provide variety to a score, the narrator of Jonah assembles his components of genre, irony and intertextual connections to present his masterpiece – a symphony of satire, Elijah and Jonah.

**The Genre of Jonah**

Just as there are numerous musical genres – e.g., rap, rock, jazz, classical – so there are just as many literary genres that are employed by writers in the Hebrew Bible. And just as some musical texts sound better when put to country-and-western while others cry out to be presented using opera, the narrator of Jonah composes his text that is best appreciated when it is “set” to satire.

Numerous generic names have been used to define the narrative of Jonah.<sup>2</sup> Though not exhaustive, the following indicates the wide variety that exists in Jonah

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<sup>1</sup> The most developed study is David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 131-33. A partial list includes Jonathan Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in the Literary Techniques of the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 102; Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg), 1986; cf. also *Studienzum Jonabuch* (Biblische Studien, Heft 47. Neukirchener-Vluyn Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, GmbH), 1965.

80-81, 168; and Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Word Bible Commentary 31. Waco: Word, 1987), 435.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the thorough discussion by Millar Burrows, “The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah,” in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament*. Edited by H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 80-107. See also R.H. Bowers, *The Legend of Jonah, Fifty Odd Interpretations of Jonah from the New Testament through the English Renaissance* (The Hauge: Nijhoff, 1971).

studies. The narrative has variously been labeled a story about a prophet,<sup>3</sup> a parable,<sup>4</sup> a legend,<sup>5</sup> a didactic history,<sup>6</sup> a philosophical treatise,<sup>7</sup> a tragedy,<sup>8</sup> an ironic short story,<sup>9</sup> a novella,<sup>10</sup> a comedy<sup>11</sup> and a parody.<sup>12</sup> Among recent writers there has been a strong move away from referring to Jonah as either an allegory or Midrash, as now the preference is to classify it as didactic fiction.<sup>13</sup> Even more recently Ehud Ben Zvi states that the book's genre is that of a "meta-prophetic book."<sup>14</sup> But all of these miss the point. The text of Jonah is composed for satire.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Gerhard von Rad calls Jonah "the last and strangest flowering of this old and almost extinct literary form" (*Theology of the Old Testament*, II [2 vols.: San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1962], 291).

<sup>4</sup> The most detailed elaboration of Jonah as a parable is that of A. Rofé, "Classes in the Prophetic Stories: Didactic Legend and Parable," in J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume* (VTSup, 26; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 143-53.

<sup>5</sup> J. Jepsen, "Anmerkungen zum Buche Jona: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments," in H. Stoebe (ed.), *Wort-Gebot-Glaube: Theologie des Alten Testaments* (ATANT, 59; Zurich: Zwingli-Verland, 1970): 297-305, 299.

<sup>6</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," *TynBul* 36 (1985): 35-59.

<sup>7</sup> E. Levine, "Jonah as a Philosophical Book," *ZAW* 96 (1984): 235-45, 236.

<sup>8</sup> B. Woodard, "Death in Life: The Book of Jonah and Biblical Tragedy," *GTJ* 11 (1991): 3-16.

<sup>9</sup> M. West, "Irony in the Book of Jonah: Audience Identification with the Hero," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 11 (1984): 233-42.

<sup>10</sup> Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 85.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Judson Mather, "The Comic Art of the Book of Jonah," *Soundings* 65 (1982): 280-91. Mather calls Jonah "a rich comic invention" consisting of "the devices of burlesque and parody" (280).

<sup>12</sup> A.J. Band, "Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 177-95; Brian Peckham, *History and Prophecy: The Development of Late Judean Literary Traditions* (ABRL: Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 690 and John A. Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody," *JQR* 65 (1975): 168-181.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Alexander, "Jonah and Genre."

<sup>14</sup> *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 85. Ben Zvi defines a meta-prophetic book as a prophetic book that deals with or is devoted to issues that are of "relevance for the understanding of the messages of other prophetic books" (85). His study discusses how the literati in Persian Yehud read the Book of Jonah against the background of other writing prophets.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, Sheffield, 1981), 40-41; Leslie Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Jonah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 178; J.S. Ackerman, "Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah," in B. Halpern and J. Levenson (eds.), *Tradition and Transformation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbruans, 1981): 213-46, 216-17; J.C. Holbert, "Deliverance Belongs to Yahweh!" Satire in the Book of Jonah," *JSOT* 21 (1981): 59-81; Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody."

Millar Burrows is one of the most ardent adherents of this view<sup>16</sup> and H.W. Wolff tentatively follows him in his commentary on Jonah by referring to elements in the story as “satiric.”<sup>17</sup> Burrows writes: “In purpose and method it [Jonah] belongs to the same general type of literature as Don Quixote or Gulliver’s Travels.”<sup>18</sup> He defines the satire in Jonah as “roughly a caricature in words.”<sup>19</sup> Others also locate satirical elements in Jonah.<sup>20</sup> For example, Terrace Fretheim believes the narrative uses “ridicule, absurdity, burlesque, exaggeration, humor, or other ways of intensifying incongruities.”<sup>21</sup>

## Satire

Lucilius – in the second century B.C. – was the first to coin satire as a literary term. He designed it as a new genre, different from the others that prevailed in classical literature, such as the elegy, tragedy and comedy. Lucilius and his followers – Horace (63-8 B.C.) and Juvenal (60-130 A.D.) – are the forerunners of this literary strategy which developed, as an influential literary genre,<sup>22</sup> mainly during the period of the Renaissance.

But what is the relevance of applying the literary term “satire,” whose origin lies in classical Roman literature, to the narrative of Jonah? Ze’ev Weisman writes:

The use of later and even modern terms for the study of ancient literature, and of the Hebrew Bible in particular, is permissible as long as the scholar is aware of the risk involved. These arise from the fact that the borrowed term was initiated and coined in an alien cultural milieu, remote in time and place.<sup>23</sup>

Cautiously, then, we may uproot the term “satire” from its cultural homeland and transfer it to the environment of the Old Testament.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah,” 80.

<sup>17</sup> *Obadiah and Jonah*, 620-64.

<sup>18</sup> “The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah,” 95.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive list that surveys the issue beginning with Thomas Paine in *Age of Reason* (1793) that includes comments by Gerhard von Rad, cf. Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs to Yahweh!” Satire in the Book of Jonah,” 76, n. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 51-52.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of this history cf. Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 1-9. David Marcus describes the work of famous satirists Rabelais, Juvenal, Voltaire, Cervantes, Gogol and Swift, and how they draw heavily from the Old Testament (*From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-Prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995], 16-30).

