Robert Detweiler has contributed to the lives of many people in abundantly different ways. He has contributed to my life in a special way by initiating a graduate seminar which we have taught together three times under the title "Biblical and Secular Modes of Interpretation." In the context of this cooperative venture, he initiated a co-authored essay entitled "From New Criticism and the New Hermeneutic to Poststructuralism: Twentieth Century Hermeneutics" (Detweiler and Robbins 1991). It is a special pleasure to offer this essay in his honor as a small way of showing my appreciation for these and other activities that are so characteristic of his commitment to an intellectual environment of collegiality, nurture, and interchange.

The seminars with Robert Detweiler have created an environment in which it has been natural to entwine the excitement of unrestricted exploration with the satisfaction of detailed, precise analysis. In them, my own practice of "socio-rhetorical criticism" (Robbins 1984) has developed into an interdisciplinary method informed by postmodern modes of interpretation (Robbins 1992a; 1992b). The terminology of "rhetoric revalued," borrowed from the work of Brian Vickers by Wilhelm Wueellner (Wueellner 1987: 453; Vickers 1982; Robbins 1993), describes well the practice of multiple readings of a text in which I engage, and this essay uses this approach as it returns to a chapter of Mieke Bal's work which Robert Detweiler and I discussed in the seminar during Fall 1992.

In Death & Dissymmetry, a chapter entitled "Virginity Scattered" presents one step in Mieke Bal's analysis and interpretation of the Book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible (Bal 1988b: 69-93). The present essay...
approaches this chapter from the perspective of a socio-rhetorical poetics that investigates four aspects of texture in a text: (a) inner texture; (b) intertexture; (c) social and cultural texture; and (d) ideological texture (Robbins 1992a: xxvii-xxviii; 1992c; 1992d).

There are three basic ways this poetics could be used in the context of Bal's analysis and interpretation. First, it could guide an independent analysis and interpretation of the passages in Judges which Bal analyses. This investigation would evaluate and reconfigure Bal's statements by putting biblical passages in the foreground and Bal's statements in the background. This is the favored approach in biblical interpretation. With this strategy, analysis of the biblical passages themselves would overspeak her speech, and the pretense would be that the new analysis presents a better interpretation than hers. Here the interpreter functions as judge, and judicial rhetoric pronounces a verdict of guilty where Bal went wrong and acquittal where she went right.

Second, it could guide a programmatic display of Bal's interpretation of the texture of the biblical passages she interprets. In this instance the parts of Bal's commentary that speak specifically about the biblical passages would be in the foreground. The biblical passages would hover near at hand, and statements in her book that do not refer directly to the passages would be in the background. This approach would emphasize exegetical method, and it would identify and display those parts of the biblical passages Bal's method did pursue and it would call attention to aspects of the text she did not investigate. This approach would produce something more like epideictic rhetoric, praising what Bal did well and censuring what she did not do well.

Third, a socio-rhetorical poetics could guide an analysis of Bal's book as a twentieth century text designed to make a cultural and ideological statement about biblical interpretation itself. In this instance the texture of Bal's entire book would be in the foreground, Bal herself would hover closely behind the text, and the biblical passages she interprets would be fully in the background. Biblical interpreters use this last approach only for the giants in the field. This approach implies a near canonical status for the interpretation alongside the biblical text itself. Only with great care, then, does one take fully seriously the text an interpreter has produced. The usual approach is to fragment another interpreter's text in one way or another while producing one's own text, just as one regularly fragments comparative ancient texts that stand alongside the ancient text one is interpreting. This last approach puts the interpreter in the most venturesome position. One functions alternately as philosopher, politician, and priest, engaging partly in philosophical inquiry that negotiates truth claims, partly in deliberative rhetoric that calls for action, and partly in radical rhetoric that calls for belief without argumentation (Kennedy: 6-8, 93, 96, 104-106, 113).

