

The Book of Jonah in Recent Research

Aron Tillema 

Department of Religious Studies, University of California - Davis, Davis, CA, USA

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Abstract

In this article, I identify where contemporary scholarship on Jonah continues to ask enduring questions of any biblical text like dating, structure, and message. I also outline how scholars have brought contemporary approaches to the book. Finally, I suggest some points of divergence between scholarship in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and consider how recent scholarship has treated past contributions. This survey shows that scholarship continues to grapple with questions that have long pervaded Jonah's interpretive history. At the same time, contemporary approaches bring exciting possibilities to a book that has often resisted a monologic interpretation.

Keywords

animal studies, Book of the Twelve, exile, feminist approaches, Hebrew Bible, history of interpretation, humor, intertextuality, Jonah, philology, postcolonial studies, psychological approaches, reception history, trauma studies

Introduction

It has been nearly 15 years since someone surveyed contemporary scholarship on the book of Jonah (Bolin 2009). The time is ripe to account for a great deal of scholarship that has accumulated over this brief, yet perpetually intriguing book. In this article, I will identify where 21st-century Jonah scholarship has continued to ask enduring questions of any biblical book such as dating, structure, and message. I also introduce how scholars have brought contemporary methods and approaches to the book including postcolonial, trauma, ecological, feminist readings, and more. Finally, I suggest some points of divergence between scholarship in the late 20th and early 21st centuries and note how recent

Corresponding author:

Aron Tillema, Department of Religious Studies, University of California - Davis, 1 Shields Ave, Davis, CA 95616, USA.

Email: amtillema@ucdavis.edu

scholarship has reexamined previous assumptions to reengage the book of Jonah. This survey will show that, despite the apparent consensus Jonah scholarship exhibited at the turn of the 21st century, contemporary scholarship continues to grapple with questions that have long pervaded the book's interpretive history. Meta-critical approaches that highlight the interpreter's role, contemporary 'contextual' approaches seeking new angles on an ancient text, and the continued advance of traditional scholarship promise to answer some of these fundamental questions. At the same time, these approaches bring new, exciting questions to a book that has often resisted a monologic interpretation.

Rather than organize this article around format (commentary/book, article, dictionary entry, etc.), I arrange pieces thematically for ease of access. I recognize that these divisions are also artificial as several pieces are cross- or interdisciplinary at the outset. Works on humor might have something to say about dating or trauma studies and I attempt to note such complexities on a case-by-case basis. Moreover, there are several works that do not fit so easily into one of the categories and should be given their own space rather than forcing them into one category or another. Still, much of the scholarship I survey is more broadly theoretically informed and can be of use to biblical scholars working outside the book of Jonah and those working in adjacent fields in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Organizing this piece thematically, then, is to allow scholars who work in other fields and disciplines to find their section of interest quickly. In addition, biblical scholars will be able to see how approaches within each thematic area compare and contrast. And naturally, while my focus is on Jonah research in the past 15 years, I draw on earlier works to trace continuity and discontinuity. This article begins by briefly summarizing broad trends in Jonah scholarship within the past 20 years, tracing continuity and discontinuity toward a general understanding of the book's message. The next, largest section will attend to the explosion of different approaches at the turn of the 21st century. I then briefly end with some concluding thoughts.

In 1999, Kenneth M. Craig Jr. summarized the state of research on Jonah by tentatively agreeing with two previous scholars (1999). The first, Edwin Good, remarked that 'There is even a remarkable unanimity on the interpretation of the book among Old Testament scholars (a notably quarrelsome lot), which seems suspicious were it not so welcome' (Good 1965, 39). The second, Arnold Band, expressed the view that the enormous interpretive activity on the book of Jonah is a testament to the creativity of the human imagination (Band 1990, 179). Indeed, at first glance, the brief 48-verse text possessing a relatively straightforward textual history might suggest that a consensus should emerge. And while there did appear to be an emerging consensus in the 60s and 70s, the interpretive history of the book of Jonah today has splintered according to various methodologies and approaches scholars have taken up. Yet rather than understand these different approaches in fundamental disagreement over the basic narrative, I suggest that these approaches have simply taken a different 'tack' in order to solve some of the book's enduring questions in addition to asking new ones. As Bolin noted in his review of Jonah research, scholarship has freed itself from notions of Nineveh as a bloodthirsty city and has begun to question the origins of its ostensibly assured results (Bolin 2009). Such questions include the book's primary message, whether there is a single message or several, the relationship between the book and the Babylonian Exile, the strangeness of

the laconic prophet, the book's relationship to other canonical texts, the role that animals and non-human entities play, the function of humor, and more. This survey will orient these branching approaches to the book of Jonah toward some of these questions. Scholarship on Jonah continues to flourish so abundantly that capturing each and every contribution is beyond the scope of this article. It has become so extensive in fact that John Kaltner, Steven L. McKenzie, and Rhiannon Graybill have recently finished a book *What Are They Saying About the Book of Jonah?* (forthcoming) for Paulist Press reviewing the recent history of scholarship on Jonah. This article does not seek to account for the totality of scholarship published in the past 15 years, but it does trace current trends and recent movements. I am confident that tracing the contours of research on Jonah will remain a fruitful endeavour and assessing recent Jonah scholarship will demonstrate that it has moved forward significantly.

In his Introduction to the book of Jonah, Uriel Simon briefly surveyed contemporary and historical scholarship to find four interpretive trends. Despite Good's insistence that Jonah scholars have found consensus, Simon identifies four central themes scholars have proposed including atonement versus repentance, universalism versus particularism, prophecy: realization versus compliance, and compassion: justice versus mercy (Simon 1999). Reading Jonah's primary message as universalism instead of atonement will highlight particular qualities of the narrative over others.

It is also worth noting that the four themes Simon identifies oftentimes correspond to the interpreter's hermeneutic or religious outlook. Simon notes that atonement and repentance might be particularly apparent in Jewish traditions since it has been linked with Yom Kippur. Meanwhile, the theme of universalism and particularism is attractive to Christian scholars, but as Simon notes, 'Hardly any Jewish Bible scholar still adheres to this exegetical line' (Simon 1999, ix). If we refer back to Robert Gregg's lengthy chapter on how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam interpreted the book of Jonah or the prophet Yunus, we can already see ancient and medieval tendencies towards such themes (Gregg 2015). Of course, this is not to say that modernity has not shaped modern interpreters, but it is to say that these hermeneutical disagreements and assumptions possess an extensive history couched in religious tradition. For example, it is perhaps unsurprising that the two non-Hebrew groups, the mariners and Ninevites, become model 'gentiles' and prefigure what many Christian scholars identify as the universalism of the New Testament. As Yvonne Sherwood notes:

A common story told in Biblical Studies circles is the story of the Old Testament's gradual theological progress from primitive religion, embarrassing anthropomorphisms, polytheistic slips, towards ethical monotheism and universalism. These New-Testament-like sentiments reach their healthy evolutionary climax in Jonah, Ruth and Deutero-Isaiah, but are contrasted with a mutant, retrogressive strain, a falling off into the "dark age" of narrow xenophobic post-exilic Judaism. (Sherwood 2000)

In other words, the moral progress these Christian scholars identify in the book of Jonah climaxes in the New Testament. Naturally, such an interpretation possesses a distinct history. Elias Bickerman (1967) suggests such a view became dominant during

the German Aufklärung, though it remains influential in some commentaries and occasionally reappears when the book is analyzed as humorous. As we will see below, chastising and poking fun at a xenophobic Jonah becomes one way that scholars promote the universalist message of the book represented by the narrator and deity.