<sup>23</sup> Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Analysis of the characteristics of political satire in each of the Old Testament’s main divisions (narrative, prophecy and wisdom literature), and in most of its literary types (e.g., prophetic dirge, parable, prophetic lawsuit, elegy and fable) leads to the conclusion that it should be recognized as a widespread literary phenomenon in the Old

Stating that the narrative of Jonah is a satire on the prophet is one thing; defining the term “satire” in any comprehensive manner is much more difficult, due in large part to the fact that there are various definitions of the term that often contradict each other.<sup>25</sup> Some literary critics are doubtful whether or not a definition of satire can be achieved. According to D.C. Muecke there is “no brief and simple definition that will include all kinds of satire while excluding all that is not satire.”<sup>26</sup> Still, certain elements do seem basic, and by coming to terms with this something at least resembling a definition can be reached that will place us in a better position to interpret the connections between Jonah and Elijah.

It is Muecke who gives what some judge to be the best list of formal criteria of satire. He notes that all satire (1) is a double-layered or two-storied phenomenon, (2) presents some kind of opposition between the two levels, and (3) contains elements of “innocence” or unawareness.<sup>27</sup> In this respect A. Koestler’s insights are helpful:

It [satire] focuses attention on abuses and deformities in society of which, blunted by habit, we were no longer aware; it makes us suddenly discover the absurdity of the familiar and the familiarity of the absurd.<sup>28</sup>

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Testament. In fact, Hebrew literature is capable of highly sophisticated satire. See, e.g. Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, where for example, in chapter one he identifies “at least 14 satires in biblical narratives” (6). These are narratives that target foreigners and Israelites alike. Foreigners are satirized in the stories of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), the story of Ehud (Judges 3), and in the book of Esther. Examples of satires against Israelites include the story of Jephthah, the Ephraimites (Judges 12:1-10), the story of Micah and the Danites (Judges 17-18), and the stories of the Levite and his concubine and the civil war (Judges 19-21). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the prophets use satire as a literary device in characterizing rebellious or stubborn people or in their attacks against foreign nations. Also helpful is Baruch Halpern, “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” *Traditions and Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, eds. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981): 213-26, 220. For an overview of how satire is used in prophetic literature, cf. Reed Lessing, “Isaiah’s Use of Satire in His Tyre Oracle,” *JSOT* (28:1) 2003: 89-112, 91-95.

<sup>25</sup> D.C. Muecke writes: “Getting a grip on satire seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there’s plenty to take hold of if only one could” (*The Compass of Irony* [London: Methuen, 1969], 3). H.J. Jensen, *The Satirist’s Art* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1972), xi, writes: “Satire’s essence is as illusive as the center of Peery Gynt’s onion. It is unlike other important kinds of literature because it lacks a definable cathartic effect or at least so far no one has isolated a general effect closely enough for generic definition.” Ze’ev Weisman echoes these sentiments: ““An unequivocal definition of satire is in the realm of literary utopia” (*Political Satire in the Bible*, xi).

<sup>26</sup> *The Compass of Irony*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> *The Art of Creation* (New York, 1964), 72-73.

Leonard Feinberg echoes these comments when he defines satire as an absurd and “critical distortion of the familiar.”<sup>29</sup> Feinberg states that it is easy to call a rogue a villain, but it is difficult to make a person appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave without using any of these opprobrious terms. Authors therefore use satire to ridicule in indirect ways. Though subtle, satire is pointed and powerful.

We may say, then, that satire has the following general characteristics:

1. It has a definite target
2. It is characterized by indirect attack and subtlety. The charge comes from the flanks rather than head-on
3. It attacks inferior excesses; hypocrisy is one classic and familiar example
4. It is usually external in viewpoint. That is, the actions of the character being satirized are emphasized rather than his or her inner thoughts

All four of these points find almost exact fits in the narrative of Jonah. As our discussion proceeds we will see in greater detail that the narrator’s satire is aimed at his audience. It is also indirect and subtle, as he attacks hypocrisy by means of Jonah’s actions rather than his inner thoughts.

This being said, while face-to-face verbal satire is usually not difficult to decipher, the presence of satire in a written text is not as easy to prove.<sup>30</sup> The satirical speaker may wink or smile, exaggerate the tone or quite subtly modify his or her manner in countless ways in order to signal that the words do not themselves speak the whole truth. The strictures on writing, however, do not permit such immediate indicators, so it may often seem a safer choice to take a writer’s words literally rather than risk a reading between the lines that is necessary to a satiric interpretation. Signals of satire in written texts are therefore often difficult to detect because the essence of satire is to be indirect. A straightforward satirical statement is a contradiction in terms.

So how do narrators signal to their audience that they are writing satirically? And since satiric messages can be and often are mixed with straightforward ones, how can these statements be distinguished within the very same text? The key to detecting satire is what Paul Ricoeur calls “sensitivity to context.”<sup>31</sup> This means satire is signaled by a conflict in the relationship between a given text and its situational context, its

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<sup>29</sup> *Introduction to Satire* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 19. Feinberg goes on to write: “The satirist, then, has to exaggerate because he is facing formidable opposition: an audience indifferent to expression of unpleasant truths, and a throng of teachers, officials, and writers who insist that these truths do not exist” (14).

<sup>30</sup> W. F. Stinespring, says: “The terrific impact of this satire is often avoided or evaded by readers or exegetes who wish to see the Bible as a book entirely of sweetness and light. In general, the extent of satire in the Bible is probably unknown to many” (“Irony and Satire” in *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 727-28, 727).

<sup>31</sup> *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145. Ricoeur also says: “Knowledge and meaning are extremely sensitive to the contexts where they are utilized.” (94).

linguistic co-text and the text itself. Often all three aspects converge in a particular manifestation of satire.

In paying attention to the contextual elements in the narrative of Jonah, studies in the last thirty years have demonstrated that the book is filled with satiric irony. Menippean satire, though anachronistic, is a type of satire that Michael Orth uses to describe the narrative of Jonah.<sup>32</sup> This is satire in which the characters speak for themselves and are made to look ridiculous through their actions.<sup>33</sup> Several times in the narrative Jonah is involved in ironic situations in which he is depicted as a sort-of “anti-Elijah.” A better understanding of the relationship between satire and irony will help us more clearly hear our two-part symphony of satire – Elijah and Jonah.

### Irony

Irony is the principle way narrators employ satire.<sup>34</sup> By using irony, which is the most sophisticated linguistic device for imparting *double entendre* and even paradoxical meaning to ordinary words, the satirist stimulates his audience to share his or her sharp criticism. Irony as a verbal and literary means (with a variety of artistic devices, such as puns and wordplays) is also employed in other genres, especially comedy. But whereas in comedy it arouses laughter and fun, in satire irony evokes disdain and contempt.

