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SOCIO-RHETORICAL CRITICISM:

MARY, ELIZABETH AND THE MAGNIFICAT AS A TEST CASE

Vernon K. Robbins

The Emergence of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

Socio-rhetorical criticism is a textually-based method that uses programmatic strategies to invite social, cultural, historical, psychological, aesthetic, ideological and theological information into a context of minute exegetical activity. In a context where historical criticism has been opening its boundaries to social and cultural data, and literary criticism has been opening its boundaries to ideology, socio-rhetorical criticism practices interdisciplinary exegesis that reinvents the traditional steps of analysis and redraws the traditional boundaries of interpretation. Socio-rhetorical criticism, then, is an exegetically-oriented approach that gathers current practices of interpretation together in an interdisciplinary paradigm.

Both the textual base for the strategies and the interdisciplinary mode of analysis distinguish socio-rhetorical criticism from historical criticism, social-scientific criticism, sociological exegesis, social-historical criticism and the study of social realia and social organization—all of which are historical methods based on data external to texts. Historians and sociologists regularly focus on signs in texts that ostensibly refer to data outside of texts, and they criticize interpreters who appear to have an 'obsession' with the nature of texts themselves rather than the 'data' within texts. Socio-rhetorical critics are interested in the nature of texts as social, cultural, historical, theological and ideological discourse. They approach a text much like an anthropologist 'reads' a village and its culture (Peacock 1986). The interpreter perceives the dwellings and their arrangement; the interaction of the people and their rituals; and the sounds of the speech, the songs, the drums and the barking as signs that invite research, analysis and interpretation (Geertz 1973, 1983). Within this approach, historical, social and cultural data stand in an intertextual

relation to the signs in texts. Socio-rhetorical interpretation, then, invites the data of the historical and social-scientific critic into exegesis at the stage where it explores the intertexture of a text.

Socio-rhetorical criticism differs from most types of literary criticism by a practice of 'revaluing' and 'reinventing' rhetoric rather than practicing one or more forms of 'restrained rhetoric' (Vickers 1982). Socio-rhetorical critics, perceiving texts to be 'thickly textured' with simultaneously interacting networks of signification, reinvent rhetoric by reading and rereading, interpreting and reinterpreting texts 'as forms of activity inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences' (Eagleton 1983: 206; cf. Wuellner 1987: 453; Robbins 1993b: 443-44). Socio-rhetorical criticism reinvents the stages of interpretation by replacing George A. Kennedy's five stages of analysis—unit, situation, disposition of arrangement, techniques or style and rhetorical criticism as a synchronic whole (Kennedy 1984: 33-38; Wuellner 1987: 455-60)—with programmatic analysis of inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture and ideological texture (Robbins 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d, 1993b). Through this process, socio-rhetorical critics explore the full range of rhetorical figures and tropes in texts. Most modern literary critics, in contrast, reduce rhetoric to four master tropes—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony—and explore texts in the context of this 'restrained' rhetoric.¹ Socio-rhetorical critics differ from formalist and structuralist literary critics by exploring the rhetorical nature of the discourse both in the text and in traditional and nontraditional interpretations of the text. They differ from literary critics who invest primarily in anti-scientific and deconstructionist efforts by programmatically analyzing and interpreting texts within changing sets of boundaries. Socio-rhetorical criticism, then, is a form of literary analysis that invites programmatic, self-critical analysis and interpretation of the full range of rhetorical figures and tropes in texts. The goal is to nurture disciplined exploration, analysis and interpretation characteristic of *wissenschaftlich* research, but to do so in a manner that maintains a self-critical perspective on the data and strategies the interpreter uses to bring referents, meanings, beliefs, values, emotions and intentions to the signs in the text.

The beginnings of socio-rhetorical criticism lie in the goals for biblical

1. For a comprehensive discussion of the reduction of rhetoric in various centuries, see Vickers 1988: 435-79, and for the reduction to four tropes, pp. 439-42. For his definition of rhetorical figures and tropes, see pp. 491-98.

interpretation Amos N. Wilder set forth in his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1955, entitled 'Scholars, Theologians, and Ancient Rhetoric' (Wilder 1956). Wilder began by raising 'the basic question of the nature of religious symbol and of symbolic discourse' (p. 1). Referring to New Testament eschatology as 'a tremendous expression of the religious imagination, an extraordinary rhetoric of faith' (p. 2), he quoted Theodor Gaster's statement that 'our task must be to get behind the words to what semanticists call their "referents"; and this is the domain of Cultural Anthropology and Folklore rather than of Philology' (p. 3, quoting Gaster 1950: 112). Asserting that we have much to learn 'from what is now known of the "mythic mentality" or "mythic ideation" as explored by the anthropologists and by students of the origins of language and myth' (p. 5), Wilder turned to an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Bultmann's demythologization of myth, Dodd's 'Platonizing tendency', and Cullmann's conforming of disparate expressions in biblical texts to a pattern in a selected body of material (pp. 6-8). In the end, Wilder's focus on biblical texts as literature causes him to limit the source for new insights into myth and symbol to aesthetic criticism, because 'workers in aesthetics... have learned much from anthropology and psychology' (pp. 8-9). As a result, it has taken New Testament interpreters a quarter of a century to begin to integrate analysis of the inner imaginative and argumentative aspects of early Christian texts with analysis of the social aspects of their discourse. Most New Testament interpreters who responded to Wilder's call to use new forms of literary criticism have resisted the insights of social scientists into myth, the social construction of reality and the ideological nature of culture.

