SWALLOWING JONAH:
STRATEGIES OF READING BIBLICAL NARRATIVES

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Biblical Narratives

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Biblical Narratives

Abstract

Interpreters of the book of Jonah understand the characterisation of Jonah, and hence the meaning of the book, in a variety of ways. These interpretive models may be categorised under seven headings: Jonah as Pinocchio, psychotic, Prometheus, fall-guy, patriot, prophet, and reluctant missionary. They reflect the spectrum of opinions regarding whether Jonah ultimately serves as a positive or negative example. How one decides this issue depends on the interpreter’s understanding of the larger group whom Jonah represents. In turn, this will largely determine what is perceived as the main message of the book. Thus the surface-level question driving this investigation is, how is the reader to understand the character of Jonah?

Many underlying epistemological and hermeneutical factors influence one’s response to such questions. These include the nature and locus of meaning, the possibility of communication, the properties of a text, the potential for narratives to convey values, the possibility of authors to communicate intentions, and the correlative possibility of readers to identify communicative intentions. The thesis advanced here is that narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives. Functional knowledge of these conventions, particularly those pertaining to setting, plot and characterisation, enables readers to identify more accurately the values espoused by biblical authors. Moreover, the characterisation of Jonah is clarified when the narrative is
read in this light, including which group he is meant to represent and whether he is portrayed positively or negatively.

The larger group Jonah represents includes those who presume a covenantal relationship with Yahweh based on illegitimate grounds. The narrative conventions reveal a negative portrayal of Jonah and the sins he represents: pride, hypocrisy, callousness toward others and small-mindedness before a sovereign God. Thus the book indicts those who presume upon God's compassion based on mere affiliation with a group.

The goal of this thesis is to set forth the value of knowing conventions of setting, plot and characterisation. Awareness of and attention to these factors hold the promise for more nuanced understanding both of Jonah as well as other narratives of the Hebrew Bible.
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The problem

‘How do you solve a problem like Maria? ...
She’s as flighty as a feather, unpredictable as weather,
She’s a darling, she’s a demon, she’s a lamb ...
She is gentle, she is mild, she’s a riddle, she’s a child,
She’s a headache, she’s an angel, she’s a girl’

These are among the opening lines to the Rogers and Hammerstein (1965) award-winning musical *The sound of music*. The writers introduce the lead female character by having a cadre of nuns offer a musical kaleidoscope of differing perspectives into their mercurial and enigmatic ‘sister,’ Maria. At the very outset the viewer is faced, together with the nuns, with an interpretive question: Is Maria basically a good person or a bad one? As the story unfolds, the full range of these widely divergent traits is exhibited in Maria’s character. Indeed, even the category of ‘goodness’ is implicitly called into question: her (unintentionally?) insouciant behavior toward the regulations of the convent becomes open and unrepentant noncompliance to the household rules of Captain von Trapp. Yet the audience is convinced that her irrepressibly buoyant confidence in herself and resilient zeal to bestow *joie de vivre* upon everyone within her orbit *vis-à-vis* the institutional rigidity of the church or the onerous, stifling habits of the Captain are much greater virtues than mundane conformity to protocol. In the end, the audience concludes that she is far more a darling than a headache, more angelic than demonic.

Determining the nature of the character of Jonah within the biblical narrative which bears his name is as perplexing for the reader as Maria’s character was for the nuns of *The sound of music*. His paradoxical, ironic and melodramatic behavior has elicited a multitude of disparate conclusions. Therefore there is a fundamental ‘readerly question’ *apropos* to the narrative: *Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy?* Is his own impetuous breaking of the rules meant to be a case
of endearing impishness as in the case of Maria (or Mary Poppins [Walsh 1964]—another Julie Andrews’ role, or Anne Shirley of *Anne of Green Gables* [Montgomery 1985], or the escapades of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn [Twain 1885])? Or is this a story of a man whose morality undergoes a metamorphic makeover akin to Ebenezer Scrooge (Dickens 1867)? Does he garner our respect, portraying the noble, indomitable human spirit up against impossible odds (such as Luke Skywalker of *Star wars* [Lucas 1977])? Or is this an outrageous display of a darker sort—an intractably malicious character like Sauron of Tolkien’s (1965) *The Lord of the rings* or Inspector Javert of Hugo’s (1950) *Les Misérables* or worse, a sinister and maleficent anti-hero set against God and all divine purposes? Unlike the case of *The sound of music*, the reading audience of the Jonah narrative has not reached anything approaching a consensus. How do you solve a problem like Jonah?

Here are a few proposals which serve to illustrate how various readers have taken the character of Jonah.

### 1.1(a) Pinocchio

The Jonah narrative has been perceived as the story of a prodigal son. For example, Gaebelein sees in chapter one a disobedient servant, who in chapter two realises his own futility and is brought to penitence, returning to God. Thus chastised, he then becomes a more understanding and obedient follower. The parallel with Luke 15 is explicit in Gaebelein’s (1970:91-93) comments.

There is a sense in which Jonah was an Old Testament prodigal.... When our souls, like Jonah's, faint within us, then we too remember the Lord.... Jonah, however, not only came to himself; he also went further and placed his finger upon the root of his difficulty... Jonah's idol was self-will.... What a lesson Jonah has learned! He knew at last who alone can give men salvation.
This sort of depiction, often encountered at the popular level both in children’s storybooks and from church pulpits, sees Jonah as an ungrateful and irresponsible son who foolishly abandons both his responsibilities and his father’s household in order to experience freedom and self-indulgent autonomy. While wandering away, he finally ‘comes to his senses,’ deciding to reestablish his familial ties by repenting and reuniting with his heavenly father. The chief lesson to be learned from Jonah’s character is the need to repent and return to obedient fellowship with God.

Though not necessarily employing the parallel with the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, there are others who take Jonah as fully repentant, at least by the end of the book. Stanton (1951:376) concludes that Jonah ‘is a changed man’ who becomes ‘no longer rebellious,’ finally eschewing his ‘former obstinacy’ by allowing(!) God to have the last word. Gevaryahu (1981:26) follows Kaufmann (1970:279-287) in viewing the book as a ‘morality tale’ which ‘is fundamentally a call to repentance,’ illustrated from the Elijah-like story of a prophet successfully remonstrated by God. In categories drawn more from psychology than biblical studies, Bull (1990:81-82) argues that ‘coming to oneself’ involves an epiphanic self-consciousness which leads to transformation, especially from addictive modes of thinking. Drawing upon the Jonah narrative, he identifies a felicitous moment of self-realisation which he describes in terminology (perhaps unwittingly) that reflects the parable of the Prodigal. Simon (1999:47) also sees Jonah as finally converted by the end of the book: ‘Jonah’s silence by no whit diminishes his complete recognition that the Lord is right.’

Barber and Strauss (1980:3-81) take this beneficent father and errant son motif one step further, drawing on the narrative of Jonah as a manual for wise parenting. They extract ‘nuggets of wisdom’ from God the Father’s patience in dealing with Jonah (see also Nowell 1986:15) as a
model for contemporary parents who need help in handling their own disobedient and wayward children.

In the Jonah-as-Pinocchio interpretation, Jonah ultimately comes around to God’s way of thinking, having successfully learned the lesson God is teaching in chapter four. Yet Jonah’s final repentance lies in the imagination of the reader rather than the biblical narrative. Where the narrative ends on a question, these interpreters ‘provide’ Jonah’s response for him (like the sailors who also try to rescue Jonah). The interpretation rests, quite literally, on an argument from silence: ‘the Book of Jonah concludes with the rebel’s submission to God… his return is manifested by humble silence’ (Simon 1999:48). Jonah is perceived as a bad guy—Martin (1979:203f) calls him a ‘backslider’—turned good. Furthermore, if people today are straying or fleeing from God, they too should return to their heavenly father. Moreover, if children depart from the ways of their parents, parents should take their cue from the Lord by gently prodding their return with Godlike, paternal patience and wisdom.

1.1(b) Psychotic

Other readers view the character of Jonah as paradigmatic of various mental dysfunctions, exhibiting clinical symptoms which certainly warrant therapy. These characteristics of Jonah have generated various psychological and psychoanalytic profiles. Each of these investigators, in his or her own way, places Jonah on the analyst’s couch in order to conduct a case study evaluation of his psychological diseases, and uses God’s ‘therapy’ upon the character of Jonah to shed insight onto the treatment of the same disorders in modern-day individuals. No consensus exists, however, as to the precise nature of Jonah’s pathological problem. Blank (1955:41) argues that Jonah’s malady is essentially self-pity, thrown into high relief by contrast to God’s pain in the context of human grief. More (1970) views the prophet
Jonah as undergoing an ‘intrapsychic process’ whereby he gains a cathartic self-understanding into his emotional states.\(^1\) Jonah’s retreat in an inward direction—into the ship, into the ‘belly’ of the ship, into deep sleep, into the sea, into the belly of the fish—is read by C Lewis (1972) as well as A Lacocque and P-E Lacocque (1981,1990: also P-E Lacocque, 1984) in Freudian terms as a vain attempt to return to the enclosed and watery safety of the uterus. Wohlgelehrter (1981:140) looks at Jonah (along with Job, Elijah, and Jeremiah) as representative of depression which culminates in a verbalised ‘death wish’ that is symptomatic of and merely masks other feelings: ‘fear, shame, disappointment, etc.’ Corey (1995) merges categories of Jungian analytic psychology with an allegorical reading to elucidate how the ego (represented by the character Jonah) is forced to confront the ‘despised and rejected elements of the personality’ (7) that are normally repressed, and which are termed by Jung as the Shadow, (symbolised by Nineveh). Resolution comes as the Self, the mediating element of personality between the ego and the Shadow, brings these opposing elements together in a psycho-spiritual process of reconciliation and holism called *individuation*. Kaplan (1995) finds the book of Jonah to yield insights for suicide prevention. Vanderwerff (1998) believes that the book of Jonah offers help for anger management, arguing that learning how to forgive is crucial to overcoming our own problems with anger, especially when it is directed toward God.

In this ‘case,’ Jonah is not a good guy but a deeply disturbed, pitiable mental patient, suffering from panoply of dysfunctions. Jonah’s problems are not described in the typical categories of sin—e.g. pride, disobedience, lack of pity—but in clinical terms such as paranoia, xenophobia, schizophrenia, depression, and death wish. In fact, such readings are not concerned with interpreting the *book* of Jonah so much as interpreting the (case of the) *character* Jonah.

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\(^1\)See also Bull (1990) in the previous discussion. In his case, as in others, it is possible to combine several of my interpretive models, which are not always mutually exclusive.
The appropriate response by the reader is to learn and administer the most appropriate therapy upon those suffering similar neuroses or psychoses today.

1.1(c) Prometheus

Some readers of the book of Jonah view him as the resolutely unbowed hero of the tragic vision, like the figures of Prometheus and Oedipus. Though Jonah displays a fateful hubris which will eventuate his demise at the hand of his demanding (and perhaps capricious) deity, readers nevertheless must admire the character of Jonah. He remains true to himself to the bitter end, a man of courage and principle, though of questionable judgment. In a dramatic script based on the story of Jonah entitled, *It should happen to a dog*, Mankowitz (1956) defends the character of Jonah against the unfair demands of God. Wiesel (1981:142/3,147) similarly charges that God, acting both as author and director of this drama, ‘singles out Jonah only to mock him’ by ‘readily consent[ing] to humiliate His own spokesman.’ Indeed, according to Wiesel ‘Jonah has every right in the world to be angry with God’ (148).² Woodard (1991:3-16; 1993:348-358) argues that the Hebrew (not Greek) tragic vision can be applied to Jonah. He maintains (1993:352) that Hebrew tragedy is comprised of six phases: dilemma, choice, catastrophe, suffering, realisation of error, and death. He sees each of these phases present within the narrative, and thus expressly identifies Jonah as a tragic hero.

In these readings Jonah is viewed as essentially a good guy worthy of our admiration and respect: ‘Jonah deserves our love and affection’ (Wiesel 1981:149). Jonah is plagued with debilitating flaws common to all humanity, so that we can readily identify with him, though few

² It is perhaps not difficult to attribute Wiesel’s opinion that Jonah has every right to be angry with God to his own sentiments as a Holocaust survivor.
of us attain the level of his praiseworthy commitment to integrity. Furthermore, God is blamed with being overbearing, harsh and unjust.

1.1(d) Fall-guy

In this scenario, Jonah is the victim of a ‘set-up’ by God. This interpretive position is somewhat similar to the above, but the stress falls on the legitimacy of the rights and authority of God, hence Jonah is viewed less admirably. Though God forcibly commissions him to this particular prophetic task, Jonah is left ‘holding the bag’ when God double-crosses him by not fulfilling the prophecy faithfully (even if grudgingly) given by Jonah. The unfortunate character Jonah is manipulated (framed?) by Yahweh to teach readers of the narrative that God is free to do as he pleases regardless of what he has pronounced through his prophets.

Examples of the freedom-of-God model abound. The Midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (Friedlander 1975:66) records the motive of Jonah’s outrage: ‘And is it not enough for me that Israel should call me a lying prophet; but shall also the nations of the world (do likewise)?’ Dentan (1963:50) accuses Jonah of being ‘pusillanimous’ in balking at the ‘credo’ of Jonah 4:2 being extended beyond Israel. Rauber (1970) calls Jonah a *shlemiel*—while focusing specially upon the aspects of humor in the narrative, Rauber (:31) concludes that ‘Jonah himself illustrates the theme of “reason gone mad,” while the Lord represents “reason made mischievous.”’ Berlin (1976:231) argues that Jonah is distraught, not because of the sparing of the Ninevites, but because the prophetic word which he obediently delivers proves to be false, making him a false prophet. Emmerson (1976:86-87) identifies the plot conflict of the book as a dialectic between the absolute freedom of God versus the unfulfilled and thus unauthenticated message of the prophet. Magonet (1983:112), while resisting a single, unifying theme for the book, nevertheless concedes that if one central message were to be identified it would be ‘the freedom of God to go
beyond any definition by which man would limit him.' Tigay (1985-86:73-75) places the book of Jonah alongside other ‘moral narratives’ of the Bible to show that, whereas in the other cases ‘strict justice reigns supreme,’ here in Jonah God renounces punishment, and this is what angers Jonah. Licht (1986:122) locates the conflict as the tension between the prophet’s integrity versus God’s message. Payne (1989) maintains that Jonah behaves as an ‘anti-prophet’ due to his refusal to intercede in prayer for his prophetic audience. Walton (1992:55) alleges that Jonah has ‘narrow theological strictures’ preventing him from allowing God to perform gracious acts. Craig’s poetical analysis (1993:154) leads him to the conclusion that the ‘single accent and unified point of view’ of the book of Jonah is that ‘God is free to command, to modify plans, and to have compassion on all of creation.’ Bolin’s thesis (1997:183-185) is that God’s absolute freedom lies beyond the bounds of Jonah’s petty notions of justice.

As in the case above, Jonah is flawed with a myopic view of the freedom of God (à la Job) and the wideness of his grace. But beyond that, his obsession of holding God accountable to his own principles yields not a tragic hero but an antihero. Not only is he a ‘bad guy,’ but he is also ‘small, mean, grubby, and hypocritical’ (Vawter 1983:101). It is noteworthy that none of these listed in this category assume a post facto repentance on the part of Jonah, but implicitly or explicitly ‘end’ the book with Jonah impenitent.

1.1(e) Patriot

Other readers see him as a zealous nationalist. Seen this way, his refusal to ‘minister’ to the Ninevites is attributable to the fact that the Assyrians represented the chief threat to Israel’s national security interests at that time (Alexander 1988:89-90). Most who perceive Jonah as a zealous nationalist take such patriotism or ethnocentrism as a negative trait. He is seen as the
worst kind of bigot—intolerant of any people except his own ‘tribe.’ Jonah is the character every enlightened and postmodern pluralist loves to hate.

Keil and Delitzsch ([1900]1975, x:384) argue that since Jonah reflected the typical attitudes of Israelites toward gentiles, he ‘is thereby fitted to be the representative of Israel in its pride at its own election.’ Bewer (1912:7) also states that Jonah, and thus the Jews, ‘had become narrow and embittered.’ Neil (1962:967) claims that through the events of the story God teaches a ‘harsh and intolerant Jew’ of his love for the ‘hated Gentile.’ The poet Carlisle (1968:3-64) has written a collection of works on Jonah, modulating the ironies of the book into biting, sarcastic verse, presenting Jonah as the kind of person whose personal self-interest, arrogance, and nationalistic allegiances are behind so many of this world’s social ills. West (1984:241) presents a case for identifying Jonah with the intended audience of the book: post-exilic Judaism, which was all too prone to pity herself rather than to pity all of humankind. Ruether and Ruether (1989:xvi) see in the book of Jonah the theme of ‘mutual acceptance between nations,’ which they use to advocate a democratic pluralism, specifically as it relates to contemporary Israeli-Palestinian politics. The Jonah-as-patriot view understands Jonah accordingly as a bigot(ed Jew—by some he is the very embodiment of all that is wrong with the Jews³), opposed to the centrifugal force of God’s grace beyond one race of people to include others (the gentiles) as well. For many interpreters, then, the issue in the book of Jonah is the universal scope of God’s grace which Jonah sought to circumscribe according to the national boundaries of ancient Israel.

By contrast, Hart-Davies (1925) argues on that Jonah’s reputation ought to be vindicated, defending Jonah for offering himself courageously and altruistically in self-sacrificial allegiance and service to his country. It should be noted that Hart-Davies, writing as he did in between the
two world wars, is sympathetic to the patriotism he finds in Jonah, seeing how patriotism was so highly esteemed in that period of British history.\textsuperscript{4} Cohen (1987) also defends Jonah’s nationalism, though on different grounds. While acknowledging that the book of Jonah draws attention to the exclusivistic tendencies of the post-exilic community, Cohen (as a Jew) insists that this was appropriate, given the special relationship and historic covenant between God and Israel. Thus he feels (16-17) ‘the need to stress our superior moral stature over the nations,’ while advocating reading Jonah ‘as a most potent and useful polemical and political demonstration of religious and national exclusivism.’

While Hart-Davies and Cohen prefer to see Jonah as a good guy, the majority of the Jonah-as-patriot readers conclude that Jonah is a very, very bad guy and that the book is a scathing animadversion of the narrow, provincial views of the Second Temple Period. ‘In short, one is angry with Jonah but in admiration with the clear-sightedness and liberalism of his “biographer”’ (Keller 1982:329).

1.1(f) Prophet

A further example of how readers have understood the characterisation of Jonah is reflected in those who take him as representing the suffering prophet of God who in the end

\textsuperscript{3} Sherwood (1997:388-393) provides evidence of such anti-Semitic views among certain German thinkers of the enlightenment, especially by Friedrichsen (1841), who himself summarised approvingly Michaelis (1782) and Eichhorn (1783).

\textsuperscript{4} While admitting the dangers of speculating at others’ motives, it seems clear that whether Jonah’s alleged patriotism here is seen as virtuous or heinous may depend, in large measure, upon whether patriotism itself is viewed with respect or disapproval in the social climate or by the reading community to which the reader belongs. For example, in the estimation of many in post-Vietnam United States, patriotism (like colonialism) is a reflection of the twin evils of militarism and modernistic delusions, whereas during WWII ‘God and country’ were highly-lauded, virtually concomitant commitments. A helpful exploration of social and historical factors which may have been at play in enlightenment and post enlightenment commentaries on Jonah may be found in a ‘New Historicism’ investigation by Sherwood (1997:377), who writes, ‘The Bible is read as a rod of discipline in the sixteenth century, as an anti-Jewish tract in the eighteenth, and as a biblicalised marine biology in the nineteenth, and these voices, to varying extents, survive in twentieth century readings, giving them at once a curious quaintness and a disturbing anachronism.’
acquiesces to God’s will for him. Opposed by his own people (‘a prophet is without honor in his own country’) and harassed or overwhelmed by the demands of the God who commissions him, Jonah protests both in word and action against the weight of his prophetic calling. Rosenberg (1974:24-25) sees Jonah as an archetype of the prophetic vocation, and the book ‘traces his education into a new understanding of prophecy’ with an enlarged vision of God’s compassion. Von Rad (1975:2:291) identifies Jonah as an ambassador who vainly refuses the role, or his own success: ‘The ridiculous, stubborn Jonah...is unable to impede God’s saving thoughts.’ Jonah languishes under la condition prophétique in which, according to Berlin (1976:234-235), the ‘prophet cannot escape his mission and is bound to suffer when he attempts to fulfill it.’ Fretheim (1977:24, see also 1978:227-237) states that the conflict of opinions between God and Jonah ultimately has to do with the issue of God’s justice, which is overly lenient in Jonah’s eyes. Shazar (1978:7) builds a case for the book of Jonah being a programmatic work which specifies that the primary role of the literary prophet was not that of a seer (whose vision of reality is unalterable), but that of one who warns people, and in so doing changes their fate.

More positively, Ackerman (1981:245) presents Jonah as a prophet of (misplaced) principle: ‘Jonah’s yearning for justice is in fact a zeal for divine integrity.’ Ratner (1988:16) maintains that Jonah needs ‘to be educated in the true prophetic role, namely to bring the people to repentance.’ Rofé (1988:164) argues that the renunciation of judgment may be described as a ‘new attribute’ of God which Jonah needed to learn. According to J W Roffey (1988:17), ‘God was both ruthless and patient in bringing Jonah back to his duty...in the prophetic roles of pity and intercession.’ Sasson (1990:346) believes that Jonah complains due to the ‘breach of proper etiquette obtaining between God and prophets, so he feels misused.’ Brichto (1992:79-81) argues that the central message of the book is Jonah’s finding fault with divine compassion,
warning all in ministry for God against ‘pride, self-righteousness, and impatience.’ According to Limburg (1993:36), the story of Jonah is a model which teaches ‘those who have experienced the Lord’s blessing and deliverance’ to respond with thanksgiving, witness, and praise.

In each of these interpretations, Jonah is outraged by God’s ostensible dismissal of divine, punitive justice toward the wicked Ninevites. But he learns his lesson at the conclusion of the narrative, becoming wiser and more compassionate. In one children’s version of the story of Jonah (Davidson and Marshall 1984), the last illustration in the book depicts Jonah as a contrite and placid figure with hands folded and eyes closed, bowed in prayer, described in the text as having ‘finally understood’ God’s forgiveness (and presumably, he simultaneously learns to obey orders). Simply put, he is a bad guy turned good.

1.1(g) Reluctant missionary

Closely related to the understanding above of the narrative is its use made by many at a popular level as a mandate to missions. On numerous occasions I have heard preachers, missionaries, and evangelists use Jonah as an illustration of God’s calling of a person into missionary service. To ignore or refuse to heed such a call to cross-cultural ministry to the lost is to be guilty of the sin of Jonah (e.g. Holland’s *A missionary treatise on the book of Jonah by a missionary* 1960). Stek (1969:49) lists as a principle element of the book that ‘participation in the benefits of God’s salvation history is not to be viewed as a mere personal privilege to be grasped for oneself, but involves a calling to become a part of God’s mission to the lost world.’ Sauer, Mayer and Danker (1974:43) argue that the theme of Jonah has to do with mission, i.e. gospel outreach to the lost. Trudinger (1989:142-143) points out that jona is the word for dove, which symbolises ‘Israel as the missional servant of God’ who needed to be reminded that being faithful in that role required becoming ‘a missional nation.’
Olson ([1988] 1998:33) argues from Jonah 4:2 that Jonah 'reasoned that since God is compassionate and would not destroy Ninevah [sic], he didn't need to preach repentance to them [sic],' as if Jonah's knowledge of compassion caused him to view the Ninevites' salvation as guaranteed on the presumption that God won't really judge the lost. Olson draws the parallel between this illegitimate excuse and the present-day malaise of the contemporary church toward evangelism. 'In the same way today Christians rationalise that God won't judge the heathen, and so we don't need to send missionaries to them' (:33). In a similar vein, Verkuyl (1981:41) argues that the book of Jonah 'squarely sets forth man's attempt to sabotage God's worldwide plans so that its readers—Israel, the New Testament church, and us—can hear what the Holy Spirit through the medium of this little book is trying to tell them,' i.e. to go and make disciples of the nations. Jonah represents (:40) 'a lazy and unfaithful church which does not heed its Lord's command,' and the plot of the book concerns 'the church's ecclesiocentric refusal to go out into the world to proclaim God's message and do his work.'

But God works in the heart of his reluctant missionary candidate to humble him and make him an obedient foreign missionary. In this interpretation, Jonah again is a bad guy become good through repentance and a sort of compulsory sensitivity training regimen. According to Verkuyl (:43), "God is still interested in transforming obstinate, irritable, depressive, peevish Jonahs into heralds of the Good News which brings freedom." Contemporary readers too can avoid Jonah's fate (i.e. become good) if they but hear and obey God's voice prompting them into missionary endeavor, putting their whole hearts into evangelism.
1.1(h) Jonah as representative

From the selection of interpretive models presented above, I believe that the answer to the question, ‘Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy?’ is, to a large degree, a matter of determining whom Jonah represents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonah as ...</th>
<th>Group represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinocchio</td>
<td>anyone who has strayed from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotic</td>
<td>those who have clinical, psychological disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prometheus</td>
<td>those who prize the indomitable human spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall-guy</td>
<td>those who are aggrieved at God’s caprice or humbled before his freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot</td>
<td>nationalists, bigots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Israelite prophetic order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there any way to arbitrate or (in)validate these options? In this thesis I aim to build a case that it is possible to do so by looking at conventions which are common to narratives. To attempt this task will require not only looking at the narrative of Jonah, but also seeking to understand ourselves as readers, and what interpretive goals or interests we may (consciously or unconsciously) value.

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5 I recognise that in framing the question in terms of whether Jonah is a ‘good guy’ versus a ‘bad guy’ borders on being reductionistic. Presumably many understand the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’ as indicative of moral categories (and hence ethical standard by which the person is to be evaluated is implied). In the case of this narrative, however, the remarkable aspect is that Jonah defies any simple understanding because of his aberrant character. He breaks the readers’ stereotypes and expectations at nearly every turn—he is an off-beat, nonconforming misfit. Simply put, he does not follow the rules appropriate to his role as a prophet of Israel (a point which I will develop throughout chapters three through six). I choose to retain the category of ‘good versus bad’ for two reasons, however. The first is that whereas Maria in The sound of music is likewise a nonconformist she is nevertheless recognisable by all as an endearingly ‘good’ character, yet in the narrative of Jonah the overall ‘goodness’ of Jonah is very much a debated issue. Whether he ultimately serves as a positive or negative role model and the degree to which readers are drawn to identify with him are fruitful areas for exploration since no such consensus exists. Secondly, in his discussion of ‘narrative conventions,’ Rabinowitz (1987:84-85) also employs the terms ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys,’ arguing that such ‘moral evaluation plays a central role in the reading of narrative fiction,’ a point that could be sustained for the reading of any kind of narrative, including biblical. Since readers generally do look to understand literary characters in the terms of good and bad, I wish to exploit this tendency here in the narrative of Jonah due to its heuristic potential.

6 By ‘narrative’ here, I am referring more specifically to stories, and especially those which are put into writing.
1.2 Three levels of inquiry

From this listing of representative (perhaps somewhat caricatured) interpretive options, it is obvious that it is not a simple task to solve a simple question: "Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy?" But interpreters do not just differ on their answer to this question. Their varying viewpoints in fact rest upon logically prior interpretive decisions made in the process of reading the narrative.

1.2(a) Surface level

In order to ‘solve a problem like’ Jonah, the reader must fill in the gaps of the narrative with interpretive bridges, whether wittingly or unwittingly. For example, questions which may arise in the reader’s mind in the process of reading might include:

- Why did Jonah flee?
- Did he sincerely repent while in the fish?
- Did Jonah tell the truth by conveying accurately God’s message to Nineveh?
- Why was he so aggrieved at God’s compassion upon Nineveh?
- Did he repent at the end of the story?\(^7\)

At the level of interpretation, then, I will frame these readerly questions under this single, larger question: how am I supposed to understand the character of Jonah? I will refer to interpretive questions such as these as tertiary or surface-level questions. (In using the term

\(^7\) Of course, even these questions reflect some of my own logically prior interpretive interests, though most of those surveyed above are at pains to answer these same issues. I will address the reader’s role more fully in chapter two.
'level' here, I am not seeking to impose a hierarchy of reading so much as to identify related but separable foci of inquiry.)

1.2(b) Methodological level

At a second level of interpretive probing, another set of questions may emerge which logically precedes the above. These deal with affective aspects which the narrative evokes: Does the narrative argue for a particular ethical response? Is the reader in any specific way being challenged to consider some standard of thinking and behaving? Is the narrative trying to teach the reader something about life? Another catalogue of correlative questions, those of a more literary nature, must be entertained and resolved in order to draw any conclusions as to the ethics either critiqued or advocated by the Jonah narrative.

- How does a narrative work?
- How does the author attempt to make his points or build his case through the means of narrative?\(^8\)
- Can readers detect or ascertain an authorial strategy within a given narrative?\(^9\)
- Why does the Jonah narrative employ and exploit satire and irony?
- Who does Jonah represent?
- Why are sailors included?
- Why is Nineveh selected? Does Nineveh represent a larger class of people?
- What is the effect of the gaps left in the narrative?
- Is this narrative a comedy or a tragedy, or is there some other alternative?

\(^8\) Here and following I will refer to the author of the Jonah narrative using masculine pronouns not out of gender insensitivity but as a matter of historical probability.
This second level of inquiry asks about how narratives work. It inquires into the strategic devices that are incumbent upon authors who select narrative as their vehicle of communication. These questions all stem from one’s views concerning a fundamental issue: Are there narrative conventions which inform readers of how to read biblical narratives? The reader’s answer to this question will determine the methods, consciously or subconsciously appropriated, by which s/he attempts to answer the surface-level set of questions above. In other words, before readers can decide on how to understand Jonah and whether Jonah is a good guy or a bad guy, they must commit themselves to certain assumptions about how narratives generally communicate—their interpretation will stem from their hermeneutical methods. I refer to these questions as the secondary or methodological level of inquiry.

1.2(c) Philosophical level

Yet the position a reader takes in response to the methodological questions regarding narrative conventions is itself derived from another level of investigation on an incipient, yet more fundamental plane. It is a philosopher’s question: Is it possible for any text to mean anything in particular? This impinges upon one’s understanding of worldviews, theories of truth, epistemology, metanarratives, postmodern critique, realism(s), philosophy of language, linguistics, and hermeneutical theory. Related issues may be identified by the following illustrative questions.

- Can language communicate? Is meaning communicable from an author to a reader via a text?

\[ The \ issue \ concerning \ the \ possibility \ of \ a \ benign \ text \ will \ be \ taken \ up \ in \ chapter \ two. \]
• Where does meaning reside? In the author? The text? The reader? The author’s or reader’s social environment? In the web of intertexts?
• Is it possible merely to describe narrative conventions without actually constructing them?
• Are conventions universal or limited to particular reading communities?
• Are narrative texts capable of actually asserting anything?
• Is it possible for a reader to know what a narrative is about?
• How should a person appropriate a biblical text? Is there not a ‘morally correct’ response to which the reader is obliged? Or is it a matter of ‘political correctness,’ i.e. conforming to the ethical expectations of the social environment of either the author or a particular reading community?
• Are there special considerations when the text under purview is regarded as Scripture?
• Are biblical narratives so socially conditioned as to make them inaccessible to contemporary readers?
• By what (or whose) standards can or should interpretations be evaluated for validation or critique? Are readers so socially conditioned as to make any attempt at ‘objective’ criteria of interpretation at best deluded, and at worst a mask for the reader’s own lust for interpretive power?

Our problem here may be stated as: **Can a text actually communicate (mean) anything apart from the reader?** These types of questions belong to what I will call the first-order or philosophical level. To illustrate the three levels of inquiry raised thus far in the discussion, I now propose viewing them in this way.
The first-order issues must be answered (or assumed) at the core before proceeding centrifugally to the secondary and finally tertiary levels. I would contend that many of the interpretive debates between readers on the surface level of biblical narratives in fact are merely symptomatic of differing conscious commitments and/or unwitting assumptions at the methodological and philosophical levels.
1.3 The thesis

Although I will give attention to all three levels in this thesis, the chief focus in here is upon the second of these levels, the methodological, and how it impinges on the other two. All readers, from children to playwrights of films to psychoanalysts to philosophers to preachers, employ a methodology of some sort in the act of reading biblical narratives. Since interpretations of the surface level of the narrative will inevitably flow from one’s methodological commitments, I wish to explore a method for reading biblical narratives. In particular I will put forth a case for the presupposition that narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives. These conventions are similar for any narrative text, secular or sacred. To make this case, I will present an explanation of those conventions and how they operate within the Jonah narrative in order to shed light onto the characterisation of Jonah.

To return to the earlier example, the creators of The sound of music enable the audience to ‘solve the problem’ of Maria by captilising upon a number of communicative conventions which are recognisable and familiar with those conversant in such ‘texts.’ The generic category to which it belongs is the Broadway/Hollywood musical. While building upon earlier works such as the Gilbert and Sullivan light operas (1870’s-1890’s), Rogers and Hammerstein developed a new form. When Oklahoma! premiered in 1943, it was considered ‘the first musical comedy to have a plot, musical score and dances that were necessary ingredients to advance the story line’ (Pauly 1993). It becomes predictable to encounter a sentimental, romantic tale of falling in love which ends on a happy note. In this case, the antagonists include the stereotyped Nazis, and a husky-voiced, heavily made-up, sophisticated and jaded Baroness with selfish designs upon the deluded Captain Von Trapp. By contrast, the protagonist Maria is associated
with good (she’s a nun), filled with wide-eyed wonder at the beauty of everything she sees and a zest for sharing her joy with others. The Captain and she fall in love despite themselves, because this love is ‘greater than the two of them’ (even the Mother Superior at the convent gives Maria her blessing and approval). Maria’s friends, the nuns, not only provide a sense of near-angelic goodness, but are also not above a little tongue-in-cheek deviousness in saving the fleeing Von Trapps from the evil Nazis, which serves to endear them to the audience further as a ‘little’ bad, making them more accessible for identification. Moreover, the musical libretto serves to interpret the inner feelings of the characters involved and guide the audience in how they are to make sense of and respond to the plot.

Thus the story partakes of a master plot, and works both by drawing upon and contributing to the conventions which make it so familiar. It is served by, and serves, a discreet body of texts (a canon)—romantic, musical comedies—which shares common themes and conventionalises the modes by which those themes will be expressed and emphasised: conflicts between good people (who do most of the singing and are funny) and bad people (who are snobbish, rude, or sinister), and where ostensibly unlikely couples overcome their differences to fall in love with one another. So predictably Maria and the Captain will have to overcome various difficulties (she is a nun, he is engaged; she’s ‘as light as a feather,’ while he is rigid and humorless; she is pulled toward the mountains, he to the sea). Together, and with the help of friends (the children, Max and the sisters at the convent), they escape to the hills, ‘from whence cometh [their] help’ (disregarding the syntax of Psalm 121). Through all of this the audience is oriented to the storyline and the characters by the conventions of stock features and the interpretive musical interludes. By cooperating with the ‘givens’ of this communicative form, the audience is thus guided toward the responses which the creators of this musical envisioned.
The defining term under consideration here is 'convention.' Biblical narratives also share common features, not only between themselves within the canon of scripture\textsuperscript{10} but also with narratives across cultures and throughout history. These features enable us to distinguish narrative texts from other texts (e.g., poetry or discourse). Fundamentally these conventions include setting (time and place), plot (a sequence of events causally connected, tension and resolution), and characterisation. Where these are all present, there exists the \textit{sine qua non} of narrative; where they are not, serious questions may be raised as to whether the text under investigation is in fact a narrative. Other stylistic elements may or may not be present—e.g., suspense, irony, misdirection, gapping, repetition, wordplay, intertextuality or reticence. Setting, plot and characterisation form the lowest common denominator by which narratives are recognised and understood. This is in keeping with understanding conventions as 'a standard technique or well-used device, especially in the arts.'\textsuperscript{11}

The thesis advanced here—that \textit{narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives}—underlies my conviction that by recognising and appropriating these the reader may be better equipped to answer the surface level question about the characterisation of Jonah. Conversely, failure to attend closely to these conventions compromises the validity and credibility of an interpretive model for a biblical narrative such as Jonah.

\textbf{1.4 Survey of recent scholarship on literary studies of Jonah}

Self-consciously literary approaches to the book of Jonah have appeared contemporaneously with the emergence of these methods within the field of literary criticism and

\textsuperscript{10} I will take up the issue of canon in the next chapter.
biblical studies over the latter half of this century. Because Jonah is a relatively brief and easily managed literary unit, it has attracted the attention of scholars interested in the application of various critical methods to a particular biblical narrative. Thus a survey of recent studies in Jonah mirrors the development of these macrocosmic text-reading strategies.

Along with the journal articles and chapter-length discussions too numerous to discuss here, several book-length treatments of the book of Jonah merit special note. Because others have taken Trble’s doctoral dissertation at Columbia University (1963) as their point of departure, it is fitting to begin a discussion of recent scholarship with this work, entitled *Studies in the book of Jonah*. Her study reflects the form criticism so dominant in that day, highlighting issues of sources, identification of generic and formal patterns, and placement of the composition of Jonah within its historical *Sitz im Leben*. For example, she maintains that the song of thanksgiving in Jonah 2 should be viewed as inauthentic, a secondary accretion traceable to the hand of some subsequent editor(s) and inapty misplaced in its current position. Writing as she did before the ascendant, holistic concerns of rhetorical criticism, redaction criticism and canonical criticism, these arguments now betray a facile consideration and inadequate attention for the present shape of the narrative in its various text traditions.

Nevertheless her contribution became a launching pad for other subsequent studies on the book of Jonah employing literary techniques, largely due to Trble’s careful attention to elements

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12 Most of these articles, because of the constraints of space, feature only one particular element of literary technique such as satire, audience perspective, use of divine names, chiastic structures, *Leitwörter* and so forth.

13 Landes (1978) and Magonet (1983) begin their discussion by referring to her work, and she is frequently cited in Craig (1993), Marcus (1995), Person (1996), and Bolin (1997) *inter alia*.

14 In his discussion of General Systems Theory, Iser (1978:71) follows Luhmann (1973) in arguing that theoretical systems structure contingent realities into a comprehensive and comprehensible order. This is done by means of a ‘reduction of complexity by accentuating some possibilities and neutralizing or negating others.’ In my judgment, Trble neutralises cohesiveness in the narrative of Jonah as well as underplays the role of literary
of repetition (an aspect of its narrative style). The pages of charts she provided drew attention to the many verbal parallels which exist in the text (Masoretic Text) of Jonah, and invited further investigation by those looking at such parallels from a more ‘literary’ bent. Indeed, even she responds to this invitation in a subsequent book (see below).

In 1974 Magonet also wrote a doctoral dissertation on the book of Jonah (translated into English in 1976, 2nd ed 1983), which (in part) built on Trible’s interest in the patterns of repetition in Jonah. In approaching these repetitions, he distinguished the ‘overt narrative text’ from the underlying ‘subliminal’ level. Entitled *Form and meaning: Studies in literary techniques in the book of Jonah*, this work presents a wealth of fascinating insights into the literary composition of Jonah. Magonet’s analyses include the following: chapter one on language (verbal features), in chapter two he focuses on the Psalm, in chapter three on certain structural elements (but not from the ‘structuralist’ perspective), in chapter four on intertextuality, and in chapter five on thematic polarities. He draws attention to the use of key words (*Leitwörter*), the employment of quotations, repetition of phrases, and rising and falling action. He also employs the term *growing phrase* to explain phenomena such as the expanding description of Nineveh in Jonah: ‘Nineveh, the great city’ (1:2), ‘And Nineveh was a great city to God—a going of three days’ (3:3), and ‘Nineveh, the great city in which there are many, more than two plus ten ten-thousands people who do not know between their right hand from their left hand, and cattle—many’ (4:11).  

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15 During this same period the term ‘literary criticism’ itself underwent a kind of metamorphosis, widely noted among biblical scholars, from primarily referring to epigenetic questions to new questions of style and poetics.

16 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own, based on the BHS text and prioritising formal equivalence.
Yet Magonet’s work suffers from a lack of an overall methodological plan. He overlooks many major components of narrative structure (e.g. setting, characterisation, plot, irony). Indeed, his failure to address the criteria for selection of materials included and excluded results in an arbitrary compendium of topics of interest (note the subtitle, ‘Studies in literary techniques in the book of Jonah’) rather than a sustained, coherent treatment of a single topic as is customary in a thesis. As rich as this work is in offering insights into particular literary aspects, it was in reading this work that I initially became aware of the need for a coherent methodology for addressing and assessing literary phenomena. After reading the book, the following questions come to mind: What criteria are employed in selecting literary features when analysing a biblical narrative? What plans or goals govern an interpreter’s selections? Why did Magonet select these features and exclude others? On the basis of his literary investigations, Magonet concludes that the result of the author’s ‘strategic mystification’ points toward the freedom of God beyond human limitations (112), ergo Magonet (and Trible, see below) falls into the category of Jonah-as-fall-guy.

Following Childs’ methodological approach,17 and supplemented by insights of J A Sanders (1972,1984) and Sheppard (1980) to reading the biblical books as canon, Dyck’s dissertation (1986) offers a canonical reading of Jonah. While sharing with literary criticism a common commitment to viewing the text as a unified whole, it diverges from there into other concerns not so clearly literary in nature (e.g. the role of the book of Jonah within the Twelve, the Latter Prophets, and the Tanak, and an extended apology for the inclusion of the Jonah psalm despite its ‘secondary’ status as determined through traditional historical criticism). For those whose primary interest lies specifically in the literary aspects of Jonah (the focus of this study),

17 One of Childs’ initial works (1958) looked at Jonah as a test case for a then-new hermeneutical prospectus, what was later to evolve into his unique canonical approach.
the insights here are limited in favor of canonical concerns. Dyck gives credit to the ‘Bible as literature’ approaches for reintroducing a more holistic approach to the text, a move which ‘is not only possible but also interesting’ (:301). Nevertheless it is a canonical approach rather than a manifestly literary one which remains his central concern.\(^{18}\) In his canonical approach, he concludes that the central message of the book has to do with God’s mercy \textit{vis-à-vis} demonstrated repentance (:301). In keeping with the emphasis on repentance, he does see a sincere conversion on Jonah’s part in chapter two: ‘Jonah appears to have gone through an immediate and radical transformation…. This is nothing short of a dramatic conversion’ (:240). Thus he fits into the category of Jonah-as-prodigal.

Sasson’s commentary on the book of Jonah (1990), while dealing with many of the same issues that characterise the Anchor Bible Commentary series more generally, additionally draws on literary criticism for his own engagement with the text. His work also contains helpful excurses on several literary features which are ancillary to his commentary on the text: the storm at sea setting and Hebrew poetry. Further, he displays sensitivity to narrative concerns in the last chapter of his book, which follows the commentary proper as addendum. Here, in a section entitled ‘Narrative art and literary typology in Jonah,’ he discusses the perspective and technique of the narrator. Following Sternberg’s (1985) discussions on narrator’s omniscience and strategic withholding of information, he defends the effectiveness of the anachronistic suppression of 4:2 (‘was this not my word…’) until its present placement. He then explores the literary category of

\(^{18}\) Dyck himself (1986:294) maintains this distinction: ‘Considerable similarity with [Bible as literature approaches] should not be surprising inasmuch as both the literary and canonical approaches seek to interpret the text as a whole regardless of literary history. That the approaches are not, however, identical is obvious….’ The distinction he draws is that Bible as literature approaches wholly disregard historical reference and historical factors of composition. I believe this categorisation is too simplistic and inaccurate. For example, some literary scholars do see the need for inclusion of historical data (e.g Ackerman 1981,1987) and understanding of compositional factors. Moreover, Dyck (see also 1981,1990) seeks to explicate a ‘canonical intentionality’ (separable from and independent of authorial intentionality) which seeks to account for its function as scripture within a believing
Jonah, discounting satire, parody, farce, parable, "mashal", fable, or didactic fiction in favor of allegory. Finally, he addresses characterisation, arguing that the narrator portrays Jonah as a 'comic hero.' As a commentary, however, there is no attempt at a more comprehensive literary investigation. His operative paradigm is the traditional commentary with certain literary factors incorporated, rather than approaching the book as a literary critic. He is not advocating nor advertising a particular literary theory, nor defending (or even locating) the hermeneutical tenets he is appropriating, but rather employing certain literary perspectives to shed helpful insights into the book of Jonah. As to the characterisation of Jonah, Sasson refers to him as a comic dupe (:347) as well as comic hero (:348-350), and compares him to other prophets (:347-348), which aligns Sasson with the Jonah-as-prophet model.

Craig's *A poetics of Jonah: Art in the service of ideology* (1993), as the title indicates, is committed to a poetical analysis of the book. He contrasts his form of poetics (i.e. the so-called Tel Aviv school—he studied for a year under Sternberg—and he also acknowledges indebtedness to Bakhtin) with literary criticism, charging the latter as being 'essentially an intuitive enterprise that lacks methods and objective rules' (:4). Craig takes up a number of features overlooked by Magonet, and is especially helpful on characterisation, along with other stylistic features (e.g. narrator perspective, poetic analysis of the psalm, the role of prayer in the story). Craig's work analyzes Jonah through the lens of Sternberg's (1985) contributions to biblical poetics, drawing upon his categories for discussing gaps and inside versus omniscient viewpoints, and how these function upon the ideological plane. His chief contribution in my estimation is his clear-sighted understanding of the relationship between literary aspects resident within the narrative with the values being espoused, not through heavy-handed didacticism but community. It is the interest in these emphases, not shared by literary critics, which more clearly distinguishes Bible as literature approaches from the canonical approaches.

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more subtly and compellingly through a skillfully told story. Nevertheless, his book has its own significant omissions. He observes, correctly I believe, that in Jonah the ‘ideology is handled implicitly by the ordering of values conferred by the plot sequence’ (:160). Yet he fails to analyze or discuss that very plot sequence in any sustained or systematic fashion. He also overlooks the contribution that settings make upon the values being advanced through the narrative. Thus it remains a valuable study—arguably the best on Jonah from a literary standpoint, yet one which invites further and more thorough investigation. As noted in my own discussion of Jonah-as-fall-guy above, Craig concludes that the central message of the book is God’s freedom ‘to command, to modify plans, and to have compassion on all of creation’ (:154).

As evidence of the shifting of exegetical trends in biblical studies from more genetic issues to those of textual strategy, Trible revamped her earlier dissertation for publication. In this newer work (1994), she sought to incorporate rhetorical criticism as sponsored by her former teacher Muilenberg (see his 1968 SBL presidential address) in her *Rhetorical criticism: Context, method, and the book of Jonah*. The strength of the work lies chiefly in the way she traces ancient Greek rhetoric through to more recent developments in the history of biblical interpretation in general, especially between the 1960’s and the early 1990’s. The rubric worked out is that by combining form critical methodology (her previous work) with classical rhetorical criticism, correct understanding of the form-content relationship in the text will yield a correct understanding of its meaning (:91). Her conclusion as to the overall meaning of the book in light of the method she espouses is that, ‘through “artful words” Yhwh seeks to persuade the hearers (or readers) about the rightness of what the deity does and will do’ (1994:224). Her view corresponds most closely with the Jonah-as-fall-guy model, emphasising the freedom of God to do as he chooses.
It must be pointed out that the term and corresponding field of 'rhetorical criticism' has undergone some significant developments which prevent a simple understanding of its goals. One factor is that it has fragmented, diverging into several separate streams (see Makaryk [1993]:1997:175-177). One of these, classical rhetorical criticism, retains the more traditional role of tracing the intentional techniques of persuasion through a text along primarily neo-Aristotelian categories. This approach, illustrated in Thonssen and Baird (1948), pursues historical interests by revealing a preference for primarily ancient discourse texts, by seeking to reconstruct the Sitz in Leben which occasioned the original communication event and by drawing their underlying critical theory directly from the principles contained in Aristotle's Rhetoric (1954). Along another trajectory, increasing attention has been channeled into the observing how the formal features of rhetoric operate within and upon the content of written biblical texts, presumably derivative from originally oral situations (see Muilenburg 1969:1-18). Yet another stream advocates a pluralism of rhetorical strategies rather than a single, monolithic system of criticism. Rhetorical pluralists (e.g., Rosenfield 1968:50-69; Bormann 1972:396-407) generally assume that reality is a social construction in constant flux, that all rhetorical exchanges are conditioned by socio-political-economic forces and that the critic should be self-reflexive—the critic rather than the rhetorical theory is central to the act of criticism (see also Goodwin 1993:176).

Another complicating factor is that rhetorical approaches, particularly as practiced in biblical studies, are caught in a crossfire of criticisms. Ackerman explains (1995:723) that, on the one hand, the so-called 'Old Guard' of biblical scholarship (i.e., historical criticism) resists rhetorical criticism's disinterest in diachronicity and further alleges that it marginalises theological insight in favor of (mere) aestheticism. At the same time and from the opposite
flank, the ‘New Guard’ criticises rhetorical criticism’s failure to take into account sociological factors in the use of language, with the implicit claims to power. In weighing these factors, it appears to me that rhetorical criticism does have merit and therefore should not be dismissed, as long as one remains guarded against viewing it as an interpretive panacea. Moreover, while most would readily acknowledge the value that rhetorical criticism can offer for understanding biblical passages, it remains doubtful that rhetorical criticism is sufficiently comprehensive or clear to merit central attention for manifestly literary investigations while displacing other literary considerations, as Trible’s work implies.\(^{19}\)

Much of Trible’s discussion in the chapters that follow, viz her treatment of the narrative of Jonah itself, however, shows less advancement from her dissertation than is expected from her 122 pages which outline the ‘new’ method. Indeed many of the verbal parallel charts which at least could have been vastly improved with 1990’s electronic technology are exact reproductions from her dissertation work twenty-five years prior, and a substantial percentage of the earlier text and ideas has also been retained, with the result that her hermeneutical paradigm shift is perhaps not as thoroughgoing as she leads the reader to believe in the earlier part of the book—the net yield in interpretive insight does not live up to the promises, and her evaluation of the book of Jonah remains substantially intact from her first work and unaffected by her new method. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Trible continues to serve a significant role in the field of Jonah studies, due to her careful attention to verbal repetitions within the book and their significance both for identifying structural patterns and for elucidating meaning and emphases.

Marcus’ (1995) published doctoral dissertation *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic satire in the Hebrew Bible* explores the literary technique of satire as it is used in Jonah, as well

\(^{19}\) In Jacobsen’s (1996:31) review of this work, the broadness, imprecision, and ‘freewheeling description’ of Trible’s use of the term ‘rhetorical criticism’ is labeled ‘rhetorical tohuwabohu.’
as draws extensive comparison with the Balaam narrative (Numbers 22-24), the bald prophet of 2 Kings 2, and the lying prophet of 1 Kings 13. Its scope is narrowly focused to this particular satiric aspect within Jonah, making no attempt at providing a fuller literary interpretation of the book. He introduces a questionable distinction in the book between ideology and behavior. He further claims that the book of Jonah satirises Jonah himself, but that no message is advocated. Thus while Marcus succeeds in arguing that Jonah fits the satirical category, the result yields literally no meaning to the book—in his words, there is 'not any ideological message' (:158). As I will argue later, satire speaks against some prevailing norm—the main message will entail an implicit rebuttal of the values illustrated through the individual who is being satirised (i.e., the satiric vehicle). Nevertheless, in his ensuing discussion he argues that it is not Jonah as an individual who is satirised, but his behavior—namely foolishness, lying, and concern with petty values—as distinct from his philosophical ideas) which is 'unbecoming to a prophet' (:158). That the satiric vehicle (Jonah) is somehow exempted from satiric attack while his behavior is rendered guilty, as it were, seems to me to be an unconvincing attempt to employ a spurious bifurcation not at all in the author's mind ('Love the sinner, hate the sin?') In relating his conclusions to my own categories, Marcus fits squarely into the Jonah-as-prophet model of characterisation (as the title would indicate).

Person, utilising Kort's (1988) elements of plot, character, atmosphere, and tone, gives a cursory look at each of these elements (1996:51-89) within the book of Jonah. In a section regarding the implied reader of the Jonah narrative, he identifies eleven presuppositions necessary for interpretation, which are valuable to determining the knowledge shared by the author and readers. According to Person, the implied reader of Jonah understands the intricacies

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20 Person's review (1996:321-322) illuminates and illustrates this problem. In terms of ideology, Marcus claims that Jonah (and Balaam) are 'legitimate prophets' (:164-165), yet in terms of behavior states that 'Balaam
of the text based on knowledge which is both presumed and which is gained through repeated readings.21 But he reserves his primary interest to a specialised study of conversation analysis. According to Person, conversation analysis deals with the organisation linguistic structures called ‘preferences’: ‘language is organised in such a way that linguistically “preferred” actions are encouraged, while linguistically “dispreferred” action are discouraged, thereby limiting conflict’ (:16). *Conversation analysis may in fact be helpful specifically in understanding elements of plot, especially those responses (‘seconds’) which contribute to plot intensification (‘dispreferred seconds’) such as those which are lengthy, delayed, or indirect (:17).

However, as Nogalski’s review points out (1999:357), Person’s idiosyncratic definition of what constitutes a ‘conversation’ causes him to see the song of thanksgiving in Jonah 2:3-10 as containing little direct conversation (thus his insight on this section is quite limited), while Yahweh’s commands to nature (e.g. ‘God appointed a scorching east wind’) are construed as ‘direct conversation.’ Moreover, his work founders from an intractably bound understanding of human rationality which operates primarily if not solely on the basis of binary oppositions.22 As such, his approach is subject to the full range of critique leveled against semiotics and structuralism, together with their predisposition for daunting and arcane nomenclature. Unfortunately, his attention to Kort’s four elements (the interest being pursued here in this study) is both truncated and controlled by this other consideration. Despite his promising start, Person’s

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21 I will invoke his insights as a starting point for my own understanding of the implied reader in Jonah, a matter of considerable importance in my interpretive model (see 4.6[a]).

22 His primary focus is upon ‘adjacency pairs,’ by which he means that ‘sequences of two moves verbal or non-verbal) that are ... adjacent or [which have] an insertion sequence (for example, a clarifying question between question and answer), [are] produced by different individuals, [are] ordered as a first part and a second part, [or are] typed, so that a particular first part has a range of second parts: those which are linguistically preferred and those which are linguistically dispreferred’ (:16). The assertion of the existence and fundamental importance of these adjacency pairs reveals the inherent dialecticism of his method, and his definition illustrates the difficulty of his terminology.
monochromatic focus upon this single feature leaves the reader to look elsewhere for a more full-fledged discussion of the literary features of the Jonah narrative. Person furthermore offers a very detailed analysis of the structure of the plot conflict, yet stops short of specifying how this informs the meaning of the book, which surely constitutes a significant oversight if one presumes that a symbiotic relationship obtains between structural and conceptual factors. He does describe Jonah’s portrayal as a ‘nationalistic prophet’ (:64) whose chief fault is ‘petty selfishness and nationalistic lack of compassion for non-Israelites’ (:65). I would conclude from this, then, that Person represents the Jonah-as-patriot model.

Bolin’s published dissertation *Freedom beyond forgiveness: The book of Jonah re-examined* (1997) utilises certain aspects of literary criticism in his discussion of Yahweh’s divine freedom presented within the narrative of Jonah. Bolin is critical of the many forms of literary criticism which effectively either marginalise the role of the author in the production of meaning\textsuperscript{23} or which idealise the author\textsuperscript{24} (:55-57). Instead he equates meaning with the recovery of authorial intent (:64). The chief literary strategy he sees the author exploiting is intentional intertextuality. This is the most appealing facet of his treatment of the book. Looking at extrabiblical sources and, especially, intrabiblical passages, and employing the methods of philological/linguistic analysis, form criticism, and tradition history, he concludes that the central message of the book is ‘the affirmation of the absolute freedom, power and sovereignty of Yahweh over all creation’ (:183). Thus in Bolin’s work, once again, Jonah is seen as the fall-guy.

\textsuperscript{23} He identifies the following as practitioners of this approach: Eubanks, Craig, Alter, and Trible’s 1994 work.

\textsuperscript{24} Here he lists Brichto, Lacocque and Lacocque, Sternberg, Craig (again!), Bal and Eubanks (again!).
In summary, each of these works, as well as numerous articles and chapter-length treatments not dealt with here because of their necessarily more cursory treatment, has made valuable contributions to the discussion of literary studies in biblical narrative, and especially to state-of-the-art scholarship in the book of Jonah. However, none of these has attempted to account for the broader range of factors which all contribute to literary approaches toward biblical narratives. Each is its own potpourri; none determines to address the need for a more comprehensive survey and analysis of the essential elements constituting narratives. It would be egregiously unfair to fault these scholars for not succeeding in something which they had not purposed to do in the first place, namely to present an analysis sensitive to each of the narrative conventions of plot, setting, and characterisation. Rather, credit is due to each of these for giving their attention to certain of these and other aspects of the narrative as literature. Yet it is equally apparent that there remains a need for an analysis of the book of Jonah that consciously and overtly constructs a more broadly encompassing model for addressing its literary aspects. It is my desire to incorporate some of their insights, together with my own findings, into a larger, coherent methodology. The anticipated results could yield benefits not only for the ongoing study of Jonah, but also for all those interested in studying biblical narratives.

1.5 The problem and the scope

For all of the substantial diversity represented by the individuals discussed above, and their perspectives and concerns when studying a biblical narrative such as Jonah, there remains a core of similarities. As Ryken and Longman (1993:18) state: ‘Underlying the range of current critical approaches...is a shared conviction that literature is the result of conscious composition, careful patterning, and an awareness of literary conventions’ (emphasis mine). In the current
postmodern environment which announces (and sometimes champions) the fragmentation and divergences and idiosyncratic particularities of theoretical approaches, such a universalising statement perhaps invites the challenge of whether all literary scholars do indeed share this conviction. Yet each of the studies mentioned in the survey above does in fact bear witness to the awareness of literary conventions. This accords with my contention that narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives. That such a conviction does indeed accurately represent the sentiments of (at least) multiple reading communities lies at the heart of this investigation. My position coincides with McKnight (1980:53) on this point: ‘Contemporary literary criticism lacks a universally accepted set of principles and methods; nevertheless, there are elements of literary study which are recognised by literary critics.’ These broadly recognised and affirmed elements are what I will attempt to set out with relation to the book of Jonah.

The quest for a universally accepted set of principle and methods in any field of study perhaps betrays a vestigial form of modernism. The post/(hyper-/ultra-)modern condition reveals a fragmentation of ideologies and perspectives, and warns against any so audacious as to proffer a ‘final solution’ to any problem or field of endeavor (I shall reserve additional discussion of these issues for chapter two).

Identifying the assumed epistemological commitments and perspectives of an identifiable reading community more or less bounded by its ideology and theology is more modest and realistic undertaking. It is therefore my intent to argue toward a greater consensus of method within a limited field, viz the study of biblical narratives informed by literary critical considerations, and within a particular theological tradition. My target audience here is evangelicals, theologically a rather diverse group in its own right, but whose sine qua non is a
shared commitment to reading the Bible as scripture, God's written word to humanity. It is my contention that certain facets of literary approaches to narrative are ideally suited for the ideological interests of such readers, and that this group could benefit from a more self-consciously extensive model of interpretation of biblical narratives. It is not my intent to attempt a validation or provide an apology for an evangelical bibliology as such. Rather it is hoped that evangelicals will both be benefited and critiqued by maintaining a dialogue with scholarship in the field of literary studies. I hold no misapprehensions that literary criticism of narrative texts will provide an easy or comfortable fit, any more than does historical criticism—there are weaknesses and blind spots in evangelical bibliology which need remediation, and conversation with literary theory could benefit thoughtful evangelicals open to refining their views. But there are also elements of literary criticism that can be fruitful to readers of biblical narratives regardless of their theological predispositions. Additionally, those who do not embrace this same view of scriptures will profit in two ways: by gaining greater understanding of evangelicals through the synthesis worked out in this study, and by observing insights which such an approach will yield into the book of Jonah.

Bar-Efrat (1980, 1989) and Kort (1988) inter alia have identified and expressed what appears to be the basic building blocks of all narratives, regardless of the age or culture of composition, whether regarded as scriptural or not. These are the essential elements 'recognised by literary critics.' In Bar-Efrat's terms, these main elements are setting (Kort: atmosphere), plot, characterisation, and style (Kort: tone). What occupies my attention here in this thesis is

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25 There are certainly nonevangelicals who also understand the Bible to be God's Word, using a variety of models to describe it. But all evangelicals share this view of scripture, and often use this as a watershed in defining themselves.

26 Similarly, Bal (1985:11-45) identifies the elements of a narrative (fabula) as events (=plot), (actors (=character), time and location (=setting).
to provide an uniquely extensive synthesis of three of these elements—setting, plot and characterisation—and display how each is used by the narrator of Jonah to shape the reader's perception of Jonah as a character, the group whom he represents, and thus how it affects the reader.

1.6 The Procedure

Since methodologies always proceed from a priori assumptions and preunderstandings, it is necessary to begin this thesis by grounding my methods in hermeneutical theory (i.e. the philosophical level), pointing out how my commitments influence, inform, and in some ways dictate the methods that I am here advocating. In so doing I will locate myself within the field of current hermeneutical theory, juxtaposing my position against certain influential figures of our day. Thus in chapter two, I explain and defend the hermeneutical goals, commitments, and strategies undergirding my literary praxis. I argue that the meaning of a literary work is found in the range of authorial intentions within the customary linguistic functions of a written text. Authorial intentions are made accessible through the use of recognisable literary conventions. I adopt a stance of critical realism, that is, employing interpretive models which are both provisional yet optimistic concerning knowledge of realities such as textual intentions which exist independently of subjective perspectives. While allowing for ambiguity and imprecision in human language, I take textual meaning to be determinate and hence shareable by those competent in the literary conventions employed by the author who are able to decenter themselves so as to share an intersubjectivity with the implied author. Attention to the generic conventions facilitates the inferring of authorial intention at three levels. First, the locutionary intention deals with the subject matter and the material elements. The second level is the
illocutionary, and describes the uses and purpose(s) envisioned by the author. The third level relates to the affects and effects anticipated by the author, i.e. the perlocutionary intention. The inferred interpretation of authorial intentions, conventionalised in the text, is warranted to the degree that it yields the most comprehensive explanation in terms of the coherence of the text under investigation. In light of approaching textual meaning as the result of a communicative act, understanding involves both an adequate identification and explanation of the cognitive elements of the text (its substance and structure) and a response to the truth claims it makes according to the author’s illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects.

Beginning with chapter three I take up the task of demonstrating how a familiarity with the conventions pertaining to narrative can helpfully shape one’s understanding of biblical narratives, with special reference to the book of Jonah. The discussion traces the role of setting within the narrative, and how Jonah’s character is thus staged. Jonah’s selection of Tarshish via the sea heavily impinges upon his negative characterisation. His descent to Joppa, into the ship, into the hold, into sleep, into the deep, and into the fish stand in direct opposition to Yahweh’s initial command for him to ‘Arise!’ The fish’s belly is an ill-suited venue for a song of thanksgiving, further indicating Jonah’s impropriety. Jonah fails to deliver his oracular message to the pagan king, subverting a type-scene in which he forfeits the rewards ‘due’ to him. By choosing to leave eastward from Nineveh, Jonah continues to place himself outside: outside the city, outside the shade, and outside of accepting God’s way of compassion.

Along both spatial and temporal axes, Jonah does not conform or yield to the expectations commensurate to a Hebrew prophet. Clearly he is depicted as one who breaks with the norms of his role. He displays his resistance to God by the places he chooses to go (the sea, Tarshish, outside the city), by the places he chooses to avoid (Nineveh, the throneroom).
choices of to spend his time (sleeping during a life-threatening storm, thanking God while inside the fish, ‘preaching’ five words and walking off the job, sitting and stewing outside the city) further indict him as nonconformist. To the end he remains noncompliant, choosing for himself a site east of the stage of God's compassion—not only a misfit but also a rebel.

In chapter four I turn attention to the conventions relating to employment. I build a case for seeing Jonah as the protagonist whose initial objective, to escape his commission, and secondary objective, to ensure the Ninevites' doom through his proclamation, both fail. Yet while he is thus a tragic figure, he nevertheless also fails to emerge as a tragic hero. Yahweh, portrayed in the role of antagonist, seeks to teach Jonah about his compassion extending to all, yet since the narrative lacks any denouement on this aspect, no success can be claimed. In a subsidiary storyline, the Ninevites succeed in their objective to avoid destruction, while Yahweh succeeds in his objective to use Jonah in confronting the Ninevites concerning their wickedness. In the present form of the narrative, the inertia and vector which may be traced through the action and dialogue point toward the plot type of a failed test, and the implied conclusion is that Jonah refuses to accede to Yahweh's ways.

The conventions applicable to narrative characterisation are foregrounded in chapter five. Because Jonah is cast as a satiric portrait, any interpretive model of this narrative which reflects a strongly sympathetic identification with him is dubious. Rather, I argue that the larger group which Jonah represents is comprised of those who presume a covenantal relationship with Yahweh based on superficial and external factors. I maintain that the implied reader experiences ambivalence of sympathetic identification with and simultaneous alienation from Jonah as an ironic figure. The unresolved ending moves the implied reader to 'decide' the outcome of the story by means of his or her own response to this narrative.
The conclusion, chapter six, summarises the results of this study—insights both for understanding the characterisation of Jonah in particular and for readers engaging biblical narratives more generally. The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate how narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives. The chief values sought here is to provide a more systematic tool for discussing the conventions of setting, plot and characterisation present in the Bible. Awareness of and attention to these factors hold the promise for more nuanced understanding of Jonah as well as for other narratives of the Hebrew Bible. I expect to provide insights for others seeking to ground the phenomenon of narrative conventions, especially those found in the Bible, within literary theory, linguistics, and epistemology.
Chapter 2: Strategies for Reading Biblical Narratives

"Stories are, in some ways, notoriously ambiguous and inefficient devices for conveying truth, and it is a puzzle worth pondering that narrative is the dominant form of choice for biblical writers." (Long 1989:66)

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will schematise my method of reading narratives, synthesising a number of strategies and priorities which are factors in my interpretive model. My overall goal is to situate myself within the field of literary studies on a variety of issues, nearly all of which have been contested. I am not seeking to advocate an original method or model as such, but rather I will draw upon insights from a variety of scholars. I am constructing an eclectic, overall combination of strategies and interpretive values that is the product of my own critical reflection upon the relative merits of various schools of literary theory. As I do so, I will ‘put my cards on the table,’ identifying my ideological and philosophical commitments which have bearing upon my hermeneutical model and hence my treatment of the book of Jonah while striving to maintain a coherency of methodology.

First, I will survey the options for locating textual meaning. I will then highlight the role of authorial intentionality and responsibility in communication, demonstrating that communication is an action having meaning only where intentionality is present. In written texts, it is possible for the author and reader to share a common ground in which meaningful dialogue can take place through a process of ‘intersubjectivity.’ The attempt to discern another’s intention requires an epistemological model of some sort. The epistemological position that I adopt is that of critical realism. I augment this model by invoking speech act theory to extend,
modify, and nuance the more traditional arguments for correlating textual meaning with authorial intentionality. I maintain that authors must make certain strategic moves in order to communicate effectively. One of these is to target an implied reader of the text, a group for whom the author intends some teleological purpose. Another strategic move is that, for speech acts to succeed, they must correspond to recognisable conventions of communication, especially of genre; authors thus must select an appropriately well-suited genre in order to communicate their intentions for the audience they envision. Since this thesis addresses narrative literature, I identify how the genre of narrative literature has unique cross-cultural and transtemporal potential, characterising some of the strengths and limitations of the narrative form as a communicative mode. Next I suggest how this model could relate with special considerations to biblical texts. I conclude with a discussion concerning the possibility of literary knowledge, i.e. whether or not any certainty or validity can be established in interpreting narrative texts.

2.2 A focus on the locus of meaning

"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).

The comparison between reading and mirror gazing raised in this passage in the New Testament suggests one of the most fundamental yet widely debated aspects in hermeneutical theory over the past century or so. Such a simile is certainly evocative for contemporary literary discussion, embroiled in complex issues. Is a written text simply an object which 'contains' no inherent images or 'meaning'? Does a text, like a mirror, simply reflect back to its 'interperter' nothing beyond what the reader initially brings to it? Reader response theorists might argue that
in fact there is ‘nothing’ there in a mirror until the observer/interpreter takes it into his or her own hands and inspires (in the truest sense of that term) ‘meaning’ into its lifeless, opaque surface. Accordingly, readers, like these figurative gazers into vanities, animate texts through the act of using them. Both readers and mirror devotees discover only what is there already resident within themselves, though perhaps latent and previously unrecognised. In this case, texts like mirrors have only derivative (parasitical?) meaning wholly independent of both their authors/makers as well as their own form. When going through the morning grooming rituals, I don’t really care whether the image I look at is reflected in a mirror which happens to be oval or framed with carved oak or beveled at its edges or even if the mirror is etched with elaborate artwork (so long as it doesn’t interfere with my self-preoccupied tasks such as shaving without bloodletting). What I want is self-understanding, not an alien face or image put there by authors/mirror-makers. The mirror must reflect my own presence—it is not the object itself which captures and holds my attention, but rather I am both subject and object in the act of viewing self-referentially.

And yet to read the text only in this self-referential way overlooks and obscures another vital aspect. The implied goal of gazing into the mirror/text is not merely to cause the beholder to think about herself or himself *ad infinitum*, but to consider personal change. In other words, the beholder responds to the text/mirror. When we go to the mirror in the morning, we do so in order to amend ourselves in various ways—shaving, combing, washing, applying makeup. In fact, wouldn’t many people disapprove of those who would go to a mirror for the sole purpose of admiring (or deprecating) themselves—the exact situation narratively ‘reflected’ in the *hubris* of Narcissus or the evil witch of Snow White (J and W Grimm 1812), ‘Mirror, mirror, on the wall…’? Instead, a person using the mirror ‘correctly’ is the one who changes himself or herself
in response to what is seen there. James’ argument is that to receive the word properly entails not merely hearing it, but acting upon it as a result of the encounter. As Ricoeur (1981b:158) notes, ‘the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better.’ To understand a text rightly is concomitant with a new and fresh self-understanding in light of encountering something different. Indeed, in picking up a book, the reader who seeks personal enrichment betrays a desire to entertain alterity, the possibility of a different, perhaps appealing and thus more preferable, way of seeing and being. In a different but related metaphor, Birkerts (1994:80) likens the experience of reading to embarking on a journey into another land. As readers experience what is foreign there, they not only open themselves to entertaining new ways of how the world is viewed, but also are changed thereby.

[T]he immersion of the self in a text has certain fundamental metaphysical implications. To read... is to cast a vote; it is to posit an elsewhere and to set off toward it....[W]hen we read we not only transplant ourselves to the place of the text, but we modify our natural angle of regard upon all things; we reposition the self in order to see differently.

(emphasis his)

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27 I will elaborate on the possibility of ‘correct’ understanding of a text later in this chapter.

28 It is at this point where James’ analogy breaks down somewhat. The mirror reflects a face, but does not tell the person in what ways to change. It does not impose an outside will or norm upon the gazers, it merely shows what is there (imagine a talking mirror which says, ‘You need to lose some weight!’). Whether or not weight needs to be lost is dependent upon the gazer’s perceptions (self-esteem, angle of vision or lighting), and is often influenced by social factors bearing upon the gazers such as perceived (dis)approval. But according to James here, when the text (that is, God’s Word) itself is read, it does establish norms for appropriate response, and to choose to remain unresponsive and thus unaffected is tantamount to defying its intent.

29 I hasten to note, however, that the ‘change’ may take different forms. I may be ‘changed’ merely by being confirmed in what I already believe. Or the change may be as sweeping as a wholesale conversion from one worldview to another. More frequently it involves a broadening of perspective as I look at some aspect of reality from a different vantage point, or again it might entail an entrenchment of my own views in resistance and opposition to the views espoused in the text. Indeed, within the reading of a single document, I may engage in multiple responses in light of the various points being argued. The point I am seeking to make here is that, in each case I am responding to an ‘other’ which is outside myself.

30 Rommetveit (1974:57), working independently of Birkerts, takes a similar view, speaking specifically of the otherness of poetry: ‘Our decision to read poems implies a decision “to do something different.”’ I shall draw out further some of Rommetveit’s insights later in this chapter.
Some may counter that Birkerts here is claiming too much. The problem is not that he makes too much of the reader in the process, but that he is overly optimistic of the capacity of human language to 'transplant' a reader to someplace different than the reader (in his social environment) has experienced. How is it possible for lines on a physical page to entail 'certain fundamental metaphysical implications'? What is at stake here is nothing less than language itself, arguably the most hotly contested area of contemporary philosophy, perhaps even of culture at large as well. Ironically, with the current explosion in technologies of communication, the very possibility of communicating meaning is widely and heatedly debated. One of the chief questions in the discussion is this: Do interpreters seek to recover the meaning by looking to the author (either behind the text or manifested in it), or by performing a close analysis of the text for the resident meaning encoded therein, or do they construct meanings for themselves, either autonomously or in reading communities who share common values? Each of these three focal points of communication—the author, the text, the reader—has received intense consideration from literary critics over the past century, with various literary schools of thought emerging from them, each tending toward emphasising one of these aspects over the other two. The order of their appearance has been from primarily author-oriented approaches to text-oriented and finally to reader-oriented. Contemporary schools of literary criticism may be plotted along these lines in relation to the primary focus for the location of meaning.\(^{31}\)

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\(^{31}\) These reflect tendencies, not absolute categories. For example, rhetorical critics may give attention to authorial intentionality or to the sociological factors of the receptor audience, but generally speaking, the predominant focus will be on the features of the text. Moreover, it may be beneficial in some cases to see blended concerns: author/text or text/reader. Illustrative of the latter would be the Constance school (Iser 1978, Jauss 1982a, 1982b) of Rezeptionsästhetik which looks both at the formal aspects of the text and the enjoyment (Genüb) of them by the reader (see Makary 1993, 1997:383). My own position I would describe as author/text, in which the intentions of the implied author are communicated via the text (see the discussion below).
Author-oriented approaches link the meaning of a text with the intentions and/or circumstances of its origination. Sometimes these approaches have presupposed written texts as windows into the past, affording interpreters more or less clear glimpses of life *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* in the past. Alternatively, the meaning has sometimes been identified with the author’s world of reference—the names, places, events, objects, and ideas to which the texts witness. Other scholars have argued that readers might seek from the text insights into the thought processes or the psychosocial states of mind which

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32 The categories I develop in this chart are comparable to those of Lategan (see below in section 2.7), whose equivalent terms are source, message (text) and receptor—he does not address the position of no determinate meaning *per se*.

33 To these more self-conscious ideologies could be added the less self-conscious ones: nationalisms, fundamentalisms, androcentrism/patriarchalism, eurocentrism *inter alia*.

34 Frei (1974:86-104) discusses this point in detail, listing S J Baumgarten (1760,1764) and C Wolff ([nd] 1965) not only as his prime examples, but also as pioneers of this approach.

35 The hermeneutics of positivism, with its alleged objectivity of method, of necessity granted priority to the referential world, since (it was thought) the goal was recovery of the *bruta facta* of history.
occasioned the text’s origin and original reception (e.g. Schleiermacher, for whom textual understanding relates to the recovery of the author’s consciousness\textsuperscript{36}). For each of these, it is deemed possible to adduce the function of these texts as intended by the author(s).