In the most basic sense, irony is a figure of speech in which (1) the intended meaning is the opposite of that which is stated, e.g., referring to a jalopy as a priceless car, or (2) an event or statement occurs or is used in a way that is just the opposite of what would be expected, e.g. a pastor has nothing to say in a sermon.<sup>35</sup> The basis of

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<sup>32</sup> “Genre in Jonah: The Effects of Parody in the Book of Jonah,” in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III*, editors W.W. Hallo, Bruce Jones and Gerald Mattingly (Lewiston/Queensland/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 257-281. Menippean satire is a combination of prose and verse, focused on a philosophical theme but dealing with it comically and parodying earlier works.

<sup>33</sup> As noted in “Satire and Symbolism in the Song of Jonah,” 228.

<sup>34</sup> The relationship between satire and irony is clarified by Norbert Frye in his book *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). Frye observes that satire is militant irony. Furthering the relationship between satire and irony he writes: “Irony is consistent both with complete realism of content and with the suppression of attitude on the part of the author. Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience” (224).

<sup>35</sup> Alonso Schökel writes, “Classical irony is of two basic types: rhetorical irony, which consists in saying the opposite of what one intends, but allowing this to be understood; and dramatic irony which consists in making a character say something which he does not understand or the implications of which he has not grasped” (*A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*: [Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 1988], 157). Wilfred G. E. Watson, terms these two types “verbal” and “situational” irony respectively (*Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Technique* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984]: 308).

irony is a perception of incongruity and it is normally used in literature as a vehicle for criticism. Irony serves to point out inconsistencies in a situation between what is and what ought to be. In this sense it is closely related to and used in satire.

The work of Edwin Good demonstrates how irony is used in the narrative of Jonah to satirize him.<sup>36</sup> Put in narrative form, the ironies in Jonah stack up like this. Commanded to go (1:2), Jonah flees (1:3). With everyone else scurrying and praying to save the swamping ship, Jonah sleeps (1:5). Commanded to pray by the captain, Jonah rolls over and snores on (1:6). Asked by the sailors his land and occupation, the prophet who had sought to escape God's domain on the high seas chants a confession of faith in Yahweh "who has made the sea and the dry land" (1:9). Jonah hits the water, and the sea calms instantly (1:15). Jonah arrives in Nineveh, mounts the first available street corner soap box, and proclaims the city's impending doom – not even giving the people a fair break by introducing the oracle with a "thus says Yahweh" (3:4). The lone voice becomes a booming command rattling the rafters of Nineveh, making the king come down from the throne, plunging the city into the widest ranging sackcloth-and-ashes conversion ever heard of in the ancient Near East, including even the animals (3:5-9). The king commands "no food, no water – everyone cry out to God with gusto." Think of the racket unwatered and unfed animals – and kids – can make! So Yahweh's anger cools down (3:10) – and then Jonah's anger heats up (4:1). As he had lectured the sailors about fear of the Creator God (1:9), he now proceeds to lecture Yahweh that he is simply too full of love for his own good (4:2) because it makes him come across as a wishy-washy capricious Oriental monarch. When a city deserves zapping – zap it! Yahweh asks whether it's proper for Jonah to be so hot and angry (4:4) and then proceeds to heat things up further – bringing on worm, sun, and sirocco (4:6-8). Now Jonah is hot over the loss of his qiqayon plant – hot enough to die (4:8), again (cf. 4:3). "Look here," asks God, "you pity plants, shall I not pity people and even their pets?" (4:10-11).

But can this pervasive use of irony legitimately lead us to conclude that the narrator intends to use it to satirize Jonah? And how can we justify the assertion that Elijah is the backdrop for much of this irony? A brief discussion on intertextuality in the narrative of Jonah will help us answer these questions; it will also bridge the gap between Elijah and Jonah, thus enabling us to have "ears to hear" the symphony of satire.

### **Intertextuality in Jonah**

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<sup>36</sup> *Irony in the Old Testament*, 41-50. See also John A. Miles, "Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody."

We may invoke Michael Fishbane's term of "inner-biblical interpretation"<sup>37</sup> to refer to the method the narrator of Jonah uses as he compares the reluctant prophet from Gath-Hepher with Elijah the Tishbite. Fishbane sees the phenomena as proto-midrashic, giving aggadic and halakhic re-workings of biblical texts, drawing on already extant tradition as on a living language.<sup>38</sup> But what are the signs in Jonah that indicate the Elijah cycle is a foil for the prodigal prophet? How can we tell that there is a re-working of Elijah that falls under the category of inner-biblical interpretation?

Before we are able to answer these questions we must investigate whether or not the narrator of Jonah reworks other Old Testament texts.<sup>39</sup> The interpretive strategy is as follows: if there are clear signs of inner-biblical interpretation in Jonah – apart from Elijah – then it is safer to argue that the prophet is satirized by means of the narrator's intertextual comparison between Jonah and Elijah.

An exhaustive list of the inner-biblical links between Jonah and earlier Old Testament texts is not the goal here; it is rather to discuss a few representative connections that indicate the narrator of Jonah is willing and able to use prior texts and re-work them for his purposes. The foremost example, therefore, of inner-biblical interpretation in Jonah is the narrator's reuse of Exodus 34:6-7<sup>40</sup> in Jonah 4:2. Exodus 34:6-7 states that Yahweh is,

A merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in loyal love and truth. Keeping loyal love to thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; surely he will not hold guiltless, visiting iniquity of fathers upon children and upon their children up to the third and fourth generations.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 2. Earlier Gerhard von Rad called a similar feature of Old Testament texts *Vergegenwärtigung* or "the fresh presentation," "updating," or "reactualization." von Rad's approach and terminology is exemplified throughout his *Old Testament Theology*, volumes 1 & 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 1965).

<sup>38</sup> For example, Jer. 3:1-5 is a rhetorical-metaphorical re-application of the divorce regulations in Deut. 24:1-4; the seventy weeks of years in Daniel 9:4 are an eschatological reinterpretation of the seventy years of exile in Jer. 29:10 (cf. Jer. 25:11-12).

<sup>39</sup> The case for intertextuality in the book of Jonah (though not in that idiom) was first made by A. Feuillet in "Les sources du livre de Jonas," *Revue Biblique* 54 (1947), 161-86. For a more comprehensive treatment of intertextual ties between Jonah and other Old Testament texts, see J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Beitrdge Zur Biblischen Exegese und Theologie; Bem: Herbert Lang, 1976) 65-84 and U. Simon, *Jonah: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation/Commentary* (The JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999) xxxvi-xxxix.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Robert Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *VT* 13: 34-51.