In 1972, Wayne A. Meeks moved Wilder's vision of interpretation decisively forward in an article entitled 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism' (Meeks 1972). Meeks analyzed both 'the special patterns of language' in the Gospel of John and the special logic of the myth of the descending and ascending redeemer (p. 44), integrating a close, rhetorical reading of the text with anthropological and sociological insights into the formation and maintenance of sectarian communities. His interpretation demonstrates the profound relationship in Johannine discourse between the redeemer who belongs to the 'world of the Father' yet comes into the 'world which does not know or comprehend' him, and those who are 'in the world' yet are drawn to the redeemer by 'believing' in him. In the end, the reader sees that the

redeemer's foreignness to the world is directly related to the sect's perception of itself as foreign to the world—'in it but not of it'. In Meeks's words,

The Fourth Gospel not only describes, in etiological fashion, the birth of that community; it also provides reinforcement of the community's isolation. The language patterns we have been describing have the effect, for the insider who accepts them, of demolishing the logic of the world, particularly the world of Judaism, and progressively emphasizing the sectarian consciousness. If one 'believes' what is said in this book, he is quite literally taken out of the ordinary world of social reality (Meeks 1972: 71).

This article, in my view, is a superb initial step toward socio-rhetorical criticism, since it attends equally to exegesis and to social and cultural dimensions of early Christian discourse. In the intervening years Meeks has written a number of important articles that advanced this kind of analysis yet further (see bibliography in Meeks 1993: 254-55). His books, however, have featured rather conventional exegetical practices to exhibit social and moral aspects of early Christianity rather than developed new practices to exhibit the social, cultural and ideological dimensions of Christian discourse in its Mediterranean context (Meeks 1983, 1986a, 1993).²

The year after the appearance of Meeks's article, Jonathan Z. Smith presented a paper on 'The Social Description of Early Christianity' that called for the incorporation of highly developed anthropological theory in analysis and interpretation of early Christian data (Smith 1975).³ In his

2. Three explanations for this, I suggest, are ready to hand. First, Meeks began his work when the traditional exegetical tools of historical criticism completely dominated New Testament interpretation. Secondly, the overwhelming majority of Meeks's colleagues were, and still are, historians who emphasize data they perceive to be referred to by texts rather than methods that explore the nature of texts themselves. Thirdly, it has taken much diligent work to develop rhetorical and social analysis to a level advanced enough to guide analysis of texts that do not evoke the same kind of countercultural, sectarian ideology as the discourse in the Fourth Gospel.

3. Despite Smith's four books since that time (1978, 1982, 1987, 1990), New Testament interpreters have been slow to adopt the critical insights of cultural anthropology. There are numerous reasons. First, a full picture of Smith's agenda emerges only through a careful reading of the complete corpus of his work, much of which first appeared in articles that were later gathered into book form. Secondly, Smith has published books with an obviously unified agenda only since 1987. Prior to this, his books contained articles that revealed only part of his agenda at a time. Thirdly, Smith

article, Smith referred to an 'almost total lack of persuasive models' (p. 19), a seduction 'into a description of a *Sitz im Leben* that lacks a concrete (i.e. non-theological) seat and offers only the most abstract understanding of "life"' (p. 19), the writing of social histories of early Christianity 'in a theoretical vacuum in which outdated "laws" are appealed to and applied... which no longer represent a consensus outside the New Testament or church history fields' (p. 19), and 'unquestioned apologetic presuppositions and naive theories' (p. 20). He suggested, however, that there were many resources available to move ahead, including a few 'major syntheses, lacking only the infusion of new theoretical perspectives' (p. 20). Calling for 'careful attention to the inner history of the various religious traditions and cults' (p. 20) and analysis and interpretation that are 'both richly comparative and quite consciously situated within contemporary anthropological and sociological theory' (p. 21), he pointed to Meeke's article on the Johannine Man from heaven as a 'happy combination of exegetical and sociological sophistication' (p. 21). Smith's critical agenda introduces theoretical practices that move socio-rhetorical interpretation beyond aesthetic criticism toward a comprehensive, critical method for constructing a new picture of the social and religious nature of early Christianity.

In the midst of these beginnings, Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson proposed a dynamic, pluralistic model for investigating early Christian groups, communities and cultures that interacted with one another in a context that, after two to three centuries, produced a Christianity with its own sacred scriptures, theological systems, ecclesiastical offices and institutional structures (Robinson and Koester 1971). Hans Dieter Betz contributed to this endeavor by bringing widespread

works at the 'critical' end of interpretative discourse, the high end that calls for a deeply informed self-consciousness about one's own work. Most New Testament interpreters who devote time to theory have preferred to generate formal theories about deep linguistic structures and self-referential features of narrative than to generate self-critical theories about interpretative practices. Fourthly, Smith's work challenges the innermost nature of the discipline itself, including the 'myth of origins' in which biblical interpreters embed their interpretative practices. Since one of the characteristics of scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) analysis is to hide its ideological foundations, it is natural that New Testament interpreters have been reluctant to evaluate their deepest commitments programmatically and submit them to public scrutiny. Socio-rhetorical criticism calls for interpretative practices that include minute attention to the ideologies that guide interpreters' selection, analysis and interpretation of data.

rhetorical practices of Mediterranean speakers and writers into interpretation of New Testament texts (1972, 1975, 1979, 1985a, 1985b, 1986), and Wilhelm H. Wuellner began to apply insights from 'the new rhetoric' to argumentation in New Testament literature (1976a, 1976b, 1978, 1979, 1986). Meanwhile, Robert C. Tannehill produced an aesthetic, rhetorical analysis and interpretation of sayings of Jesus with unusual sensitivity to the forcefulness of their vivid images and tense patterns (1975).

The same year as the appearance of Smith's initial paper (1975), Betz's first rhetorical analysis of Paul's letter to the Galatians (1975) and Tannehill's aesthetic, rhetorical analysis of sayings of Jesus (1975), John G. Gager's *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* introduced models from twentieth-century sociology and anthropology for the study of early Christianity (1975). Gager's analysis was part of the same intellectual world as Smith's; but this was a world distant from the work of Betz, Wuellner and Tannehill. Many interpreters knew that these intellectual worlds should come together, but they also knew that the road would be steep and rocky. Gager broached the issue with a well-placed quotation from Peter Brown: 'The need to link disciplines is frequently expressed among us. Discussion of this need takes place in an atmosphere, however, that suggests the observation of an African chieftain on a neighboring tribe: "They are our enemies. We marry them"' (P. Brown 1970: 17; quoted in Gager 1975: xii; cf. Gager 1982).

