

LITERARY DEVICES IN THE STORY OF THE SHIPWRECKED SAILOR

GARY A. RENDSBURG

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

This article presents a detailed study of a variety of literary devices in the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor. Special attention is paid to the role of repetition and to the presence of wordplay, particularly alliteration. Other devices are discussed also, such as the use of an inclusio to mark the completed cycle of the narrative, the employment of altered syntax to mark the end of a list of items, and the use of confused syntax to highlight the confusion of the moment at the point of the shipwreck.

THE STUDY OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN texts has undergone a quiet revolution in the last few decades. After more than a century of strict philology, with the search for answers to questions raised by that traditional discipline, scholars have begun to utilize a more literary approach, asking new questions and reading the texts with new eyes. This can be seen most prominently in the study of the Hebrew Bible, but it extends to the cognate disciplines of Assyriology and Egyptology as well.¹ In

This article is an expanded version of a paper delivered at the 206th meeting of the American Oriental Society, March 1996, in Philadelphia. I am grateful to several scholars whose comments at my presentation forced me to rethink several points. They are noted below at the appropriate places. In addition, the comments by the anonymous referees for the *Journal* were especially beneficial. Finally, it is my pleasant duty to thank the Center for Judaic Studies of the University of Pennsylvania, where, as visiting research fellow in 1997–98, I completed this study.

¹ For biblical studies, see J. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series, vol. 70; Bible and Literature Series, vol. 17 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series, vol. 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); and M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985). In Assyriology, the most important work today stems from the Groningen Group for the Study of Mesopotamian Literature, whose most recent volume is *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. M. E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (Groningen: Styx, 1996). In Egyptology, see now the excellent collection of articles in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. A. Loprieno, Probleme der Ägyptologie, vol. 10 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); several of these essays will be cited below. In addition, see

the present article, I wish to advance the discussion further with a detailed treatment of the Egyptian story of the Shipwrecked Sailor (hereinafter: ShS).² If I approach the text at times from the discipline of biblical studies, it is because it is my primary area of research and because many of the devices treated below are studied more comprehensively by biblical scholars than by Egyptologists. The main discussion will focus on two specific techniques, repetition and wordplay (and the interrelationship between them), but other devices will be explored as well.³

A. Loprieno, "Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory," in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. J. S. Cooper and G. Schwartz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 209–32; this insightful article draws heavily on contemporary literary theory, but rarely does it treat the literary devices explored below.

² For the text, reproduced from our sole exemplar, P. St. Petersburg 1115, see A. M. Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca, vol. 2 (Brussels: Édition de la Fondation égyptologique Reine-Élisabeth, 1932), 41–48. (It is available on the Internet at <http://home.prcn.org/~sfryer/Hieratic/papyrus/index.html>.) The most recent translation of the story, with notes, is R. B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 89–101. I completed this study before I had access to Parkinson's volume, but was happy to note agreement on a number of points.

³ On wordplay in Egyptian texts, a recent treatment is W. Guglielmi, "Zu einigen literarischen Funktionen des Wortspiels," in *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens zu Ehren von Wolfhart Westendorf*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: F. Junge, 1984), 491–506; a more concise presentation is W. Guglielmi, "Wortspiel," in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 6, ed. W. Helck and E. Otto (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 1287–91. Additional works are cited by S. B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, JSOT

Repetition is especially germane when discussing the ShS because of the very essence of the narrative.⁴ It is, I believe, the earliest surviving example of the story-within-a-story technique in world literature (indeed, it has a story within a story within a story⁵), and this structure permits portions of the story to be told more than once. As the study of repetition in biblical texts has shown, seldom is the repetition verbatim. It may be nearly verbatim, but there are always differences. These differences from one telling to the next are crucial, and as attentive readers notice them, they can grasp their significance. Most of these contrasts, as we shall see, work at an oral/aural level, that is, they are intended for both the speaker that reads the text aloud and the audience that hears it. But there are occasional distinctions that are primarily visual/

Supplement Series, vol. 223 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 179, n. 1. Occasionally I will comment on the interpretation of the story, although that is not my main goal; see D. Kurth, "Zur Interpretation der Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen," *SAK* 14 (1987): 167–79; J. Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *JEA* 76 (1990): 55–72; and now the introductory remarks by Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 89–91.

⁴ Some scholars have attempted to read Egyptian narrative tales, including the Shipwrecked Sailor, as verse; see most importantly J. L. Foster, "The Shipwrecked Sailor: Prose or Verse?" *SAK* 15 (1988): 69–109; and G. Burkard, *Überlegungen zur Form der ägyptischen Literatur: Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen als literarisches Kunstwerk*, Ägypten und Altes Testament, vol. 22 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993). The initiator of this approach is Gerhard Fecht, whose forty years of work on the subject is summarized in a recent article: "The Structural Principle of Ancient Egyptian Elevated Language," in *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, ed. J. C. de Moor and W. G. E. Watson, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*, vol. 42 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 69–94; twenty-six of Fecht's works are listed on pp. 93–94. For a critique of this method, see M. Lichtheim, "Have the Principles of Ancient Egyptian Metrics Been Discovered?" *JARCE* 9 (1971–72): 103–10. I remain convinced that the Egyptian narrative tales are prose; indeed I see them as closest to the biblical prose narratives in Genesis, Exodus, Judges, and Samuel. The attempt by J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), to blur the distinction between biblical prose and poetry is relevant to the debate in Egyptology. Already Lichtheim (p. 109) has compared Egyptological and biblical research insightfully on this subject. In the main, the literary techniques that I explore here are to be found in biblical prose, not poetry (though repetition is a major feature of Ugaritic and Sumerian poetry, for example).

⁵ As correctly noted by W. K. Simpson, "Schiffbrüchiger," in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 5 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 620.

scribal, that is, only a scribe wielding a pen and a reader holding the papyrus could perceive them.

The story begins with the Sailor (the designation is conventional, as he is never designated as such) relating to his Commanding Officer an event that once happened to him. He had been on a naval mission to the king's mines when an unexpected storm wrecked the ship. As the sole survivor, he found himself on a deserted island—void of human life, that is, but inhabited by a large snake. Pressed by the Snake to explain his presence on the island, the Sailor rehearses how he got there. A comparison of the two tellings, the Sailor's accounts to his Commanding Officer and then to the Snake (the latter, of course, incorporated into the former), allows us to see how repetition works in the tale.