<sup>41</sup> All translations are the author's.

The narrator in Jonah 4:2 revises these verses from Exodus in several ways and in doing so presents a softer side of Yahweh. For example, he refers to Yahweh's "loyal love" (ds,x), but eliminates reference to Yahweh's "truth." He adds a reference to Yahweh's changing his mind concerning evil but drops out "surely he will not hold guiltless, visiting iniquity ...." These changes in Jonah emphasize "loyal love" while eliminating "truth" and "punishment."

Another example demonstrating that the narrator of Jonah employs earlier texts – while also subtly changing them – is his use of the Noah cycle.<sup>42</sup> In a broader stroke Eric Hesse and Isaac Kikawada believe that there are numerous connections between Jonah and Genesis 1-11,<sup>43</sup> but what follows is a representative list of phrases, characters, and images from Genesis 5:28-10:32 that find resonance within the narrative of Jonah. First, "one hundred twenty years" (Gen 6:3) – this is the length of time allotted by Yahweh to human life; it is also how many thousands of people are in Nineveh at the narrative's end (4:11). Second, "the evil of humankind" (Gen 6:5) – this is what Yahweh observes on the face of the earth; it is also what has come to his attention with respect to the Ninevites in Jonah 1:2, "for their evil has come up before me"). Third, Yahweh changes his mind (Gen 6:6) concerning his very good creation (Gen. 1:31) and wants to destroy it. Yahweh's change of mind is what the Ninevites bank on in Jonah 3:9– "who knows, God may turn and change his mind ...". This is exactly what God does in 3:10; in 4:2 Jonah states that it is Yahweh's nature to do this. The fourth connection between Noah and Jonah is the phrase "... people together with animals" (Gen 6:7). This phrase – or something very similar to it – occurs throughout the Noah narrative (e.g. Gen. 7:23); the book of Jonah is remarkable for its very deliberate inclusion of animals along with people, both in how the Ninevites and their animals repent (3:7-9) and in how God presents his final question to Jonah (4:10-11).<sup>44</sup> Fifth, violence (smx – Gen 6:11) is the

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<sup>42</sup> Tim Koch articulates the most sustained connection between Noah and Jonah. (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss. Boston University, 2003). Leslie Allen notes this connection between Noah and Jonah, but only in passing (*Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 176). H.M. Orlinsky comments on the connections between the words "evil" and "violence" in both the Noah narrative and the book of Jonah ("Nationalism-Universalism and Internationalism in Ancient Israel" in H.T. Frank and W.L. Reed [eds.], *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honour of H.G. May* [New York, 1970], 206-236, 228).

<sup>43</sup> Hesse and Kikawada note the close ties between these narratives in their article, "Jonah and Genesis 11-1." *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 10 (1984), 3-14. As the title indicates they argue that the underlying narrative progression of Jonah is the exact reverse of the topical progression of the Primeval History. When discussing the reason for the many allusions from Gen. 1-11 in Jonah, these authors arrive at the following conclusion: "This is a radical reinterpretation of the Mosaic covenant. The framework of the people to whom the covenant applies has been expanded to cover the Israelites and the Ninevites alike. This implies that the covenant binds all of humanity, and, for that matter, even the cattle" (16).

<sup>44</sup> Rosemary Nixon writes: "In the story of Noah's ark, all species of animals shared

reason given for God's decision to destroy the earth and its inhabitants by means of the Flood; it is also the sin that the Ninevites recognize as their own, and repent of (3:8). Sixth, "forty days and forty nights" (Gen 7:4) is the period of time that the rains last, destroying all human and animal life that is not with Noah in the ark. Similarly, this is the amount of time from the moment of Jonah's prophecy until Nineveh is to be "turned upside-down" (3:4). This association of "forty days" as a period of testing with the result of a new beginning is a link to these two stories.<sup>45</sup> The seventh connection is the phrase "and God made a wind blow" (Gen 8:1). Through the Flood narrative Yahweh actively controls individual winds for specific purposes; for example in Gen. 8:1 he manages the wind to cause the flood waters to subside. In Jonah, Yahweh hurls a wind into the sea to create a storm (1:4) and, later, sends a searing wind from the east that adds to Jonah's misery (4:8). Eighth, the statement "... nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done" (Gen 8:21) is the eternal pledge that Yahweh makes to Noah, his family, and to all living creatures after the Flood. This pledge is, to a great extent, the motivation behind Jonah's refusal to be Yahweh's prophet to Nineveh as he knows that this God has voluntarily given up total destruction (at least by Flood) as a means for dealing with the habitually violent (4:2). The final example of intertextual echoes from Noah to Jonah is Yahweh's promise, "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature ... my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh" (Gen. 9:9a, 10a). In this covenant Yahweh specifically includes not only humankind but also animals, domestic and wild. This means that the umbrella of this covenant is extended to non-Israelite humans (the Ninevites) as well as their animals, whose donning of sackcloth and bleating perhaps serve to remind Yahweh of this promise (3:7-9).

When the narrator of Jonah uses Exodus 34:6-7 and the Noah cycle, he indicates his ability – and even propensity – to rework earlier Old Testament themes and ideas. He does this – not because of his deficiency in narrative skill, still less as an act of plagiarism

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with humanity in both the calamity of the flood and the eventual deliverance. The story tells how, in the ark, they were miraculously preserved together and together shared a new beginning" (*The Message of Jonah, Presence in the Storm* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press], 2003, 167). While significant differences are indicated in Gen. 1:24-31, these verses speak of the animals sharing the same day of creation with humankind. There is thus a close relationship between these two orders of creation and it is this mutual interdependence that underlies the inclusion of animals at Nineveh in Jonah chapter 3.

<sup>45</sup> The period of "forty days" occurs in other texts; for example, it is the time it takes to embalm Joseph (Genesis 50:3); the amount of time Moses spends on top of Sinai with God (Exodus 24:18); how long the scouts spy out the Promised Land (Numbers 13:25); the number of days that Goliath taunts Israel (1 Samuel 17:16); and the period of time that Ezekiel is instructed to lie on his right side, signaling the number of years that Judah is to be punished (Ezekiel 4:6). Of these, only the last reference connects forty days with punishment or destruction in any way.