Gager himself used social anthropological studies of millennialist cargo cults in Melanesia, social psychological studies of cognitive dissonance and a merger of cultural anthropological and 'history of religion' interpretations of myth to approach 'the end of time and the rise of community' in first-century Christianity (Gager 1975: 19-65). Then he discussed the transition from charismatic authority to canon and orthodoxy (pp. 66-92), the social class or status of early Christians (pp. 93-113), and the challenge of the success of Christianity for interpreters of early Christianity (pp. 114-58). Rich with sociological and anthropological insight as well as information about the first four centuries of early Christianity, this book established a new paradigm of investigation and interpretation. While a number of its agendas have been pursued in one way or another, the task of incorporating the insights of this paradigm programmatically into exegesis of New Testament texts still lies in the future. Socio-rhetorical criticism sets forth a programmatic set of

strategies to pursue, test, enrich and revise the provisional conclusions Gager advances in his book.

At the beginning of the 1980s, then, various approaches and analyses had advanced a program of investigation and interpretation of the social, cultural, religious and theological dimensions of early Christian discourse. It would take another decade, however, for these activities to come together in a programmatic, critical method. As the 1980s began, John H. Elliott developed 'sociological exegesis' (1981), and Bruce J. Malina introduced widespread topics of Mediterranean social and cultural life into New Testament studies under the name of cultural anthropology (1981). A few years later, a *Semeia* volume appeared on *Social Scientific Criticism* (Elliott 1986), and soon after, Philip Esler's study of the social and political motivations of Lukan theology became available (1987). Recently, an edited volume on *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Neyrey 1991a) and a volume on *Social Scientific Criticism and the New Testament* (Elliott 1993) have displayed the results of more than a decade of work by Malina, Neyrey, Elliott, Rohrbaugh and others on honor-shame, dyadic personality, limited good, kinship, purity and other widespread features of Mediterranean society and culture. Meanwhile, Norman R. Petersen has produced studies of Paul and the Gospel of John that merge formalist literary criticism and sociology (1985, 1993). Both the formalist approach to the text and the use of sociology without the rich resources of social and cultural anthropology limit the studies to a conventional view of the historical and social nature of early Christianity.

In 1984 and 1987, I used the term 'socio-rhetorical' in the title of a book and in an article that merged rhetorical analysis with insights from anthropologists, sociologists and social psychologists to interpret early Christian texts. Works by Kenneth Burke provided an initial rhetorical framework (Robbins 1984: 5-14, 20-48; Robbins 1987: 502, 505, 508-509) and first-century BCE and CE rhetorical treatises provided insights from the Mediterranean social environment of early Christianity (Robbins 1984: 29, 64; Robbins 1987: 503, 506-509, 512). Writings by Clifford Geertz, in turn, provided an initial anthropological framework for comparative analysis and interpretation (Robbins 1984: 5-6), and folklore studies and social psychological role theory guided the interpretation of the relation of the teacher to his disciples (Robbins 1984: 7-8, 39, 83, 110, 112-14, 158, 162, 165). Then, in 1987, Wilhelm H. Wuellner introduced the terms 'reinvented' or 'revalued' rhetoric for rhetorical

analysis that interprets biblical texts as 'social discourse' and biblical hermeneutics as 'political discourse' (Wuellner 1987: 453, 456, 462-63). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature at the end of that same year (1988) and her article on 'The Rhetorical Situation in I Corinthians' (1987) placed the issue of ideology in the text and in the interpreter's strategies directly before biblical scholars. Burton L. Mack's *Myth of Innocence* (1988), *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (1990) and *The Lost Gospel* (1993) have advanced rhetorical, textual practices informed by insights about myth and ritual from cultural anthropology and about social discourse and ideology from modern and postmodern criticism.

I presented the framework for developing socio-rhetorical criticism as a programmatic, comprehensive method within biblical studies in the introduction to the 1992 paperback edition of *Jesus the Teacher* (Robbins 1992a) and in an article for the Society of Biblical Literature later that year (1992b). These essays introduced a 'four-texture' approach to socio-rhetorical criticism: (a) inner texture, (b) intertexture, (c) social and cultural texture and (d) ideological texture. A four-texture approach was also utilized in Clarice J. Martin's interpretation of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 (1989) and in Bernard Brandon Scott's comprehensive interpretation of the parables of Jesus (1989). Other socio-rhetorical studies have appeared during the last few years, usually with some reference to the socio-rhetorical nature of their investigation and interpretation.⁴ The remaining part of this essay exhibits practices associated with socio-rhetorical criticism utilizing the four-texture approach. The goal is both to explain strategies and to illustrate them in actual exegesis. The text under consideration is the account of Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke.

Inner Texture: Every Reading has a Subtext

The overall goal of 'inner' textual analysis and interpretation in a socio-rhetorical mode is to attain initial insight into the argumentation in the text (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Perelman 1982). Any strategies of analysis and interpretation, from the most simple repetition of signs to the most subtle argumentative strategies, may contribute to

4. See the works of Altenhaumer (1992), Braun (1993), Huic-Jolly (1994), Kloppenborg (1989, 1990, 1991, 1993), Robbins (1991a, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d, 1992e, 1993b), Sisson (1994), Wachob (1993), Webber (1992), York (1991).

readings of the inner texture of a text. Every reading of the 'inner' text, even a reading that an interpreter calls 'intrinsic' to the text itself, is guided by 'extrinsic' interests, perspectives and meanings. These extrinsic dimensions may derive from disciplinary codes or 'subtexts' for the reading. A disciplinary code is a master discourse like history, anthropology or theology, which is guided, sanctioned and nurtured by authorized institutional structures, groups and organizations (Bal 1988a: 2-13). A subtext, in contrast, is a theory, approach or other text that somehow helps to illumine an aspect of the text a person is interpreting (Bal 1988b: 42, 51-65). Socio-rhetorical criticism calls for critical consciousness about the codes and subtexts an interpreter brings to 'intrinsic' readings. It also investigates the boundaries interpreters set that limit subtexts to 'Jewish' modes of thinking rather than opening them to 'Hellenistic-Roman' modes of thinking; theological modes rather than social, cultural, psychological and religious modes; formal literary modes rather than argumentative, interactive, rhetorical modes; and modes of the mind alone rather than modes that include both body and mind.