And yet, historically significant themes like nationalism, xenophobia, and compassion or mercy have become less persuasive in current scholarship on the book of Jonah. It is no longer possible to state so confidently, as R.E. Clements writes, that the purpose of the book of Jonah is the ‘affirmation of the universal love and mercy of God’ and that ‘Jonah the prophet, who represents Israel, is made to recognize that the divine mercy is not confined within the boundaries of Israel, but reaches out also to the heathen, as represented by the people of Nineveh’ (Clements 1974). As Bolin observes in his review of Jonah research:

The days when Jonah’s Nineveh was equated with the bloodthirsty city of Nahum, when the prophet Jonah was seen to represent a fictive post-exilic Judaism obsessed with ethnic purity or hatred of Gentiles, and when the author of Jonah was extolled as a preacher of universal divine love and tolerance are gone forever. (Bolin 2009)

Indeed, freed from the evolutionary paradigm Sherwood describes, recent scholarship has instead attempted to account for the book’s setting in Persian period Yehud composed by an elite class of Judahite literati. For example, scholarship has generally moved away from notions of Nineveh as a violent city representative of the Assyrian Empire and instead placed it alongside Hellenistic traditions or as a cipher for Jerusalem itself (Hunter 2022). In addition, new approaches brought from adjacent fields and disciplines have begun to flourish as interpreters continue to grapple with the book’s enigmatic features.

Traditional line-by-line commentaries have begun to incorporate other theoretical perspectives as well and continue to serve as significant points of reference. Jack Sasson’s Anchor Bible Commentary remains authoritative within Jonah scholarship on traditional matters of philology and interpretation (Sasson 1990). However, several new line-by-line commentaries on Jonah will have been published in the next few years. Most recently, Amy Erickson (2021) who, in line with the Illuminations Commentary series focuses on reception history, also includes a significant section on the book’s history of consequences complete with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and modern receptions. A forthcoming commentary by Steven L. McKenzie, Rhiannon Graybill, and John Kaltner in the Yale Anchor Bible Commentary series (forthcoming) will provide a fresh translation of the textual history of Jonah building on their previous article on the book’s compositional layers (McKenzie, Graybill, Kaltner 2020). They will include insights from recent scholarship on the ‘Book of the Twelve’ and incorporate trends in affect theory, animal studies, performance studies, postcolonial theory, psychological criticism, spatial theory, trauma theory, and a significant section on the book’s reception history (email exchange with Graybill, Nov 2022). L. Juliana Claassens is publishing a forthcoming commentary in the *Old Testament Library* series and draws on trauma hermeneutics to dialogue with feminist, postcolonial, and queer lenses to ‘take seriously the woundedness of the prophet, and the community he represents’ (email exchange with Claassens, Dec 2022). Beyond

traditional line-by-line commentaries, Jione Havea (2020) recently published a commentary within the *Earth Bible Commentary* series from an indigenous Oceanic perspective. The first section reads the text linearly from the narrator's perspective, while the second section reads it backward drawing explicitly on the author's perspective. More theologically inclined commentaries include *Jonah (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible)* by Phillip Cary (2008), *Jonah and the Meaning of our Lives: A Verse-by-Verse Contemporary Commentary* by Steven Bob (2016), *Jonah: God's Scandalous Mercy* by Kevin Youngblood (2019), Joanna Hoyt's *Amos, Jonah, & Micah* (2019), and *Jonah & Micah* by Richard Phillips (2010).

Form, Structure, Composition: Structuralist Approaches and Beyond

The rise of structuralism in the early and mid-20th century led many commentators of Jonah to attempt to fix meaning through the identification of its literary structure. Individual components gained importance if one could identify a pattern through mirroring, repetition, and more. As Tribble notes, 'The many repetitions at the beginnings forge symmetry, set tone, and provide meaning' (Tribble 1994, 112). Indeed, commentaries on Jonah in the mid-to-late-20th century began noting a balance between chs. 1-2 and chs. 3-4 that include the repetition of keywords, scenes of repentant gentiles, and more. Several scholars further divided each chapter into smaller and smaller units. For example, Lohfink's early analysis posited the first chapter contained a concentric circle centering on Jonah's exclamation (Lohfink 1961). Tribble broke each verse into smaller parts that ultimately mirrored its corresponding chapter (Tribble 1994). Meanwhile, one of Jonathan Magonet's chapters examines the distribution of repeated words in each chapter and finds, for example, that the meaning of *yd* 'grows' throughout the book (Magonet 1983, 26-28). Terence Fretheim (1977) breaks the book up into six scenes generally following the chapter format in addition to the introductory scenes in chs. 1 and 3. Indeed, the size and literary qualities of the book might suggest that scholars have reached a consensus on a structure.

Yet as is often the case, structuralist approaches often elide difference in order to achieve coherence. Some scholars have responded to the atomization of the book by pointing out the artificial constraints one must place on the text in order to make these structures intelligible. For example, in response to Tribble's proposal, Bolin notes that the analysis 'Has no place for the final reference to the animals in 4.11. She solves this problem by appealing to the specious concept of "symmetrophobia" of "the Oriental mentality"' (Bolin 1997, 70). Jack Sasson complicates the assumption that each chapter mirrors the other. He argues in his Introduction that, 'Chapters 2 and 4 cannot mirror each other and that the resemblance between chapters 1 and 3 is superficial: they gain a false likeness because 1:1-2 partially duplicates the vocabulary (but not the purpose) of 3:1-2 and because 3:9 shares the phrasing and sentiment (but not the consequence) of 1:6' (Sasson 1990, 16). In Sasson's account, interpreters have only partially understood the nuanced structure of the book.

These criticisms have left some interpreters to abandon the prospect of structure altogether. Thomas Bolin rejects attempts to derive meaning from the structure of the

book, writing ‘In light of the shortcomings of schematic analyses, I do not attempt to derive any exegetical conclusions about Jonah from patterns or designs discovered in its structure’ (Bolin 1997, 71). Recent scholarship has followed Bolin’s lead more-or-less. There are few, if any, recent attempts to account for the book’s structure on a verse-by-verse basis.

Still, interpreters remain committed to some internal relationship within the book. Whether the individual scenes were initially composed separately and combined later, its final form made sense to its earliest readers. Many simply break the book into four units according to the four chapters and are content noting recurrent themes or motifs among them. For example, the surprising malleability of the mariners in ch. 1 foreshadows the Ninevites in ch. 3. Others look for repeated words (*Leitwörter*) throughout each chapter that gain resonance as they repeat (e.g. bad/evil, large/great, go down). What is bad/evil to a character in ch. 1 may shift depending on the perspective of another at the end of the book. Ultimately, identifying the structure of the book beyond the four scenes remains a complicated endeavor that may not be resolved. Four scenes loosely connected to one another may in fact more closely accommodate the book’s narrative structure that only occasionally references back to itself.

Problems and Prospects in Dating the Book of Jonah

As is the current trend in biblical scholarship, scholars have increasingly dated the book of Jonah later. Early interpreters tended to simply assume the book was written roughly the same time as the Jonah son of Amittai recorded in 2 Kings 14:25. Recent interpreters, however, argue that the book was composed sometime after the fall of the monarchy during the Persian period or later during the Hellenistic period and many are content with such a broad periodization. Ben Zvi, for example, prefers labeling the book as post-monarchic, though this typically means the Persian period (Ben Zvi 2003). Undoubtedly, part of the difficulty stems from the narrative itself. The book of Jonah provides few historical details with which to square its compositional date. And despite calls to more precisely create criteria to date Persian period texts (Carr 2019), scholars have continued to resort to the fraught, but still promising prospect of dating the language itself due to the small amount of data available.

Early attempts at dating Jonah revolved around the problematic concept of Aramaisms in which scholars believed an Aramaic loanword pointed to its compositional date. More sophisticated attempts have attempted to identify Late Biblical Hebrew syntactical features less easily attributed to archaizing literary features frequently drawing from Landes (1982), Cohen (2013), Notarius (2013), Hurvitz (2006), and Young, Rezetko, and Ehrensverd (2008). Erickson (2021) is representative of scholarship today that is reticent to firmly assign a date or period, but suggests the book indicates a combination of Standard Biblical Hebrew (SBH) and Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) rather than a purely monarchic setting reflecting SBH or an earlier Archaic Biblical Hebrew (ABH). For example, Erickson includes sections on semantic change, syntactic features, and ‘foreignizing’ or archaizing terms that point to a later, rather than earlier, composition. For example, the phrase *’lhy hšmym* (the god of heaven) in Jonah 1:9 is used frequently in

Hebrew and Aramaic in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Elephantine Papyri. Notably, it also appears in Genesis 24:3, but ‘its distribution is denser in late texts’. Drawing on Catherine Muldoon’s syntactic analysis (2011), Erickson concludes that even if the data pool is meager, ‘The presence of several lexical and syntactical features characteristic of LBH suggests that the Hebrew of the book of Jonah is more consistent with LBH than with SBH or Early Biblical Hebrew’ (Erickson 2021, 24).