\textit{Text-oriented.} As an alternative, one might perceive a written text (\textit{à la} New Criticism\textsuperscript{37}) as an \textit{objet d’art}, an aesthetic artifact whose meaning lies intimately and inextricably within itself, that is, it is self-referential. Disregarding both genetic factors (the ‘intentional fallacy’) and its affects upon the reader (the ‘affective fallacy’), the text is approached as an autonomous entity. Other text-immanent approaches to interpretation, including French structuralism, semiotics, Russian formalism, and text linguistics (equivalent to ‘discourse analysis’ in the United States) also primarily feature the text’s form and structure rather than seeking to understand its origins or its reference. The meaning of the text is signified in its surface structure, yielding a deeper structure common to socially or psychologically based models of human rationality.

\textit{Reader-oriented.} Another alternative is the position that meaning is neither ‘there’ in an author nor in the text, but is only the extension of the reader’s psyche and the process of reading. Nietzsche (1967:327) asserted that ‘ultimately man [sic] finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them.’ Vanhoozer (1998:48-71,137) helpfully demonstrates how Nietzsche’s trajectory developed into reader-oriented hermeneutics as most notably exemplified in Derrida (1970, 1976, 1977a, 1977b, 1981), Rorty (1979, 1982, 1991), Fish (1980), and Foucault (1979), all of whom maintain that meaning does not exist as a resident property \textit{in} the

\textsuperscript{36} Schleiermacher (1998:107-117) places of intention in the author’s mind; intentionality in his interpretive model is a psychological-cognitive process. Hence, textual understanding involves analysis of the presumed psychological state(s) which would generate the work, a move which contributed to the disrepute into which authorially-grounded meaning subsequently fell.

\textsuperscript{37} Makaryk ([1993]1997:120-124) lists and discusses the following as leading exponents of this school of thought: T S Elliot, I Richards, W Empson, F Leavis, C Brooks, A Tate, and J C Ransom.
text but rather meaning takes place through the experience of reading. Vanhoozer explains how the 'undoing' of the authority of the author precipitated 'hermeneutical non-realism' (48) which seeks to unmask the implicit power plays of the author (deconstruction). Derrida's agenda involves exposing all appeals to authority and exercises of power through the use of texts, whether through creation or exploitative interpretations. He claims that every attempt to explain reality 'correctly' constitutes an illegitimate attempt at closure by limiting and restricting further reflection, thereby pre-empting criticism. Likewise, attempts to explain written texts into a new contexts are chimerical, obscuring interpreters' self-interests (1977a:183). Deconstruction is thus a form of resistance to such coercion. For Fish (1980), valid interpretation is a matter of endorsement by a localised, social consensus (16): 'there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only "ways of reading" that are extensions of community perspectives.' Literary knowledge is valid insofar as it corresponds to the approved values and norms of a reading community, and is authoritative only within the parameters of that particular group.38

No determinate meaning. Reader-response theory tends toward and ultimately blends with the position of textual indeterminacy (see Fish 1980:321,335). If validity in meaning is simply the projection of the arbitrary conventions of a particular community, then meaning itself is nothing but a 'game' played by willing participants, and nothing more.39 It is 'determinate' only for those who will it to be so; it is useful for the preservation and self-interests of some 'interested' party—hence, the discussion turns from textual understanding to the 'politics' of

38 In this way Fish (see 1980:172) seeks to overcome two opposing problems: the seeming generality of consensus opinion on the interpretation of texts (it is due to the pressure of interpretive communities against an individual reader's idiosyncratic or autonomous/anarchic reading) and also the existence of seemingly irreconcilable differences in interpretations (the strategies themselves are not universal, but learned within diverse, indigenous communities which disagree on what 'counts' as valid).

39 Of course, this discussion is not restricted to literary endeavors. For example, Irvin Yalom, professor of psychiatry at Stanford University Medical School (in Ramsay 1998:74) states flatly: 'There is no such thing as science and history. There is only interpretation.'
meaning. Clines (1993:79-80; see also 1995) acknowledges this consequence, and actively endorses it:

There are no universally agreed upon legitimate interpretations.... If there are no ‘right’ interpretations, and no validity in interpretation beyond the assent of various interest groups, biblical interpreters have to give up the goal of determinate and universally acceptable interpretations, and devote themselves to interpretations they can sell—in whatever mode is called for by the communities they choose to serve. I call this ‘customised’ interpretation.

In such a view where ‘there are no “right” interpretations’ (in the sense of an obligatory reading which transcends both the individual reader’s utilitarian interests and the collective subjectivity of a particular reading community), an ‘ethical reading’ is merely one in which the reader ‘owns up’ to his or her preferred, political interests by clearly announcing them.

Summarising the above, there are three primary points of attention for those seeking to identify determinate, textual meaning: the author, the text, and the reader. Most interpreters tend toward viewing one of these as primary for the locus of meaning (though an author/text dialectic or text/reader dialectic are possible interpretive options). With these approaches now in mind, I can now illustrate how these varying foci of interpretive interests have been adopted by various interpreters with relation to a given text. Looking specifically at the book of Jonah, it is possible to see how these differing focalising points have been reflected in some of the more widely recognised works on Jonah. In many of these cases, their title reveals what is the controlling interpretive interest.

In terms of sheer number, dominating twentieth century studies are the methods which pertain to the author as determinative of meaning, especially in the areas of historical-critical issues (i.e. date of composition, authorship, historicity, linkage to 2 Kings 14 and other such
factors) and source criticism. More recently, psychological studies have been done, although these examine Jonah as a character rather than analysing the implied author of the book (e.g. Corey 1995). Methods of redaction criticism have been blended with canonical interests in Childs (1979:417-427), Dyck (1986), and Holmgren (1994:127-132, who seeks the significance of the placement of Jonah within the canon), as well as an initial work in speech act theory (e.g. Eagleton 1990:231-236, who employs Austin's model in investigating Jonah).

Numerous studies have also appeared which focus on the text. Longacre and Hwang (1995:336-358) have analyzed Jonah for features of text linguistics (see also Segert 1980:121-130). Notable among the various forms of investigation reflecting literary criticism and narrative poetics are: Magonet (1976, whose contributions I've described in chapter one), Good (1981:39-55, whose special interest is in the function of irony), Weimar (1982:217-235, who helpfully differentiates Literarische Kritik and Literarkritik), Woodard (1991:3-16, who looks at Jonah as a tragedy), and Craig (1993, also discussed in more detail in chapter one). Rhetorical critical interests are pursued by Walsh (1982:219-229, whose primary interest is in the rhetorical impact of the Jonah psalm), Trible (1994, see my discussion in chapter one), and Wendland (1997:67-98,189-209, who explores the rhetorical functions of irony and enigma), while semio-structural aspects are the focus of Potgieter (1990:61-69) and Person's (1996) conversation analysis (again see chapter one).

Other studies have emerged which concentrate their attention on the role of the reader in the production of meaning for the book of Jonah. Ruether and Ruether (1989) read Jonah in light

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41 I have already discussed the main arguments of many of these in the first chapter of this thesis, together with my categorisation of their interpretation of the character of Jonah (see "Jonah as psychotic").
of current Israeli-Palestinian relations. In separate studies, Van Heerden (1990:71-91) and Davis (1991:224-237) point out the overriding historicist interests of naïve realists (fundamentalists). Hoffer and Wright (1994:144-150) demonstrate how (dis)similarly Jews and Christians handle Jonah. And deconstruction of the attempts to identify the genre of Jonah is performed by Elata-Alster and Salmon (1989:40-60), who seek to demonstrate that such endeavors are inevitably ideologically driven.42 Sherwood (1997:364-402) employs the techniques of New Historicism in exhibiting three readings of Jonah, taken from different periods in European church history, in which Jonah is adduced to warrant subservience to established government (sixteenth century monarchialism), to deprecate the Jews (eighteenth century anti-semitism), and to yield information into biological taxonomy (nineteen century rationalism).

My own approach here will employ and engage certain strategies pertaining to author-and text-centered approaches, including authorial intentionality, speech-act theory, rhetorical criticism, formalist/archetypal, discourse analysis/text linguistics, narratology, and canonical criticism. In addition, I will also draw upon some philosophical resources such as communication theory, critical realism and indeed even some elements from reader-response, most notably from the Rezeptionsästhetik of Iser and Jauß. In so doing, I will draw out how such a multifaceted approach will serve to elucidate features in the narrative of Jonah heretofore overlooked. I begin my argument by grounding literary meaning in authorial intent.

42 It seems to me that by this enterprise, Elata-Alster and Salmon invite a deconstructionist reading of their own article (i.e. "What interest do they have in publishing their deconstruction?"), pointing in the direction of the Derridean endless deferral of meaning ad infinitum.
2.3 A case for authorial intentionality (or, What I intend to argue)

In the everyday use of language, communicative exchanges affect us in a broad range of ways. A stirring speech may motivate us to diligence, a love song may arouse emotions of melancholy or passion, a spoken threat may cause us to change our plans, a suggestion may alter our habitual thinking, or a promise might generate hope. Interpersonal exchanges are filled with ubiquitous phrases: ‘How long until we get there?'; ‘Next!'; ‘Please leave a message at the tone'; ‘Will that be cash or charge?'; ‘See you at eight.’ The meaning of these phrases, however, is determined not in themselves (i.e., they do not have meaning) but rather by the intention of the person uttering them (i.e., they do mean) within a social environment. Language is used by speakers to accomplish desired ends. That is, communication is purposive, generated by the intents and desires of the speaker and oriented toward some goal. Wittingly or unwittingly, a communicator seeks to accomplish something through the act of articulation. The communication assumes some directive purpose.

Reader-response theorists rightly point out that there are no guarantees that the author will be heard successfully, that is, that the listener will understand correctly the message and goals intended by the author. Their case is overstated, however, if they insist that listeners cannot enter into at least a certain amount of shareable meaning which is mediated through a text.  

For example, let us take one of the above phrases: ‘Will that be cash or charge?’ This phrase may be used by a salesperson to vocalise a variety of sentiments: ‘I wish you’d be done with your shopping and leave, because I find you annoying’; ‘Let’s quickly close the transaction

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43 Rommetveit contributes significantly to this concept of shareable meaning. I shall turn to his insights on this matter shortly.
before you have a chance to reconsider and I lose out on my commission’; ‘I’m happy that you seem to be so satisfied in having found the right item that you’re eager to purchase—it makes my sales position more gratifyingly pleasant and worthwhile’; as a form of humoring a four-year-old buying an ice-cream cone; as a form of leverage to coerce a decision out of a reluctant shopper; as a triumphant note of conquest and superiority intended to be overheard by a rival, commission-driven coworker, and so on. The communication can be deemed as successful at a minimal level if the shopper responds appropriately to the surface-level question (‘I’ll pay cash’). It may be judged as more successful when all that the salesperson consciously intended to communicate to the listener is also understood correctly, who then responds appropriately: the four-year-old laughing (while handing over the cash), the coworker muttering, ‘How does she do that?’ and so forth. But the communication may be considered to have failed when the surface-level meaning has not been understood, such that the response is inappropriate (the four-year-old somberly replying, ‘My mom is the one in charge’). It may also be judged as having gone awry in several other ways. The listener may attribute to the speaker something which the speaker did not intend: the coworker snapping back when the salesperson did not even know he was present at the time of transaction. Indeed, communicators are offended when listeners attribute to their messages meanings and goals that were not authorially intended. ‘That’s not what I meant!’ bears the implicit stamp of recognition that speakers have greater rights than listeners over their own words.

Another way that communication arguably misfires is when the reader/listener correctly identifies what the original communicator did intend, but meant to obscure or withhold (when the unwelcome shopper replies ‘I’m going to leave and go where my business is appreciated’ or

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44 A more complete listing of communicative breakdowns (‘infelicities,’ ‘sins’) is provided in Austin ([1962]1975:12-24).
the pressured shopper says, 'I'm not going to buy anything until I'm good and ready'). In this case the reader/listener has successfully deconstructed the surface message in order to arrive at the communicator's underlying, motivation. Strictly speaking, this is not a failure of communication at all, though perhaps what might be labeled a case of over-communication.

Interpreting a given written text may be understood as ultimately a matter of identifying the intent of a human action. The ability of an outside party to determine the 'meaning' of a human action is part and parcel of everyday life in a social context. In the United States judicial system, for example, judges and jurors seek to understand, 'beyond reasonable doubt,' both intent as well as human actions. If an individual's action has caused the death of another person, it is essential to determine whether intention to kill is a factor in order to establish whether or not a criminal offense has occurred. Was the death accidental (unintended and unforeseeable), involuntary manslaughter (unintended but foreseeable or attributable to neglect or somehow mitigated by circumstances), or murder (intentional and premeditated)? Indeed, the severity of sentencing is directly tied to the requisite ability to determine the intentions of the accused. Moreover, if a single juror is deemed incompetent or inept at judging the intentions of the accused, s/he will be dismissed, while if as a whole the jury cannot agree as to the meaning and intentions of the action, it may be ruled a mistrial, precipitating a new trial starting over with those who are more competent (with the judge also scrutinising the intentions of potential jury members). Throughout the entire process the ability to infer human intention by virtue of their actions is essential. There may be insufficient evidence to make a determination, or a juror might betray an ideological prejudice which taints his or her ability to give a fair hearing to the evidence, or a particular juror may be incompetent on some other basis. But in any case, both an understanding of others' actions and knowledge of their intentions are considered accessible.
The point to be made here is that understanding human behavior necessarily entails the attribution of intentionality, regardless of whether the action is criminal or literary or any other.

A written text is the result of such a human action, meaningfully produced by an author who communicates something. If it is possible to judge the intentions underlying one human action (a criminal case), then in principle it should be possible to judge the intentions of another human action, viz human communication. Authors write texts purposively and intentionally, in order to communicate. Readers, using the text as ‘evidence,’ may also infer those purposes and intentions.

There are many practical illustrations that point to the ineluctable relationship between authors and their literary products. Copyright law protects authors’ rights to ownership of what is their property, that is, their texts. Appropriation of their texts by somebody else without permission constitutes an infringement upon what is legally theirs. Students copying the texts belonging to others are rightly charged with cheating. Authors of texts which publicly state falsities about others are held liable for libel. Descriptions of various misuses of authors’ words with terms frequently bear negative connotations: ‘out of context,’ ‘misquoted,’ ‘proof texting,’ or ‘plagiarising’. A spoken ‘text’ given under oath which proves to be false is grounds for prosecution as perjury. A signature on a contract or a bank check is a personal author-isation which is legally binding. The examples could be multiplied, but the point is consistent: it is authors (and not their readers) who are the morally and legally responsible agents for the texts they produce and the meanings and purposes they intend. Moreover, in certain cases readers can be held legally liable for violating that which properly belongs to the author.

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45 Here again, authorial intention comes into play. If, while under oath, someone unintentionally speaks what is false due to ignorance or misunderstanding, they are not considered evil nor legally liable, but simply wrong. If they intend to deceive through their words however, they are deemed morally perverse and legally culpable.
The argument developed here is that human communicative action, like the human criminal action as well as many forms of linguistically dependent social interactions such as those mentioned above, is subject to adjudication. Further, it is possible for outside observers (in this case, readers) to arrive at a sufficient level of knowledge of another through these communicative acts to assess his or her intentions. My starting point, then, is that the goal of communication is the establishment of mutual understanding, so that thoughts, values, and actions may be coordinated between parties through language.

Rommetveit (1974) provides some useful resources and arguments for establishing the case that mutual understanding is a realisable goal of human communication, referring to it by such terms as ‘complementarity,’ ‘intersubjectivity,’ and a ‘shared social world’ (1974:29). He asserts that commonality is established, at least to a degree, by the implicit agreement of two parties to engage in a dialogue (:37), a category which includes written communication. The written text is a vehicle by which shareable social realities may be coordinated between the implied author and implied reader. The reader whom the author envisions is capable of assessing the structure and content of the message by examining how the shared knowledge (intersubjectivity) may be expanded (i.e., there is further commonality established) or modified (there is an altered angle of perception on the social realities).

A reader/hearer who cannot or will not adopt the perception of another human being, in this case the author/speaker, remains at an ‘egocentric stage’ (:42) of development, according to the studies of children’s speech patterns performed by Piaget (s.v. 1926). In other words, the inability or refusal to give a fair hearing to another is evidence of and tantamount to inadequate socialisation of the reader. On the other hand, the potential for intersubjectivity is proportional to the capacity of the participants to adopt the other’s point of view. The term Rommetveit
employs for the willingness and ability to entertain others’ perspectives is ‘decentration’ (:43), the opposite of egocentrism (:43). Moreover, key to the dialogue between author and reader is the shared text itself: ‘the extralinguistic context cannot be assessed “publicly” or “privately,” but only in terms of the architecture of intersubjectivity at the moment of speech’

46 (45, emphasis his). He presses this point further (:51), maintaining that extralinguistic ‘facts,’ common beliefs and widely shared presuppositions are therefore as such—however veridically and publicly assessed—of no immediate significance... what is made known to the reader the moment he is reading one particular passage of a novel is only intelligible within the framework of a shared imaginary world and the intersubjectively established here-and-now of that particular passage.

Even when the chosen genre of communication is fiction or poetry, a pre-established commonality is fundamental to successful communication, affording escape from private subjectivism to decentered intersubjectivity (see :54). 47 Rommetveit then summarises the mutual responsibilities of author and reader toward one another in order for successful communication to take place (:55).

The full-fledged act of verbal communication is thus under normal conditions based upon a reciprocally endorsed and spontaneously fulfilled contract of complementarity: encoding is tacitly assumed to involve anticipatory decoding, i.e. it is taken for granted

46 As far as written (as opposed to oral) texts, I relate Rommetveit’s ‘moment of speech’ to the textual instantiation (that is, not temporally as in the ‘moment’ it is written, but objectively as the medium of expression). Thus the writing qua text is shareable between the parties, author and readers, who otherwise may potentially be temporally and culturally removed from one another. The shared world is thus ‘virtual’ (textual) rather than ‘real-time.’

47 Levinas (1985), a philosophical ethicist, argues a comparable point here based on the category of moral obligation (‘oughtness’). Beavers (2000b) summarises Levinas’ grounding of all ethics in relationships between humans. The human self, with a natural bent on egoistic enjoyment, seeks to subsume everything to its own self-interests. But when the self encounters another person it meets resistance from an other. The ‘proximity’ of the other demands a negotiation between the two parties, an act made possible only through sympathetic response. The self learns to become aware of and identify with the needs and destitution of the other rather than ignoring, dominating or seeking to silence (metaphorically ‘killing’) the other. Thus the self may become ‘subjected’ to a moral sense toward the other in what Levinas terms ‘substitution’ (:5): ‘the desire to help the other emerges because I am held hostage by the other to core of my being, and, in substitution, I am made to stand for the other’ (:6). What Levinas calls ‘substitution’ is analogous to Rommetveit’s ‘decentering’—a self-emptying move in which a self, viz the reader, seriously entertains the alterity of another’s presence (the voice of the implied author) through a written text. The reader may then sympathetically listen for and attend to the presence of the other vicariously in the text, and, by substitution, adopts a stance of subjection to (i.e., a willingness genuinely to hear out and entertain) the intentions of the implied author.

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that speech is continuously listener-oriented and monitored in accordance with assumptions concerning a shared social world and convergent strategies of categorisation. Conversely—and on precisely those premises—decoding is tacitly assumed to be speaker-oriented and aiming at a reconstruction of what the speaker intends to make known."

Thus the coordination of meaning remains a viable goal for interpretive understanding in any act of communication, resulting in an intersubjectivity in which both author and reader meet one another in the commonly accessible world of the shared text. Yet another tool is helpful at this point, the role of realism, the next related topic of concern.

2.4 Criticism of realism and critical realism

In the preceding section I have argued that society at large operates on the assumption that authors’ intentions may be derived from their written works. Nevertheless, terms such as ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ beg further questions. Who gets to decide what is reasonable? What are the criteria for establishing what counts as reasonable and what does not? The whole process seems dependent upon a kind of common sense realism in which truth is self-evident and uniformly accessible to all, and which further maintains that there is a direct correspondence between the way in which we describe things and the things themselves. Both this common sense realism and the correspondence model of truth have been sharply criticised from many angles in recent years, though primarily from postmodern perspectives. Adam’s (1995:14-15) remarks are illustrative:

When modern rationalist demystifiers appeal to ‘reason,’ without specifying what sort of reason they mean, they are mystifying their own debt to one particular tradition of reasoned inquiry.... In fact, we may confidently suppose that whenever people sit down

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48 It is also helpful to expand the notion of the implied reader by differentiating it from the intended audience. The intended audience is a smaller subset of the implied readership. In the case of the Bible, it is possible to argue (and I would) that the writers envisioned a readership beyond that of the original recipients. Both Paul (Romans 15:4) and Peter (1 Peter 1:12) attribute this proleptic and anticipatory vision of a broader readership to the authors of the Tanak. I will elaborate on the notion of implied readers under 4.6(a).
to establish a single theoretical system that would have a privilege relation to the Truth, they will contaminate the purity of their theory with decisions we can attribute to personal interests, unscientific interests, unresolved psychological determinations, or any of dozens of impure, nonuniversal motivations.

Though this argument might appear to be fatal to maintaining any credible form of realism in the current postmodern intellectual environment, it occasions the refinement and nuancing of realism as a category of description.

For this, it is profitable to turn to Van Huyssteen (1987). He asserts that realism proceeds from the notion that the scholar, whether scientist, literary critic, or theologian, is engaged in the task of discovering inherent structures within reality (9). The models of interpretation of data being investigated are not merely constructions of the scholar’s imagination but actually refer to entities they seek to describe.


- **Naïve realism**: This model understands scientific theories as accurate descriptions or pictures of reality ‘as it is in itself’ (Barbour 1974:34-35). Applied to biblical studies, the theologian recognises interpretive possibilities only if they relate to previously familiar thought categories. Van Huyssteen draws a direct line between this form of realism and fundamentalist approaches to the Bible, in which the theological schemes ostensibly drawn from the Bible are absolutised and virtually equated with biblical truth. He further shows how the naïve realism model of rationality leads to and necessitates literal interpretation of the Bible (a topic to which I shall turn shortly). Naïve realism falters in its lack of self-awareness in the interpretive and
theory-making processes and inability to look at its descriptions from any other perspectives. Søren Kierkegaard's ([1844] 1946:222) words, though offered in a different context, are nonetheless germane in assessing naïve realism: 'No one is so terribly deceived as he who does not himself suspect it.'

- **Positivism:** Positivism begins with empirical observation and utilises theoretical concepts as mere categories for classifying those observations. Positivists believe that using an inductive, 'scientific' (i.e. systematically logical) approach to observing data will yield clearly inferred interpretive generalisations. 'The scientist can know the facts of the world in propositions that are true if they correspond to the facts, and false if they do not' (Van Huyssteen 1987:21). For theology, this fosters a view of scripture as 'empirical data' which readily reveals its truth sans historical- or literary critical reflection. Van Huyssteen shows how this leads to biblicism, i.e. the assumption 'that it is possible to move from Biblical texts as such to doctrine without the critical aid of metaphors and models' and the employment of "scriptural proofs" [that] are used as valid arguments" (:21) while heeding neither context nor credible hermeneutics. Positivists operate by claiming that they are merely uncovering the 'natural,' self-evident meaning. But what appears to be a 'natural' is, in fact, the product of a particular socio-political practice. What is 'common sense' to them may be prejudicial, self-preferential, and repressive to others.

- **Instrumentalism:** Instrumentalism views theoretical categories not as derived immediately from the data, but springing from the creative imagination of the observer. Moreover, theoretical constructs are strictly utilitarian, to be evaluated not in terms of truth or falsity but rather as to their functional aptness and convenience. '[M]odels can be seen as useful
fictions: they too are neither true nor false, but only more or less useful mental devices’ (21). In biblical studies this may manifest itself in literary analysis which endlessly defers the question of referentiality and the scriptural claims to truth which call for a religious response in favor of individualistic, existential experiences.

► Critical realism: Critical realism assumes, like naïve realism, that theories represent reality, but differs in viewing these theories as always tentative and only proximate (24). Models are taken seriously but not literally. Though reality exists prior to and independent of the mind of the interpreter, interpretive models are essential for understanding, and may be compared and evaluated and thoughtfully selected, subject to continual revision and updating. There is something real ‘out there,’ and while our comprehension of that reality will always be partial and provisional, yet progress in understanding can be made in what has elsewhere been termed as a ‘hermeneutical spiral’ (see the title of Osborne 1991),49 rather than the samsara-like cycle of deferral and indeterminacy found among many deconstructionists. In other words, critical realism seeks to describe things that really exist independently of our perspective (i.e. ‘realism’) as well as recognising that interpretive models, dependent as they are on human imagination, have relative degrees of adequacy (i.e. ‘critical’).

The success of the interpretive theory rests on certain principles of validation, viz correspondence, comprehensiveness, coherence, consistency, and compellingness. In another

49 Rommetveit (1974:99) details this spiral as emerging from relating parts of a literary piece to the whole and vice versa, but making progress in assessing the way in which the gaps (potentialities) are filled. ‘The spiral by which increased insight is achieved may thus apparently proceed from some as yet not fully understood semantic potentiality to “the world of the poetry” and even “the kind of silence” out of which his message is born—and then all the way back to a reinterpretation of that semantic potentiality. What has been left in silence by the creative writer and can be assessed only by prolepsis by his lay reader may hence in literary analysis become the object of reflective explication.’

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work, Van Huyssteen (1988:850) favorably cites McMullin (1986:57) who provides these further qualifications for critical realism:

- Realism commits one to saying that there are ‘good reasons’ but not compelling grounds. The logical possibility that even a highly successful theory might be false, should be held open;
- Any theory may therefore develop further and can in principle be revised and sharpened;
- Only theories that have already shown a considerable degree of explanatory power would qualify as having reliable ontological implications;
- The explanatory success of a theory suggests truth and never implies truth.

(emphasis McMullin)

These qualifications of McMullin via Van Huyssteen are valid and useful components to the model I wish to adopt here. As applied to hermeneutics, probability favors the interpretation which best accounts for the purposive aspects of the text (see the discussion below) when taken as a whole, and which explains the function of all of the parts to the whole, and further which enables us to understand it more convincingly than other alternatives. Moreover, the critical realist\(^{51}\) acknowledges both the metaphorical and provisional nature of his or her descriptions.

### 2.5 How to do things with authors: Speech act theory and authorial intentionality

There exists a cluster of intertwined concepts (see Vanhoozer, 1998:46) that may point us back to the author for textual meaning without requiring us to revert to premodern or modern strategies. *Original* meaning, of necessity, relates to the meaning of the originator. The

\(^{50}\) Fisher ([1987]1989:107, see also 108f) establishes the logic of good reasons, by which he means ‘*those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical.* By “warrant,” I mean that which authorizes, sanctions, or justifies belief, attitude, or action’ (emphasis his).

\(^{51}\) In adopting the category of ‘critical realism” as a self-descriptive term for my methodology of biblical interpretation, I do not thereby intend to align myself with the presuppositions of a particular school of ‘biblical criticism’ or ‘higher criticism’ *per se.*
originator, i.e. author, intends a meaning, which is the *authorial* meaning. Thus original meaning and authorial meaning are coextensive. In turn, the authorial meaning is, by definition, that which is *authoritative*—that which pertains to the author. The act of interpretation is subsequent to, but dependent upon, this original, authoritative normativity. Interpretive commentary is *authentic*, then, to the degree that it reflects the authorial intent. Interpretive commentary, however, must not claim (as it so often has in the modernist mindset) to be authoritative in its own right, for *authoritativeness* (or *authority*) is an attribute of *authorship*. Rather, more modestly, it attempts, through a (self-)critical realism which is cognizant of its limited perspective, to retrace the author’s own thoughts as laid down in his or her work according to the conventions of language which are generally (if not universally) utilised between people as communicators (*homo communicans*).

Texts have historically been viewed less as ‘victims’\(^{52}\) of readers than as powerful tools in the hands of authors who may subvert, persuade, and manipulate readers. Governments have long realised the capacity of written texts to undermine their power structures. The suppression of the dissident voice, whether oral or written, has often been deemed necessary for the retention of political control. Fear that ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’ underlies countless efforts on the part of the empowered to censor public critique of the political status quo. Both history\(^{53}\) and literature\(^{54}\) are replete with examples of the silencing of the downtrodden. Tyrants, dictators, oligarchies, and other regimes may literally smash the printing presses or banish the perpetrators to some frozen Gulag in the effort to silence the voice of nonconformist authors. The impact that

\(^{52}\) In an extreme form of reader-response criticism, M Taylor (‘Text as Victim’ 1982:65) argues that interpretation is ‘a *hostile* act in which interpreter victimizes text.’

\(^{53}\) E.g. the Roman Catholic Church, Nazi Germany, the former Soviet Union—any imperial form of public censorship.

texts of the oppressed have had upon the broader landscape of human history is tacit evidence that the arguments of the radical reader-response advocates (i.e., anti-author, e.g., Fish, Foucault) are truncated—texts do incite, catalyze, and transform readers in ways that authors foresee and for which they strategize. A text may seize and grip and convert a reader to a new worldview, perspective, or opinion (e.g., Luther’s epiphanic reading of Scripture). The very existence of rhetorical study witnesses to the full-orbed power of texts to transmit messages—logos, ethos and pathos. To the degree that texts do in fact shape and modify a reader’s thinking toward the ideals they espouse (even texts purposefully written to persuade one of the incommunicability of human thought!) it must be acknowledged that something is there in the text, regardless of the response the reader chooses toward the ideals espoused.

Put another way, the solution to the very real problem of interpretive authoritarianism is neither to strangle the voice of the author—à la Barthes (1992:125), who announces, “The birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the author.”—nor to make the author a ventriloquist’s dummy sitting on the reader’s lap as the reader projects his or her voice through the mute dummy. Rather, heed should be given to the warnings of the postmodernists’ hermeneutics of suspicion concerning interpreters who mask their own power ploys by authenticating themselves from texts they ostensibly interpret to others. Claiming to speak with

55 I do not wish to imply that the reader is benign in this process—obviously there must be a receptivity to the truth claims advocated by the author within the text. My point, however, is to emphasise that neither authors nor the texts they produce are benign.

56 Indeed, if there is nothing there in the text, then even a reader’s response—in the true sense of the term—is precluded.

57 Barthes’ (1992:125-130) anti-authorial stance is the product of his belief that the author does not have a privileged position in determining the meaning of his or her work. Yet in my evaluation, the ‘death of the author’ which he espouses may be yet another form of oppression, effectively banishing and silencing the authorial voice in favor of the domineering self-interests of readers.
the authorial (authoritative) ‘voice,’ they seek to privilege themselves into positions of power. But (rightly) undermining the facile and alleged ‘certainty’ of (wittingly or unwittingly) pretentious interpreters is not tantamount to overthrowing all access to literary knowledge. Conversely, to assert that all literary knowledge is indeterminate, or that it is contextual and therefore merely local, cannot be postulated without taking a stand which is implicitly determinate, supracontextual and universal—a performative contradiction. Put more simply, a fallible interpreter is not perforce a false interpreter. It is possible to interpret correctly without doing so either exhaustively or perfectly. And it is here that I advocate once again attending to the voice of the author which has been silenced in so much of recent critical theory.

The most widely recognised exponent of attaching textual meaning to authorial intent is E D Hirsch. He maintains that ‘verbal meaning is, by definition, that aspect of the author’s intention, which, under linguistic conventions, may be shared by others’ (1967:218, emphasis his). Although here as at other points Hirsch clearly states that authorial intention is to be derived from the text, his discussion frequently fails to give adequate weight to this consideration. When seen in context, this relative lack of emphasis specifically on the text as the object of interpretive inquiry is due to the opponents whom Hirsch was engaging: the adherents of New Criticism for whom focus upon the text was already assumed, to the exclusion of the author altogether. Thus Hirsch argues primarily on behalf of the author and his or her intentions while sharing the assumption that the meaning would be acquired from the text. This lack of

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58 R M Fowler (1989:21) is, in my estimation, correct when he points out that postmodernism concerns itself with ‘an increasing recognition that reading and interpretation is always interested, never disinterested; always significantly subjective, never completely objective; always committed and therefore always political, never uncommitted and apolitical; always historically-bound, never ahistorical. The modernist dream of disinterested, objective, distanced, abstract truth is fading rapidly.’ Examples here abound, but instructive is Boone’s (1989) critique of fundamentalists’ use of scripture.

59 E.g. ‘[T]he author’s meaning, as represented by his text, is unchanging and reproducible’ (216, emphasis mine).
emphasis that the textual meaning is derived from the work itself left Hirsch’s overall argument vulnerable in other ways, however. His benchmark work (1967) has been widely criticised from numerous angles, most notably from the ranks of structuralism, New Criticism, and postmodern literary theory. Nevertheless, his essential stand has also gained much needed support and revision from subsequent scholars. Juhl (1980:12), who is sympathetic to Hirsch’s thesis, nevertheless charges that Hirsch does not actually develop his argument for authorial intent so much as he threatens opponents with impending interpretive anarchy (see Hirsch 1967:231) if any other alternative is taken. Juhl clarifies that the interpretive enterprise has to do with the performance of the communicative act (the intrinsic intention) rather than on the author’s plan in writing (the extrinsic intention), a distinction not upheld by Hirsch. By maintaining this crucial distinction, an answer to one of the arguments of the ‘intentional fallacy’ is provided: the features external to the text are not accorded any interpretive weight. Beardsley (1992:24) concurs with Juhl in the need to extend Hirsch’s argument: ‘literary works are self-sufficient entities, whose properties are decisive in checking interpretations and judgments.’ In making this distinction, the argument that the author’s psychosocial state of mind is inaccessible is met—readers can read texts, not minds. Juhl (240) further explicitly links authorial intentionality of a written text with some of the insights of speech act theory: ‘My contention has been that the meaning of a literary work is essentially like the meaning of a person’s speech act.’

Knapp and Michaels (1992) hone the argument for authorial intentionality further: meaning is intention, and interpretation is the correct locating of intention. As an ontological tenet, there simply is no such thing as ‘intentionless meanings’ (51-64), and the very suggestion that meaning without a ‘mean-er’ (my term) is nonsensical. The text is either a system of

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60 Sternberg (1985:9) shares this same textual orientation, that ‘our only concern is with “embodied” or “objectified” intention.’
linguistic markers attributable to an intentional agent (i.e., the markers signify the author's intention) or are non-intentional accidents. Thus they conclude: 'Once it is seen that the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author's intended meaning, the project of grounding meaning in intention becomes incoherent' (1987/88:12). If intention is teleological, that is, directing one's attention toward a goal or idea, then the objective meaning of a text is literally and precisely the object of the author's attention. It is the author who causes the text to be what it is (a communicative act) and why it is that way (how it functions and the desired effects).

K. Burke proposed a 'grammatical' study of discourses. He argues for a 'dramatistic pentad' comprised of act (what was done), agent (who did the act and under what subjective conditions), scene (the environment in which the act took place), agency (how the act was done), and purpose (why the act was done). Entitling his work, A Grammar of Motives (1945), Burke's aim is to demonstrate how these functions operate in the imputing of motives to the author/agent. Without necessarily subscribing to his entire approach, it is still possible to wed his emphasis on the attribution of intention (what he terms motives) with other models to buttress the case for authorially grounded meaning. First, for Burke, words have 'suasive' power as inherently value-laden and ideologically motivated. Secondly, language (rhetoric) may be used to overcome the multilevel estrangement between people: race, economic class, sex, age, or education. Combining these two thoughts, then, it is possible for readers (indeed, it behooves them), even from different cultures and perspectives to approach a text as an author's symbolic action (1966:45) and seek to identify the suasive elements of the text in order to impute intentions to the author. 61

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61 K. Burke writes (1966:45), 'The dramatistic view of language, in terms of symbolic action, is exercised about the necessarily suasive nature of even the most unemotional scientific nomenclatures.'
On the other hand, while I am in essential agreement with his argument here, in my estimation Burke has blurred together two elements which I prefer to maintain as distinct, viz the difference between intentions and motives, the latter being much more difficult to ascertain. For example, I can safely surmise that the intent of most Olympic runners is to win (or at least to perform in an honorable way) without knowing their precise motives (fame, prospect of financial rewards, joy of competition, striving for a self-actualising or existentially authenticating goal, desire to win the approval of parents or a significant other). Indeed, though I am nearly always aware of what I intend by my actions, I am frequently unaware or self-deluded regarding my motives, and rarely do I have a single motive. Thus I hold that while authorial intention may be correctly (even if not comprehensively) inferred from a text, authorial motivation lies beyond the reader’s scope.

In this connection, I grant that it may, in principle, be possible to deduce or at least speculate as to the author’s motives by appealing to extralinguistic (historical, sociological) considerations that precipitated the communicative act (roughly equivalent to Juhl’s ‘extrinsic intention’). In the case of dead authors, this interest entails the interpreter changing roles from a reader to an historian or a sociologist. But in my opinion this endeavor lies outside the scope of manifestly textual understanding of authorial intent and is thus tangential to the strategies herein employed.

However, it is both possible and necessary to broaden and nuance the concept of authorial intent that is accessible in and through a written text. In order to do justice to multifaceted aspects of an author’s telos in writing—i.e. all an author is trying to do by means of a text—it is expedient to incorporate the insights of speech act theory.
Austin, in his probative and influential work *How to do things with words* (1962, 2nd ed 1975:109-120), distinguishes three different things that are ‘done’ with language. The first is the *locutionary*, which has to do with the contextual meaning of the uttered words themselves. The second is the *illocutionary*, which is what the speaker or author is doing in the act of communicating (e.g. informing, inquiring, commanding, blessing, announcing, promising.). The third is the *perlocutionary*, which relates to the effects the speaker/author intends to precipitate (shock, change of opinion, motivation, instill fear, bring comfort, silence opposing voices, entertain, *inter alia*, together with the accompanying actions). A key element to his approach is that words can themselves be deeds, and that thereby communicators execute conventional actions, called ‘performatives.’

Building on this insight, Searle (1979) argues that every communicative instance (utterance) is a speech act in which the speaker attempts to accomplish some end(s). Moreover, speaking (and writing) entails an engagement with a rule-governed form of behavior. Interpretation thus involves understanding of these rules of behavior in order to identify and assess the intentions initiated through the communicative act (167): ‘The speaker and the hearer share a mutual knowledge... of the rules of performing the various kinds of speech acts.’

Authors thus have multiple levels of intentions (*locutionary*, *illocutionary*, and *perlocutionary*). The rules of behavior to which they subscribe as they seek to express their intentions may be labeled ‘conventions.’ The relationship between intentions and conventions is my next topic of consideration.

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62 Austin ([1962]1975:101) summarises these ideas as follows: ‘Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them.... We shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a ‘perlocutionary’ act, and the act performed, where suitable...a “perlocution.”'
2.6 Intentions and conventions

Austin (1975:14-15) stipulated four requirements in order for a speech event to be deemed successful (what he would term ‘suitable conditions of felicity’). First, there must be mutually accepted norms or procedures which govern the intended communicative act. Secondly, the procedure must be carried out by the right parties and under the circumstances appropriate to that procedure. Third, the procedure must be carried out fully and completely. And lastly, the communicative undertaking must be carried out in good faith with sincerity. These may be viewed as authorial responsibilities by which authors are held accountable for their communicative actions. They are answerable for what they have said and done, just as readers are responsible for their interpretations (a matter which I shall address shortly).

Following Austin, Searle described these procedural rules as ‘constitutive’ rather than ‘regulative,’ that is, they are not prescriptive in the expression of behavior, but instead describe behavior that has no existence outside of the constitutive rules. The rules or procedures of which Austin and Searle speak are included in my own use of the term conventions. Recognisable linguistic conventions are the means by which language users communicate intentions. Indeed, dictionaries and lexicons do not define the meanings of words as such, but rather describe the manners (conventions) in which words are typically used. As Vanhoozer (1998:244) notes: ‘In the covenant of discourse, intention and convention are cooperative, not competitive, principles.’ It is through linguistic conventions that authors are able to share their intentions with readers.64

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63 He promotes the following taxonomical categories of illocutionary functions (:20-26): assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

64 In the case of dead authors, communication will break down if literary conventions are not shared between the author and reader, or in Vanhoozer’s terms, if the ‘covenant of discourse’ does not exist. This difficulty may be surmountable, in principle, if the author’s implied reader gains familiarity with the conventions by which the author chooses to communicate (the reader’s responsibility), aided by the author anticipating the ‘strangeness’ and
To do so, the author must first posit some sort of intended audience, i.e. the implied readers of the work whom the author envisages as the anticipated respondents to his or her willful communicative act. Then, at the broadest level of adherence to conventions, the author selects which genre is optimally suited to present the case as convincingly as possible, given the implied audience. These two topics, the implied reader and the selection of genre, are the next subjects of my inquiry.

2.7 Implicating implied consent

Earlier in this chapter in my discussion of the locus of textual meaning, I argued there is a (widely-recognised) choice between three options: the author, the text, and the reader. B Lategan (1985:67-93) has written an essay on hermeneutics that links each of these emphases (his corresponding terms are source, message [text], and receptor) with the historical periods during which they came under scrutiny. Initially the preoccupation centered on the source: the circumstances surrounding the production and transmission of the text. As structuralist studies came to fore, the emphasis was placed on the message, with ‘text-immanent’ approaches dominating the discussion. More recently, attention has tended to shift to the receptor’s role as constitutive of textual meaning. Lategan points out (:68), however, what I believe is a correct assessment: ‘It is doubtful whether reception can function as a normative indicator in any way.’ Nevertheless, he sees value in investigating and giving consideration to this third aspect, that of reception. First, there is a broader recognition that communication remains incomplete until it

accommodating the reader by revealing his or her conventions with their corresponding functions in a sufficiently comprehensive manner (the author’s responsibility). In my estimation, the potential for an implicit covenant between dead authors and their implied future readers is long overdue for more extensive investigation, and may prove to be fruitful.

65 Implied in his use of the term ‘normative’ here is a standard of assessment which lies outside and above the individual or the vicissitudes of a given reading community at a particular time.
has been received, i.e. 'reached its final "destination"' (:68, emphasis his). Secondly, he argues that reception aesthetics highlights reading as essentially a productive rather than reproductive activity (:68). And third, textual communication is to be seen as multi-layered. He elaborates on what he means here (:69-70):

In literary criticism it has long been accepted that a text may have whole generations of readers besides the original reader(s) for whom it was initially intended. The way in which the text is structured offers many clues for recognising its 'implied reader,' for delineating the audience to whom it is addressed.

This last issue I believe is a key point for biblical interpretation—identifying the 'original audience' does not exhaust an author's implied audience. The implied audience is a category capable of much greater parameters than the addressees.

Lategan (:70) then proposes that 'the implied reader represents the response the author is aiming at or assuming on the part of his audience...a theoretical construct to gauge the intended effect of the text.' The corresponding and reciprocal role of the reader is to experience 'the full impact of all the strategies employed by the author, integrat[ing] the various elements, and project[ing] the ideal response to the text, that is, a response congruent with the designs of the author as expressed in the text.' Thus the real author envisions an implied reader with whom s/he shares a certain commonality (or, in Rommetveit's terminology, intersubjectivity), while the real reader envisages an implied author whose 'designs' have been 'expressed in the text.' Communication in the sense of common knowledge thus involves co-participation on the part of author and reader, both of whom imagine the dialogue partner as textually implied.

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66 Even the term 'original audience' is a curious concept—in what sense does an audience originate something which it receives? This seems to me to reflect a category mistake.

67 Iser (1974:xii) has devoted a great deal of attention to the role of the implied reader, by which he means 'both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process.' In my implementation of the term, I would emphasise that a proper theory of reception grants that the meaning potential is established by the author, mediated through the text and appropriated ('actualised') by the reader.
Voelz (1995:219-221) helpfully contributes several further insights regarding the implied reader. Determining the implied reader, he argues, is a function of the reading process itself. An implied reader is someone who has the knowledge, competence, and willingness to conform to the expectations of the author. Consequently (220), 'a valid interpreter of a text...assumes the role “required,” as it were, by a given text—who becomes the reader “implied” or called for by that very text,' with the result that the interpretive community of which the implied reader is a part is constituted of those who likewise share the same competencies, knowledge and willingness. This has impact, of course, for the reading of the Bible: the interpretive community, i.e. those who willingly share the author's perspective, is a community of faith.

Lategan (:74) drives home this very point: 'Author and reader stand in a “chiastic” relationship to one another: the implied reader is a construct of the real author, and the implied author is a construct of the real reader. The first is necessary to prepare the expected response to the text, the latter is a text-guided [sic] image in order to get a grip on this intended response. The one presupposes the other and the mediation between the two is effected through the medium of the text.... The text forms the meeting point.' While Lategan does not draw directly on the resources of Speech act theory, the model he describes here accords very nicely with it, and with the emphases upon which I capitalise.

If Lategan's argument is valid, as I have argued, then the time for a return to an authorially-oriented approach is warranted, but it will now be cognizant of the legitimate claims of text-centered and reception-centered approaches. It holds potential for being a wiser, more self-aware heuristic goal, sensitive to new questions and problems.
2.8 Speaking genre-ly

Texts are about something: 'communicators intend messages, and all communicators are strategic in their chosen causes, selections of materials, designs of composition, and styles of presentation. Every communicator, in other words, seeks to make the best possible case for his or her position' (Fisher [1987] 1989:117). An author both chooses the topic (material content) of his or her communication as well as the shaping of that topic (genre) and its purposive force. Simply put, a genre is a recognisable category of writing which follows certain rules and patterns. All verbal communication necessarily entails not only the use of words, grammar, and syntax, but at a larger level, the use of genres; 'all understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound' (Hirsch, 1967:76). Genres are not merely obligatory outlines which place constraints upon communicators. Rather, every genre provides an unique vista of the world, how one might construe it and experience it. All genres—poetry, history, apocalyptic, proverbs, fictional story, inter alia—assert certain kinds of truth about the real world, but they do so in radically different ways. Genres vary in the directness of correspondence to the truths they tell, the kinds of truth claims that are made, and the precision with which they tell it. Therefore, authorial competence includes the ability to choose the structures (genres and forms), literary styles, and modes of expression best suited to accomplishing the ends sought in that instantiation of communication. 'Writers do not...write their text just for the fun of it; they have a case to put, an argument to advance, or an opponent to overcome' (Clines 1995:23). Whether it is done consciously or intuitively, selection of genre is necessarily dependent upon to the kind of communicative act that the author intends to perform thereby. It establishes what intentionally placed potential affects the author envisions.
Readerly competence is reciprocal: it involves a corresponding ability to identify correctly the 'generic signals' (see Alexander 1985:42) by which the author informs the anticipated reader of his or her purposes. It is the reader's responsibility not only to recognise the genre of literature (i.e., its structural conventions), but also to realise the kinds of information (locutions) as well as the uses and functions (illocutions and perlocutions) appertaining to that particular genre.

2.9 Selecting a story

The scope of this study focuses most especially upon narrative, the conventions which signal it, the illocutionary force and functions of it, and how values and assertions may be advocated through it. Since genres vary in the ways that they assert or affirm the truths they tell, the competent author of narrative seeks to tell a certain kind of truth, and is responsible to do so in a particular way that is commensurate with the conventions associative to narrative.

The illocutionary force of narrative, at least in part, is a function of the world it presents to the reader, wherein the normative values (whether attitudinal or behavioral) are either advocated or critiqued by displaying their emplotted consequences. Actions are commended when their consequences lead to success or well-being for the characters. Conversely, actions are condemned which result in misfortune upon the characters. The reader is directed toward viewing the author's world, in the author's way, for the author's communicative purposes—in a sense, presenting both a narrative Welt (world) and a particular perspective or Weltanschauung (world view). Values are thus evaluated through narrative, either through direct commentary by the narrator, or indirectly, by letting its characters make the assessments or simply letting the actions speak for themselves through cause and effect.
In the case of biblical narratives, they may make assertions about what is true with an intentionally universal and timeless scope. Bible stories are designed to (re)shape the way their implied readers view reality, and the categories of the implied readers are not necessarily limited to the first readers. The interpretive goal, then ‘is not simply to explain (Erklärung) the text vis-à-vis its historical background [whether of its production or reception] but to understand (Verstehen) the text as bearing an important message’ (Wallace 1995:9, emphasis his).

One of the chief advantages in selecting to communicate via narrative is that stories are both readily recognised as such, and the conventions are generally common across people groups. The universality of narrative is widely recognised. The following quotations testify to this widespread recognition, borne out by scholars working independently of one another and representing different disciplines of academic specialisation.

The first is from Barthes (1977:79), a literary critic and semiotician:

[N]arrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural back-grounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Barthes was one of the first to extend the arguments of de Saussure’s (see [1915] 1966) structuralist linguistics to the field of literary studies, especially to the structural analysis of narrative. Thus he argues here that the deeper structure underlying all narratives is not particular to respective cultures, but is shared by all.

Fisher, a professor of communication arts and sciences, proposes that all forms of human communication are derivative of stories ([1987] 1989:65, see 86):

[N]arrative, whether written or oral, is a feature of human nature that crosses time and culture....[W]e must concede it to be a universal cultural activity.
Fisher argues that it is through a ‘narrative logic’ that is shared by all humans which provides the basis of communication and what constitutes ‘good reasons’ or warrants for believing and behaving according to the values narratively espoused (p.90). He maintains further that even our ability to conceive of ideas is predicated on the more primary mode of story structure: ‘narration is the foundational, conceptual configuration of ideas for our species’ (p.193).

Turner (1996:167), representing the field of neurobiology, argues that narrative structure is essential not only to human communication but also more fundamentally to the very capacity for and mechanics of human rationality. He too states that ‘we must concede [narrativity] to be a universal cultural activity.’ What Turner intends by this statement is that the physiology of the brain itself lends credence to understanding how humans process information: through an implicit matrix predisposed toward narrative. Hence all other forms of communication must be neurologically translated into a narrative shape in order to be processed adequately.

Hayden White is a philosopher of history who generally takes the concept of narrative as his point of departure. Recognising that historical writing is a creative and constructive process, he (1980:6) adopts an epistemology of historical knowledge whereby narrative becomes ‘a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the shared reality can be transmitted...’ Because historians by necessity must select and arrange the ‘unprocessed historical record’ in order to make it ‘more comprehensible to an audience,’ (White 1973:5) it closely parallels the process of literary production, especially narrativity. Thus epistemology in general and historical knowledge in particular partakes of this narrative ‘metacode’ through which realities from the past are made accessible to those in the present.

Examples of those who recognise the narrative orientation of all human thought and communication could be multiplied many times over, but perhaps Kort expresses this thought
most clearly. A professor of religion, Kort embraces the task of demonstrating how recent studies of narrative literature are inextricably related to religious issues of faith and morality. He thus attributes the universality of narrative conception to the universal categories which precipitate and fund religious inquiry (1988:8-9).

Narrative undercuts the distances and differences, however great they may be, between cultures, so that the culture...different and distant from our own in so many respects, is also joined to our own in this way...[W]ith the obvious distances created between us and peoples with differing languages, narrative as a shared form of discourse grants a potential access to them....The narrative form is shared by all.

The main point to be made here that it is possible to read the narratives of other cultures with understanding in the first place. Were the narratives unrecognisable as stories by the cross-cultural reader, then communication would be impossible. And yet such is not the case. There are elements (i.e. conventions) which distinguish stories qua stories68 and thereby afford a platform for dialogue and engagement between cultures. It is an intertextuality of sorts at the widest level of conception: that ‘Story x’ partakes, not merely from story a and n, but also from a necessary typology of story shared by all stories: a (meta- or proto-) story X. A primary reason that stories can speak a universal language is that each culture’s metanarrative, for all its differences from other cultures, is addressing the same issues: ‘the truths and events that grant a people unity, identity, and orientation’ (Kort 1988:18).

In propositional discourse, what counts as good reasoning or persuasive rhetoric varies widely from one culture to the next—non-narrative rationality is more localised and particularised. Poetry also suffers greatly in translation, where formal features such as meter, assonance, paronomasia, word play and rhyming are often obscured. By contrast, narrative texts
are harder when transplanted into foreign soils. Granting that certain stylistic elements may be
distorted from one culture or language to another, the essential elements of narrative (see
below)—setting, characterisation and emplotment—are much more readily received and
recognised in different cultures. And, in fact, even most subcategories of emplotment (discussed
in chapter four as stock forms) are also shared between cultures. Thus it is most likely that the
predominantly narrative structure of the Bible allows it a more readily cross-cultural
transmissibility.

2.10 Properties native to narratives

As soon as authors select a communicative genre, they accept for themselves a set of
conventions, formal restrictions which limit and shape what and how things may be said (see
under ‘Genre-ly speaking’ above). The advantage of the reader’s understanding is compromised
and jeopardised if those linguistics norms—the ‘covenant of discourse’—are stretched and
broken in too great a measure. I may sketch out here a few of the properties native to narratives,
which are simultaneously strengths and limitations as a communication medium.

2.10(a) Indirection and inefficiency

At the heading of this chapter I quoted Long (1989:66) as saying that stories can be, in
some ways, notoriously ambiguous and hence inefficient devices for conveying ideas and
assertions. That the Bible should use so many of them is, to him, a curious phenomenon, given
the fact that so many other forms of communication are available. In his reckoning, as is perhaps
the case with many western, modernistic thinkers, thematic essays and systematic theologies

68 Of course, this idea is shared by the structuralists’ model of literary criticism. Without aligning myself
completely with this school of interpretation, I readily acknowledge that on this point, viz the recognition of
common narrative conventions, my own model is similar to theirs.
state ideas in a more abstract, propositional manner. However, few stories, especially biblical narratives, conclude with, 'and the moral of the story is...' or the equivalent. Those that do end this way, such as Aesop's fables,\(^\text{69}\) seem to many readers to be pedantic and heavy-handed. Even our term 'moralise' carries with it negative connotations—a 'preachy' and patronising tone. Rather, most narratives do not tell us in so many words what the narrator is driving at. In the words of Flannery O'Connor (1957:76), the storyteller speaks 'with character and action, not \textit{about} character and action.' This open-endedness leaves room for the reader's thoughtful reflection, and with it, ambiguity. Indeed, the narrator may even purposefully misdirect our expectations, so as to surprise us, enhancing the story's appeal and impact. Where discourse states in obvious terms, narratives generally demure, luring the reader. Stories abound with questions concerning human ethics—determining what ought to be done and choosing whether or not to yield to this 'oughtness.' Not only are the characters faced with such moral decisions, but also through identification with the characters\(^\text{70}\) the reader is placed into a position where s/he second-guesses the characters' decisions. And the events of the story are implicit guideposts to the moral decision making of both actors and readers. Stories are therefore powerful, albeit imprecise, embodiments of our conceptions of right and wrong (see D Taylor 1995:59). And yet this weakness is also narrative's strength: by encoding its morals within the narrative shape, the reader may experience the excitement of discovery. As Pascal (617, see 1995:135) put it: 'We are more easily convinced, generally, by reasons we have found by ourselves than by those which have occurred to others.' The compensatory advantages of narrative presentation include its heightened memorability, the ability to capture and hold the

\(^{69}\) These moral lessons were almost certainly appended by subsequent hands (see Aesop [1998]).

\(^{70}\) For elaboration on the readers' identification with characters, see section 5.1(f).
reader's attention, the affective power to incite and arouse pathos and the verisimilitude of the
complexity, exigencies and polysemy of human life as is commonly experienced (as opposed to
the comparatively reductionistic and monolithic maxims which purport to explain all). Narrative
is thus highly appropriate for the sharing of beliefs, a textual rendezvous between implied
authors and implied readers wherein they can cohabit a certain degree of common ideological
and affective ground (see Warnock 1994:173).

2.10(b) Nonpropositional

Systematic (dogmatic) theologies written in the wake of Enlightenment rationality
illustrate clearly the predisposition toward stating theological truths in propositional abstractions.
Standing in the tradition of Aquinas’ marriage of theology to Aristotelian logic, this generated
the expectation that theological knowledge will be stated in propositional categories as the
assumed 'correct' medium of expression rather than in some other form.

For certain scholars past and present, not only theology but all communication has been
understood as fundamentally propositional in nature. One can extract from narratives their
essential meaning which can be stated simply and without the ornamental accoutrements of story
elements. In this view, narratives bear the precious cargo of intentioned assertions (or
kerygmatic kernel). Granting that formal features do in fact affect the emotions and will, the
cognitive content is nonetheless conceived as the essential factor in receiving or appropriating a
text.

Responding to such a limited and limiting view of narrative, McCarthy and Riley
(1986:193) making the following observation, focusing more particularly on the marginalisation
of biblical narrative.
Why are we so cold towards the charms of biblical stories? ...[W]e like our revelation in neat, easily intelligible packages. Stories tend to be wild growths, rambling in a few different directions at once. The only good biblical story, from this point of view, is one that can have its message summarised in a few words; then we can memorise the phrase and throw the story away.  

Others in contemporary literary circles, especially those taking text-oriented approaches, adamantly oppose this conception as well. McEvenue (1994:46) *inter alia* posits that such bifurcation irreparably does damage to the text it seeks to explicate.

[That kind of paraphrase which attempts to transpose literary truth into univocal, systematic, universal categories, whether these be philosophical, or ethical, or theological, or psychological, or historical [is]...reducing a complex meaning to a narrow thesis....To reproduce it in systematic and objective categories and statements is to escape its power, and miss its wonder, and lose its meaning....Such statements are too often, not only simplifying and reductive, but also destructive of the literary, and literal, meaning.

The affective aspects are not subordinate to the cognitive; the story ‘does not contain a message, but rather *is* a message’ (McEvenue :164, emphasis mine). The emotive response elicited is no less, and perhaps more, fundamental to the act of communicating through a text than the conceptual. Put in terms of speech act theory, a story reduced to propositions, even if the propositions correctly capture the locutionary intent, remains bereft of its illocutionary function and perlocutionary force.

2.10 (e) *Narrative strategy*

In an insightful and provocative article, Witten (1993:97-118) explores the relationship of narratives to the instilling of employee compliance in the contemporary workplace. She argues (98, following works of Bormann 1983 and Wilkins 1978) that well-constructed

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71 McCarthy and Riley (1986:196-197) go on to argue that in contemporary society we want quick solutions to our problems, and that this appetite for instant answers has worked its way into our expectations for biblical revelation, such that readers prefer precisely stated dogmas to Bible stories. Yet as they point out (:198), biblical stories provide more than mere adages suitable for memorisation; rather, ‘they are the gateways to mysteries’ which
narratives are ideal for 'emotionally involving both teller and listener, provoking attention, interest, and absorption. As teller and listeners co-orient around a narrative's central characters and events, they achieve a sense of collective participation, shared experience, and psychological investment.' Yet it is precisely because of the appeal of narrative and the apparent share-ability of experience that it may function as a disguised tool of coercion and control. This latter facet is the focus of her study, in which she links the inherently compelling power and cognitive and psychological effects of narrative with organisational sociology. Of interest for this study, is the premise with which she begins: such persuasive power is possible because of the nature of narrative itself. Values which are embedded in the genre of narrative have more persuasive force than the same values when conveyed by other communicative forms such as conversation or argument (113-114). She presents (105-106) various properties of narrative which contribute to its potential to command attention and memory. At the linguistic level, these include concreteness, vividness of description, verbs which tend toward the active voice, and repetition. Furthermore, the narrative form itself also reinforces its evocative power 'by imposing a sense of coherence on the disparate elements the narrative contains' (106). The structuring devices of plot unify episodes together meaningfully; the narrative sequence lends temporal unity to the events; and characterisation unifies the narrative action. Narratives also integrate all the details of the story sequence by orienting them both to the beginning and to the consequent outcome 'in an unbroken chain of causality.' The net effect of all these features is to provoke an emotional

prompt readers 'to reassess reality from an entirely different standpoint.' Their arguments correlate well with the position I take up regarding entering into the narrative world (see 3.2).

She continues the argument by maintaining that narratives told by empowered superiors in the workplace may thus generate obedience through covert manipulation rather than by genuine dialogue and consensus. While this is quite tangential to my own argument, it does at least lend credence to the point I seek to make here: narratives work so well because there are features which are commonly recognisable across all classes and categories of people, that is, the conventions are so broadly-ranging (if not universal) that 'everyone' senses a degree of identification and shared experience.
investment on the part of the audience and to potentiate the persuasiveness of the communication as an intentional speech act. Indeed, so compelling is narrative as a speech act that it actually truncates critical engagement: rather than challenging the internal truth claims of the story, listeners usually limit their evaluation to matters of internal consistency and the relevancy of the story to the topic of conversation immediately preceding its telling. It also short circuits critical engagement by virtue of the fact that normal conversational dialogue is suspended during the telling—mid-course questioning and challenging of the implicit truth claims must be withheld until the listener hears how the story turns out.

In an endnote to the article (:115), Witten acknowledges that her organisational sociology was yet in the process of undergoing reconfiguration while engaging with the poststructuralist literary critique of foundationalism. Indeed, some of the arguments above reflect this Tendenz. Yet one need not embrace a systematic ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ or a deconstructivist endless deferral of meaning to recognise that all authors, including authors of narrative, are purposive in their writing. In fact, an important starting point in reading the narratives is to realise that the authors have a goal for writing: to engage the implied reader’s thinking and behavior. They have chosen the strategy of storytelling as an effective way to influence their anticipated audience.

The author can influence (manipulate) the intended audience’s perspective, misdirect their interpretive guesses, surprise them, confuse them, enlighten them, keep them in suspense, enable them to feel superior in understanding to the characters in the story, affect their emotional

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73 My reaction here is not against what I believe are the legitimate concerns of deconstruction, such as the recognition of the role of readers’ interpretive schemes (paradigms, *Gestalten*, models, *vorwertsäuënis*) and the partial and constructive nature of human understanding. Rather, my response is against a more radical form of antideterminacy of meaning which holds that the goal of interpreting author’s intentions is not merely provisional but impossible; e.g. “Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it forever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge” (Norris 1982:29). Comments such as this one prompted S Burke (1992:xxix) to conclude that “the great crises of postmodernism are crises of authorship.”

74 On the intended ‘changes’ which the author envisions for the implied reader, see footnote 29.
moods and so on. The author not only chooses what to tell the readers, but how and when, and what to withhold. Readers end up seeing only that which the author chooses to divulge, and thus the implied readers' perspectives are shaped by the author's perspective, 'a group-licensed way of seeing' (Witten 1993:109). While the stories are about other people, places, and times, they are really for their intended readers, influencing and affecting their responses.

Thus one of our tasks for readers of the narratives of the Bible is to ask, 'What responses (i.e. perlocutions) does the author have in mind for the reader in choosing to tell this story, and in choosing to tell it in exactly this way?' Bible stories frequently 'work'—that is, they affect their implied readers—by doing one of the following things.

- They cause readers to identify with one of the characters who is experiencing a hardship, causing readers to think, 'I'm a lot like that.' If the protagonist's efforts are similar to what the reader would also have done in that situation, and the protagonist fails, then the reader is 'taught' not to respond that way. On the other hand, if the protagonist succeeds, then the reader is encouraged to act the same

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75 By implied readers here I again I envision the willingly 'decentered' individuals who cooperate with the implied author through 'intersubjectivity' (see above).

76 Witten is drawing upon the work of Kuhn ([1962]1970) here. Kuhn's thesis is that the paradigm shifts which constitute scientific revolutions take place when the anomalies which disconfirm the dominant paradigm are deemed by an innovative mind (usually a young scholar) so great as to require a new paradigm. Paradigms tend to ignore or suppress the contraindications, and entrenched adherents to the dominant paradigm are generally hostile to the new way of seeing. Frequently what is proffered as proof of the new paradigm is considered invalid, not because the data are errant, but because the old paradigm will not admit to a new interpretation. Thus the new paradigm must provide not only confirming evidence, but must do so through persuasive rhetoric. While Kuhn's insights specifically address this phenomenon within the history of science, there is applicability to other fields (:208-210). I see its explicative usefulness in my context of discussion in this way. Authors may anticipate readers approaching their work from different paradigms. The authors may then intend to subvert these rival paradigms, i.e. world views (see :111-135), with their own values and assertions. In this way they promote a new way of seeing, and seek to establish via their texts a growing community of adherents to the paradigm proposed. Persuasive rhetoric frequently takes the form of narrative (which is Witten's thesis), and my interest lies in how such narrative rhetoric functions to present new paradigms.
way. There are, of course, many other facets to reader’s identification, but here I merely point to its role in the efficacy of narrative as a speech act. In Witten’s (1993:107) terminology, narrative characters serve as exemplars who ‘give pragmatic instructions to listeners by offering them situated strategies of action, which listeners then can appropriate to apply to new situations by analogical extension.’

The narrator may deliberately leave out key information, causing readers to participate in assigning meaning to the text by making interpretive decisions. The reader’s gap filling tendency is an opening whereby the biblical writers involve their readers in their stories and thus ‘tease’ them into committing themselves to a particular viewpoint. If readers have made the ‘right’ commitment, that is, if their choice is vindicated by the outcome of the plot, they not only feel smug in their perspicacious judgment, but also have that manner of thinking and behavior reinforced for application in the external world of their own reality. If they betray themselves as having poor judgment, they learn from ‘their’ experience and seek to avoid repeating ‘their’ mistake in their own personal lives.

The narrator may adopt an ironic tone or position for the reader. Irony occurs whenever: (1) there is a discrepancy between what is actually said and what is meant, or (2) what occurs is the opposite of what is expected, or (3) when certain

77 I am reserving a much more extensive discussion of the reader’s identification with characters in narrative, for section 5.1(f).

78 I give fuller treatment to gapping in chapter four, including the determination of an authorially-intended gap (or ‘blank’) from a spurious point of readerly curiosity.
characters know more than the others but don’t let on, or (4) the reader knows more than the characters (see Good 1981:13-38 and Culpepper 1983:165-180). From a safe, ironising distance, the reader can learn which behaviors are met with disapproval, and take notice to avoid them in the external world.

Taken together with Witten’s observations above, these modes for the sharing of author/reader intersubjectivity, mediated via a narrative text, are illustrative (without intending to be comprehensive) of how stories make their appeal. Stories do make truth claims, assert values, render judgments on behavior and attitudes, and thus argue their points. They do so, to large degree, by adhering to a set of standard conventions.

I contend here that stories, biblical and extrabiblical, regardless of time period or cultural particularities, share certain typical and stable conventions. My position is not unprecedented; its history can be traced from at least the writings of Aristotle through the contemporary literary scene (e.g. structuralism and narratology). More recently, certain scholars in poststructuralist and deconstructionist ‘traditions’ have objected that ‘formalist literary methods operate out of a modernist paradigm whose claims of objectivity, long standard in critical biblical scholarship, have been exposed as impossible and deceptive (or at least self-deceptive)’ (Thibeaux 1993:216). It is certainly true that a good deal of modern literary theory (discourse analysis, semiotics, structuralism, Russian and folklorist formalism inter alia) has indubitably introduced concepts, nuances and nomenclature helpful only for more recent or western literature. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that when applied to biblical texts, these categories go far beyond the

79 My point here is not to claim a necessary absolutism of these conventions, but to concede the common denominators and areas of overlap which obtain between various literary schools such as archetypalism, structuralism, semiotics, and formalism as well as linguistic studies in discourse analysis. Though sometimes employing their own idiosyncratic nomenclature, these disciplines nevertheless mutually recognise the essential components of narrative which are the focus of my attention in this thesis.
epistemological and literary categories presumably held by the various biblical authors. Yet to
discount even the most fundamentally common features between stories which demarcate and
distinguish a widely shared communicative mode such as narrative is surely a case of throwing
the baby out with the bath water. Every culture tells its stories, and each of these stories, if it is a
story rather than some other communicative type, shares certain identifiable elements. In view
of the observations put forth by Barthes, Fisher, Turner, White and Kort that narratives are part
and parcel of human life, then one should recognise that biblical stories which seek to explain
human life (and its relationship with the divine) will partake of the same typical and stable
conventions which operate in other, nonbiblical stories. I attach my working presupposition to
their formulations with particular reference to the narrative conventions of setting, plot, and
characters. These elements constitute the *sine qua non* of the narrative mode.  

Not only are these basic building blocks the essential components for the overall structure
of the work, but even its subdivisions are indicated through these features. Employing a
database method for a text linguistic analysis of Hebrew narrative, Sailhamer (1984:17) notes
this phenomenon specifically in relation to biblical narratives: ‘The primary clues for such text-
segments are the changes that occur in the *narrative world* which imitate changes in the *real
world*, namely, changes in *characters, time and place*’ (emphasis his). Thus both
macrostructural divisions and the smaller, episodic sequences are demarcated into their subunits

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80 Once again, I am not seeking to establish an absolutism or colonialisation of the specific terminology
(setting, plot, and characters); rather, I am seeking to describe the ubiquity of the phenomena present in narratives as
such.

81 See also Sailhamer (1990:319-335). In this article, Sailhamer, drawing upon Güllich and Raible (1977:132-
175), proposes a correlative relation between Hebrew clause types (e.g. WAWYIQTOL, W+X+QATAL) within biblical
narratives and meta-communicational planes, with the result that they become (:326) ‘meta-communicational
clauses’ or ‘hyper-clauses’ (‘Metakommunikative’ or ‘Hypersätze’). These text-segment markers may particularly
indicate changes in setting, either in place or time (:326-330) and hence signal the parameters of narrative units.

82 For more narrative or episodic changes, see section 3.3 under ‘Traveling through space and time.’
by changes in these elements (which are further signaled by surface level linguistic features such as clause type).

Along with these three components there comes, inevitably, a fourth: narrative style (or tone). This fourth component displays far more variability and cultural idiosyncrasies; hence it must be learned by reading the literature of that particular culture. But these three are the hallmarks of narrative that have been recognised widely throughout time. For example, Kort (1988:17) states, ‘Narrative draws attention to four kinds of force or meaning in discourse: subjects (character) involved in processes (plot) under certain limits and conditions (atmosphere [or setting]) and in relation to a teller (tone [or style]).’ Just as sentences operate by retrospectively discovered yet prescribed rules of grammar, so stories share these basic rules. While exerting subsurface influence, these patterns or ‘rules’ pertaining to and governing setting, characterisation, plot and style are manifested in narrative everywhere. Perhaps Barthes (1977:80-81) makes this point most clearly:

[E]ither a narrative is merely a rambling collection of events, in which case nothing can be said about it...or else it shares with other narratives a common structure which is open to analysis....It is impossible to combine (to produce) a narrative without reference to an implicit system of units and rules.

It is to these components and ‘rules’ that I turn our attention as I approach, in order, narratives in general, more particularly biblical narratives, and specifically the narrative of the book of Jonah.

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83 I have attempted to explore the element of style within the book of Jonah elsewhere; see Lubeck 1986.

84 These discourse level ‘grammatical’ operations have received their due attention. For example, scholars doing research in the field of text linguistics are attempting to set forth in comprehensive fashion the inherent conventions of narrative composition, seeking to establish and describe the relationship of deep structure phenomena (such as temporal markers of setting, or phases of employment) with surface level linguistic features (see van Dijk 1977:153-161; de Beaugrande and Dreßler 1981:25-29; Longacre 1983:3-38).

85 This will be the format in the next three chapters.
2.11 Convention itineraries

Fish (1980:171-180) stresses the role of informed, interpretive communities of readers which admit of consensual readings. In his model, validity in interpretation essentially means acknowledgment that it ‘fits’ the party line of the reading community to which one belongs. There simply is no such thing as an objective reading or a universally recognised set of criteria for measuring the correctness of an interpretation. All interpretive moves are implicated by an informing paradigm or interpretive model or hermeneutical a priori commitments.

But against the resulting indeterminacy of meaning for Fish inter alia, Bartholomew (1998:108-109) correctly points out that ‘some form of a metanarrative is inescapable. Rather than denying the validity of metanarratives and thereby becoming the unconscious victim of one,... what Old Testament scholars need to explore is what sort(s) of metanarrative is (are) appropriate.’ For those who will not admit that transcendent truth exists, or that it is communicable via a scriptural text, the question of who is speaking (or writing), and why, and to whom, on behalf of the text is critically important—these are the targets of a hermeneutical suspicion.\(^{86}\) But for those who allow the Old Testament to function as it purports to be, God’s word given through human agents, it becomes possible to indwell an admittedly (though divinely conceived) perspectival metanarrative which offers not only a viable but the most highly

\(^{86}\) Having accepted Fish’s methodological commitments, Boone (1989) is certainly warranted in tracing this trajectory in her provocative and censorious look at the use of scripture in fundamentalist United States entitled, The Bible tells them so: The discourse of Protestant fundamentalism. As she capably demonstrates, frequently those fundamentalists who claim to speak with the voice of God do so to further their own interests and conventions. In my own model I too would allow for a kind of ‘hermeneutics of suspicion,’ but aimed at a different target than the text under scrutiny. I would focus critical suspicion upon the phenomenon of how readers within interpretive communities (ab)use the texts they ostensibly represent, maintaining the distinction between what an author intends by a text and what subsequent speakers and commentators intend by incorporating and subsuming that author’s text into their own, new texts. The issue would be the appropriateness of the appeal to the original text in warranting the claims of the commentator as measured by respect for the intentions of the originating author.

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regarded key to understanding its claims to reality. Bartholomew (:114) concludes his argument by insisting that only a bibliotropic hermeneutic (i.e., one shaped by a Christian perspective upon reality) ‘does justice to the perspectival nature of truth claims (following MacIntyre) while keeping open claims of universal relevance within that perspective.’ Thus it is possible from within a particular hermeneutical framework to maintain that there may be truth values which are universally binding upon those within that hermeneutical model, with implications for those outside it as well.

Conversely, there are limitations to meanings in reading the biblical text within such an interpretive community. Though the biblical texts allow for readers’ fresh and relational engagement, it resists alien readings by its own patterns or limits in what may be termed ‘itineraries of meaning’ (see Ricoeur 1981a:50). In my own model, I would apply this concept of meaning itineraries to the circumscription of those locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions of the implied author. Thus I take valid biblical meaning to be attenuated and bounded by several factors: the intentions of the implied author as the result of his purposive communicative speech act, the linguistic and literary conventions of the selected communicative mode which textualises those purposes, and the anticipated intersubjectivity envisioned by the author for the implied reader who is located within the author’s assumed interpretive community.

My goal is to offer a more nuanced, eclectic model for readings of biblical narratives as God-given scripture. Steering between the Scylla of absolutist, positivist interpretation (wholly determinate) and the Charybdis of anarchic interpretation or limitless deferral (wholly

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87 Ricoeur (51) continues: ‘the act of reading should be seen as the meeting point of the itineraries of meaning offered by the text and the imaginative power of the reader in redescribing reality’ (emphasis mine). In view here are authorially generated parameters of meaning which are established and warranted by the text. This is what the author has ‘offered by the text.’ In turn, the readers are catalyzed into a fresh re-imaging of their own world of reality in light of the new perspectives afforded by the encounter with that text. In other words, the author enables the readers to redescribe their own world when they have respected the intentional boundaries (itineraries of meaning) provided by the text.
indeterminate) of meaning, I posit ‘adequate’ interpretation—interpreters may know enough of
the author’s intentions to respond appropriately. Biblical narratives adhere to essential
components of narrativity generally, and these linguistically signaled components include
setting, plot, and characterisation, which serve (at least in part) to convey authorial intentionality.
There exist sufficient grounds for shared understanding, that is, communication, though always
the interpretive models must remain provisional.