This essay emphasizes the last approach: Bal's text as a cultural and ideological statement about biblical interpretation. Only briefly at the beginning does the essay comment about the biblical text itself, the first approach, and never does it programmatically analyze her commentary on a particular biblical passage, the second approach. The reason is simple. Bal's book is a late twentieth century challenge to biblical interpreters about how they go about the business of reading a text. The degree to which she is judged to be right or wrong in her interpretation of particular passages, therefore, may be less important than the way she approaches the task of biblical interpretation itself. Rather than serve as judge and jury on this occasion, I will serve partly as public orator and partly as philosopher, politician, and priest who will don a robe and concelebrate the ritual of biblical interpretation.

**Inner Texture and Intertexture in “Virginity Scattered”**

Let us start with some praise. While there are many ways Mieke Bal's book *Death & Disymmetry* has been, can and will be criticized, it has achieved something that interpreters henceforth, in my opinion, should not attempt to reverse. Interpreters should admit that the story in Judges presents women getting caught, raped, murdered, and mangled in the context of men's games with one another. To approach the issue like this is to start with a mixture of public oratory and sacred pronouncement. But the evidence seems to me to be undeniable. In the path of men's (and God's) conquest of the land of Canaan in the Book of Judges lies the brutalized bodies of women. I do not see how we (meaning "we" traditional biblical interpreters) have any choice but to accept the indictment of the male interests that the text achieves at the expense of women's bodies and voices. And implicitly, at least, this is an indictment of the way we interpret the Bible. We find ways of siding with this and that victimized and marginalized group, but we achieve these interpretations by locating ourselves one way or another in the major plot of the biblical story. Bal's interpretation, therefore, raises serious questions about the manner in which we interpret biblical texts, as well as other texts. To align oneself with the story line and to celebrate God's victory and the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites is to take a political, ideological, and theological position that must be carefully, thoughtfully, and deeply examined.
Bal achieves this tour de force by analyzing the Book of Judges with a series of modern theories that help her win the interpretive results. In chapter one she introduces modern feminist theory of interpretation; in chapter two she exposes the male point of view that guides Freud’s definition of virginity; in chapter three she attacks the vulgus of philological definition; in chapter four she uses René Girard’s theory of sacrifice and the surrogate victim to explain how the women become female victims caught between men; in chapter five she applies speech-act theory to interpret speech that produces fragmented female flesh and turns it into word to the tribes of Israel; in chapter six she uses the politics of geography and the ideology of space to examine how the houses of husbands become houses of horror for women; and in chapter seven she uses the modern theory of displacement to describe the discrediting of the mothers in the Book of Judges. Near the end, the book calls for a poetics of displacement that re(dis)places the women in the Book of Judges “in order to retrieve sight of how the men and women lived in the era represented in Judges, how their space in the land was organized, and which subjects had power in which spaces” (Bal 1988b: 230). Whether right or wrong in small details or larger vision, the book is a modern assault on much holy ground in biblical interpretation. One would presume, would one not, that the major plot of the story is the one to which one’s faith must assent? This is a difficult issue, and it is difficult for men as well as for women, for authorized interpreters as well as marginalized interpreters. And I fear that I will not be able to bring any satisfying resolution to this issue in this essay. But perhaps the essay can at least suggest a way to take the issue seriously in biblical interpretation.

In order to pursue the issue somewhat programmatically, let us turn first to the inner texture of chapter 3 in Bal’s book entitled “Virginity: Scattered,” which is the special focus of this essay. The first sentence in chapter 3 asserts that the Book of Judges is “full of virgins,” and the second sentence refers to “collective virginity”: “sons... exchanging virgins with other, pagan tribes” (Bal 1988b: 69). Throughout Bal’s chapter, by my count, the words “virgin(s) or (non)virginal” occur forty-one times and the word “virginity” occurs nineteen times. Six of these occurrences are on the first page (69) and six more occur on the last two pages (92–93). The first seven pages, in which this terminology is repeated thirty-two times, introduces the spectrum of Hebrew vocabulary that concerns virginity and formulates an opposing relation between a male and a female concept of virginity (69–75). As the chapter continues, it refers to segments of three stories in the Book of Judges: (a) the daughters of Shiloh in chapter 21; (b) the conception of Samson in chapter 13; and (c) the Levite and his concubine in chapter 19. The last five pages, in which the terminology concerning virgins and virginity is repeated thirteen times, bring the chapter to a conclusion with a dramatically new interpretation of the story about the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19 (89–93). The new interpretation emerges from a new understanding of customary marriage arrangements during the time of the settlement of Israelite tribes in the land of Canaan.