Rather than treat the book as a compositional monolith, McKenzie, Graybill, and Kaltner (2020) seek out the redactional layers and assign different dates to each. They understand the oldest stratum to stem from the Persian period, apart from 1:1-1, the prose story in chapters 3-3*. Meanwhile, the sea story in ch. 1 originates from later Hellenistic sea tales and myths. Finally, the Psalm in ch. 2 came from traditional Hebrew poetry and was inserted later, likely due to the *Leitwörter* shared in the seafaring tale and Psalm.

Ultimately, the precise periodization of setting the composition in the Persian or Hellenistic periods has not greatly affected how interpreters understand the book’s message(s). It is more the case that dating the text later than its protagonist during the ‘divided monarchy’ demonstrates that the authors understood themselves reflecting on older material in some fashion. Still, syntactic dating promises to provide firmer results than previous models relying on loanwords and vocabulary.

Identifying Humor in Jonah and its Relationship to Genre

Since Edwin Good’s publication of *Irony in the Old Testament* in 1965, the next three decades witnessed an explosion of scholarly activity on humor in the book of Jonah.¹ Oftentimes consciously attempting to escape the confines of the canonical and religious sensibilities that described the book as a parable, critics informed by the literary turn in Biblical Studies began to suggest new forms and genres for the book such as satire, parody, farce, burlesque, and more. I suggest that scholarly uses of humor and humorous genres identify cases of incongruity within the text and attempt to account for them by highlighting them rather than corroborating them with comparative cases. Rather than humor as one component within the book, some of these scholars ascribed a genre and form to it. Noteworthy among many of these interpreters is an interest in aesthetics and poetics.

Several scholars have argued that the unfavorable qualities of the prophet contrasted with other obedient characters point to the formal literary genre of satire. For example, Judson Mather regards the book ‘As a story that is really funny before the eye of God, a rich comic invention that merits attention and appreciation as a work of art’ (Mather 1982). For Mather, the function of humor in the book ‘shows him up as disobedient, uncomprehending, small-minded and hardhearted’. Mather’s conclusions echo several other contemporary analyses that understand the form of the book to didactically chastise the prophet who metonymically represents nationalist or exclusivist movements within the Judean community. Millar Burrows extended the book as a satire by portraying the conflicts in the book as a representation between the community that remained in Judah and those returning from the Babylonian exile (Burrows 1970). To satirize Jonah, then, was to covertly criticize then-contemporary political and theological ideologies.

Satire continues to be only one mode of analysis among many. Others have argued for the use of parody. John A. Miles Jr. argues that ‘The proximate target of the humor of the Book of Jonah is not Jewish life but Hebrew letters. . . the work is not a satire but a parody’ (Miles Jr. 1975). Rather than satirize the protagonist as Mather and Burrows suggest, Miles Jr. argues the book is a parody of the prophetic career more broadly and identifies five typical prophetic tropes that can be found parodied in Jonah including the call to prophecy, Jonah’s silence, the placement of the psalm, the rejection of the prophet by the king, and prophetic sorrow. Importantly, rather than serve as elements that amuse the reader on occasion, Miles Jr. finds a structural use of humor within the book and analyzes it according to these parodied scenes. Yet for Miles Jr., the purpose is not to simply laugh at Jonah, but instead the author ‘apes the whole parade of prophets, psalmists, and saints, not excluding Job’ who ‘are objecting, finally, to the fact that God is so intransigently godlike’. Surprisingly, and perhaps disappointingly, the parodied prophetic career in Jonah actually finds resemblance in the many other characters in the Hebrew Bible.

More recent scholarship has neither been keen to assign strict genres, nor confidently state that humor is so central to the book of Jonah. As Jack Sasson notes in his Introduction when reviewing this recent trend in Jonah, ‘It is unfortunately true, however, that almost every author I am about to discuss adopts a contemptuous diction, a jocose style, or a burlesque tone when assessing specific episodes, investing Jonah with more humor and levity than the text supports’ (Sasson 1990, 331). If Sasson finds that scenes have been invested with humor by the interpreters themselves, others have found the object of satire or ridicule to be a moving target (Trible 1996, 471). Finally, Thomas Bolin simply states that modern literary genres like satire and parody did not exist in the ancient world (Bolin 1997). In a response to Miles Jr.’s argument of Jonah as parody, Adele Berlin asks the question of canonization and interpretive history (Berlin 1976). How is it that the canonizers who treated the book so solemnly to read it during Yom Kippur included a text so rife with humor and mockery? Berlin’s question remains significant as scholars today continue to posit the reason for this book’s inclusion in the canon. Still, such a problem is not exclusive to the book of Jonah within the Hebrew Bible and interpreters continue to reflect on such an issue (Kynes 2011).

Contemporary scholarship has noted that previous scholarship has not come to a consensus about the book’s genre and the identification or function of humor. Instead, interpreters have been content to suggest that irony or humor may exist in the book at some points. For example, Uriel Simon simply states ‘The Book of Jonah, then, is not an ironic satire. Furthermore, what irony it does contain is not particularly biting. It looks down on the hero and painfully exposes his failures, but it is forgiving’ (Simon 1999, xxii). Meanwhile, Amy Erickson’s recent commentary suggests that whatever humor exists within the book can be anchored in other Second Temple diaspora texts. They are ‘Simultaneously self-deprecating and other-ridiculing. Diaspora humor – from irony and farce – targets both the non-Jewish characters, especially those in power, and the Jewish characters (and so also the Jews themselves)’ (Erickson 2021, 49). In other words, this position suggests that humor serves as a feature of particular portions of the text rather than a bounded genre.

Still, some scholars continue to posit humor or a humorous genre in the book of Jonah as an important interpretive tool. For example, Carolyn Sharp distrusts interpreters who only see irony ascribed to Jonah's statement in 4:2 and suggests that the deity's urging of Jonah to be compassionate is highly ironic given the fact that no compassion has been shown to the prophet (Sharp 2009). And while Sharp does tentatively agree that the book parodies the character of the prophet, it is actually only a feint before the real message of the book takes over – the fact that the deity is not truly merciful and will ultimately destroy Nineveh. Sharp's analysis nuances previous approaches that depend on humor and irony, but it heavily depends on taking the final verse in Jonah as a statement rather than an interrogative – an interpretive move that has historically had few adherents.² Still, she makes a compelling case that we should take her suggestion seriously with a text that plays so much with language and speech. More recently, Will Kynes draws on the work of Linda Hutcheon and literary criticism more broadly to reconsider how parody functions beyond ridiculing a single target (Kynes 2011). He examines five biblical texts and divides parody into four types: ridiculing, rejecting, respecting, and reaffirming. While most interpreters who consider Jonah a parody would place it under the ridiculing type, Kynes argues that reference to prophetic traditions are actually upheld and respected. He writes, 'Like Joyce's parody in *Ulysses* of the heroic patterns in the *Odyssey*, when Jonah responds to God's call by running in the opposite direction, he, and not the prophets who obeyed as they should, is the butt of the joke' (Kynes 2011). Here we see a more developed approach to parody that draws on adjacent disciplines and does not conform to strict genre expectations.