– but in order to contrast the past with the current setting of Jonah. This literary device is a sort of *déjà vu* technique that invites us to note the similarity, make comparisons and/or contrasts, and draw thematic and theological correlations between the narratives.<sup>46</sup>

It follows, therefore, that to postulate connections between Elijah and Jonah is not as far of a stretch as we might have first imagined, yet as we proceed these comments by Richard Schultz are helpful:

In seeking significant verbal parallels, one should look for *verbal and syntactical correspondence* that goes beyond one key or uncommon term or even a series of commonly occurring terms, also evaluating whether the expression is simply formulaic or idiomatic. Thus one also should look for indications of *contextual awareness*, including *interpretive re-use*, which indicates verbal *dependence* which is conscious and purposeful, even though one may not be able to determine the direction of borrowing with any certainty. If such dependence can be posited, one's knowledge of the *quoted* text will facilitate the proper interpretation of the *quoting* text.<sup>47</sup>

Schultz argues for a reasoned, critical assessment of legitimate intertexts. His focus upon the interpretive re-use is of great import as it takes us beyond simply noting the appearance of an intertext to the issue of elucidating how the borrowed material is transformed and so also affects the interpretation of the new context into which it is placed.

### Comparisons between Elijah and Jonah

The conductor of this symphony has all of his pieces in place. The genre is satire, the satire is signaled by irony, and we know that he has a propensity to rework earlier Old Testament narratives. Let's listen now as Jonah faces this music.

The narrator begins in 1:1 by placing Jonah in the eighth century, possibly as a contemporary of Amos and Hosea; even the Rabbis are unanimous in identifying Jonah with the prophet Jonah mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25.<sup>48</sup> With this connection to 2 Kings

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Alter discusses this literary phenomenon in *Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 47-62.

<sup>47</sup> “The Ties That Bind: Intertextuality, the Identification of Verbal Parallels, and Reading Strategies in the Book of the Twelve” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve*. (BZAW 325). (ed. Reditt, Paul L. and Aaron Scharf; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 32 (emphasis his).

<sup>48</sup> According to rabbinic tradition, Jonah was the very child that Elisha restored to life. Jerusalem Talmud, *Sukkah*, 5.1 (55a); *Pirkei DiRabbi Elezer*, ch. 33. In 2 Kings 4 the woman of Shunem regularly fed Elisha when he passed her way and provided a place for him to rest. She was old and had no son. In gratitude, Elisha prophesied that that she would bear a son. The prophecy came true. When the boy grew up, he got a severe headache and died. Elisha, however, restored him to life. This unnamed son was,

14:25<sup>49</sup> Jonah appears as the last in the sequence of prophets in the Northern Kingdom; Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29-39; 14:1-18), Jehu (1 Kings 16:7-12), some unnamed prophets (1 Kings 20:13-22, 28), Micaiah ben Imlah (1 Kings 22) and Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 13).

Because Jonah comes in the sequence after Elijah and Elisha many phrases from its narrative find their closest biblical parallels in these narratives about the two great prophets from the North. An account involving a great fish (2:1) as well as a small worm (4:7) would not have been out of place in the Elijah/Elisha cycle. These narratives in Kings recount encounters between prophets and ravens (1 Kings 17:4-6) and bears (2 Kings 2:23-25). The narrative of Jonah could have easily been placed after the reference to Jonah son of Amittai in 2 Kings 14:25 and not interrupt the narrative flow of 2 Kings to any great degree. In this way we are invited to compare and contrast Jonah with Northern prophets, especially with Elijah.

In another way, the “and it came to pass” in Jonah 1:1 also links the narrative with similar events that involve creation in 1 and 2 Kings, a section of the Old Testament that contains a high concentration of prophetic miracle stories. Even a representative list is impressive. Ravens bring food (1 Kings 17:1-8); bread and oil multiply (1 Kings 17:9-16); fire and rain appear (1 Kings 18); wind, an earthquake, and fire are present (1 Kings 19:11-12); a lion kills a man (1 Kings 20:35-36); fire comes down (2 Kings 1:10, 12); the Jordan is parted, a whirlwind carries Elijah to heaven (2 Kings 2:1-14); water is purified (2 Kings 2:19-22); bears kill young boys (2 Kings 2:23-24); oil is multiplied (2 Kings 4:1-7); stew is purified (2 Kings 4:38-41); bread is multiplied (2 Kings 4:42-44); and an ox-head floats (2 Kings 6:1-7).

The Jonah narrative, with its miraculous events involving the storm, the great fish, the qiqayon plant, the worm and the scorching east wind fit well within 1 and 2 Kings with their numerous stories that describe Yahweh as one who controls creation.

To review up to this point, Jonah and Elijah are both from the Northern Kingdom, their ministries involve animals and both experience the miraculous intervention of Yahweh. If we add to this list the fact that the phrase in Jonah 1:1 “now the word of Yahweh came” also introduces Elijah in 1 Kings 17:2, 8; 21:17, 28 then we are subtly<sup>50</sup>

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according to the rabbis, Jonah. For the discussion cf. Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness*, 14-18.

<sup>49</sup> When Hebrew narrative wants to begin a completely new story-line, it often begins with a noun, followed by a verb (e.g. Gen. 3:1; Ex. 3:1; 2 Kings 5:1). The use of “and it happened” in Jonah 1:1 then, signals that the narrative of Jonah begins in another place. This place is 2 Kings 14:23-27. The account in 2 Kings 14 places Jonah in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. as a court-prophet of the Israelite king Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.). 2 Kings 14:25 states: “He [Jeroboam II] restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath (i.e. Aram/Syria) as far as the Sea of the Arabah (i.e. the Gulf of Aqabah), according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which he spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.”

<sup>50</sup> Whether they employ satire and irony or not, Old Testament narratives are generally reticent to make their points directly, preferring to do so more subtlety (Cf., e.g.

led to this conclusion; one of the goals of the Jonah narrative is to compare the prophet from Gath-hepher with Elijah.

More specific – and indeed more satirical – connections between Jonah and Elijah begin in Jonah 1:2 where Yahweh calls Jonah to, “arise, go” to Nineveh. This call to go to a foreign land is paralleled only in 1 Kings 17:9 where Yahweh commands Elijah also to “arise, go to Zarephath which is in Sidon.”

Usually Yahweh’s word is the perfect performative, where to speak is to create.<sup>51</sup> The God who says “Let there be light” and “it was so” (Gen. 1:3), commands Elijah to “Arise go to Zarapheth” (1 Kings 17:9) and Elijah “arises and goes,” (1 Kings 17:10). Following this normal biblical pattern we expect the Jonah narrative to continue, “So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh.” But, instead, Jonah says nothing to Yahweh and rises to flee. It’s as though outside his door Jonah hangs a large sign with the words, “Do Not Disturb!” Jonah is certainly no Elijah!