There is a span of text almost seven pages long in the middle of the chapter where no terminology about virgins or virginity occurs (81–87). This section begins with reference to “the limits of philology” (81), which implies the absence from interpretation of something very important; then it refers to the presence in traditional interpretation of “ideology” and “a recognizable ideologeme” (82–83), which implies that something is there which should not be. The traditional ideology, Bal asserts, underlies a “rhetoric of certainty” that replaces argumentation in traditional interpretation and a “rhetoric of philology” that “allows the critics to signal problems without solving them in the light of the story as a whole” (82). From a male perspective, according to Bal, “virgin” means “exclusive property of a father,” while a female perspective defines her as a nubile woman concerned about her future and the complete cycle of her life (Bal 1988b: 72). This discussion prepares the way for three pages that introduce systematic terminology concerning marriage—nomad(ic) or beena marriage, duolocal, uxorial, and matrilineal marriage—and proposes new definitions of patrilocal and virilocal marriage (84–86). She secures a firm point for her interpretation with the observation that Samson’s first wife remained in her father’s house and Samson periodically visited her there (88). Her dramatic challenge to traditional interpretation occurs when she draws the conclusion that the Levite’s “concubine” is really a “patrilocal wife”: “a wife living in the house of the father, a wife who remains a daughter” (89). When the Levite’s wife returned to her father’s house, in accord with her local customs, the Levite visits her there with anger because she had not submitted to the marriage residence conventions of his people (90–93). In other words, the woman in the Levite’s house is caught in a male battle over the appropriate place in which a wife should reside. In this context, Bal challenges the traditional philological definition of pilegesh as “concubine,” which implies prostitution—adultery. Instead of referring to an “unmarried woman,” it is the term for a wife whose people think she should remain in her father’s house. At this point Bal reaches the conclusion
that she may have found "a linguistic development that parallels an ideological one, which is in turn related to an ethnographic one" (87).

Our interest lies in Bal’s interpretational procedure. How does her interpretation lead the reader to her conclusions? Once she has introduced terminology concerning virgins and virginity, why does that terminology disappear for a span of seven pages long? We can begin to answer these questions by turning from the inner texture of her argument to its intertexture.

Bal creates rich intertexture in her chapter by including two block quotations from the Hebrew Bible (69, 78), a block quotation from J. Alberto Soggin’s commentary on Judges (82), another block quotation from Phyllis Tribble’s *Texts of Terror* (83), three art works by Rembrandt, numerous bibliographical references in the text itself, and twenty nine end notes. In the midst of all of these references, I as a traditionally trained biblical interpreter began to be haunted by the absence of reference to a kind of resource I will discuss below in some detail. But at this point let us look more closely at the intertextuality Bal explicitly establishes in the chapter.

In her twenty-nine footnotes to the chapter (265-268), Bal refers three times to her own work, eight times to published works other than her own, and three times to museums that own the three art works by Rembrandt. In addition, she refers to “Mary Douglas’s pathbreaking work,” and to suggestions made to her in conversations with Margaretha Alexiou and Fokkelien van Dijk. The remaining notes contain comments without reference to published works. By including the first name of every woman who is a source of information or comment, the chapter communicates a distinction between male and female authors and colleagues. References to male authors, in contrast, omit the first name.