It should be noted that the Egyptian tale provides a setting for repetition that is different from those in the biblical corpus. In the latter, typically an episode is described (often dispassionately) by an omniscient narrator, after which a particular character relates the episode to another character. For example, after the narrator describes the dramatic scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Gen 39:11–12, the reader is treated to two retellings by the latter: first her report to the servants of the house in vv. 14–15 and then her report to her husband in vv. 17–18. Similarly, Pharaoh has his dreams (Gen 41:1–7) which he then relates to Joseph (vv. 17–24). In a variation of the technique, the narrator describes the death of Saul (1 Samuel 31), after which the reader hears a very different report from a character who may or may not have been present at the event, namely, the Amalekite who informs David of Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1. By contrast, in ShS, the entire story is told by the Sailor to the Commanding Officer, who hears the Sailor's "first" version as well as the "second" as told to the Snake.⁶ This repeated retelling influences the way the audience will hear the story.⁷

⁶ A near parallel to this multiple retelling in the Bible is in the aforementioned story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39). The latter tells her (very brief) version twice, once to the servants of the house and once to her husband. But the husband hears only the second account. On this study, see Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 423–27.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all translations herein are my own. I have adopted the translation method of E. Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1995), aiming to capture details in the original text. Thus, I have attempted to distinguish each grammatical form in my translation, especially where such a distinction is germane to the literary techniques under discussion. I realize that occasionally I may bend the rules of Egyptian grammar, but I do so to make certain points

In addressing the Officer, the Sailor states *šm-kwi r biš n ity hšī-kwi r wšd wr m dpt . . . škdw 120 im-s m stpw n kmt* “I was going to the mine of the sovereign, I was going down to the Great Green (Sea) in a boat . . . 120 sailors were in it from the best of Egypt” (lines 23–28). But when the Sailor speaks to the Snake, he says *ink pw hšī-kwi r biš m wpwt ity m dpt . . . škdw 120 im-s m stpw n kmt* “I am he who went down to the mine on a mission of the sovereign in a boat . . . 120 sailors were in it from the best of Egypt” (lines 89–94). The most obvious difference between these two versions is the inclusion of the word *wpwt* “mission” in line 90. By utilizing this word when addressing the Snake, the Sailor may be elevating his position. He could not use this wording when speaking to his Commanding Officer, because the latter would know that the Sailor was merely one of one hundred and twenty sailors sailing to the mines and that he was not “on a mission of the sovereign,” holding some position of authority. Moreover, the Sailor begins this description of the event with the expression *ink pw hšī-kwi* “I am he who went down.” While *ink pw* is not uncommon at the beginnings of narratives and in answers to questions,⁸ both of which are the case here, the phrase allows the Sailor to begin his story to the Snake by fronting the independent personal pronoun *ink* “I,” thus placing himself in a position of prominence. By contrast, in speaking to the Officer, the Sailor began with *šm-kwi* “I was going,” a verbal form with pronominal indicator in second position.

The use of the word *wpwt* “mission” in line 89 has a second function as well. Both this and the previous section of the story are introduced by the words *iw wpi-nfr-f r-i* “he [the Snake] opened his mouth to me” (lines 67, 81), in both instances highlighted by red ink. The two words *wpi* “open” and *wpwt* “mission” thus form an alliteration, and furthermore are written with the same sign (Gardiner F13). An additional alliteration is achieved when the reader reaches line 94, for here one encounters *stpw* “the best.”⁹ Also of interest is the variation in the writing of the word *stpw* “the best” in lines 28 and 94. When (earlier

more obvious; see, for example, my renderings of *šm-kwi* “I was going” in line 23 and *ink pw hšī-kwi* “I am he who went down” in line 89, discussed in the next paragraph.

⁸ A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 144. See also J. E. Hoch, *Middle Egyptian Grammar* (Mississauga, Ont.: Benben, 1997), 160: “These constructions are typically used in explanations.”

⁹ The final *-t* in *wpwt* may not have been pronounced already in Middle Egyptian (this process is complete in Late Egyptian), but the alliteration between it and *stpw* would work nevertheless, given the shared consonants *p* and *w*.

in the narrative) the Sailor tells the story to his Commanding Officer, the scribe uses only the trilateral *stp* sign (Gardiner U21) followed by the papyrus roll determinative (Gardiner Y1) to indicate an abstract noun. When the Sailor tells the story to the Snake, the scribe places four phonetic alphabetic signs before the U21 and Y1 signs: *s-t-p-w*. The holder of the papyrus would see three of the same signs shared in the writing of *wpwt* “mission” and *stpw*, namely, *p-w-t* in *wpwt* “mission” and *t-p-w* in *stpw* “best.” All of this focuses attention on the word *wpwt* “mission” in the Sailor’s account to the Snake, a word not heard previously in the story.

As a second example of repetition, we may compare the Sailor’s two descriptions of the crew members and their skills. To his Commanding Officer he had stated, “they look at the sky, they look at the earth, their hearts are fiercer than lions, they could foretell a storm before (it) came, a gale before it happened” (lines 28–32). To the Snake he repeats these words verbatim (lines 95–98), but then adds the following: “each one of them, his heart was fiercer, his arm was stronger than his companion’s; there was not a fool in their midst [lit., heart]” (lines 99–101). These additional phrases said to the Snake are intended to demonstrate the courage that the Sailor, like his mates, possesses (or possessed). Another alliteration brings this point out. The combination *nn whš m-hr ib-sn* “not a fool in their midst” (lines 100–101) includes the same consonantal string as the word *hšm* “folded”¹⁰ that appears in the expression “my arms folded before him” in the preceding scene (line 87). The expression “my arms folded before him” indicates the curtsy of the Sailor before the Snake, apparently while still on his belly (line 82). Because the Sailor’s posture and his inability to speak could betray his fear, for balance the Sailor paraded the courage of the ship’s crew. The link is solidified by the words *whš (+ m)* “fool” and *hšm* “folded,” both of which appear only here in the entire narrative. This nexus, incidentally, works not only orally but also visually, since the same signs are used in both words.