Nevertheless, fewer scholarly works have been published that so deeply rely on humor in Jonah compared to its heyday in the 70s and 80s. Instead, scholars have turned their attention elsewhere and occasionally blended the role of humor in the book with other interpretive approaches. One noteworthy example is Juliana Claassens work which identifies 'tragic laughter' within the book as a type of humor born out of trauma (Claassens 2015). Claassens blends postcolonial and trauma approaches with conceptions of humor in order to account for the incongruous literary features within the book and 'traumatic memories of the exile and its aftermath that had so comprehensively derailed the lives of the people of Judah' (Claassens 2015). Elsewhere, Claassens (2023a, 2023b) returns to the ironic elements scholars have identified but emphasizes irony's capacity to hold two contradictory positions in tension. Rather than satirize the prophet, Claassens shows that the book ultimately portrays several themes in tension such as an (un)merciful deity and a Torah that is both 'set in stone', yet at other times not fixed. In *A Time to Laugh: Humor in the Bible*, Mark Biddle (2013) provides a short synopsis of several books or figures in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament for teachers and a broader, Christian audience with a final chapter dedicated to 'Humor in the Bible and the Life of Faith'. Benjamin Lazarus (2014) has put together a fascinating cross-cultural comparison of humor in works from Aristophanes and texts from the Hebrew Bible. In his chapter on *Frogs* and Jonah, Lazarus shows that this particular play is rife with the metatheatrical as Dionysus not only dresses up as Herakles to retrieve a dead poet from Hades, but 'through his divine incompetence, he provides a comic version of mortal heroic *katabasis* myths' (Lazarus 2014, 143). The deity, just like Jonah in his account, ought to be understood as a

comic failure figure. The comic incongruity comes about through Jonah's resistance to a hierarchy between the human and divine, with exaggeration and the use of the animal world to show Jonah's recalcitrance. Ultimately, Lazarus believes that the comic elements show that human roles are not fixed and that readers should reflect on how they too fit into the divine-human economy.

Jonah's Placement and Role Among the Book of the Twelve

Scholars continue to posit a relationship between the book of Jonah and the broader notion of the Book of the Twelve containing the minor prophets. As James Nogalski (2011, 1) writes:

The last quarter century has focused on two issues in particular: (1) developing models regarding how the Book of the Twelve came to be recorded on a single scroll and (2) isolating unifying elements that transcend the individual writings (including catchwords, themes, and motifs) and take on new significance when the Book of the Twelve becomes a single collection rather than twelve distinct writings.

The earliest such reference to the Twelve Prophets appears in the 2nd century BCE in Sirach and may have been treated as a corpus distinct from the Latter and Former Prophets. Jonah's relationship with the Twelve is comprised of both differences and similarities. For example, Nogalski notes that Jonah's order in its placement among the textual traditions (MT, LXX, Qumran) varies. In addition, Jonah does not contain typical theological motifs that other minor prophets possess such as the Day of YHWH or judgment on Judah/Israel. Still, the book of Jonah frequently cites texts from the Twelve like Joel 2:18 and scholars continue to posit a closer connection among the Twelve Prophets. For example, Jakob Wöhrle (2009) notes that traditional scholarship has long maintained that the 'grace formula' expressed in Jonah 3 & 4 stems from its formulation in Exodus 34:6-7.³ However, Wöhrle suggests that the redactional layers among several minor prophets (Joel 2:12-14; Micah 7:18-20; Nahum 1:2, 3; Malachi 1:9) has not yet been sufficiently explored. In a new proposal for the redaction of Jonah and compared alongside what he dubs the 'Grace-Corpus', the author argues that several minor prophets 'underwent a redaction oriented on the question of Yhwh's willingness to forgive'.

Diana Edelman (2014) questions why Jonah was included within the Twelve Prophets when it may have better fit within the wisdom corpus.⁴ Building on Ehud Ben Zvi's work, Edelman proposes that Jonah's inclusion had to do with the broader issue of interpreting the prophetic corpus. She writes, 'It moves the reader beyond prophecy as a functioning means of divine revelation within society to a record of Yahweh's expression of his nature, will, and intentions in the past, which continues to be valid in the present and the future'. One datum she uses to argue her position is the messenger formula (Jonah 1:1) typically focuses on the content of the ensuing message rather than the messenger. The ensuing refusal signals to the reader that this is not a typical prophetic book and that 'By the end of the narrative, we have learned that the focus is on the nature of prophecy/word of God itself as a written medium within emerging Torah'. In Edelman's account, one reason for

Jonah's strangeness has to do with its attempt to account for the emerging medium of written prophecy and conflicting prophetic speech.

Kaltner, Graybill, and McKenzie (2020) address four primary questions concerning the Book of the Twelve in their entry on Jonah. First, to what extent can scholars trace the development of this corpus? Second, what was the original order, if there was one at all? Third, to what extent can scholars identify redactional layers? And fourth, what is the significance of shared vocabulary and themes within the Twelve? Scholars have reached a consensus that Jonah was likely the final book inserted into this corpus and thus does not have much bearing on the Twelve's development. Nevertheless, the only text that lacks a heading may suggest it was seen as a continuation of Obadiah, 'with that book's opening reference to a messenger sent to the nations serving as an allusion to Jonah's mission (Obad 1)'. In terms of shared vocabulary and themes, Jonah appears at odds with the rest of the corpus. There are relatively few shared words and whether the author or reader would have understood them to be connected to the wider corpus is a difficult question. Summarizing Edelman's work that identifies thirteen shared themes, they also note that 'these themes are in tension with what is said in other passages within the collection'. Ultimately, continued research on the Book of the Twelve promises to help scholars better understand not only structures of a larger corpus, but also the rationale for Jonah's inclusion within it.

Feminist and Masculinist Approaches

The new edition of the *Women's Bible Commentary* (2012) continues to be a staple in teaching and research of the Bible. Kelly Murphy's entry on Jonah introduces basic elements of the narrative in addition to a feminist approach to the book's themes of justice and mercy. Typically understood by mainstream interpreters as a book about the conflict between justice and mercy, Murphy builds on Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* to suggest that 'Mercy is not so much in opposition to justice, but forms part of a different, but equally valid, way of doing moral reasoning that is particular to girls and/or women' (Murphy 2012, 321). And while single-volume commentaries cannot provide the type of analysis that articles or monographs do, the suggestion serves as a helpful corrective in reframing how scholarship conceives of broader issues within the book. Thus, while lacking female characters, the book of Jonah enters into a discussion that has long been of concern to the feminist tradition.

In 'Jonah: The Jonah Experience – for Women Too?' Maria Kassel (2012) utilizes depth psychology to symbolically interpret Jonah as a collective person with relevance to a feminist perspective 'For such an analysis uncovers spoken as well as suppressed and split-off realities of one's life – including those of women – and especially those of their background experience'. Thus, Kassel understands Jonah's recalcitrance as an emotionally underdeveloped pubescent male in contrast to the mariners' emotionally sensitive response to their situation. In particular, she understands Jonah's fish episode to partially relate to the broader mythic world of the goddess's journey to the underworld where the goal is a greater consciousness towards the world and humanity. In contrast, Jonah's journey to the underworld is stunted and does not authentically represent women's

experiences. The author ends by calling for the creation of a new Jonah narrative no longer based on patriarchal experiences and is grounded in different symbols than those of the patriarchal Bible.

In *Are We Not Men? Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets*, Rhiannon Graybill (2016) argues that the prophet's body serves as a site of instability for masculinity more broadly in the Hebrew Bible. Devoting chapters to Moses, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Graybill demonstrates that the male, prophetic body is a queer body and that 'Queerness...describes a particular sort of destabilizing of the prophetic body, its actions, and its desires' (Graybill 2016, 6). Indeed, as David Tabb Stewart writes, representing sexuality and gender as two poles 'Ultimately breaks down due to its insufficiency for describing the complex phenomena of sexuality and its interrelations with human biology and gender' (Tabb Stewart 2017). Graybill's work ultimately decenters the two poles that historians of gender and sexuality have identified as quite modern and orients readers towards ancient conceptions of masculinity. Fortunately, Graybill has also dedicated a short section on Jonah. Despite having little to no women in the book (apart from the implied Ninevites), Graybill identifies the fish (masculine *dāg* and feminine *dāgāh*) as a womb-like space whereby the female body is replaced. In addition, Jonah's body plays an important role throughout the book. When he is thrown overboard and exposed to the elements, bodily suffering serves as a sign intended to move the plot forward. And finally, Jonah's perpetual act of refusal and insistence on not participating in traditional norms sets up a comparison between queer bodies and history. In a later piece, Graybill (2019a, 2019b) posits that the portrait of masculinity in Jonah involves homosocial relations between different masculine participants. The reason for Jonah's flight and his refusal to participate in typical prophetic norms can be examined through the lens of performing masculinity between different characters throughout the book.