Bal includes approximately twenty bibliographical references in the text of the chapter itself (depending on how one counts them). Approximately half of these are to male biblical critics whose interpretation she criticizes, and another three are to interpretations of Phyllis Tribble which she criticizes. The remaining references include Jacques Derrida (72), Claude Lévi-Strauss (77), Kenneth Clark’s interpretation of aspects of Rembrandt’s art works (79), and a few other people.

The notable omission, for this biblical interpreter, occurs in the seven pages of text that propose an ethnographic interpretation that should displace the traditional philological interpretation presupposed by male biblical scholars and perpetuated by Phyllis Tribble’s interpretation (81-93). In this span of text, which contains multiple references to biblical scholars, there is no reference to any published work by a cultural anthropologist, social anthropologist, ethnographer, or symbolic psychologist—even though there are narratorial comments about “anthropological terminology” (84), an “ethnographic” development (87), and “symbolic-psychological” and “anthropological” levels of the story (88, 90). At this point, I began to look around for the sources of the unvoiced intertextuality in her interpretation. What is the nature of the underlying resources for her analysis and interpretation of the residential patterns of husbands and wives in ancient Israel? Are the resources simply textual, in the manner in which most biblical interpretation is textual rather than pictorial? She includes art work of Rembrandt, and that art work plays an especially strong role in her interpretation. Do her special strategies of interpretation come primarily from the discipline of art interpretation, or do they come from some other disciplinary arena? With these questions in mind, let us turn first to an anthropological text.

*Turner's The Ritual Process As An Intertext For Bal's "Virginity Scattered"*

Bal refers to Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process* both in the bibliography at the end of her book (Bal 1988b: 296) and in note twenty-two for Chapter 2 (264), but she does not refer to Turner’s book in chapter 3 or in other chapters of her book. If the reader looks at Turner’s book, however, a discussion of residential patterns for husbands and wives appears in a context of great interest for *Death & Disintegration*:

The Ndembu, who practice matrilineal descent combined with virilocal marriage, live in small, mobile villages. The effect of this arrangement is that women, through whom children derive their primary lineage and residential affiliation, spend much of their reproductive cycle in the villages of their husbands and not of their matrilineal kin. . . . One consequence of this is that every fruitful marriage becomes an arena of covert struggle between a woman’s husband and her brothers and mother’s brothers over the residential affiliation of her children. . . .

Interestingly, it is the shades of direct matrilineal kinswomen—own mothers or own mothers’ mothers—that are held to afflict women with reproductive disorders, resulting in temporary barrenness. . . . They have been caught [with infertility], so Ndembu regularly say, because they have "forgotten" those shades who are not only their direct ascendants but also the immediate progenetrix of their matrikin—who form the core membership of villages different from those of their husbands. The curative rites, including isoma, have as one social function that of "causing them to remember" these shades, who are structural modes of a locally residing matrilineage. The
condition of barrenness these shades bring about is considered to be a temporary one, to be removed by performance of the appropriate rites. Once a woman remembers the afflicting shade, and thus her primary allegiance to matriline, the interdiction on her fertility will cease; she can go on living with her husband but with a sharpened awareness of where her and her children's ultimate loyalties lie (Turner 1969: 12-13).

This span of text in Turner's The Ritual Process has a deep intertextual relationship with Bal's entire book, Death and Dismaymetry. But its intertextuality is nowhere more evident than in the chapter on "Virginity Scattered." The following quotations from Bal's chapter will secure this point:

In Kallah's story, the opposition between patrilocal and virilocal marriage is the conflict that generates the narrative line. . . The Leviite took a woman, who was a 'nomad-wife'. . . . He married a woman who, according to the institution valid in Bethlehem, remained in her father's house. (Bal 1988b: 86)

Both the rival males as well as the memory of them has to be 'utterly destroyed.' So great is, in this male (saahas) view, the importance of the history of the people, as distinct from any other people, that the marriageable women have to be "pure" of memory, perpetuating only the sons of Benjamin.