To the Commanding Officer the Sailor had said, *sr-sn ḏc n iit nšny n hprt-f* “they could foretell a storm before (it) came, a gale before it happened” (lines 31–32). Note that in the first phrase the suffix pronoun *f* “it” is lacking after *iit*, and thus I have placed “(it)” in parentheses in the translation. But when he repeats this phrase to the Snake, the Sailor adds this morpheme: *sr-sn ḏc n iit-f nšny n hprt-f* “they could foretell a storm before it came, a gale before it happened” (lines 97–98). While it may be minor, with no apparent effect on the meaning, the change nevertheless has consequences. Robert Ratner has explained the

¹⁰ Alternatively, this word may mean “spread (in deference).”

very common morphological variation in both verb and noun forms in the Bible as a “rhetorical device by which ancient biblical authors could introduce variety in repetition.”¹¹ The example from the ShS narrative, with first *îit* (line 31) and then *îit:f* (line 98) would be an example of this technique in Egyptian literature.¹² Furthermore, such alterations most likely were intended to heighten the audience’s alertness to the literary style of repetition with variation, both in general and, in particular, in the ensuing additional lines 99–101 discussed above.¹³

In the two accounts of the storm and the shipwreck, the Sailor stays with the same vocabulary, word-for-word. However, to the Commanding Officer, he ends with *ntyw îm-s n spî w^c îm* “those that were in it [i.e., the boat], not one remained there” (line 39). When speaking to the Snake, however, he expands with *ntyw îm-s n spî w^c îm hr h^w-î* “those that were in it [i.e., the boat], not one remained there except me” (lines 107–8). Note how the addition of *hr h^w-î* “except me” serves to convey his singular fortune to the Snake. To the Snake the Sailor continues with *mk wî r gs-k* “behold me at your side” (line 108), an expression meant to confirm the veracity of his tale, as if to say: “You see that I am here beside you, how else could I have arrived here, my story must be true!” Moreover, by using *gs* “side,” the Sailor echoes a word that the Snake had spoken to him slightly earlier. When the Snake had asked the Sailor how he arrived on the island, he ended with *îw pn n w³d⁴ wr nty gswy-fy m nwy* “this island of the Great Green (Sea) whose two sides are in water” (lines 84–85).¹⁴ Now the Sailor ends his answer to the Snake’s question by utilizing the same word.

The Sailor continues with one more sentence: *h^c-n îni-kwi r îw pn in w³w n w³d⁴ wr* “then I was brought to this island by a wave of the Great Green (Sea)” (lines 109–10). Previously the Sailor had jumped ahead, from “those that were in it, no one remained there” to “behold me at your side.” In so doing, he had sidestepped the Snake’s

specific question: “Who brought you, who brought you, commoner, who brought you?” (lines 69–70) and, again, “Who brought you, who brought you, commoner, who brought you to this island of the Great Green (Sea) whose two sides are in water?” (lines 83–85). Accordingly, we are to imagine that the Sailor preferred to end his story with “behold me at your side,” but that the Snake was not impressed with this ending, and/or the Sailor realized that indeed he had not answered the question, and thus he added the sentence “then I was brought to this island by a wave of the Great Green (Sea)” to comply with the Snake’s persistent question (note the sixfold use of “who brought you?”).

Of special interest is the fact that this sentence is introduced by a rubric in red ink. Rather than indicating a major new section in the narrative, in this case the red ink occurs within the Sailor’s speech to the Snake, indeed, with just one sentence remaining; and I conclude that it was meant to indicate a pregnant pause.¹⁵ The Sailor had concluded with “behold me at your side,” but the Snake did not respond or simply was not impressed, thus the Sailor felt the need for an additional sentence. As such, the use of red ink should be considered a scribal technique on a par with the system of *setuma* and *petuha* paragraphing in biblical manuscripts; a parallel can be found in 1 Sam 15:28, where according to the Aleppo Codex there is a *setuma* in the middle of Samuel’s words to Saul.¹⁶

It is also interesting to note the wording of this additional sentence: *h^c-n îni-kwi r îw pn in w³w n w³d⁴ wr* “then I was brought to this island by a wave of the Great Green (Sea)” (lines 109–10). In speaking to the Officer earlier, the Sailor had used an almost identical sentence: *h^c-n-i rdi-kwi r îw in w³w n w³d⁴ wr* “then I was placed on an island by a wave of the Great Green (Sea)” (lines

¹¹ R. J. Ratner, “Morphological Variation in Biblical Hebrew Rhetoric,” *Maarav* 8 (1992): 143.

¹² I have not attempted to dovetail this finding, which operates on a literary level, with the work of Mark Collier, who has paid attention to pronoun omission on a linguistic level. See M. Collier, “The Relative Clause and the Verb in Middle Egyptian,” *JEA* 77 (1991): 35–42.

¹³ On the crucial difference that a single -î can make in Hebrew narrative, see my article “The Guilty Party in 1 Kings iii 16–28,” *VT* 48 (1998): 534–41.

¹⁴ For discussion of this phrase, see W. Westendorf, “Die Insel des Schiffbrüchigen: Keine Halbinsel!” in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, vol. 2, ed. S. Israelit-Groll (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 1056–64.

¹⁵ On red ink in Egyptian manuscripts, see G. Posener, “Sur l’emploi de l’encre rouge dans les manuscrits égyptiens,” *JEA* 37 (1951): 75–80, and his earlier “Les signes noirs dans les rubriques,” *JEA* 35 (1949): 77–81. For a more recent, very brief survey, see M. Weber, “Rubrum,” in *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 5 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), 313–14; and see also R. Parkinson and S. Quirke, *Papyrus* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1995), 45.

¹⁶ For details on this system, see J. M. Oesch, *Petucha und Setuma* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979); and C. Perrot, “Petuhot et setumot: Étude sur les alinéas du Pentateuque,” *RB* 76 (1969): 50–91. Red ink may indicate paragraphing in several Qumran manuscripts, most importantly 4QNum^b; see N. Jastram, “4QNum^b,” in *Qumran Cave 4, VII: Genesis to Numbers*, ed. E. Ulrich and F. M. Cross, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert, vol. 12 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 209–10. I am indebted to Andrea Weiss for these references.