In Jonah 1:3 the prophet flees from the presence of Yahweh. In a prophetic context the phrase “from the presence of Yahweh” occurs primarily in connection with Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 18:15) and Elisha (2 Kings 3:14, 5:16). The Deuteronomistic historian uses this phrase to identify these prophets as Yahweh’s servants who hear his word and execute his commands. Closely linked with this is the prophet standing in Yahweh’s heavenly council to perceive the divine word. Though Yahweh’s presence is not explicitly mentioned in the expression of this concept, it would certainly seem to be implicit (cf. Jer. 23:18, 22; 1 Kings 22:19). This means that whereas Elijah faithfully stands in the presence of Yahweh and is obedient to his bidding, Jonah seeks to escape this presence – so much so that for emphasis. the phrase is used twice in 1:3. This repetition is necessary in order to build the following chiasmus:

- A. But Jonah arose to flee toward Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh
- B. he went down to Joppa

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J. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in the Literary Techniques of the Book of Jonah* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983] and Phillis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context and Method in the Book of Jonah* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994]). In a close-knit culture like ancient Israel, where there was a much higher degree of agreement between its members about religion and ethics than there is post-modern secularized and pluralist societies, there was correspondingly less reason to spell out authorial norms and values, because the reader/hearer was very likely to share them. To this end, Old Testament narratives employ a wide array of more indirect means in developing characterizations. Mention of physical details, for instance, is seldom if ever random. If we read that Esau is hairy (Gen. 25:25), Ehud is left-handed (Jud. 3:15), Eglon is fat (Jud. 3:17) and Eli is portly and dim-sighted (1 Sam. 3:18), we should anticipate (though not insist) that such details in some way serve the characterization or the action of the narrative. An example of Hebraic subtlety in Jonah is that the prophet’s name in Hebrew means “dove.” This is a subtle suggestion already in 1:1 that we are reading about someone who will be unable to make up his mind (cf. Hos. 7:11).

<sup>51</sup> What follows is from Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives*, 244.

- C. and found a ship
- D. going to Tarshish
- C.' he bought the ship
- B.' and boarded it
- A.' to go with them toward Tarshish away from the presence of Yahweh

What the words proclaim the structure subverts. Jonah is trapped, with no way out! The irony is that the presence of Yahweh surrounds Jonah, even in his flight. This irony signals satire; Jonah's actions are foolish, indeed!

It is important to note, however, that not all of the satirical irony in the narrative uses Elijah as its foil. One example will suffice. Irony that leads to a satirical understanding of Jonah is also located in the phrase "a ship going to Tarshish" (Jonah 1:3). Ships going to Tarshish are well-known in the Old Testament. First Kings 22:2 and 2 Chron. 20:35-37 report how Jehoshaphat made "ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold; but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber." Psalm 48 praises the God who "by the east wind did shatter the ships of Tarshish" (v. 8) and this is done in such a way as to indicate that the tradition is well known. In Isaiah 23:1, 14 the ships of Tarshish are exhorted to "howl because their stronghold has been devastated." Finally, in Ezek. 27:25-26 Tarshish ships "fall into the heart of the sea."

Taking these texts together it appears as though Tarshish ships function like a "banana-skin" tradition. A "ship going to Tarshish" culturally translates as "the Titanic going out on her maiden voyage."<sup>52</sup> The analogy is almost exact, for Tarshish ships are proud, noble structures (cf. Isa. 2:16 as a symbol of everything that is "high and lifted up" against Yahweh), carrying precious cargoes, and they are generically programmed to be "shattered by the east wind" and to promptly "sink into the heart of the sea." This means that at the outset of his scheming to flee from Yahweh, Jonah is doomed to fail!

Jonah appears again as an "anti-Elijah" when we consider that in 1 Kings 19 Elijah runs – not because he begrudges Yahweh's gracious characteristics, as does Jonah (cf. 4:2) – but because he is on Jezebel's hit list. At this point Yahweh's question to the defeated Elijah is, "What are you doing here?" (1 Kings 19:9). This is very close to the captain's anxious cry in Jonah 1:6, "What are you doing in a deep sleep?" Jonah's "deep sleep"<sup>53</sup> goes far beyond the exhausted sleep of Elijah when he is on the run from Jezebel

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<sup>52</sup> The phrases "banana-skin tradition" and "the Titanic going out on her maiden voyage" are from Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlife*, 250.

<sup>53</sup> The niph'al of *radam* generally describes a trance-like state or deep sleep, such as that experienced by Daniel when he had his visions of the end time interpreted to him by angelic figures (Dan. 8:8, 18; 10:9). Used only eleven times in the Old Testament, (Gen. 2:21; 15:12; Jud. 4:21; 1 Sam. 26:12; Isa. 29:10; Prov. 10:5, 19:15; Job 4:13, 33:15; Dan. 8:18, 10:9.) the term can also describe deep sleep in general (1 Sam. 26:12; Prov. 19:15; Is. 29:10). The narrative contexts in which *radam* is used indicate that several ideas cluster around it. It is the sleep that falls upon Adam when Eve is created (Gen. 2:21) – so it is a sleep that lies beyond the pain threshold. It is the sleep that falls upon Abra[ha]m (Gen. 15:12) when a promise about the future is given to him. It is the stage of sleep just prior to death that comes to Sisera at the hands of Jael (Jud. 4:21). And it is

(cf. 1 Kings 19:5 and the words ! “and he laid down and slept.” All of the special care with which Yahweh takes care of Elijah – a plant to shade him (1 Kings 19:4]), angels to accompany him (1 Kings 19:5) and ravens to feed him (1 Kings 19:6) – find connections in Jonah, in even more miraculous forms. The irony is that Elijah’s death wish comes after his success on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18 which prompts the death threat of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2). On the other hand Jonah’s exhaustion comes after fleeing from the presence of Yahweh – the very presence Elijah is running toward (1 Kings 19:8)! These elements magnify the differences between these two prophets, and further diminish the stature of Jonah.