.. these terrified girls, stripped of their identity, are subsequently captured by the murderers and "brought" to the camp where they will be forced to "know man by lying with a male/memory." (Bal 1988b: 70)

Bal's chapter is a "masterful" reinterpretation of the Book of Judges by means of a spectrum of techniques and practices that are second nature to a cultural anthropologist like Victor Turner. Observing that the Israelites during the period of the Judges were constituted by nomadic clans, Bal analyzes the relation of lineal descent to the residential patterns that accompany marriage. In contrast to the Ndembu, who practice matrilineral descent, the Israelites and Canaanites practice patrilineal descent. Like the nomadic Ndembu, however, the Israelites practice virilocal marriage, that is, the wife resides in the village of her husband and his kin. In the midst of the conflict that arises as a result of various actions by the men, "barren women" play a special role and "memory" is central to rituals that the people perform either to restore or maintain peace within their village and/or throughout the region.

But there is more. A careful look at Turner's The Ritual Process reveals the presence of photographs interspersed throughout the text in a manner similar to the display of Rembrandt's art work in Bal's chapter. Further, an examination of the text that accompanies the photographs in Turner's chapter entitled "Planes of Classification in a Ritual of Life and Death"...
marriage of Samson that is analogous to Turner’s photographic display of moments in the *Isoma* ritual among the Ndembu (Bal 1988b: 79).

Art interpretation and cultural anthropological interpretation of ritual are related, yet they are distinctive. Is Bal functioning as an interpreter of art or as a cultural anthropologist interpreting a story as a ritual? On the one hand, the emphasis on “a moment” in the story appears to be intensified by the inclusion of interpretation of art. Artistic pieces that focus on historical episodes must feature a moment in the story. For Bal, an art work features a moment. Focus on the moment as seen in her interest in Rembrandt’s art work has also nurtured her approach to stories in the Book of Judges. But in Bal’s interpretation “moments” expand into a “sequence of actions” and “the accompanying positions”:

First the men hide and watch. Then the girls come out and dance. See and behold: catch. The order to capture the women comes as the consequence of the girls’ dancing, rather than of the men’s watching without being seen. The girls, like all victims of rape, seem to provoke their abduction. They dance, they are to be watched and behold. The memory of the military slogan *visti, vidi, visi* imposes itself nicely (Bal 1988b: 71).

Extending a moment into a sequence of actions makes it a ritual. It is not accidental that Turner’s book is entitled *The Ritual Process* and that Bal’s book contains an interpretation of sequences of moments in the stories that make them rituals in the lives of the Israelites. Her use of Rembrandt’s art work helps her to emphasize particular moments in those rituals:

(a) Manosh’s Offering: “While the man closes his eyes in fright, she, in turn, closes her eyes in intense communication with the deity, the father of her child. She is, at this very moment, conceiving. (Bal 1988b: 75-76; my italics)
(b) Samson’s Wedding Feast: “The only figure that turns toward her, also a woman, is powerless: in the grip of a sexually aroused man, she can only close her eyes and bend her head. Her hand attempts to loosen the grip of the man who holds her (Bal 1988b: 79).

In each instance, Bal places the moment in the painting in the context of “the ritual of the story” in the Book of Judges. In contrast, art interpreters usually interpret “the moment itself” without reference to the sequence of which it is a part:

(a) Manosh’s Offering: “The kneeling figure of his wife is here given the erect stance she has in the painting, and which reminded Kenneth Clark of a Leonardesque Madonna. In the Stockholm drawing the woman’s pose is much the same, but Manosh is seen from the front and shown wholly prostrate.” (Brayn: 330)
(b) Samson’s Wedding Feast: “Behind the table, slightly to the right of centre and in the full light, sits the bride dressed in white, with a garland and a bridal crown on her head. Her hands, clasped one over the other, rest on her waist and she looks straight ahead.