39–41). The difference between these two wordings is slight but informative. The wording he used to his Commanding Officer is probably a bit more accurate: “I was placed on this island.” But the Snake had asked his sixfold question, “who brought you?” using the verb *ini* “bring”; thus when the Sailor enlarges on his previous response in answering the Snake’s question, he consciously switches verbs and utilizes the word *ini* “bring.” In this way, the Sailor demonstrates his readiness to answer the Snake by using *ini-kwi* “I was brought” rather than *rdi-kwi* “I was placed.”¹⁷

There is a second difference in the wording of these two parallel phrases. To the Officer the Sailor had said ^h*h^c-n-i rdi-kwi*, literally “then I, I was placed,” using the ^h*h^c-n-f* + stative (old perfective) construction; but to the Snake he says, ^h*h^c-n ini-kwi*, simply “then I was brought,” using the ^h*h^c-n* + stative (old perfective) construction. The difference is the use of the “I” suffix pronoun in the former versus its absence in the latter. Above we saw instances where the Sailor wished to bolster himself in the eyes of the Snake. In this case, however, as he adds this final sentence to answer the Snake’s question directly, he omits this “I” to deflect attention from himself; presumably, he wished then to indicate his passive role in the act that brought him to the island.¹⁸

The Sailor’s speech to the Snake ends with the above sentence, at which point the Snake begins to speak. But earlier, when the Sailor told the story to the Officer, he supplied much more information. The Sailor had described for his Commanding Officer his first days on the island, emphasizing the variety, quantity, and quality of food that he had found there (lines 41–56). Speaking to the Snake, he omits all these details. How could he tell the Snake that he had made fair use of the island’s great bounty?

¹⁷ This lexical substitution was noted by H. Goedicke, *Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 41, but without noticing the literary technique utilized by the author of the story. In other instances as well Goedicke anticipates my points; but in general he does not enter into the type of discussion attempted in the present essay. He did recognize (p. 43) a type of wordplay with the focus on the number 120 (the ship was 120 cubits long, there were 120 sailors on board, and the Sailor was to return home after a stay on the island of four months = 120 days).

¹⁸ Hoch, *Middle Egyptian Grammar*, 109, considered the deletion of the pronoun to be “probably an abbreviated writing . . . rather than being a distinct construction.” It nevertheless remains striking that the pronoun “I” is deleted specifically at this point in the Sailor’s narration to the Snake, in contrast to its inclusion earlier when the Sailor described the event to the Officer.

Having heard the Sailor’s answer to his sixfold question “who brought you?” the Snake speaks once more: *m snd m snd nds* “do not fear, do not fear, commoner” (lines 111–12). Above, when asking the question, the Snake had called the Sailor *nds* “commoner” (lines 69 and 84). This time, a delightful sound play is effected between *m snd* “do not fear” and *nds* “commoner.” Moreover, between the two earlier uses of *nds* “commoner” at lines 69 and 84, the author has produced still another alliteration with the use of the word *sndm* “dwelling” in line 78.

We may note another example of alliteration within the same set of lines. Upon finding the Sailor, the Snake had said: “who brought you, who brought you, commoner, who brought you; if you delay in telling me who brought you to this island . . .” (lines 69–71), and the stunned Sailor was speechless. The Snake scooped him up in his mouth and set him down in his abode. The Sailor then informs us *wḏḥ-kwi* “I was okay” (lines 79–80). The Snake again asked: “who brought you, who brought you, commoner, who brought you to this island of the Great Green (Sea)?” (lines 83–85). Note how the same phrase is expanded from simply “this island” to “this island of the Great Green (Sea).” The word for “green” is *wḥd*, which alliterates beautifully with *wḏḥ* “sound, okay” several lines earlier.

On praising the island’s rich harvest of fruits and vegetables, the Sailor had told the Commanding Officer, *nn ntt nn st m hnw:f* “there was nothing that was not in its interior” (lines 51–52). Later, reassuring the Sailor that all will be well with him on the island, the Snake uses the same phrase, word-for-word, sign-for-sign (line 115). Ironically enough, the Sailor already knows this truth, because he already sampled the island’s bounty, an act, as noted above, that was not mentioned to the Snake! The audience must have been pleased to hear the two usages in reverse sequence, first from the mouth of the Sailor and then from the mouth of the Snake, when in fact it was the Snake who had used these words first and the Sailor who had only repeated them, perhaps years later.

Even within the same retelling of a story it is sometimes desirable, indeed enriching, to repeat phrases.¹⁹ Such is the case in lines 67–69 and lines 81–83, the two passages where the Snake begins to speak to the Sailor. The first reads as follows: *iw wpi-n-f r-f r-i iw-i hr ht-i m-bḥ-f ḏd-f n-i* “he opened his mouth to me, while I was on my belly in front of him, he speaks to me” (lines 67–69), after which follow the Snake’s questions “who brought you?” etc. With the Sailor too stunned to reply, the Snake transports him to his lair. The Sailor describes the action

¹⁹ See, for example, R. B. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” *JEA* 78 (1992): 170–72.

by repeating the above lines, but with a slight change: *iw wpi-n-fr-r-i iw-i hr ht-i m-b3hf-c h-c-n dd-n-f-n-i* “he opened his mouth to me, while I was on my belly in front of him, then he spoke to me” (lines 81–83). The final phrase *dd-f n-i* “he speaks to me” (line 69), using a simple *sdm-f* verbal form, has been altered to *h-c-n dd-n-f-n-i* “then he spoke to me” (line 83), using the more complex verbal form *h-c-n sdm-n-f*. This episode is an example of “build-up and climax”:²⁰ the first interrogation goes unanswered and thus the entire scene must be repeated; the second version is marked by a change in verbal form, with the intensification sharpened by a shift from *sdm-f* to *h-c-n sdm-n-f*.

These examples demonstrate clearly how repetition operates in the story. A different kind of repetition is forthcoming from the Promise and Fulfillment portions of the Sailor’s words to the Snake. After the Snake informs the Sailor that a ship will come for him and that he will return to Egypt, the Sailor promises to honor the Snake upon his return home. He plans to send all sorts of spices, and, presumably as a consequence of the Sailor’s efforts, “You will be praised in the city before the magistrates of the entire land, I will slaughter for you bulls as a burnt-offering, I will kill for you birds, I will have brought to you ships laden with all treasures of Egypt” (lines 143–47). In the last phrase, we encounter another excellent use of alliteration, with *3pdw* “birds” and *3tpw* “laden.” Both are common lexemes, but their juxtaposition here is no doubt intentional, especially within the Sailor’s relatively long speech detailing all the things that he will do for the Snake upon his return to Egypt.

The Snake laughingly comments that gifts were not necessary since, as “the lord of Punt” (line 151), he was the possessor of all the promised items. But what of the rest of the Sailor’s promises? Were they also null and void? We read that a ship did take the Sailor back home, but we are told nothing of his fulfilling the rest of his promises. Rather, the story meets us with a wonderful twist, for the Sailor tells us, “then he [the Sovereign] praised me before the magistrates of the entire land” (lines 176–77). Rather than praising the Snake before the magistrates, the Sailor instead was himself praised before them. This is our first clue to the failings of the Sailor, but there are others to follow.