Jürgen Habermas (1987:185-210) believes that it is incumbent upon the philosopher
(interpreter) to identify and reconstruct the norms implicit in a text. He argues for the necessity
of communicative competence, by which he means implicit and intuitive knowledge that
undergirds successful communication. In what he terms ‘universal pragmatics,’ he envisions a
transcendental language game, with universally recognised rules, to which all competent
language users subscribe.\footnote{Habermas seeks to avoid Derrida’s criticism of Austin, \textit{viz} that since the conditions of speech acts depend
upon (mere) conventions, they are arbitrary.} The ‘validity conditions’ required in a successful speech act are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item It must be \textit{true}, i.e. representing something in the external world.
  \item It must be \textit{truthful}, i.e. sincerely expressing the inner world of the speaker’s
          intentions.
  \item It must be \textit{right}, i.e. appropriately fitting into the context of the social world.
\end{itemize}

In presenting these criteria, several things must be noted about Habermas’ views which
distinguish him from other linguistic theorists. First, the ‘universal pragmatics’ which he
espouses are not equivalent to the universal grammatical rules of structuralism (e.g. Chomsky
1965:63-113), because Habermas’ interest is in the interactive \textit{function} of language, (the \textit{parole}),

\footnote{Habermas seeks to avoid Derrida’s criticism of Austin, \textit{viz} that since the conditions of speech acts depend
upon (mere) conventions, they are arbitrary.}
as opposed to Chomsky who focuses rather on the more noumenal, societal *storehouse* of language (the *langue*). Secondly, in stating his first ‘validity condition,’ that it must be true (representing something in the external world), Habermas (1984:274) is not advocating the representational (mimetic) model of language; rather he sees language primarily in terms of a medium for coordinating human activity. Independently of Austin and Searle, he concludes that it is a speech *act*—a means by which humans can cooperate with one another toward mutual goals.

Vanhoozer (1998:218) nuances this further by blending Habermas’ views with speech act theory: ‘To be more precise, meaning is a three-dimensional communicative action, with form and matter (propositional content), energy and trajectory (illocutionary force), and teleology or final purpose (perlocutionary effect).’ What I am seeking to attain, then, is a reasonable assurance of the aims and intentions of the author (i.e., locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary), assuming that the author implicitly has conformed to Habermas’ validity conditions. Vanhoozer (1998:245) continues by pointing out that interpreters are unable to ‘describe communicative action correctly unless they know something about the constitutive rules in force at the time of its performance, for they will not otherwise know what X (e.g., bodily movements, marks on paper) *counts as.*’ For example, when interpreters capably identify irony or allusion (intertextuality), or decide whether the literary category of a given text is fiction or

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89 The temporal element in Vanhoozer’s terminology here is misleading (*at the time of its performance...*, emphasis mine), for it suggests that biblical texts necessarily relate to the social institutions which occasioned their original composition. Yet in context, Vanhoozer means only to say (here I paraphrase him) that ‘we need to know something about the constitutive rules in force *in the textual instance* of its performance.’ His succeeding argument bears this out: ‘Biblical texts and works of literature in general, I will say, are themselves “institutions” with their own sets of constitutive rules.’ But the ‘institutions’ he lists immediately following this statement are literary genres (with their implied ‘rules’ for understanding), rather than ancient social institutions. I certainly agree with the necessity of learning the constitutive rules of the genre under investigation. I clarify my position on the implied reader elsewhere. My point here in citing him is to provide corroborative evidence that interpreters must recognise that speech acts can only be understood when both the author and the reader share a common acceptance of generic conventions (constitutive rules).
nonfiction, they are implicitly making a judgment with regard to the intention of the author, what it ‘counts as,’ and what they believe the author is doing with his or her text.

One position which is maintained for what the Bible ‘counts as’ is that held by evangelicals. To be evangelical implies, in part, that in some meaningful sense the 66-book canon of the Old and New Testaments is identified as God’s revelatory self-disclosure. This is a foundationalism which is inescapable, practically serving as the sine qua non for ‘membership’ in this interpretive community. Wide diversity and sharp disagreement exist in the area of bibliography concerning the tenability, the meaning, the relative importance, and the function of numerous terms and ideas: inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, canon, scripture, revelation, and textual criticism. Yet after all caveats and disclaimers have been lodged, evangelicals nevertheless see the Bible as God’s Word. A self-revealing God remains the ultimate presupposition of evangelical ontology and epistemology, and consequently, hermeneutics. The hermeneutical corollary to this commitment is that what the divine Author intends, however tainted by human hands (and thus subject to hermeneutical suspicion) will remain the goal of interpretation. For this reason, evangelicals have always been among those who have traditionally located scriptural meaning with authorial intent.

I represent an evangelical critical realist—who takes the authority and divine authorship of the Bible seriously (while granting the problematic and metaphorical nature of theological terms such as ‘authority’ and ‘inspiration’)—desiring to be informed by literary strategies of narrative composition. The claim which I stake, then, is neither for a self-deluded hermeneutical

\[\text{Deist’s (1978a:41-71) discussion on the concept of ‘God’s word’ may help to pave the way forward for evangelicals, emphasising the necessarily metaphorical nature of this phrase and the reality that every responsible hermeneutical system acknowledges its operative regula fidei, and its relationship to the exigencies and philosophies of its day. Some evangelicals already sense this need for a clearer understanding of revelation. For example, H H Knight (1997:112) correctly admits that ‘the language of scripture is both necessarily inadequate to its divine object and abundantly rich in its description of God. There is a real correspondence between scripture and God, but it is not and could not be a one-to-one correspondence.’}\]
objectivity nor an unassailable, metacritical high ground, but for an investigative model specially à propos to other critical realists who acknowledge that reading the Bible as God’s Word befits its itineraries of meaning, and my model will follow the conventions common to narratives by which authors seek to make their intentions known.

2.12 On a text, texts, canonical texts, contexts, intratexts, and intertexts

In order to establish what are the itineraries of meaning appropriate to reading the Bible as God’s Word, I believe that it is advantageous to define first of all some of the attributes it bears as a text more generally. In this regard text linguistics provides clarity. Text linguistics has as its goal to study the structure of texts and the function of constituent units in order to determine how meaning may be constructed (see Makaryk [1993]1997:34-35).

2.12(a) Biblical narratives as a text

A fundamental tenet of text linguistics (or discourse analysis—these two terms refer to coincident interests) is the acceptance of the cohesion and coherence of a given text. De Beaugrande and Dreßler (1981:3) define a text as ‘a COMMUNICATIVE OCCURRENCE which meets seven standards of TEXTUALITY.’ These include cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality (:3-11, :48-112).91 These first two are related in that ‘the cohesion of the surface text rests upon the supposed coherence of the textual world’ (:71).92 Among other things, then, text linguistics strives to elucidate texts as

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91 On pages 3-11 de Beaugrande and Dreßler introduce each of these elements and explain their terminology. On pages 48-112 each of these components of textuality is taken up in more detail.

92 See also van Dijk 1977:93-129. He argues (:93) that ‘coherence is a semantic property of discourses, based on the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences.’ Even when certain
wholes, seeking to relate all of the parts to a macrostructural whole. In this respect, literary criticism shares a similar outlook, that the primary operative principle to evaluating a literary work is to assume its unity: McEvenue (1994:171) asserts that ‘the very first, and only really rigid, rule in literary theory is that texts must be read from beginning to end, as the meaning of each word is not determined by definition but only by the relations of all elements of the whole text to all others.’

To approach the Bible as a text, then, presupposes an essential unity of some sorts. Of course the difficulty in this postulation is the ‘dual authorship’ concept resident in any notion of divine inspiration. Generally speaking, textual phenomena which exhibit unity are attributed to the coherence of thought of the Bible’s Single Author, while phenomena which manifest diversity or (apparent) contradiction are attributed to the human component. The issues associated with this problem are many and complex, and go outside the scope of my investigation here. My modus operandi here will be to accept the coherence of Jonah within a larger literary corpus which meets the criteria of textuality as defined by de Beaugrande and Dreßler above. Yet when I refer to the author of Jonah, I will generally have in mind the implied human author unless otherwise noted. If textual disunity problems arise during this particular study of Jonah, they will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

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kinds of changes occur in the discourse, for coherence to exist, these changes must fall within the text-dictated bounds of possibility native to this ‘universe of discourse’ (94).

93 A century ago Moulton (1895:1719) argued the same point: ‘no principle of literary study is more important than that of grasping clearly a literary work as a single whole.’

94 See my discussion under the previous section.

95 Carson (1996:189) suggests that the typical ‘fundamentalist fallacy’ is to ignore the Scripture’s highly diverse literary genres, while the opposing and parallel ‘liberal fallacy’ is to ignore the unity of the Bible with its developing plot-line.
Vanhoozer (1998:225) defines a text as 'a communicative act of a communicative agent fixed by writing.' In so defining it, he fixes the authorial meaning of the text in its communicative activity rather than in the subjectivity of the author. He advances beyond Hirsch here in that, by attaching communicative action to a fixed text which is publicly accessible, the authorial meaning is no longer merely an attribute of the author’s consciousness. This avoids both the psychologising impulse of some interpreters (e.g. Schleiermacher, Dilthey), and allows for perlocutionary effects unforeseen in specificity yet broadly ‘intended’ by the author. The fixity of the text will sustain an interpretive approach, then, which simultaneously upholds the identification of meaning with the implied author while also keeping the text (rather than the historical or psychological Urgrund of the actual author) as the focal point. This method overlaps with other ‘text-immanent’ approaches, yet is differentiated in its scope: the nature, structure, and content of the text as a literary act. Meyer (1989:18) also adopts this stance: ‘the text has a primary claim on the reader, namely, to be construed in accord with its intended sense.’ Being inanimate objects, texts themselves have no intentionality, which returns the discussion once again to the author.96

The central thesis of Frei’s (1974) The eclipse of biblical narrative: a study in eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics identifies a hermeneutical problem precipitated by enlightenment (modernistic) thinking. He argues (:10) that though ‘a realistic or history-like (though not necessarily historical) element is a feature...of many of the biblical narratives...[it] finally came to be ignored, or—even more fascinating—its presence or distinctiveness came to be denied for lack of a “method” to isolate.’ Biblical interpreters made a confused equation between textual (especially narrative) meaning and the identification of historical reference or

96 In what amounts to a hermeneutical credo, Vanhoozer (1998:249) states, ‘I believe in the reality of the author’s intention, for without it I cannot explain the emergence of meaning, that is to say, how meaning supervenes
historicity (77) rather than upon values espoused therein. The description of details of the events to which the text referred became the telos of critical 'exegesis,' which set aside the meaning of the narrative text qua text in favor of seeking to establish the meaning of the event as critically reconstructed from materials and models extraneous to the text.97 The rise of historical criticism98 was largely linked to the referential aspects of biblical texts, to a large degree unaware of the self-imposed limitations their assumptions and methods would yield, culminating in what has been variously labeled as a 'a desert of criticism' (Ricoeur 1969:350), a 'crisis' for biblical theology (see the title of Childs 1970), the 'collapse of history' (the title of Perdue 1994), and an 'ugly ditch' (the title of Michelson 1985, quoting Lessing) between biblical criticism and faith in theological truth. The role of historical criticism for ascertaining the meaning of biblical texts may be called into question on two important fronts. First, as Frei maintains, it has blurred the focus of (biblical) meaning, obfuscating the text with the event. Secondly, as modernist presuppositions in general have come under the postmodern critique of suspicion, the historical critical method in particular, rooted as it is in Enlightenment philosophies of history, has also been found as blind to its own ideological interests (see Bartholomew 1998:96). While reference (or significance) may be considered an aspect of meaning broadly defined, the two may be differentiated (and I agree with Hirsch inter alia that they must be). In light of speech act theory, Frei's argument may be improved. Referring to empirically verifiable, historical realities is only

97 Frei (87) maintains that the focal point of interpretation 'was increasingly on the identity of explicative meaning with the historical or ostensive reference of the texts.' For these interpreters (160), 'the clue to meaning now is no longer the text itself but its reconstruction from its context, intentional or cultural, or else its aid in reconstructing that context, which in circular fashion then serves to explain the text itself.'

98 The term 'historical criticism' admits of several different interpretations as it relates to biblical narratives. One concern is the question of the historicity of the ostensive references within the text—the degree of realism when judged against the findings of history and archaeology. Another concern is the investigation of the generative factors which precipitated its origin and reception. Yet another is the history of its composition and transmission of
one thing which an author may do with a text (including a narrative), and may not even be one of the important locutionary intentions. But limiting meaning to referentiality entirely overlooks the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of the text. Taken alone, historical criticism of the biblical text circumscribes meaning far too narrowly and fails to do justice to the full range of intentionality. In other words, I not only wish to know what the text is about, but what it is doing. And if the object of interpretation is upon the communicative act being performed as embodied in the text, it is of limited value in instances where historicity does not appear to be the author’s primary communicative Tendenz. 99

A closely related matter to the misguided attempt to equate textual meaning with its ostensive reference and the events to which it refers is the issue of literal interpretation. Certain interpreters champion a ‘literal’ approach to biblical interpretation as a hermeneutical platform of superiority. Indeed, most fundamentalists and some evangelicals are wont to say that what differentiates their hermeneutical method (at least in part) from others is their adherence to the ‘literal meaning’ of the Bible. But confusion abounds regarding this term. First, it must be immediately qualified in some way in order to accommodate figures of speech, parable, poetic language, and similar features. Secondly, it tends to foster an atomistic approach to language, prioritising much more the individual words. In light of both text linguistics and speech act theory, it is necessary to look toward much larger units in order to understand what is the locutionary content as seen in context.

99 Vanhoozer (1998:426) offers the probing insight that fundamentalists equate ‘the meaning of a text with its referent, that is, with its empirical or historical correspondence. It is this essentially modern theory of meaning and truth that generates literalistic interpretations and harmonisations where all parts of the Bible are read as though the primary intent were to state historical facts. Whereas Bultmann dehistoricises historical material, fundamentalists may historicise unhistorical material’ (emphasis his).
Literal interpretation also founders in wrongly presupposing what it is that the author is trying to communicate—it is a misattribution concerning the function of the text. In Rommetveit’s nomenclature, it neglects to grant a ‘fair hearing’ to the author with the concomitant openness to acknowledge the author’s purposes and adopt the author’s point of view. Or in Frei’s categories of thought, as I illustratively apply them to the book of Jonah, ‘literal interpretation’ of the meaning of this narrative have been ‘eclipsed’ by preoccupation with and proofs for and against the historical facticity of the recorded events (e.g., how can a man live for three days inside a fish?), as if this was the primary (if not sole) truth claim of the book. Or again, in the terms of speech act theory, literal interpretation is inadequate as an interpretive goal, because it fails to address the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of the communicative act. I believe that what evangelicals ought to say with regard to bibliology is that the locutions, the illocutions, and the perlocutions that the author intends as advocated within the biblical text are trustworthy, truthful, compelling, and must be followed at the risk of displeasing God.

Even the most plausible identification of these features, if taken no further, is wholly inadequate: an ‘ethical’ reading of Scriptures (the very purpose of interpretation) mandates conforming to the norms it espouses. D Taylor (1995:60) makes this point well:

Literature invites us into relationships—relationships between writers and readers, between characters and readers, between all of these and the world (both society and nature), between readers and other readers, and, sometimes, between the reader and God. Such relationships have the potential to change us and are fraught with ethical considerations.

100 While it is wholly beside my point to enter into this discussion, I do think that preliminary to the arguments for what God could or couldn’t do, or did or didn’t do, lies more fundamental questions, e.g. what kind(s) of truth claims are made? and, what counts as evidence to establish its truthfulness?
When reading the Bible, readers are called to a relationship with God. The ethical interpretation is one which responds accordingly. Treier (1999:22) connects this moral obligation of the reader to evangelical theology: ‘Responding to postmodernity by indwelling the Christian metanarrative as told in Scripture, and by telling this story as a story, is very fitting for evangelicals, and is perhaps our distinctive theological contribution.’ I make no self-deluded claim to objective distance, the holy grail of modernism. But neither do I merely defer to confessionalism. The biblical text is read as a text (in keeping with text linguistics, literary approaches, the arguments of Frei, and speech act theory), but it is also read as the text.

2.12(b) Biblical narratives as texts

Behind pledging allegiance to the text there immediately looms a huge conundrum with which most of those involved in biblical scholarship are only beginning to reckon: which text is the text? The problem is that there are multiple texts for any given biblical narrative. There are far too many options here: the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint(s), the Peshitta, the Targums, the Vulgate, the Masoretic Text(s), a Masoretic text sans vocalisation marks, the critically-reconstructed Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (or one of its forthcoming competitors), a hypothetical and critically-reconstructed Vorlage to one of the above, a nebulous ‘final form’ for each of the individual books, a pre-redactional Urtext of which we have no copies, a source-critically rendered hypothetical text (e.g. J, E, D, and P). In reality, there is no textus receptus for the Old Testament. The entire field of Old Testament textual criticism is in upheaval as scholars try to sort out just what the goal of textual criticism should be.

Naturally this creates interpretive problems for all those who locate meaning either in the author or in the text. No single extant text can be fully equated with authorial intent, for no autographs exist. Many have functionally defaulted to Masoretic Text/Biblia Hebraica
Stuttgarten's for the Old Testament and Nestle/Aland (United Bible Societies) for the New Testament, with occasional preference for an alternative reading. Where this appropriation is uncritical and naïve, interpreters are open to charges of un-realism (positivism, naïve realism).

There is no claim here to solve this riddle. Operatively, I too will choose to work with Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia as the source text in this analysis. I do so wittingly and willingly as a member of a (large and very diverse) reading community for which this text has served as a norm. But it is precisely for issues such as this that I recognise that my hermeneutical model must be that of the critical realist—open-ended and provisional.

2.12(c) Biblical narrative as a canonical text

In North America Childs and in Europe Rendtorff have sponsored widely influential ‘canonical’ readings of the Old Testament which foreground the ‘final form’ of the text—that which has been received by communities of faith and understood to be scripture. The canonical text is both a finished product (the so-called final form) and a forward-aimed trajectory capable of making demands upon the world of various, future readers. This roughly corresponds

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101 The danger here is to grant a given text (such as BHS) with a functionally canonical status, which is at the least anachronistic. While there may be a very real relationship between a given text and Scripture, these two should be differentiated, at least in principle.

102 For Childs, this includes (1979) An introduction to the Old Testament as scripture; (1984) The New Testament as canon: An introduction; (1985) Old Testament theology in a canonical context; and (1992) Biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments. Childs (1992:722-723) details the development of his views vis-à-vis the ongoing engagement with his critics in three particular areas. First, while he maintains the necessity of historical criticism in his own work, he rejects procedures which allow historical criticism to ‘set the agenda’ or ‘filter the biblical literature,’ or which grants the same privilege to philosophical, sociological or psychological interests. Secondly, he has tempered his enthusiasm for narrative theology as an ally to his concerns, pointing out that it can yield ‘fully secular, non-theological reading[s] of the Bible,’ which in more radical forms may eviscerate theological value from the scriptures. Finally, he sharpens his critique against primarily functional views of scripture that threaten to domesticate the Bible’s authority according to self-interested ideologies. Rendtorff (himself influenced by Childs) has written significant works including (1993a) Canon and theology: Overtures to an Old Testament theology; (1993b) ‘The paradigm is changing: Hopes—and fears’; (1994) ‘Canonical interpretation; a new approach to biblical texts’; and (1999) Theologie des Alten Testaments, Ein kononischer Entwurf. In short, his works follow Childs’ lead in prioritising the value of reading the Bible as the scriptures of a believing (Protestant Christian) community, rather than as the object of the academy’s higher critical agenda.
to the distinction drawn by Hirsch between meaning (which is textually fixed) and significance (its appropriation in the lives of readers).

Childs’ concern is with how the Bible functions within the community of believers as scripture.\textsuperscript{103} But the force of his argument is blunted by the charges of his critics that he has not adequately dealt with the formation of the canon, and the influences upon the formative process. Deist (1989:12) points out that canonical ‘scholars tended to “side-step” the socio-anthropological problem by focusing more and more on the finished product, the “final/canonical text.”’ While this may be of no significant concern to reader-oriented approaches, it presents a very real problem both to text-oriented advocates and author-oriented scholars, both of whom maintain that every detail of the precise wording of the text may be charged with formal significance and pregnant with meaning. Bolin (1997:57) counters that ‘[s]uch an apotheosis of the author—endowed with such genius and incapable of any mistakes—amounts to nothing less than a collapsing of the divine dictation model of scriptural inspiration into the mind of the author, yet another naïve, post-critical move’ (emphasis his). The ‘final form’ of the text to which Childs so frequently alludes remains an elusive, theoretical abstraction fraught with difficult questions, particularly in attempting to draw a line distinguishing compositional editing (contributing to a ‘final form’) and transmissional variances (subsequent and inferior to the ‘final form’).\textsuperscript{104}

However, the importance of recognising that textual interpretation is manifestly seeking to understand a text must be underscored. Questions as to the source of the text under scrutiny

\textsuperscript{103} Childs (1992:721) uses the term \textit{canon} ‘as a theological cipher to designate those peculiar features constitutive of the church’s special relationship to its scripture. It entails charting the area in which God’s word is heard, establishing the context for its proper hearing,...’

\textsuperscript{104} This certainly problematises the goal of Old Testament textual criticism, a point clearly brought out by Deist (1978b:11-19). His proposal (:249-254) involves reconstruction of a first century CE, non-vocalised Hebrew text, which I would also embrace as a first priority.
(the socio-historical factors that occasioned its origin and effected its provenance)—Deist’s objection, and the mode of inspiration—Bolin’s objection, belong properly to isagogics and theology (bibliology), respectively, rather than to textual analysis. These are indubitably valid concerns, and merit response. But neither argument is sufficient to illegitimize the deliberate choice of focusing on a given text at hand (as recognised within an established reading community) as the object of literary investigation. And once again, critical realism must be brought to bear on the problem. It surely is reasonable to perform a close reading of the BHS text as I’ve advocated here, with a close eye toward authorial intentions and narrative conventions as a foundational move, then in subsequent studies read these other texts, using the same methodology, while seeking to discern what divergences exist and hypothesise as to why.

The concept of canon functions in yet another, more literary manner: it establishes the parameters of the text as a literary whole. Individual biblical books are not autonomous entities, but operate as subunits of a larger whole, viz the canon. In text linguistics (see Longacre 1983:269-336), the larger level textual phenomena supervene over the lower levels. For example, the textual role of יְהַלְוָה in Genesis 5:1 is not found merely in the syntax of the sentence, but in the compositional strategy of the entire book as a textual marker. So in canonical interpretation, larger level conventions supervene upon lower conventions (i.e., book level and smaller).\textsuperscript{105}

In addition, the principle of canon serves to demarcate that which is not part of the text from that which is. That which is canonical is of a higher order, bearing the imprimatur of divine

\textsuperscript{105} This could account for the Jonah narrative beginning with a WAYYIQTOL construction ("And the word of YAHWEH...")

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authority.\textsuperscript{106} Lindbeck (1984:117) extends the breadth of this phenomenon to incorporate the entirety of ‘the preeminently authoritative texts that are the canonical writings of religious communities.’

2.12(d) Biblical narrative as context and intratext

This demarcation further helps readers to establish higher degrees of interrelationship between a given biblical passage and any other passage. The textual world of the Bible provides an ‘intratext,’ an intermediate level of text networking in which interdependence operates more self-consciously and pervasively than with extrabiblical texts.\textsuperscript{107} As Lindbeck (1984:136) points out, ‘In an intratextual religious or theological reading...[there exists] a privileged interpretive direction from whatever counts as holy writ to everything else.’ Biblical books provide a closer, higher and more dominant level of intertextuality than ‘extra-texts’ (see figure below).\textsuperscript{108} I take this to be not merely an ideological commitment imposed upon the Bible, but an attempt to conform to the claims it makes for itself: the implied readers will recognise Scripture as such and will distinguish them from other works which are not designated as God’s word. The practical implication of this within my model of interpretation is simply that I will seek to identify literary patterns and relationships not only within the book of Jonah, but also Jonah as seen against the

\textsuperscript{106} It also establishes the necessary boundaries for inner-biblical (intratextual) interpretation in keeping with the Reformer’s hermeneutical dictum, Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres.

\textsuperscript{107} Sailhamer (1995) has systematically worked out the implications of textlinguistics, Frei’s (1974) distinction between text and event, the concept of canon-consciousness, and a confessional (evangelical) theological stance in his Introduction to Old Testament theology. I am deeply indebted to his seminal insights for my own synthesis here.

\textsuperscript{108} Once again, I am declaring where I position myself rather than offering a full-blown apologetic for doing so. The degree to which biblical authors were aware of their own compositions as situated within a larger textual entity (the canon) is a topic which would merit extensive reflection. There are clear passages within the Bible which refer to other individual books or authors as having authoritative status (e.g. Joshua 1:7-8; Jeremiah 18:18; Psalm 119; Daniel 9:2; Luke 24:44-45; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16) not given to other sources. Admittedly this is an argument from internal coherence rather than ‘external’ criticism, but it is a starting point for developing such a position. One could also argue for intratextual preferentiality on the basis of one’s identification with an interpretive community (a contemporary form of confessionalism?). It remains to be fully worked out elsewhere, however, from a critical realist stance.
backdrop of other biblical narratives, which is a commonplace procedure throughout the history of biblical interpretation.

2.13 The responsibility of the ability to respond

2.13(a) Can readers respond?

There is little argument as to the possibility of readers responding to the texts they read. Regardless of whether one locates meaning in the author, the text, or the reader, virtually all would agree that readers are catalyzed by their reading. The manner in which readers respond is the product of their interpretive goals. Self-reflective readers may seek to assess what readers, with varying interests, may do with a text. For example, at the Society of Biblical Literature there are hermeneutical special-interest groups such as the African-American Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media, Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible,¹⁰⁹ New Historicism and Biblical Studies, Ideological Criticism, Social History of Biblical

¹⁰⁹ For a feminist reading of the latter prophets, see Brenner (1995)
Scholarship, *inter alia*. In various ways, these are studies of the ways that students study—how reading communities interpret interpretation and form new consensuses among themselves.  

In fact, there are also innumerable things that one *could* look for in biblical texts which still would be quite text-oriented: the orthography of Hebrew letter formation, the so-called ‘equidistant letter sequencing’ (ELS) popularised in ‘The Bible code’ project, influences of cognate Semitic language borrowing in biblical Hebrew, comparison of clause length in Hebrew versus Ugaritic poetry, evidence for Syro-Israelite political relations in the 8th century, *inter alia*.

My own interest, by contrast, lies not in how various reading communities may use the text. While this constitutes a valid field of investigation in its own right, I would contend that this is not engagement in textual interpretation *per se*, but rather a form of criticism of the text. In fact, it is arguable whether claims such as ‘What this text means for me ...’ or ‘...for this group...’ should be rightly construed as textual *understanding*. Vanhoozer (1998:401-403) prefers to call these endeavors textual ‘*over*standing’—without intending any necessary pejorative connotation to the term. Even Clines (1993:86), an enthusiastic promoter of employing multiple reader-oriented approaches reflecting various ideological interests, allows for drawing this distinction:

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110 An example of multiple ideological reading perspectives may be found in the Bible and Culture Collective (1995). This group shares the premise that (4) ‘there is no innocent reading of the Bible, no reading that is not already ideological.’ Hence (:17), this ‘variegated and, on occasion, contentious’ group of individuals share a common goal of seeing (:15) ‘explicit acknowledgments of ethical stances, ideological positionings, self-critical and self-reflexive consciousness, and affirmations of the positive values of difference and multiplicity.’ With the contributing authors resisting any sort of homogenisation resulting from collaboration and compromise (see :17), the net product of this volume preserves the disparate voices in tension and dissonance toward one another. In a related work on a more popular level, Hill and Cheaule (1996) seek to demonstrate that the Bible has been selectively used by religious and political leaders to support self-serving policies under the rubric of the statement ‘It’s in the Bible.’

111 In Hirsch’s terms, this would be the ‘significance’ of the text; in Searle’s nomenclature, it would be the ‘function’ of the text; Austin might describe it as the perlocutionary ‘effects.’

112 Caird (1994:423) adopts a similar stance: ‘if the hearer takes words in a sense not intended by the speaker, that is not an enlargement of meaning but a breakdown of communication.’
'Perhaps we should be sharply distinguishing between acts of *interpretation*, which seek only to represent the text... and, on the other hand, acts of *criticism*, which judge the text by a norm outside itself. If a feminist or some other ideological point of criticism takes its point of departure from an ethical or ideological position that lies outside the text, one which may indeed be deeply hostile to the text, its goal cannot be mere *understanding*, mere *interpretation*...'

(emphasis his)

Nor is my interest in various descriptive philological analyses, nor in social history of the ancient Near East, but in how the text is intended to function as the linguistically encoded product of a communicative act. My response is commensurate with what I understand the determinative author\(^\text{113}\) to be doing: I am seeking to understand his literary act with respect to his implied readers with whom he shares an intersubjectivity. Thus his communicative act may be evaluated on the basis of the textual clues and the conventions governing the communicative act.

2.13(b) *Can readers respond appropriately?*

In a well-known series of exchanges between Searle (1977, 1994a, 1994b) and Derrida, Derrida (see 1977a, 1977b, 1988) seeks to prove that authors cannot control their texts or decisively limit what subsequent interpreters can do with them. He betrays an all-or-nothing extremism, attempting to force his readers\(^\text{114}\) into selecting between two alternatives: absolute certainty (a notion already convincingly refuted in the postmodern critique of modernity) and thoroughgoing skepticism. Searle (1994a:648) objects: 'The standard mistake is to suppose that

\(^{113}\) In a radically reader-oriented statement, Morgan and Barton (1988:7) admit that, while a reader is never compelled to seek the author's intent, s/he *can* do so: 'Texts, like dead men and women, have no right, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author's intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so.' My position is that, while undeniably texts may be *used* to whatever ends readers desire (the author cannot guarantee reception), to *understand* them (which is a different matter) entails precisely 'respec[ting] an author's intention,' i.e., the ends that the author desired. Adam, another postmodern critic who maintains indeterminacy of meaning, is surely right when he acknowledges that such 'postmodern interpretations are, in a word, "unauthorized"' (1995:19)—when the author is removed, there cannot be an *authoritative* or *authorised* reading.
a lack of evidence, that is, our ignorance, shows indeterminacy or undecidability in principle' (emphasis mine). In light of the discussion of realisms above, moreover, it is both possible and preferable to acknowledge that there is something in the text which transcends the individual interpreter and is knowable by him or her, at least to a certain degree. I choose to adopt a stance of critical realism in which the determination of authorial intention can be realised (or rather, approached) by interpreters, albeit tempered with the awareness that their interpretive models are fallible.

In my approach, communication involves the sharing of mutually recognised linguistic conventions (words, grammar, syntax, sentences, genres, features of literary style, and texts) with the authorially directed goals of eliciting both conceptual understanding and eliciting desired effects. Appropriate response, then, is predicated upon correct recognition of the literary conventions utilised in the author's communicative act, together with correct inference of their function and force. It is thus a cooperative effort between authors and readers in which linguistic and literary conventions (i.e. communicative rules) are shared (see M. L. Pratt 1977:86).

2.13(c) What is the appropriate way to respond?

This past century has witnessed the changing landscape of the discussion regarding textual understanding. Initially, the focus of interest was primarily upon hermeneutics, i.e. identifying what are the correct rules of interpreting texts. Next, the debate broadened to the ethics of reading, i.e. seeking to negotiate what constitutes a morally responsible way to interpret the text. Here the viability of whether such hermeneutical rules could be construed as inherently 'right' or 'wrong' was questioned—'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' were deemed as better

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114 In an unwitting faux pas which defeats his very point, he even accuses Searle (who resists identifying the locus of meaning with the reader) of not understanding what he meant. Obviously, if textual meaning is wholly determined by readers, then there could be no misinterpretation.
categories. Then, the topic of debate evolved into the politics of reading. The questions related to this issue are complex. What are the effective uses of the text? By whom? To/for whom? Who gets to decide? On what basis? Who ‘wins’ by profiting from this interpretation? Who ‘loses’?

In the interpretive model (or particular form of critical realism) which I am seeking to advocate here, responsible interpretation is that which attends to the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary intentions of the author. It seeks to identify, understand, and then to conserve the material content, the force, and the effects anticipated by the author. The appropriate response is thus a tri-fold one: to understand the concepts presented (locution), to appreciate the force and function of the literary forms selected in the communicative action (illocution), and finally to adapt one’s thinking and behavior (or at least to entertain them seriously as a viable alternative) in a manner consistent with the effects the author sought to elicit (perlocution). My intention, then, is to propose a morally responsible (ethical) way of reading commensurate with the text under investigation. In other words, the interpretive goal of the competent reader is to give a sympathetic hearing to the author’s case as presented and instantiated in the text.¹¹⁵

Concomitant with this model is the understanding that interpretative validity is contingent upon the degree to which it adequately and accurately describes the communicative intention of the author as enacted by the text. It is erroneous (or invalid or defeatable) to the degree that it ascribes to the author intentions or functions which are deemed improbable or unwarranted by the text, which serves as a public record of the author’s communicative act. The implied reader is someone who submits to the assertions, point of view, and values esteemed in the text, and who further cooperates with the intended perlocutionary effect(s) envisioned by the author.

¹¹⁵ Again my goal is manifestly textual understanding. In principle one might gain other kinds of insight by looking into generative factors inferred from history and sociology, but that is not my interest here.
2.13(d) **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the goal of interpretation for which I’ve argued here is that the meaning of a literary work is found in the range of authorial intentions within the customary linguistic functions of a written text. Thus the text itself is the object of my inquiry, for in it readers encounter the authorial intentions vivified and made accessible through the use of recognisable literary conventions. This model reflects a critical realism, hence it remains provisional yet optimistic of accurately describing realities which truly exist independently of humanly limited perspectives. This model is also interpretive, seeking to elucidate the text, rather than critical in the sense of reading it ‘against the grain’ in order to critique and oppose its truth values. I take textual meaning to be determinate (while allowing for ambiguity and imprecision) and thus shareable\(^{116}\) by those conversant with the literary conventions employed by the author and willing to ‘decenter’ themselves in order to share an intersubjectivity with the implied author.

Those attending to the conventions are enabled to infer authorial intent on three levels: the locutionary (the subject matter and material elements), the illocutionary (how the text is being used by the author), and the perlocutionary (the affects and effects which the author envisions for the implied reader). The inferred interpretation of authorial intentions, conventionalised in the text, is valid insofar as it yields the best explanation in terms of the coherence of the text under investigation. A fuller understanding of the text, however, requires not merely an adequate identification and explanation of the cognitive elements of the text (i.e. material content and

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\(^{116}\) Hirsch (1967:6) points out that ‘determinacy is a necessary attribute of any shareable meaning, since an indeterminacy cannot be shared.
structure), but also includes a response to the truth claims it makes according to the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects envisaged by the author.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} This element is comparable to Bakhtin's (1993:49) \textit{pravda}, i.e. truth that is 'compellingly valid,' a 'cognition that answerably obligates me,' and which reaches beyond the theoretical knowledge (\textit{znanie}) of the content in itself.
Chapter 3: Setting

*Wer den Dichter will verstehen
Muß in dichters Lande gehen*

—Goethe

3.1 Making a scene over Jonah

In chapter one I introduced a problem regarding interpretation of the book of Jonah, that is whether Jonah is characterised by the narrator so as to be viewed as a good guy or a bad guy. The main intent of the book turns largely on the identity of the people whom Jonah ostensibly represents. The following are the parties most often implicated in the various interpretive models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonah as ...</th>
<th>Group represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinocchio</td>
<td>anyone who has strayed from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotic</td>
<td>those who have clinical, psychological disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prometheus</td>
<td>those who prize the indomitable human spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall-guy</td>
<td>those who are aggrieved at God’s caprice or humbled before his freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot</td>
<td>nationalists, bigots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Israelite prophetic order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thesis here is that narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives. One set of these conventions relates to narrative setting.

I contend that understanding the settings in Jonah which comprise its narrative world will contribute toward an answer to the question regarding his characterisation. For example, does it make any difference that Jonah flees toward Tarshish rather than, like Elijah, toward Mount Horeb? If commissioned to go to Tarshish, might he have fled to Nineveh? Does it matter that Nineveh was given forty days rather than, say, three (as in the case of the Septuagint\textsuperscript{118})? In the

\textsuperscript{118} Several possibilities for this textual divergence exist. One possibility is that from a thematic or literary point of view, these numbers function similarly, i.e. both forty and three share an overlapping stereotypology, and
discussion that follows, I seek to demonstrate that it does make a difference, and that such details matter for understanding and interpreting the book, and can help to solve the problem of the characterisation of Jonah.

3.2 Setting the stage for the setting

When a narrative is told, the narrator meets the reader in an in-between ‘world,’ the world within the narrative being presented. The author cannot invite the reader directly into his or her own actual world, nor can the author enter the real-life world of the reader, but they can meet on a common ground within the narrative itself. A simple drawing illustrates:

![Diagram showing the relationship between author, narrative, and reader]

The author relates details to the reader to which the reader responds imaginatively. The reader thereby becomes a participant in the narrative world. The author, located in a given space-time matrix, draws readers from other space-time matrices into the imagined scenes, and introduces

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hence an equivalent meaning. Another possibility is that the Septuagint parallels Jonah’s ordeal of three days and three nights in the fish with the same number of Ninevite days of testing, thus drawing them into closer relationship. In a different vein, it may be that a three-day rather than forty day period of Ninevite testing more closely parallels New Testament concerns such as Jesus’ three days and three nights in the grave. More likely in my judgment is the possible linkage with passages in Acts concerning Peter and Cornelius. The thrice-occurring vision (τρεῖς Acts 10:16) perhaps better relates with a three-day testing period for the Ninevites as well as Jonah (τρεῖς LXX Jonah 2:1) along with other details of the story: Joppa, Peter ‘Bar-Jonah’ (see Matthew 16:17) as the reluctant Jewish messenger to the gentiles, a gentile officer *cum* convert, a jealous response on the part of the Jews toward gentile reception of grace (Acts 10:14; 11:2). For more on these parallels and the significance for Lucan theology as developed in Acts, see Wall and Lencio (1992:129-140).
them to the narrative characters, and lures them into complicity in the events described. Authors enable their readers to perceive, experience, and know things to which the readers would not have access without the narrator’s guiding voice (e.g. through explanatory asides or relating the inner thoughts or emotions of characters), while denying them access to elements that are tangential to the author’s intended purposes. Understood in this way, both authors and readers traffic in narrative meaning, with the communicative common ground found in this intermediary narrative world.

In the previous chapter I presented a case for maintaining an interpretive goal of identifying textual meaning with authorial intention as it is presented within the narrative text. The approach adopted here is that a narrative text is a construction of the author, who willfully intends to communicate: to affirm, to suggest, to deny, to qualify, to suggest, to solicit, to assess, to convince, to assert, or some other intention. The author communicates his or her intentions, in part, by presenting a narrative world, which is the sum of all its individual settings, taken together with all the potentials implicit therein. This point is also made by Frei (1986:54) with reference to Ricoeur (1979:98): ‘The text speaks of a possible world and of a possible way of orienting oneself within it. The dimensions of this world are properly opened up by, disclosed by, the text.’ Furthermore, the narrative not only invites the reader to its a narrative world, but also steers the reader to adopt an intended, normative stance toward it.\(^{119}\) Indeed, intentionality is one of the seven criteria of de Beaugrande and Dresler (1981:1-13,113-138) in distinguishing a text from a non-text.\(^{120}\) Whether or not the author is successful in accomplishing those ends, or

\(^{119}\)Iser (1974:38), drawing on both Graumann (1960:14) and Lobsien (1975:42-74) draws the same conclusion: [the reader] finds himself directed toward a particular view which more or less obliges him to search for the one and only standpoint that will correspond to that view. By virtue of this standpoint, the reader is situated in such a position that he can assemble the meaning toward which the perspectives of the text have guided him.

\(^{120}\)The other elements are: *cohesion*, i.e. words are connected in a dependent sequence; *coherence*, i.e. the notional relations are mutually accessible and relevant through causal links; *acceptability*, i.e. having some use or
whether the reader is willing and competent to identify and accept those intended assertions, are both importantly related but separate issues. Readers are active agents (whether conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional, competent or incompetent) in the perception of the author’s intentions, yet the author remains the agent of textual intention.¹²¹ Birkerts (1994:81) argues this point of the author’s role in the creation of the narrative world:

[The narrative world of the text] is a world held fully in the suspension of a single sensibility—the author’s. However much the life in the book may resemble life as it is known to the reader, it is nevertheless irradiated through every part with the intended coherence of its conception. The fictional world is a world with a sponsoring god—or creator—and this is true even where the work argues for the nihilistic chaos of all experience.

While it is possible for readers to attach meaning to other aspects (see chapter two), I choose the narrative text itself as my point of interpretive focus. It provides a common site which may be shared by the two communicative parties. The narrative world is a mutually accessible venue where the author’s and the readers’ ideologies and value systems are engaged: the reader’s axiology may clash with, negotiate with, or be confirmed and reinforced by the author’s. Through this figurative vis-à-vis encounter, the reader either maintains a contesting aspect toward the author’s asserted truth claims, or adopts them, or is more or less reconciled to them through adaptation, compromise, and synthesis. In terms of narrative conventions, the common ground shared between author and reader as envisaged here is the recognisable narrative components of characterisation, setting and plot. Setting, i.e the narrative world, is thus an aspect of the sharable elements between author and reader. The authorially constructed world

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¹²¹ This understanding of the relationship between author and reader accords with the concept of the covenant of discourse (see chapter two).
becomes the reader’s world in some identifiable sense as well. Hart (1999:197), in arguing that the narrative world is discernible to the reader, maintains that the reader can resonate with this narrative world in a profound sense: ‘we discover that it was our world all along.’

Implicated in any discussion of narrative setting is also the relationship between the described world within the narrative and the real world of its author. Frei (1974) has already provided an insightful analysis of how these two ‘worlds’ became merged in the minds of biblical scholars of various stripes during the post-reformation period, and further how that the collapsing of these two horizons has precipitated hermeneutical confusion. Even in non-fiction, the narrative world is not to be equated with the real world in a facile manner, but is a depiction of it, an interpretive rendering or reproduction. The characters, places, events and concepts it presents to the reader are not those readers would perceive even if they were actually in the real world of the author, for they have been shaped, edited and composed by the author. Just as a portrait painting of a person is not homologous to the person who is being painted (observers are most aware of this in certain art genres such as expressionistic or cubist, though in fact every objet d’art maintains a différance toward its subject),¹²² so narratives are linguistic ‘landscapes,’ that is, representations distinct from the material world.

Thus readers are invitees to another world, a narrative world wherein they encounter people and places which become familiar as they spend time with them in that world. And as readers rub shoulders with its characters and begin to find their way around in its environment

¹²² Keeney (1983:79) relates this anecdote about Picasso which illustrates this point. ‘Somebody was saying to Picasso that he ought to make pictures of things the way they are—objective pictures. He mumbled he wasn’t quite sure what that would be. The person who was bullying him produced a photograph of his wife from his wallet and said, “There, you see, that is a picture of how she really is.” Picasso looked at it and said, “She is rather small isn’t she? And flat?”’
they are more open to a sort of transculturalisation in which the readers begin to adopt the
verities, perspectives, and values common there, and perhaps will import them back into their
own real world. As Birkerts (1994:80-81) puts it,

the transition from the world we live in to the world of the book is complex and gradual. We do not open to the first page and find ourselves instantly transported from our surroundings and concerns. What happens is a gradual immersion, an exchange in which
we hand over our groundedness in the here and now in order to take up our new groundedness in the elsewhere of the book....[W]hen we read we not only transplant ourselves to the place of the text, but we modify our natural angle of regard upon all things; we reposition the self in order to see differently.

(emphasis his)

Of course, this is not to say that readers are somehow able to suspend all attachments to their
own real world—this is the baggage (for better or worse) that they inevitably bring with them to
the narrative world. But the critical realist model I am here advocating allows for such an
encounter with another environment, narratively mediated, into which readers can enter.

3.3 Traveling through space and time

The term setting (or ‘atmosphere’) within narrative texts refers to the spatial and temporal
elements and relationships within the narrative world. Setting incorporates not only the locale
and time period required for narrative action, but also the scenery and the properties which these
elements contribute to the action, and hence the narrative intention. Space (or ‘place,’ or
‘staging’) indicates the whereabouts of the narrative action. As Bal (1985:93) helpfully points
out, the notion of narrative space exceeds that of mere ‘place.’ While place indicates location—
the physical and spatial dimensions within the narrative, it also may point beyond mere
locations: ‘places are linked to certain points of perception. These places in relation to points of
perception are called space.’ In other words, space refers to the mental associations that people
make with particular places. The temporal element relates to the passage of *time* within the narrative itself: the marking of sequences, pauses, jumping back to a previous point or jumping ahead, alternating between simultaneous events and so forth. The setting of a longer narrative generally passes through several *scenes*. The main criteria for scenic divisions are a change of locale, a change of time, or a change of characters. Conversely, scenic changes also function to indicate the textual structure of a narrative—usually a scenic change signals another a new textual division. Fokkelman (1999:97) identifies two useful avenues for determining divisions within biblical narratives: ‘the entrances and exits of characters on stage, and the way in which the writer employs his system of time and space coordinates’ (emphasis mine). Thus close attention to these scenic modulations enables the reader to identify structural patterning.

Setting may also function by generating an ambiance, by becoming a factor in the plot conflicts, by revealing character traits, and by suggesting associations from the reader’s own real world (see Rhoads and Michie 1982:63). When these associations occur, readers may find themselves viewing their own world in a different manner for having experienced travel in the narrative world. Larger typologies are suggested which transcend the particularities of a given narrative atmosphere: Spring is typically a time for romance, while a dark forest is a place of lurking dangers. Kort (1988:53-54) explains this associative principle at work in the process of reading: ‘recurring patterns eventually take to themselves a quality of timelessness and the transcendent. Reading a narrative, therefore, takes one from the world of the contingent and changing into the world of the constant and enduring.’

It may be objected here that settings such as these do not in fact carry universal associations among different cultures. For example, an approaching rainstorm surely would not

123 Increasing attention has been given to the correlation between scenic divisions and their signification by particular clause types in Hebrew Bible narrative. In this regard, for example, see Talstra (1978,1982,1995),
connote the same idea for a bushman of the Kalahari Desert (where rain is a months-long awaited event) as it would for an inhabitant near Mount Waialeale on the island of Kauai, which averages about 1220 centimeters (480 inches) of rainfall annually. Sheep herding carried a different stigma to cattle ranchers of the old American West (where the close-cropping grazing habits of sheep killed off available range grass) than it does to present-day New Zealanders (where sheep outnumber humans twenty to one). Thus it would be wrongheaded to believe in some sort of panhuman, associative typology inherently hard-wired into human perception.

But it is precisely for this reason that the reader must be relocated and reoriented by the narrative world. The sense of space must be derived, not from the cultural norms in the world of the receptor, but traced through the patterning within the narrative world of the text. To repeat Birkerts (1994:80), readers must exchange their ‘groundedness in the here and now in order to take up [their] new groundedness in the elsewhere of the book.’ This may be done by becoming more and more familiar with the correlation between settings and the events of narrative world itself. For example, reading about the sea in the biblical narratives may ‘naturally’ evoke a different perception in a water-loving Polynesian than in a hydrophobic landlubber. Nevertheless, by indwelling the biblical narratives, it is possible for each of them to learn to see the sea from the perspective of the narrator and characters in the Bible by observing how the sea is linked to typical events, namely to storms, peril, and as confronting characters with an ostensibly unsurpassable obstacle. Or again, how would a contemporary reader view the term ‘dog’ where it occurs in the Bible—as ‘man’s best friend,’ or perhaps as a tasty delicacy (as in some Far Eastern cultures)? Looking to the narrative world of the Bible, the reader consistently finds negative and repulsive connotations: dogs are mentioned in poetic parallelism with the

Sailhamer (1990), and den Exter Blockland (1996).
wicked (Psalm 22:16), they eat human flesh (2 Kings 9:35-36) and their own vomit (Proverbs
26:11), they lick open sores (Luke 16:21), and hence dogs are an epithet for evil men
(Philippians 3:2). In what could be termed ‘readerly reorientation,’ the sympathetic reader can
become increasingly attuned to viewing the narrative world as the author intends to present it. It
is this narratively presented ‘land’ which I have in mind in citing Goethe at the beginning of this
chapter: ‘Wer den Dichter will verstehen, muß in dichters Lande gehen.’

The narrator’s (Dichters) ‘land,’ i.e. setting, provides a range of possibilities which may
not even correspond to the real world. Again, Kort (1988:83) is instructive here: ‘Atmosphere
 [=space] is that element principally responsible for granting a narrative a “world,” of
establishing, that is, the horizon of conditions or possibilities under or within which life in the
narrative is carried on.’ These become the ground rules for life in that narrative world,124 and
hence may be potentially related to Ricoeur’s (1981a:50) ‘itineraries of meaning’ (see section
2.11). For instance, in the narrative of Judges 9:7-15 the trees of the tree kingdom converse
among themselves. That trees should talk not only is an impossibility in the reader’s real world,
but is also excluded from the realm of possibility elsewhere in the book of Judges—what is
permissible here is impermissible elsewhere. If the setting is significantly different from what
the reader knows—e.g. the tiny Lilliputians of Swift’s ([1726] 1947) Gulliver’s travels or the
barnyard society of Orwell’s (1946) Animal farm—a safe, ironic distance may be established for
satiric critique of extrinsic reality. Where it does parallel the reader’s experience, the reader can
live vicariously—a world of ongoing conflicts and denouements, of aggravating personalities
and physical needs and personal triumphs, the ebb and flow of life itself. As readers are able to

124 Van Dijk (1977:94) makes a similar point in his discussion of discourse coherence. ‘[A] change of world or
situation will also be constrained by some accessibility relations to the world or situation already established. In
other words, changes must somehow be homogenous...within the bounds of some higher level principle
determining the possible individuals and properties of some universe of discourse.’
identify elements of the narrative world with their own, their capacity for identifying with the characters and events depicted therein also increases. As Torrance (1978:8) points out:

When the invincible underdog of fantasy and fable enters a world we recognise as our own and engages in a struggle with its complexities and dangers, he assumes the dimensions of the comic hero—an underdog no longer invincible, no longer immune to the possibility of defeat, and one whose victories, when he wins them at all, are provisional, precarious, and never final.

Thus sensitivity to aspects of setting can once again aid the reader in understanding plot and identifying with the characters.

Another factor in the presentation of the narrative world to the reader is the narrator’s perspective. Uspensky (1983:58-65) discusses in detail the concurrence or nonconcurrence of the spatial position of the narrator relative to a depicted character. Though detailed engagement upon the topic of narrator’s perspective lies outside this study (it is more appropriately discussed as an aspect of narrative style), this facet does overlap somewhat with spatial considerations. The author may tell the narrative through the eyes of one of the characters (e.g. Ishmael in Melville’s [1851]1969 Moby Dick),125 through a series of characters, from a specific spatial vantage point, or from a transcendent bird’s-eye view. In the Bible, the bird’s-eye (or rather, a God’s-eye) perspective is employed in the overwhelming majority of the narrative material. Possible exceptions to this rule are the comparatively scarce first-person accounts such as Isaiah 6 and 8 (but not 7), Nehemiah, and Daniel 7-12.126

At this juncture, it is now appropriate to turn to the particular conventions relative to space and time, respectively, noting how these conventions may influence the functions of plot and characterisation, and hence the intended meaning of the narrative.

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125 This technique is not common to biblical narratives. Perhaps a rare example here would be the ‘we’ sections of the books of Acts.

126 Even in these examples, the first-person accounts may be embedded within larger 3-person frameworks.
3.3(a) Space

Space may be used in a variety of ways within a narrative. These ways, listed below, I have revised, adapted, and expanded from MacAuley and Lanning (1987:167ff). The various aspects are not mutually exclusive, and may vary from one narrative text to another in terms of their relative bearing upon the characters, to the events and ultimately, to the themes of the narrative. Nevertheless it is possible and beneficial to identify and classify these aspects or functions. I will discuss these in an order ranging from less intrusive into the narrative storyline to the more overtly influential.

3.3(a)i Backdrop

In some biblical stories, there is no spatial identification at all. The absence of a place name, together with vagaries concerning identification of the characters, helps to signal the formal category of parable. occasionally a place is mentioned, but it has relatively little direct bearing on the plot or the characters. For example, Numbers 33:3-49 lists over fifty place names in tracing the travel itinerary of the wandering Israelites. While some of these places will achieve the stigmatisation as spaces (e.g. Soccoth, Marah, Elim, the Red Sea, Rephidim, Sinai, Kadesh, Edom, the plains of Moab, the Jordan, and Jericho), the majority of these are neither described here nor are mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The cumulative impression is a long, tedious journey, passing through many forgettable places as well as some that are more

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127 'One day the trees went out to anoint a king' (Judges 9:8); 'There were two men in a certain town' (2 Samuel 12:1); 'A farmer went out to sow his seed' (Matthew 13:3); 'There was a landowner who planted a vineyard' (Matt 21:33); 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop' (Luke 12:16); 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet' (Luke 14:16); 'There was a man who had two sons' had two sons' (Luke 15:11); 'There was a rich man whose manager was accused' (Luke 16:1); 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple' (Luke 16:19); 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men' (Luke 18:2); 'Two men went up to the temple to pray' (Luke 18:10). An exception to this general rule is Luke 10:30, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho.'
significant, mostly for the unpleasant experiences there. Though the specifics of the spatial setting are not always critical for the events and characters present in a given episode, they may nevertheless function in a broad sense to establish ambiance.

3.3(a)ii Historical credibility

Information about narrative space may be given to lend historical credibility. In this case the setting is not particularly important in terms of relationships within the narrative world, but with its relationship to the external, real world of which the reader has a certain degree of knowledge (see Ryken 1992:58). A frequently employed technique in filmmaking is to begin the drama with words appearing on the screen which identify the place and time. The audience is thus provided, not merely with a point of orientation, but also with a general sense of lifelikeness and truthfulness. So also in narrative concrete data relating to history may also generate a generic expectation of asserted facticity. For example, in Joshua 13-21 the reader is provided with a lengthy and detailed description of the land apportionment given to each of the tribes of Israel during the occupation of the land of Canaan. Scores of cities are mentioned here which appear nowhere else in biblical narrative; they do not figure in any of the succeeding stories, but the mention of them here lends force to the reality and the extent of the occupation through their sheer volume and detail—fiction does not invite this excess of information about setting.  

3.3(a)iii Type-scene

Space may also function to elicit emotions or associations beyond the immediate narrative. Here again the details of the geography are eclipsed, relatively speaking, by other,

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128 Although spatial details are not necessarily a guarantee of historicity, the conventions of biblical parable and allegory do not generally include features such as geographical lists, physical descriptions of places, genealogies or patronymic identification. Here in Joshua, the specificity lends weight not only to historical credibility, but also places ideological emphasis the complete fulfillment of Yahweh’s land promises to the patriarchs.
more important considerations. In this case the setting provides a general atmosphere and certain reader expectations; it operates as a symbol or a type-scene (see Alter 1981:47-62). High noon in a Western town with a name like Stagecoach Gulch is the setting for melodramatic gunfights; castaway stories are typically set on tropical islands. Paris is a place of romance, Vienna one of culture, Geneva of peaceful dialogue, Rome of ecclesiastical power. In biblical narrative, the desert is a place of barrenness, need and subsistence living; green pastures are associated with serenity and ample provision; the mountain is a place where God frequently chooses to meet humans. (Other examples of biblical type-scenes are provided later in this chapter.) In some cases, specific places are mentioned which are significant because the events in the narrative will parallel (through comparison or contrast) with other, past events which have happened in the same place. The association of a particular place with a predictable event as a ‘fixed combination’ is identified by Bal (1985:97) as a topos. But whether termed as a ‘type-scene’ or ‘topos,’ this association between place and action is a widely recognised phenomenon in literature.

3.3(a)4 Revelatory of character

Space is sometimes used in narrative chiefly as revelatory of character. The sort of place where a person chooses to live or decides to go tells us something about their traits. If word of an approaching opposing army comes to a character, where they next appear in the narrative sequence reveals something about him or her: galloping away in the desert, or engaged in deep discussion in the king’s council chamber, or consorting in the camp of the enemy, or retreating into a secret hideout or pacing on the wall with weapons in hand implies something about that character, such as cowardice, fortitude, ingenuity or treachery. In 2 Samuel 11:1, ‘at the time when kings go off to war,’ David is not found where kings are supposed to be, but remains in
Jerusalem, where he will fall into sin. The inappropriateness of David’s behavior is thus initially signaled in the narrative by a spatial factor.

3.3(a)v Unique context

In realistic narratives, the combination of a particular time and place tips us off to a unique context which influences readers’ understanding of the characters’ actions. A context of social foment is indicated by settings such as New Delhi in 1946 and Selma, Alabama in 1962; a context of war by Normandy, France in 1944. In the same way, when the book of Ruth begins, ‘In the days when the judges ruled...’ a reader can surmise that this is a chaotic, oppressive, and violent time for Israel in the land of Canaan. Similarly, Esther 1:1-3 sets the narrative during the reign of Ahasuerus, in Susa, that is, during the period of Persian rule over the Jews, in the (foreign) king’s palace. In biblical narratives, sometimes the place cum space even merits a new name to commemorate the momentous event which transpired there: the ford of Jabbok becomes Peniel (Genesis 32:31); Rephadim becomes Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:7 cp 20:13); Achan’s burial place near Jericho becomes Valley of Achor (Joshua 7:26). Once the place has thus been stigmatised, all the subsequent intratexts draw upon the connotative associations (e.g Sodom and Gomorrah are equated with wicked and sexual immorality, Baal [Beth] Peor with idolatrous intermarriage).

3.3(a)vi Opponent

Space may also operate very directly in the plot of the narrative wherein the characters are in conflict with the elements and forces of their native, narrative environment. The setting represents an opponent—the physical surroundings are an obstacle preventing figures in the narrative from doing what they wish, or impede the character from being in another, more
preferable place. Hunger or thirst in the wilderness and danger at sea are common examples of setting as opponent. For example, in London's ([1908] 1986) 'To light a fire,' it is the prospect of freezing to death in the Alaskan cold which is the chief 'antagonist' in the plot. The protagonist sets out, heedless of others' advice against traveling alone in the brutal Alaskan winter and ignoring the instincts of his dog. Not recognising the difficulty of attempting even simple tasks when exposed to temperatures of fifty degrees below zero Fahrenheit, he repeatedly makes mistakes as he vainly tries to build a fire, eventually succumbing to the penetrating cold and finally death by freezing. In Exodus, the Israelites face such natural opponents as the Red (Reed) Sea and the inhospitable and waterless wilderness.

3.3(a)vii Angle

Besides the spatial functions listed above, another factor in the presentation of setting is that of angle. Drawing an analogy from the world of film, the narrator may offer a 'wide-angle,' panoramic view of a given scene (an entire city, plain, battlefield) or may choose to 'zoom' in the focus upon one or two individuals. In biblical narratives, the most common mode of angle is the panoramic, while zooming usually is reserved for contrastive emphasis (e.g. Numbers 25:4-7). In addition, biblical narrators frequently employ a penetrating vision in which the inner lives of the characters are revealed: thoughts, emotions, motivations and intentions which would be invisible to a bystander can be communicated by the omniscient narrator (e.g. Esther 6:6).

3.3(a)viii Movement

Spatial relationships in a narrative may be indicated through movements. While episodes generally take place within a single narrative location (change of place being one of the most common indicators of episodic demarcation), sometimes the narrative follows the movement,
blurring text segment boundaries. This is the literary equivalent of a moving camera shot, emphasising action. If there are several places mentioned in a brief narrative context, the movement appears rapid. Such quick-paced movement is presented either as a technique for creating a tone of urgency or for simply indicating that the places themselves are not significant, subordinated to the plot development (see backdrop). Also, direction of movement may also contribute to the narrative atmosphere. A descent is normally ominous; the further down the more foreboding, as happens in Dante's ([1320]1954) *Inferno*. Conversely, ascent may be arduous, with the path functioning as an opponent, yet it is movement in the 'right' direction (e.g., Pilgrim's ascent to the Celestial City in Bunyan's ([1678]1978) *Pilgrim's progress*). Characters who prefer to descend are sinister, while characters striving to ascend are seen as noble.\(^\text{129}\)

Characters who courageously go to dispreferred places in order to accomplish some greater good (often benefiting not merely themselves but the society whom they represent) are heroic champions. Examples here are easily apparent: soldiers at war, Frodo and Samwise going to Mordor (Tolkien's [1965] *Lord of the rings*), a bushman traveling to the 'end of the world' to get rid of 'the evil thing' (*The gods must be crazy* [Trotskie {1980} 1987]), Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51).

In biblical narrative, movement east is likewise a step in the wrong direction, for ill fortune lies in that direction: the wilderness, nearby enemies (such as Moab, Ammon and Edom), and far-off enemies such as Babel/Babylon and Assyria. And in the world of the Bible, movement northward is generally good, while arising and ascending is almost always positive:

\(^{128}\) Bal (1985:44) points out that such 'psychological, ideological, and moral oppositions' such as 'high-low,' 'favourable-unfavourable, fortunate-unfortunate,' 'far-near, open-closed, finite-infinite,' 'safe-unsafe, and accessible-inaccessible' so common in Western literature are inherited from not merely Latin and Greek mythology but also, importantly, from the biblical vision. This observation is significant to answering the objection that the typologies of movement in these examples are (merely) the imposition of Western categories upon the Bible—on the contrary, their radix lies in the world of the Bible. Indeed, the bibliography which documents the impact of biblical symbolism upon the literature of western civilisation is vast.
one always goes ‘up’ to Zion or to the ‘hill country’ where so many important events in Israel’s history take place.\textsuperscript{130}

3.3(b) Time

Narratives are necessarily related to a succession of time in some way. As Ricoeur (1984:1:3) observes: ‘The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world.’ Narratives inevitably have some internal sequencing structure, either chronological or logical. Indigenous to the narrative world is an implied clock or calendar. The internal time of the narrative cannot be equated with external, reading time. The time that it takes for the reader to read a narrative text is not the same as the amount of time required for those events to have transpired in actual life: a narrative can conceivably jump twenty years’ time between paragraphs, or the narrator may, through explanatory embellishment, keep a reader suspensefully in limbo for several pages in which only a few narrative seconds elapse. Furthermore, the author may choose to tell us the events or give us information which is in a different time sequence than the way it would, could, or did happen (see Genette 1980:35). Literary and dramatic impact usually govern the author’s decisions regarding the order of presentation in what has been termed ‘dischronologized narration’ (W Martin 1969:179-186) or ‘anachrony’ (Chatman 1978:64; Genette 1980:39-40). Thus the presentation of the narrative may proceed on grounds which subordinate temporal sequence to logical flow: Barthes (1977:98) alludes to the antiquity of the recognition of this feature: ‘Aristotle himself [Poetics 1459a], in his contrast between tragedy...and historical narrative..., was already giving primacy to the logical over the chronological.’ The following list of (critical realist) categories specifies those aspects which I

\textsuperscript{130} High places play an important role in the biblical narratives (Ararat, Moriah, Sinai, Zion, Carmel, Sermon on the Mount, Mount of Transfiguration, Mount of Olives, Golgotha). It is also in the high places where idolatry takes place (e.g. 1 Kings 12:31-32).
believe to be most useful in understanding how time functions in contributing to narrative meaning.

3.3(b) Pace

The rate of delivery of new storyline (plot) information in the narrative is indicated by the term pace or tempo. Fast-paced action describes events more quickly than they could have occurred in real time. Slow pace retards the movements, often through protracted description of a scene or a character or consequences of an event. This creates a slow motion effect, sometimes reserved for crucial moments in the plot to heighten both suspense and sense of significance to the narrative. Generally speaking, biblical narratives are predominantly fast-paced, although occasionally a slow motion delivery is introduced. For example, the Ehud narrative of Judges 3:7-30 maintains a quick pace, moving through a rapid presentation of the action. At the climax of the deliverance, however, the action slows for an arresting graphic description of Ehud’s assassination of Eglon (verse 22, NRSV): ‘the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out.’ Comparatively speaking, this ‘overdescription’ retards the pace at the crucial moment in which the oppressor-ruler is slain, the narrative peak of the plot of this episode.

Genette (1980:94-95) discusses four different ‘tempos’ for narrative movement, which I take the liberty to plot. These are a helpful starting point for further discussion of temporal aspects.
### Accelerated movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ellipsis</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events implied but skipped (gaps)</td>
<td>Events spanning a wide time frame are described cursorily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Decelerated movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Pause</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Especially in dialogue, where narrative time and story time are roughly equivalent\textsuperscript{131}</td>
<td>Storyline action ceases, giving way to description or explanation (freeze)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3(b)ii Gapping

Sternberg (1985:237) defines a narrative gap as ‘a lack of information about the world...an event, motive, causal link, character trait, plot structure, law of probability...contrived by a temporal displacement.’ More simply, it is a readerly question left unanswered, a deliberately withheld piece of information necessary to making sense of the narrative\textsuperscript{132}.

Iser (see 1978), a representative of the Constance School of Rezeptionästhetik and hence a moderate reader-response position, uses the concept of narrative gapping or ‘blanks’ as a fundamental component in his interpretive model. According to Iser, an author’s intentions are encoded in the text, but s/he strategically places gaps or blanks in the narrative which must be interpretively filled by the reader, who can thus participate in the construal of meaning. Readers must assume an active role, which is designated, but also limited, by the text (1978:191). Thus what is not said (i.e., left ‘vacant’ :182) is of paramount tactical importance, for through these gaps the reader is both prompted to ‘concretize’ the meaning by filling the blanks:

\textsuperscript{131} Of course, Rimmon-Kenan (1983:44) is correct in arguing that ‘strictly speaking, [narrative time] is a spatial, not a temporal, dimension’—that is, how much written space is devoted, relatively speaking, to describe the events which take place in time.

\textsuperscript{132} It must be acknowledged that what the reader perceives as ‘deliberately withheld’ can only be inferred. It is truly an argument made from silence. For example, it would be very easy to pose scores of questions that are left unanswered in the narrative of Jonah (Who was the author? How big was the ship? What language did Jonah employ in delivering his oracle to Nineveh? Why did the king of Nineveh respond so positively? Why does Yahweh take pity on Ninevite cattle? \textit{ad infinitum}), yet how does a reader determine which questions stem from issues that have been strategically withheld by the author, and those which were not in the author’s mind in the first place? Nevertheless, I maintain that careful attention to the pace and the timing of the information revealed within a
reader...cannot help but try and supply the missing links that will bring the schemata together in an integrated gestalt’ (:186) and is enabled to do so by the textual code that is provided. In this way Iser can preserve the normative role of authorial intention, he maintains the parameters of valid interpretation which are circumscribed by the text as a linguistic code, while also giving weight to the ‘intersubjective’ role of the reader who functions as a co-creator.\textsuperscript{133} Like someone who follows the assembly instructions for a child’s bicycle, the manufacturer’s ‘intentions’ for the various pieces are realised when the reader follows the instructions in ‘creating’ the bicycle. This closely corresponds to my own understanding of narrative interpretation, and of gapping in particular.

Though my agreement with Iser on this topic is substantial, however, I reserve two criticisms. They both have to do with nomenclature. First, he correlates narrative gaps with ‘indeterminacy’ (1978:170-179) a freighted term which has been tainted by others (e.g. Fish) who negate any possibility of authorial intention being mediated through a text (see chapter two). While Iser does not hold this position, the use of the term indeterminacy hurts the reception of his own work by those who value authorial intentionality. The connotations of the term ‘indeterminacy’ suggest that authorial intent lies beyond the grasp of the reader’s ability to comprehend, thus the quest for authorial intent is rendered an exercise in futility. While I do not

\textsuperscript{133} In a book-length treatment of the subject, Holub (1992) offers an explanation for the curious lack of conversation between the German school of reception theory, most notably represented in the writings of Iser and Jauß, and the French and American schools of poststructuralism and deconstruction. The effect, in part (see :20-21,24-25), is that Iser has been perceived by Americans as an incipient and underdeveloped form of the bolder, more stimulating reader-response projects of Derrida, Foucault and Fish \textit{inter alia}. I find this unfortunate, for reception theory certainly deserves a voice of its own. Reception theory allows for determinacy of textual meaning (disallowed by the latter parties), while acknowledging the participative role of the interpreter (Iser 1981:83): ‘The words of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between the given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies.’ Such a position correlates well with the model of critical realism I am advocating here. And, as Holub (1992:31) rightly notes, ‘the—perhaps unwitting—consequence of Iser’s theory is to reassert the primacy of the author,’ another feature I prioritise.
see evidence that Iser himself has taken the argument to this level, his use of this term damages the receptivity among those already in reactionary modality toward the ‘hermeneutical anarchy’ they perceive to be underlying other reader-response advocates. Secondly, the term ‘co-creator’ (of meaning) obfuscates the matter of intentionality, for it implies that both parties, author and reader, have intentions which would have equal bearing upon the text. Yet as I argued in chapter two, textual understanding involves adherence to the author’s locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions—aspects that are not bilaterally and equivalently constituted by author and reader.134

Authors do leave gaps in the plot to entice the reader to become more involved in the narrative as they guess at what was intentionally omitted. Thus authors tease readers into coming up with theories and interpretations during the reading process. It makes for both more challenging and more interesting reading as readers become more active participants in the reading process. If an author creates a gap, and a reader ‘takes the bait’ by postulating an interpretive guess, and the reader’s interpretive guess subsequently is vindicated as correct by a later plot development, often by way of a flashback or explanation, s/he may feel somewhat superior and perspicacious; a special bond of kinship is forged with the author. On the other hand, if the guess is exposed as erroneous, s/he may be especially vulnerable to the author’s point. Often the implied readers are guilty of the same sins, weaknesses, and problems as the characters in the narrative, and the reader may feel as entrapped as the characters within the plot.

134 I do not mean by this, of course, that the readers are themselves void of intentions. The Bible and Culture Collective (1995:14) pointedly argue the reverse, stating that ‘our representations of and discourse about what the text meant and how it means are inseparable from what we want it to mean, from how we will it to mean’ (emphasis theirs). But whereas authors seek to encode their meanings in the texts they create, readers do not ‘create’ textual artifacts per se, nor do they intend locutions, illocutions and perlocutions so long as they remain readers (rather than speaking or writing critics, producing their own texts).
3.3(b)iii Summary

Summary entails a compressed or condensed description of elapsed periods of time in which the time it takes to read the account is substantially shorter than the time period to which it refers in the narrated world—what Chatman (1978:62) refers to as ‘discourse time’ versus ‘story time.’ The narrative of Chronicles is filled with examples of such summaries: ‘Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one’s regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings’ (2 Chronicles 21:20, NIV). Chatman also points out (:68) that the verbal aspects most commonly associated with summary are durative (‘and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years’) and iterative (e.g. Jonah 1:11, ‘for the sea was going and storming’).

3.3(b)iv Progress

Progress (= Genette’s ‘scene’) refers to narrative in which the discourse time is roughly equivalent to story time. The most obvious cases here are quoted dialogue and actions of short duration which take approximately the same time to perform and to narrate.

Progress in narrative is chronological when the narrative follows the same sequencing of the events as those events actually took place in the story: first, a happened, then b, next c, and finally the result was d. Chronological narration is the default mode; it is assumed that things are presented in the order of their occurrence unless there are compelling reasons or clues given which would indicate otherwise. Progress is also singulative (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:57-58) when what happens one time is told only one time in the text, or iterative when what happens repeatedly is told only once (‘For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand,’ 1 Samuel 17:16).
Progress must not be confused with stasis, however. The very notion of plot (see chapter 4) involves cause and effect relationships, such that everything that occurs necessarily impinges upon what follows. Prior to the climax of the plot, normal progress entails increasing complications and a heightening of tension. Following the climax, normal progress involves a resolution of the plot conflict(s).

3.3(b)v Freeze

*Freeze* (=Genette’s ‘pause’) occurs whenever the presentation of actions and events of a narrative are withheld while the author ‘interrupts’ the event sequence in order to give us some other kind of information. In other words, the action (plot) stalls and waits as the narrator turns to something else.

Freezing the action slows the narrative pace (see above) and may create *suspense*, and as such it is a device intended to draw the reader more deeply into the narrative as well as heightening the *dramatic impact* of the climax. The song of Deborah and Barak (Judges 5) does not advance the action of the book of judges, but is a sustained, poetic lingering over the accomplished fact of the conquest of Sisera and his army, underscoring the drama of the moment. Suspense may be created by lengthening the sentences, incorporating repetition, digressing, providing description or explanation, including poetic reflection, and so forth. Freezing the action may be necessary for the author to provide us with a description of either some aspect of a character within the narrative or some circumstantial detail that will be of causal significance. Though in nonbiblical literature this kind of character embellishment may be done for aesthetic purposes, in the economy of biblical narrative this information will later prove to be necessary to the storyline. The same is true when the narrative freezes in order for the narrator to communicate information about the narrative space. The storyline is also frozen
when narrator explanation occurs. The narrator finds it necessary to provide additional information so that the reader will be prepared for, understand or recognise the significance (e.g., Deuteronomy 1:2 ‘It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road’) of what is happening or will later take place. Such an explanatory intrusion occurs in Judges 3:16: ‘Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit in length, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing.’ There are also aetiological comments which explain the origins of an object (e.g., the pile of stones in Joshua 4:9), site (e.g., renaming Luz as Bethel in Genesis 28:18-19), people (the descendants of Anak in Numbers 13:33) or a practice (e.g., stepping over the threshold to Dagon’s temple in 1 Samuel 5:5; the origin of Purim in Esther 9:24-26). The presence of descriptions, explanations, aetologies and other narrative time slowing tactics may also be referred to as digressions which are followed by the return to the storyline as resumption. Terms such as pause, digression, narrative intrusion, and narrative freezing should not be construed as elements which are secondary or insignificant to the intended meaning, however. Indeed, it is frequently the case that these are the points where the narrator most clearly reveals what the authorial intent is.

Besides Genette’s four categories, there are several other factors relating to temporal aspects within narratives which potentially hold significance for structure, meaning, or affect. These are dischronologised forms of narration. The sequencing of the events in the narrative may not follow the implicit time-line within the narrative world. The author may instead reorder them for stylistic purposes.
3.3(b)vi Flashback

Flashback, also known as 'analepsis,'\textsuperscript{135} occurs when the storyline is interrupted to provide us with details that occurred previously, but which are only just now important to understanding what is happening in the narrative. For example, Abimelech's reward for Abraham's departure is explained retrospectively (Gn 20:17-18): 'Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, for \textit{Yahweh had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household} because of Abraham's wife Sarah.' This temporal disruption or dischronologising gives readers necessary information at the time when they need it rather than when it fits sequentially (and perhaps more likely to be forgotten or overlooked by the reader).

3.3(b)vii Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing, or 'prolepsis' or 'flashforward,' occurs when the author gives the reader a 'preview of coming attractions' into what will happen in the future (e.g. Exodus 6:6-9, in which Yahweh tells Moses of the deliverance of Israel and their possessing of the land; Ruth 4:18-21, anticipating the future king David). Such a technique tends to shift the reader's attention from wondering \textit{what} will happen to \textit{how} it will happen. Another kind of foreshadowing takes place when an isolated event is told which seems unrelated to the main storyline, but which will prove to be important to the plot at a later point. For example, in Esther 2:21-23 readers are informed of Mordecai's intervention to thwart Bigthana's and Teresh's plot to assassinate Xerxes, an act that will later turn out to be decisive. Foreshadowing may involve a prophetic prediction by one of the characters in the narrative (e.g. Joshua's oath that the

\textsuperscript{135} This term, along with 'prolepsis,' was introduced by Gennette (1980:39-40) to avoid the psychological associations with the terms 'anticipation' and 'retrospection.' Following Gennette's use of these terms, see also Chatman (1978:40) and Ska (1990:8).
rebuilding of Jericho would take place at the expense of the death of the builder’s sons [Joshua 6:26→1 Kings 16:34]). It may also be present in a direct comment by narrator: ‘…Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came)…’ (Genesis 10:13).

3.3(b)viii Alternation

When two scenes occur simultaneously, the narrator may choose to alternate or ‘toggle’ back and forth between the two. There is an implied ‘meanwhile’ as the shift takes place from one scene to the other, and this technique implies that the two are interrelated such that a plot crux will bring the two together. An example of this from the Hebrew Bible would be 1 Samuel 1-8 in which the story of Eli and his sons interchanges with the story of the ascendancy of Samuel.