One important subtext is the basic rhetorical nature of language as explained by Kenneth Burke: language has repetitive, progressive, conventional and minor rhetorical form (Burke 1931: 123-83). The basic question related to this subtext is: On the basis of sign repetition and patterns of progression, where are the beginning, middle and end of a significant span of text? A strategy in answering this question is the giving of 'basic lexical sense' to signs signifying 'narrative agents' in Lk. 1.26-56.

In terms of sign repetition and progression, the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth, who live in the region of Judea, are the first characters to appear in the Gospel of Luke (1.5), and they are the center of attention through Lk. 1.25. In a sentence that constitutes Lk. 1.26-27, the name Mary occurs for the first time in the text, and twice in this verse the text refers to this woman as a *parthenos*, which is regularly translated 'virgin' in English. The occurrence of these signs signals the potential beginning of a span of text with special focus on 'a *parthenos* named Mary'.

It is noticeable that the name Zechariah, which appears six times (1.5, 12, 13, 18, 21) prior to the occurrence of the name Mary (1.27), reappears only once in the phrase 'house of Zechariah' (1.40) until it recurs twice in Lk. 1.59, 67. This means that a significant span of text

occurs in which two women interact with one another in the absence of the husband Zechariah or any other man. A programmatic display of the names of narrative agents reveals repetition of four words or phrases that refer to deity and two that refer to two women named Mary and Elizabeth.

Narrative Agents in Luke 1.26-56

26	God	angel			
27					Mary
28			the Lord		
30	God	angel			Mary
32	God		the Lord		
34		angel			Mary
35	God	angel		Holy Spirit	
36					Elizabeth
37	God				
38		angel	the Lord		Mary
39					Mary
40					Elizabeth
41				Holy Spirit	Mary
					Elizabeth
					Elizabeth
43			my Lord		
45			the Lord		
47	God		the Lord		
56					Mary

As this display shows, there is reference to God and the angel Gabriel in Lk. 1.26 before there is reference to Mary in Lk. 1.27. This signifies that something with reference to God and the angel Gabriel establishes the context of utterance (Fowler 1986: 86-88, 93-96) for the circumstances in which Mary functions. In addition to God and an angel, the discourse refers to 'the Lord' and 'the Holy Spirit'. While references to God, the Lord and Mary span the entire unit (1.26-56), a basic 'beginning' pairs Mary with the angel Gabriel through 1.38. A basic 'middle' for this span of text appears in the double occurrence of the phrase 'the Holy Spirit' (1.35, 41) and four occurrences of the name Elizabeth (1.36-41); and a basic 'end' appears with references to Mary, my/the Lord, and God in the absence of reference to the angel, Elizabeth and the Holy Spirit (1.42-56). Basic repetition of names of narrative agents, therefore, exhibits a span of text with a basic beginning, middle and end.

In the first step of analysis 'voice' has not been given to the sign

patterns in the text. In order to locate the narratorial boundaries of the beginning, middle and end of this unit, it is necessary for the interpreter to give 'voice' to the signs in the text.⁵ Narratorial voice in Lk. 1.26-56 differentiates narration from attributed speech. There are two and one half verses of narration (1.26-28a) that open the beginning of the unit. In the context where the language refers to Elizabeth, there is a span of three and one half verses of narration (1.39-42a) that open the middle of the unit. A short 'And Mary said' in 1.46a opens the final unit, which contains nine and one half verses of attributed speech before a final verse of narration (1.56). This reveals the narratorial boundaries of the beginning (1.26-38), middle (1.39-45) and end (1.46-56); and the voicing leads the interpreter to strategies of argumentation that occur throughout the unit.

The voice of the narrator, the first level of narration (Tolbert 1989: 90-106), introduces Mary to the reader/hearer within a narrative pattern that features an angel sent from God. This pattern begins when the narrator asserts that an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah while he was praying inside the Temple at the hour of incense (Lk. 1.10-12), and it recycles with the assertion that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary at Nazareth in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. At the second level of narration, the level of the voices of characters that are embedded in the voice of the narrator (first level), the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is God's 'favored one' and that the Lord is with her (1.26-28). The narrator tells the reader/hearer that Mary was troubled at the statement and debated in her mind concerning what it might mean (1.29), much as the narrator's voice says that Zechariah was troubled and afraid when he first saw the angel of the Lord (1.12). The implied reader begins to detect, then, a dialogue between the voice of the narrator and the voices of characters in the story. In the context where the narrator focuses on Mary's puzzlement, the angel tells her she has found favor with God, she will conceive and bear a son, and the son

5. 'Narrative critics' give 'voice' to signs in the text by generating a subtext of an 'implied' author and reader whom they perceive to be 'presupposed by the narrative' itself (Powell 1990: 19-21). It is important to be attentive to the 'meanings' narrative critics embed in the voices they give to the signs. It is customary for narrative critics to embed twentieth-century, post-industrial values, meanings, convictions and perspectives in the voices while insisting that these meanings are 'in the text'. Socio-rhetorical criticism attends programmatically to this issue in the intertextual, social and cultural, and ideological arenas of analysis.

- (a) will be called Jesus;
- (b) will be great;
- (c) will be called Son of the Most High;
- (d) will be given the throne of his father David by God;
- (e) will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and
- (f) will have a kingdom that has no end (Lk. 1.30-33).