Betsy Bryan has gone so far as to label the Sailor an anti-hero, with behavior contradicting the traditional Egypt-

tian teachings.²¹ He speaks too much—contra the wisdom teaching which calls for precise speech—indeed virtually the entire text is his long-winded account. He also is self-absorbed, a point which we begin to realize when he speaks to the Snake on the island, and which we grasp more fully when we learn that the Sailor’s promises to the Snake were empty.²²

As the Sailor boarded a ship to return home, the Snake had said, *imi rn-i nfr m niwt-k mk hrt-i pw im-k* “give my good name in your city, behold, it is what is due me from you” (lines 159–60). Naturally, the Sailor neglects to fulfill this request when he arrives in Egypt.²³ The reader is reminded of the Snake’s words when the Sailor ends his entire story, telling his Commanding Officer: *sdm rk [. . .] i mk nfr sdm n rmt* “listen now [. . .] behold, it is good for people to listen” (lines 181–82).²⁴ The Snake had used the words *mk* “behold” and *nfr* “good” in his request, the Sailor uses them here in his summary statement to the Officer, and the reader recognizes the connection.²⁵

We are reminded of more of the Sailor’s promises to the Snake by the one sentence in the entire narrative spoken by the Commanding Officer. Having patiently listened to the Sailor’s tale, the Officer responds in lines 183–86, *m ir ikr hnms-i in m rdit mw n 3pd hq t3 n sft-f dw3* “do not make the excellent [= do not act like a big shot], my friend, why give water to a goose [lit., bird] at dawn before its slaughtering in the morning.”²⁶ The use of

²¹ B. Bryan, “The Hero of the ‘Shipwrecked Sailor,’” *Serapis* 5 (1979): 3–13.

²² Although I see a lesson to be drawn from the story in this regard, I do not agree with E. Otto, “Die Geschichten des Sinuhe und des Schiffbrüchigen als ‘lehrhafte Stücke,’” *ZAS* 93 (1966): 100–111, that Shipwrecked Sailor and Sinuhe are in essence didactic pieces. Baines, “Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” p. 55, n. 1, has the same view vis-à-vis Otto: “I see the text as less didactic than he did.” For a different take on the silence regarding the Sailor’s fulfillment of his promises, or lack thereof, see Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 100, n. 28.

²³ On this point, see Baines, “Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 68.

²⁴ This is one of two places in the entire manuscript where a sign or two cannot be read due to lacunae; see Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories*, 47a, n. 16a, for suggested restorations. For the second instance, see below, n. 32.

²⁵ Obviously, both *mk* “behold” and *nfr* “good” are common words, but this does not obviate the point. As a parallel, note Parkinson, “Literary Form and the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*,” 170: “In the petitions the repetition of individual words, including such key terms as *nfr*, is extensive and significant.”

²⁶ This statement by the Officer implies that he has been an attentive listener to the Sailor’s tale. As noted above, the Sailor

²⁰ For this phrase and numerous examples in the Bible, see C. H. Gordon, “Build-up and Climax,” in *Studies in Bible and the Ancient Near East Presented to Samuel E. Loewenstamm on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Y. Avishur and J. Blau (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein, 1978), 29–34.

the word *špd* “bird,” echoes the Sailor’s long-forgotten promise to kill birds for the Snake.²⁷ The earlier mention of birds was highlighted for the reader by the alliterative *štpw* “laden,” and we now recognize the importance of that attention-grabber when we reach the story’s end. Similarly, the Officer uses the word *sft* “slaughter,” thus recalling the Sailor’s promise: “I will slaughter for you oxen as a burnt-offering” (lines 144–45); the reader realizes that this too was not performed.²⁸

In addition, the first words spoken by the Officer, *m ḫr ḫkr* “do not make the excellent [= do not act like a big shot]” remind the reader of the opening words of the entire narrative, namely, *ḏd in šmsw ḫkr* “said by an ex-

made himself look more important than he actually was in his telling his tale to the Snake. The Officer’s sole sentence implies that he realized this, just as the attentive reader is to realize the same. Ziony Zevit (oral communication) suggested that another reading is possible, that the Officer would have been proud of the way that the Sailor bolstered himself in the presence of the Snake, that he had acted very pragmatically given the situation, even if it meant stretching the truth and changing his story. This is an attractive proposal, though the one sentence uttered by the Officer suggests the opposite. Of course, much depends on how one understands *ḫkr* “excellent”; on this issue, see Goedicke, *Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen*, 71. See further the next note.

²⁷ In light of this observation, I would read the proverb in a negative manner, along with most scholars, and contra those who interpret the proverb in a favorable light—thus, e.g., Otto, “Die Geschichten des Sinuhe und des Schiffbrüchigen als ‘lehrhafte Stücke,’” 110. See also D. Devauchelle, “Naufragé 184–186,” *GM* 101 (1998): 21–25, who raises the possibility that one does water a fowl before slaughter. For general discussion, see A. Loprieno, “The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor,” in *Religion und Philosophie im alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, ed. U. Verhoeven and E. Graefe, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta*, vol. 39 (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 216.

²⁸ If A. Spalinger, “An Alarming Parallel to the End of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” *GM* 73 (1984): 91–95, is correct that the words “why give water to a goose [lit., bird] at dawn before its slaughtering in the morning” represent a proverbial saying, then the use of *špd* “bird” and *sft* “slaughter” earlier in the narrative is especially deliberate in anticipation of the quoted aphorism. On the technique in general, see W. W. Hallo, “Proverbs Quoted in Epic,” in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. T. Abusch, J. Huehnergard, and P. Steinkeller (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 203–17. My thanks to William Hallo for bringing these articles to my attention.

cellent attendant” (line 1).²⁹ Who spoke these opening words? The narrator, no doubt. Or was it the Sailor himself perhaps? Note that there is no independent narration anywhere else in the entire text (except for the colophon at the end); everything in the story is the Sailor’s first-person narration. When reading the opening words of the manuscript, we were led to believe that a narrator “spoke” these first four words. Now, as we reach the end of the manuscript, we are forced to rethink the matter, especially in light of the Commanding Officer’s well-chosen words. Both through the Sailor’s description of what occurred when he reached the palace and through the Officer’s single sentence, the reader is reminded of what the Sailor had promised and then failed to fulfill.³⁰

Other narrative devices are exploited in the tale. The word *ḫkr* “excellent” is not the only example of a link between the tale’s opening and closing lines. Another word spoken by the Commanding Officer echoes the opening portion of the tale, namely, *dwš* “morning,” heard at the outset in the expression *dwš ntr* “god is adored” (line 5). Together these repeated words create an inclusio, another device well-known from the study of biblical literature.³¹