3.3(b)ix Repetition

Sometimes the author will repeat\textsuperscript{136} an episode in order to emphasise its importance. The usual tactics for this is the narrator’s account of the events, followed by a retelling of the same event by one or more of the characters. In Acts 10, the narrator tells the story of Peter’s vision of the sheet filled with animals, in Acts 11 Peter recounts the same story for the benefit of the believers in Jerusalem. The incorporation of gentiles into God’s chosen people is a leading theme in the book, which the repetition of this episode underscores.

3.3(c) Summary of space and time

The categories or variables I have listed above are eclectically drawn from various schools and ideologies of literary criticism. Flashback and foreshadowing (analepsis and

\textsuperscript{136} In Genette’s and Rimmon-Kenan’s terminology, repetition relates to ‘frequency,’ i.e. how often something is stated.
prolepsis) and freeze (pause) reflect the structuralist categories of Genette (also Chatman, Rimmon-Kenan, Ska). The concept of type-scenes, however, emerges from archetypal and romantic approaches (such as Campbell [{1949}1968], Auerbach [1953], Alter [1978, 1981] and Ryken [1984, {1987}1982]). What I have termed ‘backdrop’ and ‘historical reliability’ overlaps with some of the concerns of historical criticism and apologetics. Yet I maintain the usefulness of each of these because, as I argued in chapter two, it is possible for authors intentionally to do different things with narratives. Since the genre of narrative may be employed for different illocutionary purposes, it is necessary to draw eclectically upon different narratological schools of thought in order to assimilate a range of possibilities broad enough to do justice to the various functions which an author might intend in a particular work. My own intent here is to demonstrate that a working interaction with a narrative text in light of these conventions pertaining to setting can elucidate the intended meaning of the text under investigation. How these factors are worked out in the text of Jonah will serve as an illustration of their worth.

It is possible now to plot the variables pertaining to the analysis of the narrative world.
3.4 The narrative worldliness of the Bible

Within the discussion of literary settings, readers encounter certain features which are specially appropriate to the narrative world of the Bible. While others have addressed this specialised area, I again synthesise and adapt their work here for my purposes.¹³⁷

In biblical narrative, as in other kinds of narrative literature, the author influences the way readers respond to the narrative by the way he describes the 'narrative world.' Careful attention to what the author chooses to tell us about the setting of the narrative, and the way he describes it, can give the reader clues into the overall themes and assertions of the narrative as a whole. Readers may assume that every detail about setting will be important.

The narrative *possibilities* for the narrative world of the Hebrew Bible are reflected in a number of features. What kind of place is the overall setting of the narrative? What kinds of things happen there? Wilder (1991:141) addresses these issues in saying, ‘All stories have their presuppositions. But with the more significant kinds it becomes clearer. These all posit a scheme or order....’ The biblical world certainly lays out a clear scheme for the reader. The following are elements which are implicit or explicit assertions about life as it is depicted within the world of biblical narratives.

- It assumes (it does not attempt to prove) the existence of a transcendent, all-powerful, sovereign God. He is the creator and sustainer of all that exists in the universe. He is the ruler over all the peoples of the earth, yet this God, whose name is Yahweh, has entered into a special covenant relationship with the people of Israel. He is not their tribal god, but stands alone above all other claims to deity. He will not allow his glory to be shared with any other god or person. Israel’s covenant obligation is to respond to his covenant love/fidelity (גְּםַי) with a corresponding covenant love/fidelity (גְּמַי).

- Yahweh has set up the world to operate according to natural operations. The world of nature operates in an orderly and predictable fashion. Close observation of it yields insights not only into the patterns of its physical realities, but also of its moral and spiritual realities; such a pursuit is the way of wisdom. Nevertheless, because Yahweh is free he may choose to intervene miraculously, bringing either blessing or disaster according to his purposes.
Yahweh has taken it upon himself to communicate to humanity, revealing himself not only through the beauty and order of nature but also directly to and through certain individuals. These spokespersons, his prophets, transmit his very words to his people Israel and beyond. God has thus initiated a dialogue with mankind, and expects humanity to respond appropriately.

The narratives of the Bible record historic events in a realistic fashion. They speak with precision about names of real people (a good deal of space is devoted to genealogies), frequently identified by nationality or tribal affiliation; they present geographic details such as countries, cities, distances, and bodies of water, which ostensibly refer to the extrinsic world; they provide aetiologies to account for entities outside of the narrative world; the events described are given spatial and temporal specificity; and the objects depicted are those which may be seen in the world contemporary to its origin. All of these elements (with the exception of aetiologies) are ill-suited, to say the least, to religious (fictive) legends—a damning overspecificity which mitigates against reading them as mere fables, and implying a high valuation of truth-telling. This moves beyond similitude (this is something that could have happened) to reference (this is what did happen). While modern and postmodern scholarship may justifiably hold these claims up to critical scrutiny to ascertain the accuracy of these claims, it must nevertheless be granted that the Bible claims for itself the presentation of realities beyond the textual world which are resident in the external world. What is

\[138\] Childs (1992:72) makes a similar point, arguing against ‘mere’ narrative theologies or literary studies which are dismissive of historical realities. ‘It is not the construal of a symbol system in which fictive world the reader is invited to participate, but the entrance of God’s word into our world of time and space.’ Nevertheless, I
included in the Bible is clearly attributed to God’s own perspective and as such is unassailable. In the words of Frei (1975:145), it is inconceivable according to the implicit assertions of these narratives ‘that it should not have taken place.’

▶ The stories of the Bible also employ omniscient narrators, a feature common to a broad range of narrative literature. That is, the narrators are able to provide information that no person merely observing the events could know: the unspoken thoughts and motives of characters, the ‘furniture of heaven,’ recounting concurrent scenes widely separated in distance, and so forth. At the same time, biblical narrators are reticent, revealing no more detail than necessary to carry the plot forward and often leaving gaps. However, though these narrators may withhold clues about future outcome of events, creating suspense, it is nevertheless always clear that uncertainty about the future never includes Yahweh. As sovereign Lord he knows about and controls all outcomes.

▶ The ethic implied by the Bible is to embrace its values and to follow it with the reward of Yahweh’s blessing. Conversely, refusal to submit to Yahweh’s ways as revealed in scripture will result in punishment. This is not something restricted to Israel, but involves all its readers. The inherent stance of the Bible resists its reception on mere aesthetic grounds—it is a call to respond with heart, mind, and strength. As Lindbeck (1984:34) puts it: ‘To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience ourselves and our world in its terms.’

would qualify his insight by advocating that the narrative world in which readers are engaged is a worthy object of textual enquiry, while its referential aspect is a necessary but separable endeavor.
These elements are indigenous to the narrative environment of the Bible. In order to enter the world of the stories of the Bible, readers must recognise and give due consideration to the rules of its 'domain.'

3.4(a) Space

Biblical narratives make fairly extensive use of the type-scene. Alter (1981:49) has explored this concept in several of his works: 'In biblical narrative more or less the same narrative often seems to be told two or three or more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the same character in different sets of circumstances.' Alter (60) accounts for its frequency within the scriptures: 'The type-scene is not merely a way of formally recognising a particular kind of narrative moment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger pattern of historical and theological meaning.' In other words, type-scenes not only capitalise on reader expectations generated from other biblical passages (what I am here calling intratextuality), but bind the individual episodes into an overarching narrative framework. The type-scenes he sees (51) which are largely unique to but prevalent in the Bible include the annunciation of the birth of the hero to his barren mother; the encounter with the future betrothed at a well; the epiphany in the field; the initiatory trial; danger in the desert and the discovery of a well; and the testament of the dying hero.

In addition to these, there are other specific geographical locations where similar events tend to recur. For example, the spatial setting of the exposure of Saul's disobedience in 1 Samuel 15 is Gilgal. The importance of covenant obedience is a theme which already has been stressed consistently in previous passages, and it is specifically linked to the site of Gilgal (Deuteronomy 11:26-30; Joshua 4:19-5:12; 9:3-10:15,43; Judges 2:1-4; 3:15-23; 1 Samuel 10:8; 11:14-15; 13:4-15). For Saul to leave the scene of the battle and deliberately travel to Gilgal thus
highlights his brazen violation of Yahweh’s command and Samuel’s instruction (1 Samuel 15:24).

Numerous places in the Bible should create for the observant reader consistent literary patterns and thematic associations. These places include:

| Jerusalem / Zion | the Temple | North |
| Samaria | Bethel | East |
| Babel / Babylon | Egypt | Galilee |
| Jericho | Nineveh / Assyria | Edom |
| Moab | Sinai / Horeb | the Jordan River |
| ‘the land’ | Sodom and Gomorrah | the wilderness |
| the garden |

3.4(b) Time

Over the past century, temporal disruptions have not only been viewed by biblical scholars as infelicitous and as evidence of literary ineptitude, but indicative of multiple sources and, on some occasions, haphazard pastitchery. In more recent times, the tide has turned such that these anachronies have been attributed to intentional artistry. As Craig (1993:53) observes, ‘Deformation in chronological ordering in the Bible, so long considered a sign of sloppy or accidental integration work, may actually signal artistic genius.’ Even alleged redundancies are now more often understood as deliberate, serving to emphasise, to create suspense or to indicate text segmentation.

Just as many type-scenes within the narrative world of the Bible may be identified (see above), there are certain time periods which similarly resonate with typical patterns and associations. New Moons, sabbaths, the first of the year and sunrise all signal newness and

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139 The temple/tabernacle concept as the place of God’s habitation, as the ideal center of right worship, and as the place where he may be encountered in some sense obtains regardless of the period of Israelite history (including the exilic—see its depiction both real and idealised in Ezekiel).
restoration. Winter and night are cloaks for evil and danger. Festival times such as the annual pilgrimage appointments and feasts are a time of joy and blessing.

It has also long been recognised that numeric patterns frequently occur within the Bible. Numbers such as one, three, seven, twelve, forty, seventy, one thousand and ten thousand are usually identified as bearing significant relationships. Several of these are especially prominent in marking passage of time: three days (and three nights), seven days or seven years, forty days (and nights) or forty years and four hundred years. Thus passage of time may not only indicate duration but a quality of existence.

3.5 Setting with Jonah

3.5(a) Space

With the broader considerations of the role of setting in literature more generally now in mind, together with additional features common to biblical narratives, it is now possible to see how these function within the Jonah narrative. I begin with how factors of space (place) operate within the narrative.

Overall, the staging of Jonah strikes the reader as overdrawn to the point of caricature. Everything is either very big or very small. The term ‘great’ (יָרָא) occurs fourteen times throughout this short book, creating a narrative environment of gigantic proportions: storm and wind, fish and city, anger and joy. Yet alongside of this world of immensity exists a contrasting element of miniature: the least within the city in contrast to the greatest (the nobility), the worm in contrast to the great fish, the humble booth in contrast to the great city, and the smallness of Jonah’s pity in contrast to the greatness of Yahweh’s. This extremism lends a carnivalesque atmosphere to the book.

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By way of overview, the book of Jonah moves rapidly from an unspecified opening scene, to the seaport of Joppa, to the ship, the inner hold, the storm-tossed sea, and back on deck. Jonah is thrown into the sea, is swallowed by a great fish, and after his expulsion from it, is recommissioned at another unspecified site. He is next seen in Nineveh, and then Jonah goes ‘offstage’ while the king of Nineveh issues a decree. Meanwhile, Jonah leaves eastward of the city, awaiting its destruction. He first builds a shelter to shade himself from the heat, then God supplies him with a plant better suited to shading him. Its subsequent withering and Jonah’s exposure to the heat, intensified by the wind, occasion his final outburst.

3.5(a) Opening

The narrative of the book of Jonah opens with an unspecified setting. No information is given which would allow us to locate it either spatially (such as ‘in the hill country of Ephraim’) or temporally (such as ‘during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel’). The introductory formula is a stock form informing readers that they are located within the overall narrative world of the Bible as described in the previous section above. Yahweh appears without introduction, and the WAYYIQTOL form of the initial verb (יָדַע) establishes continuity with previous narratives, implying that this narrative is another episode in a greater narrative infrastructure, the intratext of Hebrew Scriptures where the commissioning formula is identical (see chapter four).

What immediately draws readers’ attention, however, is the movement in the scene. Jonah is commanded to arise (לִפֵּג), which typically implies movement in a positive direction; and at the verbal level, he initially complies (לִפֵּג). But thereafter he descends (לִפֵּג) to
Joppa and onward and downward, moving not only in direct opposition to Yahweh’s command, but in the direction that normally has negative associations.

3.5(a)ii [Tarshish]

I have placed Tarshish in brackets here because it is not a scene within the narrative, but is merely referred to (three times in one verse, for emphasis) as Jonah’s target destination. Since none of the characters arrive there, it does not comprise a setting per se. Tarshish functions as a unique type-scene in biblical narrative. It is unique in that no action ever takes placed there, nor is it ever given a spatial description. Nevertheless it is consistently associated with an activity: distant and lucrative sea faring. Because of its reputation as distant, Tarshish in the Bible is a nondescript, idealised far-away land, which was real but unimaginably remote. It represented the farthest edge of the known world (Isaiah 60:9; Psalm 72:10), the last chance stop on the way to oblivion.

Tarshish was accessible by seafaring ships, a means of travel and commerce which the Israelites usually avoided. The chief characteristic of Tarshish in Scriptures is that of a wealthy merchant seaport, famous for its commerce. Identified with the Japhethites (Genesis 10:4; 1 Chronicles 1:7), Tarshish is associated not only with ships (Ezekiel 27:25; 2 Chronicles 9:21)), but with the prosperity that comes from sea trade (Jeremiah 10:9; Ezekiel 38:13), and hence with wealth, pride and arrogance (Isaiah 2:16). Because of this, Tarshish is singled out for future judgment which will destroy its harbor and ships (Isaiah 23:1,6,10,14; Psalm 48:7). Beyond this, a postexilic return of diaspora Jews bearing riches from afar are borne along on Tarshish ships (Isaiah 60:9). Eventually Tarshish is linked with the distant islands who are ignorant of God and
his ways that will one day receive emissaries from postexilic Israel proclaiming the glory of God (Isaiah 66:19). Ships from Tarshish then will return with tribute for the king (Psalm 72:10).

The impression is that Jonah grabs the first boat out of town, wanting to leave fast and go far, and in the narrative world of the Bible, one could hardly go any further than Tarshish. Traveling by boat—more specifically, by Tarshish ship—was perhaps the quickest, highest-tech way to put miles between himself and Nineveh. Thus portrayed, Tarshish may also be categorised here as revelatory of character—the place whither Jonah desires to flee is as far from his own land of prophetic vocation as was possible. Its particulars are irrelevant, but what it represents is noteworthy. Wiesel (1981:131-132,138) captures the function of Tarshish eloquently: ‘Why Tarshish? Are its people more righteous than those of Nineveh? Readers (and scholars) do not know....What matters is that Jonah goes further and further away from Nineveh, and from God....In the true tradition of romantic fugitives, he sails off into the sunset.’

This last phrase introduces a noteworthy paradox. In the Bible, movement toward the East is consistently associated with evil (I discuss this in more detail further down in this section). When God commissions Jonah, then, he is sending him in the wrong direction! He sends him ‘east of Eden’ (Genesis 3:24), to the place of the banishment of Cain (Genesis 4:16), toward the archetypically evil spaces of Babel/Babylon, Assyria, and Nineveh. God was sending Jonah back toward the region which he told Abram to leave. Ironically, Jonah flees from God by traveling west, the direction traditionally associated with obedience and blessing (e.g. Abram moves west, the children of Israel enter the land moving west, Jesus enters Jerusalem moving west). This helps to establish an ironic tone to the narrative from the very outset. Readers are hereby being prepared for an entire narrative full of surprises, contradictions and reversals.
3.5(a)iii Joppa

In the biblical world of the Hebrew Scriptures, Joppa was the closest thing Israel had to a seaport. Though the Israelites were not a seafaring people themselves, foreign imports were received at Joppa (Ezra 3:7; 2 Chronicles 2:16). It has no further significance in this narrative except as a backdrop which receives no embellishment whatsoever. It is simply the most logical place for Jonah to look for a way to leave the country by sea. A trajectory of downward movement by the protagonist is established.

3.5(a)iv The sea

In the various narratives of the Hebrew Bible, the sea emerges as a type-scene: a foreboding, ominous place—wild, uncontrolled and chaotic (see Good 1981:43-44). Though under the golden age of Solomon’s united monarchy sea trade flourished briefly, and Jehoshaphat attempted unsuccessfully to construct ‘Tarshish-ships’ for trips to Ophir (1 Kings 22:49), ‘Israel was never noted for its maritime enterprises’ (Gilchrist 1980:1:380). Frequently associated with the term ‘sea’ (םי) is ‘the deep’ or ‘the abyss’ (םוֹדָד); in Jonah these two terms appear in parallelism in 2:3[2:4]. ‘The deep’ is mentioned in parallel with the untamed land in the opening verses of Genesis (1:2), described as ‘wild and waste’ (see Fox’s translation of וֹרְדֵּי אֶרֶץ; 1983-1995:13), and shrouded in darkness. Creation is portrayed as an act of God bringing light and order into this seething, tumultuous state. In his song of thanksgiving, Jonah speaks of

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140 In the NT, Joppa plays an interesting role. At the request of Tabitha (Dorcas), Peter comes to preach and minister (Acts 9:32f.). During his stay in Joppa, Peter receives a vision (Acts 10) which announces through drama God’s plan that the gospel message be extended to the gentiles. A god-fearing Roman centurion, prompted by God, comes to Peter. Peter realises that ‘God accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right’ (10:35). Cornelius becomes the first gentile convert to Christ. Thus Peter, a ‘son of Jonah’ (Matthew 16:17), during his journey to Joppa, learns a lesson that Jonah refuses to accept.

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his experience in the sea as sinking downward, a continuation of the narrative *movement* which places him into ‘deeper and deeper’ peril: Jonah describes the sea as the grave (עַם). 

In the prophets, the heathen nations are symbolised by a roaring sea (Isaiah 17:12) and islands in the sea (Isaiah 24:15; 41:1), while in Daniel 7:3 the hostile world powers are symbolised as beasts rising out of the sea. Thus for Jonah to choose the way of the sea willingly and knowingly is, in effect, a choice for ominous and uncertain landlessness over the security of the dry land (for more on the sea-storm as a biblical type-scene, see Thimmes 1990, 1992).

The sea, like Tarshish, is *revelatory of character*. At the very least, Jonah places himself in a world of peril and great risk.\(^{141}\) This setting is an outward representation of his attitude toward God—wanting none of God’s control or constraints.

The storm which Yahweh hurls at the sea threatens the lives of Jonah and his entire entourage of sailors. Standing as a barrier to their target destination of Tarshish, and even preventing them from returning to any dry land, the sea also functions in the plot as an *opponent*.

3.5(a)v *The ship*

The ship does not constitute a separate setting than the sea, but is an example of a sustained narrative *zooming* movement: from the winds hurled by Yahweh to the storming sea, to the floundering ship, to the sailors and finally to the protagonist Jonah, deeply asleep below deck. Jonah’s downward *movement* continues as he descends (גָּלְפִּים) into the ship (1:3) and further down (גָּלְפִּים 1:5) into its hold. Curiously, the ship is a quasi-character as much as a scene, for it is personified, being granted the ability to think for itself: ‘and the ship considered (נָבְאָה)

\(^{141}\)The storm-at-sea motif is found in the NT as well. Jesus sleeps in the boat: Matthew 8:23-27 par Mark 4:36-41 par Luke 8:22-25 (compare parallels with Jonah 1); Jesus walks on the water: Matthew 14:22-33 par Mark 7:45-52 par John 6:15-21; and Paul’s shipwreck: Acts 27:13-44 (compare parallels with Jonah 1).
breaking apart’ (1:4). Craig point outs (1993:49) that in using this particular term for thinking, not only does the narrator present the reader with a striking personification, but also achieves assonance with the term for breaking up (יהב `think,’ and נバイפ `break up’). Ships are portrayed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as animate in Isaiah 23:1,14 where, in the oracle against Tyre, ships of Tarshish are told to howl (`howl, O ships of Tarshish’). This is the only ship scene in the Hebrew Bible (disqualifying it for consideration as a type-scene), and little detail about it is given—it had an inside compartment, was capable of being rowed and was carrying cargo (tackle? מַהַל). I conclude from this that it functions as a backdrop.

3.5(a)vi Inside the fish

In this section, as in the previous ones, Jonah’s self-orientation and isolationism becomes increasingly apparent as he turns away from Yahweh, away from Nineveh, and now even from others into solitary confinement, as it were. Jonah’s movement in chapters 1 and 2 is downward and inward. Jonah goes down to Joppa, down to the ship, down below deck, he lies down ( saldo, 1:5), and drops into a deep sleep ( יָרָה, 1:5). The sailors attempt to interrupt his downward spiral by urging him to ‘get up’ (1:6), by trying to row back to land (1:13), and (ironically) by hurling him overboard (1:15). Jonah’s descent inward continues, however, as he goes inside the fish (1:17[2:1]; 2:1[2:2]). While ensconced in the belly of the fish, he poetically describes his experience in the sea with terms such as ‘depths’ ( יָדְבֵל, 2:2[2:3]), ‘the grave’ ( יָרָאש, 2:2[2:3]), ‘the deep’ ( יָרָאש, 2:3[2:4]), ‘the very heart ( יִבְלַפֵּשׁ) of the seas’ (2:3[2:4]), ‘the deep’ ( יָרָאש, 2:5[2:6]), ‘to the roots of the [subterranean] mountains’ (2:6[2:7]) and ‘I sank down’ ( יָרָאש, 2:6[2:7]). His downward slide finally bottoms out and start to rebound upward at the pivot point in 2:7, where Jonah says ‘my prayer rose to you’ ( יָבַכ). The inwardness of the insides of the
fish, then, is a manifestation of Jonah’s withdrawal from God and society into complete self-centeredness.

The great fish (ךְָנָב הָנַּבְּ) is neither described by the narrator nor (surprisingly!) by Jonah. Jonah recounts his trauma in the sea in vivid terms, while his piscatorial environment curiously merits no comment. The fish hardly qualifies as a backdrop, ‘functioning’ as an agent more than as a scene. While many have attempted to identify the great fish (for analysis, see Davis 1991) either with sea creatures intrinsic to the intratextual narrative world (leviathan) or with extrinsic marine creatures (e.g. whale shark, sperm whale, *inter alia*), the identity and nature of this creature does not occupy the narrator’s attention in any way: biblical authors rarely cater to readerly curiosity on matters which do not have direct bearing on plot. The fish is not portrayed as a threat to Jonah, but narratively becomes his vehicle of deliverance from the life-threatening sea.

3.5(a)vi Dry ground

The dry ground (2:10[2:11]) operates as a *type-scene*. It is not only the site onto which Jonah is vomited, but presumably is the stage on which Jonah receives his recommissioning. No information whatever is given about its location, but it does subtly figure in the plot development. The term employed here is נְפָנָה, ‘dry ground’ as opposed to ‘[the] land’ (כֹּס, used of Israel. Earlier, the sailors had asked Jonah to identify for them his ‘land’ (כֹּס, 1:8); Jonah responds (but does not answer) by telling them that Yahweh made the sea and the ‘dry ground’ (נְפָנָה, 1:9 cp Psalm 95:5), without identifying the specific country from which he comes. The implication is that Jonah is disavowing his allegiance to the land of Israel. The men attempt to return to the dry ground (נְפָנָה), that is, any land at all would do. Thus this ‘scene’
refers to *terra firma* generically and to no place in particular. The *movement* implied in this scene is positive: there is a reversal of the ‘death spiral’ downward and inward which culminated in the Jonah ending up inside of the fish to coming up out of the fish and onto dry ground.

Jonah’s passage through the sea to dry ground (יַחֲדַּשׁ) is a type scene, however, because it resonates with intratextual overtones. Earlier Jonah declared that Yahweh is the creator of the sea and the ‘dry ground.’ This accords with the creation account (Genesis 1:9-10), where God brings forth the dry ground from the sea (see also Isaiah 44:27; Psalm 95:5). Upon hearing Jonah’s statement, the sailors vainly attempt to return (row) back to ‘dry ground.’ They cannot effect the rescue from the sea themselves—that will happen only as an act of God. Elsewhere in biblical narratives the people of God undergo other very important passages through water (the sea) onto dry ground, using the same Hebrew term, which serves to define their identity: the drying up of the Flood (Genesis 8:7,14), the crossing of the Red/Reed Sea (Exodus 14:16,22,29; 15:19; Joshua 2:10; Nahum 1:4; Psalm 66:6; Nehemiah 9:11), and the Jordan River (Joshua 4:22-23; 5:1). Each of these important deliverances from sea to dry land marks a rite of passage to a new identity in relationship to God: creation of humanity, the Noahic covenant, the Sinaitic covenant, and entrance into the land. These are each followed by failure of God’s people in abiding by the stipulations of the land: the fall (Genesis 3), the drunkenness of Noah and immorality of his sons (Genesis 9), the Israelites’ lack of faith and complaining in the wilderness (Exodus and Numbers), Achan’s sin at Ai and subsequently the chronic disobedience of the Israelites throughout deuteronomistic history (Joshua 7 – 2 Kings). Jonah’s voyage from sea to dry ground thus miniatures God’s deliverances of his people in the past, yet also may evoke the expectation that Jonah too will subsequently fail, according to the typical pattern of his predecessors. True to form, this is indeed the case in Jonah 4.
3.5(a)vi8 Nineveh

In Jonah, the term ‘Nineveh’ is used more frequently as a collective term for its people than as a place. Nevertheless, some scenic description is provided. Through the use of what Magonet has labeled the ‘growing phrase’ (1983:31-33), Nineveh seems to become larger and larger as the narrative progresses: ‘the great city’ (1:2), repeated in 3:2; then ‘a great city to God’ (3:3); then a description of its size, ‘a going of three days’ (3:3); finally, the elaborate depiction of Nineveh by Yahweh in 4:11, ‘Nineveh, the great city in which there are many, more than two plus ten ten-thousands people who do not know between their right hand from their left hand, and cattle: many.’

From the broader intratext, readers learn much about the nation of Assyria, of which Nineveh is the capital.¹⁴² Nineveh is categorically a center of opposition to God’s people. It was built by Nimrod, son of Cush and grandson of Ham, that is, from the genealogical list of those consistently hostile to Yahweh’s chosen people, the Israelites. In a further ‘guilt by association,’ Nineveh and Assur/Assyria are mentioned ‘in the same breath’ (narrative context) with Egypt and the Canaanites (Genesis 10:6;18). Under Shalmaneser and Sennacherib, the Assyrians conquered Israel (2 Kings 17:1-6) and threatened Judah (2 Kings 18:17-19:36; Isaiah 36:22-37:38). The entire book of Nahum describes the destruction of Nineveh, ostensibly subsequent to their reprieve by God in Jonah, citing their many sins (so also Zephaniah 2:13-15). Nineveh is presented (Nahum 1:11) as the embodiment of ‘the wicked’ in terms recalling Psalms 1 and 2: ‘From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against Yahweh [cp Psalm 2:1-2] and

¹⁴² Bell (1996:85-101) convincingly posits that since the book of Jonah draws so heavily upon antecedent biblical texts taken from the Torah, the former prophets, the latter prophets, Psalms, and wisdom, that the author seeks to recontextualise the older traditions specifically to emphasise God’s concern for the nations. Presumably
counsels wickedness [cp Psalm 1:1].’ Although Assyria is never mentioned by name in Jonah, there are many passages in both the former and latter prophets which present Assyria as one of Israel’s/Judah’s chief enemies and which condemn its practices and predict its doom. Nineveh is thus a symbol for a people who have historically been diametrically opposed to Israel and cruel, violent, inhumane and unmerciful in dealing with other nations.

And yet in Jonah some of these elements are not given emphasis. Its evil (מַעֲשֵׂי בֵּית) is in ‘the face of’ Yahweh (1:2); later in the narrative the king proclaims that they should each repent from ‘his evil way [נִדָּמֶרֶךְ מִבֵּית] and from the violence [מִשְׁמַעְיָה] that is in their hands’ (3:8). Neither the narrator, Jonah nor Yahweh identify Nineveh as the enemy of Israel (see under ‘Characterisation’). It is a great city, and one that is violent and evil. As Good (1981:48) points out, this product of evil multiplied by immensity looms large (‘a great city’) even in God’s opinion. Thomas (1953:210-216) in his comments on ‘a great city to God’ (3:3) remarks that the force of 1°lōhîm may be a form of the superlative, ‘a divinely big city...or a godawfully big city.’ And if Nineveh, being another instantiation of the (pagan) gentile world, does indeed stand in comparative relationship with the sailors, then the pagan world Jonah encounters is here ‘writ very large indeed’ (Dennis 1991:147), i.e. the condition as lost humanity and its perversions is intensified in such a huge and Godless city.

To classify Nineveh in terms of my categories, Nineveh is a backdrop; while the Ninevites are characters (aspects I will address in chapter five), the setting itself does not contribute to this narrative. If one draws upon intratextual evidence or the weight of biblical tradition informing the book of Jonah, then it is a unique context with overtones of hostility towards Israel, but whether the narrator intends those overtones here is arguable. Whatever

Nineveh is chosen as a stereotypically evil people because of the biblical traditions which had so aligned Nineveh
negative or hostile attitudes early readers of the book of Jonah may have had toward Nineveh, the ‘adversary’ is converted, thus the dominant views toward the Ninevites, narratively embodied in Jonah, are here subverted.

Nineveh is revelatory of character in that Jonah will go to the ends of the earth (as literally as he is able) to avoid it. While the description of its size and population may suggest, at least to some, prima facie evidence for historical credibility, the lack of specificity concerning the proper name of the king and the date of his rule, together with the hyperbolic description of repentant cattle and the universality of the conversion mitigate against seeing the establishment of mimetic realism as a dominant concern of the author. The angle of vision in this scene is panoramic—the entire city is in view.

3.5(a)ix Throneroom of the king

The throneroom of the king is not mentioned as such, and should not be thought of as a separate setting. Rather, this is another instance of the zooming technique: from a panorama of the entire city to a telescopic view of the royal chambers. The palace of a king being confronted by a person of God is another biblical type-scene seen elsewhere in the intratext of the Hebrew Scriptures. Often a prophet delivered a message from Yahweh to the king of Israel or Judah. There is a clear though not univocal pattern for the king to reject the message. This is displayed in the Bible with Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 5-14), Elijah before Ahab, (1 Kings 17-21), Micaiah before Ahab (2 Chronicles 18) and Jeremiah before Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Jehoiakim ignores Jeremiah’s plea for the people to ‘repent from their evil ways’ (Jeremiah 36:7) in words paralleling those used here by the king of Nineveh in Jonah 3:8. Jehoiakim then burns Jeremiah’s scroll and orders Jeremiah to be arrested (36:26). In response, Jeremiah’s message is that ‘man

with cruelty as to become symbolic.
and beast' (36:29 cp 7:20; 21:6; 27:5; 32:27; 32:43; 33:10; 36:29) are threatened with
destruction. Here in Jonah, however, 'man and beast' 'repent from their evil ways' (3:8).

More particularly, the type-scene here in Jonah 3 can be narrowed further to a
spokesperson of God before a foreign king. Biblical examples abound:

Joseph before Pharaoh (Genesis 41)
Moses before Pharaoh (Exodus 5-10)
Ehud before Eglon (Judges 3)
David before Achish (1 Samuel 21:10-15)
Elisha 'before' the King of Aram (2 Kings 6)—he hears every word, though is not
physically present
Jehoichin before Evil-Merodach (2 Kings 25:27-30 parallel Jeremiah 52:31-
34)—though we do not read of any divine message mediated to Evil-Merodach
through him
Esther, and Mordecai before Xerxes/Ahasuerus (Esther)
Daniel/Belteshazzar, Hananiah/Shadrach, Mishael/Meshach, and Azariah/Abed-
nego before Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel)
Daniel before Belshazzar and Darius (Daniel)
the proclamation of Cyrus (Ezra 1; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23)
Nehemiah before Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:1-8)
David's men before Hanun (1 Chronicles 19:1-4)

From the New Testament I may add to this list:

the magi before Herod (Matthew 2)
& John 18:29-40)
Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:8-12)
people of Tyre and Sidon before Herod (Acts 12:19-23)
Paul before Felix (Acts 24)
Paul before Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25-26)

In each of these cases, the king interacts with a representative of God's people. When the king
responds favorably, not only is he blessed, but also he becomes an instrument of blessing upon
the person of God who has brought the prophetic oracle, message, request or interpretation of his
dream. On the other hand, when the king rejects the message or demeans the representative and

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refuses to humble himself, he is humiliated by the judgment by Yahweh. Given this intratextual paradigm, the reader brings to Jonah the expectation of one of these two responses by the king:

representative of God’s people before king → king accepts message or person → representative is rewarded both by God and the king

OR

representative of God’s people before king → kings rejects message or person → king is humbled by judgment of Yahweh

The most elaborately developed illustrative cases for each of these alternatives comes from the Torah. In the case of Joseph (Genesis 41) Pharaoh has two dreams, neither of which can his wise men interpret. His cupbearer is reminded of his former prison-mate Joseph’s abilities to interpret dreams, so Joseph as the representative for God (41:16,28) explains the meaning of the dream. Pharaoh accepts the message, ‘The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials’ (41:37). Pharaoh then honors Josephs by giving him his own signet ring, dressing him in robes of fine linen, putting a gold chain around his neck, making him second in command, and riding around in a chariot honored by a herald (41:42-43).

In the case of Moses (Exodus 5-10), Moses comes before Pharaoh with a command from Yahweh to let go of his people, the Hebrews. Pharaoh not only rejects the word through Moses but also intensifies their already onerous workload. Though Moses and Aaron come before Pharaoh repeatedly, and in the face of multiple plagues, Pharaoh is resolute in forbidding them to leave. Only after all the firstborn in the land are struck dead does Pharaoh yield, and even then he ‘repents’ of his decision. The army that he sends to pursue them is drowned in the Red Sea, clearly humiliating him and exposing Yahweh’s dominance over him.
In the case of Jonah, the reader is trapped by misdirection. The spokesperson of God, Jonah, brings a message to the city, but ‘neglects’ visiting the king with his message. Nevertheless, the king of Nineveh does in fact receive the message and not only accepts it, but actually establishes the high-water mark in the entire Bible for royal modeling of humble self-abnegation in repentance. For this successfully decreed ‘revival’ of epic proportions, both he and his people are recognised by God and rewarded by receiving God’s compassion and a reprieve of announced judgment. What readers now expect to happen is for the king to bestow great honor upon Jonah, giving him an important position within his kingdom (as with Joseph; Jehoiachin; Esther and Mordecai; Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel, and Nehemiah). Indeed the royal favor may even include the king’s signet ring, gold, a purple robe of fine linen, and the rank of second in the kingdom (Genesis 41:42-43; Esther 8:2,15; 10:3; cf Daniel 2:46-49; 5:29). By failing to show up before the king and by leaving the city instead, however, Jonah short-circuits this possibility. Rather than basking in the blessing of both God and man, Jonah prefers to suffer in self-imposed exile, hot (inside and out) and bothered (exceedingly). Conspicuous by the absence of the protagonist Jonah, the throne room is nevertheless decidedly revelatory of character.

3.5(a)x East

Of the four points on the compass in the narrative world of the Bible, east is the one most associated with bad circumstances. Prior to the fall, east was good, being the direction of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8), while afterwards it is the direction of the banishment of Adam and Eve (3:24). So also the guilty Cain goes to the east for his ‘exile.’ The troublemaker Lot
chooses east, while righteous Abram goes west (Genesis 13). The chosen son Isaac remains in the west while his non-elect brothers head east (Genesis 25:6).

The east was renowned for its wise men, practiced in special knowledge and human insight, though often flawed and polluted with superstition and divination (1 Kings 4:30; Isaiah 2:6; Job 1:3; cf Ezekiel 8:16; Matthew 2).

The promised land was bounded on the east, in part, by the lifeless Salt (that is, the Dead) Sea. While certain territory east of the Jordan was granted to the Israelites (Numbers 34:15; Joshua 1:14-15; 13:8,32; 14:33; 18:7; 2 Kings 10:33; 1 Chronicles 5:9), it was never occupied successfully (cf Judges 10:7-9). Beyond this area it opened toward a vast desert area (Deuteronomy 1:1; 1 Chronicles 5:9) in what is now the Arabian Peninsula. The Kidron valley to the east of the temple area in Jerusalem was (and still is) the place of rubbish (Leviticus 1:16; Jeremiah 31:40) and of burial (Ezekiel 39:11), and on the other side of the valley is a high place that was used for idolatrous worship (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13) and evil counsel (Ezekiel 11:1-4).

Across the Jordan on the east lived several peoples who were particularly antagonistic toward the Jews: Amorites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. Israel never enjoyed any peaceful relations with any of these groups. Much further to the east, across the desert in Mesopotamia were the two evil superpowers which would eventually be used by God to destroy Israel (Assyria) and then Judah (Babylon; see Isaiah 41:2; 46:11; Jeremiah 18:17; cf Ezekiel 25:4,10).

The wind which blows from the east is dry and life sapping (see Genesis 41:6,23,27; Isaiah 27:8; Ezekiel 17:10; 19:12; Job 15:2; 27:21; cf Exodus 10:13). When blowing over the sea, it threatens to destroy the ships of Tarshish (Psalm 48:7; cf Ezekiel 27:26). To ‘pursue’ the
east wind by going toward it is also used metaphorically for vain and godless activity (Hosea 12:1). Israel’s attackers are also described metaphorically as an east wind (Hosea 13:15).

For Jonah, then, to go out east of the city is once again a step in the wrong direction for a follower of Yahweh, a movement which implicitly indicts him. The east is to be associated with opposition, calamity, and barrenness. For the book to ‘end’ in the east is thus a most unsatisfactory setting for any notion of literary and theological resolution to the narrative: just as Jonah the character is left unreconciled, east of the city, so the reader is left with an unresolved narrative. For Jonah to move east and to remain there is thus revelatory of character.

3.5(a)xi [The sun, the booth, the qiqayôn and the east wind]

The introduction of the sun, the booth, the qiqayôn and the east wind do not constitute a separate setting. The sun and the east wind both serve to intensify Jonah’s misery. Yahweh, in effect, ‘turns up the heat’—and outward ‘burning’ to match Jonah’s inward ‘burning’ with anger. They function as scenic elements which matches my category of setting as opponent: ‘[T]he adverse conditions—...the destruction of the shade plant by a worm, and the hot sun and sultry east wind—effect changes in Jonah’s attitudes and behavior....Adverse conditions, in other words, correct Jonah’s course and enlarge his world’ (Kort 1988:37-38). Because these elements elicit a forceful response from Jonah, a repeated death wish, this scene is also revelatory of character. The qiqayôn vine is a stage prop, just as the worm. While it figures into the plot line, it is not a separate space: the location remains east of Nineveh.

3.5(b) Time

The pace of the book of Jonah begins by moving very quickly: from the commissioning of Jonah to Joppa to a ship to a great storm to panicked sailors to a sleeping Jonah in the textual
space of five verses. This frenetic tempo is best labeled as *summary*. It is maintained through most of the setting of the storm at sea, stylistically reinforcing the hurry, frenzy and pandemonium experienced by the characters, Jonah excluded. Ironically, Jonah is a high-speed character until he is on board ship (1:3), but when all the action around him speeds up, he slows down in inverse proportion, underscoring what will be a contrary nature throughout. When the captain and the sailors speak, they do so in abrupt, truncated clauses with a high density of imperatives. They also move quickly from one activity to the next, the narrator connecting these actions through a series of WAW/YIQTOL constructions (‘...and...and...’). These features all contribute to the atmosphere of urgency and haste. By contrast, the depiction of Jonah is comparatively slothful. He first falls into a deep sleep. After being aroused, he responds to their machine gun burst of five short questions with a single, inordinately drawn-out response: ‘Hebrew am I, and I fear Yahweh, God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry ground’ (1:9).

In the next verse (1:10) readers encounter their first narrative *freeze* in the form of a *flashback*. The narrator intrudes into the storyline to inform the reader: ‘because the men knew that he was running away from before Yahweh because he had told them.’ Readers had no prior knowledge of this conversation which presumably transpired sometime earlier in the narrative, but it does provide necessary storyline ‘backfill.’ What readers do not learn from the narrator here, however, is Jonah’s motive for fleeing, a narrative *gap* which simply begs for the reader’s conjecture.\(^{143}\) In verse 14 the pace of the action slows to *progress* as the sailors pray to Yahweh,

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143 The position that this is a deliberate gap intended by the author is given further weight by 4:2 in which the narrator does provide (some) further information which was previously withheld. Jonah claims to have already given some sort of (verbal? נַ֣שָּׁה?) response to the initial commission, which temporally must be placed between 1:2 and 1:3. Here Jonah does give a partial explanation for his flight, though he stops short of giving the underlying motivation. In chapters five and six I will demonstrate how this temporal gap contributes to the plot structure and ultimately to the intentions of the narrative itself.

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building suspense as the reader draws close to the episodic climax. Chapter one finishes, completing the resolution to the sailors’ plight and their response at the quick pace of summary.

In 1:17 [2:1] the reader encounters the first designation of a length of time: three days and three nights. Though in chapter two there is no marking of the passage of time, the duration of Jonah’s occupation in the fish is here indicated. The ‘three-day’ motif (see Landes 1967b) in the Hebrew Bible is frequently associated with a journey: Abraham’s binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:4), the Israelites journey into the wilderness (Exodus 3:18; 5:3; 8:27; 15:22 cf Numbers 33:8), their departure from Sinai (Numbers 10:33), the pursuit of the spies at Jericho (Joshua 2:16), the Israelites arrival at the city of Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17), the journey of David and his men to Ziklag (1 Samuel 30:1), the time needed to assemble the men of Judah (2 Samuel 20:4), the search for Elijah (2 Kings 2:17), the time needed to assemble the exilic remnant in Jerusalem (Ezra 10:7-9). Thus the term ‘three days and three nights’ corresponds to a numeric pattern within biblical narrative. This pattern is reinforced in 3:3, where Jonah’s mission to Nineveh is described: ‘and Nineveh was a great city to God—a going [יָד] of three days.’ I take this expression not as a reference to its proportions, but to the length of Jonah’s tour of duty (so Wiseman 1979:36-37, Stuart 1987:486-488; see Lubeck 1988:42). So both Jonah’s stay in the fish and his service to Nineveh involve three days’ travel apiece (see also Christensen 1993:52).

Jonah’s prayer in 2:2-9[2:3-10] is the most complicated section in the book to assign in terms of temporal factors. First, since prayer is a form of dialogue, the narrated time approximates the time necessarily for Jonah to speak these words, hence this falls under progress. Yet Jonah in his prayer becomes a poet-narrator, telling his own story of sinking into the water. Presumably his self-described descent lasted much longer than the time it takes for him to tell it, so this entails summary. Yet because the majority of the poem is referring to
previous events (2-7[3-8]), the action line is not advancing at all, but stalls into a freeze, an effect communicated by the much longer clause types and sentence length. Since the setting is inside the fish, yet no mention of the fish is made, this is a retrospective look, a flashback to the period before he was swallowed. In 2:9[2:10] Jonah states, ‘what I have vowed I will complete.’ The narrator has not told readers of what it is that Jonah has vowed, nor when the vow was taken. Since the reader is left to guess on these matters, it suggests another instance of gapping.

Perhaps at this point one may wonder at how valid are the categories I have introduced, for seemingly mutually exclusive elements appear to coincide here. One alternative would be to maintain the legitimacy of the categories, but doubt the reliability of the text. Trible (1963:75n1) inter alia has concluded that the prayer was not authentic, despite the absence of any manuscript evidence to support the claim that the book ever existed without this passage. Another alternative is to conclude that these categories betray Western constructs of time alien to the thought categories of the author which are being inaptly imposed. Yet there is another solution.

I maintain that this is the case by intentional design. Seen from multiple perspectives, in almost every possible way this prayer is aberrant. Not only does it present itself as temporally disjointed, but it doesn’t follow any other conventions either: it breaks the form of either a thanksgiving (which it purports to be) or a lament, conceptually it is completely out of place given his circumstances, it is ironic, it lacks originality, being a rather clumsy assortment of quotations from and allusions to other passages, it employs conventionally figurative language (e.g. ‘all your waves and breakers swept over me’) in a literal sense. Thus its temporal unconventionality is consistent with all the other ways in which it is unconventional—a red herring prayer if ever there was one! Trible (1994:161-174), in a subsequent study in which she employed a rhetorical critical approach, attempts to deal with the presence of the song within its
present position, finding it much more preferable than her former approach. I would argue that confusion created by this song is deliberate for compositionally strategic reasons.144

The storyline resumes in 2:10[2:11] with Jonah’s expulsion from the fish. The action speeds back up to summary until 3:3b, where the readers encounters a short freeze in which the narrator ‘intrudes’ into the storyline to give readers explanatory information about Nineveh, heightening suspense as to whether Jonah will in fact cooperate with Yahweh this time. The reader also encounters a narrative gapping in 3:2 as Jonah is commanded to deliver the message which Yahweh gave him, yet no indication is given in the broader context that this was the message which Jonah delivers in 3:4 (see Lubeck 1988).

In 3:4 Jonah delivers his terse oracle: ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overturned.’ Was this statement issued one time (singulative), or was it repeated over and over (iterative)? The narrative is unclear on this point. The number forty, when connected with a time period—either forty days [and forty nights] or forty years—is used as a numeric pattern within the narrative world of the Bible. The number forty is associated with testing and judgment: days and nights of rainfall at the Flood (Genesis 7:4,12), days and nights at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; Deuteronomy 9:9-11), days of Moses’ stay on Sinai (Exodus 34:28), days of exploration of Canaan by the spies (Numbers 13:25), years wandering the wilderness (Numbers 14:34; Deuteronomy 2:7;8:2), days Goliath challenged the Israelites (1 Samuel 17:16), years of Saul’s reign (2 Samuel 5:4), years of David’s reign (1 Kings 2:11), years of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 11:42), days of Elijah’s flight to Sinai (1 Kings 19:8) and others. Here then readers have a

144 Why does this song not really look like (i.e comply with the conventional formal features of) a thanksgiving song despite its claim to be such, nor seem suited for Jonah’s circumstances at this juncture in the narrative? What is the effect of these considerations upon the characterisation of Jonah? I will offer a more extended discussion of the interpretive alternatives as well as my own explanation for the impropriety of the Jonah song in my treatment of plot, section 4.6(b)\textit{ii}.
testing and judgment period being announced to the Ninevites which is in keeping with other biblical examples—the temporal equivalent to a type-scene (perhaps a „time-scene‟?).

The action continues with fast paced summary until the block of 3:7-9, which is the royal edict of the king. Narratively, there is a freeze in the action while the king orders are presented. It is odd here, however, that the king should command the people to repent (3:7-9) when, in the narrative, they have already done so (3:5). The royal proclamation is best understood here as a case of repetition: that is, the king reinforces and extends to totality what was already initiated at the grassroots level. The effect is to emphasise the Ninevites’ wholesale repentance. Here again I would note that understanding the mechanics and conventions of setting can contribute to the one’s understanding of characterisation.

Summary resumes in 3:10 through 4:2a, involving two additional scenes of alternation. Three different parties—the Ninevites, God, and Jonah—are waiting and watching simultaneously in separate locations in parallel with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ninevites repent and wait to see</th>
<th>MEANWHILE</th>
<th>God waits to see what the Ninevites MEANWHILE do, then he repents</th>
<th>Jonah waits to see what God does [but does not repent]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:5-9</td>
<td>3:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of this generates suspense and points to a narrative climax.

In Jonah’s prayer the reader encounters another narrative flashback: ‘O Yahweh, is this not my word when I was still with my people? Because of this I began to flee toward Tarshish...’ This statement takes readers back to a moment which ostensibly would have taken place between 1:2 and 1:3, but is the first time readers have heard about his thoughts at that time. There is some ambiguity here, for the term יִנְשָׁפַת may be understood either as something Jonah said or something he merely thought. In either case, there was no spoken response on Jonah’s
part to the original commission in the original context. His remark here touches once again on the narrative gap raised back there: why did he choose to flee? However, these comments do not really answer that question; the *gapping* is maintained, and this issue resurfacing here heightens the plot tension. Jonah’s comparatively long sentences slow the *pace* here to dialogical *progress*, but the *summary* returns as Jonah leaves the city, constructs a booth for himself, Yahweh provides the *qiqayón*, and Jonah rejoices in its shade.

A temporal break occurs at 4:7, ‘when dawn arose on the next day.’ It operates here as a text segmentation device (אֶחָד frequently functions in this capacity), but the place remains the same. 4:7-8a continues the summary pace. Beginning with Jonah’s spoken words in 4:8b through the end of the book in 4:11 there is straightforward *progress* at the moderate pace of spoken dialogue.

3.5(e) *Summary*

After examining the spatial and temporal elements, it is possible to outline the development of the narrative by tracing features of the various settings in the book of Jonah.

Setting 1: Unspecified 1:1-3

scene: Joppa 1:3

Setting 2: Ship at sea 1:4-16

zoom: inside the ship 1:5-6


duration: 3 days and 3 nights

Setting 4: Dry ground 2:10[2:11] - 3:3

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Setting 5: Nineveh 3:4 - 4:4

- zoom and repetition: throneroom 3:6-9
- scene and alternation: unspecified place of God 3:10
- scene and alternation: unspecified place of Jonah 4:1-4

Setting 6: East of Nineveh

- scene: booth 4:5
- scene: qîqayôn 4:6-7
- time change: dawn the next day 4:7-11

3.5(d) Conclusion

What are the significances of the conventions relating to setting in the book of Jonah, and how do they relate to the characterisation of Jonah? The conventions relating to space uniformly militate against Jonah. Though it is perhaps possible to be more sympathetic toward Jonah for fleeing westward toward Tarshish once consideration is given for the negative connotations associated with a command to go east, his guilt is quickly established not only by his disobedience, but also by his selection of Tarshish as his destination. His contrariness is indicated by virtue of the fact that Tarshish is directly opposite of the direction he is supposed to go. It is as far away as the remote islands (aligned with them in poetic parallelism), and he is willing to risk the ominous sea to go there. His downward movement to Joppa, into the ship, into the hold, into sleep, into the deep, and into the fish is also in direct violation to the first command word of Yahweh: ‘Arise!’ He offers a prayer of thanksgiving in an altogether unbefitting place, the fish’s belly. Once recommissioned, he goes to the stereotypically wicked city of Nineveh, where against all type-scene expectations the people are repentant. He fails to even show up to deliver the message to the King, thereby foregoing the rewards ‘due’ to him

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from a king who accepts his message. He then goes further east—the wrong direction again, and remains there at the end of the book. Thus the book ends with him outside the city, outside the shade, and outside of accepting God’s ways of compassion, sitting under the vine withered by God’s judgment, resolutely contrary even in prayer.

The conventions of time also indict him. When confronted by God, the narrative pace of his response is lightening quick—in the wrong direction. Once safely aboard the Tarshish-bound ship, the frenzied pace is passed on to the sailors, while Jonah, by contrast, does little and speaks in slow motion. In the first of his two, three-day durative ‘journeys,’ spent inside the fish, he does not even address his current situation, but appropriates and conflates others’ words to describe his previous condition in the sea before closing with a few words about his bright future prospects. The commission is repeated nearly verbatim, highlighting the determination of God to use his reluctant spokesman. On his second three-day durative ‘journey,’ his supposed term of duty in Nineveh, he ceases after one day, having already announced the stereotypical 40-day testing period. The repetition of the account of Nineveh’s repentance serves to emphasise both its totality and its genuineness. In a three-way waiting game, the king waits to see what God will do, God waits to see what the Ninevites will do, and Jonah waits to see what God will do with Nineveh. This temporal alternation coincides with the crux of the plot, contributing to its suspense. Jonah spends two days outside the city (the remaining two days of his three-day durative journey?). The overall fast-paced, summary-speed action winds down to mere progress as the longest conversation closes out the book.

To answer my initial questions (see 3.1), it does make a difference that Jonah flees toward Tarshish rather than toward Mount Horeb à la Elijah, because Horeb/Sinai is the place where the covenant-making and covenant-keeping Yahweh meets his people, whereas Jonah
wishes to flee from his presence in the direction opposite of God’s command. If commissioned to go to Tarshish, would he have gone to Nineveh? I would answer no, because Nineveh represents the embodiment of wickedness and cruelty, whereas Tarshish primarily represents somewhere far. Nineveh was given forty days in which to turn, because forty is the number associated with testing, whereas three days correlates with journeys.

In light of this discussion about the function of narrative conventions of setting, I can now return to the initial question raised in this thesis: Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy? Throughout the entire narrative, both in spatial and temporal terms, Jonah will not yield to the expectations (conventions) that are appropriate. Clearly he is being depicted as one who breaks with the norms of his role. He either shows up in the wrong places or behaves in inappropriate ways when in those places. More than merely a nonconformist or gadfly, he displays his resistance to God by the places he chooses to go (to the sea, to Tarshish, outside the city), by the places he chooses to avoid (Nineveh, the throneroom), and by how he chooses to spend his time (sleeping during a life-threatening storm, thanking God while inside a fish, ‘preaching’ five words and walking off the job, sitting and stewing outside the city). He remains noncompliant, and, by his own choice remains east of the site of God’s compassion. In short, he’s a bad guy who remains a bad guy. The entire world (Lande) which is provided by the narrator (Dichter) here in this story steers the reader toward understanding (verstehen) the author’s intent to portray Jonah in a negative light. As the sympathetically de-centered reader travels (gehen) into this narrative world, he or she is shown a land wherein in Jonah is not only a misfit, but also a rebel.
Chapter 4: Plot

'Narrative is one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality: man’s time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality.'


4.1 Characterising plot (and vice versa)

In the previous chapter I sought to demonstrate the relationship between character and setting—in the presentation of characters within the narrative world, what they are depends on where they are, and when. Authors use both spatial and temporal elements in creating a narrative world which influences how readers view the characters. In the same way, readers learn about characters by watching how they behave. In talking about false teachers, Jesus stated, ‘By their fruit you will recognise them’ (Matthew 7:13,20). The same maxim may be applied to understanding characters within a written narrative. The decisions they make, the responses they choose, the words they say, the acts they attempt, and their success or failure in accomplishing them, all serve to reveal aspects of their character.

In the book of Jonah, awareness of narrative conventions generally as well as those specifically appropriate to the biblical narratives influence how interpreters understand Jonah. Judgments about whether ultimately he is best understood as a good guy or a bad guy are inferred from his actions (and his inaction) and his words (or refusal to speak). For example, some interpret the lack of a verbal response by Jonah to Yahweh’s final question as implying tacit acceptance of and acquiescence to Yahweh’s will. In the Jonah-as-Pinocchio and Jonah-as-reluctant-missionary models, the fact that there is no answer given to Yahweh’s final question is taken as positive evidence that Jonah has no argument to make, and thus has fully accepted the validity of Yahweh’s claims and has learned his lesson—it is the awe-stuck silence of humble
submission. On the other hand, others take this silence as indicative of complete collapse of communication.\textsuperscript{145} In the Jonah-as-Prometheus model, Jonah’s silence may be seen as a resolute refusal to accept life on the terms that Yahweh demands. There is nothing ‘rhetorical’ about Yahweh’s question, and Jonah’s non-answer is meant to win further respect from the reader who can readily identify with Jonah—life on earth with an unpredictable, interfering and irresistible deity can be so ‘wrong’ that even a desire for death may be a preferable ‘good.’

Observed in isolation, the solution of the interpretive problem of this non-answer ending may itself appear to be non-answerable, or at least should be recognised as mere conjecture by those interpreters who possess at least a modicum of the virtues of humility and honesty. However, I believe that awareness of the conventions of plot that are operative throughout the book will provide patterns of behavior that clearly point toward how the author intended this silence to be understood. Within the parameters of critical realism, and without sacrificing either humility or honesty, a case based on the plotting of Jonah can be built which clearly tips the scale toward one of these views, and not the other. Determination of whether Jonah is a good guy or a bad guy is a very important function of the plot.

\textbf{4.2 Some thoughts about narratives and thought}

In chapter two I sought to ground my interpretive strategies for reading narratives into a larger hermeneutical rubric. There I interacted with certain theoretical elements of sociology, communication, speech acts, critical thinking and related disciplines. As I now turn more

\textsuperscript{145} The question as to why interpreters differ, i.e. the factors which consciously or unconsciously predispose or influence them to favor one model over another would constitute an intriguing study, but which is tangential to my own interests here. Possibilities might include the reader’s personality profile (see Johnson 1983:45-61), the reader’s appreciation for or aversion to ambiguity, the reader’s identification with a particular reading community or theological tradition, social factors, the reader’s conception of God and perhaps other factors.
specifically to the conventions relating to plot, it may be helpful to illustrate the broad-ranging recognition of the interrelationship between the ways in which humans process information and narrative structures.¹⁴⁶

One of the most fundamental aspects of human thought is the search for order. Human beings are ‘wired’ to detect patterns, logic, relationships and causes, and to pursue certainty in their knowledge of these elements. Neurobiologist Turner (1996:18) points out that ‘cognitive scientists have observed that the human brain is uncommonly sophisticated in its capacity for constructing sequences.’¹⁴⁷ Narratives in general, and employment in particular, facilitate the quest to make order out of the sequences of events which make up life. Turner (1996:v) maintains that ‘story is a basic principle of mind. Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories’ (sic, emphasis his). He argues that narrative structure is essential not only to human communication but to the very capacity for and mechanics of rationality.

I see ubiquitous evidence for his claim. Children dangled at the knees of adults frequently implore them, ‘Tell me a story!’ This plea generates not merely from an inherent impulse for entertainment, nor is it simply a demand for the undivided attention of an adult (though these may be factors). Rather, it seems to arise out of a genuine human need to make sense of life itself, such as seeing patterns and causative relationships amidst the myriad of stimuli bombarding us, understanding how people and nature and things work, learning the consequences of behaviors, and discovering a system of values. Stories do not merely tell people

¹⁴⁶ My interest here is not to prove the ubiquity of narrative per se, but to acknowledge that the premises with which I am working have been attested by numerous others across various disciplines.

¹⁴⁷ On a more popular level, Buzan and Buzan (1993) have explored and propose a method for mapping the mind’s processes. Their argument, borrowed from the field of neurobiology, is predicated on the notion that the human mind is inherently structured to order information sequentially.
about life, stories are the essential means by which to experience, process and define life. The link between narrative structure and human rationality is strong.\footnote{An emergent interest in psychotherapy is the field of 'narrative therapy,' in which linearity of people’s experience of past events is the focus of investigation—various events are linked into progressive structures by the narratives people invariably invoke in order to understand their lives. Alternatives for the telling of these stories are explored, along with linking them to the stories of other significant persons. The shared themes are revelatory of the values, purposes and commitments which are deemed important by the individual patient (see M White 2001). For a more pastoral perspective, see Allender and Hudson (1997:48-65) and Frank (1998:9-20).}

Turner (:14) continues: ‘Our core indispensable stories not only can be invented, they must be invented if we are to survive and have human lives.’ People’s self-understanding is in large part determined by the (meta)stories they embrace. Indeed, other scholars outside the field of neurobiology—theologians, literary critics and ethicists—concur on the importance of narrative for human rationality.\footnote{For example, communication scholar Fisher ([1987]1989):193) argues that ‘narration is the foundational, conceptual configuration of ideas for our species.’ Kort (1988:21), whose area of specialisation is in the fields of theology and biblical narratology writes, ‘Narrative is fundamental...because the elements of narrative relate to a set of human needs and concerns that must be answered before a life can go on.’ MacIntyre (1983:201), a philosophical ethicist, states, ‘Man [sic] is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a storytelling animal.’} Humans live by locating themselves—their origins, identity, ethics, and purpose—within their stories.

The following list is illustrative and suggestive of a variety of ways in which I see that human thought and rationality can be related to narrative structures.

- People live out their daily lives in a way that parallels the essential elements of narrativity. They are always located both in place and time, that is, in a setting (which comprises their ‘narrative’ world). They interact with others, i.e. characters, in a sequence of situations and events, i.e. plots, involving both routine conflicts and resolution as well as major crises. Thus the most basic elements of moment-to-moment existence are shared with the distinguishing elements of a narrative text.\footnote{In this regard MacIntyre (1983:197) states, ‘We all live out narratives in our lives and we understand our own lives in terms of narratives.’}
• People **evaluate** their lives according to narrative thought patterns. The meaning that people attribute to their lives is discovered, negotiated and reshaped through comparing their own story with other people’s stories, such as the biblical narratives, biographies of admirable people and testimonies of friends.\(^{151}\)

• Hardy (1968:5) points out that human **mental processes** operate narratively; when people think about life, they typically do so in terms of stories: ‘We dream in narrative, we daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative’ (see also Barthes 1977:119n1).

• Additionally, human **imagination\(^ {152}\)** may be related to narratives as well. Decision-making often entails contrasting an anticipated quality of life as people imaginatively construct the alternative “stories” that their lives will follow, and then choosing those storied outcomes that would appear preferable.

• People **argue**, contend and persuade through narrative. In legal cases, jurors listen to rival versions of a story (the prosecution’s version versus the defense’s), and then select which version is the more probable. Further, appeal is made to legal precedents, that is, to similar stories in the past that are relevant to the case at hand.\(^ {153}\)

\(^{151}\)Fisher writes ([1987]1989:137), “Rationality is grounded in the narrative structure of life and the natural capacity people have to recognise coherence and fidelity in the stories they experience and tell one another.”

\(^{152}\)Turner (1996:20) says, ‘Narrative imagining is our fundamental form of predicting ... of evaluating ... for planning ... for explanation.’ Barthes (1977:123) also links imagination with stories, ‘*art* ... is a matter of statements of details, whereas *imagination* is mastery of the [narrative] code’ (emphasis his)

\(^{153}\)Fisher ([1987]1989:137) argues his case about how people argue their case: ‘No matter how strictly a case is argued—scientifically, philosophically, or legally—it will always be a story....The concept of narrative rationality
• **Ethical values** are likewise instilled and developed by narratives. Ethical behavior is shaped first through those stories told to children by the significant others in their early lives. There they learn of heroism and villainy and courage and deceit, not in abstraction, but through stories and fairy tales. As they grow and develop into adults, they test these values by the ‘narratives’ of their own experience. The moralities into which they are socialised are not so much sets of rules or principles as they are collections of stories about human possibilities and paradigms for actions and their consequences. These stories disclose who they are, where they have been, and where they are going, thereby allowing them to locate their position and axiology in the larger scheme of things (see Nelson 1987:9). Thus MacIntyre (1983:216) observes, ‘I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question, “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”’\(^\text{154}\)

• Even non-narrative **discourse** can be related to narrative situations. Math ‘problems’ need to be ‘solved’ (i.e. *plot conflict* and *plot resolution*), with all the preliminary exercises preparing students for the ‘story problems’ (i.e. possible real-life situations). The microbiology lecture prepares students for the laboratory, where in this *setting* the student (*character*) performs experiments with real-life problems (*plot conflict* and

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\(^{154}\)In the same vein, Long (1989:72-73) writes, ‘To relate a part of our story to another person is not only to tell what happened but also to reveal how we make sense of life, how and what we decide is important and not important, and how we respond to the ethical decisions arising from events.’
resolution). Hypotheses in lab experiments are comparable to interpretive hypotheses about the ending of a book.

- **Postmodernism** issued forth, at least in part, by the conviction that modernisms were various, competing attempts at subsuming all of reality under a particular, totalitarian metanarrative or *Weltanschauung*. These metanarratives are irreducibly exclusive of one another, yet it is impossible to adjudicate between them without appeal to yet another foundational metanarrative. However, even this realisation, in an ironic and self-defeating tautology, is itself an irreducible metanarrative. Thus despite Lyotard’s (1984:xxiv) oft-quoted definition of postmodernism as ‘an incredulity toward metanarratives,’ both modernists, postmodernists, and premodernists are inescapably harnessed to metanarratives of some sort.

If it is true that human rationality is perforce related to narrative structures, then it is reasonable to expect certain conventions to be seen commonly in written narratives. Kort (1988:8-9) expresses this same thought in his own words: ‘with the obvious distances created between us and peoples with differing languages, narrative as a shared form of discourse grants a potential access to them....The narrative form is shared by all.’

155 Fisher ([1987]1989:85-86) boldly writes, ‘There is no genre, including even technical discourse, that is not an episode in the story of life....I contend that even technical discourse is imbued with myth and metaphor’ (see also Kort 1988:134).

156 For example, Best and Kellner (1991:171) offer this perceptive insight: ‘Does not the very concept of postmodernity or of a postmodern condition presuppose a master narrative, a totalizing perspective, which envisions the transition from a previous stage of society to a new one?’ Likewise, Middleton and Walsh (1995:77) argue that ‘the postmodernist is thus caught in a performative contradiction, arguing against the necessity of metanarratives precisely by (surreptitious) appeal to a metanarrative.’

157 I do not understand Lyotard to be saying that no metanarratives exist, but that no single metanarrative can hope to achieve consensus beyond local levels, and a growing suspicion that no single metanarrative can explain the totality of life’s problems and a monolithic, final solution.
If human rationality is narratively configured, as argued above, then it would naturally follow from this that it is also a cultural universal, transcending local or ideological parameters. And further, if it is the case that persons within a culture can adequately communicate their individual stories within a shared world of a common metanarrative (i.e., enculturation is possible through the telling of its narratives), it raises an intriguing question. Is it possible for cultures to communicate adequately with each other through the shared vehicle of a common narrative macrostructure? Is the essential narrative form itself (without mere stylistic idiosyncrasies) a cultural universal? Aside from the obvious differences in the content of these narratives, does story making itself have certain universally recognisable elements? Structuralist and semiotician Barthes (1977:79) responds to this question affirmatively:

narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society.... All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

Others concur that narrative is transcendent of cultural particularities, a medium which affords the possibility of communication across the gaps of time, space, experiences, perceptions and ideologies.\(^\text{159}\)

My interpretive goal, then, is to see how these narrative conventions ‘shared by all’ can be traced in biblical narratives, so as to enable readers to approximate more closely their

\(^{158}\) See the further discussion in chapter two under ‘Selecting a story.’

\(^{159}\) For example, Fisher ([1987]1989:65) says, “[N]arrative, whether written or oral, is a feature of human nature that crosses time and culture....[W]e must concede it to be a universal cultural activity” (Turner [1996:167] repeats this second sentence nearly word for word). White (1980:6) also takes this position: “[N]arrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the shared reality can be transmitted....” Over against the arguments of certain postmodern theorists that true communication cannot be accomplished between parties of differing cultures (ideologies, metanarratives, tribes or interpretive communities) are these, including myself, that remain hopeful of the possibility of transcultural and transtemporal communication through mutually recognisable conventions of written narratives.
understanding of the intentions of the author. In so doing, as an interpreter I can associate and identify with certain narrative elements and draw parallels to my own life thereby.

4.3 What's plot and what's not

The term plot refers to the arrangement of events and actions within a narrative so as to highlight the temporal and causal relationships between them. Plot serves as the means by which the episodes are related to meaning. Plots are constituted by the arranging of events, which are described by Rimmon-Kenan (1983:15) as something that happens to bring about 'change from one state of affairs to another' (see also Chatman 1978:44 and Bal 1985:13). A random listing of events by itself does not produce a plot structure, however. There must also be an intentional arrangement of the events to produce an order of some sort. Rimmon-Kenan (16, drawing upon Barthes [1966]1977:9-10 and Chatman 1969:3,14-19) identifies two categories of events: kernels and catalysts. The term kernels refers events that advance action by creating alternatives (confronting the character with a fork in the road, thereby forcing decisions). The term catalysts refers to events which expand, amplify, maintain, or delay the kernels. If the succession of events revolves around a specific set of characters, it comprises the main storyline, while events which feature others may be termed as subsidiary storyline. The intentional arrangement which serves to organise the sequence of events may be combined by either of two principles: temporal succession and/or causal relationships.

Forster ([1927]1985:86) distinguishes between narratives in which the main ordering principle is time-sequence (story) and those in which the main ordering principle is causality (plot). This bifurcation is rightly criticised as overly simplistic. The search for causality (or 'contingency,' see Chatman 1978:48) is so strong within human rationality that the assumption
of causality may be imposed upon what is simply sequential. Rimmon-Kenan (:17) cites this example: 'Milton wrote Paradise Lost, then his wife died, and then he wrote Paradise Regained.' Readers feel the irresistible pull to supply a causal relation where none is stated. They cannot infer why he wrote Paradise lost, nor can they infer why his wife died, but they can infer from this short text why he wrote Paradise regained (and most do).

I would argue, then, that the search for and recognition of causal relationships between the narrated events is what sustains the concept of plot in a narrative. Indeed, it could be plausibly argued that it is the presence of plot (with the implicitly attendant characters and setting) which serves to distinguish narrative from non-narrative texts.

If setting dictates the when and the where of the narrative, and characterisation the who, plot communicates the what and the why. As Loughlin (1996:141) points out, 'emploiement synthesizes character, action and circumstance.' Perhaps excluding certain experimental, avant-garde literature of contemporary times, the reader may assume that the plot of most narratives contains material which is germane to the author's purposes. The author's strategy for communication is served by the plot. Since plot is the Grundprinzip of the selection and organisation of narrative material, narrative meaning is derived therefrom. The overall narrative plan governs the content (the kernels and catalysts) and the sequence of the various components of the text (see Longacre and Hwang 1995:339). Emploiment therefore concerns both the movement of the action within a narrative as well as carrying the notional, ideological weight. Every event, every part of the story is fraught with significance.\footnote{This issue underlies the resistance that some have toward attempts at paraphrasing a narrative.}

Because of the 'reticence' and economy of style in the biblical text, the authors of scriptural stories have very carefully selected and arranged every detail—intentionally revealing
to readers a certain amount of information, in a given order, and at particular junctures to lead them into viewing the narrative world (and what they are asserting about it) in the way they wish them to view it. As Holman (1980:336, emphasis his) puts it:

The demands of plot stipulate that the author select from this welter of event and reflection those items which have a certain unity, which point to a certain end, which have a common interrelationship, which represent not more than two or three threads of interest and activity. *Plot* brings order out of life; it selects only one or two emotions out of a dozen, one or two conflicts out of hundreds, only two or three people out of thousands, and a half-dozen episodes from possible millions. In this sense it focuses life.

The plot, then, emerges as a chain of interconnected events, consciously and deliberately arranged according to the ‘selective logic of the writerly act’ (Fowler 1973:145) in order to impact the reader with meaningful truth-claims. Or as Bar-Efrat (1980:93) puts it, ‘the plot serves to organise events in such a way as to arouse the reader’s interest and emotional involvement, while at the same time imbuing the events with meaning.’ Authors may draw readers into the story by causing them to identify with what is happening to the characters in the plot, either by applauding a particular character, or sympathising with him in his misfortune, or by ‘booing’ a character the reader doesn’t like.\(^{161}\) The point is that the author causes readers to applaud, sympathise, or boo through a careful narrative strategy which guides the telling of the story. Chatman (1978:43) argues that the plot’s ‘function is to emphasize or de-emphasize certain story events, to interpret some and to leave others to inference, to show or to tell, to comment or to remain silent, to focus on this or that aspect of an event or a character.’ In so doing, the author highlights those aspects of the story which form a network of cause-effect relationships. For example, the protagonist’s behavior \((b^1)\) led to a certain consequence \((c^1)\): having learned from this, the protagonist modifies his or her behavior \((b^2)\) such that a different

\(^{161}\) I shall develop this point further in the next chapter on Characterisation (under ‘Identification’).
and preferable consequence \((e^2)\) ensues. Generally speaking, authors enable their implied readers to follow the logic of this causality by emphasising that which is narratively significant while diminishing or omitting that which is extraneous to the author’s intentions. Readers find themselves responding to the prompting, cues and clues of the author in the process of reading.\(^{162}\) As Culpepper (1983:85) puts it, ‘The plot interprets events by placing them in a sequence, a context, a narrative world, which defines their meaning.’

Kort (1988:79) also points out the importance of narrative context: ‘“Storyfollowing” is the process of trying to understand what has already happened by finding out what will happen next. Events…reveal the meaning of previous events by revealing their consequences.’ For example, in two different places the New Testament records a parable in which a shepherd leaves his flock of ninety-nine sheep in the fold in order to find and rescue one sheep that is missing. The meaning of the parable is in both cases wholly determined by the context in which it is placed. In Matthew 18, the sheep is an erring ‘little one,’ while the shepherd is the reader who should do all within his or her power to rescue (restore to the fellowship of faith) this wayward one, first individually, then soliciting the help of two or three others, and finally the church. In Luke 15, however, it appears as the first of a triad of parables relating to the joy of finding that which was lost. Everyone rejoices over the finding of the lost sheep (the repentance of a sinner); everyone rejoices over the finding of the lost coin (again the repentant sinner). But in the third parable, the pattern is broken for emphasis: not everyone rejoices over the return of the younger son: the older brother begrudges the extravagant attention given to the son who was ‘lost and is found.’ In this case, the reader is forced to consider in what ways (s)he may be like the older

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\(^{162}\) Of course, there can be no guarantees that the author’s stratagems will ensure right reception. Readers can and will overlook or mistake authors’ clues. In my own interpretive model of critical realism, however, increased ability to recognise authorial intentionality is a real possibility. Rimmon-Kenan (1983:8) points out how: ‘This
brother, resentful of the mercy of the loving father (God) towards others. Retrospectively, then, in Luke’s version of the lost sheep, God is the shepherd, the lost sheep is the repentant sinner, and, by inference, the reader is to identify with those who rejoice along with the shepherd. If the reader fails to rejoice in God’s grace being given to others who are undeserving, (s)he will be guilty of the sin of the older brother of the third parable of the triptych.

In my approach, the act of reading and interpreting a narrative rests upon the assumption that every piece of the narrative within the context is significant. Fewell and Gunn (1993:102) also maintain this stance: ‘presuming that every element of the story has a purpose and is somehow connected to every other element of the story, we are constantly organising and amplifying the fragmented but potentially coherent information, striving in the process to forge meaning and a sense of the whole.’ Plot suggests what may be useful for the reader to know in his or her own real life. Plot infuses movement with meaning such that, in the words of archetypalist Frye (1982:46), it captures the ‘universal in the event, the aspect of the event that makes it an example of the kind of thing that is always happening.’ To re-invoke the terminology of Rommetveit, the author’s and readers’ desire to share between them mutual interests contributes to the possibility of intersubjectivity. The author provides a perspective on the events described, while the sympathetic reader who wishes to see through the eyes of the implied author cooperates by seeking to follow both the sequence and the implicit commentary upon causal functions. Moreover the readers draw inferences from the particulars in this one narrative and generalise them to other, parallel situations in their own lives. Thus the things that happen in a story somehow adumbrate, recall, parallel, or suggest equivalent events that happen, or could happen, to anyone.

competence is acquired by extensive practice in reading and telling stories.’ By indwelling the biblical narratives, a reader can move toward greater understanding of authorial intent.
4.4 Connecting the plots

Narrative plots are teleologically driven: there is a projected ideal which the protagonist pursues. Obstacles and opponents interfere with the pursuit, but the protagonist continues in his resolve to seek the goal. In discussing plot, Brooks ([1984]1992) makes this point: 'Plots are not simply organising structures, they are also intentional structures, goal-oriented and forward-moving.'\textsuperscript{163} The pursuit of a good or the evasion of an evil is the backbone of plotting. Bal (1985:22-23) follows Bremond (1978) in arguing that all plot sequences involve either processes of improvement or processes of deterioration. As examples of improvement, the following are listed: the fulfillment of the task, the intervention of allies, the elimination of the opponent, the negotiation, the attack, and the satisfaction. Examples of deterioration include the misstep, the creation of an obligation, the sacrifice, the endured attack and the endured punishment. Bremond's theory is also taken up by Rimmon-Kenan (1983:22). Bremond's basic narrative unit (called a function) can be schematised.\textsuperscript{164}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}

\node (success) at (3,4) {Success \ (objective reached)};
\node (process) at (1,3) {Process of action \ (steps taken)};
\node (possibility) at (0,2) {Possibility \ (an objective is defined)};
\node (process_inaction) at (1,1) {Process of inaction \ (no steps taken)};
\node (failure) at (3,1) {Failure \ (objective missed)};

\draw[->] (possibility) -- (process);
\draw[->] (process) -- (success);
\draw[->] (process) -- (failure);
\draw[->] (process_inaction) -- (success);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{163}Bal (1985:26) concurs: 'The actors have an intention: they aspire towards an aim. That aspiration is the achievement of something agreeable or favourable, or the evasion of something disagreeable or unfavourable.'