But a closer look at Elijah’s death wish demonstrates further satire when it is compared with Jonah 4:3 where this pouting prophet asks Yahweh to take his life. David Daube analyzes every instance of a wish for death or act of suicide/killing in the Old Testament. Of interest here that he designates the requests made by Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah as the tradition of “the weary prophet.”<sup>54</sup> But Jeremiah’s so-called request for death is in reality a wistful (and futile) yearning that he should never have been born (Jer. 20:14-18) and not a desire that his life come to an end. Consequently, it should be categorized with Job 3:2-7 as a curse of life rather than as a request for death. This leaves the requests of Moses, Elijah and Jonah in a group for consideration.<sup>55</sup>

In 1 Kings 19, in his flight from Jezebel, Elijah comes to Horeb and begs Yahweh to kill him (v. 4). Elijah’s motivation appears to be twofold: he is a failure as a prophet and he is the only true follower of Yahweh left. Not only does Elijah overlook Obadiah and the hundred Yahwistic prophets still in hiding (1 Kings 18:3-4), but also that there are

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the deep sleep that falls upon Saul and his encampment when David steals his spear and jug of water (1 Sam. 26:12). From this cluster of texts two broad meanings arise. The verb *radam* denotes the deep sleep associated with death and a sleep that takes place when a revelation from Yahweh is given. The former meaning is in Prov. 10:5; 19:15; Ps. 76:7. The latter definition is in Job 4:12; 33:15; Dan. 8:18; 10:9. In Isa. 29:10 the prophet uses the paradox of including both ideas by proclaiming that a deep sleep will fall upon the false prophets so that they can no longer prophecy. Isaiah says: “For Yahweh brought over you a spirit of deep sleep (*radam*); he has sealed your eyes, O prophets; and he covered your heads, O seers.”

<sup>54</sup> “Death as a Release in the Bible,” *NovT* 5 (1962): 82-104.

<sup>55</sup> In Numbers 11, in the course of the constant complaining of the Israelites, Moses in exasperation prays for death. He places the responsibility for his frustration on the people, but also upon Yahweh. It is after Moses hears the weeping of the people and the anger of Yahweh being kindled, that he becomes displeased (v. 10). Moses also makes it clear that his predicament is due to Yahweh’s less than compassionate dealings with him (v. 11) and the continuance of his misery is in part due to Yahweh’s actions (v. 15). Put this way, it is clear that Moses is not only brought to despair by the murmuring of the Israelites, he is equally frustrated at the anger and vengeance of Yahweh which is continually being unleashed upon the people (v. 1). Yahweh’s response is to anoint seventy assistants to Moses to ease the burden of dealing with the people (vv. 16-17).

7,000 people left in Israel who have not worshipped Baal (1 Kings 19:18). In response, Yahweh commissions Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor (v. 15).

In contrast, in 4:3 with the words “Yahweh, take my life from me” Jonah strikes a noble pose by echoing the prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4 where he says, “Yahweh, take my life.” But instead of continuing, “for I am no better than my fathers.” Jonah adapts Elijah’s words to, “for my death is better than life.” This satire of Jonah is based upon the fact that Elijah, wearied with his endless struggle with Baalism, is convinced that he will not succeed where his fathers had failed. He feels that it is time to join them in death. On the other hand, Jonah is disappointed with the very success of his mission! Jonah has Elijah’s depression without Elijah’s excuse!

The immediate divine response to both requests for death made by Moses and Elijah is a diminishment in prophetic authority. Moses’ portion of his divine authority is divided among the seventy elders (Num. 11:16-17). Elijah’s office as prophet is shared with Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). The most significant shared feature is the fact that these entreaties for death are denied by Yahweh. Jonah’s requests for death in 4:3, 8, therefore, hint at an imminent reduction in Jonah’s authority and status vis-à-vis Yahweh’s prophet.

Like Elijah before him, who sits under a broom tree and prays to die at a time of crisis (1 Kings 19:4), later in chapter four Jonah experiences a similar loss of confidence under his qiqayon plant.<sup>56</sup> Also like Elijah who experiences a revelation of Yahweh on Mt. Horeb, Jonah will also receive a revelation in 4:10-11.

Only two other prophets ever explicitly receive Yahweh’s word outside the boundaries of the Promised Land: Elijah at Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:8-9, 15-18), and Ezekiel by the River Chebar in Babylon (Ezek. 1:3). When Yahweh extends the revelation of his word to Jonah in this “extra-terrestrial” way, the prophet is unmoved by this act of kindness. Jonah hears only that his anger has not been an appropriate response.

On the other hand, Elijah travels to Horeb and has his dramatic encounter with Yahweh who speaks to him from the “soft murmuring sound” (or “still, small voice,” 1 Kings 19:12). The contrast couldn’t be any more definite – Elijah at Horeb, the ancestral locale of revelation, speaking as a faithful emissary with Yahweh and Jonah petulantly bickering with God about his personal discomfort outside of the Promised Land.

In both 1 Kings 19 and Jonah 4 – by means of his creation – Yahweh attempts to edify his prophet. In Elijah’s case the prophet finally understands that Yahweh’s work will not be by wind, earthquake or fire (1 Kings 19:11-12). Rather, Yahweh will

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<sup>56</sup> How the plant is categorized botanically continues to perplex all Jonah commentators. Most identify it with the *ricinus*, the castor-oil tree, on the basis of Egyptian *kiki* and Talmudic Hebrew *qîq*. The LXX and Syriac versions seem to have thought of a bottle gourd, *Symmachus* and Jerome ivy. The options appear to fall into four categories, as noted by Bolin, *Freedom beyond Forgiveness*, 154. The identity of the plant is not important – it functions much like the plant in “Jack and the Beanstalk.” In both episodes the exact identity of the plant is immaterial; it is the function in their respective narratives that is the crucial fact on which to concentrate. The great fish (Jonah 2:1) functions in much the same way; what its botanical classification is not important in the narrative.

accomplish his great purposes through a “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12), that is to say, through the political and prophetic affairs of Israel and Aram (1 Kings 19:15-18). In Jonah’s case – after everything Yahweh has done to him and for him by means of a fish, his “second chance” (cf. 3:1) and the qiqayon plant – his lack of responsiveness is shocking.

The intertexts we have explored between the Elijah and Jonah invite a comparison of the two, and it is thus. If Elijah is the most daring, courageous, victorious Yahwistic prophet in Israel’s history (cf. e.g., Malachi 3:23) – indeed one of the major fulfillments of “a prophet like me [Moses]” (Deut. 18:15) – then Jonah is certainly the antithesis of this mighty hero of old. When compared to Elijah, the narrative of Jonah is a well orchestrated symphony of satire.