²⁹ Some scholars have suggested that a line or two, or even more, may be missing from the beginning of the preserved text; see, e.g., Simpson, “Schiffbrüchiger,” 619; and A. O. Bolshakov, “Some *De Visu* Observations on P. Hermitage 1115,” *JEA* 79 (1993): 254–59. It is not clear whether or not Parkinson has inspected the manuscript, but he writes: “Although the start of the manuscript has been tampered with to add a strengthening strap (now lost), there is little doubt that the text is complete” (*The Tale of Sinuhe*, 91). Until absolute evidence to the contrary is found, it is better to assume that the text is whole, a view which also can be defended from a literary perspective. That is to say, the opening words *ḏd in šmsw ḫkr* “said by an excellent attendant” (line 1) are so intentionally, inviting the reader into the reading process in a most effective manner. In Loprieno’s words, “The contingent tense *ḏd.jn šmsw jqr*, in the absence of any introduction of the *dramatis personae* and of any anaphorically evocable pretext, reminds the reader of his role, of his partnership in the literary game” (“The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 215). See similarly Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 89: “The Tale begins in dramatic fashion, *in medias res*.”

³⁰ One might object that no such point was intended by the author and that the narrative simply moves on to other concerns. But I believe that the lexical clues imbedded into the story militate against such an interpretation; these lexical items clearly are intended to guide the reader to the proper conclusion.

³¹ Inclusio is usually associated with poetry, but it occurs in prose texts as well, even in unexpected places; see G. A. Rendsburg, “The Inclusio in Leviticus xi,” *VT* 43 (1993): 418–21.

But there is more. There are numerous lexical items in the colophon of the manuscript that echo corresponding terms (or sounds) in the opening lines of the text. The colophon reads, *iw:f pw h3t:f r ph:fy mī gmit m sš [m] sš sš ikr n qb^cw:f imny s3 imn.^{c3}nh wq3 snb* “it is come, (from) its beginning to its end, as found in the writing, [as] a writing of the scribe excellent of fingers, Imen-Aa son of Imeny, life, prosperity, health” (lines 186–89);³² while the opening of the text reads thus: *qd in šmsw ikr wq3 ib-k h3ty.^c mk ph-n-n hnw* “Said by an excellent attendant: Be sound of heart, captain; behold, we have reached home” (lines 1–3). Note the following correspondences between these opening and closing lines: *h3t:f* “its beginning” and *h3ty.^c* “captain” (that is, the Commanding Officer); *phwy:fy* “its end” and *ph-n-n* “we have reached”; *m sš* “in the writing” and *šmsw* “attendant”; *ikr* “excellent” (in both places); and *wq3* “prosperity” and “be sound.”³³ Finally, the name of the scribe and his patronym both include the element *imn* “Amun,” a word that echoes the sounds of the vocable *mnit* “mooring-post” in line 4. The colophon is rather standard,³⁴ but as this accumulation of correspondences demonstrates, the author of ShS has worked its contents into the narrative in a most thoughtful manner.³⁵ The only

non-standard element in the colophon is the name of the scribe, Imen-Aa son of Imeny. While the mention of the scribe’s name would become standard practice in New Kingdom manuscripts, its inclusion in ShS, or at least in our sole exemplar, P. St. Petersburg 1115, is unique among Middle Kingdom literary texts. We may conjecture that the scribe decided to include his name in the colophon to echo the opening lines of the narrative. Therefore, much in the last few lines of the manuscript—both from the narrative and from the colophon—creates the inclusio.

Furthermore, while it is true that ancient compositions used the inclusio simply for literary enhancement, in the present instance I suspect that the author has relied on this device to heighten the sense of cyclic completion: The Sailor has returned home; the text has done likewise.³⁶ On another level, ShS follows “the circular pattern A-B-A’,” with B representing the Sailor’s journey and A and A’ representing the narrative framework. The author of ShS “wraps the cycle with a happy ending (the experience of the sailor) within a less optimistic narrative cycle (the experience of the captain listening to the sailor, returning apparently after a failed expedition).”³⁷ In light of this structure, the form of the inclusio follows the content of the story.

There are many more examples of alliterations and wordplays in ShS. Early in the narrative the Sailor states: *ph-n-n phwy w3w3t* “we reached the end of Wawat,” and then continues, *snī-n-n snmwī* “we passed Senmut” (lines 8–10). Both phrases are worded to maximize the alliteration.

In my study of *hapax legomena* and other rare forms in the Bible, I have noticed that very often such words are utilized to elicit an alliteration.³⁸ The same phenomenon obtains in ShS. Lines 54–56 read as follows: *šdt-i d3*

³² The second *m* needs to be restored. See the note at the bottom of page 16 on S. Fryer’s Internet site (see above, n. 2, for address): “Although the other pages of this papyrus scroll were remarkably well preserved, this page has suffered a certain amount of damage, especially along its top edge. This makes some of the signs rather difficult to read, and at the top of the second-to-last column an unknown number of signs are lost entirely. One suggestion is that this was an ‘m’ sign.” See also Blackman, *Middle-Egyptian Stories*, 48a, n. 3a.

³³ Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 101, n. 31, notes the nexus between *ikr* in the colophon and *ikr* in line 183 discussed above. Parkinson further notes that the use of “life, prosperity, health” “after the copyist’s name is a little grandiloquent (an occasional tendency in colophons),” a point which we now can explain in light of the concord between *wq3* “prosperity” in line 189 and *wq3* “be sound” in line 1.

³⁴ See R. B. Parkinson, “Teachings, Discourses and Tales from the Middle Kingdom,” in *Middle Kingdom Studies*, ed. S. G. Quirke (New Malden, Surrey: SIA, 1991), 95; and S. G. Quirke, “Archive,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 380.

³⁵ On the literary integration of colophons in other ancient Near Eastern texts, see M. Garsiel, “Implicit Puns upon Names as Subtle Colophons in the Bible,” in *Haim M. I. Gevanyahu Memorial Volume*, vol. 2, ed. B.-Z. Luria (Jerusalem: World Jewish Bible Center, 1991), 15–22; and H. Hunger, “Playful Writings in Cuneiform Colophons,” in the same volume, pp. 32–36. In addition, see the brief remarks in S. B. Noegel, “Wordplay in the

Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur,” *Acta Sumerologica* 18 (1996): 177–78. Scott Noegel informs me that he currently is preparing a longer treatment of the subject.