Feminist approaches unanimously begin with the recognition that there are few women in the book of Jonah. Nevertheless, they all claim that the book continues to possess relevance for feminist issues. Murphy suggests that the previous dialectic between justice and mercy should be reconsidered. Instead, mercy is an equally valid form of moral reasoning that forms a part of justice rather than excluded from it. Kassel suggests that Jonah serves as a communal person and that the book presents psychological issues of relevance to women, though it remains a deeply patriarchal text replete with masculine symbols. Finally, Graybill takes a masculinist approach and argues that the homosocial relationship between the masculine characters throughout the book helps us understand some of the book's features such as Jonah's flight and his anger. Feminist and masculinist approaches continue to provide insightful points about this perpetually intriguing book.

Jonah as Postcolonial Literature and Exilic Studies

Recent Jonah research has continued to produce extensive literature on its relationship to the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles and the authors' life under Persian rule, though grounded in broader theoretical disciplines like Postcolonial Studies provoked by thinkers like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha (Crowell 2009). Postcolonial Studies attend to the investigation of dominating colonial powers and their effects on colonized persons, often

overlapping with feminist, liberation, and trauma approaches (Garber 2015). While previous scholarship often understood the book in relation to the Assyrian or Babylonian exile due to the narrative's focus on Nineveh, more recent scholarship has shifted towards the Persian and early Hellenistic periods. Thus, scholars interested in Jonah as post-colonial literature often argue that Jonah has been in some fashion inflected by exile and the problems arising from the diaspora.

For example, Chesung Justin Ryu (2009, 2016) argues that Jonah's silence throughout the narrative should not point to the prophet as an embittered nationalist unwilling to prophesy to a foreign nation. Instead, his silence should be understood in terms of the power differential between the Israelites and Ninevites and that silence becomes a tool of the oppressed. In addition, the author brings to bear his own Korean context as a comparison whereby promoting universalism and downplaying the anger of a colonized community becomes unimaginable. He rhetorically asks, 'How is it possible that the oppressed could write a book whose theme is to praise God's universal salvation toward their oppressor (a heinous destroyer of their country?)' In a close reading of Jonah 4, Ryu argues that the Ninevite's repentance would have been seen as insincere by Jonah's earliest audience and that throughout the debate between Jonah and his deity, '*Jonah is trapped in the rhetoric of the strong and his anger is now connected exclusively to the plant*'. In Ryu's account, Jonah represents the needed justice of a colonized people strong-armed by the deity's rhetoric and call for universalism. Interestingly, he returns to an early proposal by *Midrash Jonah* that suggests the Ninevites were duplicitous and insincere in their repentance. He also offers another solution to the reason for Jonah's flight that builds on earlier scholarship concerning the centrality of Nineveh's violence, but outright rejects the anti-Jewish sentiments that often come with such claims.

David Downs (2009) focuses on the spatial setting throughout the book of Jonah to argue that memories of the exile 'haunt' features of our text. Moreover, even if the trauma of the exile haunts aspects of this text, strands of postexilic Judaism that highlight positive aspects of the other ethnic groups feature in the deity's treatment of the mariners and Ninevites. Downs points towards several aspects of Jonah that have long puzzled interpreters, such as the apparent non-location of our protagonist at the beginning of the book, the attempt to ירד ('go down') away from the deity's presence to seek security, and the depiction of Nineveh as 'a place where the world is nonsensically – and discomfordingly – re-sorted' (Downs 2009). The author also points towards verbiage of exile located elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible such as the image of Sheol as a metaphor for exile in Jonah 2 and Isaiah 5, being 'cast into the deep', (שַׁלַּךְ), and the deity driving (גָּרַשׁ) Jonah and Cain away into a literal or metaphorical exile. Despite these various images and allusions to exile, Downs argues that the surprisingly compassionate turn toward non-Hebrew characters throughout the narrative is a powerful attestation of the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. Set among the broader discussion of enduring problems in Jonah scholarship, the author provides one answer to the strange use of space in Jonah. The memory of displacement accounts for Jonah's non-location at the beginning of the narrative, the collapse of distance between the Levantine coast and Nineveh, and leaving the reader sweltering in the desert heat at the end of the book.

In *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, Steed Vernyl Davidson (2016) challenges the notion that prophetic texts in the Hebrew Bible consistently put forth an anti-imperial

stance. Even if many of the latter prophets were composed under imperial domination, Davidson argues that the ‘final form of prophetic books subscribe[s] to the logic of empire’. He writes, ‘Essentially, prophetic literature is a product of elite society, intended for the most part for an elite readership’ (Davidson 2016, 508). For example, the author points to the inclusion of superscription in each prophetic book that excises the divinatory and oral aspects of the prophetic performance in order to transform it into a class of literature only accessible to the elite, literate class as one piece of evidence. However, Davidson also points to the books of Jonah and Daniel as counternarratives to prophetic normativity. Neither prophet easily identifies with their role as a prophet and Jonah repeatedly refuses to perform the typical functions of his office. Moreover, Jonah’s prophetic utterance never leads to the destruction of the city and demonstrates the ineffectiveness of supposedly quasi-divine speech. In Davidson’s account, few prophetic books as a whole engender anti-imperialist critique and actually end up taking on imperialist discourse as they are transformed in elite settings under Babylonian and Persian rule.

The 2016 issue of the journal of *The Bible & Critical Theory* dedicated volume 12 entirely to the book of Jonah where two articles on trauma and postcolonial studies appeared. Elizabeth Boase and Sarah Agnew (2016) argue that the silences and textual gaps throughout the narrative are products of the trauma the Judean community endured during the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the ensuing exile, and their continued life under Persian rule. For example, rather than understand Jonah’s initial flight as a recalcitrant, selfish prophet interested in self-preservation as some have argued, Boase and Agnew suggest it is more about fear ‘of God, God’s wrath, or of the anger of the Ninevites’. In the same issue, Rebecca Lindsay (2016) problematizes the depiction of Nineveh as a wholly evil, violent city representative of the Assyrian Empire by bringing Kwok Pui-Lan’s ‘postcolonial imagination’ to bear on the minoritized city in Jonah. Lindsay is particularly attentive to the ways that intertexts like Nahum and Zephaniah attempt to produce a monolithic portrait of a city that resists categories like colonizer or colonized, guilty or innocent, and history or fiction. Ultimately, the author hopes such a reading can serve to reimagine supposedly normative readings for the Church elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and reexamine the power structures that enforce them.

Marian Kelsey (2020) rightly notes that there are no explicit references to the Babylonian Exile throughout the book of Jonah. Interpreters have often resorted to importing notions of a violent exile from other biblical texts like Nahum or xenophobia from Ezra/Nehemiah. However, Kelsey contends that inner-biblical allusions to exodus narratives and the primeval creation accounts ultimately highlight exilic motifs. For example, Kelsey identifies a number of allusions to the primeval narratives in Genesis by noting shared words like *יבשה*, *מים/ים*, *רוח*, and *רדם/תדרמה* point to allusion. And while these words are somewhat common, the identical phrase *מה-זאת עשית* (‘What have you done!’) is shared in both accounts. In Genesis, the deity voices displeasure towards Adam and Eve for having consumed the fruit which resulted in their expulsion from the garden. Kelsey ultimately suggests that the inner-biblical allusions throughout Jonah do not paint a positive picture of the prophet, yet the recurring themes of exile within the book also point to hope that the deity continues to speak to Jonah (and by extension the people).