The narrator tells the reader that Mary is 'a virgin betrothed' to 'Joseph, of the house of David' (1.27). The angel tells Mary the Holy Spirit will come upon her, the Most High will overshadow her, and therefore the child will be called holy, the Son of God. In addition, the angel tells Mary that her kinswoman Elizabeth is six months pregnant after being barren, because with God no word will be impossible.⁶

When Mary speaks, she presents a different perspective from the narrator and the angel. The first time she speaks, she tells the angel she has no man (1.34). The second time, she refers to herself as a maid-servant of the Lord and says, 'Let it be according to your word' (1.38). Mary has believed and consented, then, in a context of concern that she has no man. From the point of view of the angel, Mary is a fortunate young woman with everything she could hope for on her side. She has been specially favored by God, and the child within her is specially blessed. The narrator, however, says Mary is troubled, and when Mary tells her story in song, the reader gets a somewhat new insight into things.

Mary's voice in the Magnificat uses and reconfigures other characters' voices in the text. First, Mary repeats language the angel speaks to Zechariah about joy and gladness (1.14, 47). Secondly, Mary reconfigures language Elizabeth uses when Elizabeth says that the Lord has shown regard for her and taken away her own reproach among men (1.25, 48a). Thirdly, Mary reconfigures language Elizabeth uses when she tells Mary that she, Mary, is blessed because she has believed in the fulfilment of the things spoken to her (1.45, 48b). Fourthly, Mary uses, reconfigures and embellishes language the angel Gabriel spoke to her about the power of the Most High (1.35, 49). Fifthly, Mary reconfigures the angel's statements about her son's 'father David' and about his reigning 'over the house of Jacob forever' (1.32-33, 54). Mary asserts that God 'puts down the mighty from their thrones', and 'exalts those who live in humiliation' (1.52). Thus, Mary's voice not only introduces a

6. See Troost 1992 for the importance of 'word' throughout Lk. 1-2.

dialogue with the narrator's voice but with the voices of the angel that appeared to Zechariah, of the angel Gabriel who appeared to her, and of her kinswoman Elizabeth. Is Mary simply perpetuating the views of these other narrative agents, or does she have a somewhat different perspective? This will be a point at issue as we proceed to other arenas of interpretation. From a narratorial perspective, Mary's Magnificat engages in dialogue with other voices in the discourse.

Robert Tannehill has produced a compelling reading of the inner texture of the Magnificat by using Hebrew poetry as a subtext to give meaning to Mary's voice (Tannehill 1974; Tannehill 1986: 26-32). Tannehill emphasizes parallelism, repetition and the natural rhythm of reading, and his analysis yields two stanzas or strophes: (a) 1.46-50 and (b) 1.51-55. The division is marked, he says, by two concluding lines for each strophe (1.49b-50; 1.54b-55), which resemble each other in thought and form. For Tannehill, then, the inner texture of the poem yields a traditional hymn, which opens with a statement of praise and follows with a series of reasons for this praise. To reiterate, the subtext for this compelling reading of the inner texture of the hymn comes from presuppositions about Hebrew poetry. Tannehill observed that the opening statement of the hymn is a statement of praise and the following statements provide reasons for the praise, but he did not analyze the nature of the reasons. Lucy Rose, in an unpublished paper written at Emory University, approached the Magnificat with a very different subtext, namely argumentation in Hellenistic-Roman rhetoric (Rose 1989). The argumentative texture of the Magnificat comes into view if one follows guidelines from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was written in the 80s BCE.

Theme or Topic:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has gladness in God my Savior (Lk. 1.46b-47).

Rationale:

because he has shown regard for the humiliation of his maidservant (Lk. 1.48a).

Confirmation of the Rationale:

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed (Lk. 1.48b).

Embellishment:

(1) For he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name,
and his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.

(2) He has done a strong thing with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away (Lk. 1.49-53).

Conclusion:

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever (Lk. 1.54-55).

After Mary's announcement of her topic of magnifying the Lord (1.46b-47), she provides an initial rationale for her speech-action: (because) 'God has shown regard for the humiliation of his maidservant' (1.48a). These two steps set the stage for 'the most complete and perfect argument', to use the words of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.18.28-19.30 (Robbins 1993a: 123-25). With this announcement, Mary has started her hymn with an enthymeme—a rhetorical syllogism that provides a minor premise for her topic and leaves the major premise unstated. The unstated major premise appears to be embedded in ritual logic that suggests that when the Lord God focuses special attention on the humiliation of a woman, such a woman responds naturally with hymnic speech from her glad heart. This produces the following underlying syllogism:

Implied Major Premise:

When the Lord God shows regard for the humiliation of the soul and spirit of one of his maidservants, the favored woman praises the Lord God as her savior.

Minor Premise:

God has shown regard for the humiliation of the soul and spirit of his maidservant Mary.

Conclusion:

Mary's soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her savior.

From a rhetorical perspective, the hymn begins syllogistically rather than paradigmatically. In other words, the beginning of the speech introduces the deductive logic of a rhetorical syllogism rather than the inductive logic of a rhetorical example. This raises the fascinating issue of whether there was a specific instance of 'humiliation' that Mary could narrate if asked, or whether Mary's 'humiliation' was some general state common to most, if not all, women.

After the opening enthymematic argument in 1.46-48a, v. 48b voices a confirmation of the rationale. This is a natural next step for a 'most complete and perfect argument'. The confirmation that 'God has given regard to my humiliation' lies in the future: 'From now on, all generations will bless me' (or, 'will call me blessed'). In 1.48b, then, Mary buttresses her initial rationale with a *rationis confirmatio*, a confirmation of the initial rationale.

After stating the theme, rationale and confirmation to open her argument (1.46-48), Mary embellishes the opening statements (1.49-53). This move fulfils the next step in a most complete and perfect argument. The embellishment contains two stanzas (1.49-50, 51-53), each beginning with what the mighty one 'has done' (*epoiēsen*). The first stanza links what God has done for Mary with what God does for 'those who fear him'; the second stanza presents a series of basic actions by God:

- (a) God has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts;
- (b) God has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humiliated;
- (c) God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty (Lk. 1.51-53).