To the right of her Samson—distinguished from the other men by his long hair crowned by a circle—turns round on the bench on which he is sprawling. He is putting his riddle to six of the Philistines, who lean forward toward him, listening, as he grasps the middle finger of his left hand in the thumb and forefinger of the other. The man at the back of this group holds a flute, while the one at the front leans over a harp.

Behind the table, to the left of the bride, a woman turns away from a drinking cup her neighbour is urging on her, her arm round her shoulders. A woman at the front of the table is being embraced by a man; she lies with her legs on a wide bench covered with cushions and a red cloth draped in folds. Both these figures are seen from behind, and in shadow” (Brayn: 248).

The difference in interpretation is noticeable. The interpreter of art describes the minute details of the moment which stands frozen in time. One who interprets story as ritual places each moment in the context of a sequence of moments which enact or desire: rape, a sacrifice, or a fight.

**Social and Cultural Texture in Bal’s Interpretation**

A context of social ritual, then, embraces all of Bal’s interpretation of the Book of Judges. When she turns to the interpretation of the story about the Levite and his concubine (Judges 19) immediately after her interpretation of the Samson ritual, she deepens the analysis with anthropological terminology concerning residential marriage patterns:

The term patriarchal, if used at all, is traditionally synonymous with virilocal marriage, thus conflating husband and father again (Bal 1988b: 85).

The irony here, as mentioned above, is that Bal makes no bibliographical reference to anthropological sources in this section. It is informative for people who are not specialists in anthropology to peruse some of the standard literature on the subject. Robert Pehrson’s entry on “Bilateral Kin Groupings as a Structural Type” contains the following statement:

By the time a Lapp is ready to marry, band and family leadership may reside in the person of a sibling or cousin rather than in a member of the parental generation. In other words, a Lapp’s relation to his siblings may be as important as his relation to his parents in determining local group membership. Therefore, the terms “matrilocalism” and “patrilocalism” do not correctly characterize the whole situation. The terms “virilocal” and “uxorilocal” are more useful here. Virilocalism means that the married couple...
lives at the locality of the husband's kinsmen, uxorilocalism that the married couple lives at the locality of the wife's kinsmen. . . . Thus, when dealing with a bilaterally organized society which emphasizes sibling solidarity it seems apropos to use the terms "virilocal" and "uxorilocal" in place of the terms "matrilocal" and "patrilocal" with their implications of unilaterality (Pehrson 1954: 194-195).

Compare this statement with a segment from Bal's chapter:

Anthropological terminology does not escape the sort of rhetoric we are discussing. Both terms—nomadic and duolocal—focus on the husband's situation, not on the locus of the marital union itself. A third and fourth term uxorilocal and matrilocal, displace the issue in another way . . .

In order to disentangle some of the confusions attached to the current terminology, I will propose to call this patrilocal marriage, thus stressing that it is the power of the father, over and against that of the husband, which characterizes this type of marriage and that the place where this power is rooted, the house, is the shifter where residence and descendancy meet (Bal 1988b: 85).

On the one hand, the quotation from a standard anthropological entry in 1954 exhibits the manner in which anthropologists rework their terminology to make it function appropriately in an interpretation of the data they have uncovered. On the other hand, a statement in a more recent anthropological publication suggests Bal is approaching the text from an untraditional anthropological stance:

Anthropologists have traditionally analyzed residence in relation to marriage, based on the kin group with which the newly married couple resides. This approach yields a few basic patterns: uxorilocal residence (Lat. uxor-wife), where the couple resides with the wife's kin group; virilocal residence (Lat. vir-man, husband), where they reside with the husband's kin; and neolocal residence, where a new and independent household is established. Where residence reflects the dominance of a unilateral descent system, an older terminology can be used: patrilocal, describing residence with the husband's father, in a patrilineal system; matrilocal, describing residence with the wife's mother, in a matrilineal system (see Pehrson 1954: 194-195). However, such classifications may be misleading, and several alternative approaches to the analysis of family and residence have been proposed (Winthrop 1991: 116-117).