Even if recent scholarship has destabilized the previously unassailable notion of the violent Assyrian exile into the book of Jonah, Claassens (2023a, 2023b) reads Jonah as a ‘symbolic trauma narrative’. Recognizing that scholars have moved the compositional date beyond the immediacy of the Assyrian or Babylonian exiles, Claassens argues that trauma wrought by colonial powers endure long past deportation. Ultimately, reading the book of Jonah allows the community to face their oppressor and deal with generational trauma.

The differing conclusions each author has submitted in this section attest to the varied approaches each author has taken toward our text. For Ryu and Downs, the violent memory of the exile remains a given in which the prophet protests against Nineveh, synecdochally representing empire writ large. In contrast, Lindsay problematizes that very characterization of Nineveh as a wholly evil entity. Meanwhile, Davidson stresses the counternarrative that Jonah offers in contrast to other prophetic texts by emphasizing the narrative’s structure, the protagonist’s repeated refusal to fit into prophetic tropes, and the failure of prophetic speech. Kelsey notes that while the exile does not appear explicitly within Jonah, a number of inner-biblical allusions to the primeval creation and exodus narratives point to the presence of exilic motifs. Finally, Claassens returns to Jonah as a postcolonial trauma narrative that allows a generationally traumatized community to work through social and psychological issues. While each takes a different approach to the portrayal and effects of the exile in Jonah, all agree that it constitutes a key feature in some fashion. To conclude this section, I note several additional works that have appeared in the vein of postcolonial studies. Juliana Claassens (2021) builds on Visser and Havea’s work to focus on the “‘material”, “spatial”, and “collective” aspects of trauma instead of the “individual, temporal, and linguistic qualities highlighted by earlier (Western) trauma theorists””. In ‘AdJusting Jonah’ Jione Havea (2013) seeks to highlight aspects of justice that Jonah stood for and ‘adjust’ how we hear Jonah. Both of these articles take seriously the colonized aspect of Jonah who represents the broader Judean community.

Psychological Approaches to a Rebellious and Laconic Prophet

Drawn in by the curiously laconic and rebellious prophet, psychoanalytic/psychological approaches have often attempted to flesh out the reason for the book’s popularity in addition to the prophet’s own psychological profile. Indeed, modern approaches that do not style themselves attending to psychological questions are still drawn to making some sort of character judgment on the book’s protagonist. While the approaches below all take different tacts, each are drawn to the unique character of Jonah who repeatedly resists the deity’s call and the many psychological concepts within the book such as the death wish, vulnerability, and the problem of a totalizing authority.

Avivah Zornberg (2008) focuses on the themes of flight from God as opposed to standing before the deity, the death wish, and Jonah’s prayer from the fish. In addition, Zornberg takes Jonah’s insistence on knowing the ultimate outcome of his actions as ‘an important facet of his flight from the enigma of his humanity’. Ultimately, the author concludes that Jonah’s psychological need for certainty concerning human life might pave

the way for the acceptance of not knowing and that in some ways Jonah is a representation of humanity more broadly.⁵

Stuart Lasine (2016) reviews contemporary psychological approaches to the book of Jonah and frequently finds that commentators ascribe traits to Jonah such as self-centeredness, petulance, arrogance, dogmatism, and childlike, or as an everyman figure representative of humanity's flaws. Through an exploration of attribution theory, that is, how we go about judging others and the tendency for us to believe that behaviors point to fundamental character traits, whatever psychological makeup we ascribe to Jonah often affects our understanding of the book's message. Ultimately, Lasine argues that one reason for the many different messages interpreters have divined from the book partially stems from its many psychological themes like the need for enclosure, the fear of engulfment, the relationship between father and child, the crises of childhood and adulthood, the death wish, and more. The book of Jonah is less about an identifiable 'Jonah Complex' and more of a mirror that prompts a response from our own deep-seated psychological issues.

Jonathan Kaplan (2018) draws on work in psychology and traditional scholarship on Jonah to consider how moral agency is introduced and reflected on within the book. Building on Heelas and Lock's cross-cultural grid mapping human agency, Kaplan agrees with Newsom that the Deuteronomic model apparent in Jonah and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible fits within the grid as 'an internalized conceptualization of the self in control' albeit constructed in relationship to 'desire, knowledge, and the discipline of submission to external authority' (Kaplan 2018, Newsom 2012). Caught between an overwhelming external authority (the deity) and the will of the individual (Jonah) in Jonah, Kaplan argues that 1) parodied elements from prophetic literature, 2) didactic elements like rhetorical questions from wisdom literature, 3) the questioning of the Deuteronomic model, and 4) a somewhat immoral protagonist serves to prompt reflection on moral agency among its audience. Kaplan's work is representative of interdisciplinary scholarship moving beyond traditional approaches, yet remaining attentive to Jonah scholarship that posits Persian-period Jerusalem literati attempting to rework authoritative models. Notably, he also draws on previous biblical scholarship that understands the text as a parody, but neither assigns the entire text a genre per se nor posits Jonah as a villain who is meant to be ridiculed. In his account, Jonah's less-than-moral character enables 'introspective reflection on the audience's own potential actions when faced with similar circumstances' (Kaplan 2018). In addition, Jonah's silence throughout the narrative not only builds literary tension but allows readers to put themselves in his place to work out the moral issues he encounters.

Fish, Plants, and a Scorching Heat - Animal Studies and Ecological Approaches to the Book of Jonah

In general, Jonah scholarship and biblical studies have only recently adopted some of the approaches and methodologies from the so-called 'Animal Turn' in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Weil 2012). As Phillip Sherman notes in his survey of Animal Studies and the Hebrew Bible, 'Animal Studies can broadly be seen as a set of questions which

attempt to take seriously and pay close attention to the reality of animal lives, past and present, and the ways in which human societies have conceived of those lives, related to them, and utilized them in the production of human cultures' (Sherman 2020). As Levi-Strauss famously wrote, animals are not only good to eat, but 'good to think' (Levi-Strauss 1963). They are modes of thinking more broadly about human culture. Thus, rather than a single approach or methodology to apply to a certain biblical text, Animal Studies is concerned with the values and questions texts construct concerning animals and how interpreters consequently view them. It should come as no surprise, then, that interpreters of Jonah have begun to produce scholarship on a book so rife with the non-human. For example, while scholars may not explicitly draw on theoretical models commonly used in Animal Studies, Brent Strawn (2012) compares the phenomenon of vomiting in Leviticus and Jonah and its relationship to ancient conceptions of land. He then connects it to contemporary ecological concerns and exhorts readers to act. Strawn's philological approach thus fits within the broader set of questions of how human cultures relate to their environment.

Several interpreters have noted that the book contains a surprising amount of references to animals and non-human entities in this short book. These include the meaning of Jonah's name (dove), the great fish playing an important but enigmatic role, animals wearing sackcloth and engaging in the mourning ritual of the Ninevites, the gourd-vine growing and withering, the hungry worm, and the deity ultimately including cattle as worthy of care (or punishment) in the final verse. Yet as Ken Stone notes when reflecting on Levi-Strauss's statement that animals were good to think with, the biblical writers were 'using their observations about and relations with animals to understand themselves, their relations with one another, their relations with other peoples and nations' and more (Stone 2017). Animal Studies thus has the twofold potential to illuminate this relationship between the biblical writers and their world, and the commentator of the Hebrew Bible and theirs. Whether or not interpreters actively draw on Animal Studies or Ecological approaches, all must make decisions regarding the role and function of animals in this short book.

Yael Shemesh (2010) argues that Western intellectual history, from Aquinas and Descartes to modern interpreters, has not generally considered animals to be worthy of moral or ethical reflection. Yet some biblical texts like Jonah express that the deity cares for animals in some fashion and that divine care in the final verse is not as absurd as some commentators may care to admit. After a brief foray into Western philosophical thought, Shemesh begins examining the function and perception of animals in the Hebrew Bible. She categorizes the animals according to their function and notes that some belong in more than one. Animals can be signs or portents, a didactic tool, a means of punishment, or a means of salvation and deliverance. Shemesh importantly notes that among the many animals, 'there is no story in which such animals evince any degree of independence'. She then turns to the book of Jonah and applies this categorization to some of the non-human characters. For example, the great fish seems to fit all of the categories Shemesh identifies. It is a sign, a didactic tool, and also a means of punishment or salvation depending on one's perspective. Ultimately, she finds that the fish and worm are literary devices 'to convey a better understanding of the Lord's essence and ways, and of His governance of

the entire earth'. These devices reinforce the book's message that the deity is compassionate to all – both Ninevite and animal.