These statements assert that God watches over all generations (1.48b, 50) and that God has been especially attentive to those who live in humiliation (1.48a, 52); and they imply that God welcomes those with a rejoicing, praising spirit, since he 'scatters' those who are 'proud in the imaginations of their hearts' (1.46b-47, 51). These statements amplify and more deeply ground the opening assertions of the speech. Mary concludes with a recapitulation that refers to the help God gave to Israel in the past, to Abraham and his seed forever (1.54-55). Thus Mary, standing in the line of 'Abraham's posterity forever', praises God with reasoning that fulfils Hellenistic-Roman guidelines for 'the most complete and perfect argument'.

The final part of the inner-textual reading has proposed the presence of argumentative features that did not appear when Hebrew poetry provided the only subtext for the reading. This suggests a bi-cultural nature for the discourse that will be important to pursue in additional interpretative steps. The unit ends with an argument by Mary that God's benevolence to her has a relation to God's benevolence in the past and God's plans for the future. Yet Mary has come to this point only through a troubling encounter with the angel Gabriel and a supportive

encounter with Elizabeth. It will be necessary to investigate additional dimensions of meaning in the context of other textures of the language in this unit.

The present discussion of the inner texture of Lk. 1.26-56 has introduced a limited number of subtexts for its reading. Socio-rhetorical criticism invites any number of subtexts to approach the unit, with the goal of enriching the understanding of the topics, voices and arguments in it. Readings from yet other angles can explore the interchange between male and female voices and the reverberation of topics about different classes and statuses of people. Analysis of inner texture has introduced an initial set of strategies to identify topics and get a glimpse of the argumentative interaction in the unit.

Intertexture: Every Comparison has Boundaries

A second arena of rhetorical criticism is intertextual comparison, analysis and interpretation. Here the strategies emerge from the following questions: From where has this passage adopted its language? With what texts does this text stand in dialogue? Comparison takes us into canonical issues, understood in the broad terms introduced by postmodern criticism (Eagleton 1983: 1-53). All interpretations can be characterized in terms of the data with which they allow a particular text to be compared. These issues appear in an interpreter's observation, analysis and interpretation of reference, recitation, recontextualization, reconfiguration and echo in a text.

An initial dimension of intertexture is reference. Reference to proper names in Lk. 1.26-56 indicates explicit dialogue with people and places in Israelite tradition. There is reference to the angel Gabriel, God, a city of Galilee, the house of David, the Most High, the Lord God, the throne of David, the house of Jacob, the Holy Spirit, the Son of God, a city of Judah, his servant Israel, and our fathers, Abraham and his posterity. There also is reference to a virgin betrothed to a man (1.27), a woman called barren (1.36) and a maidservant of the Lord (1.37, 48). With what texts and textual traditions are these phrases in dialogue? We will see that this is a highly-contested issue in interpretation.

A second dimension of intertexture is recitation, which includes rehearsal of attributed speech in exact, modified or different words from other accounts of the attributed speech, and rehearsal of an episode or series of episodes, with or without using some words from another

account of the story. Recitation appears in the form of generalized summary in 1.51-55: in the past God has shown strength with his arm, scattered the proud, put down the mighty from their thrones, exalted those in humiliation, filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich empty away, helped his servant Israel, and spoken to our fathers, to Abraham and his posterity. It is not clear exactly what events are being rehearsed; this is recitation of past events in a generalized, summary form. Such recitation allows an interpreter freedom to draw boundaries in various ways around episodes recounting God's interaction with Israel; an interpreter may include or exclude stories according to the interpreter's inclination.

A third dimension of intertexture is recontextualization, which is the placing of attributed narration or speech in a new context without announcing its previous attribution. There is a long list of recontextualized speech from the Septuagint in this unit (R.E. Brown 1977: 357-62; Fitzmyer 1981: 356-57), which we will discuss below.

A fourth dimension of intertexture is reconfiguration. Certainly the Lukan unit is reconfiguring the long tradition of barren Israelite women who have conceived in their old age and borne a son. Exactly which stories are the strongest intertexts is an important issue. But what of accounts of virgins? Does this account of the virgin Mary reconfigure any accounts of virgins in the Septuagint? Are there any Mediterranean accounts of virgins that this account of Mary may be reconfiguring? We will see below that the established boundaries for discussion of reconfiguration in traditional New Testament interpretation not only suppress discussion of the stories of virgins in the Septuagint but completely exclude well-known stories about virgins impregnated by gods in Mediterranean society. Here a purity system has been functioning with the intensity of all purity systems, keeping stories about the immoral Hellenistic gods raping virgins on earth out of 'scientific' exegesis. The result is an absence of biblical monographs that programmatically compare the Lukan account of the conception of the virgin Mary, when the Holy Spirit comes upon her and the power of the Most High overshadows her (Lk. 1.34), and accounts of the conception of virgins in Mediterranean literature, when gods come upon them in different forms and circumstances. It is highly likely that the account of Mary is multicultural, reconfiguring Mediterranean stories about virgins as well as Israelite stories about virgins and barren women. We will return to this below in the discussion of the social and cultural texture of the account.

A fifth dimension is intertextual echo. Beyond specific configuration of traditions and episodes lie echoes (Hollander 1981; Hays 1989). When the Lukan account of Mary and Elizabeth is recounted in Greek toward the end of the first century CE, the echoes in its intertexture are manifold. Again, the traditional boundaries in New Testament exegesis have been drawn in such a way that interpreters saturate the discussion with echoes from Israelite and Jewish tradition but suppress echoes from broader Mediterranean tradition, society and culture.