This entry in 1991 reveals that Bal is using standard anthropological terminology. About whom is Bal talking when she refers to "traditional usage"? Is Bal in dialogue with "several alternative approaches" (Winthrop 1991: 117) of which she does not inform the reader? She does not tell us. At this point, the fourth arena of socio-rhetorical criticism comes into play: ideological texture. Bal announces the ideological texture of her study on the second page of her book. Thus, it is a rich arena to explore in her interpretation. We will not be able to explore it at any great length, but we do need to turn to it at least for a moment in our ritual of interpretation.

**Ideological Texture in Bal's Interpretation**

Ideological texture resides in the text under investigation, in the history of interpretation of the text, and in the interpreter's current interpretation. Bal's interpretation makes a strong case for a patriarchal, patrilineal ideology in the text of the Book of Judges. Disagreements about this must surely focus on details, since the basic observation is well grounded. Her particular readings of the stories will undergo careful scrutiny and be mildly or significantly reconstructed—this is the nature of interpretive activity. There should be little doubt that Bal has exhibited deep ideological problems in traditional interpretations and in the understanding of certain key words in the Book of Judges. These call for significant revision of certain lexical entries, of exegesis of particular verses, and of interpretation of the interplay of meanings in various stories. Bal's own interpretation, of course, is ideologically grounded, and here we must pause for a moment.

On the second page of her book, Bal announces her ideological position:

This study is about women's lives and deaths. It is about the complex and fascinating relations between text and social reality. And it is about method. The development of a feminist method of interpretation of ancient texts as sources for our understanding of the history of gender-ideology and as connected to present-day culture is the underlying purpose of this voyage through the Book of Judges (Bal 1988b: 2).

Can I, as a man, say anything about this ideology (Robbins 1992d)? Or am I forced to be silent? Bal's own approach is instructive for me. She looks at that which is absent and that which is present in male interpretations, and she tries to understand both.

To deal with the absence of bibliographical reference to current anthropological literature, I solicited some help from a female colleague and found two respected sources, both written by males, that describe the terminology anthropologists use to describe residential patterns within marriage. The two documents describe the current meaning of the terminology in the manner in which Bal uses it, and they introduce a complexity and flexibility that prepares the way for Bal's use of the terms.
Bal, in turn, simply says that current use of the terminology by most anthropologists is insensitive to the male and female aspects of the residential patterns she describes.

I see two choices before me. On the one hand, I can call upon Harold Bloom's discussion of "the anxiety of influence" (Bloom 1973). Here I can point to the extensive manner in which Bal's method of interpretation uses procedures like Victor Turner, a male author, in The Ritual Process, which Bal does not cite in this chapter even though there is ample evidence in her writings that she knows the book well. From this observation, I can reiterate what we have uncovered about the use of anthropological terminology concerning residential patterns within marriage and her assertion that she is using the terminology differently from most anthropologists. From the perspective of "the anxiety of influence," it would be especially natural for Bal to omit references to these sources. First, she is so deeply influenced by an anthropological approach like Turner's that citing him and others could blunt the edge of her individual achievement. Second, the critical creativity of these males is so evident that it might compete with her incisive feminist interpretation.

On the other hand, I could use the terminology "the politics of omission," which appeared in an article in the field of biblical studies in 1989 (Martin 1989: 120-126). One of the strengths of this approach would be that the source for the terminology is an article by an African American woman, published initially in a volume entitled "Interpretation for Liberation" and subsequently republished in a volume entitled The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics (Martin 1989). In this article, Clarice J. Martin, Professor of New Testament at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, expresses her bewilderment at the omission of Ethiopia from maps of the New Testament world in the standard Biblical Atlases. I could describe the absence of references in Bal's chapter as a politics of omission of positive reference to male authors and plead for a more inclusive approach. If I were to use this approach, however, I would run the risk of using the authority of one woman interpreter to confront the authority of another woman interpreter, which could have negative implications for me as a man.