\textsuperscript{164}I have altered the terminology somewhat for the sake of clarity.
The narrative plot’s inertia is toward an end (resolution): either the success or failure of the protagonist in achieving the objective. The main storyline traces the processes and progress toward this teleological destination. As Fewell and Gunn (1993:105) observe,

plots, and the reading of plots, are goal-oriented: we read to get to the end because the end will make sense of what has gone before....We want to know how order will come from disorder, completeness from incompleteness, and the further we become immersed in the conflict, the obstacles to resolution, the more captured we are by our desire to know how it will all end.

And once readers arrive at the end, there is now a vantage point from which to reconsider all that has gone before, rereading, remembering, revising, and reevaluating details overlooked or patterns unrecognised, or stylistic subtleties, or significances missed.

When investigating the function of plot within narratives, it may be useful to identify the variables by which it is formed. Plot movement refers to the general progress of events, that is, the notion of sequential stages inherent in the storyline. Opponents are those parties which stand in antagonistic relationship to the protagonist of the narrative, hindering, delaying or preventing the successful completion of the protagonist’s objective. Plot type refers to whether the protagonist succeeds in the objective (in the case of comedy) or fails in the attempt (in the case of tragedy). There also exist certain categories of narrative, which allow for their grouping under stock forms. These forms include narratives which share similar conflicts, and whose storylines are comparable. Finally, narrative style has to do with the techniques the author or narrator employs to highlight strategic points or to generate and sustain the readers’ interest in the plot. Consideration of these plot variables may lend insight for the analysis of any particular narrative, and afford potentially profitable bases of comparison with other narratives.
4.4(a) Plot movement

The narrative plot, that is, the progress (whether improvement or deterioration, kernel or catalyst) of the storyline, inevitably revolves around a conflict of some kind, with a fairly universal typology or paradigm governing its structure, regardless of language, culture or time period. Discourse analyst Longacre (see 1983:20-38) argues from research done on a wide variety of cultures that the typical pattern unfolds as follows.\(^{165}\)

4.4(a)i Opening: (or Aperture, Beginning, Exposition, Manipulation, Orientation, Stage)

The story commences with some sort of information about setting, that is, time and place (e.g. 'In the beginning...'); 'It was a dark and stormy night') and/or the introduction of (a) character(s) (e.g. 'Mr. And Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much'; 'These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel...'). Generally there is a minimal amount of action, though in more recent literature this has changed somewhat: contemporary authors often 'hook' their audience by placing them immediately into a high-action sequence before filling in the details. The opening serves to orient the reader to the narrative world and establish context for the events to follow. It functions as a buffer to move us from one's own world into engagement with its world. According to Ska (1990:21), the opening generally presents 'indispensable pieces of information about the state of affairs that precedes the beginning of the action itself.'

4.4(a)ii Incitement (or Complication, Introduction of conflict, Middle)

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\(^{165}\)It should be noted that plots often do not move with straightforward linearity through these steps from initial problem through rising intensification (complication) to resolution. Often there are lesser tensions and resolutions, unexpected improvements which relieve tension (decomplexify) that are yet penultimate, subsidiary storylines with their own conflicts and resolution and deferrals (catalysts). Nevertheless the main storyline generally proceeds along these elements, which are useful to trace.
Fairly early on in the story, the initial stability is disrupted in some way. Usually the main character(s) encounter(s) some form of difficulty. The cause of the conflict can come from a variety of sources (see below) or in some combination of them. This conflict will end up controlling in some fashion all the succeeding events. It is at this stage that an objective is defined which will serve as the main storyline.

4.4(a)iii Escalation (or Developing conflict, Prepeak episode)

Escalation refers to an extension and intensification of the initial conflict. Usually there are additional complicating factors which contribute to the severity of the dilemma. At this point the reader often encounters various forms of storyline delay (catalysts) which heighten the sense of suspense. These delays may come through the introduction of another, subsidiary storyline or as a temporal freeze, interrupting the narrative flow for dialogue, explanation, prayer or some other feature.

4.4(a)iv Peak (or Apex, Climax, Crisis, Crux, Performance, Turning-point)

At the narrative peak, the conflicting forces build to a climactic crisis point where they clash most directly and intensely. Usually, the surface features of the text reflect the tension at the notional level—e.g., different narrative perspective, change in clause structure or length, or synoptic accounts. ‘One thing is certain, the peak of a discourse is non-routine. It may, in fact, be thought of as a zone of turbulence in regard to the general flow of a discourse’ (Longacre 1983:xvii).

4.4(a)v Resolution (or Denouement, Falling Action, Unraveling)

Resolution refers to the release of plot tension in some fashion. Whether or not the outcome is favorable, the problems have been confronted and the situation dealt with. In tragic
plots, this denouement comes in the form of a catastrophe involving the failure of the objective, and frequently entailing the death of the hero (see Holman 1980:143). In comedic plots, the hero emerges triumphant over his or her ordeals, 166 successfully achieving the main objective.

4.4(a)vi Ending (or Coda, Conclusion, End, Finis, Sanction)

At the ending there is a return to some (re)new(ed) form of stasis—a normal, stable, peaceful way of life. In comedic plots, it is some variation of ‘and they lived happily ever after.’ The ending is of vital importance, for in it readers learn the author’s version of which behaviors are successful and which are not. The values held up for esteem or critique are most sharply focused here at the conclusion. As Ryken (1984:52) observes, ‘It is characteristic of stories that they do not end where they begin. Change, growth, and development are the very essence of stories.’

The action peak does not necessarily coincide with the didactic peak; that is, the height of conflict in the storyline may not occur in the text at the identical place where its themes are most sharply focused (see Collins 1995:34-35), nevertheless as readers approach the end of a story, they expect a ‘promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle’ (Brooks [1984]1995:19). More frequently it is at the ending of the plot rather than at the climax where the intentions of the author will be most evident. Thus the ending provides the most clues for evaluating all the previous events by revealing all the consequences for the decisions made and the actions taken. And as Ska (1990:29) notes, the ending may also ‘direct a special message to the reader: a moral lesson, an etiology connecting the world of the narrative with the

166Walsh and Middleton (1995:64) trace this master plan movement behind plot: ‘every story has, minimally, a plot, and as far back as Aristotle’s Poetics plots have been understood as involving movement from an initial complication or tension to the denouement or resolution of that tension’.
world of the reader, information about the origin of the story or its relevance, or a reflection of the narrator.

The ending raises for the thoughtful reader a constellation of questions, the answers to which point to the message(s) of the story. How has the protagonist changed in his/her behavior, thinking, morals or attributes? What has (s)he learned? How have the antagonist and secondary characters changed? How have the circumstances or setting changed? Does the story conclude on a good note or a bad note? Is there a clear sense of conclusion, or is it open-ended and unresolved? If the latter, why has the storyteller not told the reader ‘the rest of the story’? What actions directly contributed to the successful accomplishment of the objective? What actions delayed or compromised it? What actions led to failure of the objective, and how could they have been avoided?

4.4(b) Opponents

The conflict underlying employment engages the main character(s) with some opponent. The source of this opposition can arise from any of the following parties.

4.4(b)i God(s) or spirits: The protagonist encounters conflict from God, the gods, angels, demons, other spiritual forces or fate. This clash may be instigated by the whimsy and caprice of the supernatural beings, or it may be caused by a need for divine testing, or precipitated by the character’s sins or flaws. A biblical example of this category is the testing of the faith of Abraham as seen in the narrative of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22).

4.4(b)ii (An)other person(s): Other human or humanlike characters within the story oppose the main character. When this is the case, generally they are of equal or greater strength
than the protagonist to provide a legitimising of the tension and the testing. The unwarranted opposition of David by Saul (1 Samuel 18-31) serves to prove David's character as above reproach, vindicating Yahweh's selection of him as Israel's next king.

4.4(b)iii Society: Sometimes the opposing party is not a single person or group, but the generalised 'they' of society at large (e.g., Huxley's [1932,1998] *Brave New World*). McCarthy and Riley (1986:48-49) suggest in this case that plot tension 'includes the extinction of personal (or communal) existence,... endangered relationships, social status, approval by authority or any other threat to one's security.' Jephthah illustrates one who is opposed by multiple parties of his society, including his 'brothers' and the Ephraimites (Judges 11-12).

4.4(b)iv Nature and circumstances: The main character must overcome physical hardships due to the environment or the lack of resources (as in the stories of Jack London): temperature extremes, storms, natural disasters (fire, flood, earthquake, volcano, hurricane) or cataclysm, pain, injury, physical handicaps, deprivation of food, water, shelter, clothing or separation from loved ones. The healing of Naaman (2 Kings 5) from his leprosy by washing himself seven times in the Jordan River is an example of this category.

4.4(b)v Self: In this case the main character experiences inner turmoil of conflicting thoughts, feelings, commitments, or must make a difficult decision. Paul alludes to the struggles of his inner life (Romans 7), and Saul likewise seems to vacillate between his own good intentions and his contrasting perversity which leads to rashness, disobedience, and self-destruction (1 Samuel 9-31).
Very often plots involve simultaneous conflicts. For example, Job is in conflict with God, with his wife and his ‘friends,’ with Satan (though unwittingly), with his physical pain, and within himself in his doubt, grief, and suffering.

4.4(c) Type

Literary critics from the time of Aristotle have identified two fundamental types of plot: tragedy and comedy. These two categories of literature, birthed in a Greek culture which was both ideologically and aesthetically removed from ancient Israel (what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?), are consequently not easily meshed with biblical narratives. Nevertheless, they do have heuristic value when compared to the nature of biblical narratives. This comparison will be elaborated below in my discussion of biblical employment, along with examples from biblical narratives.

4.4(c)i Tragedy

Tragedy takes characters who are noble or admirable in relation to other human beings, and throws overwhelming problems at them. In tragedy, characters fall from a high estate to a lower one through a series of events of deterioration, inexorably leading to suffering, failure and frequently ultimate death. Courage, dignity, and integrity which heroically refuse to compromise on principles or waver from essential character are virtues which are lauded as protagonists face the irresistible forces of catastrophe before finally succumbing. Often there exists a debilitating vice or trait (e.g. hubris) which is the cause of their undoing. This may be due to the inherent finitude or weaknesses of humanity, to some particular faux pas or sin, to irrefragable fate, to foregone destiny, or to divine will. Generally, the reader identifies with the protagonist sympathetically (‘I too am good, though flawed—perhaps I can learn how to avoid his or her
fate’). The overall sense is that they failed despite their best efforts, eliciting a sense of pathos in the reader.

4.4(c)ii Comedy

In comedy, the main objective determined by the protagonist is successfully achieved, thus leading to a happy ending (eucatastrophe). Often the success is greater than that originally envisioned, and frequently it is dramatised by overcoming seemingly impossible odds. Comedy portrays a main character that typically is more ordinary than heroic, but who ultimately overcomes all obstacles to emerge triumphant. The success may come either in the form of a change in the hero’s circumstances and fortunes or in his or her character (or both). As a subcategory of the latter case, the reform plot involves an initially unsympathetic or evil person undergoing a change for the better, so that (s)he comes around by having learned important lessons about how life works best. In revelation stories the plot follows the protagonist’s movement from a state of ignorance to knowledge and wisdom. Frequently in comedy there is some sort of celebration at the conclusion: a marriage, a feast or parade, reconciliation with opponents, or an honorary ceremony. In contrast to tragedy, the sense is that the heroes succeed despite their very commonness, a trait which allows the reader more ready identification: ‘as they are ordinary, so am I, so I too could succeed like them.’ Comedy, according to Appleyard (1990:189), ‘is above all a view of community transformed and redeemed from its limitations.’ There is hope for οἱ πολλοὶ, who may also transcend their circumstances just as their exemplars. An additional component in many comedies is the magnanimity of the hero toward conquered opponents, displaying compassion upon them and even including them in his or her celebrations (see Frye 1967:43-49).
4.4(d) Stock forms

Identifying ‘stock forms’ of narrative plotting is an endeavor fraught with difficulties. Chatman (1978:84-95) provides an overview of plot mapping which includes the differing models of Aristotle, Frye, Crane, Friedman, Forster, Shklovsky, Todorov, Propp and Bremond. Their lack of consensus, together with the fact that the various typologies seem heavily dependent upon culture-specific codes of convention led him to conclude that ‘the notion that all narratives can be successfully grouped according to a few forms of plot-content seems to me highly questionable.’ Cognizant of the legitimacy of Chatman’s criticisms, I nevertheless believe that it can be useful, from a critical realist’s perspective, to employ various models in order to determine which appear to be most effective in accounting for the specifics of any given narrative corpus such as the Bible.

The following list that I offer is the suggestive and experimental, with no intent to be comprehensive of all possible plot forms. I select these with biblical narratives specifically within my purview. These represent specific stock forms (master plots) which correlate with many biblical narratives (in fact, several of these forms may be operative in a single narrative). For each one I suggest at least two examples, one (or more) from an extrabiblical narrative and the other from an intratextual (biblical) narrative.

4.4(d)i Journey

The journey describes a plot in which the characters encounter hardships while moving from one location to another in the narrative space, that is, a travel log in which the protagonist (and his or her entourage) faces oppositions and conflict. The journey motif may be subdivided into two smaller categories. In the quest the protagonist undertakes a dangerous mission which involves an arduous journey in order to achieve his or her determined objective. For example, in
Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab’s obsessive pursuit of the white whale responsible for the loss of his leg becomes all-consuming, and brings about his own tragic demise. In the Bible, the book of Numbers chronicles the people of Israel’s journey toward the promised land. Although their objective to enter into the land remains unfulfilled throughout the book (it will be fulfilled in Joshua), the hardships and tests they encounter while וַיַּעֲבֹר correlate with the journey plot type.\(^{167}\) In the *return* the protagonist has been unwillingly or ill-advisedly separated from his or her home and estranged from loved ones and must overcome hardships in order to return home again. Dorothy (and her beloved dog Toto) undergo a myriad of trials and ordeals while attempting to return home to Kansas after a cyclone displaces them into the land of Oz in Baum’s (1900) *The wonderful wizard of Oz*. Likewise, the theme of return is important (the term בָּשָׂר in various forms appears fifteen times) in the biblical book of Ruth as Naomi comes back to her hometown of Bethlehem after her husband’s fatally ill-advised flight to Moab. While the story doesn’t focus on the return voyage *per se*, the conflict does involve a process of re-assimilation into her native culture.\(^{168}\)

4.4(d)ii Test

In the test, a challenge to the hero’s strength, wit, power or virtue must be met successfully for the protagonist to achieve his or her goal. In Potok’s (1972) *My name is Asher Lev*, Asher’s desire to become a significant and successful painter lead him further and further into conflict with the Hasidic community of his roots. Ultimately he must choose between


\(^{168}\)Other cases include Twain’s (1889) *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s court*, Dickens’ (1838) *Oliver Twist*, the Spielberg (1978) film *E.T.*; the most prominent example in the Bible would be the narratives dealing with the return from exile which, like Ruth, focus less on the journey and more on the hardships encountered by the returnees: Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra-Nehemiah.
either retaining the acceptance of his community or painting his _piège de résistance_ which will bring him certain ostracisation, a crucifix. He ‘passes the test’ by choosing the latter, and accepting the consequences. The most obvious example of the test in the Hebrew Bible is the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. Abraham is instructed by God to take Isaac, his only (!) son, whom he loves, and offer him as a sacrifice to Yahweh. In a suspenseful and poignant narrative, Abraham does so, but the angel of Yahweh intervenes before the fatal knife thrust, demonstrating Abraham’s willingness to trust God.\(^{169}\)

4.4(d)iii Conquest

In the conquest a fearful opponent must be met and defeated in a battle or contest for the protagonist to win his or her goal. In Homer’s (1999) _Iliad_, Achilles fights in the Trojan War. He leaves the battlefield when his commander Agamemnon takes for himself the prize of war, maiden Briseis. He returns to the battle when his friend Patroclus is killed by the Trojan prince Hector. Achilles avenges his friend by slaying Hector.\(^{170}\) The Hebrew Bible is filled with narratives involving battles, though the emphasis consistently vindicates the claim that ‘victory rests with Yahweh’ (Proverbs 21:31), making him the champion of Israel. A clear example of this is the defeat of Sennacherib and the Assyrians ‘by’ Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18-19, in which the

\(^{169}\)Other examples of the test include Euripides’ (1963) twelve tasks of Hercules, Frodo’s destruction of the ring in Tolkien’s _Lord of the rings_; of the Bible’s many examples I would note Elijah’s prophetic showdown at Mt Carmel in 1 Kings 18. Often the test may involve the rescue of a loved one (Tchaikovsky’s _Swan lake_ [see Helprin 1989]; Lewis’ [1953] _The silver chair_; Abram’s rescue of Lot in Genesis 14; David’s winning of Michal in 1 Samuel 18). In _dramatic irony_, the audience or reader knows more about the situation than does the protagonist (e.g. Sophocles’ [1998] _Oedipus Rex_; White’s [1958] _The sword in the stone_). The biblical book of Job is a dramatic irony in which the reader has been informed by the narrator in Job 1-2 that a test of Job’s righteousness and faithfulness is taking place as a result of Satan’s challenge to Yahweh. Job ultimately passes the test (‘When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold’ 23:10), and is vindicated as ‘right’ (נייער 42:7,8) while remaining oblivious to the end of the circumstances precipitating the test.

\(^{170}\)In an example involving personified animals, Kipling’s ([1894] 1992) mongoose _Rikki-tikki-tavi_ must defeat his cobra nemesis Nag and Nagaina.
angel of Yahweh kills 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during the night before Sennacherib’s impending attack upon Jerusalem. The conquest plot may be between individuals (e.g. David and Goliath, 1 Samuel 17) or it may be the clash between good and evil on a cosmic scale (e.g. apocalyptic literature).

4.4(d)iv Romance

In a romance difficulties must be overcome in order for two persons to fall in love or for two lovers to be married. In Segal’s (1970) Love story, Oliver, an upscale ‘preppie’ at Harvard falls in love with Jenny, a Radcliffe student who is the daughter of a labor-class, widowered, Italian immigrant. For marrying ‘beneath’ his class, his scandalised father spurns Oliver, but Oliver remains devoted until death (Jenny’s). In the biblical book of Ruth, the plot also follows that of a romance.\footnote{Ruth accompanies Naomi/Mara back to Bethlehem, where as a Moabitess her prospects for remarriage are slim (cf Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Yet she attracts the attention of Boaz. Overcoming the obstacles of ethnic difference, age difference, and a kinsman-redeemer (חָטֵל) with legal priority to Ruth, they do marry, and eventually give birth to a son who will become grandfather to David.\footnote{Another example is Snow White (Heins 2000). In a tragic romance (I can think of no biblical examples), their love is finally thwarted (e.g. Shakespeare’s [{1595}2000] Romeo and Juliet, Rostand’s [{1897}1950] Cyrano de Bergerac).}}

4.4(d)v Rebirth or healing

In this plot the hero endures either death or a close encounter with death and miraculously remains alive or returns to life. While this form may be only a component of a larger plot form (e.g. the journey, the romance), it does place a unique spin on the plot. In the
Brothers Grimm fairy tale of *Snow White* (ed P Heins 2000), a lovely princess is threatened by a witch's curse at birth. Raised under the protection of forest dwarves, she is nonetheless discovered by the witch who, under disguise, gives her a poisoned apple, which leaves her in a deep, spell-induced sleep until she is 'reborn' by the kiss of a prince.\(^{173}\) Biblical examples of this include each of the resurrection and miraculous healing stories. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah leaves Israel during a time of drought, brought on by Ahab's wickedness. While living at the residence of a widow in Zarephath and her son, the son becomes ill and dies. Elijah prays for the boy three times, and the boy's life returns, demonstrating to the widow that 'the word of Yahweh from [Elijah's] mouth is the truth' (v 24).

4.4(d)vi Conversion

In a conversion plot, the protagonist undergoes an inner metamorphosis of character, turning from pride, egotism, avarice or some other vice toward virtue. In Cathacart's (1864) fairy tale, 'The light princess,' a baby princess is cursed at birth by a witch (once again) with a resulting loss of 'gravity,' both literally (she is weightless) and figuratively (lacking all seriousness). Only as she learns that a prince's 'rescue' of her comes at great sacrifice to him, and she in turn must sacrifice to rescue him, does gravity come to her, enabling her to walk with dignity at their subsequent marriage. Conversion lies at the heart of numerous biblical narratives. For example, the resurrected Jesus confronts the young, up-and-coming Pharisee Saul on the road to Damascus, where he had intended to persecute Christians. Saul, soon to become Paul, experiences a complete change of disposition toward Jesus and toward all the

\(^{173}\) Other examples include the stories of *Pinocchio* (Colladi [1883]1991), *The ugly duckling* (Andersen [1844]1989), *Beauty and the beast* (Hahn 1991, based on de Villeneuve 1740); another biblical example is Hezekiah, who is healed of an otherwise deathly illness (2 Kings 20).
‘followers of the Way,’ becoming the most ardent missionary-evangelist of the incipient church (Saul’s conversion in Acts 9-28).\footnote{Ebenezer Scrooge of Dickens’ (1867) \textit{A Christmas Carol}, Rodya of Dostoevsky’s (1881) \textit{Crime and Punishment} and Wallace’s (1880) \textit{Ben-Hur} further illustrate the conversion plot; the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal (Luke 15) undergoes conversion, while Naaman is both healed and converted (2 Kings 5).}

4.4(d)vii Retribution

In a retributive plot an unsympathetic or villainous figure receives some sort of punishment for their misdeeds. Retribution involves reestablishing a moral equilibrium in the case of someone whose wickedness and refusal either to obey or repent is entrenched. In such a case, the reader senses that there is justice and vindication in the fabric of the world, even if it is deferred to their final end beyond the grave. Scarlett O’Hara of Mitchell’s (1939) \textit{Gone with the wind} is proud, beautiful, vain, headstrong, and manipulative. A conniving and resilient survivor of the collapse of the ante-bellum South, she hurts all in her path, and is chronically discontented with what she has. In the end, she sacrifices happiness with her husband Rhett for yet other, vague but grandiose illusions. The biblical narratives contain many examples of retribution. Saul, Israel’s first king, consistently disobeys God’s instructions as given through his prophet Samuel. Rather than humbling himself in repentance, Saul acts rashly, lies, makes excuses for himself, pursues his loyal subject David in fits of paranoia, and finally takes his own life after being wounded in battle (2 Samuel 9-31). The nation of Israel (and Judah) as a whole lives under covenantal stipulations with God, with the programmatic consequences of their obedience (blessings) or disobedience (curses) clearly spelled out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The macrostructure of the former prophets (deuteronomistic history) reveals Israel’s long, downhill slide into the retribution of exile.\footnote{Other biblical narratives exhibiting the retributive plot structure are the accounts of Pharaoh, Samson, Nabal, Ahab, Jezebel and Judas.}

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4.4(d)viii Vindication

In vindication, the protagonist is wrongly accused or is in some way singled out for undeserved suffering at the hands of others. The resolution takes place as the hero’s virtue is revealed and (s)he is subsequently honored. In Hugo’s ([1862]1992) *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean is imprisoned for nineteen years for stealing a single loaf of bread. A hardened criminal upon release, his life is transformed by an act of forgiveness and grace bestowed upon him by a bishop, hence Valjean vows to give his life to bestowing goodness upon others. A ruthless police inspector named Javert, heartless in his obsession with law and duty, doggedly pursues him in order to reimprison him. The hunt reaches its climax during an uprising in Paris when Valjean has an ideal opportunity to kill Javert. Preferring to exhibit kindness, Valjean frees him. However, Javert is as incapable of receiving grace as he is of extending it to others. Unable to live in any way indebted to Valjean, Javert commits suicide by drowning. In the end (and with more plot complications), Valjean dies, happily in the arms of those who love him. The contrast between these two characters is perhaps nowhere as stark as in their respective deaths, where Valjean’s ability to overcome hardheartedness is vindicated *vis-à-vis* Javert’s incapacity to do so.¹⁷⁶

In the narrative of Esther, Mordecai the Jew is overlooked despite his courageous act in revealing a conspiratorial plot against the king. Much later, at precisely the time when all Jews in general and Mordecai in particular have been singled out for destruction by the conniving Haman, right-hand man to King Xerxes, the King treats his insomnia with the reading of court

¹⁷⁶ The story of *Robin Hood* (see Pyle 1980) provides another example of vindication wherein Robin Hood is juxtaposed against the corrupt Sheriff of Nottingham and the avaricious usurper Prince John, finally to have his name cleared upon the return of the rightful King Richard. Likewise in the story of *Cinderella* (see Luske and Geronimi 1950), Cinderella is vindicated against the wicked stepmother and stepsisters. In its animated film
records, discovering his oversight. He elevates Mordecai to a high position within the kingdom,\textsuperscript{177} the Jews are spared, and Haman is deposed (and disposed).

Vindication may also be accompanied by a second aspect, in which the injustice of the antagonists is exposed and they receive their just desserts. In the examples cited above, both Javert and Haman end up dying as a result of their unfairness toward the protagonist.

\textbf{4.4(e) Style}

Authorial style, or technique, is a major component in examining narrative; it is an aspect equivalent to plot, setting and characterisation, worthy of book-length treatment in and of itself.\textsuperscript{178} Nevertheless, a few features that overlap with my concerns in treating employment merit remark.

\textbf{4.4(e)i Suspense}

Sternberg (1985:264) points out: ‘In art as in life, suspense derives from incomplete knowledge about a conflict (or some other contingency) looming in the future.’ Suspense is achieved through some sort of delay in the storyline at the points of plot escalation or peak. Typically, the storyline is disrupted in some way, both at the surface (e.g. clause type, clause length, change in verbal forms) and notional levels (e.g. crowded stage, dialogue, narrator’s explanation or description, prayer, poetry, flashback). Though suspense is more properly dealt with as a function of temporal setting, its impact is felt upon the plot as it heightens the reader’s sense of anticipation and sustains tension at a high point.

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\textsuperscript{177} The narratives of Joseph and Daniel both closely parallel the details of Mordecai.

\textsuperscript{178} I have attempted to explore this in a separate, earlier work (see Lubeck 1986).
4.4(e)ii Irony

It has been said that ‘irony, like love, is more readily recognized than defined’ (Good 1981:13). Irony is a literary technique in which authors communicate something different from what they actually say. Booth (1974:1) asserts that irony ‘cannot be understood without rejecting what [it] seems to say.’ In irony there exists two levels of meaning: one on the surface and one at a deeper level. These two levels stand in tension or opposition to one another. Because it is possible to take the surface meaning ‘innocently’ at face value, those who recognise the deeper meaning maintain an ‘ironising distance’ which allows or causes them to feel somewhat superior. Irony holds a special potential for bonding between the author and reader. The more subtle the irony, the more likely that it will be misunderstood by a gullible reader, yet the more powerful is the bond between the author and the astute, discerning reader. Readers feel smugly flattered by their own cleverness (i.e., competence) in ‘really’ understanding the insider’s joke, and appreciate an author clever enough to see life at a similarly deeper level. Booth (1978:11) summarises this point well: ‘Even though some readers or listeners may be left by the wayside, those who come along will be clamped inescapably into the author’s patterns—they will in fact have the illusion of having built each point for themselves.’

4.4(e)iii Satire

Satire is a subset of irony which seeks to amend some human vice by holding it up to scorn, and seeking to elicit responses of amusement, contempt, indignation (see Abrams 1981:167). Thus a particular folly is targeted for satiric attack. The folly is to be seen in some larger stratum of society, usually among the self-important or the wickedly self-deceived. Like humor generally, for satire to work, it must target those in society who wield power. A pie in the
face of a paraplegic orphan is not funny—a pie in the face of a blustering, pompous socialite is. Similarly sarcasm and public ridicule are reserved for government leaders, big business, popular movements, and social dogmas—not the marginalised and weak. The character in whom these foibles, errors or incongruities are exhibited is referred to as the satiric vehicle (or satiric portrait), and typically is a verbal caricature. There is also an implied satiric norm which is the preferred alternative to the pattern of behavior modeled by the satiric vehicle—a standard by which (s)he is measured and found wanting. Despite the overall negative tactic of satiric technique, a positive ideal emerges to counter those faults. A satiric plot will frequently occasion irony, exaggeration and humor to make its point, though the humor may range from playful tongue-in-cheek (e.g. Horatius [2000]; Andersen’s [{1837}2000] The emperor’s new clothes) to acerbic invective and name-calling (Juvenal [1999]; Swift’s [{1726}1947]Gulliver’s travels).

4.4(iv) Humor

Humor is an effective way for speakers or writers to charm an audience into accepting their point of view. People’s defenses are lowered when they find themselves laughing, and skillful rhetors take advantage of this strategy frequently to win over their audience to their point of view. Humor may break down walls of opposition at the ideological level by amusing the audience at a more superficial level. For my purposes, it must be recognised that plot twists, asides, misdirection, and surprises may at times function less to carry the storyline with its ebb and flow of conflict tension and more to provide occasion for humor, which, while entertaining, is a strategic compositional device intended to disarm the audience in order to gain a more favorable reception.
4.4(e)v Gapping

While I discussed the theoretical aspects of gapping in more detail in the chapter on ‘Setting,’ I mention it here only to point out that gapping necessarily relates to plot as well. It can be used to create suspense and to lure the reader into greater participation in the story. Craig (1993:82) points out one of the important aspects of gapping, which he labels ‘informational suppression’: ‘Reconstructing the projected world is essential for understanding the narrative field of reality, and informational suppression proves to be a distinguishing feature of the narrative....Meaning is equated not only with what happens at the book’s terminus but also with all that develops in the mind of the reader as thoughts and impressions are drawn, then redrawn, throughout’. A more subtle, hidden aspect of plotting, then, is noting what expositional (catalyst) and what storyline (kernel) information is conspicuously absent in the text, but necessarily attended to by a reader desiring to make sense of the text.180

4.4(e)vi Parallels

In the discussion above on stock forms I have presented how a comparative reading of literature may distill certain typologies of plots. Just as there are stock characters (e.g. comedic hero), and type-scenes (the desert), so certain attributes of plots may be seen in parallel others. The entire discussion of stock forms in plotting is predicated upon seeing patterns and relationships between intertexts. Without delving into the complex issues of both intertextuality and the sociology of knowledge, I simply note here that plot parallels exist because certain things typically happen, and stories which capture and hold one’s attention subscribe to generic

179 See 3.3[b]ii.

180Obviously, the presence of blanks or gaps is an open-ended one. It is very difficult to theorise a model which can arbitrate whether a particular point has been deliberately and intentionally elided by an author so as to evoke an interest-investing response from the reader and what is absent because it is of no consequence to the author. What we are dealing with is the relative importance of various ‘nothings.’

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patterns—the essential variables are not infinite but are circumscribed by certain generic conventions. Thus an author can conceivably play off of readerly expectations of what is to happen next, and exploit these with dramatic flair by subverting those expectations (e.g., nobody would anticipate a tortoise winning a race over a hare).

4.4(f) Summary

Once again, here is a display in graphic form of the main variables appropriate to the conventions of plotting.
4.5 Thickening the plot description in the Bible

In the discussion above, I’ve commented upon the issue of emplotment generally for all works of narrative. I now turn my attention to the ways in which those features relate to biblical narratives in particular to allow for additional refinements of those generalisations. I will not restate the discussion of each of the factors above, but will touch only on factors which allow for further precision in the application of the features above. It is my intent in so doing to provide a model for a more fully developed, ‘thick description’ (see Vanhoozer 1998:284-286) of narrative conventions as encountered in the Bible.

4.5(a) Plot movement in the Bible

Plot movement in biblical stories follows the same general plan as outlined above: opening, incitement, escalation, peak, resolution, and ending. However, the individual stories within the Hebrew Bible may be seen as episodes within a larger narrative framework, particularly in the flow of material from Genesis through Second Kings (that is, the Torah and Former Prophets). Thus most of these stories do not labor through a brand new opening which moves the reader from his or her own world into the narrative world, rather they seek to locate the individual episode within the ‘more fantastic country’ (L. L. Thompson 1978:4) depicted in the Bible wherein all the particular stories take place. Implied at the beginning of many

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181 What I mean by ‘larger narrative framework’ relates to my commitment to reading the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as a canonical text and in light of the intratext (see Chapter Two). I cannot prove that individual human authors always wrote their individual works with an awareness of how it would relate to the entire canon. However, at least at the editorial level there is evidence of macrostructural compositional intentionality which serves to unify the Hebrew Bible (e.g. similarity of themes at the seams of the Tanak) and to provide clues as to the order of arrangement.

182 By way of comparison, while new chapters within a novel may commence with changes of setting or character, each chapter does not start over again with an opening and incitement—they presume that the reader is already located within the narrative world and further develop the existing storyline. So it is with most biblical books (especially Exodus through 2 Kings, the Torah and Former Prophets)—though they may include setting or character changes, they merely continue that same literary patterns and themes.
biblical narratives is, ‘And then....’ For this reason, the context of the narrative of a given story requires that the reader be familiar with the rest of the biblical intratext. This shapes the way in which the plot is initiated. Furthermore, because the common form of Hebrew narration is the *waw*-consecutive (‘...and...and...’), readers must infer causal links (e.g. ‘nevertheless,’ ‘meanwhile,’ ‘so,’ ‘instead,’ ‘but,’ ‘consequently’). In the same way, if the biblical narratives are seen as constituents of a larger, canonical plot, then the individual plot endings can never be more than penultimate—the narrative continues on to what happens next. (I argue this further in the ‘side note’ below.)

4.5(b) *Opponents in biblical narrative*

All of the opponents listed above (God[s]/spirits, other persons, society, nature, and self) appear as antagonists within biblical narratives. However, a word of qualification regarding the role of Yahweh as an opponent or antagonist is warranted here. The categories with which I am operating here are those relating to manifestly literary systems, not those of faith or dogmatics. In employing these terms, I see no necessary connection between the literary function of Yahweh within a biblical narrative and his relative (or incommensurable) morality. In any case where a disobedient character is a main character by virtue of being a focal point of narrative attention, Yahweh presumably stands in opposition to him or her (even if entirely implicitly, as in the case of Haman in Esther). As the one standing in opposition to evil protagonists, by definition God fills the role of antagonist. To label him as such is not pejorative, nor should it any sense cast aspersion on his character—an antagonist can be a(n infinitely) ‘good guy.’

In addition, the other gods are assumed to be either comparatively impotent (e.g. Dagon in Judges 5) or nonexistent. Spirit forces, including angels, Satan, or evil spirits are also seen as
subject to the sovereign Yahweh and thus are not used in biblical plots as viable antagonists to human protagonists except by the direction and under the auspices of God.

4.5(c) Plot types in the Bible

The two categories of tragedy and comedy, so common to western literature from classical Greek forward, are of limited value for the study of biblical narrative. The chief reason for this is that they are intractably anthropocentric. Tragedy idealises the indomitable human spirit, infusing it with potential nobility based on meritorious character and actions. Yet the biblical characterisation of the human spirit is far less flattering: nobody is essentially righteous (Psalm 14:1-3). While humans are accorded a position of dignity, the emphasis falls on attributing human worth to God’s underlying gifts of goodness and his gracious intervention. Thus no humans are heroes in the ultimate sense—God alone is champion and advocate for the human race, the source of every good thing. Humans become penultimate heroes only by virtue of recognising that their strength comes from the divine power that lays outside themselves. While meritorious behavior positions one for receiving blessing, God’s blessing nevertheless is granted as a gift, not earned by human endeavor. So also the success in achieving the initial objective that is the basis of comedy is not ultimately the result of human wit or strength, but of divine favor. Thus these categories must be reconfigured in the case of biblical narrative if they are to be of any benefit. I believe that it is possible to do so.

4.5(c)i Tragedy

Woodard (1993:352) argues that there are six phases of Old Testament tragedy—dilemma, choice, catastrophe, suffering, perception or realisation of one’s error, and death. He further proposes that Old Testament tragedy bears witness to ‘a tragic flaw within the protagonist
that elucidates his own heroic status." Moreover he maintains that the book of Jonah is a premier example of the biblical tragedy.

His argument is problematic, however. While granting that such a structural *topos* is tenable, and that the biblical narratives do in fact reveal the underlying sins which cause the demise, I find nothing heroic in those biblical characters most frequently associated with tragedy. Whereas in classical tragedy the protagonist draws admiration, appreciation, respect and sympathy, in the case of biblical narratives, these are largely inapplicable.\(^{183}\)

Several biblical names are commonly suggested\(^ {184}\) as being close to tragic figures, but none truly qualify in the classical sense. Samson is heroic in his death, as is King Saul (to a lesser degree), yet in neither case are they commendable examples of virtue facing irresistible odds—they simply get what is coming to them for their stupid and sinful behavior. Exum and Whedbee (1992:286-305) argue that there is "one obvious choice for a biblical representation of the tragic vision, the story of King Saul." The primary reason they classify the narrative as tragedy (even comparing it to the story of Oedipus) is that Saul dies isolated from God—without reconciliation with God (unlike Samson), restoration, or future for his house (:294). Yet I would argue that Saul (and Samson) fails to elicit the audience's admiring identification.\(^ {185}\) Though a royal figure, Saul is not cast as noble, nor in such a way as to promote any sympathy for him: he is petty, disintegrated, mean-spirited, capricious, and boorish. News of his death comes as a

\(^{183}\) Woodard (1993:353) identifies Jonah's despising of the gentiles as the tragic hero's *hamartia* or tragic flaw. He does not explain how this tragic flaw is supposed to elucidate the heroic status of Jonah or elevate readers' estimation of him. Nevertheless, maintains his position (:355), even to the point of claiming that 'Jonah possess[es] grandeur and stature.' Yet in developing in what sense Jonah reflects grandeur Woodard describes him (:356) as 'cowardly', 'confused' and 'desperate', culminating with 'a more pitiable circumstance is difficult to imagine.' While Jonah is characterised by the narrator in such a way as to elicit the reader's pity is plausible; that he is characterised so as to elicit admiration is unsubstantiated.

\(^{184}\) Those who consider the prospect of tragedy in the Hebrew Bible include, for example, Sewall (1959), Gottwald (1984), Humphreys (1985), Exum and Whedbee (1992), and Woodard (1993).

\(^{185}\) I will deal with the concept of reader identification in more detail below in section 5.1(f).
relief for the implied reader who has every narrative warrant for desiring David to assume kingship. Likewise in the New Testament Judas Iscariot doesn’t fit the qualification of a noble character, and also gets (by his own hand) his just desserts.

Moreover, another typical aspect of the classical tragic genre is the role of fate—the gods are seen as pitiless or captious forces who (arbitrarily) seek out heroic, dignified figures to target for humiliation and undeserved suffering. In other words, the tragic antagonist is an indifferent deity, not a compassionate one. So even though the pathos of Job does meet the standards for ‘heroic’ behavior in the face of tremendous hardship and elicits a reader’s positive identification, the story ends happily with Yahweh not only restoring but also doubly blessing him; he is actually a comedic hero (a vindication plot type) rather than a tragic. Again, in the case of the ‘tragic’ death of Jesus, his resurrection effectively reverses the ‘tragedy’ of his crucifixion; so his death is (literally) the crux of the conflict in what is ultimately a comedy (a test plot type). Thus I conclude, with Humphreys (1985:1), that it ‘is all but universally agreed that formal tragedy is not to be found within the literary repertoire of ancient Israel or early Judaism’ (emphasis mine).

Nevertheless it may be of benefit to recast the formal notion of tragedy for use with biblical narratives. Drawing on the previous discussion of Rimmon-Kenan and Bremond (see 4.4 above), each plot begins with an initial objective defined, and ends either with the successful accomplishment of that objective or the failure to accomplish the objective. The failure of the protagonist to accomplish the objective is a feature often encountered in biblical narratives. If it is possible to dissociate the broader conventions and common generic expectations of classical (western) tragedy from this single, minimalist feature—the failure of the protagonist to achieve the objective—then perhaps the term tragedy could be retained to describe these biblical
narratives. Another possibility would be to link tragedy with the plot form of retribution. If the focus is upon a biblical protagonist who characteristically displays attitudes and behavior that leads directly to his or her demise (deterioration), then perhaps this could be labeled as the Bible’s form of tragedy, and characters such as Saul and Samson (neither are noble, virtuous or exemplary characters) would partake of this quasi-tragic category. In either case, however, the danger facing the biblical interpreter employing the term is using a common term in a very unique sense. My own preference is toward the former, employing the term tragedy for the protagonist’s failure to achieve his or her objective.

4.5(c)ii Comedy

Following the argument above, biblical comedy can be a profitable interpretive category only if the definition is tightened vis-à-vis what is commonly understood in the classic or formal sense. By comedy I mean simply that the protagonist’s initial objective is successfully attained or exceeded in the end. Further, and in contradistinction to comedy of western literature, the success must be recognised as attributable not to the protagonist’s merit (strength, skill, cunning, or luck) but to the grace of God which either empowers the protagonist or intervenes on his or her behalf. The success, then, is not earned, but is a serendipitous gift. For example, after a prolonged delay and numerous missteps by Abraham, he and Sarah do in fact finally have a baby son, which is a comedic development. Yet it is so unexpected, so beyond the range of natural human abilities, that it is met with laughter (‘Isaac’).

Two recurrent themes run through the comedies of the Bible. The first is that, compared to God, even the most powerful human personalities and nations are insignificant—the ‘exalted’

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For example, the failure of Moses to enter the promised land, the failure of the tribes of Israel to conquer the inhabitants of Canaan (Judges 1:19-36 and the succeeding narrative of Judges), the failure of Nehemiah to effect any lasting spiritual reform (Nehemiah 13) and the failure of the Davidic dynasty to uphold Torah (Chronicles).
are humbled. The other is the obverse of the first, that even the lowliest person is of infinite value to God—the humble are exalted. Frequently these are combined into a single plot structure, especially in the vindication plot type.

By way of illustration and orientation to the function of plot with particular reference to the book of Jonah, it may be helpful to revisit the initial categories of interpretation introduced in chapter one and relate each of these to the plot type. Those who see Jonah as a comedic figure as I have defined it above, *viz* when the protagonist either achieves or exceeds the initial objective, include the following.

- *Pinocchio*—Jonah’s expectations are exceeded through his conversion.
- *Prophet*—most (not all) understand Jonah to have learned and thus benefited from the lesson regarding his prophetic vocation.
- *Reluctant missionary*—most would see Jonah not only successful as a missionary, but also as having gained a new and better perspective.

Those who see Jonah as a tragic figure according to my revised definition, *viz* when the protagonist fails to achieve his or her main objective, would include the following:

- *Psychotic*—most see Jonah’s dysfunctionalities as ongoing rather than successfully treated.
- *Prometheus*—by definition, Jonah is seen as a tragic figure here.
- *Fall-guy*—Jonah is the victim of God’s unrelenting will.
- *Patriot*—most (i.e., all who view patriotism as a negative trait) see Jonah as both bigoted and unchanged.
With these in mind, a close reading of the plot sequence done below will provide another helpful measure of comparison and evaluation of these interpretations.

4.5(d) Side note: Aiming the canon at tragedy and comedy

In the wake of source critical studies which have prevailed in biblical criticism through much of the last century, more attention has been given recently to the possibility of a comprehensive plot line for the Hebrew Bible at levels larger than individual books.\textsuperscript{187} If there is indeed an overall plot line for the Hebrew Bible or even for narrative subunits larger than individual biblical books, then the question may be raised as to whether the ending(s) point(s) to a comedic or tragic plot.

One could not say definitively that Genesis ends on either a comic note (‘Joseph died and ... was placed in a coffin in Egypt’) or a tragic note—Joseph’s last words assure his family that God will eventually lead them back to their land. It is a hopeful ending, not a happy ending. Nor could it be said that the ending of Deuteronomy (the Torah) is either tragic (the people are still in the wilderness, Moses dies, and no prophet like him has arisen since) or comic (Moses’ last words in the book assure the Israelites of victory over their enemies in the land they are about to enter). Their objective of returning the land, which has driven the plot line from Exodus through Deuteronomy, has neither been accomplished nor has it failed—it is a future hope. The ending of 2 Kings (i.e. the Former Prophets) fits this pattern as well. It is not comic (Judah has just gone into much-deserved captivity, the temple is destroyed, the people gone into diaspora),

\textsuperscript{187} The bibliography here is large and growing. Two examples must suffice. Freedman (1991) argues in \textit{The unity of the Hebrew Bible} that ‘Primary History’ (i.e Torah and Former Prophets) ‘is a deliberate assemblage conceived and organised by a single mind or by a small group of people,’ (1) with an isolable plot development (see :39). He builds a similar case for the Latter Prophets and even the Kethubim, maintaining that ‘an overall compiler or editor has been at work here as well, and without tampering with the contents or integrity of the separate works, has achieved a certain cohesion and unity through careful selection and arrangement of the parts’ (:75). House (1990), in a work entitled \textit{The unity of the twelve}, argues that the Book of the Twelve exhibits unity at multiple
but neither is it tragic—the last words of the book describe how the Davidic heir (and hence the promises related to David’s dynasty) is not only preserved intact, but for unspecified reasons the foreign king has preferred to privilege him within his own court (a scenario evoking comparison with Joseph?). The book of Malachi (i.e. the ending of the Latter Prophets) is a programmatic denunciation of Second Temple worship concluding with a threat: ‘or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.’ But it also ends on a positive note for those who fear the name of Yahweh (4:2[3:20]), affording hope for an eschatological vindication of the righteous. Chronicles (the last book of the Kethubim in most orderings) ends with an edict being issued by Cyrus. Not only does the book stop abruptly without telling the reader that the edict was obeyed (or ignored), but the edict itself is interrupted in mid-sentence (cp Ezra 1:1-4), somewhat like a radio suddenly going dead in the middle of a special emergency announcement. Such an abrupt stop can hardly be deemed as closure or resolution, and leaves the reader suspended in mid-air, unable to determine whether this unresolved ending points to accomplishment (comedic) or failure (tragic).  

Yet at each of these junctures (also known as ‘seams’) in the Tanak there is a strong sense of anticipation: the solution to all the current problems lies ahead in some form of an eschatologised future, emphasising (re)entry into the land, a future prophet/king figure, a (re)new(ed) covenant, and the reestablishment of Torah-based temple worship. If readers understand these elements as indicative of a comedic outcome, they must nevertheless quickly

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levels: genre, structure, plot, characterisation, and point of view, and as such the Twelve should be approached as a literary piece of ‘coherent construction’ (2:43).

188 In some mss, Ezra-Nehemiah follows Chronicles, and consequently supplies the ending to the Kethubim. But the ending of Nehemiah is no more satisfactory, so the problem remains. In the last chapter Nehemiah is utterly frustrated by the noncompliance of the people toward his instructions, resorting to attempting to beat and bully them into submission, while praying to God that he look favorably upon him personally.

189 For an introduction to and survey of studies on canonical intentionality at the level of the Tanak see Lubeck (1999); for a discussion of these themes as seen in the seams of the Tanak, see Dempster (1997a, 1997b).
amend and enlarge the concept to allow for what I would term ‘proleptic comedy,’ an ultimate ‘and-they-hope-to-live-happily-ever-after’ story that is yet to be realised. The ending of the Hebrew Scriptures remains a future, as-yet-unfulfilled promise: someday there will be a ‘day of Yahweh’ in which final vindication is achieved, and only then will the right people live happily ever after.

Reading the Bible as canon (an intratext) militates against viewing any given story within it as a comedy or tragedy in a final sense, since scenes, episodes and stories continue to flow into subsequent narrative units. While there may be denouement in an intermediate sense, the larger, ongoing metanarrative resists closure. In 1 Samuel 11, Saul successfully defeats the Ammonites at Jabesh Gilead, i.e. he successfully accomplishes his objective (hence, a comedic outcome). On the other hand, within the larger narrative of 1 Samuel, Saul may be identified as a tragic figure (as discussed above). Yet viewed within the overall narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel, he is an obstacle to a comedic figure of greater consequence, David. Nevertheless, taken within the narrative structure of the Former Prophets as a whole, Israel fails to occupy the land (good kings such as David notwithstanding) due to their disobedience (hence a tragic outcome), yet seen against the entirety of the Nebi'im, there remains a future hope for a revitalised Davidic kingdom in the land—a proleptic comedy. In other words, episodic closures are ephemeral, because they are always embedded within a larger narrative framework whose inertia carries these along on greater currents. In light of these considerations, the labels of tragedy and comedy, however useful to describing smaller plot structures, must be used provisionally.

4.5(f) Stock forms

In the discussion above I offered biblical examples for each of the major stock forms in plotting which were listed: journey (quest or return), test, conquest, romance, rebirth/healing,
conversion, retribution, and vindication. The only additional comment I would make to those categories relates to the biblical conception of rebirth. Within the canon of the Hebrew Bible there is an emerging presentation of individual life transcending death. In the case of Enoch (Genesis 5:24), it is implied that he did not die as all the others in the genealogy, but 'was no more' (bypassing physical death?). The return of Samuel's spirit (1 Samuel 28) points to a conscious and personal existence of the human spirit. There are accounts of resurrection to life: Elijah's raising of the widow's son (1 Kings 17) and Elisha's raising of the Shunnumite's son (2 Kings 4). Elijah is transported into heaven via a fiery chariot rather than experiencing physical death (2 Kings 2) and his return redivivus is proleptically announced (Malachi 4:5[3:23]). Arguably, Job believes in personal resurrection (Job 19:25-27), a view corroborating apocalyptic visions of 'awakening' from death (Daniel 12:1-2). Excluded from biblical accounts are instances of reincarnation, metamorphosing of animals into humans or human into other life forms such as angels. Radical change in humans is presented, not in terms of physical metamorphosis (other than physical healings), but rather in terms of repentance and conversion—no morphological changes are indicated to evidence such 'rebirth.'

There are additional literary forms which emerge through comparative reading of the various stories of the Hebrew Bible. These subcategories (i.e. operative within the above mentioned plot forms) may be labeled 'motifs' to distinguish them from the larger, formal structures of emplotment. These include recurrent events such as the birth of a child to a previously barren couple, the passage through water, the prophetic confrontation, Yahweh's protection and blessing while his people are in a foreign land, and the farewell discourse.
4.5(g) Style

Besides all the stylistic elements shared with narrative literature more broadly (see above), I append the following observations regarding the conventions of biblical emplotment which serve to nuance these categories further with a view toward biblical narratives.

4.5(g)i Suspense

Suspense is certainly apparent in the narrative of biblical stories, though two comments here are in order. First, because of the widely recognised stylistic economy of description (reticence) in biblical narratives (that is, minimal descriptions of character and setting beyond that which is necessary to the plot) and the fairly rapid pace of delivery of new plot developments, suspense in the Bible is relatively truncated, usually occupying mere sentences rather than whole chapters. Though suspense is certainly present, it is not drawn out in the case of individual episodes: storyline action dominates over description.

Secondly, overarching elements of suspense do hover over the individual episodes at the macrostructural level. The plot tension concerning whether or not Yahweh will fulfill the land promise given to Abram is never fully absent in the succeeding episodes concerning Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua. ‘Will Yahweh maintain his promise to David, granting his dynasty perpetuity in the face of his house’s chronic and flagrant disobedience?’ is a question behind the story of each royal figure in the sequence throughout 1-2 Kings. Thus at the episodic level suspense is short lived, while at the macrotextual level suspense is sustained from book to book.\footnote{Of course, in one sense suspense is primarily effective for first-time readers only, since thereafter they know what will happen. Therefore it may be helpful to augment the concept of initial suspense with the idea of a sustained anticipation for re-readers.}

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4.5(ii) Irony

There are no special considerations regarding irony of which I am aware which are especially applicable to biblical narratives versus extrabiblical literature. However, I do believe that at least at a popular level it has often been overlooked, perhaps because of readers’ predispositions grounded in their theology. Frequently readers’ generic expectations of biblical literature, colored by their epistemology and beliefs regarding revelation and inspiration, preclude or inhibit their ability to detect irony—in this view, ‘The Bible means what it says.’ In the case of irony, however, the Bible does not mean what it says at the surface level. Though the use of irony and satire is a powerfully effective literary device in proportion to its subtlety (see my discussion of irony in the section above), the risk of misunderstanding is also in direct proportion to such cleverness. Marcus (1995:4) rightly notes in regard to satire (a subset of irony) that ‘since satire almost always pretends to be something other than what it really is, it sometimes succeeds so well that readers miss the satiric intention entirely.’ Fortunately, this topic has received more attention lately by those seeking to raise the level of awareness of the widespread presence of irony in the Bible.⁹¹ Reading the biblical text in such a way as to recover the authorial intent as closely as possible thus necessitates alacrity and sensitivity to its ironic possibilities.

4.5(iii) Satire

Pride and trust in one’s self, one’s allies, or one’s resources as opposed to Yahweh are often targeted sins that are criticised in the Bible. One of the most effective ways of exposing

pride is to ridicule and humiliate those who are self-important. Thus Yahweh uses sarcasm to scorn human arrogance and presumptuousness: ‘The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them’ (Psalm 2:4). Since sin is so offensive to Yahweh, mockery is a prominent way in which God expresses his displeasure with human sinfulness, especially in the prophetic literature. As Jemiellity (1992:41) observes, ‘The prophecy which seeks to instruct, amend, and reform also seeks to offend’. Ameliorating the sometimes vituperative language of satire in the Bible, however, is the Bible’s propensity for the employment of satiric indirection. Causing a reader to laugh about the obtuseness and stupidity of someone else who happens to be guilty of the same sin or weakness as that of the reader is an author’s less offensive circumlocution for criticising his or her behavior.

4.5(g)iv Humor

Some readers of the Bible may fail to see anything ‘funny’ about the Bible at all, because of the seriousness of their reverence for God and the Bible. In their opinion, God is infinitely somber, they assume that the Bible is entirely humorless, and to follow him implies gravity. Consequently, they cannot see what they do not seek. For example, Whitehead (cited in Radday and Brenner 1990:21)\(^{192}\) once commented that ‘the total absence of humour from the Bible is one of the most singular things in all of literature.’ For those looking for it, however, humor is present in the Bible in many forms: wit, joke, satire, irony, sarcasm, burlesque, caricature, travesty, parody, and comedy. There are several main reasons for the presence of humor in biblical narrative.

\(^{192}\) Radday offers several other quotations, including ones by George Eliot, Theodor Lessing and W Phelps, all of which evidence a common misperception of the Bible as being humorless. The derivation of these quotations is not provided by Radday (Phelps excepted).
In Van Heerden’s discussion of humor in Jonah (1992:389-391), he summarises theories of humor, pointing to a general consensus that humor arises from the recognition of incongruities which derive from ‘mutual clash, conflict, or contradiction’ (390). These latter elements are, of course, the stuff of plot. He further points out (391) that although the same could be said of irony, the difference between the two is that whereas irony ‘deals with humanness in a general sense…the humorist focuses on humanness in a more sympathetic way….characterised by warmth, kindness, and reconciliation.’ Since in the Bible reconciliation is so fundamental to the divine-human relationship, as well as emphasising the importance of reconciliation between humans, the conflict-borne-of-kindness matrix is extensive in biblical literature, affording ideal circumstances for the presence of humor. Humor and laughter are a natural, spontaneous response to pleasant surprises and joyful living. As Hyers (1987:15) points out, ‘Laughter, humor, and comedy are commonly associated with feasting, parties, reunions, weddings, birthdays, spring rites—wherever people get together and say yes to life, in spite of its difficulties and its darker side.’ Though there are ‘dark hours’ along the way, the Bible is essentially optimistic and hopeful—its message is ‘good news’ (מְבָשָׂר Isaiah 52:7; Εὐαγγέλιον in the NT) which brings joy, and with it, laughter; for ‘where there is hope there is humor’ (Hyers 1987:5).

4.6 Plotting along with Jonah

4.6(a) The implied reader of Jonah

In chapter two I introduced the concept of the implied reader (see under ‘Implicating implied consent,’ section 2.7). There I presented Lategan’s (1985:70) proposal that the author has in mind an implied reader who is the ideal respondent to the author’s intentions.
Correspondingly, the reader infers from the text an implied author with whom the reader shares a commonality. Communication between authors and readers becomes possible where authors who envision their implied readers and readers who envision implied authors meet in the common ground of the text. The common ground shared between them also involves a more broadly shared repertoire (see Iser 1974:68-73) or familiar territory of understanding, which includes mutual recognition and acceptance of literary conventions as well as allusions to other texts, information or norms. Not only must the same language be shared between author and reader, but also there are larger literary functions and conventions which must be bilaterally respected in order for a 'covenant of discourse' to be maintained.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the emplotment of Jonah, I believe it is now necessary to identify and specify clearly this common ground that is shared between the author of Jonah and his readers, i.e. what the implied author of the book envisioned as the implied reader. There are certain assumptions about the implied readers' knowledge without which key aspects will be misunderstood. Person (1996:109-110) has already collated the following list, each item of which I believe is valid.

1. Both its author and its actual readers can understand the Hebrew text.
2. Nineveh is the capital of Israel's enemies, the Assyrians.
3. Israel's enemies, including the Ninevites, are considered to be the Lord's enemies.
4. Nineveh is east of Israel.
5. Tarshish is west of Israel.

193 Again, this concept of the implied reader expands the notion of the intended readership beyond the limits of those contemporaneous to the time period and geographic locale of the originating author. This broader readership is a function widely noted among those pursuing canonical approaches to scripture. In this regard, see Kurz (1993:160-161), Watson (1994:4), Witherington (1994:3-4), G W Knight (1996:3-13) and Vanhoozer (1998:380), each of whom argues that canonicity relativizes the historical particularities which occasioned the original composition. Even J A Sanders (1987:9-39), taking a more historicist slant to the issue of canon, acknowledges the retrospective timelessness of scriptures through his use of the phrase 'adaptable for life.' I would argue that, in principle, biblical authors who understood themselves to be spokesmen for God's word would also recognize the inherent potentiality for an audience wider than and subsequent to the initial recipients. In this sense they would be 'reaching out' to this broader range of implied readership prospectively and proleptically. Thus the 'implied' or 'intended' audience is distinguishable from the 'original audience,' i.e. those who first received it.
(6) The sea is a place of chaos.
(7) The Lord's chosen people, the Israelites, are considered to be more righteous than pagans, like the sailors and the Ninevites.
(8) Sackcloth, ashes, and fasting are signs of repentance.
(9) When delivered from peril, one utters a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord.
(10) Jonah is a prophet and, therefore, should be loyal and obedient to the Lord.
(11) The Jonah narrative purports to be a prophetic book.

To this list I would add the following.

(12) The book of Jonah is recognisable as a narrative.
(13) The conventions of narratives generally are applicable to reading Jonah.
(14) The additional conventions common to other biblical narratives are applicable to Jonah.
(15) The reader is familiar enough with the types-scenes, stock plot forms, and stereotypical characters that one would find elsewhere in biblical narratives to be able to recognise them as such.
(16) The conventions of Hebrew poetry apply to Jonah's song of thanksgiving.
(17) The book of Jonah is understood as a text that stands in interdependent relationship with other books of the Hebrew Bible which provide a larger intratextual framework.
(18) The reader will discern the intratextual quotations and allusions.

Each of the items in both of these lists are consistent with and may be derived from approaching Jonah as a text, as a canonical text, and as an intratext\textsuperscript{194} (see my discussion of these features in chapter two).

Without this presumed knowledge being fully shared by the reader, he or she lacks the background to recognise what the author is doing here in the book of Jonah, both as to what patterns are being followed and which ones are being broken. The importance of pattern breaking and expectation defying in Jonah will become increasingly apparent and important in the analysis and discussion which follows.

It is now against this backdrop that it becomes possible to draw upon the categories and conventions pertaining to emplotment in narratives and biblical narratives in particular in order

\textsuperscript{194} Although I am aware of the complexities and difficulties surrounding compositional versus redactional emendation (see Sallhammer 2000:15-35) and the various strata and schools of thought regarding textual criticism of
to analyze emplotment in the book of Jonah. Of special interest will be those features which impinge upon the characterisation of Jonah, and whether he is rightly to be understood as a good guy or a bad guy. My *modus operandi* here is to follow the narrative sequence of Jonah, dealing synthetically with the aspects of plot movement, identification of opponents, plot type, stock forms, and those stylistic elements which have direct bearing upon plot.

4.6(b) Emplotment sequence in Jonah

4.6(b)i Opening 1:1-2

The book of Jonah commences in *medias res* with a WAYYIQTOL construction (יָרָה). No expositional information is provided concerning setting, either spatially or temporally. Thus it presumes continuity with the narrative world of the biblical intratext. The familiar stock phrase, נָשַׁב לְכוּ נַעֲרֵי-ירָחָה אְלִילָה [לָאָמָרוּ]. [לָאָמָר] לַאֲמָר further implies that readers are dealing more specifically with the impartation of a divine message through a prophetic figure. In the Twelve, the identical construction opens Hosea, Joel, and Zephaniah (with very similar variants

Hebrew Bible, I retain the position that authors (and their subsequent editors) operated with some sort of canon consciousness.

195 Dyck (1986) has already pursued a canonical interpretation of Jonah, and others have sought to view the Book of the Twelve as an integrated whole (e.g. Schneider 1979 and House 1990). In my estimation, this work of the Twelve is still for the most part in its early stages, though it holds promise. For example, I see a few intriguing connections between Obadiah and Jonah. In both books, the prophecy concerns a foreign nation (Edom, as opposed to Nineveh) rather than Israel or Judah directly (the other book within the Twelve which focuses upon another nation is Nahum, which like Jonah is about Nineveh). One of the reasons cited for judgment of Edom is *violence* (Obadiah 10 פֹּלֶת), of which the Ninevites were also guilty (Jonah 3:8 פֹּלֶת). The Edomites are also guilty of standing aloof from the city of Jerusalem, gloating on the day of the destruction of its inhabitants (Obadiah 11-12), which is precisely what Jonah intends to do in relation to the city of Nineveh (Jonah 4). Through this juxtaposition, the Israelite prophet Jonah stands equally guilty alongside a particularly-hated group of pagan gentiles, a motif seen in the book of Jonah. In another example, Hosea 11:11 describes Israel as being like a ‘dove’ (יְהוָה) from Assyria, and in the same context (12:1) there is a collocation of several other elements found in Jonah: Ephraim (representing Israel) pursues the east wind, multiplies violence, and makes a treaty with Assyria. Taking just these three passages, I would suggest that Jonah (Israel) is guilty not only of covenant unfaithfulness, but is guilty even when judged according to the lower, strictly humanitarian standards to which God holds pagan nations. The parallels I see here are suggestive, and in my estimation warrant further exploration. Another, broader implication of observations such as these is that the Twelve does in fact form a larger, coherent intratext, which also presumes upon an intratexual knowledge of Torah.

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opening Micah, Haggai, and Malachi). Moreover, two characters are introduced who will assume the roles of protagonist and antagonist. Concerning Jonah, the reader learns only that he is the son of Amittai, providing the intratextual touchstone of 2 Kings 14:25. The net effect is that this book is indeed part of a larger whole of which the reader should be aware,¹⁹⁶ and with which the events are to be compared. Jonah is given a task, one which will become the defining element of the plot conflict between Yahweh and himself: to go to Nineveh and call out against it. This task constitutes the initial objective of Yahweh, and marks the startup of the book with kernel action which forces Jonah to respond.

Implicit in the words of Yahweh here in 1:2 is an incipient sub-plot (subsidiary storyline): Yahweh is aggrieved by the Ninevite wickedness, that is, there is a conflict between Yahweh and Nineveh: God cannot stand their wickedness.

4.6(b)ii Incitement 1:3-4a

A reader conversant with the conventions of biblical narratives might recognise a stereotyped situation here. In intratextual parallels, God commissions someone to a particular task.¹⁹⁷ In the typical pattern, (1) Yahweh gives a command to a particular person, (2) the person raises objections based on their inadequacies, (3) Yahweh reassures them of his presence and power, (4) a prediction concerning the success of the ministry is given, (5) the person obeys, and success is granted. But here in Jonah, the pattern is disrupted at the outset. Rather than encountering the usual protestations with Yahweh over the would-be prophet’s unworthiness to the task, Jonah offers no verbal response. (Regardless of whether or not the others’ protest is

¹⁹⁶ There are implications for authorial intentionality when the books of the Hebrew Bible are seen as constitutive of a larger metanarrative. Emergent studies have begun to address this issue (e.g. Sheppard [1980], Freedman [1991], Dempster [1997a, 1997b], Sallam [2000] and the theme of the annual theology conference hosted at Wheaton College [April 2000]), yet this aspect also merits further attention.
justifiable, they do in fact establish a norm from which Jonah departs. Jonah wordlessly arises in order to flee in another direction, in effect not only running from God, but also running from the narrative protocol to argue about it. This action initiates the conflict between Jonah and Yahweh. Jonah too has an initial objective: to escape his commission. He chooses to do so by embarking on a journey in a quest to escape. His opponent is Yahweh. Because the narrator now traces Jonah’s flight to Joppa, to the ship, and on out to sea, the narrator trains the reader’s attention on his movements, with the result that Jonah emerges as the main storyline figure, that is, the protagonist. Jonah shows his resolve to flee not only by his choice of transportation, but also by his willingness to pay the fare. The reader here encounters a narrative gap: the reader wonders what motivated Jonah to flee rather than obey. Nationalism? Xenophobia? Antiauthoritarianism? Fear of personal assault? Fear of leaving the familiar? Fear of lending assistance to the enemy? Doubts concerning the trustworthiness of the message? Suspicion of being labeled a false prophet? Fear of contact with gentiles? With the violently wicked? The narrator provides no information at this juncture, leaving readers to their own inferences.198

In response to Jonah’s nonverbal answer, Yahweh reciprocates nonverbally by hurling a great wind upon the sea. With this action, the die is now cast for the rest of the book: Jonah is the protagonist, while Yahweh is the antagonist, responding to Jonah’s moves; indeed all of Yahweh’s actions henceforth will form a responsive counterpoint to human action. When Jonah speaks to God, God answers verbally. When Jonah eschews verbal communication in favor of

197Abraham (Genesis 15; 17; 18:1-15), Moses (Exodus 3), Gideon (Judges 6), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1).

198The construction of these interpretive inferences into a more comprehensive model or Gestalt for the entire work is a process described by various terms: concretisation or blank-filling (Iser 1974), paradigms (Kuhn [1962]1970), schema organisation (cognitive science, e.g Crawford and Chaffin 1986) and gaming (Brums 1980).
action, Yahweh follows suit by acting in lieu of speaking. Thus this entire section involves *kernel* action.

4.6(b)iii Escalation 1:4b-13

This next unit is signaled by a נ, elsewhere in the book an episodic divider (1:1; 2:1[1:17]; 3:1). The conflict is intensified (a movement of *deterioration*) by the great storm and the threat of shipwreck. In this segment the narrator shifts the attention to the sailors, providing another *subsidiary storyline*: the sailors’ *objective* is to survive the storm. They (including the captain) are the subject of main verbs in the narrative fourteen times to Jonah’s five; their speech contains fifteen independent clauses, while Jonah’s speech only five. Thus while Jonah remains the *protagonist*, his *opponents* mount: Yahweh (implied throughout but made explicit in the aside of 1:10), nature in the form of a great storm,\(^{199}\) and increasingly the sailors, who have no desire to oppose him, but who nevertheless are constrained to confront him. Their frenzied activity in saving the ship, themselves and Jonah stands in bold relief to Jonah’s passivity. Their good faith efforts to spare Jonah contrast with Jonah, who appears unconcerned about the jeopardy into which he has placed them. Nor does he respond to them (either not answering or giving non-answers) or to the circumstances appropriately. The tension *escalates* as the situation *deteriorates*—the storm continues to rage, the sailors strive against their apparent *opponents* (the storm, until they realise that *God* is behind the storm, 1:10, and Jonah who is the cause of their peril), and Jonah remains determined to succeed in his *objective* to escape. There exists a point/counterpoint relationship between the actions of the sailors versus those of Jonah, the activities of each contrasted more starkly by their close juxtaposition.

\(^{199}\) יְמִימָנָה, as Jonah and the narrator describe it in 1:4,11,12,13, or a great evil (נָבַע) as the sailors describe it in 1:7,8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAILORS</th>
<th>JONAH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>goes down to inmost parts of the ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cry out to their gods</td>
<td>lays down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurl utensils into the sea</td>
<td>falls into a deep sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain comes to Jonah</td>
<td>[no response]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain confronts Jonah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailors discuss casting lots</td>
<td>responds to (doesn’t answer) sailors’ questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast lots</td>
<td>[no response]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailors interrogate Jonah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Fear a great fear             | answers sailors’ question (putting responsi-
| Ask Jonah another question    |    bility for action on them)               |
| Ask Jonah yet another question|                                            |
| Row toward shore in vain      |                                            |

Their proactive movements are met with and matched by Jonah’s passivity and inactive responses.

Although Yahweh is the prime source of opposition to Jonah in this section, he is not the subject of any storyline verb: the sailors appear to act in high-speed motion, Jonah in slow motion, and Yahweh remains mute. Yahweh’s original commissioning words to Jonah, however, continue to reverberate at the surface level as the captain commands Jonah to arise (נָעֵל) and call out (יָצָא), the first and third imperative verbs of Yahweh’s initial commands to Jonah. Meanwhile the second commissioning verb, go (לָנֵל), echoes from the lips of the sailors as they discuss casting lots over Jonah. *Humor* appears in the form of farce (e.g., an unperturbed Jonah calmly ‘fearing’ the maker of the sea and the dry ground while fleeing from him). In a moment of *dramatic irony*, the sailors discover what the reader already knows: Jonah is the guilty party responsible for visiting upon them the calamitous storm. Their burst of five, abrupt, redundant questions serve to set a tone of urgency more than to advance the action. Jonah’s
response, by contrast, is lengthy, formal and pious-sounding. Throughout this section the storyline is broken up by the interpositions of dialogue (the only two-way conversations in the book prior to chapter four) and catalyst statements in which the narrator provides explanations. The growing opposition between Jonah and the sailors takes an ironic twist when Jonah informs them that they need only hurl him to the sea in order to be saved, and they oppose him by trying their utmost to return (נָשַׁנַּן) him to dry ground. Throughout this section suspense builds as a result of these interpositions, and the conflict escalates through the multiplication of Jonah’s opponents (God, nature, the sailors), through the panicky speech and activities of the sailors, and by the two principal parties (Jonah and Yahweh) not being on speaking terms.

4.6(b)iv Peak 1:14-15b

The subsidiary storyline (i.e. the sailors versus the Yahweh-induced storm and the sailors versus Jonah) reaches its peak as the sailors finally face the futility of their efforts, and turn to Yahweh in petitionary prayer, imploring him not to hold them culpable for Jonah’s death. The phasing and length of the prayer, in contrast to all the previous speech of the sailors, draws out the suspense further. Then, in a dramatic moment of kernel action they lift up (נָשַׁנַּן) Jonah, momentarily reversing his downward trend (ץִיאַת) throughout the chapter, and hurl him to the sea. The decisive action is taken on their part to solve the problem of the storm/evil at sea.

4.6(b)v Resolution 1:15c-1:17a[2:1a]

Immediately thereafter the sea stops its storming, defusing the immediate tension of the threat of shipwreck and drowning, a resolution of conflict through immediate improvement. They have reached their objective to survive the storm, and thus the subsidiary storyline ending fits the plot type of a comedy. The focus lingers on the sailors, rather than immediately
following Jonah overboard. They respond in superlative awe: fearing a great fear toward Yahweh (on the ‘growth’ of their fear, see Magonet 1983:32), sacrificing sacrifices and vowing vows to Yahweh. It is now possible to see this subsidiary storyline as conforming to the stock plot convention of a conversion. The sailors have undergone a metamorphosis of character in that they have become Yahweh worshipers who pray, make vows and offer sacrifices to the God of the Hebrews, the one who ‘made the sea and the dry ground’ and who calmed the great storm that had fallen upon them.

Meanwhile (?)—there is no hesitation in action—Jonah is swallowed by a great fish. With the attention now back on Jonah, the main storyline is resumed. Were the story to end here, the plot form would be that of retribution—the protagonist Jonah is a disobedient fugitive who justly meets his end—death by digestion. Jonah would have failed to reach his objective, to escape the commission (and live through it), pointing toward a tragedy. And the antagonist Yahweh would also have failed to reach his objective to send Jonah to ‘call out’ to the Ninevites. This would provide a satisfactory ending to the main storyline, albeit a tragic ending for all but the sailors.

There are those who, in effect, do end the book here. Those who see the main point of the book of Jonah as being, ‘God punishes the disobedient,’ or ‘Don’t try to run away from God’ see Jonah as a bad guy who gets what is coming to him.’ In so doing, they fail to respect the larger narrative plot structure, hence prematurely misidentifying both the plot type (tragic) and plot form (failed journey/quest).\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{200}While thankfully I am unaware of any published scholars reaching this conclusion, I have heard messages in churches that strive to make this point as the main point of the book.

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The next text segment is again demarcated by the use of ‘겠’, that is, neither at the chapter division followed by the English Bibles nor the division followed in the BHS and Ralph’s Septuaginta, but halfway between them. The phrase, ‘and Jonah was in the insides of the fish three days and three nights’ does not provide resolution, though it subtly does refuel conflict. This section serves as a catalyst which amplifies his pre-fish experience in the sea, maintains his duration in the fish, and delays the upcoming kernel event: ‘What did he do after the three days and three nights?’

It is at this point that interpreters again frequently part ways. Many assume that the prayerful song indicates Jonah’s contrition and his desire to be reconciled with God. The Jonah-as-Pinocchio and Jonah-as-Reluctant-Missionary models view this episode as a kind of penultimate repentance toward God: while there are still some issues in Jonah’s heart that need divine wisdom and action in order to be wholly purged (hence chapters three and four), Jonah here ‘comes to his senses’ and realises his need to follow God.\(^{201}\) In this prayer Jonah initiates his return to Yahweh, and thus his expulsion onto dry ground is the reward given to one of ‘those who diligently seek him.’ On the other hand, others (especially Jonah-as-Prometheus and Jonah-as-Fall-Guy) maintain the opposite: Jonah’s prayer is so unbelievably ill-suited to his situation as to be farcical, betraying either Jonah’s insentience or worse, a tongue-in-cheek charade intended

\(^{201}\) Campbell ([1949]1968:90-95,219), whose archetypal analysis of mythical characters and plots is grounded in psychoanalytic theory, identifies various myths sharing a common plot element of the hero swallowed by a monster, later to re-emerge with new insight, power or privilege. Included among these are native American, Eskimo, Zulu, Irish, German, Polynesian and Greek tales. Although he does not discuss Jonah per se, the chapter is entitled “In the belly of the whale,” and contains an illustration of Jonah being cast into the fish. Without entering here into a full discussion of psychoanalysis or comparative religion, it is noteworthy that his work lends further credence to my position regarding common plot strategies or forms shared and recognised on a broad scale. He also notes (101) that ‘if anyone—in whatever society—undertakes for himself [sic] the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his [sic] own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself [sic] in a landscape of symbolical figures…. [T]his is the second stage of the Way,
to bribe God, or even to mock him through pretentious piety. It is here that narrative
conventions can pave a way ahead in arbitrating between these opposing views.