The spectrum of intertexture, from reference to echo, intensely raises the issue of canon in interpretation (Eagleton 1983: 1-53). For most interpreters, canonical boundaries for interpretation of the Lukan account of Mary and Elizabeth have been drawn in a manner that intentionally excludes comparison of the Magnificat with hymns of praise in Hellenistic-Roman culture and the conception of Mary with accounts of the conception of other virgins in Mediterranean literature. The strategy that keeps such data out is a 'canonical strategy', and the elements of this strategy are basic canon, canon within the canon (or 'inner canon') and near canon (Myers 1991: 53-54). The basic canon for New Testament interpretation of this unit is comprised by the Old and New Testaments. Central to any canonical strategy, however, is the establishment of a canon within the canon, an 'inner' canon. The canon within the canon for interpretation of this unit comprises the Israelite tradition of barren women and the account of Hannah and her hymn of praise in 1 Sam. 1.1-2.10. This strategy produces an interpretative near canon comprised of material from Psalms (35.9; 111.9; 103.17; 89.11; 107.9; 98.3) and other passages in the Old Testament, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (R.E. Brown 1977: 358-60; Fitzmyer 1981: 356-69). It is noticeable that this inner canon and near canon exclude any stories about virgins in Israelite tradition. Beginning with the tradition of barren Israelite women, it opens its boundaries to hymns of praise within the book of Psalms and within prophetic, apocalyptic, pseudepigraphic and Qumran literature. If interpreters open the boundaries of near canon further they may bring in information from rabbinic literature and from the church fathers, monastics and mystics in Christian tradition. But all of this opening of the boundaries carefully avoids stories about virgins who are forced to conceive, either by gods or by men fulfilling the will of a god. The absence of significant comparative work on Hellenistic-Roman hymns to gods and goddesses and on accounts of virgins who are overpowered and made pregnant by gods makes it impossible to

redraw those boundaries here. Instead, the discussion will focus on the one major, recent attempt to open these boundaries in New Testament interpretation.

The Lukan account is susceptible to non-conventional boundaries. In Luke, the angel appears to the husband Zechariah concerning the conception and birth of the son John the Baptist to the barren wife Elizabeth (Lk. 1.11-20); but the angel appears to the betrothed virgin Mary, and to her alone, concerning the conception and birth of Jesus (Lk. 1.26-38). In the Matthean account, in contrast, the angel appears to the man Joseph rather than to the virgin Mary (Mt. 1.20; 2.13, 19). In Luke, no male is part of Mary's scene unless the reader genders Gabriel as male (Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes 1993; Troost 1993). The Lukan account is closer to the account of the birth and conception of Samson in Judg. 13.2-25 than to any other account of conception by a barren woman, since the messenger of God appears to the future mother in the account and tells her that she will conceive and bear a son. In Luke, a kinswoman Elizabeth, whose barrenness has been removed by God, in effect replaces the role that the husband Manoah plays in the story of the conception and birth of Samson. The function of Elizabeth raises another issue, namely the relation of one blessed woman to another blessed woman in Israelite tradition. This essay will turn to that issue in the section on ideology; for now the discussion turns to the Lukan reconfiguration of a 'dishonorable' Israelite tradition about the overpowering of virgins by embedding it in the 'honorable' tradition of the perpetuation of Israel's patriarchal line through barren women.

The special dynamics of a 'canon within the canon' are at work in Mary's reference to her 'humiliation' in the rationale she provides for her joyful soul and spirit (Lk. 1.48b). Her humiliation is different from the humiliation of a barren woman: Mary is pregnant before marriage, and conventional social logic presupposes that a male causes a female to become pregnant. When a male causes a female to become pregnant outside of marriage, he is said to have 'humiliated (*tapeinoō*) her'. Interpreters suppress the difference between the humiliation of a married, barren woman and an unmarried, pregnant woman in the Lukan account by establishing boundaries of intertexture that keep the accounts of Israel's dishonored virgin women outside the interpretative 'canon within the canon' and, indeed, outside the interpretative near canon. In essence, the interpretative strategy erases the accounts of dishonored virgins from Israelite, Jewish and Mediterranean literature. It erases the

accounts by displacing them with accounts of honorable barren women. This may, indeed, be a natural effect of Lukan narration on readers. But interpreters should exhibit the nature of Lukan discourse in exegetical practice rather than simply replicating its discursive strategies.

Jane Schaberg has challenged the traditional inner canon of intertexture for the Lukan account of Mary by calling attention to legislation about and accounts of sexually dishonored women in Israelite tradition. Deut. 22.23-24 (cf. 22.29) presents specific legislation about betrothed virgins who are dishonored:

And if there be a young virgin betrothed (*pais parthenos memnēsteumenē*) to a man (*andri*), and a man (*anthropos*) has found her in the city and lain (*koimethē*) with her, you shall take them both out to the gate of their city and they shall be stoned with stones, and they shall die; the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humiliated (*etapeinōsen*) his neighbor's woman (*gunaika*) (Deut. 22.23-24 LXX).

The language of virgin, betrothal and humiliation in this legislation is precisely the same as in the Lukan account. Mary is a virgin betrothed to a man (Lk. 1.27: *parthenon emnesteumenēn andri*), and when she becomes pregnant she refers to that pregnancy as humiliation (Lk. 1.48: *tēn tapeinōsin*). From her perspective, her pregnancy has humiliated her.

As stated above, this humiliation of Mary perpetuates a 'dishonorable' tradition of important women in Israel's history. In Gen. 34.2, Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob, was 'humiliated' (*etapeinōsen*) by 'Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land', when he seized her and lay with her. In Judg. 19.24 and 20.5 the father of the Levite's concubine offers both 'my virgin daughter' (*hē thugatēr mou hē parthenos*) and the Levite's concubine to the men of the city that 'you might humiliate' (*tapeinōsate*) them. In 2 Sam. 13.12, 14, 22, 32 David's daughter Tamar pleads with Amnon not to humiliate her, but he overpowers her and lies with her, and his death was considered to be a punishment for this act. Deut. 21.14 is an additional, instructive form of legislation. When Israel goes forth to war, and an Israelite captures a beautiful woman and desires her and takes her for a wife,

Then, if you have no delight in her, you shall send her out free, and you shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her with contempt, since you have humiliated (*etapeinōsas*) her.