³⁶ On *nostos* as a feature of ancient literature, especially ancient Egyptian narratives, see C. H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1965), 102, 111, 125, 223; and C. H. Gordon, *Homer and Bible* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor Publishers, 1967), 22–23, 36–37. In addition, see G. A. Rendsburg, “Notes on Genesis xxxv,” *VT* 34 (1984): 361–64.

³⁷ S. G. Quirke, “Narrative Literature,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 270.

³⁸ I plan to write a monograph on the subject. Individual examples are discussed in the following articles: G. A. Rendsburg and S. L. Rendsburg, “Physiological and Philological Notes to Psalm 137,” *JQR* 83 (1993): 385–99; and G. A. Rendsburg, “תלפיות” (Song 4:4), *JNSL* 20 (1994): 13–19.

šḫpr-n-ī ḥt ḥr-n-ī sb n sḏt n ntrw, literally, “my cutting out a fire-drill, I created a fire, I made a burnt offering to the gods.” The verb *šḏi* normally means “remove,” but obviously the Sailor could not have removed a fire-drill at this point (he had just survived a shipwreck!).³⁹ Accordingly, we must understand the word here as “cut out,” a meaning attested elsewhere for *šḏi*.⁴⁰ Why would the author utilize this verb—a common verb when it means “remove,” but an uncommon one when it means “cut out”—in this phrase? The answer lies in the alliteration that is produced with the word *sḏt* “burnt offering” later in the sentence. Like most languages, Egyptian has a plethora of words for “cut, cut out, cut off, etc.,” for example, *šc*, *swš*, *ḥsk*, *wḏc* (most of which can mean “remove” as well), but none of these words produces the alliteration with *sḏt*, and thus the author opted for *šḏt* (from the root *šḏi*).

In lines 59–61 we are treated to another example of wordplay. Here the author for the first time in over fifty lines, and for only the second time in the entire narrative, uses, in the expression *ḥtw ḥr gmgm* “trees breaking,” the Egyptian pseudo-verbal construction of *ḥr* + infinitive.⁴¹ The presence of this construction with the verb *gmgm* “break” gains special significance when in the next sentence we read, *kfi-n-ī ḥr-ī gm-n-ī ḥfšw* “I uncovered my face, I found a snake,” in which occur both *ḥr*, though in this case with the meaning “face,” and the verb *gm* “find” alliterating with *gmgm* “break.”

In lines 124 and 181 the author uses the ordinary verb *dp* “taste” in its infinitive form *dpt* in the metaphorical sense of “experience”⁴² to create an alliteration with the word *dpt* “ship” central to the whole story (lines 25, 37, etc.).

Within the narrative of the ShS appears the Snake’s account of how his family was destroyed by a meteorite and how he alone survived—a story within a story within a story. He refers to his seventy-five family members, not including “a small daughter brought to me in prayer” (line

129). This is a touching statement, though its exact import is not readily apparent.⁴³ A bit further on, however, the reader hears the Sailor say in reply: “I will tell of your might to the sovereign, I will cause that he become acquainted with your greatness” (lines 139–40). Two key words in these statements alliterate with each other: the word for “prayer,” *sšš*, itself not all that common, and the word for “become acquainted,” also *sšš*. About the latter word two points are worth making: first, *sšš* is not the normal word for “become acquainted” (the usual word is *rḥ*); and second, the usual form is *ššš*, though here the scribe used the form *sšš* (attested elsewhere occasionally) to assimilate as closely as possible to the first *sšš*, “prayer.”⁴⁴ I am not sure that we are closer to answering our question as to why the Snake highlights the daughter brought in prayer, except that it gives humanity to the Snake, but clearly the alliteration with a later statement attracts our attention to it. Furthermore, these words from lines 139–40 play an important role in the story as a whole. As noted above, the Sailor promises to honor the Snake upon his return to Egypt, and this is another example where he fails to do so.

Another set of two like-sounding words in close proximity occurs in the Snake’s advice to the Sailor: “if you are brave (and) master your heart, you will fill your embrace with your children, you will kiss your wife, you will see your house” (lines 132–34). Here the words *ḥn* “brave” and *ḥni* “embrace” alliterate, solidifying the link between the conditional “if” clause and the result clause.⁴⁵

The author of the ShS demonstrates his literary flair again in the two statements in lines 156 and 161. In the former the Sailor states, *rdi-n wi ḥr ḥt kš* “I placed myself on a tall tree,” and in the latter he states, *rdi-n wi ḥr ḥt-ī* “I placed myself on my belly.” Once more there is nothing atypical in these phrases. The language is standard, but in close proximity the audience appreciates the similarity of sounds used to express contrasting actions, one an upward motion of climbing a tree for a better view of a ship at sea, the other a downward motion to show obeisance to the Snake. While we cannot be absolutely certain about the exact articulation of the different phonemes involved, *ḥ* and *ḥ*, it is clear that both are voiceless guttural fricatives (the former almost certainly uvular, the

³⁹ The rendering “remove” for *šḏt* goes back to the very beginning of ShS scholarship; see V. Golénischeff, *Le conte du naufragé* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1912), 202; I cite this work from D. Berg, “Syntax, Semantics, and Physics: The Shipwrecked Sailor’s Fire,” *JEA* 76 (1990): 168–70. Berg retained “remove,” but attempted another solution to the problem with the translation: “Removing the fire drill when I had ignited the fire, I made a holocaust to the gods” (p. 169).

⁴⁰ See R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962), 273.

⁴¹ Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 243; and Hoch, *Middle Egyptian Grammar*, 73.

⁴² A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1926–63), 5: 443–44.

⁴³ The best treatment of this section of the story is M. T. Derchain-Urtel, “Die Schlange des ‘Schiffbrüchigen,’” *SAK* 1 (1974): 83–104.

⁴⁴ See Derchain-Urtel, “Die Schlange des ‘Schiffbrüchigen,’” 97–98.

⁴⁵ I owe this example to Scott Noegel. See now Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 100, n. 20.

latter most likely palatal⁴⁶) and no doubt pronounced similarly enough for the alliteration to work. Also, it is worth noting that, given the great flexibility available to the scribe in the writing of individual Egyptian words, in these two passages he elected to compose the sentences in exactly the same manner, with only the necessary difference of *ht* “tree” and *ht* “belly.”