Gerald West (2014) also seeks to reinterpret the divine care of animals in 4:11 in light of postcolonial theory, specifically the interactions between mid-17th century Dutch settlers and the indigenous people of South Africa and Botswana, and how it might serve as a liberating resource for the contemporary South African context. West builds on Edward Said's and Alissa Nelson's notion of the contrapuntal, that is, an attempt to recognize the totalizing enterprise of western biblical scholarship and seek connections between indigenous practices and ideas, and the Hebrew Bible. West, citing Jones Nelson, argues such an approach favors 'the decentring of the dominant discourse in favour of exchange' (Jones Nelson 2014 in West). Thus, after reviewing the ending verse of Jonah as a rhetorical question through deep engagement with Ben Zvi's (2009), Guillaume (2009), Shemesh's (2010), and Bolin's (2010) work, West engages the final verse in light of the journals of the Dutch East India Company and the 'cattle culture' of the indigenous Tswana. West's review of these letters and journals reveals that over several years the Dutch became increasingly perplexed and frustrated as the indigenous population was coy about trading their cattle – a singular purpose for the profit-driven trading company. As it turns out, the Tswana possessed an abundant source of cattle, but the cattle served as an integral source of 'identity in ways that the Company cannot imagine' as well as 'their link to the land' (West 2014). Fragmentary as the stories of the Ninevites and the indigenous Tswana are, West suggests that we might understand the final verse as a reference to the Ninevite cattle culture. West's indigenous postcolonial liberative approach is noteworthy in turning traditional postcolonial approaches on their head. It is not Judah or Israel, but the Ninevites who had been 'decimated, conquered colonized and denigrated' as the Tswana.

Like West, Schalk Willem Van Heerden returns to the final verses of the book in order to navigate between two divergent approaches (Van Heerden 2017). He notes that approaches to the final verses of Jonah have typically split on whether the book's message is ultimately about mercy and compassion or the sovereignty of the deity. Some commentators have argued that the deity's extension of care toward animals in the final verse is clear (Limburg 1993). The connection of the animals to the Ninevites suggests that the Ninevites are as 'dumb' as beasts, as innocent as them, or both. Yet Bolin fears divine care of animals is anachronistic. Instead, he argues that the book about divine sovereignty actually understands the inclusion of animals as a reference to sacrifice in the context of kingship (Bolin 2009). In response to a humorous interpretation of the incorporation of animals, Bolin writes:

One potential answer and often overlooked answer is that Yahweh, like all his divine colleagues in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, feasted on a daily diet of roasted animal flesh and that his reference to the animals is made in the context of forthcoming sacrifices from the newly pardoned (and grateful) Ninevites.

Van Heerden notes that such an approach has the advantage of referencing sacrifice and thanksgiving elsewhere in Jonah, though these practices are not explicitly mentioned in

the final verse. Drawing on the work of Ehud Ben Zvi, he attempts to reconcile these two positions by invoking a double reading of the final verse that reads it both as a rhetorical question and an asseverative statement. Van Heerden explains, ‘An assertive reading of 4: 11 emphasises the unlimited power of YHWH (reflecting royal sovereignty and power), while an interrogative reading highlights the boundlessness of the deity’s mercy, as experienced in the Jerusalem cult’ (Van Heerden 2017). In this account, Jonah is a product of Jerusalem’s elite literati able to reflect on their many intersecting positions as a relatively independent cultural group in Jerusalem, but also actively under the Persian administration’s thumb.

As we have already seen, Jione Havea has produced a significant amount of scholarship on Jonah covering several different approaches and it should not be surprising to find his work in this section. Havea (2020) takes the reality of climate change as his starting point in the *Earth Bible Commentary* series to revisit the book of Jonah with this in mind. It is a traditional commentary insofar as it follows the flow of the narrative verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter, remarking on particular words and syntactical issues. At least initially. It then reads the book backward, ‘highlighting the difference that sea and native (is)land matters make to rereading the biblical narrative’ (Havea vii). Where the first section of the book follows the narrator’s design, the second part reads the narrative backward and the books ‘opens up to ecological analysis as well as to ecological hermeneutics for the voices of beasts and of the city of Nineveh’. It also does not center on the relationship between Jonah and his deity, but seeks to animate the other characters and figures within the book like the fish, sea, wind, boat, city, bush, worm, sun, and beasts in light of ‘native, sea and (is)land orientations’. Thus, the moments of (ecological) crisis within Jonah must also be oriented towards ‘the interests of ecology in general’, not just the humans. Havea’s work here is a challenge to traditional Western biblical scholarship while providing several fresh insights into the well-trod book of Jonah. Undoubtedly, Animal Studies and ecological readings of the book of Jonah will only continue to flourish as climate change continues to affect the globe and interpreters increasingly engage with the notion of the Anthropocene.

Jonah Through the Ages – Reception History and Reception Exegesis

Few biblical texts have sparked the imagination of popular culture as the book of Jonah. After all, what other biblical text can draw the attention of the cultural critic Ta-Nehisi Coates (2010), novelist and playwright Joshua Max Feldman (2014), Iranian author Amir Ahmadi Arian (2020), and hold pride of place as Zora Neale Hurston’s first novel (1934)? Indeed, biblical scholars have increasingly considered the diverse ways the book of Jonah has been portrayed and interpreted beyond its composition. And beyond cataloging examples of the book’s appearance throughout history, scholars have used this data to make broader meta-critical claims about modern biblical scholarship (Sherwood 1998, 2000). Finally, much of the work I describe below takes advantage of the dazzling breadth of artwork that has been produced on Jonah.

Robert Gregg (2015) includes a chapter on Jonah in early and medieval Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and sets it in a broader discussion of how each religious tradition

has historically interpreted shared narrative traditions like Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Gregg's book is particularly noteworthy for its presentation of high-quality artwork showcasing the book's rich artistic history. Amy Erickson's (2021) commentary includes a sizable section on the 'History of Consequences' that divides subsections into Jewish, Christian, and Muslim consequences in addition to a short section on Jonah and the modern world. Each subsection on the religious traditions is further divided into chronological periods, with the exception of her section on Muslim consequences which is divided based on sacred text/tradition (Qur'an, Hadith literature, stories of the prophets). Erickson's history is informed by a theoretical discussion on the intimate relationship between composition and interpretive history. She pithily writes, 'Biblical texts are already accumulations, often the product of a number of historical contexts – as are readers' (Erickson 2021, 67).

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer has written extensively on Jonah's reception in both broader commentaries and through focused articles.⁶ Rather than progress through each religious tradition and move chronologically, Tiemeyer (2021) structures her work in a verse-by-verse format. One advantage to such an approach is the ability to demonstrate the overlap between different religious traditions on the same verse. For example, Tiemeyer shows that the later tradition of identifying Jonah with the widow of Zarephath's resurrected son (1 Kings 17) appears in Jewish sources like Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, *The Lives of the Prophets*, and the Jewish statesman and philosopher Abarbanel, in addition to Christian sources like Jerome and Ephrem the Syrian. Moreover, her commentary is not limited to influential thinkers or texts within each religious tradition, but also includes popular culture like sermons, poetry, music, artwork, and drama. Her more focused pieces include the reception of the fish in early Jewish and Christian reception history (2017). She demonstrates that while the fish began as a benevolent and obedient servant, it later 'turns into a symbol of death, a monster, and even the Devil'. Elsewhere, she builds on Paul Joyce and Diana Lipton's 'reception exegesis' whereby she explores how 'The reception history of a given text helps us to see aspects of that same text that are present, yet often hidden from plain sight due to our own predetermined ideas of what the text ought to be about' (Tiemeyer 2022). She traces three major tropes in 20th-century literature on Jonah and finds the failure to flee from God's calling, Jonah as a refugee, and the exploration of God's justice as opposed to mercy remain significant themes.