Since I am implicated in the first approach and endangered by the second approach, what should I do? Obviously I have already introduced both ideas, even though I have not developed them at any length. But the procedure has been worth it, has it not? A strong interpretation like Bal's Death & Disymmetry deserves detailed scrutiny and pressure, because it offers so much to men and women alike.

But now I must deal with my own "anxiety of influence" or "politics of omission," though it is difficult for me to do so. Who have provided the formative influences on the development of socio-rhetorical criticism? Norman Perrin was a creative interpreter with whom I studied; Charles H. Talbert welcomed me into the Luke-Acts Seminar in the Society of Biblical Literature; Robert C. Tannehill was a close colleague in the Pronouncement Story Work Group from 1975 through 1987; and Burton L. Mack was a co-author of a book with me that appeared in 1989. There is also Robert Detweiler. I notice that he introduces an eight-step procedure for interpreting a text with a combination of strategies from phenomenological and structuralist in his Story, Sign, and Self (Detweiler 1978: 204-207). One of the copies of this book (I have two) in my library has my signature in it with a date that reads 1979. And it does have some underlined and circled words in it, in the manner in which I marked books during the '70s. But, honestly, I am quite sure that I never read these pages on the eight-step procedure until today (March 16, 1993). Any influence Detweiler's book may have had on me had to come incidentally as we have talked with each other and taught together during the last few years.

In any case, I shouldn't concern myself with influences of us males on one another, should I? The topic is Mieke Bal, and the male influences on her. In the words of Mieke Bal, the male view considers a virgin to be "exclusive property": "metonymically, the daughter is bound to the father as an ontological property: she is part of him, his synecdoche" (Bal 1988b: 72). For this reason, the virgin daughter has no name. The "female view" of virginity, in contrast, is "oriented toward the future and toward integrating the nubile life stage within the whole life cycle" (Bal 1988b: 72).

Mieke Bal, obviously, has been concerned not to be nameless. So her voice has come, unknowingly perhaps but really, into a conversation between Robert Detweiler and some of the rest of us. Detweiler has things well in hand, applying phenomenological and structuralist strategies of interpretation on a "hermeneutical scene" that he describes "not only as post-Christ Critical but also as the era of post-formalism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, post-representation, post-modern and even post-hermeneutic" (Detweiler 1989: xii). Detweiler has, in the past, had significant public conversations with Bal, and Bal, in turn, is publishing a paper in this volume. Again, Mieke Bal keeps coming into our conversations. A good colleague, like Robert Detweiler, is like wisdom:

She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her....
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her.
those who hold her fast are called happy (Proverbs 3:15, 18).

Will I be misunderstood? Even oral presentation cannot assure that an auditor will distinguish tongue in cheek from serious tongue. But what is the difference? To quote Robert Detweiler at the end of Breaking the Fall:

A communitas of readers, joined at first merely by the fact that they read, can learn to confess their need of a shared narrative and encourage the creation and interpretation of a literature that holds in useful tension the doubleness we feel that we live at once both liminally and in conclusion (Detweiler 1989:190).

This quotation, taken seriously out of context, signals the fruitfulness not only of exposing the vulnerabilities of others but also of exposing our own, not only to ourselves but to others as well. Moreover, this brings us back to the issue with which we began, namely the ways in which our interpretations submit to the major plot of the story, on the one hand, and submit to the liminal, marginal voices in the text, on the other hand. As we make our decisions in this regard, we expose our ideologies, our self interests. We confess the major plots—the beginnings, middles, and ends—in which we participate, as well as the liminal, marginal voices we embrace. Does this introduce a new climate of interpretation? The intensity of certain responses in the academic community to this kind of ideological exposure of our own work and the work of others suggests that a new environment of interpretation truly has been launched during the last two decades. Mieke Bal has contributed decisively to this new environment, and Robert Detweiler has nurtured it for many years. It is a pleasure to show gratitude to Robert Detweiler through dialogue with a colleague with whom he himself has engaged in significant exchange.

WORKS CITED