In a comparatively lengthy narrative freeze, the storyline is paused for Jonah’s song of
thanksgiving, prayed to Yahweh while Jonah is ensconced within the great fish. With the
author’s (or an editor’s ?) permission, Jonah in effect takes over the narrator’s job, giving a first-
person account of what followed his being thrown overboard. Curiously, Jonah makes no
mention of the fish or of being swallowed, yet his rescue from the sea is clearly implied in what
he terms as his ‘ascension from the pit’ (2:6[2:7]). Instead, Jonah elaborates in ‘gushing’ terms
on his trauma in the sea, the (alleged) events of which must be inserted temporally between
1:15a and 1:17. The incongruity of a man singing from inside a fish adds another humorous
element.

As Jonah traces his descent into the sea/grave, the tension inversely heightens
(deterioration). It reaches its apex just as Jonah reaches his nether world. The reversal comes as
Jonah says, ‘but you made my life ascend from the pit’ (2:6b[2:7b]). Jonah’s ostensible rescue is
here announced—from the sea, that is, leaving the narrative gap concerning his piscatorial plight.
Consistent with his Tendenz thus far, it is not Jonah who willingly reverses his direction, but the
direct intervention of Yahweh who causes him to ascend. Generalising statements about God’s
goodness to all of his own (2:8-9[2:9-10]) follows his description of salvation from
circumstances, which conforms to the form of a thanksgiving psalm. Other gaps are also created
in this section: Why does Jonah pray a song of thanksgiving while inside the belly of the fish?
Why does his song fail to mention his sin, disobedience, repentance, or especially a very
understandable request for salvation from the great fish? Why is the prayer mostly a collection

that of the “purification of the self,” when the senses are “cleansed and humbled,” and the energies and interests
“concentrated upon transcendental things.”

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of quotes from the Psalter rather than his own words?\textsuperscript{202} What vow did he make that he now promises to fulfill, and how can he while yet inside the fish?

Some of the lines of Jonah’s psalm \textit{parallel} individual verses found in the Psalms. Jonah 2:4b is identical to Psalm 42:8: ‘all your breakers and waves swept over me.’ Other lines are comparable: e.g. 2:3 with Psalm 120:1; 2:5a with 31:23; 2:6 with 69:2; 2:7 with 103:4; 2:9 with 31:7; 2:10 with 3:9. Given his extreme situation, an unoriginal pastiche of others’ words suggests a hollowness and inauthenticity.

Many scholars have noted the impropriety of the song within its context. Formally, a song of thanksgiving in the throes of ostensibly certain acid death evinces solecism. What readers ought to expect is confession and repentance and a plea for salvation in the most urgent way, but this jejune prayer lacks any mention of Jonah’s sin, repentance or his current desperate plight. This problem has been noted by many scholars, and is reflected here in a few representative comments.

A drowning man does not recite psalms, describe the ocean’s canyons, or complain that he has been wreathed in a turban of seaweed. And to be sure, he is too busy praying for help to bribe the Deity with a hymn of praise recounting past beneficence or with vows pledging future sacrifices.

(Brichto 1992:73)

Jonah’s Psalm is astonishing because it ignores the essential issue between the prophet and God: Jonah’s refusal of a prophetic commission.

(Watts 1995:145)

\textsuperscript{202} In another case of \textit{humor}, what was originally figurative in the psalms become literal for Jonah. As Mather (1982:284) puts it ‘Because the psalm is intoned from the belly of the fish, its moving, metaphorical language is burlesqued by being rendered literal’; that is, Jonah’s situation is not \textit{like} being overwhelmed with deep waters (as it is for the psalmist), but he actually \textit{is} being overwhelmed by deep waters.
[A] psalm of thanksgiving would not only seem to be out of character for Jonah, it would also be inappropriate before his rescue.

(Marcus 1995:111)

All in all, therefore, this song is better fitted for the temple than for the fish’s belly.

(Wolff 1986:129)

One solution to the psalm’s inappropriateness is that it is not authentic to the book, but was placed here by a later editor (e.g. see Truble 1963:75-82; Eissfeldt 1965:406). Brichto (1992:73) counters this solution: ‘To suppose that so inapropriate a hymn was borrowed or composed for insertion is simply to solve the conundrum of a narrator’s idiocy by attributing that idiocy to a supposed editor.’ It still does not account for why it is found here. Another suggestion is that the psalm was originally placed after the narrative of Jonah’s expulsion in 2:10[2:11], but has subsequently been ‘misplaced’ (so Bewer 1912:21-24), but this proposal is entirely lacking in textual support from either manuscripts or the ancient versions (as well shifting the idiocy to an unknown, pre-septuagintal scribe and all of his subsequent proofreaders and readers).

Numerous scholars have contested such proposals, arguing that its inclusion and placement here enhances the book both stylistically and conceptually.²⁰³ Preference should be given to retaining its position, noting several factors. First, Jonah is claiming to be rescued from

²⁰³ Landes (1967a:3-31) argues that the psalm’s structure and placement are intended to parallel Jonah 4, and especially Jonah’s prayer in 4:2-3, the song serving the purpose of providing special emphasis. Thus in his judgment (:29) ‘the Jonah psalm is integral to the whole...mak[ing] an essential contribution to the thought and message of the entire work.’ Welmar (1984:43-68) argues for its (double-redacted) inclusion on the basis of Stichwortrepetitionen, chiastic narrative framework (erzählender Rahmen), and both literary and theological considerations. Brenner’s (1993:183-192) defense of the inclusion of the psalm is grounded in his conviction that apparent incongruities dissipate when it is correctly read as ironic. Craig (1993:73-82) maintains that the song serves a ‘highly sophisticated narrative strategy’ (:82) which has deliberately introduced and sustained interpretive gaps, propelling the reader toward the final, crucial scene at the end of the book. Examples could be multiplied, but these are illustrative of attempts to defend its in situ placement within the narrative.
the sea, not the fish: the great fish is the *deus ex machina* of Jonah’s deliverance from drowning. Indeed, as presented here the great fish ‘has had to swim right down death’s throat to get him’ (Dennis 1991:144). Second, this narrative *gap* occasions a rekindling (*escalation*) of plot conflict: Why would anyone sing a song of *thanksgiving* while inside a fish? By providing insufficient information here, the author incites the reader into more active attention in order to make sense of this incredibly improbable and baffling turn of events. Third, in filling this gap without recourse to alleged layering of discrete compositional sources, the most convincing explanation is that these words are intended to be taken *satirically* and *ironically* (e.g. Miles 1975:173-175; Holbert 1981:70-75). Taken as an amalgam of insincere and perfunctory clichés, the prayer becomes the ‘high-water mark’ of an already satiric book. In the words of Jones (1995:151), ‘It is legitimate...to interpret Jonah’s prayer in 2:3-10 to be the surpassing irony in a book that is marked through and through by ironic and incongruous features.’ Fourth, the psalm prepares and shapes readers’ anticipation for what will happen later in the story—a set-up for the subsequent narrative in chapter four. Watts (1995:145) elaborates on this point:

The psalm is used in a subtle manner to draw out the readers’ sympathies for Jonah’s predicament at sea, by playing on the expectation that the psalm’s presence marks the climax and immediate resolution of the story’s main conflict. The sympathies thus engendered remain after this expectation has been disappointed, thereby leaving readers vulnerable to the implications of the book’s quite different climax two chapters later.

Finally, and in my judgment most convincing, is the fact that if the poem is taken ironically, the ‘salvation’ that Jonah sings about is not from death at sea. Nor is it from the fish, which he somehow overlooks (!) in his thanksgiving (and from which he has *not* been delivered at this point). So what has he been saved from? Incarcerated as he is in the fish’s belly he is now ‘safe’ in protective amnesty from his mission to Nineveh. Jonah’s *initial objective*, to escape his commission, is successful as long as he remains in the fish. After a botched attempt to escape to
Tarshish, Jonah had thought his last recourse in avoiding his commission was death by drowning (1:12), but Yahweh had provided an alternative more remote than even Tarshish, surely precluding any opportunity to preach to Ninevites. Just as Jonah remained unafraid during the storm (in the ‘belly’ of the ship), so now he appears unafraid in the belly of the fish. Thus understood, at Jonah’s pontification that ‘salvation belongs to Yahweh!’ even the fish can no longer stomach him, and he is summarily and indecorously evicted from his gastric haven.

The ill-suitedness (off-beat) nature of this song of thanksgiving certainly promotes interpretive blank filling. So at this point once again it is possible to hold up the seven interpretive positions introduced in chapter one and to postulate how each might tend to handle the prayer of Jonah.

- Pinocchio—Jonah is assumed to have repented sincerely, if not wholly (yet).
- Psychotic—Jonah displays a fragmented personality, whose efforts at prayer here are symptomatic of his unhealthiness.
- Prometheus—Jonah’s prayer is a temporary concession to his overwhelming deity, but he vindicates himself by re-exerting his self-will in chapter four,
- Fall guy—Jonah’s prayer is the reasonable response of one who has been backed into a corner, duly pious but somewhat grudging.
- Patriot—Again, though outwardly compliant in the prayer, the seeds for a ‘plan b’ are already fomenting.
- Prophet—Jonah’s prayer is half-hearted, stating more than he really feels.
- Missionary—Jonah is fully repentant, willingly acquiescing to God’s will for his life.
In each case, something must be done to fit the prayer into (or in some cases, exclude it from) the overall scope of the book. Whether one ultimately sees this prayer as inauthentic, as sincere, or as ironic both contributes to and depends upon the larger interpretive model with which the reader operates.

4.6(b)vii Resolution 2:10[2:11]

The resolution segment is indicated by the change in literary form with the resumption of storyline narrative in a wayyiqtol construction (YHWH). Yahweh commands the fish to evacuate Jonah onto dry ground. Jonah is thus delivered from mortal danger (perhaps even more saved than he wants to be!). Were the story to end here, it potentially could provide a (somewhat) satisfactory resolution. The interpreter would need to view Jonah’s thanksgiving song as sincere, and fill the interpretive gap of the inappropriateness of the psalm with an implied repentance, taking his vow as his intent to obey God henceforth. The stock form of the plot would be that of conversion, and the plot type would be comedic because while Jonah has failed in his initial objective to escape his commission, he has experienced a change of heart and mind and has a new objective in its place: to obey God. In this scenario Jonah would be viewed as a bad guy turned good, and his repentance serves as a model to all those who likewise have brought self-induced suffering upon themselves by attempting to run from God. The main point of the book would be that ‘God forgives and saves those who repent’ (sailors and Jonah alike).

This characterisation founders on several points, however. First, Yahweh’s initial objective is overlooked: Jonah as yet has still not spoken to Nineveh. At worst, this means that God failed; at best, he has yet to succeed. Secondly, it reads repentance into a narrative where it does not exist. Jonah never owns up to his sin, and in fact his opposition to Yahweh is heightened when he attributes being thrown in the sea, not to the sailors, but to God (2:3[4]).

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Thirdly, it overlooks the fact that Jonah doesn’t petition for salvation from the fish. Jonah is glad to be saved from the sea, but the narrative does not state that he wants to be saved from the fish. Indeed, the ‘holy temple’ that Jonah anticipates is more likely the heavenly temple (cf Micah 1:2-3) of his presumed afterlife than the temple in Jerusalem.

4.6(b)viii Incitement 3:1-4

However, the story moves immediately to Jonah’s recommissioning in words parallel to 1:1-2. In retrospect, Jonah is back to ‘square one’: the first two chapters comprise a detour from the main line of divine intention and human execution (see Kort 1988:35), while this passage is a return to the start. The same three commissioning verbs are employed by Yahweh (םרמ, תב and נָּעַרְ). At the surface level, Jonah immediately obeys the first two verbs, arising (םרמ) and going (תב) to Nineveh. Here there is kernel action, Jonah is confronted with a choice either to flee once again or to obey, choosing the latter. Ostensibly, he has a new initial objective, viz to obey God’s commission. Yahweh’s initial objective is retained: he desires to send Jonah to Nineveh to deliver a message. The main storyline is then interrupted before indicating Jonah’s obedience to the third command. The narrator makes two catalyst expository comments: (1) ‘according to the word of Yahweh’—reinforcing the reader’s impression of Jonah’s willingness to comply and (2) ‘and Nineveh was a great city to God—a going of three days.’ The explanation of its size, measured here not spatially but temporally, prepares the reader for the

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204 That Jonah is a two-part book is widely recognised. Not only does the recommissioning (3:1-2) parallel the original commissioning (1:1-2), but subsequent actions as well: Jonah responds by arising, a pagan group is implicated and threatened by his presence, the pagans cry out to God, a spokesman for the pagans verbalises a speculation concerning the possibility of not perishing by turning to God, the pagans are not destroyed, Jonah prays an improbable prayer, Jonah’s prayer contains quoted material from elsewhere in the canon, Jonah’s life is imperiled, Yahweh bestows on Jonah his favor. These parallels could be developed in much more detail, but do point to an overall structural pattern to the plot.
next point of conflict: ‘And Jonah began to enter into the city a going of one day (יְנוֹחֵי יְרוֹמֵה). The two intrusions, followed by this construction, heighten suspense.

The proclamation that Jonah makes in 3:4 implies that Yahweh’s objective is reached and thus indicates an improvement. But the message Jonah delivers incites conflict on several planes. First, the pronouncement brings Nineveh into conflict with their impending doom. Readers already know that the Ninevites’ opponent, that is, the one causing their destruction, is Yahweh (1:2). This conflict between Yahweh and the Ninevites was established at the outset of the story but only now is resurfacing. Secondly, there is an implied opposition between Jonah and the Ninevites. The herald of bad fortune is in a risky business: as McCarthy and Riley (1986:115) put it, ‘If it is true that good news never sold newspapers, then it is equally true that bad forecasts never made prophets popular.’ Third, the content of his oracle is problematical. It simply does not ‘scan’ like any other prophetic oracle encountered elsewhere in the biblical text. It is truncated beyond credulity, a mere five words in the Masoretic Text; it makes no mention of Yahweh; no reasons whatsoever are cited for the impending destruction; there is no call to repentance; it leaves no opening at all for conditionality. Trible (1963:220) accurately points out that Jonah’s ‘message has no classical introduction, such as “thus says the Lord”; it is not concluded by a stylistic formula such as “oracle of Yahweh.” In other words, this utterance does not partake of the elements of a standard Botenspruch.’ Moreover, while the reader learns that Jonah ‘went to Nineveh according to the word of Yahweh,’ there is no indication from the narrator that he did in fact deliver ‘to it the message I [Yahweh] spoke to you [Jonah]’ (3:2). In light of the previous observation, the reader should entertain the possibility (which is lent even greater weight in the following narrative) that there is a continuing conflict (escalation) between the protagonist Jonah and the antagonist Yahweh: did he say what he was supposed to? The
reader’s suspicions may be further raised by Jonah’s use of the ambiguous term דנין (which may mean either destroy or overturn) rather than the expected and unambiguous term רבע. Did Jonah intend a double entendre with the term דנין? Thus readers may continue to wonder whether Jonah has fulfilled God’s mission, or his own (see Dennis 1991:147).

4.6(b)i Escalation 3:5-9

In this section the focus turns to the Ninevites, introducing a new subsidiary storyline. Their situation has deteriorated in the face of impending doom. Because Jonah has not informed them of the source of his message, they are left to infer their opponent: God (יהוה). Against all probabilities, and in unprecedented measure, the Ninevites repent in toto. By turning away from their wicked ways and humbling themselves to humorously hyperbolic proportions (even the cattle wear sackcloth in remorse), an unexpected conflict arises (escalation). In a kernel event, Yahweh is forced into a decision. Can he justifiably retain his opposition toward the Ninevites when they forsake their evil ways and violence? Whereas before Yahweh had a problem with the Ninevites’ wickedness, now the problem is what to do with them when they are no longer wicked.

An additional conflict (escalation) also occurs here in the form of a narrative gap. How is it possible to account for the greatest corporate turning to God to take place among a people not chosen by him, and based on such flimsy grounds as Jonah’s paltry ‘sermon’? Others have

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205 I have discussed this elsewhere: see Lubeck (1988). There I also address the question of whether it is the narrator or Jonah who employs the double entendre, favoring the latter.

206 Rashi’s commentary on 3:4 mentions the existence of this interpretation, that the term is equivocal, meaning either ‘overthrown’ or ‘transformed,’ and because of Nineveh’s repentance the latter meaning came true.

207 Perhaps the question will arise as to whether Jonah’s actual message here has been greatly abridged by the author, that what is recorded here is merely the overall theme or gist of his proclamation. My answer would be to reassert that my field of interpretive interest has to do specifically with understanding Jonah as a text. Rimmon-Kenan (1983:3-4; herself following Genette 1972:71-76) is helpful here. She presents the following threefold
noted this feature of the story. According to Fretheim (1977:108-109), Jonah’s message revealed ‘little effort, poor skills, a terrible sermon—and total success.’ In like manner, Hyers (1987:104) remarks that the ‘world’s shortest and poorest sermon becomes the world’s most successful sermon’—a humorous incongruity.

Several other features contribute to the growing tension (escalation) in this section. The king’s pronouncement interrupts the subsidiary storyline; it is a catalyst which delays the response of God to the Ninevites’ repentance (according to 3:5, every one of them had already repented before the edict was issued)—there is suspense in reading the edict while waiting to find out what will happen next. Several humorous elements also appear here: burlesque (e.g. the king asserting his authority by magniloquently commanding the people to do what they are already doing) and a(n unintended?) pun (3:7 רָעְשָׁה יִרְעַה ‘pasture’ / רָעְשָׁה ‘be evil.’

Additionally, verses 7-9 (the edict) are redundant. As I pointed out in the discussion of temporal features (chapter two), the passage contains alternation, the juxtaposition of simultaneous actions: first the people’s response, then the king’s. Other than to spread the net of repentance further by mandating that not just the people but also the cattle must repent (!), there is little informativity, and it is this delay which facilitates suspense. The tension is also heightened through parallel: the king speaks from among his people just as the captain did in chapter one. Further, their language is similar:

classification of basic aspects of narrative texts. Story (Genette histoire) is a succession of events and the participants, text (Genette récit) is a specific spoken or written discourse which tells the story, narration (Genette narration) refers to a particular perspective within that text: the narrator is an implied communicator (real or imagined as part of the narrative world) from whose angle the story is told. Rimmon-Kenan (4,6) then rightly points out that of these three, ‘the text is the only one directly available to the reader… Indeed, since the text is the only observable and object-like aspect of verbal narrative, it would seem to make sense to take it as the anchoring-point for any discussion of the other aspects’ (emphasis hers). Thus to choose to focus upon the text at hand (rather than speculating on how the story might have been different in the ostensive world, or upon how earlier readers may have filled in the blank) with the goal of textual understanding is, in my estimation, warranted.
captain (1:6)

'May the God will notice us, and we will not be destroyed.'

king (3:9)

'Who knows? The God may repent and he may have compassion and he may repent from his burning anger and we will not be destroyed.'

Because the captain's 'maybe' was answered by the sailors' deliverance in chapter one, there is warrant then to suspect that the 'who knows?' of the king may likewise be answered with deliverance. But whereas the sailors are innocent of evil (so far as the reader knows), clearly the Ninevites are guilty. Can repentance alone suffice in reversing the consequences of their wickedness? Abraham had unsuccessfully pled that the Sodomites be spared on the basis of the possibility that there might be a few (ten) righteous ones among the population, because he couldn't find even that amount. But the possibility that they might earn a reprieve through repentance was never suggested. What is intimated here represents a revolutionary concept: that repentance will turn away God's hand of judgment (see Tigay 1985-1986:74).

4.6(b)x Peak 3:10a-b and Resolution 3:10b

The subsidiary storyline peak is narratively indicated by the end of the king's quoted speech and the resumption of storyline with WAYYIQTOL verbal forms. In response to the Ninevites' 'turning from their evil ways' (השׂבע מִמָּרְכְּךָ), God withholds his own threatened 'evil' (נָשָׁע). The conflict between the Ninevites and God is thus ameliorated (improvement).

The message of the efficacy of human repentance and the contingency of God's mercy and judgment finds parallels elsewhere in the latter prophets. This message, resisted by Jonah but tacitly asserted by Jonah's biographer, finds its expression in Ezekiel 18:23: 'Do I take any
pleasure in the death of the wicked?” declares sovereign Yahweh. “Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” Jonah provides a narrative example of this very claim. Many verbal affinities tie Jonah to Jeremiah 18:7-10:

If at any time I speak against (דיבר על) a people or kingdom in order to uproot, and to tear down and to destroy (אבן), and that people repent (שוחב) of their evil (רעה) that I spoke against (דיבר על) them, then I will have compassion (נחמה) concerning the evil (רעה) that I thought (חשבתי) to do (עשת) to them. And if another time I speak about (לע) a people or a kingdom in order to build up and to plant and they do (עש) evil (רעה) in my eyes, not obeying my voice, I will reconsider ( gridView) concerning the good (טוב) that I said (אמר) to do good ( טוב) to them.

Likewise Joel 2:12-14 shows marked verbal correspondence with Jonah:

Repent (שוחב) to me with all of your heart and with fasting (עמא) and with weeping and with mourning. Tear your hearts and not your garments and repen/return (שוהב) to Yahweh your God for he is gracious (חנן) and compassionate (נורא), long to anger (לארך) and abounding in loyal love (לא אולא) and he has compassion (جمال) from the evil (אלהי). Who knows (מי ידעת)? He may repent (שוחב) and he may have pity (ישלח)...

The irony here of course is that these terms are used with relation to the covenant nation of Israel, whereas here in Jonah all of these are applied to the gentile Ninevites.

Several gaps appear here as well. Since Jonah’s prophecy was not fulfilled in the sense of Ninevah being destroyed within forty days, is he a false prophet? Is God implicated in falsehood by reversing his position toward the Ninevites?
Were the story to end here, the ending would be somewhat abrupt but quite satisfactory: the conflict between God and the Ninevites resolved, the conflict between Jonah and the Ninevites having failed to materialise due to their positive reception of his message, and the conflict between Yahweh and Jonah resolved in that Jonah obeyed and Yahweh blessed his ‘ministry.’ The subsidiary plot involving the Ninevites would fall into the stock form of conversion. It would also fit into the plot type of comedy, since the Ninevites would have reached their objective of avoiding the judgment. The main storyline involving the protagonist Jonah would also be labeled a conversion, provided that one interprets Jonah’s message to be faithfully delivered. If that were the case, then Jonah’s revised objective of obeying Yahweh’s commission would be successfully reached, as well as Yahweh’s initial objective of having Jonah bring his message to the Ninevites. The main message of the book might be ‘God grants people second chances’ (exemplified in both the cases of the Ninevites and Jonah), or ‘God saves those who repent’ (based on the sailors, the Ninevites, and Jonah).

Yet this interpretative model also has its problems. It assumes that Jonah’s prayer in chapter two indicates his repentance (see the discussion above under 2:10[11]). It further depends on Jonah delivering the message that Yahweh gave him against all the objections based on formal and contextual considerations. It would probably further assume that Jonah’s message was much longer than is recorded, that his ‘ministry’ was for the full three days rather than just the first, and that there was an implied or explicit conditionality to the message.

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209Tigay (1985-1986:72) observes that ‘when Saul sought to nullify God’s rejection of him by repenting of his sin, Samuel responded that “the Eternal of Israel neither lies nor renounces his plans, for he is not a man that he
4.6(b)xi Incitement 4:1

However, the narrative obviously continues with a resumption of the main storyline, focusing upon the protagonist Jonah. And it is from this point on that the various interpretations most significantly diverge. The narrator introduces another conflict immediately: that Yahweh should rescind his announced judgment upon the Ninevites is, from Jonah’s perspective, an ‘evil ... a great evil’ (רעים ... רעים). The conflict between Yahweh and Jonah is reignited (escalation), a deterioration of ‘great’ proportions. This turn forces interpreters to retrofit their interpretive models for what has already transpired. Clearly, to attribute to Jonah the new objective of the desire to obey Yahweh’s commission is wrong, for his successful achievement of that goal distresses him. A different objective needs to be postulated. I contend that his new objective in his recommissioning of 3:1-2 is to announce a death sentence upon the Ninevites which would ensure their irreversible doom. His angry response constitutes a kernel event for him, for he must choose to do something about his intolerable circumstances.

4.6(b)xii Escalation 4:2-7

In parallel with 2:1[2:2], Jonah prays. The first sentence is a question which flashes back to an earlier, narratively-suppressed scene: ‘O Yahweh, was this not my word [thought? רע] when I was still among my people?’ The reader did not encounter this exchange (it is possible to take רע here as Jonah’s unverbalised opinion). Here the reader learns that Jonah had suspected this eventuality from the outset. In the second sentence, he cites this as being the reason for his initial flight, though readers are still left with the gap concerning what his motivation is: why is the Ninevites’ conversion so reprehensible to him? He ‘proves’ his ‘I-knew-it-all-along’ should renounce his plans” (1 Samuel 15:29). Yet here is the Book of Jonah proclaiming with the very same Hebrew word that God does indeed renounce his threats!”

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excoriation of Yahweh by quoting from Exodus 34:6, formally making it a parallel passage. But here the quotation is contorted against its original purposes in such a staggering incongruity (perversely humorous) that it catches the reader quite by surprise, for it is predicated upon many strange leaps of logic. Marcus (1995:100) draws out some of the presuppositions on Jonah’s part:

But Jonah’s reasoning requires that a number of fantastic assumptions be made: that Jonah, a prophet from a far-away land, would be accepted and given a hearing in Nineveh; that Jonah’s god, the god of Israel, would be accorded greater prestige and prominence than Nineveh’s own gods, so much so that the message of this foreign god would be heeded without Jonah having to give any sign or act to support his threat; that Jonah’s message would be taken, not in the direct assertive manner in which it was delivered...but as a warning: ‘this will happen if Nineveh does not repent!’; that the repentance of the Ninevites would be universal and would have behind it the full support of the king of Nineveh; that God would then automatically forgive the Ninevites and desist from the punishment he had initially threatened. Every one of these assumptions would be considered ridiculous ... and would thus add to the overall comic effect.

Jonah follows up this brief but passionate outburst with a petition for Yahweh to take away his life, maintaining that his death is preferable to his life, given God’s disposition of ‘taking pity against the evil’ (גוניה). This escalation to dramatic proportions underscores the deterioration of the situation to satiric proportions. Jonah remains thoroughly opposed both to the Ninevites and to Yahweh. In this kernel event, he attempts to force Yahweh into action, just as he had done with the sailors, to take his life from him.

Yahweh responds to Jonah with spoken speech, making this the first dialogical exchange between them in the entire book: in chapter one, Yahweh commissioned Jonah but Jonah fails to give a verbal answer, in chapter two Jonah prays to Yahweh but Yahweh does not to give a verbal answer (probably due to the inaptness of the content of the prayer), in chapter three Yahweh recommissions Jonah but again there is no verbal exchange. This direct speech between Jonah and God serves as a contrast to the previous incommunicativeness, equivocation, and

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indirection\textsuperscript{210} of the initial three chapters. Yahweh challenges the appropriateness (יהוה) of Jonah’s request by questioning him. Presumably God is not seeking information here, but is using the question to force Jonah into a response (which will probably incriminate him). Furthermore, I do not take this as a rhetorical question, but one which expects a direct, verbal answer, i.e., it is a kernel event which puts the onus of responding back onto Jonah. But Jonah’s response (as in chapter one) is again nonverbal—he leaves. Departing eastward (see discussion under ‘setting’) from the city, he constructs a booth and waits to see what will happen. His action too is a kernel event in which he again attempts to force Yahweh into action on his terms.

Jonah stonewalls his deity, lapsing back into silent, passive aggression. In the words of Dennis (1991:152): ‘His actions speak louder than words. No speech of his could have conveyed with such force his refusal to face the reality of God’s forgiveness.’ A nonverbal battle ensues, with action carried on through WAYYIQTOL verbs taking the place of dialogue: ‘and he went out,’ ‘and he sat down,’ ‘and he made,’ ‘and he sat,’ ‘and he appointed [a qiqayôn],’ ‘and he was overjoyed,’ ‘and he caused it to arise,’ ‘and he appointed [a worm],’ ‘and it chewed,’ ‘and it dried,’ ‘and he appointed [a scorching east wind],’ ‘and it blazed.’ Through all of this is a continued deterioration of circumstances which escalates the conflict. God provides the miraculous qiqayôn plant, quite literally to overshadow Jonah’s efforts at providing shade for his own head in order to deliver him from his ‘evil’ (יהוה) state. Jonah’s mood dramatically swings as he is overjoyed with great joy; a case of humor born of absurdity (i.e., preposterously effusive joy over finding a shade). The shade also arrives as a surprising development, for it implies that God is still expressing divine favor upon Jonah despite the prophet’s petulance (an improvement of the situation). All of this action maintains the level of suspense, because while

\textsuperscript{210}By indirection here, what I have in mind specifically is the need to retrofit Jonah’s objective in the
the pace of the action moves quickly, the real issues of conflict have to do with the appropriateness of Jonah’s anger and of Yahweh’s freedom to show mercy, not with Jonah’s relative comfort.

In verse 7 the situation intensifies (deteriorates) further. The pleasant shade afforded by the plant turns out to be merely a brief reprieve, with greater suffering ahead. God dries up the qiqayôn by appointing a (voraciously hungry) worm, and the qiqayôn withers (םבר).²¹¹

4.6(b)xiii Peak 4:8-11

The final scene is demarcated by a temporal scenic change, dawn of the next day, introduced by the author’s preferred episodic milepost שָנָה. God turns up the heat with both a blazing sun and a scorching east wind. Jonah’s hugely excessive joy over the plant is reversed—he again wishes for his death (escalation and deterioration). Jonah finally breaks the stalemate of silence, in response to his unbearable circumstances (in parallel to his song in chapter two). Jonah repeats verbatim his last spoken words, ‘My death is good, more than my existing.’ In terms of plot development, it is as if readers should retrace their steps back to a fork in the road in order to explore the other alternative, this one having failed. Because the reader has been here before, a narrative déjà vu revisitation of verses three and four, s/he anticipates what God will say, although now there is an important addition: ‘Is it good—the burning within yourself about the vine?’ The principles for which Jonah is willing to die have greatly diminished in

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²¹¹ This particular term is associated with God’s judgment of people elsewhere in the prophets. In Isaiah 42:15 God says that he will dry up (שָׁבַר, bîr) both their rivers and their vegetation, and in an assymanal parallel in 42:17 he will shame (שָׂרְדָו וְשָׁבַר) those who trust in idols (cp Jonah 2:8). In Ezekiel 19:12 Israel is likened to a vine (מן) which the east wind (cp Jonah 4:8) shrivels (שָׁבַר). In Hosea 13:15, disobedient Israel is described as springs that are ‘dried up’ (שָׁבַר וְשָׂרְדָו) by an east wind, once again, from Yahweh. Likewise, in Joel 1:12 the vine (מן) is shriveled (שׂבַרְתָּם), representing God’s act of punishment upon his people. Drying up as an aspect of divine judgment is also found in Ezekiel 17:9; Hosea 9:16; Joel 1:20; Amos 1:2 (reading as שָׂרְדָו); 4:7; Nahum 1:4 et al. Here, then, God literally withers the vine/qiqayôn in an act of judgment upon his Hebrew spokesman, Jonah.
significance. Aviezer (1985:14) expresses it this way: ‘Jonah’s first death-wish is a consequence of his high standard of justice, whereas his second death-wish is a consequence of his personal comfort having been impinged upon’ (emphasis his).

This time, Jonah ‘honors’ God’s direct question with a response: he unswervingly maintains his own right to mortal dissatisfaction with God’s extension of mercy to the Ninevites (another humorous incongruity). That he should be on speaking terms with God might represent an improvement, but given what he expresses here, it is a further deterioration. The second path leading from the narrative fork in the road may be verbal rather than nonverbal, but Jonah is obdurately unchanged and unyielding, as unpersuaded of God’s justice by wind on the wasteland as he was by wind on the water. He truculently maintains his resistance to and resentment of being ‘the butt of God’s mercy—having God be merciful at his cost’ (Mather 1982:288).

Yahweh’s verbal response provides the climax of the main storyline plot conflict between the protagonist and antagonist throughout the book. Jonah’s first speech in chapter four is comprised of thirty-nine words in the Masoretic Text, and is now ‘answered’ by a speech of Yahweh’s which also contains exactly thirty-nine words. In this irony filled speech, Yahweh challenges Jonah’s rights to extend pity to the qīqayôt for which he was not responsible while asserting that Yahweh himself ought not to pity human and animal life (much more valuable than a plant) which Yahweh had made (and had vested interest) and who had reversed themselves from their wickedness (which Jonah still has not). For Jonah to herald the extension of God’s favor to the northern kingdom of Israel despite their ongoing affinity to wickedness (cf 2 Kings 14:23-25) was an honor, for him to extend pity even to a plant was justifiable in his own eyes, but for him to extend the boundaries of divine grace to the Ninevites was completely unacceptable to him. Jonah’s capacity for pity is exposed as frivolous and self-serving, while
Yahweh's grace is revealed to be as capacious as Jonah feared it might be (cf 2:8[2:9] and 4:2). The incongruity of pitying plants over people certainly constitutes ironic humor.

4.6(b)xiv The Resolution and Ending

The book of Jonah stops—it does not conclude nor resolve the fundamental conflict initiated in 1:3 with Jonah's flight. The oppositions between Jonah and nature, Jonah and the sailors, the sailors and nature, the sailors and Yahweh, and the Ninevites and God have all dissipated; the tension between Jonah and the Ninevites never materialised; but the one, fundamental problem remains: Yahweh the antagonist and Jonah the protagonist never achieve a meeting of the minds anywhere throughout the course of the narrative, and the gulf separating them gapes nowhere larger than at the end. The story begs for denouement, for Jonah to capitulate, humbly (and verbally) turning from his own wicked ways of seeking to hoard God's grace to his own people. Though each previous chapter of Jonah comprises a self-standing mini-plot, buttressing the reader's expectation for a final, satisfactory solution at the end, the overall structure of the book decidedly does not.

The effect of the abrupt ending of Jonah is to force the reader to deal with yet another narrative gap, perhaps the largest and most troubling of all: what will Jonah's response to Yahweh be? Is there some modus vivendi to reconcile the two estranged parties?

4.6(c) Conclusion

Having traced the emplotment of the book through its sequential arrangement, it is now possible to make further observations on the narrative as a whole. The first has to do with opponents. Throughout the entire narrative, Yahweh appears directly only to Jonah. The conflicts between Yahweh and the sailors and between God and the Ninevites are indirect,
mediated through Jonah. As the mediator of God’s *opposition* toward the Ninevites, Jonah is thereby implicated in the *opposition*, though the Jonah versus Ninevites confrontation is never developed in the narrative as an *opposition*.

The poles of *opposition* within the narrative of Jonah may be distinguished according to the following matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yahweh</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Sailors</th>
<th>Ninevites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jonah  | Jonah flees; prays insincerely; protests Yahweh’s grace to Nineveh *main storyline* | storm threatens Jonah’s life; sun & wind threaten Jonah’s life | Jonah imperils sailors’ lives | [Jonah’s bad news may jeopardise his life]  
Jonah’s message threatens Nineveh |
| Yahweh | —      | Sailors realise Yahweh is responsible for the storm / evil | Yahweh, through Jonah, threatens to destroy Nineveh |
| Nature | Storm threatens to destroy sailors | —       | —         |

Jonah, the *protagonist*, is the only character who *opposes* and is opposed by each other entity in the book. Yahweh, the *antagonist*, is *opposed* by the well-meaning sailors who initially ‘cast their lot’ with Jonah, aiding and abetting his flight. However, once they yield Jonah to Yahweh by hurling him into the Yahweh-made sea, the storm immediately ceases. They pay homage to Yahweh through worship, and so Yahweh and the sailors are reconciled. The sailors are *opposed* by nature, but that conflict is immediately resolved after they rid themselves of Jonah. Because the Ninevites have offended God through their wickedness (1:2), are *opposed* by him; as they repent from their evil ways and violence, God also repents, and their conflict is resolved. By responding positively to Jonah’s message, any potential conflict between them is short-circuited. At the end of the book, only one loose end remains, conspicuous and demanding
of attention: Jonah’s opposition toward Yahweh.\textsuperscript{212} He resolutely maintains his recalcitrant disaffection for Yahweh’s extravagant pity toward the Ninevites—the boundaries which Jonah has placed on Yahweh lack the plasticity to accommodate the boundlessness of Yahweh’s compassion.

Throughout the entire narrative, the absence of any sustained dialogue between Jonah and Yahweh is striking. The collision of their wills (or in terms of employment, their mutually incompatible objectives) is revealed through their problematised communication. The dialogue, and lack thereof, between Jonah and Yahweh may be schematically laid out as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chap</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-way\textsuperscript{213}: Yahweh to Jonah, no verbal response</td>
<td>Jonah flees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-way: Jonah to Yahweh, no verbal response</td>
<td>Yahweh causes fish to evacuate Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-way: Yahweh to Jonah, no verbal response</td>
<td>Jonah speaks to Ninevites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-way dialogue: both parties speak dialogue cut short by Jonah</td>
<td>Yahweh reprimands Jonah, who leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2-way dialogue: both parties speak 2x dialogue cut short by Jonah</td>
<td>Yahweh reprimands Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jonah does not respond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When observing the patterns here, it becomes clear that Jonah’s failure to respond to the final question is not the first time that he has stonewalled Yahweh. In chapter one, he did not contest the commission, but instead acted out his opposition to Yahweh. When called upon by the captain to call out to God, no response by Jonah is indicated. Throughout the entire storm scene, while he interacts with the sailors, even speaking to them about Yahweh, there is no evidence that Jonah ever spoke to Yahweh. In chapter three, when Jonah is recommissioned, there is opportunity (according to the literary pattern of the standard commission form) for him to

\textsuperscript{212} It may be argued that Jonah is still in conflict with nature, but since it is Yahweh who controls (תָּם) nature, this opposition is only symptomatic.

\textsuperscript{213} Obviously, a ‘one-way dialogue’ is something of a misnomer. I choose it deliberately to indicate a short-circuited dialogue which has gone awry. Instead of a bilateral conversation taking place between the two parties, only one voice speaks.
respond verbally to Yahweh, but he is not forthcoming. At the beginning of chapter four, Jonah breaks off the conversation, refusing to answer Yahweh's question. And now, at the end of the book, when dialogue is reestablished, the book stops short—Jonah yet again does not offer any verbal response to Yahweh's final question.

There is sufficient evidence here, in my judgment, to infer a pathological pattern. Since Jonah's silences toward Yahweh in chapter one and again at the beginning of chapter four have indicated entrenched unwillingness to comply with God (i.e. opposition), I see no reason to assume or postulate a tacit willingness at the ending. Thus all the interpretive positions which seek to 'rescue' Jonah at the end (see chapter one under Jonah as 'Pinocchio,' some of those under Jonah as 'prophet,' and most of those under Jonah as 'reluctant missionary') by finally acquiescing to God or learning his lesson are flawed. The plot pattern clearly puts the burden of proof upon them, and the narrative offers them no support whatsoever—the trajectory obviously points toward sustained opposition. These interpretations of the book I believe are driven by an ideological interest for a happy ending. For this to be the case, Jonah must be converted after the narrative ends. Only in this way can Jonah successfully reach his objective, which presumably is to obey Yahweh with the right attitude as well as in actions.

Additional insights which have bearing upon both the meaning of the book and the characterisation of Jonah can be gained from reflecting upon the plot type as well. The open-endedness of the story is one of the primary reasons for such diversity of opinion regarding its main message. The ending of Jonah defies its simple placement according to plot type. While the antagonist's (i.e Yahweh's) initial objective, viz for Jonah to call out to the Ninevites concerning their wickedness, is successfully reached, the same cannot be said for Jonah. As protagonist, his initial objective, viz to escape his commission, failed. If an interpreter believes

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that his implied second objective was to obey God, then he is successful in reaching that goal, in which case the story is a comedy. Yet all of chapter four stands against this interpretive option—clearly it turns out that he did not want to obey God if that entailed the sparing of the Ninevites from judgment. However, if his second objective was to guarantee through his announcement the irreversible doom of Nineveh, then he failed. His word as a prophet is not ultimately binding, but remains contingent upon God's will, which in turn is contingent upon the Ninevites' response of repentance.

The fourth chapter, which focuses upon the main storyline of Jonah and Yahweh, points in a very different direction than it would if the book ended with chapter three. The strategic placement of chapter four shifts the attention away from Nineveh and back to Jonah. As argued above, it forces a retrofitting of previous interpretation of various elements (such as Jonah's second objective). But perhaps at this juncture a crucial revision also needs to be made to the initial objective of Yahweh. If his primary objective is to reach the Ninevites through Jonah, then the book of Jonah badly overshoots that goal by an entire chapter—chapter four is superfluous (and the salvation of the sailors is a mere aside). If on the other hand the primary objective of Yahweh is to teach Jonah about his compassion (pity) extending to all his creation including non-Israelites (represented not only by one group, the Ninevites, but by two different parties, the sailors included) and even to (gentile?) livestock, then it accounts for not only chapter four but also the entire book. To reach such a conclusion, however, will be unsettling, for the main storyline of the book then ends as a tragedy, defined as I have maintained here as the failure of a protagonist to reach his or her initial objective. Moreover, it would imply that that Yahweh's primary objective also is not reached. Once again, a graphic display may help.
Main storyline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTAGONIST:</th>
<th>Initial Objective</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>to escape his commission</td>
<td>failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary Objective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to ensure the Ninevites’ doom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>through his proclamation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANTAGONIST:</th>
<th>Initial Objective</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh</td>
<td>to teach Jonah about his compassion</td>
<td>failed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>extending to all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsidiary storyline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTAGONIST:</th>
<th>Initial Objective</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nineveh</td>
<td>to avoid destruction</td>
<td>succeeded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(by virtue of greater narrative focalisation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANTAGONIST:</th>
<th>Initial Objective</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh</td>
<td>to use Jonah to confront the Ninevites concerning their wickedness</td>
<td>succeeded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To suggest that Yahweh should ‘fail’ at anything is surely a theological affront to some (many?). Yet I would argue that the failure of Yahweh to achieve an objective is not of necessity due to any deficiency on his part. Clearly he is in control of all his creation, a point which even Jonah grants (1:9). Yet he chooses to be responsive to human beings: to the sailors’ prayer, to the Ninevites’ repentance, and even to those such as Jonah who refuse to yield to him. The failure of Yahweh to teach him is not attributable to Yahweh’s inexpertise as a teacher, but the refusal of the ‘student’ to learn. While God disallows Jonah’s flagrant insubordinate actions (chapter one), he chooses not to steamroll his resistant attitude. Nevertheless, neither will he allow Jonah to dictate to him how to dispense justice and mercy. McCarthy and Riley (1986:138) capture this thought well:
Throughout the narrative, we have witnessed the overriding power of God’s will and the absolute ineffectiveness of Jonah’s, even though Jonah’s centrality to the story may have masked this somewhat. At the end of the story, we know that Jonah’s response to Yahweh will make no difference: Yahweh will not be swayed from his generous decision by Jonah’s anger.

The failure of Jonah to learn Yahweh’s intended lesson about compassion—taught both by example (3:10) and in word (4:10-11)—remains the failure of Jonah, period. And that is tragic.

In terms of plot form, the two subsidiary storylines, the sailors versus Yahweh and Ninevites versus God, both follow the pattern of conversion, and hence are comedic. The main storyline, Jonah versus Yahweh, follows the form of the test. For most of the book, that is, the first three chapters, Jonah’s test presumably concerns his willingness to accept Yahweh’s terms of commissioning. Only in chapter four does the reader learn that the deeper issue is his willingness to accept the wideness and freedom of Yahweh’s grace.

The unsettling ending to the narrative, i.e. an unanswered question, virtually demands reader reaction. Inevitably, readers will ‘do’ something with the character of Jonah. As mentioned above, some try to rescue him by postulating a post-narrative change of heart, which fundamentally shifts the plot type from tragedy to comedy, and the plot type from failed test to passed test. But as it stands, the inertia and vector as already traced through the action and dialogue of the book point toward a failed test, and the conclusion that Jonah refuses to accede to Yahweh’s ways. In short, Jonah is a bad guy.
Chapter 5: Characterisation

‘Reading a character becomes a process of discovery’ (Sternberg 1985:323)

5.1 Building a model for characterisation

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing that understanding narrative conventions is beneficial to the interpreter seeking to identify the author’s intended meaning, and that awareness of these conventions will yield positive results in trying to determine the characterisation of Jonah. To say that knowledge of characterisation conventions will help readers to understand characterisation in Jonah seems to be patently self-evident if not tautologous. However, I contend that the lack of careful attention to these devices has been a decisive factor in the multiplicity of opinions as to the meaning of the book of Jonah.

The main models for interpreting the character of Jonah, and hence the main message of the book, I have already presented according to what larger group Jonah is seen to represent, as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonah as ...</th>
<th>Group represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinocchio</td>
<td>anyone who has strayed from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychotic</td>
<td>those who have clinical, psychological disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prometheus</td>
<td>those who prize the indomitable human spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall-guy</td>
<td>those who are aggrieved at God’s caprice or humbled before his freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot</td>
<td>nationalists, bigots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Israelite prophetic order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attention to the factors which comprise characterisational conventions generally in narratives can be useful in solving this particular issue in the case of the book of Jonah.

Is the main character in the book Jonah or Yahweh? Those who see the primary purpose of the book as the freedom of God beyond human expectations (‘Jonah as fall guy’) or over
against the spoken word of the prophet (‘Jonah as prophet’), or the breadth of God’s compassion, have tended, consciously or unconsciously, to identify Yahweh as the main character. Those who emphasise the importance of repentance (‘Jonah as Pinocchio’) look to the conversion of the Ninevites as the heart of the story, and tend to label both the sailors’ response to the calming of the storm and Jonah’s prayer inside the fish as further evidence of repentance in the book (and many also assume the implied repentance of Jonah after the end of chapter 4). Those who see Jonah as a psychologically disturbed patient (‘Jonah as psychotic’) obviously choose to focus upon Jonah, as well as those who see in Jonah a tragic hero (‘Jonah as Prometheus’). Those who believe the chief purpose of the book is universalism, i.e. God’s compassion extends beyond the borders of Israel (‘Jonah as a patriot’), not only see Jonah as the main character (tragically cast), but also give greater attention to the roles of the sailors and the Ninevites.

There are other important storyline questions that emerge when seeking to relate the characters to one another in connection with the primary purpose of the narrative. For example, if one maintains that the chief idea in the book has to do with Jonah being instructed in God’s pity upon Nineveh, then the role of the sailors is problematised—what do their responses toward Jonah and toward God contribute to Jonah learning about God’s disposition toward Ninevites? If Jonah is seen as a reluctant missionary, why does the king of Nineveh occupy center stage for four verses in chapter 3, and how does his role further the case of the consequences of Jonah’s reluctance? If one maintains that the main idea is that repentance leads to salvation, then why is the sea calmed before the sailors fear Yahweh, offer sacrifices, and make their vows? The interrelationship between the characters, and between the plot and the characters, is vitally important to understanding the book as a whole.
A very helpful point of departure for the model of characterisation which I advocate here is found in Rimmon-Kenan, who devotes several chapters of her *Narrative fiction: Contemporary poetics* (1983) to the conventions relating to the aspects of narrative character and characterisation. She begins her argument (29-31) by tracing the development of what she terms ‘the death of the character.’ Partly in reaction to the psychologising impulses of some author-based strategies of interpretation, the text-oriented efforts of some of the formalists and structuralists pointed toward a de-emphasis upon character in favor of plot considerations. Since what was sought in the deep structures of human rationality underlying narrativity were those elements which are common to humanity, the individuality of characters was minimised. Because of their preoccupation with these comprehensive patterns and general categories to the neglect of distinctive particularities, these theorists did not adequately develop a well-rounded, nuanced model of characterisation. Consequently, structuralists and formalists have frequently seen characters as little more than functionaries in the service of plot, or, in Chatman’s (1978:111) words, they are ‘participants or actants rather than personnages.’ Rimmon-Kenan (:34-35) presents Greimas’ (Greimas and Courtés 1979:3) theory, in which characters serve merely as ‘actants’ (senders, objects, receivers, helpers, opponents, and subjects) necessitated and borne along by the exigencies of the plot, who lack distinctly individual personality. In criticising this reductionistic approach, Rimmon-Kenan (1983:30) argues that ‘structuralists can hardly accommodate character within their theories, because of their commitment to an ideology which “decentres” man [sic] and runs counter to the notions of individuality and psychological depth.’ My own position aligns with Rimmon-Kenan (:36) and Chatman (1978:118) on this point: the character-plot relationship is symbiotic, and in principle character and plot are co-equal components. In some narratives, characters may occupy the more dominant position,
whereas others are more action-oriented. In either case, both aspects function significantly in the designs and intentions of authors.

Rimmon-Kenan next moves on to the related issue of ‘purist’ versus ‘realist’ understandings of narrative characters. The purists maintain that no character exists outside of the depiction within the narrative itself. By contrast, realists (not to be confused with critical realism) hold that it is possible to posit from clues within the text a construct of a given character which is more encompassing, potentially capable of a speculated, psychological profile and an implied past and future beyond his or her life in the text. One of the chief arguments in the realist position is that readers are able to create imaginatively flesh and blood ‘people’ from the literary *personnages de papier*, based on their experience of like personalities and character traits in the real world. Strictly speaking, Rimmon-Kenan (:33) is much closer to the purist position, yet allows for some realist dimension: ‘Although these constructs are by no means human beings in the literal sense of the word, they are partly modeled on the reader’s conception of people and in this they are person-like.’ Despite this allowance, her position remains essentially purist (:36): ‘in the story character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications *dispersed throughout the text*’ (emphasis mine). Fewell and Gunn (1993:47), like Rimmon-Kenan, also leave room for the reader’s experience, yet still limit characters to what is found in the text: ‘We may not be dealing with real people when we encounter biblical characters, but we are using our experiences of real people to help us understand these linguistic constructions.’ They clarify this point further (:51-52): ‘Because literary characters come to us through an artistic medium, we realise, of course, that we are *not dealing with real people*. The biblical narrator’s customary reticence about characters may remind us further that these people are *literary constructs*.... We experience biblical characters as *mediated through a narrator* who
selects and shapes what we experience' (emphasis mine). I would argue that literary characters \textit{qua} literary characters exist within a particular narrative world in which they are found. My interest is on their depiction as encoded by a text which is willfully intended by an author (a point that I sought to establish in chapter two).

In biblical narratives, this may raise the question once again concerning the correspondence between a real, historical figure and the represented character within the narrative. For example, I take David to be a real, historical figure in the history of Israel (i.e., outside the narrative world). This is in keeping with a critical realist's epistemological model. But when I read the narrative of 1-2 Samuel, I am looking at David through an interpretive lens, seeing him as the narrator wants me to see him, with certain traits highlighted and other traits overlooked. The focal point I maintain here is upon written, narrative conventions—what is presented of the characters from within the depicted narrative world, independently of their extratextual existence, i.e., I am seeking to understand David as defined by the narrator. The narrator reveals only what he wants readers to know about each character, with the result that the character is deliberately presented as the author wishes the reader to view him or her. Simon (1990:13) is thus correct in maintaining that 'every narrator selects and rejects, lengthens, and abbreviates, illuminates and obscures in keeping with his expressive purpose.' If my goal is to understand better what the narrator's purpose is, then I will seek it in the narrative as it is told. Berlin (1983:43) also takes this same stance: 'Never can the reader step behind the story to know a character other than in the way the narrative presents him.'

\textbf{5.1(a) Defining character}

At this point Rimmon-Kenan moves into a discussion of how characters are reconstructed from the text, beginning by defining 'character.' Speaking at the broadest level, the term
‘character’ as used in discussion of narrative literature refers to a person or a collective of persons employed in the events of a story. In my own model, I take the following three definitions of character, each providing emphases which are useful. Roberts (1973:45) describes ‘character in literature as the author’s creation, through the medium of words, of a personality who takes on actions, thoughts, expressions, and attitudes unique and appropriate to that personality and consistent with it.’ From this perspective there is a clear link between authorial intentionality and the ‘creation’ of narrative characters, as well as an implied consistency or coherency of character (a point to be taken up below). Secondly, according to Chatman (1978:137), characterisation contributes ‘sets of human traits attached to a name.’ These traits he describes as persistent personal qualities that distinguish one individual from another (see Chatman 1978:121; Powell 1990:54). Chatman (:126) insists that traits ‘must be distinguished from more ephemeral psychological phenomena, like feelings, moods, thoughts, temporary motives, attitudes, and the like.’ To qualify as a trait, there must be an intransient quality, a consistent pattern. From Chatman, then, I take character to refer to a being within the narrative who is the assemblage of certain traits which serve to make that person recognisably distinct.

Thirdly, Hauerwas (1975:11) expounds on character as ‘the qualification of man’s [sic] self-agency through his beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a man [sic] acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being.’ Strictly speaking, since every character is the construct of the author’s ‘creation,’ self-determination is only apparent; yet this is also an important point. Being shabbily dressed and unkempt does not carry negative associations on the character who is being held hostage by wicked men—his state of misery further indicts them, not him. But if a character willingly chooses to be slovenly in appearance, the implied ‘self-agency’ reflects upon his or her ‘moral history,’ i.e. character.214 Taking these definitions

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214Rabinowitz (1987:86) explains the relationship between appearance and moral character. ‘The most basic
together, then, I propose the following: **Character** refers to a personality, created by an author, in which consistent traits are combined together such that distinctive individuality emerges through the implied choices of that person or being. **Characterisation** is the term used to describe the means employed by the author in fashioning or influencing one's perceptions in their portrayal of each figure in the story. It is thus an instrument by which the author speaks, a tool in the service of authorial strategy.

Though characters are created by an author, the reader is also engaged in the process of characterisation through what Rimmon-Kenan (38) call ‘reconstruction.’ The reader looks to the author to ‘tip his hand’ in the world of the text as s/he looks for clues, patterns, and relationships. Thus Rimmon-Kenan (38-39) argues that readers search for cohesion in the characters they encounter in the narrative. This insight corresponds to the observation of Fewell and Gunn (1990:14): ‘character construction (by readers), like plot construction, is inevitably a search for consistency.’ Analysing characters in narrative, then, involves the search for order in the portrayal of its figures. Rimmon-Kenan (:39-40) lists four main principles of cohesion. The first is repetition, in which seeing the same behavior in a character on multiple occasions ‘invites’ labeling it as a character-trait. The second is similarity, where the same behavior is exhibited in different circumstances, which also encourages character generalisations. Her third principle is contrast, which she illustrates but does not define. I take from her example that she is referring to an instance in which conflicting traits are evident in a character in a given instance in the plot. This could be illustrated from Jonah 1:9, where Jonah claims to ‘fear’/‘worship’ (יָ֣הוָ֖ה) Yahweh from whom he is fleeing. The last principle is (logical) implication in which psychological states

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rule of appearance is that we are to judge characters by their exterior, until the text gives us sufficient reason to judge them in some other way. Physical appearance, in other words, can be assumed to stand metaphorically for inner quality.'
are inferred from symptomatic physical actions (e.g. biting fingernails) or related psychological states (my example: worry indicating fear).

5.1(b) Depth of Exposure

Rimmon-Kenan continues her discussion by noting that literary critics, following Forster’s ([1927]1985) typology, have commonly adopted his approach to identifying ‘flat’ and ‘round’ characters within a narrative. A flat character (or type) is known by a single, dominant trait which is consistent and predictable. A round character (or full-fledged or multidimensional) is complex and multifaceted, possessing potentially contrastive traits and nuances. The relative importance of the character is not necessarily related to their depth of exposure—a flat character may have a major role, but their personality is uncomplicated. Generally speaking, readers find round characters more interesting and lifelike.\(^{215}\) Fewell and Gunn (1993:75) describe how:

They have the capacity to grow, develop, to change their minds, to surprise the reader as well as the other characters in the story. We remember these characters because we cannot pinpoint them. They, like the real people in our lives, are elusive, always evading complete definition or explanation.

Rimmon-Kenan (:40) legitimately criticises Forster in offering merely the two categories of round and flat, claiming that the ‘dichotomy is highly reductive, obliterating the degrees and nuances found in actual works of narrative....’ Nevertheless, I maintain\(^{216}\) that these categories may be useful in understanding the degree to which characters are developed by the author if one bears in mind two necessary caveats. First, in a given scene or episode, a character may appear flat, where elsewhere in the narrative s/he may be more full-orbed (e.g. Saul/Paul is flat when

\(^{215}\) As Bal (1985:79) puts it, ‘a [round] character resembles a human being and an actor [=flat character] need not necessarily do so.’

introduced in Acts 7:58 versus highly developed in Acts 9-28). Secondly, readers need to recognise degrees of character exposition—round, flat, and agent are not pigeonholes but designations along a characterisation continuum, capable of infinite degrees of complexity, which may be graphically represented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round</th>
<th>Flat</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It may be appropriate, then, to modify discussion of the depth of exposure of characters with modal terms such as ‘mere agent,’ ‘more rounded’ and ‘minimally developed.’</td>
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For example, the description of David is one of the fullest, most direct characterisations readers encounter in Scripture. ‘One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor and a warrior. He is circumspect in speech and a handsome man. And Yahweh is with him”’ (1 Samuel 16:18). Here one can see that the narrator wants his readers to think highly of David by giving a very well rounded description:

► ‘a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite’ indicates his family and hometown.
► ‘who is a skillful musician’ and ‘circumspect in speech’ indicate skills and abilities.
► ‘He is a mighty man of valor’ indicates a positive and virtuous character trait.
► ‘and a warrior’ indicates competence and experience, which gain him a good reputation.
► ‘and a handsome man’ indicates his appearance.
► ‘and Yahweh is with him’ indicates his approval before God.

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Here we see qualities and traits being multiplied in a highly compressed space such that a very distinctive personality emerges—a round character whose traits are mutually reinforcing of a thoroughly ‘good guy’ image.\textsuperscript{217}

5.1(c) Dynamism

Rimmon-Kenan (:41-42) gives cursory treatment (one paragraph) to another axis. Characters may also be viewed in terms of the relative change that they experience through the events of the narrative. \textit{Developing} characters undergo a permanent alteration in some significant aspect of their character, personality or outlook as a consequence of the events in the narrative. Through the course of the plot, their lives have been transformed, resulting in a new and different set of values and behavior. Readers perceive the development of character\textsuperscript{218} when, in their search for consistency of character\textsuperscript{219} they encounter something which cannot be integrated without revising their model. Rimmon-Kenan (:38-39) explains:

When, in the process of reconstruction, the reader reaches a point where he can no longer integrate an element within a constructed category, the implication would seem to be either that the generalisation established so far has been mistaken (a mistake which the text may have encouraged), or that the character has changed.

In the former case, of course, there has been no real development of the character, but the (surprising) revelation of another dimension of his or her personality which forces a change in the reader’s reconstruction. Only when there has been a transformation in the character can the term developing be meaningfully employed.

\textsuperscript{217}His ‘goodness’ in the eyes of the reader remains inferential (the narrator does not say ‘good,’ and ‘a man of war’ may not evoke associations with goodness. Nevertheless the goodness of his warlikeness is vindicated by the consequences in the narrative which immediately follows.

\textsuperscript{218}M M Thompson (1993:182) notes that ‘the impression of “development” is the effect of reading the story.’

\textsuperscript{219}In his discussion of coherency, Rabinowitz (1987:86) notes that readers ‘tend, on the whole, to assume a kind of consistency of character that hardly holds in life.’
A static character, by contrast, is one who retains the same essential, defining traits at the end of the story as at the beginning, whose internal character remains substantially unaffected by the vicissitudes of the plot and its constitutive dramatic conflicts (eg Pharaoh in Exodus 5-14).\textsuperscript{220}

I would augment these two by introducing a third term, ambivalent. An ambivalent character may be used to describe a quasi-category of those who ostensibly change, but where the reader is left wondering about whose side the character is really on, or about the sincerity, reality or permanency of change. Again I envision these not as two or three predetermined slots, but as points on a continuum which allow for degrees of change.

\begin{center}

\begin{tabular}{c}
Developing \hline
Ambivalent \hline
Static
\end{tabular}

\end{center}

\textbf{5.1(d) Modes of characterisation: direct and indirect}

In a later chapter, Rimmon-Kenan (59-70) takes up the topic of characterisation, that is, various modes by which a narrator may reveal the characters. She posits two basic types of ‘indicators of character’: direct and indirect. Direct information includes explicit statements made by the narrator which evaluate, describe, or explain a narrative personality’s traits and character. Direct information from the narrator is more intrusive, disrupting the flow of the storyline, but it is more reliable—readers are generally confident of the accuracy of the assessment. For example, when the narrator in Genesis 6:9 says, ‘Noah was a righteous man,’ it is assumed that he is providing a trustworthy evaluation. A narrator’s description is also taken to be reliable, but it is less clear what is to be inferred from the description. For example, the narrator of Samuel describes Saul as ‘a handsome young man. There was not a man among the

\textsuperscript{220} Presumably one could conceive of Pharaoh’s increasingly entrenched hardness of heart as ‘developing.’ I see this as intensification of existing traits rather than transformation, and thus would not label the devolution of
people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else’ (1 Samuel 9:2 NRSV). Based on this physical description readers may draw inferences as to his character, but these inferences are less certain than the narrator’s own explicit evaluation.

Indirect information refers to clues given into the character through intermediate means: telling us what the character is thinking or feeling (the ‘inner life’), what other characters have to say about the main character (how they evaluate or describe him), what the main character says, and what the character does. In the order listed above, there is a decreasing amount of certainty that the reader can have in the accuracy of his or her reconstruction of character. Although the varying degrees of certainty are not discussed by Rimmon-Kenan, I believe they are a promising augmentation of her theory. Here they are, graphically displayed, with special reference to the most reliable source in biblical narrative reserved for the narrator’s inclusion of God’s evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncertainty</th>
<th>Certainty</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>(\text{inferred})</td>
<td>(\text{stated})</td>
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Characters’ actions \(\rightarrow\) Characters’ speech \(\rightarrow\) Other characters’ characters’ inner life \(\rightarrow\) Narrator’s description \(\rightarrow\) Narrator’s evaluation \(\rightarrow\) God’s evaluation

McCracken (1993:36), in describing biblical narrators, points out that they tend ‘toward speaking with rather than speaking about’ their characters (emphasis his), though information which is inferred from characters’ actions or speech are generally not as certain as that which is provided by the narrator. Likewise, other characters are not always reliable either—an evil man’s

\(\text{Pharaoh as developing.}\)

\footnote{Some of these are present in the discussion of Alter (1981:116-117).}

\footnote{This mode of showing rather than telling is not restricted to biblical narratives, but is an accurate generalisation about them.}

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assessment of a good woman is not trustworthy. If the person describing the character is not narratively proven to be unreliable, the default mode is to accept that person’s assessment. To return to the previous example about the well-developed characterisation of David in 1 Samuel, it should be noted that this description is provided by one of the people within the narrative world: by putting these words in the mouth of a servant rather than telling his readers directly, the narrator is less intrusive, speaking through a narrative mouthpiece—he lets someone else do the talking for him. In this passage, then, readers learn about David in two ways: (1) through a comparatively comprehensive description of him (2) as evaluated by one of the characters in the story.

Rimmon-Kenan next enumerates the ways that indirect information displays and exemplifies character. In discussing action (61), she argues that habitual actions (as opposed to single occurrences) point toward that which is characteristic of an individual, adding that ‘when a character clings to old habits in a situation which renders them inadequate’ their static response may become comic or ironic. She also points out (61-62) that one may differentiate between acts of commission (performed by the character), acts of omission (what the character ought to do, but does not), and contemplated acts (what a character intends to do, but is unsuccessful). A character’s speech may be indicative of character when it is ‘individuated’ by revealing ‘origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession’ (64). External appearance bears a metonymic relationship with character—what a character looks like is suggestive of their inner life (see 65-66).223 She also points to the relationship of environment (66-67) to character (a point which I sought to develop here in much greater detail in chapter three).

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223Rabinowitz (1987:86-88) offers numerous illustrations of this relationship between appearance and character.
Rimmon-Kenan next discusses (68-69) how names may impinge upon character, though there are several elements overlooked in her presentation. Names may reveal ethnic background (Japanese, Jewish), tribal affiliation (Benjaminites, Dinka, Cherokees), social status (especially titles such as Baron, Duchess, Miss) or profession (Cook, Cohen, Knecht). Each of these elements can contribute not only to how that individual is nominalised, but also to how the reader will reconstruct his or her character, shaping traits and confirming patterns. According to Rabinowitz (1987:89), names found in narrative may evoke an 'aura that, in a particular context, will carry a particular moral valence.'

Rimmon-Kenan (70) concludes her discussion of characterisation by describing how characters may be placed in analogous relationships with one another. Seen vis-à-vis one another in similar situations, the comparative similarity or contrastive differences reciprocally emphasises the traits of each. The observation of this feature in narrative leads me to identify the role of the foil, which I shall discuss below.

In summary, Rimmon-Kenan's work provides an excellent point of entry for discussing narrative characterisation. I am in complete agreement with most of her arguments, and where I have departed from her, it has been primarily to extend her trajectories or elaborate on contiguous ideas beyond what she has stated. In my estimation, the chief oversight on her part has been on the identification of narrative roles, to which I turn next.

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224 She discusses visual relationships (e.g. the letter O with a fat character), onomatopoeia (e.g. the buzzing sound of Beelzubub, Lord of Flies), articulatory when the oral muscle activity is suggestive of character (my example: the Ores Grishnâkh and Uglûk in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings), morphological (i.e. etymological, as in Lewis' Wormwood of The Screwtape letters), allegorical in which a trait becomes a proper name, and contrast in which the character's name is so unfitting that it stands in ironic opposition (e.g. the skunk named Flower in Disney's Bambi).
5.1(e) Roles

The central character of a story is called the protagonist. For my purposes, I distinguish between the protagonist and the antagonist in the same way as between main and minor characters: on the basis of the narrator’s focalising attention. Put more simply, the character receiving the most page space in a written narrative is the protagonist, the one most directly opposing him or her is the antagonist. This identification is made irrespective of the moral values held by these parties—there is no presupposition that the protagonist’s character is necessarily superior to that of the antagonist. For example, in L Alexander’s (1997) *The iron ring*, the protagonist Tamar is continually, though unwittingly, opposed by King Jaya. Though Tamar emerges as a comic hero who is committed to upholding the perceived virtue of dharma (code of ethics, especially of the prince-warrior), it is the antagonist Jaya who is proven in the end to be of superior moral character, teaching the protagonist Tamar of the folly of slavish adherence to the existing dharma and holding up to critical scrutiny many of its questionable values. Thus I contend that the term protagonist is to be reserved for the main character, viz the one to whom the narrator devotes greatest narrative attention, and antagonist for the character(s) who stand in opposition to the protagonist.

Each of the elements of a story—style, perspective, setting, plot, characterisation—have as their focal point the challenges, frustrations, failures, and successes of the main character. Of course, it may be argued (so Fee and Stuart 1985:25) that ‘in the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives.’ But in biblical narrative, the authors generally reveal God’s character by choosing human figures as protagonists. The protagonist is the one on whom the narrator has specially focused in the telling of a particular story—s/he is the one the narrator is following with the ‘spotlight,’ from whose viewpoint readers follow the action. The protagonist may be
portrayed as good or evil or ambivalent; this designation is independent of the character’s morality. The protagonist may also be accompanied and supported by lesser figures, known as the protagonist’s entourage (eg Elisha’s servant in 2 Kings 6:15-17).

The antagonist opposes the protagonist as an adversary, competitor, or obstacle. As with the protagonist, the antagonist may be portrayed either as good or evil. Though usually the antagonist will be the obverse of the protagonist (good protagonist versus bad antagonist or bad protagonist versus good antagonist), occasionally the intent of the antagonist is to aid the (resistant but otherwise good) protagonist. Biblical stories frequently feature a ‘bad’ person (whether evil, wayward, ignorant, or obtuse) who serves as the protagonist, who is opposed by (the good) God, who functions as the antagonist (eg Cain in Genesis 4). But the chief element is that the antagonist stands in dramatic opposition against the protagonist. Those minor figures who are allied with the antagonist form the antagonist’s entourage (eg the Philistine army aligned behind their champion Goliath).

Several other roles may be identified. A foil (or deuteragonist) is a character who serves principally as a contrast to another character. Often, foils are presented as primarily flat characters, providing the antithetical narrative example of a particular trait or behavior of the opposing character (who may be a round character). For example, the young men who ate the royal food of Nebuchadnezzar serve as foils to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who ate vegetables and water (Daniel 1). They are minimally developed (i.e flat)—no names, no traits which serve to distinguish them as individuals. They are not opponents to Daniel (the protagonist) and his cohorts (the protagonist’s entourage) and hence do not qualify as antagonists. But they are contrasted to the protagonist Daniel and his entourage. They are foils; in this case a ‘control group’ over against which the health of the Hebrew slaves is contrasted.
A satiric portrait is a character who is held up for ridicule by the author. The satiric figure, normally a person of wealth and high social standing, is held up for ridicule for his vices, a narrative strategy intended to cause readers to reject similar behaviors.\textsuperscript{225} For example, Ahab the king, a presumably powerful person in light of his office, exacerbated by attitudes of his own self-importance, is completely dominated and overshadowed by both Elijah the prophet and his own wife Jezebel (1 Kings 16-22). The satiric portrait involves not only a satiric vehicle, i.e. the individual being held up to scorn, but also a satiric norm, i.e an implied standard by which the satiric vehicle is judged. In both the cases of a satiric portrait and the foil there may be overlap with the roles of protagonist and antagonist, frequently the protagonist being satirised by an antagonist-foil.

\textbf{5.1(f) Identification: Caring about characters}

One other important element not addressed by Rimmon-Kenan which I believed to be very important for understanding characterisation is the degree and kind of identification which readers establish with the characters of a narrative. To varying extents, readers tend to draw parallels between what they read and their own lives. As E D Hirsch (1994:553) puts it, ‘Analogueising to one’s own experience is an implicit, pervasive, usually untaught response to stories.’ Storytellers generally portray their characters not merely to tell the audience about people, but they anticipate particular responses (perlocutions). The interaction between the main parties within the story may be multifaceted and complex, but usually reveal human traits that serve as paradigms or models of values and behavior. Characters not only express the author’s point of view through what they assert in speech, but model the very traits about which the

\textsuperscript{225}Jemielity has devoted a book-length discussion in his Satire and the Hebrew prophets (1992) to the presence of satire in the prophetic literature of the Bible, illustrating how it particularly targets those who occupy positions of esteem such as kings, priests, elders, court prophets and the rich.
author implicitly comments (approvingly or disapprovingly). Bar-Efrat (1978:23) expresses this idea well:

Not only do the characters of the narrative express the ideas and sentiments of the author in their conversation, but in their entire lives and fates they embody the conception of life contained in the narrative. Which of the characters' qualities are illuminated and which obscured, which details of their conversations, actions and life histories are communicated to the reader and which concealed—these facts disclose a great deal of the narratives' norms and values. The characters also attract the reader's interest...and succeed as a rule in making him [sic] emotionally involved in their vicissitudes.

When these character traits are positive, the person may be described as a sympathetic character, that is, one with whom readers identify, approve of, admire, and appreciate. S/he becomes a role model, whose virtues are to be emulated. Jauß (1989:264-292), whose interests and forte lie in the area of Rezeptionsästhetik, helpfully points out that the term 'sympathetic' identification is inclusive of several sub-categories which serve as gradients on a continuum of depth of identification:

- greater
  - 1. associative—the reader vicariously living through a character
  - 2. admiring—the reader respects the hero, but cannot fully identify
  - 3. sympathetic (in a narrower sense)—feeling solidarity with a flawed hero
  - 4. cathartic—the reader's purgation of emotions through a character
  - 5. ironic—the ambivalence of identification with, and simultaneous alienation from, an ironic figure.

The prospect of successful sympathetic identification is also dependent upon several other factors. Aristotle (1989:15:44) isolated the following elements as crucial to the reader's acceptance of the credibility of a character.

- Morality: Any speech or action which demonstrates morality (good or bad) may serve as a pattern—a positive example if the character and the purpose are admirable, a negative example if the character and purpose is sinister.
- Appropriateness: While narrative characters may be unpredictable, their behavior must nevertheless conform to what is generally deemed fitting in a given situation.
- Verisimilitude: A credible character also must be true to life—speech and behavior must fall within the range of normal human responses.
- Consistency: Basic patterns of behavior should be seen; even if a character is portrayed as irrational or unpredictable, they must consistently maintain those traits. Indeed, it is characterological coherence which is one of the chief ways in which the unity and integrity of a story is established. For a reader to identify with a character, then, requires that a certain stability must be maintained throughout the narrative; yet genuine insight comes to the reader at those precise points where the character 'breaks the mold' in order to take a new way. Artful characterisation thus walks a tightrope between the predictable and the startlingly innovative.

In comic plots, the comic hero is typically known for his or her very ordinariness. A reader identifies with comic heroes because s/he, like they, faces challenges which make demands beyond his or her own humble resources, and sometimes serendipitously emerge as overcomers—the comic hero succeeds despite his or her meager assets. Thus Hyers (1987:115-116), who writes specifically on the role of the comic within biblical literature, characterises the comic hero as follows.

A major strength of the tragic spirit [in its classical sense] has also been its greatest weakness, namely, its exaltation of warrior virtues: courage, loyalty, duty, honor, pride, indomitable will, unquestioning obedience, stubborn determination, passionate involvement, uncompromising dedication....Yet these same noble virtues have so often led directly or indirectly to all manner of evil....In comedy, on the other hand, these

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226 For my perspective on the mimetic (realist) view of character versus seeing them as literary constructs (purists), see my comments above under the heading of 'Building a model for characterisation'.

227 Powell (1990:56) observes this feature as an important aspect of biblical narrative in particular: 'Readers are most likely to empathise with characters who are similar to them (realistic empathy) or with characters who represent what they would like to be (idealistic empathy)' (emphasis his).

228 Fisher ([1987] 1989:47) eloquently states the vital importance of this attribute of consistency, terming it 'actional tendencies,' by which he means that readers come to expect certain responses and behaviors of the characters whom they 'get to know' through the narrative:

character may be considered [as] an organized set of actional tendencies. If these tendencies contradict one another, change significantly, or alter in 'strange' ways, the result is a questioning of character. Coherence in life and in literature requires that characters behave characteristically. Without this kind of predictability, there is no trust, no community, no rational human order...Its importance in deciding whether to accept a message cannot be overestimated. Determining a character’s motives is prerequisite to trust, and trust is the foundation of belief.

Once again this perspective harmonises with hermeneutical commitments I have laid out in chapter two: understanding a narrative text (i.e. 'accepting a message' which the author intends) requires a cooperative effort between author and reader.
military virtues are counterbalanced by...an odd collection of virtues: laughter, humor, playfulness, childlikeness, meekness, humility, flexibility, moderation, magnanimity, willingness to compromise, love.

These qualities and character traits which Hyers lists here are those which invite readerly identification as worthy characteristics.

By contrast, an antipathetic character is one designed for the audience to reject, oppose, and even to hold in contempt. The villain or antihero is the character whom readers will dislike. Often, they are flat characters who incarnate a particular vice which the author intends to oppose through the narrative. Frequently, the antipathetic figure is also held up as a satiric vehicle, representing the evils the author seeks to expose to ridicule. On other occasions, the antipathetic figures can be more developed (round), capable of complexities which do not exonerate them, but incriminate them further as their distastefulness is compounded.