In 'Fish Swallows Man: The Tale of Jonah and Its Reception History in Folkloristic Perspective', Susan Niditch (2021) engages the morphological approach of Vladimir Propp and folklorist Alan Dundes to suggest that the book of Jonah contains several interlocking scenes that share a resemblance to international folklore motifs. Niditch focuses on the folk motif of 'fish swallowing a man' since it appears often in Stith Thompson's index of folktales. For example, a French-Canadian story relates that the hero Ti-Jean drinks a sleep potion provided by his fellow mariners whereupon they throw him overboard and is consumed by a whale. Ultimately, he escapes the belly of the whale by instructing his piscine companion to beach itself onshore. These international tales share key features such as a dangerous voyage, tossing a person off the ship, a monstrous creature, and the ultimate survival of the victim. Unlike Stith Thompson who sought an origin story for all of these tales, Niditch suggests the enduring popularity of Jonah has to

do with its inclusion of global folkloristic motifs able to capture the imagination of its diverse readers.

This brief review shows that interpreters continue to catalogue the book's fascinating reception history for a variety of reasons. Undoubtedly, one such reason is to showcase the variety of media forms Jonah has taken throughout history and many of the cited works take advantage by including high-quality images sure to please any reader. Others like Tiemeyer and Sherwood use the book's history of interpretation to destabilize dominant modes of reading Jonah today. Finally, Niditch provides one answer to the book's enduring popularity by comparing it to international folklore where folk motifs like a fish swallowing a person is able to capture the imagination of a diverse global population.

Untidy Research on an Untidy Text

Naturally, several recent works do not fit into the sections above or do not necessarily constitute a trend in Jonah research, but nevertheless merit mention for their innovative contribution. While affect theory has influenced adjacent disciplines for quite some time, it has only recently become influential in Biblical Studies. Fiona Black and Jennifer Koosed (2019) define affect theory as 'A critically informed analysis of emotions and bodily sensations, one that resists any neatly bifurcated analysis of emotions as either interior states or as social-political conditions'. The angry, fearful, and morbid Jonah would be a fitting target for such a theoretical model, though its recent introduction to the study of the Bible has produced relatively little scholarship on Jonah thus far. One exception is Rhiannon Graybill's 'Prophecy and the Problem of Happiness: The Case of Jonah' (2019) where she argues that Jonah's supreme unhappiness comprises an important aspect of the book and prophecy more broadly. Rather than pass judgment on Jonah's responses throughout the narrative, Graybill draws on the work of Sara Ahmed and argues that 'The book of Jonah is organized around happy and unhappy objects, and the prophet Jonah is an affect alien'. Her work is significant insofar as it no longer interprets Jonah's responses away as petty or childish and instead takes them as her starting point, exposing the stakes of what it means for a prophet to partake in (un)happiness.

Another significant tool recent scholarship has extensively used is the broad notion of intertextuality. Often undertheorized, many interpreters simply understand it to mean a text's relationship to another rather than using more particular literary terms like citation or allusion without consideration of how ancient authors reused earlier literature (Sanders 2018) or the fluidity of the canon that persisted long past Jonah's composition (Mroczek 2016). Nevertheless, nearly every interpreter of Jonah has noted that the text reuses literature in some fashion. Explicit explorations of intertextuality in Jonah include Catherine Muldoon's *In Defense of Divine Justice: An Intertextual Approach to the Book of Jonah* (2010), Joseph Kelly's 'Joel, Jonah and the Yahweh Creed: Determining the Trajectory of the Literary Influence' (2013), Edward Greenstein's (2016) 'Noah and Jonah: An Intertextual Interpretation', Jione Havea's 'Sitting Jonah with Job: Resailing Intertextuality' (2016), Sheila Tuller Keiter's 'Noah and the Dove: The Integral

Connection between Noah and Jonah' (2012), and 'Jonah in the Shadows of Eden' by Yitzhak Berger (2016).

Scholars have also increasingly analyzed the book of Jonah through theories of 'critical spatiality' (Schreiner 2016). Gert Prinsloo (2013) treats the book of Jonah by setting it within larger models of cosmic space in the ancient Mediterranean world. He attempts to foster a concern with space in the Hebrew Bible by formulating a model applicable to the ancient Near East. Building on Edward Soja's modified model of Henri Lefebvre, Prinsloo seeks to systematically treat the book of Jonah in order to take notice of the complex ways space is reflected and produced. For example, he distinguishes between terms like narrative space, social space, and spatial orientation that contribute to the meaning-making of space in literary texts. He ultimately concludes, 'A spatial reading reveals the author's intent to portray YHWH as the universal God with compassion for everyone who turns "from his evil way" (3:8)'. Anthony Rees (2016) also builds on Edward Soja's work with devoting particular attention to the directional markers of 'up' and 'down' throughout the text. John Day (2012) and Julia Montenegro and Arcadio Del Castillo (2016) return to the problematic location of Tarshish. Day reaffirms Tarshish as Tartessos in southern Spain in contrast to recent proposals by Arie van der Kooij (1998) and André Lemaire (2000) while Montenegro and Del Castillo consider the place's relationship to trade, particularly precious metals like silver.

Concluding Thoughts

Research on the book of Jonah has only recently examined its interpretive assumptions, opening up new avenues and fresh insights into this enigmatic text. Meta-critical analyses of the book's reception history have destabilized the previously unassailable notion that the violent Nineveh present in other canonical texts ought to be intertextually imported into the book of Jonah. One such avenue is the recent turn to postcolonial and exilic studies. While interpreters have long posited a relationship between Jonah and the Babylonian Exile, Davidson problematizes the notion of a consistently anti-imperial prophetic corpus in the Hebrew Bible. Others like Ryu remain committed to Nineveh as a representative of Assyria, but argue that the deity's rhetoric ultimately strongarms his prophet into a complicit silence. Meanwhile, consulting data from linguistic analysis, scholars have increasingly dated the book to the Persian or Hellenistic periods, suggesting that readers were reflecting on past incidents to explore then-contemporary issues of prophetic speech, the changing role of the prophet, and non-Hebrew characters. New insights from reading Jonah as part of the Book of the Twelve have allowed scholars to forge connections between canonical texts, moving beyond the sole connection to Nahum. Instead, these scholars highlight Jonah's frequent reuse of the minor prophets as a corpus through citation, allusion, and motif. Moving beyond themes that mainstream interpreters have identified as significant, animal studies and ecological approaches have emphasized Jonah's frequent inclusion of non-human entities. Indeed, the perplexing final verse of the book continues to provoke discussion. Scholars appear divided on whether these non-human entities are solely tools of the deity or whether prophetic and divine care ultimately prevails at the end of the book. Much more can be said about this perpetually

intriguing book that appears to resist a monologic interpretation, but a brief review of the book's recent interpretive history suggests that scholars will undoubtedly continue to grapple with the book's peculiarities longer still.

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ORCID iD

Aron Tillema  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4262-5418>

Notes

1. While dated, Wille Van Heerden (1992) provides a look into the many analyses of humor in Jonah. See Erickson (2021, 38) for an updated list.
2. However, see Alan Cooper (1993), Philippe Guillaume (2006), and Ehud Ben Zvi (2009) who suggest taking the final verse as a statement rather than a rhetorical question.
3. See also Klaas Spronk's (2009) response to Wöhrle in the same issue.
4. Aaron Schart (2012) also questions the inclusion of Jonah in the Twelve Prophets, but approaches it from a source-critical perspective.
5. See also Dennis Shulman's (2008) and George Fishman's (2008) response to Zornberg.
6. See also her two entries in the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Reception (EBR)* on Jonah in film and on the book and person of Jonah in rabbinic Judaism. She also has a chapter on the reception of Jonah's flight in *Images of Exile in the Prophetic Literature* (2019).

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