Another example of a rare word utilized for purposes of alliteration is *s3h* “endow” in line 178. This relatively uncommon verb is used here because two lines later appears the same trilateral root *s3h* in its common meaning of “touch, reach” (line 180).⁴⁷ Furthermore, notwithstanding the fact that *r s3* is the commonest preposition expressing “after” in a temporal sense, it is noteworthy that the same lines employ this form twice (once overlapping lines 179–80 and a second occurrence later in line 180), again with the same alliterative effect.⁴⁸ The result is a string of four *s3* signs (Gardiner Aa17) in extremely close proximity.

Aharon Mirsky has noted a particular technique of Hebrew style that is little recognized even among scholars of the Bible. When a list of parallel phrases is presented, the syntactic order of the elements is the same in each of the phrases, except in the last instance where a change in word order is produced.⁴⁹ We find two examples of this device at the beginning of ShS. In lines 3–5 we read, “the mallet is taken, the mooring-post is struck, the prow-rope is placed on the land.” In the first two phrases the order is the typical Egyptian syntax of verb followed by subject: *šsp hrpw hwi mmit*. But in the third instance the sub-

ject is fronted and the verb follows in atypical fashion: *h3tt rd:t(w) hr t3*.⁵⁰ Similarly, the next set of lines reads, “praise is given, god is adored, every man embraces his companion” (lines 5–6). In the first two phrases, the order is the typical syntax of verb followed by subject: *rdi hknw dw3 ntr*. In the third phrase, however, the subject appears first, and then the verb follows (with direct object in third position): *s nb hr hpt snwyf*.

The most difficult sentence in the entire story occurs at lines 36–37 (repeated in lines 105–6 of the Sailor’s second telling), where we read: *in ht hwi n-i s(y)*, literally, “by wood, struck, to me, it.” The syntax is so confusing that scholar after scholar has deemed the phrase too difficult to render with any certainty.⁵¹ Here is a sampling: Adolf Erman (via A. M. Blackman’s English translation): “It was a piece of wood that . . . it to me,” with a footnote: “The whole account of the storm is unintelligible to us.” W. K. Simpson: “There was a plank which struck it (the wave) for me,” with a footnote: “This passage difficult in the original.” Miriam Lichtheim: “The mast—it (the wave) struck (it),” with a long footnote justifying her rendering and an honest statement that “this admittedly imperfect solution is presented largely in order to emphasize that the passage remains problematic.” R. B. Parkinson: “Only the mast broke it for me,” with a footnote: “An obscure phrase: *it* is probably the wave, so that the sense is that the mast sheltered the sailor from the storm.”⁵²

The difficulty and unintelligibility of this passage are exactly the point and represent the stylistic device employed here. In biblical literature, confusion and excitement are indicated at times by unusual syntax,⁵³ and I propose that something similar obtains here. A ship is in danger at sea, the wind is howling, and an eight-foot wave

⁴⁶ A. Loprieno, “Egyptian and Coptic Phonology,” in *Phonologies of Asia and Africa*, ed. A. S. Kaye (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 1: 437, 440.

⁴⁷ See already Goedicke, *Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen*, 69–70, who also relates these two different usages of *s3h* to the presence of the same word, with its meaning “touch, reach,” in lines 34 and 103.

⁴⁸ For another instance of wordplay involving a preposition, see Loprieno, “The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 215: “The text continuously plays with the word *hnw*, both in its substantial meanings of ‘home’ and ‘royal residence’ and in its prepositional usage.” See his “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Literary Theory,” 215, n. 55; and “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theories,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 44; see also M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1973), 215, n. 5; and Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 99, n. 15.

⁴⁹ A. Mirsky, “Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew,” *Semiotics* 5 (1977): 9–23.

⁵⁰ Goedicke, *Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen*, 4, recognized the grammatical issue in these passages, but did not relate this information to the literary device under discussion.

⁵¹ For detailed discussion see Goedicke, *Die Geschichte des Schiffbrüchigen*, 21–22.

⁵² A. Erman, *The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of their Writings*, trans. A. M. Blackman, ed. W. K. Simpson (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 30, and n. 5 (first English edition 1927); W. K. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), 52, and n. 6; Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1: 212 (translation) and 215, n. 1 (comment); and Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 93, 98, n. 6.

⁵³ A. Hurvitz, “Ruth 2:7—‘A Midrashic Gloss?’” *VT* 43 (1993): 121–23; and G. A. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (electronic journal at <http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/>), in which I treat Gen 37:28, Gen 37:30, Judg 18:14–20, 1 Sam 9:12–13, 1 Sam 14:21, 1 Sam 17:38, and Ruth 2:7.

(see line 36 [=105]) strikes the ship (by this statement I do not mean to imply that I accept Lichtheim's rendering; others are equally possible). In the very next sentence we read that "the ship stood a death" (lines 37–38 [=106]). Between the great wave and the ship sinking there was one minute of complete confusion for the Sailor, and the language mirrors his confusion with its confused and irregular syntax.⁵⁴

Scholars long have recognized that the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor is an entertaining tale, especially with its mix of "humor and serious intent."⁵⁵ The "Robinson Crusoe" motif is one that naturally attracts listeners and readers. The story within a story, or in this case the story within a story within a story, is always entertaining. And the general style of the narrative—"the simple, unadorned

⁵⁴ For similar examples in the Tale of Sinuhe, see Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe*, 47, nn. 36 and 40.

⁵⁵ J. Baines, "Myth and Literature," in ed. Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 373.

language of this tale," to use Peter Der Manuelian's words⁵⁶—makes for easy and lovely reading. Recognition of the literary devices discussed above, and of the stylistic and narrative roles which they play, not only enhances our appreciation of the story, but also encourages us to focus on one of the tale's many teachings, namely, *r n s nḥm:fsw* "the mouth of a man, it rescues him" (lines 17–18).⁵⁷

⁵⁶ P. Der Manuelian, "Interpreting 'The Shipwrecked Sailor,'" in *Gegengabe: Festschrift für Emma Brunner-Traut*, ed. I. Gamer-Wallert and W. Helck (Tübingen: Attempto, 1991), 232. See, earlier, Otto, "Die Geschichten des Sinuhe und des Schiffbrüchigen als 'lehrhafte Stücke,'" 110–11, who contrasted the simplicity of language in Shipwrecked Sailor with the more elevated language of Sinuhe.

⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the view of Bryan presented above that the Sailor speaks too much. On this passage, see the perceptive comments by Loprieno, "The Sign of Literature in the Shipwrecked Sailor," 217. Baines, "Interpreting the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," 60, considers these words in lines 17–18 to be a proverb.