As with the categories of flat versus round and static versus developing, it is preferable also to distinguish gradations of identification. While some characters may elicit strong sympathetic identification and others strong antipathetic identification, other characters may elicit only a ‘weak’ form of identification (sympathetic or antipathetic). And potentially, a character may be so compelling as to create a strong sense of identification, but who causes the readers to vacillate between sympathetic and antipathetic. In my estimation, the depiction of both Samson and Saul fall into this category—at times (on those occasions where they appear to be trying to obey God) I wish to see them succeed, at other times I simply wish that they would receive their due judgment.

Thus with identification I see a continuum, which I display graphically as follows:

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| Strong Sympathetic | Weak Vacillating | Strong Antipathetic |
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It is possible to combine each of the individual graphs and continuums above to produce a summary chart. Below I present a diagrammatical synthesis of the main elements of characterisation in which the variables may be seen on a single page. This also serves to summarise what I believe are the most significant narrative conventions relative to characterisation in narratives generally, including biblical narratives.

\[\text{Dynamism}\]
\[\text{Developing} \quad \text{Ambivalent} \quad \text{Static}\]

\[\text{Identification} \quad \text{Characterisation} \quad \text{Roles}\]
\[\text{Sympathetic} \quad \text{Antipathetic} \quad \text{Weak} \quad \text{Vacillating} \quad \text{Protagonist} \quad \text{Entourage} \quad \text{Antagonist} \quad \text{Entourage} \quad \text{Foil} \quad \text{Satiric Portrait}\]

\[\text{Depth}\]
\[\text{Round} \quad \text{Flat}\]

5.2 Characterising biblical characterisation

As in the previous two chapters, I believe that the conventions appertaining to characterisation in narrative literature generally are applicable to biblical narratives as well. In
addition, these conventions can be nuanced further with supplemental remarks for application to biblical narratives in particular.\textsuperscript{229}

The Bible contains a large enough corpus of narrative material for internal literary patterns; just as there are type-scenes, recurrent events and plot themes, so also there are stereotyped characters. A stereotype character differs from a flat character in that the stereotype is known primarily as a representative of a larger collective or category of people—a New York taxicab driver, a federal tax accountant, a KGB agent or a movie star are all suggestive of traits which fit their ‘class’ rather than the individual. In the biblical narratives, these stereotypical character patterns include the barren couple, the beleaguered prophet, the needy widow, the egotistical king, the prisoner in exile and the fugitive. But precisely because these character patterns do exist, there are numerous examples of variation within those patterns and stereotype breaking. Sternberg (1985:348) observes this feature in commenting that ‘the Bible takes no less delight in non sequiturs of personality than of plot, interweaving the two for maximal incongruence and variety.’ Often a stereotyped figure is presented, creating certain expectations, for the purpose of misdirection, reversal and surprise. Kort (1988:70) also notes this interchange between stock expectations and the peculiarities of specific characters.

The depiction of character in biblical narrative is often derived from an interplay, then, between a stable or standard role and the individuality of the character or the diversity of characters who play it. The two, the constancy and the diversity, are interdependent. It is because of the stability that the structure of functions provides that such liberty can be taken with idiosyncrasies and individuality.

In comparing the characters of various biblical narratives, then, it is possible to register both the similarities and the diversities. I would argue that enhanced understanding of any given text

\textsuperscript{229}These features may be found in various pieces of extrabiblical literature as well (they are not necessarily unique to the Bible), but they do function as common denominators between biblical narratives.
requires attention both to the similarities with other type scenes, stock forms and stereotypes as well as departures from the apparent ‘stability’ of such literary patterns.

Though the various biblical narratives do emphasise different aspects of the human characters, a certain ‘stability’ emerges here. Few individuals other than God are presented as wholly good, given that within the narrative world of the biblical canon, ‘there is none that is righteous, not even one’ (Psalm 14:3). Because of this, it is erroneous to think of any human figure as a hero in an absolute sense, for none is a perfect ideal but God alone. Nevertheless, even these blemished characters are presented in such a way as to be mostly positive. For example, Abraham is commended for his exemplary faith (Genesis 15:6) that God will keep his promises to him of a future son, a land for his progeny, and a blessing. This faith is severely tested but vindicated in the binding and near-sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22). Yet it is because of his faith that he is considered righteous, not because of his actions, many of which are dubious or wrongheaded. He is thus not so much heroic as fortunate to be chosen by God for blessing. On the other hand, frequently negative characters have their portrayal ameliorated somewhat by certain positive qualities (e.g. Samson’s eleventh-hour repentance).

5.2(a) Direct information

The narrator of most biblical narratives is assumed to be reliable and omniscient, capable of divulging what would otherwise be private information: the ‘inner life’ of thoughts and feelings of his characters. The narrator can see right into the soul of the characters, revealing not only their conscious thoughts and schemes (e.g. Amnon’s plot against Tamar in 2 Samuel 13), but

\[230\] Thompson (1993:179) comes to the same conclusion about biblical narratives in general in an article focusing specifically on the characterisation of God within the Gospel of John.

\[231\] E.g. taking his nephew Lot along with him to the land after being told to leave his household, trying to pass Sarah off as his sister to save his own skin (twice!) and trying to fulfill the promise of a son through Sarah’s servant Hagar.
also their level of ignorance (e.g. 'Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them' in Genesis 31:32), their misconceptions (e.g. 'Now Haman thought to himself, “Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?”' in Esther 6:6), their emotions (e.g. Absalom's hatred of Amnon in 2 Samuel 13:21), and their hidden motives (e.g. the fear of synagogue expulsion by the parents of the man healed of blindness in John 9:22-23).

The naming of characters (and places) within biblical narratives is frequently significant. The very conferring of a proper name establishes a character as having a unique identity, while the withholding of a proper name relegates that figure, in most cases, to 'minor-league' status. Frequently the name itself has a meaning which is indicative of circumstances at birth, for example Isaac (laughter), Ben-oni (son of anguish), Ichabod (no glory). The name may indicate character, as in Nabal (Fool), or may be proleptic of future events, as in Jezreel (Yahweh scatters/sows) and Shearjashub (a remnant shall return). Just as frequently paranomasia obtains, where a name sounds like, but is not identical to, another significant term. Since the giving of names carries such importance, the changing of names which takes place within narratives becomes especially significant: Abram (Abraham, 'father of many'), Jacob (Israel, 'fights with God') and Naomi (Mara, 'bitter'). Revell (1996) has offered a detailed analysis of naming in the Bible. He observes (69), 'In most cases, the first mention of a named character is made in the form of a compound designation including the name and a patronymic, gentilic, or title.' The typical formula for a patronymic is '___, son of ___.'. A 'gentilic' identifies the nationality of a non-Israelite (e.g. Hadad, the Edomite' in 1 Kings 11:14) or the tribal affiliation of an Israelite (e.g. 'Sheba son of Bicri, a Benjaminite' in 2 Samuel 20:1). Other elements frequently disclosed along with the name include home place (e.g. 'Micah of Moresheth' in Micah 1:1), status (e.g. king, widow, rich, old) and profession (shepherd, prophet, tax collector, prostitute). Less
frequent in biblical narratives are descriptions of physical traits (beautiful, lame, ruddy); such physical descriptions (including dress) are always important to the story when they are mentioned, serving not as aesthetic embellishment, but as necessary ‘props’ for the events: e.g. Bathsheba’s beauty (2 Samuel 11:2), the hair of Esau (Genesis 25:25), the hair of Samson (Judges 13:5) and the hair of Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25-26 cf 18:9). Likewise, personality traits (wise, foolish, meek, cunning, righteous) are rarely stated directly, but always are significant (e.g. ‘Abigail...was intelligent and beautiful, but her husband...was surly and mean’ (1 Samuel 25:3).

5.2(b) Indirect information

More often, however, readers learn about biblical characters indirectly, that is, through the narrative action itself such as their own speech and actions, as well as how other characters perceive, respond to, and described them. Through this technique, the reader is more effectively drawn into interpretive participation in the story.

The first of these avenues of indirect information is from the character’s own self-revelation. The self-description may involve self-abnegation (e.g. Gideon: ‘My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the weakest in my family’ Judges 6:15) or of boasting (‘Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’ Daniel 4:30). Obviously, in the first of these cases Gideon has understated his worth, in the second case Nebuchadnezzar has overstated his accomplishments, thus the reader cannot always accept at face value self-characterisations in the narrative.

More frequently, readers must interpret the actions of the narrative figures as they reconstruct their character. By ‘actions’ I mean to include activities, choices, movements,

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232 Ryken (1974:26) addresses the issue of choice in biblical characterisation: ‘The plot of biblical literature has the motif of choice built into its very structure and results in what might be called the drama of the soul’s
gestures, mannerisms, and habits. Biblical narratives most often use deeds to reveal character, letting readers learn about characters through observing the way that they behave in various situations, preferring showing to telling.\textsuperscript{233} This forces readers to build hypotheses as they go, which are constantly, if subconsciously, being shaped, monitored, revised, and refined through the reading process. Readers are not told directly by the narrator that Moses is an impetuous and impulsive man, but that perception becomes clear to them as he repeatedly reacts in a violent manner: killing an Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-14), breaking the tablets (Exodus 32:19) and striking the rock (Numbers 20:11). So also when Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac, he doesn’t say anything in the text. Instead, one reads (Genesis 22:3):

Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

The author doesn’t tell his readers that Abraham was obedient, nor anything about what Abraham was thinking or feeling, nor whether Abraham questioned God—he lets them draw those conclusions. The perception of Esau as a ‘caveman-ish’ brute emerges through the series of actions described in short order in Genesis 25:34, ‘Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.’ In these cases it may justly be said that actions do speak louder than words, even if more ambiguously.

Another clue in the composite picture of a character may be found in his or her behavior toward others. Freye (1979:xx) observes that ‘the most intensely individual characters in the Bible are always put into vital relation with their communities as well as with their God.’

\textsuperscript{233}Sternberg (1985:322-325), Bar-Efrat (1989:77), and Powell (1990:52) have each emphasised this same point.
Readers admire Ruth’s fidelity to Naomi as well as Jonathan’s self-sacrificing consideration for David. Alternatively, they react negatively to Job’s self-righteous ‘friends’ as pompous blowhards who whitewash their patently obvious arguments with clichés and flowery fluff—their speech, both in content and in style, betrays them. Thus when Adam says, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it’ (Genesis 3:12), again the narrator doesn’t directly say that Adam blamed Eve instead of accepting responsibility—he lets readers figure that out for themselves.

The physical surroundings may also be a source of information for characterisation in biblical narratives. Just as visiting an acquaintance in their home can shed a great deal of light onto their lifestyle (e.g. what kinds of books on the shelf, which furniture pieces are given priority, landscaping, comparative cleanliness and order, pictures on the wall), so in a story where a person chooses to be often tells the reader about him or her. John the Baptist’s preference for living in the wilderness is in keeping with his iconoclastic prophetic ministry; Naomi continuing to live in self-imposed exile in Moab, the land of a longstanding enemy, for years after the deaths of her husbands and her sons reveals the relative unimportance of her identification with her own people.

Another avenue of indirect disclosure of information about a character comes from other characters in the story: what they say to or about that character and how they treat him or her. The earlier example in this chapter of Saul’s servant’s description of David is a clear case of ‘second-hand,’ indirect information, as is Ahithophel’s counsel to Absalom, in which the tacit acceptance of his assessment of David’s abilities plays a pivotal role in the episode: ‘You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs...All Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave’ (2 Samuel 17:8,10).
Sometimes readers are given previews into people's lives through prophecies given concerning them at their time of birth. For example, Ishmael is called 'a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers' (Genesis 16:12). Samson's mother is told that 'he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines' (Judges 13:5). These narrative foreshadowings should be accorded a high degree of reliability, for while others' assessments may be flawed, the recorded predictions about persons in the Bible unswervingly and irresistibly come to pass.

Readers also gain insight into a narrative figure by observing the attitude of others toward the character. So, for instance, they learn a vital clue into the psyche of Jephthah by taking note of his half-brothers who resent his illegitimate birth (Judges 11:2); not only is he a tainted figure (consistent with the characterisation of nearly all Israel's judges in this book), but he also is the target for sibling rivalry, a familiar theme often encountered elsewhere in biblical narratives (e.g. Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers). Caution is necessary, however, for the other character may not be a reliable witness—a bad person may slander a good character.

The most clearly defining relationship a character sustains within biblical narrative is his or her relationship with God. McCracken (1993:30-31), following Bakhtin, employs the term 'interdividuation' to describe how characterisation is formed in biblical narratives, namely, in the intensely dramatic encounters and interaction with God. Characters are often dynamic, as they respond to God, often during crisis and under the stress of severe tests. These encounters are crux experiences, and according to McCracken (:32) constitute 'eternal time, when they face a question of ultimate importance.'
Of course, the most reliable source of information about a character within a biblical narrative is the evaluation of that person by God (e.g., ‘Then Yahweh’s anger burned against Moses’ Exodus 4:14). Yet even here, because of God’s patience and grace, the reader cannot assume in a facile or mechanical manner that God blesses only the righteous (e.g., Samson, ‘Yahweh blessed [Samson], and the Spirit of Yahweh began to stir him’ Judges 13:24-25) or visits hardship only upon the wicked (e.g., Job). Nevertheless, when he provides a spoken evaluation concerning a person, one may correctly agree with his assessment. As a case in point, though Abraham’s actions reveal a portrait of mixed colors, faith yet cowardice, strong leadership yet foolishness, boldness yet easily intimidated, the final judgment on him is approval by Yahweh: ‘Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws’ (Genesis 26:5).

Characterisation in biblical narratives is also achieved through contrasts: a character is often seen in juxtaposition with another party to highlight certain traits. These contrasts may occur in several different ways. First, and most commonly, a contrast may be drawn between a main character and another character within the narrative: the use of a foil. For example, Esau is seen as a primitive, impulsive and ignorant outdoorsman as opposed to Jacob, who is a shrewd, calculating, manipulating ‘mama’s-boy’ (cf Nabal and Abigail). Secondly, the contrast may be presented as the before and after states of the same main character within the narrative of a conversion plot: a developing character (e.g., young Jacob versus old Jacob/Israel; Nebuchadnezzar before and after his humiliation).

In the previous chapter on plot I presented a specialised definition of comedy and tragedy as it appears in biblical narratives. There I argued that the term comedy is useful in understanding biblical narratives when it entails the protagonist successfully completing his or
her initial objective, while tragedy refers to the ultimate failure of the protagonist to achieve his or her initial objective. These definitions were adopted primarily to overcome the shortcomings or inapplicability of the classical (i.e., western) definitions to biblical characterisation in particular. In the Bible, there are neither tragic nor comic ‘heroes’ (see above), but those who align themselves with God and those who do not. Comedic protagonists and tragic foils come from the class of those who do choose to follow God (believe in him, obey his commands, keep his covenant, fear him). Comedic antagonists and tragic protagonists come from the class of those who do not follow him.

Underlying both of these plot/character matrices, the tragic and the comic, lies reversal. The Bible deals with life change: both within its characters and implicitly between the narratives and the implied readers. The implication for characterisation is that the more fully described (round) characters are not static but developing, either for better or worse. Stories of the foolish, weak, oppressed, poor and humble becoming wiser, stronger, liberated, and blessed comprise a significant theme in scriptures. Thus many Bible stories present before and after pictures of their main characters, both the sympathetic and antipathetic. In his book on the presence of comedy in biblical literature Hyers (1987:45) elaborates on its connection with this concept of reversal, describing how

giants are felled, and underlings are victorious. Tyrants are defeated and slaves liberated. Beautiful people are splattered with mud and Cinderellas fitted with glass slippers. Despite our love of greatness, the Bible does not offer the kind of heroic literature that emphasises and eulogises human greatness. The Bible...has very little to say about human greatness....Like comedy, the biblical impulse is to find foolishness in wisdom and wisdom in foolishness.

God is not at all impressed with human importance, and is especially opposed to human self-importance and those maintaining a superiority complex.
5.2(c) Summary

In his literary study of the Bible, Gottcent (1986:xxvi) observes that the biblical character roles are often misunderstood by contemporary readers: ‘Perhaps the most damaging misconception about the Bible is the prejudicial belief that its characters are all straitlaced, tedious saints whose stories demonstrate a steadfast—and boring—piety.’ Gaining insight into a biblical character involves readers’ readiness continually to adjust their opinion of that person, much the same way as one continually updates his or her opinion of the real people encountered in everyday life. Readers make interpretive guesses and postulate tentative hypotheses which they hold until some new element forces them to alter their opinion further. In studying characterisation, then, readers are doing the same thing as they do in studying plot or setting: looking for the details of the implicit narrative conventions which are indicators of authorial strategy and thus intent. So I cite once again the insight of Fewell and Gunn (1990:15): ‘Character construction (by readers), like plot construction, is inevitably a search for consistency’; that is, the readers’ task in interpreting characters is to seek explanations which best account for all the details within the story.

5.3 Characterising Jonah

Having established the theoretical underpinnings of characterisation in narrative in general and biblical narrative in particular, I turn now to an application of my method on the book of Jonah. An initial problem to be faced concerning characterisation in the book of Jonah is deciding upon the identity of the main character. The obvious and immediate answer, of course, is Jonah. However, Jonah is not the main character in several key scenes which comprise a substantial part of the story. He is passive in 1:4-17, doing nothing proactively and speaking
only when spoken to, in stark contrast to the frenzied activity of the gentile sailors. Likewise in 3:5-10, he is absent from the scene as the gentile Ninevites repent before God and become recipients of God’s mercy.

Moreover, a case for Yahweh/God in the role of protagonist can plausibly be made. He has the first and last words in the book. His activity is seen throughout the book. Yahweh commissions Jonah (1:2); he ‘hurls’ the storm (1:4); he appoints the fish to swallow Jonah (1:17); he commands the fish to vomit Jonah on dry land (2:10); he re-commissions Jonah (3:2); he has compassion upon the Ninevites (3:10); he questions Jonah (4:4); he appoints a vine (4:6), a worm (4:7), and an east wind (4:8), and questions Jonah again (4:9-11). Moreover, unlike Jonah there is a relationship of sorts between him and the king of Nineveh which ties the king into the plot of the story. Nevertheless, he does not really fit the definition of a protagonist, for the author does not train the spotlight in the book on him.

The protagonist is the character who receives the most attention in the narrative. Jonah himself remains the focal point of the narrator’s attention. From a strictly statistical perspective, Jonah is the subject of the storyline verb more frequently (31 clauses for Jonah, 15 for Yahweh), and speaks more (35 clauses for Jonah, 13 for Yahweh). The sailors’ actions are more frequently directed to Jonah (Jonah is the direct object 7 times when the captain or sailors are the subject of the verb, compared to Yahweh being the direct object 3 times), and they speak more to Jonah (12 clauses) than to Yahweh (3 clauses). Jonah is ‘on-stage’ in 36 of the 48 verses of the book, while Yahweh/God is referred to in only 18 verses. Thus while Yahweh can reasonably be described as the character who initiates and has the ‘final say’ in the actions described in the narrative, the focus of the narrator’s attention follows Jonah and the details of his experiences and progress(?) through the main storyline, making Jonah the protagonist of this narrative.

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I shall begin by discussing the minor characters of the book of Jonah first, then return to look at the roles of Yahweh and Jonah in more detail.

5.3(a) Nature

While none of the elements of nature (the storm, the great fish, the cattle, the plant and the worm) or human construction (the ship, the booth) can be rightly termed a character, a few comments are in order in regard to their presentation. The ship is accorded the faculty of thinking: ‘And the ship considered breaking apart’ (רָעַבְתָּ יָאָשַׁב מָשְׁנֶה, 1:4). This may be attributed to stylistic flair, viz a personification in the service of assonance, but because of the way in which other elements are described, it appears there is more to it than this. The great wind/spirit (רוּחַ) is something which does not merely blow or arise, but is ‘hurled’ (רָעַבְתָּ, 1:4). The great fish (1:17 [2:1]), the qîgayôn plant (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the east wind/spirit (רוּחַ, 4:8) are all ‘appointed’ (רְכֵּ֣֟בָּ) by Yahweh, as if they are agents enlisted into God’s service as sentient beings. The verb רָכַּ֣בָּ (3:8) describing the sackcloth to be worn by Ninevites and their cattle is a hithpael conjugation, requiring not a simple passive, ‘they shall be covered,’ but as Brichto (1992:268n17) points out, it is a reflexive, ‘they shall cover themselves.’ It is incredible enough that cattle should be constrained to wear (presumably uncomfortable) clothing, but so much more when they are expected to dress themselves!

Throughout the entire book the elements of nature are used by God to direct (and thwart) Jonah toward his ends. As McCarthy and Riley (1986:137) wryly note, ‘Perhaps the real satire of the book is that a half-hearted prophet can convert Sin city in a day’s bad preaching; but God has to mobilise half of the forces of creation to teach his prophet anything.’ In 1:9 Jonah claims to ‘fear Yahweh, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry ground.’ Thus in the narrative
Yahweh manipulates both the sea [1:4ff] and the dry ground [4:7ff]' (1:9) to instruct Jonah. To use the expression of Thompson's title phrase (1978), readers are surely in a 'more fantastic country,' inhabited by personified natural elements, obedient to their maker.

5.3(b) Gentiles

While the text of Jonah does not employ the term 'gentile' (גָּוי), all the other human characters in the story besides the protagonist are non-Israelite. These include the sailors, the captain of the ship, the Ninevites, and the king of Nineveh. The gentile-ness is underscored by several features. First, the sailors and the Ninevites both function as foils to Jonah (a point I develop below), and several significant verbal parallels link them together: both 'cry out' to God (עָשִּׂים 1:5; עָשִּׂים 3:7), both groups have a leader and spokesman (the captain, the king) who issues the command to 'call out' (והו 1:6; 3:8) to God, and who speculates that by turning to God that they 'will not be destroyed' (וֹלַד 1:6[14]; 3:9) by the God-sent 'evil' (דֶּנֶּה 1:7,8; 3:10). The sailors attempt to return (שָׁוַא 1:13), while the Ninevites repent (שָׁוַא 1:13; 3:8). This begs the question as to why these two parties are placed in parallel, i.e., what quality is shared by both. In my estimation it is that neither group has a prior relationship with God (they are non-covenantal people), yet God spares them both. Secondly, when Jonah identifies himself, he stresses two things: that he is a Hebrew (ָֽיִהוּ), and that he fears Yahweh. This response links the concept of Jonah's Hebrew-ness to the covenantal name of Yahweh. The sailors, functioning within the

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234Limburg (1993:53) notes that when the term 'Hebrew' is used in the Hebrew Bible, it is either a foreigner's description of the people of Israel or 'when the text marks a contrast between Israelites and other people (Gen. 43:32). In the latter prophets, it is found only here and in Jeremiah 34:9,14 where יִשְׂרָאֵל is used in parallel to 'Jew' (יָדְרוֹן). In the former prophets, it is used only in 1 Samuel (eight times), where in every case it is used alongside 'Israel' (יָדְרוֹן).
narrative as foils, are contrasted with the protagonist Jonah. Since Jonah identifies himself as a Hebrew, then a key point of contrast, viz their non-Hebrew-ness, is thereby highlighted.

A role reversal takes place between Hebrew and gentiles within this book. Magenet has demonstrated ([1976] 1983:70-71) that one of the techniques employed in the book of Jonah is that the speeches of gentiles echo traditional Israelite confessions. When the sailors pray to Yahweh (1:14) ‘Do not hold against us innocent blood,’ their words parallel Deuteronomy 21:8, ‘do not let the guilt of innocent blood [יָדִי דַּם] remain in the midst of your people Israel’ (cf Jeremiah 26:15). Also in 1:14, the words ‘You, Yahweh, have done as you pleased,’ are identical to Psalms 115:3 and 135:6. In 3:9, the king’s pensive speculation, ‘Perhaps God will turn and repent and will turn away from his fierce wrath,’ matches the language of Moses interceding for Israel in Exodus 32:12. The effect upon the reader is disorienting. As Jones (1995:149-150) puts it, ‘The pagans in Jonah ironically speak like pious Israelites while Jonah utters traditional confessions that are either completely incongruous with his actions (1:9) or with the narrative context of the confession (4:2).’

5.3(c) Sailors

The sailors are known only through indirect information—the narrator tells readers nothing about them, preferring to let them act and speak for themselves while they are ‘on stage’ (1:5-16). The sailors operate collectively as a single entity—they act in unanimity and speak as if in unison. Aside from the captain (see below), there is no evidence of individual identity—the only diversity reflected is when initially each man cries out ‘to his own god,’ and even then they

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235Craig (1993:70-71) also acknowledges this point, recognizing affinities between the words of the gentiles in Jonah with statements from Israelite tradition: Jonah 1:8 as a contrast with ‘the people of the east’ in Genesis 29:4-8, Jonah 1:14 compares with Deuteronomy 21:8 and with Jeremiah 26:14b-15 and contrasts with Jeremiah 26:11. The point here is that the sailors and Ninevites in the narrative are characterised with phrases befitting God’s people
do so uniformly, betraying no differences of opinion or response. As a collective personality constituting a single, minor character, they remain nameless, what may be termed as a unitary 'actant,' described by Bal (1985:26) as 'a class of actors that shares a certain characteristic quality' (Bal 1985:26). The terms used for them are: sailors מרים (once in 1:5), 'each to his companion' שלט (1:7), and 'the men' נָעֲשֵׂה (1:10). They are not given a gentilic, that is, identification by nationality, though from their behavior and their unfamiliarity with Yahweh they are presumably non-Israelite.

5.3(c)i Depth of presentation and dynamism

On the continuum of depth, they correspond most closely with the flat character, yet they are not monodimensional. They demonstrate several moods and responses (traits): fear, mercy, awe, and devotion. In terms of their dynamism, I see them as a group operating as a single, developing character. The sailors are profoundly changed by their encounter with Yahweh, moving from a privatised and presumably polytheistic religious outcry of their need to mutual and collective fear and worship of Yahweh. They evolve from each being a worshiper of 'his own god' to becoming worshipers of Yahweh. Their reversal is thus not the discovery of religious faith, but a new understanding of who is to be the object of their faith.

5.3(c)ii Role

The role occupied by the sailors has two facets. Initially they appear as merely the protagonist's entourage, but as the storyline progresses their actions soon overshadow Jonah as the focal point of activity. The narrator's presentation of their actions and dialogue go beyond

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236 I have chosen to retain flat yet developing characterisation for the sailors because, while they do undergo transformation, the description of them is sparse and they are portrayed as a collective rather than as a gathering of individuals. Even the captain, though an individual, is not portrayed in any qualitative way as different from his cohorts.
simply enabling the protagonist Jonah. In fact, their activity is juxtaposed against Jonah’s inactivity: their panicky, passionate speech contrasts with Jonah’s deliberate and laconic style of speaking, and their fear (יְהוָה 1:10) of Yahweh is sincere and ‘great’ in comparison with Jonah’s perfunctory, self-proclaimed ‘fear’ (1:9). They exhibit two fundamental traits: (1) responsiveness to God/the gods, and (2) commitment to the preservation of the life of a foreigner. As such they function as a foil to Jonah, whose actions betray the very opposite of these two traits. The picture that emerges is that of men who, despite extreme duress, regard the life of another human being, though foreign to them, with such high esteem that they will expend self-sacrificing, heroic effort to spare that individual. Jonah, by contrast, remains unresponsive to God and uncaring (hostile) toward others, especially foreigners. Though initially not fearers of Yahweh, even they are appalled at Jonah’s callous or cavalier attitude toward Yahweh (‘What is this you have done?’). Their religious expression is genuine, even if generated by circumstances, whereas Jonah’s is entirely superficial. Thus the sailors function as a narrative foil to Jonah, as sincere in character as Jonah is insincere.

5.3(c)iii Identification

The sailors are a sympathetic character—readers generally approve of the ‘rightness’ of their behavior. The reader may presume that they are gentiles, given their polytheistic theology and the kinds of questions that they ask (they do not recognise Jonah as a Hebrew). The rapid-fire burst of five, very short, somewhat redundant questions (v. 8) implies a panicky babbling which is realistic for those who are gripped with fear. By contrast, their prayer to Yahweh is measured and unhurried, containing long clauses and clear construction, as if proleptically anticipating the calm to follow.
Several features prevent readers from perceiving them as completely realistic. The fact that they are a single, yet corporate character makes identification with them problematic—groups rarely behave in unison during a panic. Further, the content of their questions, their intense interest in Jonah's background during a time a crisis, seems odd. Nevertheless, one can admire them for their traits.

Several other comments about the author's portrayal of the sailors are in order. They are, from their entrance into the story until their departure, described as 'fearful' (אֲדֹנֵי 1:5,10,16), drawing a direct causative connection between their circumstances and deity. They are polytheistic, indicated by each man crying to his own god. They might be labeled as superstitious as well, based on their casting of lots, although other biblical narratives also support this practice. They place a high value on human life, demonstrated by their persistent measures taken to prevent having to hurl the culprit Jonah overboard: they pray to their own gods, they hurl the 'cargo' (tackle? מִלְכָּא) overboard to lighten the ship, when the lots they cast to determine the guilty party falls upon Jonah they interrogate him, they seek Jonah's advice for what should be done, they attempt to return/repent (זָרָע) back to dry land, and they pray to Jonah's God (Yahweh).

Finally, the sailors function in a precursory and anticipatory role to the Ninevites encountered later in the story. Their responses both parallel and prepare readers for the actions of the Ninevites. As Sasson (1990:341) observes: 'The trauma aboard ship becomes a subtext

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237 Marcus (1985:108), discussing the virtual ubiquity of the presence of irony in the book of Jonah, argues that 'the sailors ask too many questions of Jonah (1:8), and at the wrong time. In the midst of a life-threatening storm they request what seems to be a short autobiography of Jonah.' Their questions do not appear to be germane to the issue at hand until verse 11, when they ask him what it is that they must do in order to be saved from the storm.

238 The sailors in fact act in ways that might be expected of Israelites: they cast lots to determine God's will (Proverbs 16:33 states, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD'; Proverbs 18:18 says, 'Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart' cf the identification of Achan as the guilty party
that clarifies and explains the Ninevites’ behavior and thus serves to render slightly more persuasive their instant turn to God when a single foreigner utters the briefest of verdicts.’

5.3(d) The captain

5.3(d)i Depth of exposure and dynamism

The captain of the ship is the least developed human figure in the book, an anonymous ‘bit player’ character who is present in only a single verse (1:6), and who functions strictly as a flat character—a mere agent or actant. He is identified by the term נָבִיא, indicating his rank as a leader, yet he is not privileged with a name. In the single, brief scene where he appears, he is static, showing no change or development as an individual (presumably as one of the sailors he later develops, but it is not as a distinct entity).

5.3(d)ii Role and identification

What readers know of him is learned by indirect information through a single action (seeking out the sleeping Jonah below deck) and a single speech. What he says consists of a rhetorical question: ‘How can you sleep?’, a command: ‘Arise and call on your god!’, and an indicative speculation: ‘Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish.’ The captain speaks as the spokesman for the gentile sailors. His primary narrative function is to echo Yahweh’s words, attempting to rouse Jonah from his sleep with the same terms that Yahweh used to ‘rouse’ Jonah at his commissioning. The captain here commands Jonah with two of the same imperative verbs as spoken by Yahweh in 1:2 and 3:2: Arise! (יִנַּח) and call out! (נָרַק). In a subtle way, then, his words contrast with Jonah’s actions, thus making him a foil as well. Because he is a mere agent appearing in a single verse (1:6), the reader does not develop any real

by lot casting in Joshua 7:14-26). Limburg (1993:49-58) discusses other ways in which the sailors’ actions either
sense of identification with the captain, though his action and his words are realistic and appropriate to the crisis situation.

5.3(e) Ninevites

5.3(e)i Depth of exposure

Like the sailors, the Ninevites are not distinguished as individuals, but function as a collective whole, an actant—‘men of Nineveh’ (אשךְר יָנוּ ה 3:5; מְצַנְחָה 3:7,8). As Revell (1996:187) notes, the non-specific term ‘man’ (ish שָׁנַ) is employed when a pronoun is inadequate, but the position of the character in the narrative does not justify the attention which the use of a more specific designation would attract. There is a certain discrimination made within their ranks: from the greatest to the least (מקהלתֵ יָוֶה 3:7,8), nobles (ברכֵר), and with the expression, ‘man and animal’ (יִבְשׁוֹת 3:7,8), even the animals are included in their population. All the Ninevites (including the animals!) operate in concert, ‘from the greatest to the least.’ This provides indirect information into their character.

They are a flat character, presented in this narrative only very minimally. Though the focus of the narrative centers on Jonah’s call to ministry in Nineveh, the Ninevites themselves are active in only one verse (3:5), doing three things: believing in God (ניינרֵ יָבֵלוֹ), declaring a fast, and putting on sackcloth. Their wickedness had already been announced by the most credible witness within the story possible, Yahweh (1:2). This evaluation is corroborated by the reliable narrator, who says that the Ninevites repented (or ‘turned’ לְשׁוֹם) from their evil ways (והָרַךְ 3:10). In both of these passages the reader receives direct information which clearly specifies and emphasises the Ninevites’ wickedness. Moreover, the entire

fulfill or adumbrate Israel’s legal and wisdom traditions.
population repents in the most absolute terms (see 3:5,10). It is these two traits, utter wickedness and universal repentance from that wickedness, without any mixed or partial response, and without any dissenting voices, which make for the simple characterisation.

5.3(e)ii Dynamism

Again, like the sailors, the Ninevites are portrayed as gentiles who are immediately responsive to God with works and reverence appropriate to their repentance. Because of this dramatic change, they are depicted as a developing character.\textsuperscript{239} Indeed their change is even more dramatic for four reasons. First, readers do not know the prior moral condition of the sailors, but they do know from both Yahweh’s testimony (1:2) and the king’s own admission (3:8) that the Ninevites are wicked and violent. Secondly, they repent before their deliverance, while the sailors showed their reverence to Yahweh after their deliverance. And thirdly, they repent unanimously, a singular event among gentiles in the Hebrew Bible. And finally, they repent on the basis of the scantiest amount of information, offered by a begrudging prophet. The reversal one sees, then, is in the boldest possible relief: from wickedness that reeks to high heaven (1:2) to one hundred per cent conversion of comic proportions, including ‘low’-ly sackcloth-clad cattle repenting from their ‘wicked ways,’ and thereby delivered on the basis of God’s pity for them.

5.3(e)iii Role

The Ninevites function narratively in parallel to the sailors of chapter one. They, too, serve as a foil to Jonah. They repent (excessively?) with theScarcest of knowledge of God, while Jonah remains unrepentant despite a personal (though antagonistic) relationship with God.

\textsuperscript{239} Though it may be argued that Nahum demonstrates that they have not undergone any lasting change.

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Their response also conforms to the biblical patterns of expectation for the Israelites. They called a fast (3:5,7) in light of impending crisis (cf Jeremiah 36:9; Joel 1:14; 2:15; 2 Chronicles 20:3). They also wore sackcloth and sat in ashes (3:6,8), also an Israelite practice (cf 2 Samuel 3:31; 2 Kings 19:1-2; Jeremiah 4:8; 6:26; Esther 4:1-3; Nehemiah 9:1). They also manifest contrition in hopes that their cries to God would be heard (3:8-9 cf Daniel 9:3; Nehemiah 9:1). The king of Nineveh commands the people to ‘turn from their evil ways,’ a common biblical phrase.240 In the words of Limburg (1993:82), ‘the people of the world are demonstrating to the people of God how they ought to conduct themselves!’ Thus they, like the sailors, also operate primarily as a contrast to Jonah to highlight how bad he truly is.

5.3(e)iv Identification

The degree of reader identification with the character of the Ninevites raises several important interpretive issues. The first has to do with the implied readers of the book. It is possible to postulate two different audiences, the original readers or recipients and anticipated future readers. Identifying the original readers is no easy task, given that the book has been dated by various commentators from as early as Jonah’s lifetime in the eighth century BCE (by a host of those assuming he is the author of the book) to as late as the third century BCE, the terminus ad quem being established by reference to the book of Jonah in Tobit. Sasson (1990:20-28) very capably presents and assesses the various arguments for the dating of Jonah. I am in agreement with his entire line of argument. He begins (:20) by asserting that ‘although there is no shortage of theories and proposals regarding the date of Jonah, few scholars categorically set Jonah in a specific period of Hebrew history,’ due both to the lack of consensus

on the issue and to the absence of any superscription. After weighing the historical, literary, linguistic, intertextual, social, and theological arguments, he favors a probable final editing or composition of the book in the postexilic period. Yet he (27) goes on to make the following point, with which I concur.

At the same time, however, I acknowledge how little this admission contributes to a fuller understanding of this particular book.... In the case of Jonah, whether we place it in the early fifth century or in late third century B.C.E., we gain little insight either into the text or into the selected period.

Against a backdrop of the post-exilic community under the strictures of Ezra's and Nehemiah's nationalistic reforms (my own leaning), its universality may serve as a corrective, yet this historical identification remains speculative.241

In the previous chapter, I adopted Person's characterisation of the implied reader, augmenting his suggestions with my own (see under 'Plotting along with Jonah'). I would maintain that the implied reader242 is familiar with Nineveh and Assyria from the broader narrative world of biblical narratives, readily recognising its longstanding reputation as standing in hostility towards God, towards God's people, and even to many other gentile nations. Thus if the implied reader is thus the biblically literate, the parameters are significantly broadened, while at the same time building upon important, presumed information about Nineveh.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, an archenemy of Israel, as amply demonstrated elsewhere in Scripture. Populated by 'bad-guy' Hamites and built by Nimrod (Gn 10:8-10), it well could be stereotyped as the focalisation of violence and cruelty, receiving book-length

241 The model of a postexilic critique of Jewish nationalism (e.g. Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah) "fits" my understanding of the message of the book very well (see Chapter Six). But there is little extratextual evidence to substantiate this position. As Von Rad ([1960]1968:11:302, cited favorably by Jauß [1993:274n14]) states, "Von einer "universalistischen" Opposition gegen die "partikularistischen" Maßnahmen Ezra-Nehemias wissen wir nichts, und in dem Büchlein finden sich dafür schlechterdings keine Anknüpfungspunkte."
condemnation in Nahum. Both Isaiah and Hosea make numerous references to Assyria as the future conquerors over Israel, and the narrative of Assyria's destruction of Samaria and the northern kingdom, with the subsequent siege of Jerusalem, is recorded in 2 Kings 17-19. Hyers (1987:94) comments that, viewed from this perspective, the author 'could not have chosen more unlikely and undeserving recipients of divine grace.' Yet the author is surprisingly reticent in depicting Nineveh, not even hinting at the significance of Assyria as a nation (the proper noun 'Assyria' is not mentioned in Jonah). If the author has deliberately chosen Nineveh as a stock figure of a 'sin city,' he nevertheless has left understated the particulars of their evils, choosing not to list a litany of their offenses. That the Ninevites are very wicked is made obvious (by God, by the narrator, and by the king's admission), but the author does not indulge the implied reader's imaginations with the details of their sordidness, nor does he establish any clear reference of hostilities toward Israel. As Tigay (1985-1986:70) points out:

Nothing is further from the author's mind than the sins of Nineveh against Israel. The text makes it clear that the sins of which the Ninevites repent are 'each man's evil ways' and 'the injustice which is in their hands' (Jonah 3:8), not the oppression of Israel, not even idolatry, which the Ninevites are not asked to abandon. The Ninevites' sins apparently are those committed against each other.

In what may be another reversal of expectations, rather than capitalising on the role of Nineveh/Assyria in Israel's demise, the narrator chooses to foreground their offensiveness to God (1:2).

Initially wicked and violent, they place their faith in God (3:5), they repent of their evil ways, God responds to their repentance with compassion, and they are saved. This embedded

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242 Perhaps in more current parlance the term 'virtual' reader is preferable—one who is willing fully to enter into the world of the biblical narratives and participate in its values.

243 According to Rofé (1988:161), 'Nineveh is portrayed merely as a large city—not the capital of the Assyrian empire which was the perpetrator of Israel's subjugation, destruction and exile, not even simply as the capital of an anonymous pagan empire' (see also Schmidt 1976:37).
story within the story is a happy one, one that most readers will identify with sympathetically. One can admire their response, yet cannot fully identify with them. One reason the reader may experience some difficulty in identifying with the character of the Ninevites is that, again like the sailors, this character is a corporate individual rather than a single person—it is harder for some to think of themselves in terms of an entire society of king, noblemen and peasants (with cattle thrown in to boot!). But a second, larger reason is that Nineveh, as portrayed in Jonah, is incredible. They repent: unanimously—all social strata from greatest to least (!), every last one of the entire 120,000 inhabitants(!); universally—even the animals are in on the affair(!); overwhelmingly—sitting in dust, fasting from food and water, exchanging robes for sackcloth, praying, forsaking their entire former lifestyle(!); uniquely—no other prophetic message in biblical history begins to approach the number of conversions(!); ignorantly—they don’t even know the name of the threatening God, nor have they been told whether he wants them to repent(!); instantaneously—they effect a total reversal of their lives on the basis of a five-word prophecy(!). All this points to melodrama, the effect of which makes the likelihood of serious reader identification less plausible. The Ninevites truly constitute a comedic (in both senses of the term) figure of hyperbolic proportions.

A final obstacle to identification stems from a literary disequilibration. Powell (1990:57) describes it in this way:

As a general rule, the reader of a narrative will care the most about those characters for whom the protagonist cares the most. This is because the protagonist is usually one character with whom the reader experiences some degree of empathy....If the implied reader empathises with a character who feels aversion toward other characters, then the implied reader also will feel aversion toward those characters.

A reader might expect the Ninevites to be an antipathetic character because of the intratextual knowledge of them (the Assyrians), and because the protagonist Jonah, with whom the reader
identifies most strongly, disapproves of them thoroughly. Yet, as is the case in most irony, the surface appearance conflicts with the deeper reality. Readers may have difficulty, despite themselves, in disliking the Ninevites in Jonah—they might elicit (ironic? embittered?) laughter rather than hatred. Though they may be associated with Israel’s failure and frustrations, their over-responsiveness borders on the ludicrous.

5.3(f) The king

5.3(f)i Depth of exposure

The king of Nineveh is a flat character, whose limited depth of exposure tends toward that of the agent. He is not identified by name but merely by rank. Since one of the chief functions in the bestowal of a proper name is the differentiation of that character from other figures in the narrative (see Reinhartz 1993:119), the absence of it here indicates that he is not important as an individual. Revell (1996:146-147) elaborates:

The title is sometimes the only designation used for a ruler....In such cases, the title simply represents a threatening foreign power. The name of the ruler who directs it is not relevant to the narrator’s purpose.

While this results in less verisimilitude, his anonymity is less distracting to the storyline than a name would be, discouraging attempts at identifying him in external history. Instead, the implied reader will tend to supply the stereotype of a foreign king, and he both fits and breaks that expectation. Kort (1988:107) describes the interplay between this general stereotype versus the particular individuation here:

Spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, warrior, leader, king, prophet, priest—people have their places. The interests of particularity do not slight the constancy of repeated, predictable offices and functions. And characters, by their individuality, give new meaning to the constant.
Initially he fits the typical pattern of the malevolent, foreign king, because, as the leader of this wicked and violent people he is implicated in their wrongdoing. But he quickly departs from the norm, for while a foreign king usually resists the condemning words of a prophet of Yahweh (e.g. Pharaoh and Moses, Exodus 5-10; Barak and Balaam, Numbers 22-24),\(^ {244} \) in this case he immediately humbles himself and turns toward God after hearing merely a second-hand report of the prophet’s meager words.

Indeed, the king of Nineveh here stands not only in contrast with other gentile kings who are confronted by a prophet, but in an even more indicting contrast, he behaves in a remarkably receptive way when juxtaposed with the all-too-resistant kings of Israel and Judah. Saul is defensive and evasive toward Samuel (1 Samuel 15), Ahab and Jezebel threaten Elijah with his life (1 Kings 19:1-2), Jehoiakim burns the scroll of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:20-27), and Zedekiah beats and imprisons Jeremiah before throwing him into a muddy cistern (Jeremiah 37:14-38:6), and Asa imprisons the prophet Hanani (2 Chronicles 16:10). Thus the king of Nineveh here not only surpasses the other foreign kings, but also the rulers over God’s people.

5.3(f)ii Role

The king is known to readers indirectly by what he does. He arises, and in so doing, at the verbal level, he ‘obeys’ the first of Yahweh’s commissioning words (1:2; 3:2). He takes off his robes, covers himself in sackcloth, and sits in the dust. His ‘arising’ compares with Jonah (1:3; 3:3), while his ‘sitting’ (בָּשַׁע) in self-abasement in the dust contrasts with Jonah’s selfish sitting in the shade (4:5): Jonah defiantly sits in the shade to seek comfort and safety for himself alone, while the king humbly sits in the dust to seek deliverance for all his people. Thus the king serves as a foil to Jonah, as do all the other human characters in the narrative.

\(^{244}\)See my discussion of the king’s throneroom under ‘Setting.’
As a spokesman singled out from among the Ninevites, the king is comparable to the captain of the sailors, who speaks as a spokesman for the sailors. In what might be termed as narrative ‘ballast,’ a term borrowed from the study of Hebrew poetic technique, the captain’s actions occupy minimal narrative attention as recounted in a single verse (1:6), just as the Ninevites’ actions are described in a single verse (3:5). And as the sailors are treated in a more lengthy passage, so by compensation (i.e. ballast) the king is ‘on stage’ for a more extended length (3:6-9).

The king’s character is also revealed indirectly by what he says. He issues a royal edict in which he commands universal fasting from food and water and requires the wearing of sackcloth, which, ironically, they have already done (3:5 cf 3:8). He further mandates that everyone call on God (קָרָא), the third verb used in Yahweh’s commissioning words of 1:2 and 3:2, and orders repentance from evil and violence. He then asks the rhetorical question, ‘Who knows?’ (cf the captain, 1:6), and offers an indicative speculation, ‘God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish’ (compare again the captain’s words in 1:6). He is thus portrayed in parallel with the captain of chapter one in several ways. Moreover, his words not only echo Yahweh’s and the captain’s, but may also be compared outside the book of Jonah. The phrase ‘let everyone repent from his evil ways’ occurs frequently in Jeremiah (18:11; 23:14,22; 25:5; 26:3; 35:15; 36:3,7). Likewise, he is recalling a phrase from Joel 2:14 when he says, ‘Who knows but that God may repent and relent?’ It is as if the pagan king was as steeped in ‘bible-speak’ as Jonah. And God’s response parallels the terminology of his pardon of the Israelites following the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:14).
5.3(f)iii Dynamism and identification

Unlike the captain, the King of Nineveh is portrayed as a developing figure, undergoing a reversal comparable to that of the sailors. Though his characterisation is relatively limited, he does play a significant role. According to Barthes (1977:106), 'In short, every character (even a secondary) is the hero of his own sequence'—i.e. in this subsidiary storyline. One's identification with him is sympathetic and admiring, though because of the shallowness of narrative exposure, he does not emerge as a 'real' person with whom the reader can readily relate, thus the identification, while sympathetic, is relatively weak.

5.3(g) Yahweh

5.3(g)i Depth of Exposure

The characterisation of God in the Bible presents readers with unique challenges. Many of the elements of characterisation applicable to humans are simply inappropriate when speaking of God: his parentage, his geographical situation, his physical appearance, social status, ethnic background, or 'development' of his character.\(^{245}\) In any particular passage of Scripture he may be presented more (e.g. Genesis 3) or less (e.g. Esther) transparently, more monolithically or multi-faceted, but he will not be portrayed as having abandoned one set of values, traits, and behaviors exchanged for another, different set.

If it is true that the Bible is in a real sense the self-revelation of God (however that may be defined), then any interpretive approach must address the issue of the composite picture of God that emerges when all the various parts of the canon are viewed together. Seen from a different perspective, no characterisation of Yahweh in any individual book will present anything

\(^{245}\)As Sternberg (1985:322-324) points out, the notion that God should in any way develop runs into difficulties with passages which assert his changelessness. This point is argued, however, with process theologians and
approximating a ‘complete’ picture of who God is. Fewell and Gunn (1993:89) offer this instructive insight relating to the portrayal of God in the Bible:

Coming to some understanding of the character of YHWH is one of the great challenges of the Hebrew Bible, not only of its narrative. Of course, we can make it simpler by treating component stories as wholly discrete so that we see not one character but many. On the other hand,... the canonical shape of the Bible may incline us to keep looking for a single character, even if complex, mysterious, enigmatic, and quite often frustratingly elusive.

In this case, it may be plausibly argued that Yahweh is ‘complex, mysterious, enigmatic, and... frustratingly elusive’ even within the space of a single, short book!

In the book of Jonah Yahweh is depicted as a round character, i.e. complex and multifaceted. In fact, this is a significant factor within the book. When the captain says ‘maybe’ (1:6) and the king ‘Who knows?’ (3:9), the ambiguity concerning God’s preference for mercy versus destruction is highlighted as the issue at stake—they don’t know how to peg God. Even Jonah is uncertain about God, reflected in the fact that, after accusing God of being (overly) compassionate, he hangs around the city to see what would happen, unsure of the outcome. The effect is that while aspects of God’s character can be known, he is not fully comprehended by anyone else in the narrative. Interpreters who approach the narrative seeing Jonah as the ‘fall-guy’ (see chapter one) stress that it is the freedom of God to do as he chooses (see the words of the sailors in 1:14, ‘for you, YAHWEH, have done as you pleased’) which constitutes the main message of the book.

5.3(g)ii Dynamism

As noted above, the polarity of static versus developing is problematic in discussing the characterisation of God. A static character is one who remains unaffected by the events and

advocates of the ‘openness of God’ taking the opposing view that God is not only capable of change, but that the Bible records aspects of his development.
other characters of the story. In Jonah God is not static, because he responds to people’s responses: storming at Jonah’s disobedience, calming the sea for the prayerful sailors, sparing Jonah from the sea/fish following Jonah’s prayer, repenting from his threatened ‘evil’/destruction (יִשָּׁר, 3:10) upon the Ninevites repenting from their own evil, and questioning Jonah’s right to anger. But neither is he a developing figure, because no permanent change takes place in his habits, personality, or outlook. Osborne (1991:106) correctly observes that ‘the constant alterations within God’s actions are not due to changes in his character but rather to the ever-changing developments in the people within the stories.’ Instead of these two antipodes I propose coining the term responsive to describe him—incommutable in his essential character, yet sensitive to the shifts in thinking and adaptive to the changes of behavior on the part of the other characters in the story. As Sternberg (1985:325) helpfully points out:

One does not play tricks with God’s image: the writer of Jonah shows exceptional courage as well as craftsmanship in twisting order and response. But even he draws the line at temporary misdirection, with a view to ultimate enlightenment reinforced by the dynamics of surprise. Permanent ambiguation of character...is out of the question in the divine sphere.

While I believe that Sternberg here is guilty of assuming his proof based on his theological predispositions, I do agree that the narrator here in the book of Jonah does employ ‘temporary misdirection’ and ambiguation in characterising of God246 (Will his implied destruction of the city be executed in the face of both Ninevite repentance and his own prophet’s disapproval?). McCarthy and Riley (1986:119-120) offer this perceptive comment:

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246 Of the seven models for interpreting the narrative of Jonah which I introduced in chapter one, Sternberg’s (1985:320) reading conforms to ‘Jonah as Prophet’: ‘Beginning as a punitive affair between God and Nineveh, temporarily interrupted by the go-between’s recalcitrance, Jonah evolves before our eyes into a story of a prophet’s education.’

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The Yahweh of Jonah is delightfully anthropomorphic, changing his mind as circumstances demand, enduring the verbal dressing down which he receives from an aggrieved prophet, trying to comfort Jonah and to explain to him in tender terms why even divine wrath needs to be held in check at times....The God of the Book of Jonah wears his transcendence lightly.

God’s dealings with relation to the Ninevites features probably the leading theological issue in the book—how can God change his mind (גַּם הִנְמוּ 3:10), his word (דְּבָרָה 3:10), and his intended actions (נָשָׁתָן לָךְ 3:10)? This anthropomorphism contrasts starkly with Balaam’s words: ‘God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind [נָשָׁתָן לָךְ]. What he has said, will he not do [נָשָׁתָן לָךְ]? And what he has spoken [דְּבָרָה] will he not fulfill?’ (Numbers 23:19 cf 1 Samuel 15:29). If changeability is a characteristic of humanness, then God appears all too humanly unpredictable here. Nevertheless, what the narrator describes as God’s ‘change of mind’ was predicted by Jonah as something he knew all along, having even said so (דְּבָרָה 4:2) before his journey. In other words, what the narrator tells readers is a change of God’s mind is no change at all from Jonah’s perspective! It is this kind of ambiguity and multi-perspectivalism which contributes to the portrayal of God as both round and responsive—he defies any facile description, either by the characters in the story or by readers of the narrative.

5.3(g)iii Role

Yahweh is a major character in this story, the catalyst behind every action taken by others throughout the book—he ‘pushes people’s buttons.’ He owns both the first and last words in the story—his speech forms a narrative inclusio to the book. The initial action, Yahweh’s commissioning of Jonah, prompts Jonah to flee. The storm he ‘hurls’ upon the sea forces the captain and the sailors into frenzied activity, culminating in Jonah being thrown overboard. Yahweh’s calming of the sea causes the sailors to respond in worship. When he appoints the
great fish to rescue Jonah from the sea, it provokes a ‘song of thanksgiving’ from Jonah. His re-
commissioning of Jonah leads to Jonah’s oracular pronouncement in Nineveh. The threatened
overthrow of Nineveh incites the population, and the king, into acts of repentance. The ‘stay of
execution’ that he grants to the Ninevites elicits Jonah’s great anger, intensified by his twofold
interrogation of Jonah as he ‘turns up the heat.’

Nevertheless, because Jonah remains the predominant focus of attention throughout the
story, and Yahweh opposes him, Yahweh conforms to the role of the antagonist (see opening
remarks under ‘Characterising Jonah’), one who in this case proactively precipitates all the
actions within the entire story. He has a point-counterpoint relationship with Jonah, even at the
surface level of the text. Magonet (1983:31-33) observed that (in the Masoretic Text of Biblia
Hebraica Stuttgartensia) Jonah’s speech in 4:2-3 contains 39 words, and God’s speech in 4:10-
11 also contains 39 words. God’s question in 4:9 has 5 words, while Jonah responds with 5
words. God’s question to Jonah in 4:4 has 3 words, just as Jonah’s lament in 4:8. The point here
is not the precise number count, but the relative balance between the two. They are in direct
conflict throughout the entirety of the book (see my discussion of ‘Plot’).

5.3(g)iv Identification

Reader identification with Yahweh is also fundamentally problematical. The reader is
sympathetic in the sense of approving of, appreciating, and admiring. Yet whether God is
behaving ‘appropriately’ is, at least for Jonah, entirely arguable. And as for consistency, God
seems to show nothing but grace to all parties in the story, even to the unappreciative and
unrepentant protagonist. While this may be construed as consistency within the book of Jonah, it
certainly appears to Jonah as inconsistent with his expectations of the character of God as
revealed in his previous dealings with Israel and the nations.

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5.3(g) Mode of presentation

Yahweh is revealed indirectly in the book of Jonah through what he does. He is active in every main section of the book, and he is the only one in the story who is narratively related to every other human character in the book. He is thus involved in human affairs, a point which Sasson (1990:350) makes: ‘This readiness to toy with mortals is a conspicuous vision the narrator has about Jonah’s God; the ship, the sailors, the fish, the Ninevites, even nature itself are all called upon to demonstrate this attribute.’ His control over nature—the storm, the great fish, the plant, the worm, and the wind—demonstrates his power. His control over inanimate objects (the casting of lots) and over people (the fate of Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites is entirely in his hands) points to his absolute freedom to rule; in other words, he does as he pleases (1:14).

What he says also reveals his character. In the original commission to Jonah, he stands against the wickedness of the Ninevites; the fact of his opposition to evil indicates his goodness.\textsuperscript{247} His questioning of Jonah in chapter 4 also further witnesses to his concern for all the inhabitants of Nineveh.

The narrator grants readers a glimpse into the ‘inner life’ of God in 3:10, where readers discover that he had compassion on the Ninevites, relenting from the impending doom pronounced upon Nineveh for its wickedness. Rofé (1988:164) is only partially correct in saying that ‘God’s quality of “renouncing punishment”....was a “new” attribute, it is possible that Jonah’s criticism was directed specifically against it.’ That Jonah took exception to God’s revocation of threatened punishment is clear from the text, but for God to relent from destructive judgment was not unprecedented in Scriptures (e.g Exodus 32:14; cf the quotation of Exodus

\textsuperscript{247}The theologian, seeing these narrative descriptions, will supply his or her own technical nomenclature for these attributes: holiness, righteousness, immanence, omnipotence, sovereignty and so forth. I will avoid employing them here, for this terminology is not indigenous to literary studies.
34:6 in Jonah 4:2). What is new is that here God revokes that punishment for non-Israelite people (cf Jeremiah 18:7-10), and further, that he has the positive disposition of compassion on them as well. There are other intimations of God’s favor toward non-Israelites, but this is the example par excellence of God’s disposition of pity upon them.

Yahweh is likewise revealed to readers indirectly from other characters in the story. From the sailors readers learn that God answers prayer, and that his purposes cannot be thwarted (1:14-15). From the Ninevites readers learn that God responds compassionately to wholesale repentance, demonstrated through fasting, sackcloth, and turning from their evil ways. Through Jonah the sailors learn God’s name, Yahweh, and that God is creator and ruler over heaven, the sea, and the land (1:9). Jonah’s song indicates that God answers desperate cries for help (2:2), that he was responsible for the storm (2:3), that he was the one who had rescued Jonah from the sea (2:6), that he grants grace (v. 8, נָשָׁב), and that he is the source of salvation (2:9). In Jonah’s outburst in 4:2, Jonah quotes, in part, Exodus 34:6, which lists further character traits of God: ‘gracious’ (נָשָׁב), ‘compassionate’ (נָשָׁב), ‘slow to anger,’ ‘abounding in love,’ ‘relents from sending calamity.’ Portions of this passage are also quoted in Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Nehemiah 9:17, but in each of these other cases, it has to do with Yahweh’s graciousness toward his own people to whom he is covenantally bound. Only here, in the accusatory voice of Jonah, is this passage applied to non-covenantal people. Ironically, in the context immediately preceding the passage that Jonah quotes (Exodus 33:19), God states to Moses, ‘I will have mercy (נָשָׁב) on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion (נָשָׁב) on whom I will have compassion,’ emphasising the freedom of God’s right to choose those to whom he wishes to extend his compassion. But its use here in Jonah is distinctive in

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248 E.g. the non-preferential treatment of the resident alien (Deuteronomy 24:17), the inclusion of Ruth the
explicitly extending God's compassion to those outside Israel as his chosen people, incorporating not only gentiles but also those who are wicked.

The narrator also reveals Yahweh indirectly from elements of nature in the story. The violent storm both arises and is calmed at his will. He also 'appoints' (נַעַמִּים) the great fish, the vine, the worm, and the east wind. Thus natural elements prove the validity of Jonah's claim that Yahweh is 'the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land' (1:9).

Finally, Yahweh/God is revealed indirectly by the narrator's use of divine names. Revell (1996:198) explains the common rule of the use of divine names in the Hebrew Bible. 'Where a simple designation for God is used by the narrator or by a speaker who is a member of Israel, the name [Yahweh] is nearly always chosen. Where the title is used as a simple designation, the word "God" (יהוה יְהוָה) is usually used alone.' So generally speaking, to Jonah God is Yahweh (יְהוָה), while to the gentiles he is God (גֵּד). There are two exceptions to this rule. First, when Jonah identifies by name which god is responsible for the storm, the sailors cease referring to him with the generic term גֵּד and pray to him on a first-name basis as Yahweh: praying to Yahweh, fearing Yahweh, sacrificing to Yahweh, and making vows to Yahweh (1:14-16). On the other hand, since Jonah never 'clues in' the Ninevites concerning God's name, they can only respond to him as (the) God (גֵּד). The narrator 'honors' their understanding of him by saying that it was (the) God (גֵּד) —rather than Yahweh—who has compassion on them. Thus the narrator in essence depicts God as meeting the Ninevites at their own level of understanding of him.

Moabitess and Yahweh's deliverance of the Philistines and Arameans (Amos 9:7).

While several others have discussed the use of divine names in Jonah (Kidner 1970:126-128; Waldman 1994:53-57), they fail to give due considerations to the exceptions discussed here.
The second exception occurs in Jonah’s tantrum of chapter 4. Up to that point, Jonah and his deity had always related as Jonah / Yahweh. (Jonah, of course, acknowledges that Yahweh is the supreme God in 1:9, but as a character in the story he had always related to him as Yahweh.) But when Yahweh questions Jonah’s right to anger, Jonah refuses to answer—he is no longer on speaking terms with the deity of his discomfort. Thus it is Yahweh God who appoints the vine (4:6), and from there on the relationship is Jonah / God (יהוה). The next day God questions Jonah the second time, and Jonah (more judiciously) answers—insolently, yet at least Jonah is back on speaking terms. With communication thus reopened, it is once again Yahweh (4:10) who asks Jonah the final question. Thus the narrator reserves the name ‘Yahweh’ for those who have a dialogical relationship with him, while allowing for God to demonstrate his compassion on those who properly respond to what little they know of him, i.e. who know him only as ‘(the) God.’

5.3(h) Jonah

5.3(h)i Depth of presentation

Given the relative brevity of this book, the narrative depiction of the character of Jonah results in a truly remarkable and compelling figure, evidencing sophisticated literary strategy, capturing the imagination of young and old alike and attracting the attention of scholars from many diverse fields. So enigmatic and complex is he that psychological and psychoanalytic analyses have been conducted on his ‘case’ (see under ‘Jonah as psychotic’ in chapter one). Clearly Jonah is a round character, variously exhibiting extreme emotions with little provocation.

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250 This implies that the gentile (i.e., non-covenantal) Ninevites do not enter into an ongoing, dialogical relationship with God, a point which is forcefully made in Nahum. Indeed, it appears that the pattern is that non-Israelites come into that relationship with Yahweh only via the Israelites: the remnant of Edom (Amos 9:11), Egypt and Assyria (Isaiah 19:23-25; Micah 7:11), and the nations generally (Isaiah 2:1-4; Zechariah 8:20-23).
(e.g., either suicidal or superlatively joyful, depending upon the presence or absence of shade) and little or no emotion during times of extreme provocation (e.g., the lack of discernible concern in the face of an imminent shipwreck). His baffling inconsistencies and self-contradictions, his shocking and scandalous flaunting of the expectations of a prophet of God, and his eccentric behavior all make him simultaneously interesting (an understatement) and inscrutable. In Kort's (1988:105) discussion of main characters in biblical narrative, he observes that they 'are frequently morally complex, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable.' In respect to this profile, it might well be argued that Jonah achieves a high water mark in the traits of complexity, idiosyncrasies, and unpredictability.

5.3(ii) Dynamism

The dangling ending of Jonah leaves the issue of Jonah's response to Yahweh's question wide open. Will he walk out of the conversation again as he did earlier (1:3; 4:5)? Will he argue with Yahweh again, insisting on his rights and what is 'good' in his own opinion (4:3,9)? Will he finally yield before Yahweh, humbly and repentantly receiving the message of the full extent of God's compassion? The story cries out for resolution, as has been commonly noted, but none is forthcoming (see my discussion under 'Plot'). Because the story obviously does not conclude, any attempt to provide closure to the book remains not only speculative, but in my judgment, contrary to the perlocutions of the author who intends frustration and unfulfilled desire for denouement in his implied readers. In the narrative as we have it (regardless of text type), Jonah does not ever finally 'come around' at the end of the story, he remains essentially...

unchanged. Thus, he must be viewed as a \textit{static} rather than a developing figure.\textsuperscript{252} Rather than experience any real reversal, there is a consistent deterioration of his character portrayal.

5.3(h)iii Role

Jonah is the central character of the book, and thus he is to be viewed as the \textit{protagonist}. According to Harvey (1966:56), protagonists are generally ‘the vehicles by which all the most interesting questions are raised; they evoke our beliefs, sympathies, revulsions; they incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel.’ It stands to reason that the main intentions of a narrative work will directly relate to the main storyline of the plot, hence the protagonist and the conflicts he or she faces. This general rule is applicable here. Jonah is the primary means by which the author generates the emotive impact upon and pathos within the implied reader, and through whom the moral issues are raised.

One important issue concerning the characterisation of Jonah is whether he is being held up as a comedic hero or whether he is a (flawed but) noble, tragic hero. If seen as tragic, Jonah’s great flaws are that he despises gentile inclusion into the grace of God, and that he feels betrayed by Yahweh’s freedom to extend his compassion (stated in covenantal terms, 4:2) toward such noncovenantal people. Throughout the book he remains stoic, unbowed, and resolute, and despite all of the circumstances that Yahweh ‘hurls’ at him, he is at least to be viewed as a man of uncompromising principles.\textsuperscript{253} As previously developed (see my discussion of ‘Plot’), Jonah is a \textit{tragic} figure when the term tragedy is specially nuanced for biblical literature: the tragic plot is (merely) applicable anytime that the protagonist fails to accomplish his or her initial objective. In western literature a tragic figure is heroic because he or she draws the readers sympathy—

\textsuperscript{252} Jonah does become more entrenched in his position, but as noted above this is an matter of intensification of his character traits rather than transformation.

\textsuperscript{253} For this reading of Jonah, see Woodard (1991:3-16 and 1993:348-357). 

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despite facing impossible odds, (s)he remains true to ideals which are admirable. By contrast, in biblical tragedy the protagonist fails, ultimately, because of refusal to trust in or obey Yahweh—an offense which not is presented as admirable. Against Levine (1984:241), who states, ‘nowhere in the Book is Jonah ever denigrated or depicted in negative terms,’ I maintain that the ‘ideals’ he represents are not admirable, and the suffering he experiences from God is essentially self-inflicted. In fact, judged by standards elsewhere in the Latter Prophets (e.g. Micah 6:8), it could well be argued that he deserves worse, and has received more mercy from God than his attitudes and behavior merit.

As a tragic figure (not hero) Jonah embodies of the very traits which the author seeks to expose and oppose—a satiric vehicle who is a lightening rod for ironical portrayal. Sasson (1990:345-348) identifies Jonah as a ‘comic dupe,’ seen elsewhere in the Bible in the figures of an unnamed ‘man of God’ in 1 Kings 13 and Balaam (Numbers 22-24). In each of these three cases, the prophet refuses the initial commission, is called upon to deliver a prophetic pronouncement upon a people not his own, each is ‘instructed’ through the agency of animals, and is taught a lesson while delivering his message. While this term is heuristically useful in establishing a trajectory for the characterisation of Jonah, I maintain that it does not go far enough. That Jonah is portrayed in a largely negative light, and yet does not create readers’ antipathy, is further evidence that he serves as a satiric portrait, implicitly scorned by the narrator. He is presented as ridiculous, inviting readers’ disapproval (see Good 1981:41) and, at times, their laughter. Jonah clearly illustrates the truth of Torrance’s (1978:11) observation that ‘the two conceptions of comedy, as satire and as celebration, though opposite, are by no means exclusive: reviling and reveling have always been closely akin.’ Jonah’s proclivity to the inapt, the non sequitur, and faux pas elicit both readerly disapproval and amusement. As Feinberg
(1967:234) demonstrates, the literary technique of satire also invites the portrayal of main figures as caricatures. Jonah fits this classification, since much of his behavior is entirely inappropriate to his circumstances and his responses are exaggerated beyond the normal bounds of human behavior (e.g., his extreme anger, extreme joy, and extreme anger again in chapter 4). He is unflatteringly presented as a thoroughly self-serving figure (see Jones 1995:161). The point of the satire is to portray Jonah as a representative of a class of people who are thereby rebuked for their attitudes and behavior. I shall identify this category shortly (see ‘identification’).

5.3(h)iv Mode of presentation

What is known about Jonah comes to the reader through indirect information. In his case, there is a great deal that can be learned through this source. I begin with his name. The first line of the book identifies Jonah as the son of Amittai. This phrase accomplishes several things. First, it presents Jonah as a realistic character, for genealogical information is not a feature in parables. Secondly, it serves as an intratextual link to 2 Kings 14:25, where Jonah, son of Amittai, is described by that narrator as a ‘servant’ of ‘Yahweh, the God of Israel,’ ‘the prophet from Gath Hepher’ whose prophecy concerning the extension of the boundaries of Israel is fulfilled during Jeroboam II’s reign. Thirdly, it may point to a word play. It has often been noted that the name ‘Jonah’ (יְהוֹנָה) means ‘dove,’ a term which is used metaphorically in the Book of the Twelve to describe Israel: ‘like a dove, silly and without sense’ (Hosea 7:11 cf 11:11 and cf Psalm 74:19). Flightiness and silliness both are fitting terms to describe Jonah’s behavior. Thus the group being satirized here may be hinted at from the outset by the use of this particular name. I suggest here a further possible wordplay. This exact word in the Hebrew Masoretic Text is found in Zephaniah 3:1, a passage which in context immediately follows an oracle against Assyria (2:13-15), mentioning the devastation of Nineveh specifically (2:13). The
precise word is: הָוֶּֽרָה, from the root הָוָּרֵה. The entire verse in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia reads:

ධේශා මෝලියකු තුට්රි නියෝගනා
Woe to the rebellious and defiled one, city of oppressors!

The Brown Driver and Briggs lexicon ([1907]1972:413) under this entry reads as follows:

oppress, maltreat...esp. of ill-treatment of poor & weak, particularly of the "םב, 'stranger', sojourner by the rich and powerful Ex 22:21 Lv 19:32 (25:14,17; Dt 23:16; Jr 22:3; Ezk 18:7,12,16) 22:7,29 (45:8)

In this interesting parallel, it is Jerusalem which is the city of oppression, and the word הָוֶּֽרָה points to her mistreatment of the foreigner by the Israelite, even as in Jonah God confronts the protagonist for his lack of compassion upon the foreign Ninevites.²⁵⁴

Jonah Ben-Amittai is the only named person in the book, other than Yahweh. As is typical within Hebrew narrative, in the first mention of his name there is a compound designation that identifies his father (see Revell 1996:69). He is not, however designated by title or office. Readers are left to infer, from the employment of the stock phrase ‘The word of YAHWEH was to son of ___saying,...’ (נְָיֹה יְהוָה בְּנִי — כַּהֵנַּר לָאַמַּר) that he was a prophet. The narrative here does not employ the usual terms associated with a prophet: the ‘man of God’ (נביא) or ‘prophet’ (נביא). Moreover in the narrative of Jonah he both receives an immediate message from God (1:1-2; 3:1-2) as well as ostensibly delivers a message from God

²⁵⁴ The context of Zephaniah 3:4-11 echoes or is suggestive of other images, terms and concepts also present in Jonah:

Her prophets are arrogant men of treacheries...I [Yahweh] cut off peoples [gentiles בֵּלָה], their strongholds demolished...their cities are destroyed....I said to the city, ‘Surely you will fear me and accept correction!’ Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishment upon her....My decision is to assemble the peoples [gentile nations], to gather kingdoms to pour out on them my wrath, all my burning anger. Indeed, by the fire of my anger the whole earth will be consumed....I will remove from within you those who rejoice in your pride. Never will you repeat your haughtiness again on my holy hill.
to the Ninevites. Two intratextual factors further point to the readers’ perception of him as a prophet: the linking of his name in 2 Kings 14:25 with the function of prophet and the inclusion of the book Jonah within the latter prophets. In identifying him as the son of ‘Amittai’ (עאמה), meaning ‘truth,’ there is a certain irony in the text, for Jonah is characterised throughout as insincere and unreliable.

Curiously, when the sailors interrogate Jonah, they ask about his background and occupation, but not his name. Accordingly, Brichto (1992:69,266n9) translates 1:8 as ‘Mr. On-Whose-Account-This-Misfortune-Has-Come-Upon-Us,’ that is, ‘Mr. No-Name.’ Their interest in him is not as a named person, but as a human being, and hence one whose life they seek to protect (in contrast with his attitude toward both them and the Ninevites).

Jonah’s answer to them is, ‘Hebrew am I…..’ This self-description itself is revelatory. He identifies not his nationality (Israelite), office (prophet), home place (Gath-Hepher?), but rather his ethnicity, using an ‘outsider’s’ term for himself. Kort (1988:38-39) comments, ‘It may...not be too much to say that the Book of Jonah is grounded in the whole text of Israel’s history….When Jonah identifies himself as a Hebrew, he reaches back to a designation used by Abraham (Gn 14:13) and of the slaves in Egypt.’ As in the story, ‘The man without a country,’ Jonah has by this term distanced himself from identifying with the Israelite people, yet inescapably is bound to them (see my discussion of שבע under ‘Gentiles’ above). He views himself ethnically as from the perspective of an outsider, for that is what he wishes to be—outside the land, outside of covenantal obligations, outside of the expectations attaching to a prophet of Yahweh. He is not one who fights with God (יהוה), but one seeking to evade God and these responsibilities by running away from (passing over? שבע) them.
In addition to his name, indirect information about his character is conveyed through his actions and speech. This includes both what he does and says as well as what he does not do or say. When commissioned by Yahweh to go to Nineveh, he instead goes toward Tarshish, thereby displaying disobedience to Yahweh. While the sailors desperately throw cargo overboard in order to save the ship, Jonah goes below deck and falls asleep, manifesting unconcern for others and selfishness. When awakened by the captain’s urge to call out to his God, he does not give any response whatsoever; that is, he is portrayed as passive. When the sailors interrogate him, they ask him five questions. Jonah’s ‘reply’ answers only one of their questions directly. ‘I am a Hebrew’ answers the question: ‘From what people are you?’ Thus he is evasive and minimally cooperative, conversing with them only on his terms. If narrative ‘truth’ may be described as ‘the coincidence of existence and appearance, of the identity and qualities of an actor on the one hand, and the impression s/he makes, his or her claims, on the other’ (so Bal 1985:35), then Jonah is untruthful. His actions belie his speech: ‘I fear [יָקָב] Yahweh.’ Irony obtains when characters act out a point of view which is incongruous with what they claim to believe. Here his speech demonstrates that he is unreliable, lying, insincere, pious-sounding, and hypocritical. Readers learn after the fact that Jonah had previously admitted that he was running away from Yahweh, which elicits great fear (יָקָב) on the part of the sailors but no ostensible concern on Jonah’s part; that is, he is brazen toward Yahweh and without remorse for defying God and jeopardising the sailors. Irresponsibility is seen in that he

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255 Bar-Efrat (1978:24) maintains that ‘not only man’s [sic] doings, but also his abstaining from action bear witness to his personality traits.’

256 Fewell and Gunn (1993:71) observe that insight into a character may be gained by ‘measuring what they say against what they do.... Look[ing] for congruence or discrepancy. In effect, we are comparing and contrasting the voices of character and narrator.’
does not volunteer to jump overboard (or even help row!), but places the burden of casting him overboard on the innocent, already-victimised sailors.

In the prayer of chapter two, he offers a ‘song of thanksgiving’ for deliverance while he is ensconced in the belly of the fish. Borrowing the wording from other (legitimate) psalms, his words echo hollowly in these circumstances, betraying insincerity and pretension. Pious phrases, grand promises, and sacred vows easily pour forth from him in this crisis situation. As Holbert (1981:73) has suggested, Jonah’s words are typical of what one might call foxhole religion, or in this case ‘fish-belly’ religion. He praises Yahweh for delivering him from the sea, yet sees this deliverance as already complete despite the obvious fact that he has not been saved from the fish. He does not ask to be delivered from the fish. He does not confess any wrongdoings on his part whatsoever, nor does he ask for forgiveness.\(^{257}\) He alludes to a ‘vow’ he had made, but nowhere do readers discover what this vow might have been, nor when he made it. Thus it appears that the only thing Jonah has really been ‘rescued’ from is the prospect of going to Nineveh; in this one may detect hypocrisy, pride, presumption, and unrepentance. The entire song exudes satiric irony and malapropisms.