Behind Jonah stands a group of people who are much like the prodigal pompous, prideful and pretentious prophet, just as surely as the Pharisees stand behind the Elder Brother of Luke 15:11-32 and the expert in the law stands behind the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The possibilities of this group are limited to the period within which the narrator can be supposed to have lived, but this is a very difficult date to ascertain.<sup>57</sup> Yet however wide may be the possible applications of his story, the narrator must have had in mind some definite group of his own day. In 2 Kings 14:25 Jonah appears as a prophet of national conquest and glory, like the four hundred court prophets

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<sup>57</sup> Jonah cannot have been written any later than the third century B.C., as it is mentioned in Ben Sira (49:10) and possibly cited in Tobit 14:4, 8. The upper limit is the identity of “Jonah ben Amittai” (1:1) with the prophet of the same name from Gath-Hepher, who according to 2 Kings 14:25 prophesied to Jeroboam II (c. 786-746 B.C.) the extension of his kingdom to Davidic size. Given the great variety in linguistic interpretations over the Hebrew used in Jonah, it is not surprising that dates for the narrative’s writing range over a span of six centuries. G.M. Landes evaluates the linguistic debate in Jonah and concludes that linguistics does not offer a sure guide for deciding when the narrative was composed; in fact, he demonstrates that in some cases the narrator writes good pre-exilic Hebrew (“Linguistic Criteria and the Date of the Book of Jonah,” *Eretz Israel*, vol. 16 [1982], Orlinsky Volume: 147-70). Stuart has the highest date at c. 760 (*Hosea-Jonah*, xliii) while P. Haupt, “Jonah’s Whale,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 46 (1907): 151-64., 159, gives the lowest date of c. 100. Sasson opts not to assign a date (*Jonah*, 26-28). Most date the writing of the narrative in the late fifth or early fourth century B.C., since, they say, the implied universalism best accords with a postexilic date and may be understood as a protest against a xenophobic mood in the somewhat self-righteous reforming zeal of those years (as noted by Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 39). Several criticisms, however, have been raised against this view. The primary observation is that there is no substantial historical evidence (apart from a highly irregular reading of Ezra-Nehemiah which overemphasizes putative ethnic conflicts) to substantiate any Israelite particularism in the post-exilic era (cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 2 [San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1962], 292 and Sasson, *Jonah*, 26). Second, the reference to Jonah in 2 Kings 14:25 does not portray him as a zealous Israelite nationalist, as commentators who hold for the anti-exclusivist approach claim.

of Ahab (2 Kings 22:6, 14-15). Jonah may also represent the nationalistic, optimistic prophets of his day. However we conceive of the group under critique, Brevard Childs is correct when he writes of Jonah: “It serves as a critical prophetic judgment on Israel in line with the rest of the prophetic witness of the Old Testament.”<sup>58</sup>

The satirical tone of the narrative is therefore not accidental or incidental; it is rather the very essence of the narrator’s intention. The function of the final question in the narrative (4:10-11) then is to challenge the attitude of this group among the narrator’s contemporaries, as well as those of all times and all places, who fail to walk in the footsteps of mighty Elijah and instead exhibit the characteristics of Jonah.

### Conclusions

In the process of his literary creation, the narrator of Jonah finds himself within the dialectic between the necessity to use established forms – in this case the Elijah cycle – with his new creation, the story of Jonah. By mixing the old with the new he is able to communicate coherently as he remakes the Elijah narrative for his own new purposes.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Jemielity demonstrates that both satire and Old Testament prophecy tend borrow, mix and ironically invert earlier texts. He writes:

Critical analyses of satire and prophecy recurrently point to the mixture of speech forms as a major feature of both, a fertile field for the appearance of all sorts of forms, each a form of forms using and subverting the shape of language familiar from other discourse and from other walks of life.<sup>60</sup>

This use and subversion of familiar language is a major characteristic in the narrative of Jonah,<sup>61</sup> and – as we have seen – includes several allusions to Elijah that satirize the prophet from Gath-Hepher.

Sherwood has surveyed the commentators and put together the following descriptions for Jonah.<sup>62</sup> Jonah is “self-centered, lazy hypocritical and altogether inferior

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<sup>58</sup> *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 426.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Robert Altar, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 62 and Richard Clifford (*Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* [New York: Paulist, 1984], 8).

<sup>60</sup> *Satire in the Hebrew Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 58-59.

<sup>61</sup> On the mixing of forms in satire, see L. Guilhamet, *Satire and the Transformation of Genre* (University of Pennsylvania, 1987). He writes: “This appropriation of other forms is unique to satire and is one of its chief identifying characteristics” (Ibid., 13, 16; cf. 165).

<sup>62</sup> *A Text and Its Afterlife*, 65. Sherwood cites the following; Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs to YHWH,” 70, 74; A. Loch, *La religion Disraeli* (1931), 196, cited in C. A. Keller, “Jonas Le Portrait d’un prophete, *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965), 329-40, 329; Von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, trans. J.H. Marks; (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 76; M.

to the wonderful pagans around him” as well as a “good-for-nothing.” Jonah is “revêche et tête” (cantankerous and bad-tempered), “mulish,” “sinister,” and a “bigot” who is “eyeless with hate.” He is the embodiment of “Fleischliche Gesinnung und niedrige Rachsucht” (carnal mentality and base vindictiveness). Jonah is a mutant dove who is less like a dove than a hawk who is “self-centered, self-righteous, and self-willed.” He is a “psychological and religious monster,” the incarnation of all that the author of this book means to reject. We see all of this – and more – when we understand how Jonah is portrayed as the exact opposite of Elijah.

But as the narrator of Jonah satirizes the prophet in order to expose some departure from the truth in the audience to which he addresses his message, his is *constructive* criticism. That is to say, the narrator doesn’t oppose his audience in a manner typical of prophetic judgment speech in which the temple, nation, king, cult are promised certain death (e.g. Is. 5:1-7; Amos 5:18-27; Jer. 7, 26). What he does oppose are Israelites after the order of Jonah who try very hard to limit the grace of Yahweh. These people are those who, when the word is grudgingly given, and the deliverance is affected, claim that this is a “great evil” (4:1). They would rather die than live if such events can occur (4:3, 8). They are disobedient and hypocritical Hebrews, angered by Yahweh’s will to save. They claim to affirm Yahweh’s power to do so (2:10), having witnessed it in their own life.

The narrative attacks this kind of narrow-mindedness that limits the grace of God as the sole possession of the elect and deserving. This means that the narrator challenges his audience to aspire – not to the likes of Jonah – but to that of Mr. Prophecy himself, Elijah whose ministry was, in part, marked by compassion and concern for others beyond the borders of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 17:7-24; Luke 4:24-26).

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Burrows, “The Literary Character of the Book of Jonah,” 86; A. and P.E. Lacocque, *Jonah: A Psycho-Religious Approach to the Prophet* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 31; K. Kautzsch, *Biblishe Theologie des Alte Testament* (1876), 187; M. Burrows, “The Literary Character of the Book of Jonah,” 87; J. A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Jonah*. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1912), 64; von Rad, *God at Work*, 66. Compare von Rad’s comment with that of Allen, “What religious monster is that?” (*Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 229).