In chapter 3 readers learn that Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of Yahweh (v.3, NIV ‘obeyed’), but several significant features in the text merit closer investigation. Readers are told that Nineveh is a ‘three-day city,’ yet find that Jonah goes only a day’s worth. The oracle of doom that Jonah delivers is highly suspect, being unlike any other prophetic announcement in the Bible. Conspicuously absent are the mention of Yahweh (or even ‘\(\text{Y}^\text{h}^\text{w}^\text{h}^\text{m}\)’), the reason(s) for threatened judgment, a call to repentance or any element of conditionality (see my discussion under ‘Plot’). Its extreme brevity also draws special attention.

\(^{257}\)Either a confession of sin or a protestation of innocence is frequently found in the individual lament, a form which would be far better suited to his circumstances.

320
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257 Either a confession of sin or a protestation of innocence is frequently found in the individual lament, a form which would be far better suited to his circumstances.
And though the word reaches the king’s ears, it is presumably not through Jonah, but through others. It thus appears that Jonah has done as grudgingly little as possible to appease Yahweh’s demands and discharge his unwanted duties; he remains inwardly defiant while outwardly and minimalistically compliant.

In chapter 4 Jonah’s character is revealed most clearly. He burns with a very great anger that the message he has delivered is so successful. To Jonah’s thinking, ‘success’ would have taken the form of destruction of Nineveh, while to the Yahweh (and to the implied reader?) ‘success’ entails their repentance and the consequent deliverance. He then reacts with an angry prayer in which he questions Yahweh, defends his earlier disobedience, and quotes scripture (Exodus 34:6) against God. Here there is anger, presumption, pride, arrogance, and self-righteousness. He then petitions Yahweh to take his life (he still refuses to take matters into his own hands) in suicidal, petulant selfishness. Wolff (1965:118) notes Jonah’s self-preoccupation by the cluster of first person pronouns:

[k]ommt allein in V. 2 fünfmal ein Ausdruck der 1. Person vor (‘Das ist’s ja, was ich dachte, als ich noch in meinem Lande war, weshalb ich auch eilends fliehen wollte; denn ich wusste ...’) und in dem kurzen V. 3 viermal (‘Nimm, Herr, meine Seele vor mir; denn mein Sterben ist besser als mein Leben’).

(emphasis mine)

When Yahweh responds with a direct question, Jonah gives no answer, but walks out of the conversation to a place east of Nineveh. When Yahweh God provides Jonah with shade, Jonah experiences great (גָּאָה) joy; when it withers he immediately returns to his suicidal state. These actions reveal that he is petty and highly unstable emotionally (manic-depressive?). When God again questions Jonah, he defends his right be angry to the death. Marcus (1995:120-121) well expresses Jonah’s fixation with death: ‘His only proposed solution on the boat is death; his
reaction to the events of Nineveh is death; his reaction to the loss of his shade is death.’ Thus Jonah’s actions reveal him to be morbid, stubborn, uncontrite, uncompromising, melodramatic, and self-righteous. Wiesel (1981:135) sums up the overall portrait of Jonah well:

Unhappy, unlucky always... No honors, no rewards, no friends, no supporters. Whatever he undertakes seems to go wrong. Whenever he wishes to win, he loses; whenever he would prefer to lose, he wins... The quintessential anti-hero, he takes no initiative, aspires to no glory, works on no grandiose scheme to change life or history. Completely passive, he lets others worry and make decisions for him... Jonah is the object rather than the subject of a story which he dislikes and rightly so; it does not do him justice.

The composite picture which is the product of all of these traits ‘promotes’ Jonah in an altogether unflattering, negative portrayal. As such he is perfectly suited to function in the role of the satiric portrait.

Another fruitful area of indirect information about Jonah comes by way of contrasts with other characters, both within the story of Jonah as well as outside of the book. All these negative traits that have been identified above stand out starkly when placed against the relief of the other characters in the story. According to Ska (1990:85), ‘[t]he complexity of Jonah’s character... comes to the fore in scenes where he is confronted with pagans who respond immediately and appropriately in crucial situations whereas the prophet cannot reconcile his faith with his mission and God’s mercy.’ The sailors not only forfeit their profit but also risk their lives in seeking to save Jonah’s life (profit for prophet?). Vainly the sailors attempt to repent/return [חזר] Jonah back toward land [1:13]); meanwhile Jonah, a ‘son of truth,’ sacrifices absolutely nothing for them. Indeed it is he who continues to imperil them; not only countering their activity with passivity, but also ostensibly resisting their entreaty to call out to his god. Likewise, the Ninevites seemingly repent upon the scarcest of ‘provocation,’ while Jonah remains recalcitrant and obstinate despite extreme, life-threatening conditions. Both the captain
and the king, serving as spokesmen for their people, have some implicit grasp of the freedom and inscrutability of God. By contrast, Jonah, who serves as a spokesman not only for his people but also for Yahweh, presumptuously rebukes Yahweh and arrogates to himself the right to stand in judgment over him. Most telling, however, is the comparison at the end of the book, where Jonah’s pity (ןְוַני) cannot rise above the level of plant life, while the aegis of Yahweh’s pity (יִנְוַי) extends to the entire human and animal population of Nineveh.

The pattern that emerges is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gentiles:</th>
<th>Threat of ‘evil’</th>
<th>Response: repentance</th>
<th>Result: deliverance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sailors</td>
<td>storm at sea</td>
<td>prayer, sacrifices, vows</td>
<td>sea is calmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninevites</td>
<td>destruction of the city</td>
<td>prayer, sackcloth, fasting</td>
<td>destruction is averted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jonah:</th>
<th>self-caused discomfort</th>
<th>Response: no repentance</th>
<th>Result: requesting death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>storm, drowning at sea</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>‘hurl me into the sea’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heat, outside the city</td>
<td>‘Isn’t this what I said?’</td>
<td>‘better my death than my life’ [twice]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pagans immediately react to their dire circumstances with the most ideal response toward God possible, while the covenantally-privileged prophet, even after bringing calamity upon himself, still refuses to yield to Yahweh.

The character of Jonah also invites contrast with other analogous figures in Hebrew history. Narrative analogy is a technique in which patterns, recurrences and relationships are observed between otherwise distinct stories, inviting comparisons between one character or situation and another (see Gordon 1988:76). Within biblical narrative, people occupying a particular office or role bear resemblances to one another, such that expectations of predictable
behavior and traits are created (see Turner 1996:133). In the case of Jonah, the expectations are those consistent with a prophet of God, based on the title being conferred on him in 2 Kings 14:25, the stock commissioning form at the narrative aperture (‘The word of Yahweh was to , son of _____, saying,...’) and the fact that he does pronounce an oracle to Nineveh. Throughout the narrative a dynamic tension is maintained between offering indirect support for regarding him as a prophet and consistently violating one’s expectations of how a prophet is supposed to behave. Marcus (1995:94-95) specifies these violations:

A prophet ought to be obedient to God’s will, Jonah is not; a prophet ought to intercede with God in times of trouble, Jonah does not; a prophet ought to plead with his audience to repent from their evil ways, Jonah does not; a prophet ought not to wish that his prophecy of destruction come true, but Jonah does; a prophet ought not be overly concerned about his personal comfort, but Jonah is; a prophet should not be portrayed in uncompromising or ridiculous situations, but Jonah is (on the ship, in the fish, outside Nineveh).

Jonah is portrayed largely in terms of not doing what he is supposed to, and doing what he is not supposed to.

Many parallels exist between Moses (and the exodus event) and Jonah: both become fugitives, they both oppose powerful foreign kings; they experience a passage through the sea; their rescue from the sea is praised with a song of thanksgiving which shares numerous verbal correspondences ([Jonah 2; Exodus 15]: ‘salvation,’ ‘hurl,’ ‘deep waters,’ ‘sank,’ ‘the heart of the sea,’ ‘swallowed,’ ‘unfailing love’ [בְּשָׁם], ‘your holy dwelling’/ ‘your holy temple,’ ‘mountain[s],’ the ‘reed’ sea); God’s use of an east wind; an argument with God by a bush/vine; Yahweh relenting and not bringing upon the people the destruction which he had threatened (Exodus 32:14); Jonah’s quotation of Exodus 34:6, originally spoken to Moses; Yahweh’s ‘burning anger’ (Numbers 11:10) versus Jonah’s ‘burning with anger’; Jonah constructs a ‘booth’ (the instructions for building booths are given by Moses in Leviticus 23:40-44); both
suffer in a hot and dry desert; Moses/Jonah challenge Yahweh with rhetorical questions (Numbers 11:11-13), followed by the petition for death.

Likewise, parallels exist between Jonah and Elijah (1 Kings 19): both are prophets from the northern kingdom of Israel; both flee from the land; both fall into a deep sleep during their flight; both experience extreme despondency immediately after huge success in their prophetic ministry; both go ‘a day’s journey’; both sit under the shade of a plant; both pray that they might die; both passages refer to forty days; both are interrogated by Yahweh; both try to justify their selfish response to Yahweh.

For all the resemblances, however, Jonah fares far worse for the comparison. Moses protests his commissioning on the basis of his inadequacy (so also Jeremiah, Isaiah); Jonah refuses Yahweh without so much as a verbal response. Moses and Elijah both complain over their frustrations in attempting to accomplish God’s work; Jonah complains that he is forced to do God’s work at all. In the case of Moses and Elijah, they are despondent over their failures to effect changes in the lives of the objects of their prophetic ministry; Jonah is despondent because of his success in prophetic ministry. Both Moses and Elijah became ‘burned out’ as they seek to live up to the ongoing demands placed on them by their prophetic vocation, especially in facing opposition to their message at every hand. Jonah, a ‘minor league’ prophet by comparison, ‘burns’ in anger despite encountering not the least bit of human opposition. Thus his pettiness and his ‘right’ to die in the line of ‘service’ is made all the more ridiculous.

The comparisons between Jonah and the other characters in the narrative, as well as the comparisons between Jonah and Moses and Elijah, function to reinforce the net effect of satire. Jonah is the individual targeted for lampooning. The satiric norm to which the ending points is that others, whom Jonah represents, should no longer behave like Jonah, attempting to resist or
thwart the extension of Yahweh’s grace to non-Israelites. Rather, they should take their cue from Yahweh’s magnanimity and similarly take pity upon ‘outsiders’ such as the Ninevites. The expected elements of irony and humor so common to satire are abundant here. But the ridicule is designed to extend beyond the character of Jonah, boomeranging onto the implied reader, which leads to ‘identification’.

5.3(h)v Identification

Reader identification with the protagonist in the case of Jonah, I believe, brings interpreters near to the reason for the diversity of views regarding the primary purpose of the book. I will begin by returning to the initial categories of interpretation given to the book which I surveyed in chapter one. For each one I chart whether the identification is sympathetic or antipathetic, and suggest the reason.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive model</th>
<th>Sympathetic/antipathetic</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pinocchio (the Prodigal)</td>
<td>sympathetic (strong)</td>
<td>It is ‘human’ to stray from God, and it is gracious of God to restore the lost back to himself. Jonah’s ‘conversion’ at the end is assumed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychotic</td>
<td>sympathetic (weak)</td>
<td>Jonah is a pitiable individual, whose mental disorders are deserving of humane treatment. Readers feel sympathy for him, but not as much identification with him (unless we have the same neuroses).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prometheus</td>
<td>sympathetic (strong)</td>
<td>Jonah is a tragic hero who has suffered beyond what he deserves. Readers feel for the underdog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall-guy</td>
<td>sympathetic (strong)</td>
<td>Jonah has been victimised by God’s freedom to do what he pleases. Readers too have sometimes felt wronged by God, but need to accept God on his terms, not theirs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriot</td>
<td>antipathetic (strong)</td>
<td>Jonah is a narrow-minded bigot who wants to hoard God to himself and his ‘own’ people rather than share him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>sympathetic (weak)</td>
<td>Jonah took God at his word, but God will not be bound to it if circumstances change. We need to learn the lesson too, although we’re not prophets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant missionary</td>
<td>sympathetic (strong)</td>
<td>Jonah didn’t want to evangelise cross-culturally, but was successful when he went. Readers too need to be willing (and hope that they don’t have to).</td>
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</table>

In evaluating these interpretive models critically, an awareness of narrative conventions of characterisation becomes vitally important, especially the issue of reader identification with the protagonist. There are two factors that deserve special consideration in order to determine identification in the case of Jonah. The first is the function of satire on character identification. I have built a case for seeing Jonah as a satiric portrait in both chapters four and five. Satiric figures are laughable persons, hyperbolically portrayed, whose egregious wrongdoings are
presented as so foolish or small-minded that they become the butt of the narrator’s humor. A satiric portrait is a powerful literary tool, but only to the degree that the audience correctly determines who is being satirically exposed, and for what vices. Acknowledging the satiric elements in Jonah seriously jeopardises interpretive models which view Jonah positively. Two interpretive models from the list above cannot adequately account for the role of satire. The ‘Jonah as psychotic’ interpretation takes his attitudes and actions as unintentional symptoms of mental disorders—he is the victim of problems beyond his control. The ‘Jonah as Prometheus’ model also views him as the victim, and thus his actions as worthy, though ultimately his efforts were in vain. Neither of these models allows for the protagonist to engage willingly in behavior which the author intends to hold up to scorn; victims are not laughable.

The second issue is the targeted group of the satiric attack. The satirical portrait here developed of the character of Jonah implies that he is representative of some group beyond himself, which is guilty of some of the same vices, and thus is in need of correction. In satire, the target is usually a type rather than an individual because, in the words of Feinberg (1967:232) the author ‘is usually concerned with Man rather than men [sic], institutions rather than personalities.’ It may be reasonably argued that all the main characters of biblical narratives operate paradigmatically, that is, they represent not just themselves, but those traits wherever they may be found in humanity more broadly. Thus Jonah does not stand alone, but stands for a larger group. In chapter one I listed the parties represented by Jonah for each of the interpretive models as follows:
<table>
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<th>Jonah as ...</th>
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<td>nationalists, bigots</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Israelite prophetic order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
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</table>

Looking back at the narrative of Jonah, there are clear signals as to the category of people whom he represents. In the context of the narrative, two other human individuals besides Jonah are presented: the captain and the king. The captain serves as a spokesman for his people: the sailors. The king, as the captain’s counterpart, serves as a spokesman for his people: the Ninevites. In Jonah 1:8, Jonah is asked by the sailors to what people he belongs (יְהוָה שֵׁם יָדְעוּל). His answer to them is the answer to the question raised here, ‘Hebrew am I’ (יִבְרֵי שֵׁם) that is, Jonah identifies the people group whom he represents in this reply. I may graph the three individual people mentioned in the narrative in relation to their larger community as follows:
Indeed, Jonah’s complaint in 4:2 (‘Was not this what I said while still at my home?’) echoes the words the Israelites in the wilderness claimed to have said, referring back to their life in Egypt, that they would have preferred remaining as slaves rather than leaving Egypt, ‘Was this not what we said to you in Egypt...?’ (Exodus 14:12). These are the only two occurrences of this expression, and in both of these cases there is no prior indication in the text of such a statement.\footnote{I am indebted to Marcus (1995:99n27) for this observation.} At least in the immediate sense, then, it is this group for whom Jonah serves as an exemplar.

In biblical narratives, the individual Israelite frequently serves as a figure for the entire people. Nohrmberg (1991:59) argues that ‘God’s resolve to convoke Israel as a morally answerable corporate individual suggests both why character matters so much in the Old Testament, and why none of its characters are to be understood without incorporating them into their national experience or incorporating it into them.’ This statement in my judgment clarifies one matter but obscures another. It elucidates the fact that the individual and the group to whom he or she belongs cannot be as radically differentiated as many westernised, enlightenment and post-enlightenment interpreters are prone to do. The ‘Jonah as Pinocchio (Prodigal),’ ‘Jonah as psychotic,’ ‘Jonah as Prometheus,’ and ‘Jonah as reluctant missionary’ models all betray an individualistic emphasis that is not native to biblical conception of corporate identity.

However, the issue that Nohrmberg obscures is in the facile linking of Israelite corporate identity with nationalism. This term implies that the essence of the corporate identity of God’s people in the Hebrew Bible is political, a notion which I contest. God’s choice of a people for himself predates the nation of Israel—it can be traced back at least as far as Abram. Of course it
is anachronistic and inaccurate to refer to any figure prior to Jacob as an ‘Israelite.’ But if the
term ‘Israelite’ is to be taken nationally, it is equally inaccurate to give the label to the
inhabitants of the southern kingdom of Judah of the divided monarchy (they were a separate
nation), and to the people of God in the diaspora (the nation of Israel did not exist), and to the
returnees from Babylonian exile (who were primarily former Judahites, hence ‘Jews’).
Moreover, there is not a suggestion in the latter prophets that the northern kingdom is to be
equated with God’s people while the southern kingdom is not, or vice versa. Rather, there is an
internalisation—the people of God with whom he chooses to be covenantally committed are not
circumscribed by national or political boundaries.

This also relates to whether it is Israelites ethnically, but not nationally, who are the
target group. Again, I object to this equation for several reasons. First, there are numerous
examples of non-Israelites (i.e. offspring of Jacob) who are incorporated into the covenantal
community of faith: Jethro, Rahab, Ruth inter alia. Secondly, it is clear in the prophets that
many who are ethnically of Israelite extraction are not God’s people (see e.g. שַׂרְפָּה, Hosea
1:9). Third, neither of the other two spokesmen/representatives in the book represent an ethnic
group: the king of Nineveh (not ‘Assyria’) represents a city, while the captain represents the
sailors, an occupational class who are not ethnically identified in any way. This calls into
question whether Jonah represents a people group who are defined by race (שַׂרְפָּה, notwithstanding). The term שַׂרְפָּה is found 38 times in the Hebrew Bible (BHS). Of these, half
(19) occurrences are clustered in Genesis 39-Exodus 10, while another eight are in 1 Samuel 4-

259 Albertz ([1992]1994:509) argues that theological solidarity with the community of faith came to ascendency in the exilic period precisely because of the collapse of socio-national community. Thus the remaining sense of community following the destruction of Israel and Judah was centered upon piety rather than external or ethnic factors. If Jonah is taken to be an exilic or post-exilic work (I would favor the latter), then it would strengthen the argument that the word שַׂרְפָּה should be understood more in covenantal and religious terms than ethnic.
29. These two sections not only involve dealings with gentiles (Egypt and Philistia, respectively), but also are narrative sections preceding important biblical covenants (Sinaitic and Davidic, respectively). Thus while there is an ethnic element to the term, I would argue that there are covenantal overtones associated with the word. Most often it is used by gentiles to describe the progeny of Jacob who, in these narratives, are entering into covenantal relationship with God. Thus there may be some warrant to understanding the term ‘Hebrew’ as a member of the Yahweh-community as much as a racially-defined group.

Thus I return to the issue of the implied reader once again. Jonah represents the audience (i.e., the implied readers), or at least what the audience could be like if they behave like him. There is scant, inferential evidence that the target audience was the order of the prophets themselves (casting doubts on the ‘Jonah as prophet’ model). While historically it is possible to speculate that the ‘original’ audience was post-exilic Judaism filled with religious and racial zeal, I would argue that it was possible for the author to anticipate a broader audience which would include both those who are covenantly-related to Yahweh and, more pointedly, those who presume a covenantal relationship with him based on superficial and external factors (e.g., such as offering sacrifices in a grudging and perfunctory manner cf. Malachi, or those who ‘honor’ Yahweh only by lip-service Isaiah 29:13), but who are, in fact, distant from him. It is this latter group that I see being attacked here in the book of Jonah. It includes all those who take God’s compassion upon themselves for granted, while begrudging his grace being extended beyond themselves to those whom they deem less worthy. The implied reader is one who is familiar with the narratives that one encounters in the Hebrew Bible and who generally accepts the

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260 The term is also found in 2 Kings 18:26,28 = Isaiah 36:11,13, where it refers to the Hebrew language, not the people, as well as in Jeremiah 34:9,14, which refers back to the Sinaitic covenant.

261 See my discussion of the implied reader in chapter four. Here I stress again the following: (1) The reader is familiar enough with the common stock of these narratives to be able to recognise literary patterns such as type-
values espoused therein. This identification implicates also those who draw near to God with their mouths (Jonah is never at a loss for religious platitudes), but whose attitudes and actions betray their posturing as a mere façade under which lurks antagonistic attitudes towards other peoples.

Hyers (1987:107) also envisions a broader, longer-range audience including all readers of the book, and generally anticipated by the author of Jonah, asserting that

the butt of the laughter is not just the comic figure immediately before the audience, but the audience itself...The fool strikingly enacts the foolishness of our own hypocrisies and contradictions...Ultimately Jonah is all of us, for all of us, individually and collectively, behave like Jonah at some time or another.

Thus in terms of identification, the conventions of characterisation and of satire offer promise for evaluating interpretive options for the book of Jonah. He is not a hero in either the comedic sense (ultimately he fails), or in the classical sense of a tragic hero (he is not noble). Rather, as an ironic figure, a satiric portrait, the implied reader’s identification with him is both crucial to the illocutionary and perlocutionary intents of the narrative, and problematised. I maintain that, while the identification here is strong, the implied reader experiences ambivalence of sympathetic identification with, and simultaneous alienation from, an ironic figure.\textsuperscript{262} In other words, as the story progresses, the identification is vacillating.\textsuperscript{263} Yet the unresolved ending insists upon identification. Just as the outcome of whether Jonah learned the lesson is suspensefully left hanging in the balance, so the implied reader is left to weigh his or her own

\textsuperscript{262}This coincides precisely with Jauß’s (1989:264-292) description of ironic identification.

\textsuperscript{263}While not agreeing with all of Magonet’s (1983:87-90) conclusions, I do believe his assessment of the characterisation of Jonah is certainly correct when he argues that ‘because of the ambiguation of the character of Jonah, the reader switches back and forth between identifying with him [sympathetic identification] and rejecting him [antipathetic identification].’

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outcome in response to this subversive narrative. As it draws to the end, the implied author implicitly asserts, in the words of Nathan (2 Samuel 12:7): "םִּנְיָנָה יִגְנֹב."
5.4 Appendix to Chapter 5: Characterisation

This chart displays which characters are ‘on-stage’ throughout the book, demonstrating the legitimacy of identifying Jonah as the protagonist, i.e., the focal point of the narrator’s interest.

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<th>ref MT</th>
<th>Yahweh</th>
<th>Jonah</th>
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<th>Ninevites</th>
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Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Prologue

Throughout this discourse (i.e., my thesis) I have sought to shed light on the workings of narrative. In this final chapter I would like to reverse the procedure by using a narrative to shed light on the workings of this discourse. Interwoven through this chapter will be excerpts from the fanciful and intriguing tale *Haroun and the sea of stories* (Rushdie 1990). In this story, the lead character Haroun Khalifa is the son of Rashid, the highly acclaimed storyteller whose narrative prowess is famous throughout the country of Alifbay. Though Haroun’s father is known as the Ocean of Notions to those who appreciate his great gift, not all share an appreciation for him (to them he is the Shah of Blah), nor place any value in the role of stories in the no-nonsense world of everyday life. Haroun and his father lived in a town which was ‘so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name’ (:15). One day Haroun asks Rashid as to the source of his stories, and is told that his father ‘subscribes’ to a water supply which flows through an invisible tap connecting him to the great Story Sea. As this tale progresses, Rashid suddenly and inexplicably discovers his mouth and heart are empty of stories—his supply from the Ocean of Stories has been disconnected. Haroun, with the aid of a water genie named Iff, goes on a quest to have his father’s supply reinstated, and discovers in the process truths about the world, himself and about the importance and role that stories have for our lives. Some of these very important lessons about the nature of stories have direct correlation with the same issues that I have sought to address and explicate (in a much more prosaic fashion) in this thesis. Thus in this chapter I will attempt to weave this intriguing story into both my own academic discourse, together with the other intriguing story of my interest, the narrative of Jonah.

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6.2 Review and Synopsis of the Method

I have sought to demonstrate a number of things in this thesis. My epistemological starting point is the working presupposition (or recognition) that telling stories is fundamental to human rationality. As others have claimed, human thought processes do not take place in some sort of cognitive vacuum, but within the context of lives that are experienced in a narrative manner. Culture and values and goals and identity are most often and most effectively mediated through the sharing of stories. Communication remains a possibility between individuals because there is, at a very essential level, a unity behind this narrative rationality or sensibility. That is, people recognise in the stories that they are told, how the author or storyteller perceives, understands and explains life, and it is through the comparability of stories that we share a certain commonness with people of different cultures. Haroun likewise encounters this assumption or claim with his first arrival in the setting of the strange world in which his quest takes place.

He looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity; and Iff explained that these were the Streams of Story, that each coloured strand represented and contained a single tale. Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe. And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive.

(:71-72)

What Haroun discovers here is that all stories share a commonality, an interrelatedness which connects them all together. This commonality may be recognised and appreciated (by all
who are willing to travel to this *Dichters Lande*). Humans have within them the capacity (perhaps even necessity) for the kind of reflection that draws upon this narrative-oriented means of understanding reality. Speaking from the field of communications theory, Fisher ([198]1989:62-63) extends this concept by describing humans as *homo narrans*, a term by which he intends to signify that human beings are storytellers who through the act of sharing their narratives partake in a ‘generic form of all symbol composition.’ While I have not sought to prove this thesis *per se* (it will remain for other disciplines such as neurobiology and anthropology to substantiate further this claim of narrative ‘homoversality’ which is nevertheless becoming more broadly recognised), it has provided the epistemological bedrock upon which this study rests—the first-order, philosophical level introduced in chapter one.

Building on the idea that humans share in a ‘common’ sense of narrative rationality, I have sought to identify, isolate and describe the shape and function of the elements of a narrative which are widely recognised across cultural boundaries. These elements which are shared whenever and wherever stories are told I have termed *conventions*. More precisely, my thesis which I have presented here is that *narrative conventions may inform readers on how to understand biblical narratives*. Every story borrows, as it were, from this body of narrative ‘givens’ or conventions. Haroun deduces this point (i.e. the impossibility of stories without informing constituents) as well.

‘*Everything comes from somewhere,*’ Haroun reasoned, ‘*so these stories can’t simply come out of thin air...?*’

(:17)

Later in the story, his companion Iff confirms his insight.

*Nothing comes from nothing...no story comes from nowhere; new stories are born from old—it is the new combinations that make them new.*

(:86)
I see in this last statement an implicit claim that there are certain predictable and fairly stable elements which are the stuff of narratives—though the components allow for creativity of combinations, they are the building blocks used to construct stories. Without the presence of these conventions, the very ability to communicate to one another through story would in fact devolve into something else entirely—non-story. Indeed, the loss of the capacity to share stories is the precise problem which Haroun is seeking to rectify.

What I have argued in particular is that these shared conventions relating to narratives specifically include the aspects of setting, plot, and characterisation, and that the reader’s awareness of these conventions assists in assessing and validating interpretations which have as their aim to understand and elucidate what biblical authors intended to communicate through their writings. Part of the uniqueness that I claim for this work lies in the attempt to analyze the factors relating setting, plot, and characterisation in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible in a more comprehensive fashion than has been available heretofore, specifying the chief variables for each of these three elements and working out their application in a given narrative. It is not my intent to marginalise the existing works on literary approaches to biblical narratives, many of which provide very beneficial insights into various aspects\textsuperscript{264} that augment the considerations with which I have dealt. My intent has been to offer a broader, more inclusive treatment of these particular narrative conventions (setting, plot and characterisation) which synthesises some of their contributions, and enhances them with some of my own original insights. None of these

\textsuperscript{264} The most instrumental book-length treatments in my research on the study of narratives in the Hebrew Bible have been the following: Alter (1981,1992), Berlin (1983), Culpepper (1983), Rimmon-Kenan (1983), Sternberg (1985), Kort (1975,1988), Bar-Efrat (1989), R L Pratt (1990), Ska (1990), Brichto (1992), Ryken (1992), Fewell and Gunn (1993), and Fokkelman (1999). In most of these cases, they discuss additional literary aspects (e.g narrative perspective, stylistic elements, archetypal analysis) that do merit consideration. But I have purposed to keep my discussion narrowed specifically to the conventions of setting, plot and characterisation, and to raise the level of discussion on these crucial aspects beyond what is currently available.
previous studies has encompassed setting, plot, and characterisation in the detail which I have offered here. Moreover, I have incorporated insights from both those involved in biblical studies as well as strategies adopted and adapted from other fields of scholarly endeavor including especially (but not limited to) contemporary literary theory.265

In chapter one I delineated three levels of inquiry: the philosophical level, the methodological level, and the surface level. I chose the book of Jonah as a test case with which to model my analysis, with the controlling question being, ‘Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy?’—a very informal, yet penetrating way of broaching the problem of characterisation in this narrative. I surveyed and catalogued the range of interpretive options, and recounted recent scholarship on the book of Jonah. These options I listed under the following headings, determined largely by which larger group the interpreter believes Jonah is representing.

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<td>Prophet</td>
<td>Israelite prophetic order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary</td>
<td>those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe that each of these interpretive models attempts to answer the question of whether Jonah is a good guy or a bad guy, and will identify how shortly.

After introducing this problem in chapter one, in chapter two I proposed the rationale and set out my philosophical commitments for the strategies and methodology employed in the body

of the thesis. After setting out the options for the location of textual meaning, I presented my arguments for the legitimacy and value of seeking authorial intentionality as my interpretive goal. I acknowledged the limitations of the interpreter in inferring the author's intentions by adopting a critical realist stance, which admits of the metaphorical and provisional nature of interpretive descriptions, while retaining a philosophical commitment to realities which exist outside of interpretive constructs. I then sought to augment the 'usual' arguments for authorial intentionality most frequently associated with Hirsch by drawing upon the speech act theory of Austin. In turn, Austin's speech act theory was further clarified and refined by Searle, who argues that authorial intention is the extension of communicative action directed toward certain ends envisioned by the author: locutionary (which refers to contextual and cognitive meaning), illocutionary (the function or purpose for the communicative act), and perlocutionary (the desired effect upon the recipient). In order for the author to achieve these communicative goals, s/he adopts a set of conventions\textsuperscript{266} which facilitate expression, and which include selection of a particular genre. These genres not only provide a structure for communication to take place, but also circumscribe what kinds of truth claims can be made, what kinds of arguments or warrants count as valid, and what kinds of appeals may be made upon the implied readers. Included among these generic possibilities is narrative, and (as with all genres) there are certain features which make it interesting and compelling as well as certain liabilities or limitations. I argue that the particular defining elements which signal narrative are setting, plot, and characters. I believe that these may be construed as constituents of narratives which are universal.\textsuperscript{267} It is the use of

\textsuperscript{266}What Barthes (1977:81) terms an 'implicit system of units and rules.'

\textsuperscript{267}I wish to proceed cautiously here, for surely no one can claim to have access to all the narrative literature of every culture which has existed throughout history. Lacking any omniscient viewpoint, I invoke a critical realist's stance in saying that I know of no narrative literature which has been recognised as such by general readership
the conventions relating to these elements present in narratives in general and biblical narratives in particular that occupies my attention in the succeeding chapters.

Drawing primarily upon Rommetveit (1974), I maintain that sympathetic readers are those who voluntarily decenter themselves in order to enter into an intersubjectivity, a communicative covenant with the implied author which seeks to allow the author to speak in his or her own voice in order to ascertain as closely as possible what the author’s intentions might have been. I believe that such a corrective, viz a renewed interest in authorial intention, if properly nuanced within a critical realist’s stance, is overdue in light of the current emphasis upon the reader (or reading community) as virtually the sole factor in assigning (or constructing) meaning to a text.

In the case of Haroun and the sea of stories, a contemporary work involving a living author, critical realism toward the author’s intentions admits of a certain degree of ‘contextual’ knowledge. The author, Salman Rushdie, dedicates the story to his son Zafar, then ten years old, from whom he is estranged. He does so with an acrostic poem. Its last two lines are, ‘As I wander far from view, Read, and bring me home to you.’ This was the first book written following his novel The satanic verses (1988), the work which brought him into international infamy for its criticism of Islamic fundamentalism. The Ayatollah Khomeini’s murderous fatwa was imposed upon him at that time, forcing Rushdie into hiding, and hence the separation from his son. In this storied rebuttal, Rushdie (‘Rashid’) presents the plight of one whose storytelling abilities are directly threatened by an oppressive silencer of stories. His point is that we suppress stories only at peril to ourselves. As it is presented in the book, the oppressor (Khattam-Shud)

which is devoid of these three elements, and thus feel that this generalisation is warranted. This may well be a thesis topic in its own right.

See also Levinas (1985) and Beavers (2000a,2000b).
knows that stories create trouble where tyrants rule, and are more to be feared than armies. They form a potential threat toward anyone who wish to lay claim to absolute truth for themselves, and thus must be censored. To avoid this implicit critique against ourselves, then, a critical realist stance is necessary, even when reading such stories—our understanding remains provisional and always open-ended, subject to needed amendment as better explanations may arise. This is true even (especially) when the narratives at stake are biblical, and the absolutists are fundamentalist interpreters for whom any hermeneutical or interpretive uncertainty is anathema. Modesty, integrity and humility require a more moderate estimation of one’s interpretation of biblical texts.

In the case of biblical narratives, I would argue that another lesson from Haroun is suggested. There is a connectedness between biblical narratives and narratives more generally in ‘the sea of stories.’ It is this feature which underlies the argument that I have undertaken here, that there exist certain conventions in storytelling which potentially make them both understandable as well as powerful means for subverting status quo thinking.

Turning specifically to biblical narratives, I located my own position as one for whom the Bible functions as God’s Word. This admittedly confessional commitment necessarily entails both epistemological and ethical ramifications which make the reader accountable for his or her responses according to the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects authorially envisaged. The confrontational nature of the Bible precludes a response of approval on aesthetic merits—it forces the reader into the responsibility of deciding the adequacy, credibility, truthfulness and authority of its claims, together with the implications for the reader’s thinking and behavior. Thus the ‘decentered’ and sympathetic reader is one who will not only hear the implied author’s voice, but will seek to respond in an appropriately ethical way by obedience.
In chapter three I explored the conventions attendant to setting, which is comprised of narrative space and narrative time. This is the first of the three elements which I identify as essential. The setting provides a narrative world in which the characters and the events take their shape. The indispensability of the setting for a story is a point which is borne out by Haroun’s chief antagonist, Khattam-Shud.

*And inside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a storyworld...*

(161)

Besides establishing a spatial and temporal location for the action, the story world which is constructed by the author, whether in narrative fiction or narrative nonfiction, establishes the range of possibilities granted to the narrative plot. Of course, in fiction the possibilities are endless—talking plants (e.g. Fanghorn in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* [1965]), talking animals (e.g. the Narnian creatures of Lewis’ *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe* [1950]) or talking sub-cellular life (e.g. the farondalae of L’Engle’s *A wind in the door* [1973]). But even in nonfiction there may be the assumed belief in (or assumed rejection of) invisible life and a ‘world’ of supernatural realities. Here the distinction between fiction and nonfiction becomes a point of contention between *a priori* commitments over what is or is not possible in the real world. Once again this point is addressed in my illustrative story. Haroun learns that what he often had assumed was ‘only a story’ is continuously vindicated in a world of reality which he had previously not been able to perceive, and begins to understand the blindness of others who still cannot see their truth or value.

*Haroun kept his feelings about Mr Buttoo to himself. He knew what he knew: that the real world was full of magic, so magical worlds could easily be real.*
Of course, such matters are also at stake when reading biblical narratives. They make demands upon the reader's credulity in many ways: the existence of spiritual entities, conscious human existence beyond death, divine causation of natural phenomena and occasional supernatural, miraculous events. Conventions relating to setting as they relate to biblical narratives, then, require a 'story world' of supernatural realities.

The conventions of setting also involve other features of place and time. Spatial factors include the functions of mere backdrop, lending historical credibility, as type-scene (i.e. a place where predictable events tend to happen), as revelatory of character (i.e. where the very presence of a person in that place is indicative of one's character), as a unique context, as an opponent (i.e. the place itself presents hardships to characters within the story), as an angle of vision (yielding a particular perspective), and for indicating movement. Temporal factors include pace (how much narrative space is given to the telling of events), gapping (omitting information which is significant and relevant to the storyline), summary, progress, freeze (pausing the narration of action for explanation or description), flashback, foreshadowing, alternation (interweaving of two or more parallel situations), and repetition. Moreover, setting lends to the narrative a particular atmosphere. For example, the settings that Haroun encounters include a sad, sad city (which needs to be rescued from its plight), the incredibly beautiful Ocean of Stories which, alas, has become fouled (it too must be rescued), and the ever-dark world of Chup ('silent') City (which also must be rescued). I demonstrated how each of these factors is also operative in biblical narratives, initially from other narratives in the Hebrew Bible and then in an extended example in the book of Jonah.

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In chapter four I investigated the components of emplotment. Plots display consistent patterns (conventions) which also establish what kinds of things will happen, and under what conditions. Plot may be conceived of as a blueprint for human action, indicating connectivity and linearity and patterning in the arrangement of the details. Thus the events come in an intentional and strategic order if their significance is to be realised. The sequencing of the events which are selected reveal significant relationships to one another, emphasising causality and consequences. This is yet another point which Haroun learns through his experiences. Near the end of Haroun's adventure, he is offered this sagacious insight from the Walrus.

'Happy endings must come at the end of something,' the Walrus pointed out. 'If they happen in the middle of a story, or an adventure, or the like, all they do is cheer things up for a while.'

(202)

Thus the happy ending perforce cannot happen at the beginning or in the middle, for then there would be no remaining action which is called for. Plot movement follows a predictable (conventional) pattern: an opening which orients the reader to the story world and introduces its characters, incitement in which some need is identified or some task undertaken, escalation of the conflict, the peak upon which the entire outcome hinges, a resolution of the conflict in some teleological sense, and the ending which resolves any subordinate conflicts and reestablishes equilibrium. Invariably the protagonist faces opposition in some form: God(s), spirits, other persons, society at large, nature or self, and frequently s/he will face a combination of these forces. There are two conventional types of plot. In comedy, the initial objectives of the protagonist are met or exceeded (often in surprising ways), and usually by someone of ordinary or low stature but who succeeds due to some commendable or endearing trait(s). In tragedy, the protagonist suffers failure and the ultimate defeat of accomplishing the realisation of his or her
initial objective. The tragic hero is usually someone of elevated stature, position or gifting whose demise evokes both pity and admiration. Stock (conventional) forms of plot include the journey, test, conquest, romance, rebirth or healing, conversion, retribution, and vindication. Each of these conflict paradigms is predictable in the sense that there is a limited range of possible outcomes (either comedic success or tragic failure) to these situations. Stylistic features closely intertwined with emplotment include suspense, irony, satire, humor, gapping and parallel situations.

In looking at biblical narratives, the classical understanding of tragic and comedic vision is inapplicable, due to the characterisation of the hero in each. Instead, I offered a revised (and simplified) description for biblical narratives: the failure of the protagonist to achieve his or her initial objective constitutes a tragedy, while the successful completion of the initial objective constitutes a comedy. The comedic 'heroes' are those who trust in and obey God, who rewards them despite their otherwise unworthiness. Comedy is very common in biblical narratives; however, once again the phenomena do not allow for protagonist to be thought of too highly (made too much a hero), for his or her success is always and ultimately attributable to God's gracious intervention. Tragic heroes are not real heroes at all, because the reason for their failure is wholly attributable to their unbelief or disobedience toward God—they simply receive their just desserts. The determination of a tragic or comedic plot is furthermore dependent upon whether or not there is a sense of closure to the story (which not all biblical narratives have). Near the beginning of the story, Haroun is informed by his father of the importance and necessity of this decisive sense of closure.

*And because everything ends, because dreams end, stories end, life ends, at that finish of everything we use his name. 'It's finished,' we tell one another, 'it's over. Khattam-Shud: The End.'*

(39)
Whether the outcome depicts the protagonist as having succeeded or failed will indicate the presence of comedy or tragedy, respectively. In my own argument, I demonstrated that all readers and interpreters of the narrative of Jonah seek, even strain, to provide a sense of closure to this book which leaves its readers hanging on Jonah’s expected response to Yahweh’s question. To this issue I will return shortly.

In chapter five I turned my attention on the third essential component of narrative, characterisation. Characterisation not only provides names to the various actors in the plot, but also gives them personalities which allow readers to recognise traits that they see in themselves or in others that they know. The Water Genie Iff describes the vivifying effect of naming things.

*To give a thing a name, a label, a handle; to rescue it from anonymity, to pluck it out of the place of Namelessness, in short to identify it—well, that’s a way of bringing the said thing into being.*

(63)

Some characters may be merely named, and thus have little impact on the story itself, and thus win little in the way of audience identification. Characters may be classified along a continuum of depth of exposure from flat (a single trait) to round (highly-developed and complex). The more depth of exposure a character receives, the more response, positive or negative, is typically generated within the audience. Conventional roles may also be assigned to characters. The protagonist serves as the focal point of the action. The protagonist’s entourage is comprised of all those allied to the protagonist. The antagonist(s) oppose(s) the protagonist, with the antagonist’s entourage of (anti-allies). A foil is one who serves in a point-counterpoint relationship to the main character to provide a contrast of highlighted traits. The satiric portrait
refers to one (usually either the protagonist or antagonist) whose behavior is exposed to ridicule through the events of the narrative.

The readers’ identification with characters is highly significant in how a narrative works—the author presents characters in such a way as to elicit the readers’ sympathetic identification with those narrative figures whose values the author wishes the readers to embrace as their own. Conversely, antipathetic identification is affected toward those traits of which the author disapproves. Minor characters usually elicit weak identification (whether sympathetic or antipathetic), and occasionally a main character may elicit a vacillating response on the part of the reader (sometimes admiring, sometimes disapproving) as the reader struggles between the two poles in seeking to understand the character. Characters may also be evaluated on the basis of their relative dynamism: static (that is, essentially unchanged throughout the narrative), ambivalent (experiencing only temporary changes), and developing (those undergoing significant and presumably long term or permanent transformation). Knowledge of character is gained either directly from information divulged by the narrator or indirectly as the reader infers his or her own conclusions based on the character’s speech, behavior and interrelationships.

In each of these cases—setting, plot, and characterisation—special considerations may be given to the way in which these conventions operate within biblical narratives. In addition to all of the general observations discussed above, biblical narratives may be either nuanced further or given specificity. This is not to say that the above considerations do not prevail (they do), but that they can be fleshed out further with concrete details. For example, the *spatial* world of the Bible incorporates not only general type-scenes (e.g. the wilderness, the land) but also type-scenes related to specific geographical locations (e.g. Egypt, Bethel). Similarly, *temporal* typologies also exist at both the general level (e.g. sunrise, harvest) and in specific numeric
durations (e.g., forty days, seven years). Common employment features within the Bible also include satire, narrative gapping, and a general reserve in presentation of detail—virtually no elaborative embellishment of detail is provided beyond what is necessary in service of plot considerations.

_Characterisation_ technique in biblical narratives also demonstrates particularities. For example, generally speaking biblical narratives tend toward indirect over direct information; that is, they prefer to show rather than for the narrator to state an overt judgment. Also, it is reasonable to infer that characters who are blessed by Yahweh are most likely being implicitly affirmed by the narrator as a positive example. Another particularity of biblical characterisation is that, though Yahweh is depicted as a multifaceted figure, both proactively initiating events and responsively adjusting to the vicissitudes of other characters, he resists being labeled as a developing character—he is adaptive to others but unchanging in essence.

### 6.3 Contributions to the Field of Scholarship

Early on in the story of Haroun, the lead character encounters Mr Sengupta, a man who has no use for either stories or their tellers.

> _What are all these stories? Life is not a storybook or a joke shop. All this fun will come to no good. What’s the use of stories that aren’t even true?_

(20)

Yet in this (fictional) story Haroun learns that stories may be true in many ways, and that they have the power to give joy, hope, purpose and instruction in life. Thus stories, even fictional ones, hold the potential benefit for communicating insights and perspective and in staking truth claims.

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It is now time to be forthcoming with the truth claims which I am asserting here as a result of developing and testing my interpretive model upon the narrative of Jonah.

6.3(a) Methodological

By looking at biblical narratives in general and the book of Jonah in particular I believe that it is possible to draw significant conclusions about how biblical narratives work. By no means do I suggest that any biblical author laid out before him the various matrices I have synthesised here, selecting from ‘my’ options how he wished to proceed in creating his narrative. Yet recognisable communicative patterns are nevertheless present within the Bible, and promise to yield insights for readers who wish to understand how an author might narratively encode values he wishes to aver. Lest I be charged with attempted of colonialising of the biblical narratives by forcing my own alien and anachronistically western conventions of literary logic, I maintain that my strategies were derived through a critical realism that weighed the value of each strategy on the basis of its explicative potential for understanding and interpreting the book of Jonah in particular. I do not conceive the narrative conventions for which I’ve argued as ironclad rules or bruta facta to which the biblical narratives must yield allegiance. Instead I have sought to detect patterns, regularities and intuited norms shareable by people generally as they encounter these narratives.

I have sought to commend my strategies for reading narratives by exemplifying their usefulness and applicability to Jonah. Yet many of the particular strategies I advocate here are traceable to seminal sources to which I am indebted. I strove to give credit these sources throughout. What I offer as original is found in the merging of various disciplines and streams of thought ideas into a coherent synthesis by which I have sought to convince fellow scholars of the Hebrew Bible (and especially my evangelical colleagues) to approach these narratives with a
heightened sensitivity to the ways in which authorial intentionality may be identified through a clearer understanding of the generic narrative conventions concerning setting, plot, and characterisation. To do so, I have eclectically mined in many tunnels: narratology, literary theory and criticism, text linguistics, biblical scholarship, postmodern theory and others. It is my hope that the strategies and method adopted herein may provide a reference point and a stepping stone for others wishing to continue or carry on further investigation of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible with sensitivity to its literary nature.

I now briefly list the methodological strategies for reading biblical narratives which I believe to be warranted both by theoretical coherency and the pragmatic utility for reading the Jonah narrative.

➤ Authorial intention remains a valid interpretive goal. The meaning of a given text may be linked to the purposes which author envisioned in initiating the speech act.

➤ The ability of the interpreter to infer the author's intentions is both limited and fallible. But this fact does not obviate either the possibility or validity of sufficient, substantial understanding, provided the reader adopts a sympathetic stance toward the text in which a shareable intersubjectivity with the author is facilitated by the reader's act of centering oneself.

➤ The adoption of a critical realist model allows for interpretive conclusions to be stated in metaphorical and provisional terms, yet insists that objective realities do exist independently of the ways in which we may try to describe them. To admit that our interpretations are constructs does not signify that they are 'only constructs' incapable of adequately or truthfully representing their referents.
A full-orbed description of an author’s intended meaning as rendered in a given text must take into account not only the locutionary aspects (the ideas and concepts), but also the illocutionary (the purpose it was intended to serve), and the perlocutionary (the anticipated response on the part of the recipient).

Identifying the author’s intentions requires that both the author and readers share a common understanding of the language, the informing texts and the recognition of the conventions endemic to the chosen genre of communication.\(^{269}\)

Narratives all share certain conventional elements; these include predictable patterns relating to setting, plot and characterisation.

Knowledge of the conventions for setting, plot and characterisation will enable the interpreter to make more informed and thus more accurate inferences about the intentions of the authors of biblical narratives.

**6.3(b) On Jonah**

I have also intended for this study to contribute to the field of studies on the book of Jonah. Most of the interpretive conclusions I have reached as a consequence of implementing the strategies advocated here have been more or less broadly recognised in the history of the interpretation of Jonah. Nevertheless, there are some insights which I have gained that have not been widely noted. It is these which I will set out here.

\(^{269}\) A belief in the viability of sharable intentionality proceeds from a fundamental openness to the possibility that the author can in fact anticipate a more extensive audience beyond that of his contemporaries. Thus the reader’s ‘reaching toward’ the narrative world of the text is commensurate with the author’s ‘reaching toward’ a more general audience willing to become understanding of his literary means and cooperative with his goals. This point I established above in sections 2.3 and 4.6(a). The interaction between author and implied (virtual) readers is perhaps better illustrated not so much in terms of a dialogue, but as a time capsule such as that carried on the Voyager spacecraft, understandable by contemporaries but anticipatory of an audience remote in both space and time.
With relation to the *settings* of the book, I noted that both Tarshish and the sea function in ways that reveal Jonah’s character—he would rather risk the fearful perils of the sea and flee to the presumed ends of the earth than to face the nonnegotiable demands of his God. Nineveh is presented not primarily, as is frequently argued, as the chief enemy of the Northern Kingdom (though this association cannot be entirely overlooked), but simply as a great city of uncommon wickedness and violence. The throneroom of the king in 3:5-9 is a special type-scene which unfortunately has not received its due recognition from biblical scholars. This passage shatters expectations that should be operative on the basis of other parallel scenes in the Hebrew Bible which take place in a throneroom. Typically the king either openly rejects the prophetic message and thus incriminates himself, or embraces the message entirely, and subsequently honors the herald of the divine message to an exalted position within the kingdom. But here in this narrative the king receives the message second-hand, and responds with a biblically unparalleled receptivity and humility, repenting (and urging all within his domain to do the same) without the messenger even putting in a personal appearance. Moreover, Jonah through his own default does not ‘hang around’ to enjoy the expected privileges of royal favor—typically a robe, a ring, and a prominent position within the royal court. Once again, the setting has a direct bearing upon Jonah, and casts him in a highly unfavorable light in contrast to the king. Finally, Jonah’s willful decision to position himself on the east side underscores what takes place at the deeper level: he remains unreconciled to Yahweh to the very end. Since movement eastward is generally associated with evil, punishment and banishment, that the story should end here precludes a happy ending. Indeed, this frustratingly unresolved ending leaves readers wondering, not only about the trajectory of the ensuing, unspoken outcome, but also about the role that Jonah has played throughout this final episode and hence the meaning of the entire narrative itself.
The investigation of temporal aspects of the setting also yielded an observation of note. Delay and suspense are indicated by the employment of non-WAYYIQTOL constructions. The two longest temporal freezes occur during the song of thanksgiving in chapter two and in the issuing of the royal edict in chapter three. Both contribute to suspense: Jonah is alive while inside the great fish (What will become of him?) and the city has only forty days before its imminent destruction (How will it be destroyed? Will God destroy the penitent?) There are several other cases of dischronologising that are discernible within the narrative. In each of these cases it is signaled by a non-WAYYIQTOL clause, as is most of the quoted speech.

In terms of the plot it is significant that Jonah (and he alone) stands in opposition to each of the other characters and elements in the story (versus Yahweh, nature, the sailors and the Ninevites). And while every other party is reconciled to their opponents (e.g. the Ninevites and God, the sailors and nature), Jonah remains unreconciled to every one of his opponents, alienated from every other figure in the narrative to the very end. And it is precisely the ending which presents the greatest challenge for the interpreter of the Jonah narrative. At the surface level, it ends with an interrogative posed by Yahweh. At the notional level, the level of plot structure, there simply is no resolution or ending at all. It is an altogether unsatisfactory cessation of narration rather than an ending with an air of finality. There is neither the closure of a tragic failure (e.g. ‘and Jonah died there in the wilderness east of Nineveh, and no one knows his grave, even to this day’), nor the confident note of a happy ending. And without the finality of a discernible denouement, the meaning of the narrative becomes ambiguated.

Like all participants in a story, Haroun too strives for a happy ending, yet receives this word of caution from the great cognoscente in the story, the Walrus.
Happy endings are much rarer in stories, and also in life, than most people think. You could almost say they are the exceptions, not the rule.

As nature abhors a vacuum, so readers resist non-resolutions in stories. In fact, it could be argued, and I would, that the ending itself creates the biggest gap or blank within the entire narrative (notwithstanding the fact that it seems difficult and improbable to speak of a ‘gap’ between the end of a book and the ‘nothing’ which follows it!). Yet I maintain that the lack of closure created by the non-ending is (deliberately) intolerable, and not only invites but virtually forces the interpreter to speculate as to the trajectory in which the narrative points.  

By inferring what are most likely the deliberate and strategic narrative gaps in the telling of this story, it is possible to account for most of the divergences of interpretive opinions regarding the characterisation of Jonah. In other words, the interpretations most often differ less on what is stated in the narrative than the blanks that are not there. I see the following as the more prominent and crucial gaps.

- Why does Jonah flee from his commission to go to Nineveh? And if he had such a problem with going there, why doesn’t he verbalise his protest to Yahweh (prophets usually argue their commission)?
- What advantage does Jonah seek to gain by heading to Tarshish rather than simply staying home (doesn’t he know he can’t escape God)?
- Why does Jonah pray a song of thanksgiving while inside the belly of the fish? Why does his song fail to mention his sin, disobedience, repentance, or a very understandable request for salvation from the great fish? Why is the prayer mostly a collection of quotes
from the Psalter rather than his own words? What vow did he make that he now promises to fulfill, and how can he while yet inside the fish?

➢ Did he speak to the Ninevites the message that Yahweh spoke to him?

➢ Why does God’s sparing of the Ninevites arouse him to such extreme anger and suicidal agitation?

➢ Since Jonah’s prophecy was not fulfilled in the sense of Nineveh being destroyed within forty days, is he a false prophet? Did he intend a double entendre with the term יָרָשׁ—destroy/overturn? Is God implicated in falsehood by reversing his position toward the Ninevites?

➢ How does the story end? Does he walk out on the conversation yet again? Does he bullheadedly protest his rights (and Yahweh’s ‘evil’) again? Does he humble himself and repent?

This diversity of opinion about Jonah stems primarily from the alternative ways in which readers have attempted to fill in the narrative gaps delineated above. By becoming more conscious of the interpretive options and decisions relative to the gaps, contemporary readers can better understand how they arrive at their own conclusions concerning the book. Indeed, raising these questions and admonishing all contemporary interpreters of Jonah to be more cognizant of the reasons for why they would fill in these gaps the way that they do may well be my chief contribution to the ongoing exploration of the book of Jonah. I will return with my own solutions shortly.

—\footnote{For example, Vanderwerff (1998:13) proffers this solution: ‘Though the story doesn’t tell us outright that Jonah changed, God has the last word, and the fact that the story is in the Bible indicates that God’s answer touched home.’}
Under the discussion of *characterisation* in the book of Jonah I noted that the gentiles (i.e. both the sailors and the Ninevites, who stand in parallel relationship to one another at both the surface and notional levels) have an unwitting, and thus ironic, propensity to speak in the same words and phrases as the covenant people of Israel do elsewhere. For example, the king speaks as if he has read Joel 2:13-14 and Jeremiah 18:7-8, ironically acting as if he knows far more than he is ‘supposed’ to, given the narrative as we have it. By contrast, Jonah also ‘mouths’ the correct terms of his tradition, but does so in circumstances and contexts that make them hollow and wholly inappropriate (1:9). Thus his words are also ironic, but for a different reason: he says more than he really believes. I also brought out the fact that in spite of two factors—intratextual knowledge of Nineveh and the fact that the protagonist opposes them—the Ninevites are not presented disapprovingly, for in them, as nowhere else in the Bible, the wholesale repentance of an entire population is seen. All of the other figures in the book are contrasted with Jonah, and so serve as foils to him—the awestruck sailors, the self-abasing king, even the fasting and sackcloth-clad cattle (and the God who loves them) all tacitly indict the pitiless Jonah by force of contrast.

The use of divine names is also significant. The pagans know God only as (ha)*lōhîm, though as soon as the sailors learn his name from Jonah, they address him as Yahweh and cry out to him. The Ninevites, not privileged in learning his name from Jonah’s meagre message, repent before ha*šîm. Correspondingly, the narrator describes ha*šîm who (literally) meets them on their terms, and condescends to their level of knowledge of them, and spares them. Throughout the narrative, Jonah and God relate to each other both directly in speech and indirectly through narration with the designation of ‘Yahweh’ until chapter four, at which point Jonah impetuously severs all verbal communication (as if he were a non-Israelite). God then
relates to him as "Iōnîm until Jonah finally breaks off his self-imposed silence, at which point it is Yahweh again who responds to him.

I also understand Jonah as functioning in the role of a satiric portrait throughout the entire story. This factor problematises the reader’s identification with him—the readers experience both a sympathetic affiliation with and alienation from or repulsion by him. While most would readily grant that Jonah is narratively exemplifying traits that the author seeks to oppose or amend, where they differ is whether or not Jonah does indeed undergo any sort of conversion.

As a further contribution to Jonah studies here I suggest an additional word-play on Jonah’s name in addition to that of ‘dove,’ a term also recognised by others as being employed elsewhere in the prophets to symbolise God’s people Israel. As a participial form of the root יִדָּע, ‘oppressor [of strangers]’ (see Zph 3:1), this homograph for Jonah’s name echoes the mistreatment of foreigners by the Israelites. And the way that Jonah behaves toward the foreigners, sailors and Ninevites alike, is surely tantamount to ill-treatment toward the foreigner (see Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 23:16).

I would argue that the chief interpretive issue in the book, the one which enables the interpreter to judge whether Jonah is a good guy or a bad guy, has to do with the identification of the group whom Jonah represents. Jonah is representative of a larger entity which needs to be determined. I am now in a position to assess the positions held regarding the characterisation using my initial question, ‘Is Jonah a good guy or a bad guy?’

At the outset, let me present several of the problems associated with formulating the issue of the characterisation of Jonah in such seemingly simplistic language as ‘good guy versus bad guy.’ First, these terms suggest that the chief message of the book has to do with Jonah’s
morality, which should not be presumed as a given. Indeed, some would argue that the book is mainly of God’s character rather than Jonah’s morality. Second, since the relative goodness or badness of Jonah is evaluated by the interpreter, it raises the question of the validity of the implicit criteria upon which the interpreter bases his or her decision—one interpreter’s values are not necessarily those of another—relative goodness may lie in the eye of the beholder. Third, the most apparent factor in Jonah’s behavior throughout the book is not good versus bad so much as his unpredictability and failure to conform to any conventional categories. He defies the stereotype of one who has been commissioned by God, and is chiefly remarkable as being an offbeat misfit. In short, he does not conform to the expectations appropriate to his role as a prophet of Israel.

Nevertheless, I believe that the dialectic of ‘good guy versus bad guy’ is warranted for several reasons. First, the question of whether Jonah is offbeat is, for heuristic purposes, a non-question. I think that few interpreters would contest the notion that Jonah behaves in unexpected ways. While the degree and the particular manifestations of his iconoclasm and nonconformity may be debated, it is not a particularly helpful interpretive watershed by which to compare and evaluate the interpretive models for the book—we would all end up on the same side of the fence, yet still disagreeing over the main idea of the book. Second, the issue of the overall ‘goodness’ of Jonah commands no such consensus, and thus functions much more usefully as an interpretive crux by which to weigh interpretations. Third, the decision as to whether he ultimately serves as a positive or negative role model impinges heavily on how and to what degree readers will identify with him as a model for their own behavior. Fourth, I do not believe that it is presumptuous to assume that the chief message of the book will be linked to Jonah’s morality. Since he functions as the protagonist (see my arguments in chapter five), the author
has already drawn the focus of attention to him. And, in fact, it is the narrative itself that raises the issue of whether Jonah is ‘good’ at a crucial point of the narrative (נש ו 4:4,9 twice). Finally, in a work I pointed out previously, Rabinowitz (1987:84-85) also sees the necessity of thinking in terms of ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys,’ when he posits that ‘moral evaluation plays a central role in the reading of narrative fiction,’ and, I would argue, it is equally important for understanding biblical narratives such as Jonah. Generally speaking, since readers already operate with the tendency to evaluate the characters they encounter in a narrative in terms of a good/bad continuum, I have sought to exploit this tendency here in the narrative of Jonah due to its heuristic potential.

Returning now to the categories introduced at the outset of this thesis, it is possible to see how interpreters, consciously or unconsciously, have related Jonah to a group for whom he stands as a representative (see table below).
### Whom does Jonah Represent?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Group Represented</th>
<th>Resulting Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pinocchio (Prodigal): those who have strayed from God, the unrepentant</td>
<td>God will discipline those who refuse to obey Him, even to the point of coercing them into submission. Those who desire grace must first repent. Yahweh’s equitable offer of covenant grace (יְהֹוָה) to all is limited only by the necessity that the recipients be repentant. Reader, beware—it’s not safe to defy God!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>Psychotic: those who have clinical, psychological disorders</td>
<td>God wishes to restore to health those who are suffering from self-debilitating mental illness. The return path to recovery is presented within the story. Reader, learn how to diagnose and treat others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prometheus: those who prize the indomitable human spirit</td>
<td>We must learn to live, and even sacrifice, for our principles. Reader, be true to yourself, even if you find you’re up against God himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall-guy: those who are aggrieved at God’s caprice or humbled before his freedom</td>
<td>God is not bound by human understanding or opinions of what he ‘ought’ to do. He is free and not accountable to anybody outside himself. Reader, be advised—he will do as he pleases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patriot: Jews OR nationalists, bigots</td>
<td>God is rejecting the Jews as his elect people in favor of the gentiles. Gentile readers, rejoice! Jewish readers, abandon Judaism for the new elect, the Church! Yahweh’s compassion is not circumscribed by national, racial, or class boundaries. Reader, don’t attempt to limit his grace to your ‘own’ kind of people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophet: Israelite prophetic order</td>
<td>Yahweh cannot be manipulated by the interests, attitudes, words and actions of his chosen prophets, nor will they coerce him. Reader, God’s thoughts and ways beggar human categories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reluctant Missionary: those called by God to cross-cultural evangelism</td>
<td>We need to be willing to go wherever God sends us to spread the gospel to all nations. Reader, you better heed his call to evangelism!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading the book of Jonah in the enlightenment (1782), J D Michaelis thought the book of Jonah was so self-evident as to say that its meaning hits the reader right between the eyes:
‘Der Sinn der Fabel fällt genug in die Augen.’ Obviously, however, the meaning of the book is far from self-evident, as this range of opinion attests. Yet I do believe that it is possible to move toward an interpretation which concords with what is most likely to have been in the mind of the author. Even if it does not smack the reader ‘in die Augen,’ (according to Michaelis’ positivism), the reader need not be left with doing ‘that which is right in his own eyes.’

In light of the study of the conventions of setting (chapter 3), plot (chapter 4), and characterisation (chapter 5), several of these can be eliminated from serious consideration. Since the most probable interpretation is that which best accounts for all the details of the text, the interpretive model for the characterisation of Jonah must also account for the roles that the other characters play in the book. The first model, Jonah-as-Pinocchio, founders, in part because it does not explain the presence or the significance of the sailors—they are ‘saved,’ despite the fact that they are not described as being wicked (they are humane to the point of being self-sacrificial) nor as being repentant (though the subsidiary storyline is a conversion, and their subsequent worship is real). Jonah-as-psychotic is inadequate, because it does not account for either the sailors or the Ninevites—they are entirely extraneous. For the same reason, Jonah-as-Prometheus is too Jonah-centric, and the fact that he is willing to jeopardise the lives of everyone else in the story without remorse militates against such a positive and admiring characterisation.

Another factor by which to judge the interpretive models is to ask which ones would best account for Jonah being cast as a satiric portrait, i.e. which ones see his thoughts and behavior as being implicitly critiqued, especially by contrast to the foils (sailors and Ninevites)? Jonah-as-psychotic clearly does not fit this model: who would hold up mental patient as an object of

scornful attack, and why? Likewise, Jonah-as-Prometheus cannot seriously reckon with the satirising of Jonah.

As I argued in chapter five, Jonah represents God's people. It is not as an Israelite (he refuses to answer the sailors question about his land 1:8, and does not call himself an Israelite to them), or as a Jew that he speaks. Rather I take his self-identification as an יְהוּדָה (1:9) to indicate that he is covenantally-related to Yahweh, though he has presumed upon this relationship. He is guilty of believing that his position as a Hebrew (see the parallel uses of this term in Exodus) places him and his people in a specially privileged position with his deity. Thus God is obligated to Hebrews such as Jonah to maintain his love to them—and them alone (4:2, also drawn from Exodus).

Taking liberty with my own categories, I would thus take the Jonah-as-patriot and strip it of any nationalistic or ethnic overtones. I see the book as a powerful indictment against any who believe that they have any kind of 'inside track' on God's compassion based on their affiliation with a group. God does not extend his pity on terms demanded by anyone, but may choose to give it to any and all who call upon him (1:14; 2:2; 3:8). If I may adapt my own category, and coin a word simultaneously, I would label him Jonah-as-presumptor, representing the small-minded and miserly of spirit who wish to hoard God to themselves. The corresponding table for this model looks like this:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>Group Represented</th>
<th>Resulting Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonah</td>
<td>Presumptor: those who believe that God 'belongs' to them</td>
<td>God will not be confined to extending his grace only to people who qualify by virtue of our approval. God is willing to display his mercy to any and all who repent. Jonah represents those who believe they have a right to God's favor regardless of whether they are repentant or obedient. Reader, humble yourself before God, and do not oppose his grace to others!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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I would also be quick to point out that the interpretation I advocate here, based on the identification of the group whom Jonah represents, yields a result which is large enough to subsume several aspects (inferred narrative assertions) which have been recognised in the history of Jonah scholarship. The freedom of God to extend his grace to whom he will intersects with the Jonah-as-fall-guy and Jonah-as-prophet positions. The emphasis on the necessity of repentance corresponds to the concerns of Jonah-as-Pinocchio. And as indicated above, Jonah-as-presumptor shares with Jonah-as-patriot the idea that Jonah wishes to hoard God to himself and ‘his’ people, while expurgating the anti-semitism of that view.

In retrospect, I find perhaps the strongest corroboration for the conclusion that I have reached here not from the ranks of another biblical scholar or literary critic, but from the words of a poet who has devoted an entire (though short) book of poetry to Jonah, depicting him not as a hardhearted Jew, but as the spiritually small-minded and petty person whom any one of us might be surprised to meet in our own mirror someday. The following piece, entitled “Reprimand to a naïve deity,” is illustrative of Carlisle’s (1968:7) simple eloquence capturing this concept.

I will not advertise
this crazy scheme
of Yours.
God, what a farce
that men should sin and find
escape.
I mean, of course,
not me
but all our mutual
antagonists.
Dear God, kind God, don’t listen
To their prayers.

(emphasis his)
Having now identified the group whom Jonah represents (and in so doing the locutionary intent), viz those who seek to limit God’s favor to themselves, it is easier to understand the trajectory at the end of the book. As I pointed out above, the ending, or rather, the non-ending of Jonah results in an intolerable indeterminacy, forcing readers to infer or supply at least some sort of resolution. Consequently, each of the seven interpretive models I suggested necessarily tends to ‘solve’ the problem of Jonah by the implied ending that they assign to the book. The spectrum here is wide, from those who claim that Jonah’s repentance and subsequent salvation were so breathtakingly complete as even to eclipse Nineveh’s (the ‘best possible ‘good guy’\(^{272}\)) to Jonah’s not only being utterly unmoved by God’s final, questioning appeal, but entirely justified for being so (and hence again, a ‘good guy’). Here I graphically display the spectrum and possibilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>FAILURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comic Hero</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unchanged</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prodigal</td>
<td>missionary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the prodigal and missionary models, the plot of Jonah is a conversion, he becomes a good guy, and he is therefore a positive example to the reader—there is a happy ending for all. In the

\(^{272}\) In my introductory chapter I cited several examples of those who see Jonah’s silence as indicative of his unalloyed submission to God. More striking even than these, however, are some of the Jewish legends as recorded by recorded Ginzberg ([1913]1968: IV,246-253). There Jonah has a complete ‘makeover’ such that even the details of the Jonah narrative are so reinterpreted and embellished that he becomes a saint approaching perfection. Seventy different nations are present on board the ship. The fish who swallows him has window-like eyes enabling Jonah to see out on undersea wonders. Jonah ends up actually saving the fish, for it was nearly swallowed by Leviathan, which stopped only when seeing Jonah inside (again through the fish’s eyes), exhibiting in his body the sign of the covenant. In Nineveh, Jonah’s voice was so loud as to resonate to every corner of its entire one and a half million inhabitants. In the end, Jonah is translated directly to heaven without experiencing death.

On the other hand, some Christians take Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:39-40 regarding ‘the sign of the prophet Jonah’ and the parallel of Jonah’s three days and three nights in the fish to Jesus’ three days and three nights in the earth to indicate a typeantitype relationship. Reasoning backward, since Jesus died and was raised to life, and Jonah typifies Jesus, Jonah is therefore also said to have died, his soul gone to Sheol, and to have been resurrected.

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psychotic, most do not see him as fully 'cured,' by the end of the book, but the reader's identification with him as a mental patient is weak. Most often readers are urged to learn from (and identify with) God-as-therapist, seeking solutions to help the Jonah's who require effective treatment plan. Jonah is 'disturbed,' but neither a good nor a bad guy. Curiously, the ending is not as prominent a feature (probably because ongoing psychotherapy is indicated). Both Jonah-as-fall-guy and as prophet tend to view him more negatively than positively, although the readerly identification with Jonah is vacillating due to the seemingly unreasonable expectations of God. In these models, it is not a success story, and there is no happy ending projected for Jonah—he is a mostly bad guy who remains essentially unchanged, and is therefore a negative example. The Jonah as patriot model is much the same, although generally there is less vacillation seen, because Jonah remains both unchanged and unreasonable before Yahweh, who is both gracious and reasonable. Jonah is a bad guy, and the projected ending is negative. Jonah-as-Prometheus views him fully as a tragic hero, deeply flawed but essentially good, unchanged throughout. It ends, of course, on a tragic note, yet he serves as a positive example.

My own proposal, Jonah-as-presumptor sees all the narrative conventions indicating a very negative portrayal of Jonah throughout the entire narrative. The trajectory and inertia then at the close of the narrative is that no happy ending is to be expected. The setting remains east of Nineveh, with Jonah feeling 'burned' by his environment. The plot shows Jonah as refusing to answer a question that is not intended to be rhetorical, leaving Jonah in the least favorable light throughout the entire narrative. He remains unreconciled to any of his contrastingly good antagonists, thus there has been no resolution evident, and no indication of any change of heart on his part. The charaterisation of Jonah displays consistency in his range of traits. Whenever

The fact that the book bears his name is 'evidence' that he wrote it, and presumably he would have done so only after having 'learned his lesson' from Yahweh's final question.
confronted by opposition he takes evasive action. He does this through physical actions: fleeing, sleeping, going outside the city. He is noncompliant verbally: mouthing truisms of worshiping Yahweh that are clearly false, giving ‘answers’ that don’t fit the questions he is asked (whether by sailors or by God), shifting responsibility for his life to the sailors, thanking God (in the words of other texts) for saving him when he has not yet been saved, and uttering a minimalistic message across a minimalist time frame before quitting. Chapter four does nothing to reverse any of the elements of this portrayal. He is still mouthing words which hardly befit the circumstances (4:2), he refuses to answer Yahweh’s first question, petulantly insists on his own rights in response to the second question, and refuses to answer the third question. In summary, Jonah is a bad guy throughout. He serves as a negative example, the embodiment of the very traits the author is seeking to expose through satire. He represents the characteristics of selfishness, hypocrisy and presumption. He abdicates his responsibilities while arrogating to himself privileges to which he believes himself entitled. Indeed, his sins are precisely those to which every honest person must also admit, and thus the illocutionary force of the message of Jonah is a sobering rebuke to anyone who remains entrenched in the same sins.

The solution to the non-ending lies also with the issue of character identification. The implied author envisions someone reading this narrative who stands in need of its correctives. The implication is that there are Jonah-like people whose thinking and behavior need modification. Other interpreters have seen this clearly—Jonah is an unfinished book because it leaves the reader who is honest and humble enough to identify with Jonah to determine whether or not this story will turn out well. The implied reader is the one who, by a response of repentance, finishes the Jonah narratives with the appropriate perlocutions.
6.4 Epilogue

In the world that Haroun visits he encounters many things which he does not understand. Always inquisitive, he characteristically asks questions about these things, yet he does not always receive a satisfactory answer. Another of this protagonist's entourage is his friendly mode of transportation, Butt the Hoopoe, who gives him this response to one of his many questions.

'How are you doing that?' demanded Haroun, and back came the inevitable answer, quick as a flash of thought: 'By a P2C2E. A Process Too Complicated To Explain.'

(66)

In evaluating my overall method and its suitability to lend clarity to literary approaches to the study of biblical narratives, several areas remain problematic or merit further investigation. Foremost among these is the ongoing need to recognise that there remains no consensus regarding the locus of meaning when readers approach narrative (or any other) texts. For some, an author 'reconstituted' through means of historical critical construction is the figure whose meaning they pursue (e.g. traditional historical critics of various stripes). For others, the meaning is sought in the author-in-text, that is, by 'reconstructing' the implied author using those clues that can be garnered from the text itself (e.g. Hirsch [1967], Wood [1981], myself). Another point of focus is the text alone, independent of authorial considerations (e.g. new criticism, semiotics). The sociopolitical factors giving rise to the origination of the text is the central concern of sociological and deconstructionist readings. And yet others 'locate' meaning entirely with the reader, either as seen from within an interpretive, ideological community or as the construction of each individual reader. With such a plethora conflicting ideas, goals and means
for interpreting texts, no single work or methodology can reasonably be expected to emerge as definitive or to command consensual support.

I believe that this work may contribute to an ongoing discussion relating to understanding biblical narratives, and hence I have sought to operate on a platform which may be shared by those of various hermeneutical commitments who are open to investigating literary features. But it is not expected to cut the Gordian knot of hermeneutical and communication theories.

What I initially set out to do was to provide a more systematic tool for discussing the setting, plot, and characterisation of biblical narratives. In carrying out this investigation, I was impressed by the volume and breadth of perspectives of those claiming, independently of one another, that narrativity is fundamental to human thought, both in individual cognition and at the social and cultural levels—whether or not this is provable lies beyond my expertise, though will continue to be of interest to me in the future. By attempting to set forth the parameters of what I take as common or ‘homoversal’ conventions concerning setting, plot, and characterisation, then, it has become more readily apparent to me that such mutuality does indeed exist, and that the shared understanding is possible, substantial, and beneficial.

Narratives work so well because there are features that are commonly recognisable across all classes and categories of people; that is, the conventions are so broadly-ranging (if not universal) that ‘everyone’ senses a degree of identification and shared experience. If one becomes familiar with these features of narrative in general, and thereby becomes more familiar to how these conventions are worked out in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, then I anticipate s/he will have useful tools with which to approach any given narrative. In terms of practicality, becoming cognizant of the options and variables available for each of these categories (see the summary charts for each of the chapters on setting, characterisation and plot) is a realistic task.
for even entry-level students. Though I have attempted to argue my points in a more comprehensive and sophisticated fashion, the basic points made could fairly easily be summarised and learned for a much wider use than by scholars who read such theses and dissertations as this.

Finally, I do not claim to have uncovered some hitherto-hidden meaning of the book of Jonah. This was never intended or expected on my part. A number of insights were gained at various levels (philosophical, methodological, and exegetical), and I can only hope that those studying Jonah in the future will find useful (or at least heuristic) insights with which to interact. Moreover, that no completely unprecedented and previously hidden meaning to the book of Jonah has emerged I take as an indication of the legitimacy of strategies employed here. Were all previous readings contravened, then my claim for the ‘implicit rules’ of narrative that I believe are endemic to and shared across various cultures would ipso facto be called into question. Sometimes what is implicit needs to be stated, and that has been part of my task here. What others perhaps have intuited about the book of Jonah, or have concluded by literary (or other) interpretive methods more or less clear to themselves, I have likewise concluded, though, it is hoped, in a more informed way. Thus the insights that I have derived from the application of the methodology and strategies I have pursued here include not only some which are not present in the current scholarly literature on Jonah, but also help to confirm many which are.

I will reserve the last word for the novel which has served as my foil in this chapter, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories:*

*Khattam-Shud*²⁷³

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²⁷³ *Khattam-Shud* means 'completely finished', 'over and done with' (:216).
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