An Israelite is given the right to humiliate a foreign woman whom he has taken captive, but certain regulations govern his activity, including

the recognition that he has humiliated her. Lam. 5.11 offers a cry of anguish over the 'dishonorable' tradition of humiliated women:

They humiliated (*etapeinōsan*) women in Zion,
Virgins (*parthenous*) in the cities of Judah.

In Ezek. 22.10-11 the prophet indicts the princes of Israel themselves:

In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they humiliate (*etapeinoun*) women who are unclean in their menstruation. One deals unlawfully with his neighbor's wife; another has defiled his daughter-in-law in ungodliness; and another in you has humiliated (*etapeinoun*) his sister, the daughter of his father.

The humiliation to which Mary refers in Lk. 1.48a refers to this 'dishonorable' tradition. In Jane Schaberg's words: 'The virgin betrothed to a man (Lk. 1.27) was sexually humiliated. But her humiliation was "looked upon" and reversed by God' (Schaberg 1987: 100; Schaberg 1992: 284-85). This information suggests the importance of including Deut. 22.24; Gen. 34.2; Judg. 19.24, 20.5; 2 Kgs 13.12-32 and Lam. 5.11 as inner canonical intertexts for interpretation of Lk. 1.26-56. Yet these texts are never mentioned by Raymond Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer, to mention two interpreters who have worked in detail with the intertexture of the Lukan account.

If the inner canon included all the information in the Bible about virgins who were overpowered by males, then new data would emerge from the near canon of the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha and other Mediterranean literature. The beginning point for the strategy that keeps this information out is the suppression of a dimension of the 'inner texture' of the Lukan account itself. Namely, the virgin Mary refers to 'her' humiliation in Lk. 1.48a, not Elizabeth's. Mary's 'low estate', as it is often translated, results from conception outside of marriage, not absence of conception within marriage. Mary's rationale for praising God is that God has shown special regard for the pregnancy that was forced upon her. Unfortunately, there is no space to develop this further here; it is necessary to summarize and move on to social and cultural texture.

Socio-rhetorical criticism calls for a detailed assessment of the manner in which inner canonical boundaries have been established for interpretation in relation to the inner texture of a unit itself. In the instance of the Magnificat, New Testament interpreters have suppressed the intertexture of Mary's speech with virgins overpowered by men or male gods by

changing the reference of her speech to barrenness instead of pregnancy outside of marriage. Once an 'inner canon' for interpretation has excluded all discussion of overpowered virgins in the Bible, it can easily push back any comparison with accounts of virgins in extracanonical Jewish texts and other Mediterranean literature.

Social and Cultural Texture: Every Meaning Has a Context

The social and cultural texture of a text raises questions about the response to the world, the social and cultural systems and institutions, and the cultural alliances and conflicts evoked by the text (Fowler 1986: 85-101). These social and cultural phenomena are primary topics in rhetorical theory (Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica* 1.2.21-22; 2.22.1-23.30; 3.15.1-4; Kennedy 1991: 46-47, 186-204, 265-68). Particular social data regularly are 'material' topics in discourse, specific 'subject matter'. Social and cultural systems and institutions are common topics, those that span all subject matter in society and culture. Cultural alliances and conflicts are 'final' topics, those that function specially to make one's own case to other people. These topics functioning together evoke the social and cultural nature of a particular discourse (Robbins 1993b; Wuellner 1991; Elliott 1993: 36-51).

Bryan Wilson's analysis of types of religious sects can assist an interpreter initially in ascertaining the social response to the world in the discourse of a particular New Testament text. James A. Wilde introduced Wilson's sociological typology of sects into New Testament study in his dissertation and an article (Wilde 1974, 1978), and in 1981 John H. Elliott incorporated Wilson's insights into the method he called sociological exegesis (Elliott 1981: 75-77, 96, 102-106, 122; cf. Elliott forthcoming). Later, Philip Esler used them for an initial test of Lukan discourse, and his lead can be helpful in our analysis. Since this essay is designed to introduce the reader to socio-rhetorical criticism, it seems good to describe all seven of Wilson's types briefly, each of which, from our perspective, is evoked by specific topics that occupy the discourse.

1. The *conversionist* response views the world as corrupt because all people are corrupt: if people can be changed then the world will be changed.
2. The *revolutionist* response assumes that only the destruction of the world, of the natural but more specifically of the social order, will suffice to save people.

3. The *introversionist* response sees the world as irredeemably evil and presupposes that salvation can be attained only by the fullest possible withdrawal from it.
4. The *gnostic (manipulationist)* response seeks only a transformed set of relationships—a transformed method of coping with evil—since salvation is possible in the world if people learn the right means, improved techniques, to deal with their problems.
5. The *thaumaturgical* response focuses on the concern of individual people for relief from present and specific ills by special dispensations.
6. The *reformist* response assumes that people may create an environment of salvation in the world by using supernaturally-given insights to change the present social organization into a system that functions toward good ends.
7. The *utopian* response presupposes that people must take an active and constructive role in replacing the entire present social system with a new social organization in which evil is absent (Wilson 1969; Wilson 1973: 22-26).

Most historical manifestations of religious communities exhibit a tensive relation among two, three or four of these responses to the world. A strong focus on only one regularly signals the manifestation of a cult—a group organized around a new idea or an imported alien religion—rather than a sect (Stark 1986). Esler concludes that the thaumaturgical, conversionist and revolutionist types of response are relevant for Luke-Acts (Esler 1987: 59). Let us test his conclusion in the context of analysis of Lk. 1.26-56.

First, the miraculous intervention of God upon both Elizabeth and Mary signals thaumaturgic rhetoric. This essay will explore a few of the details below, but perhaps it is sufficient at this point to cite the statement of the angel: 'For with God no word will be impossible' (1.37). Secondly, the change of Mary from being 'greatly troubled' (1.29) to her agreement to 'let it be to me according to your word' (1.38) exhibits conversionist rhetoric. Mary changes from a young woman who does not believe she can conceive a son apart from a man to a young woman who accepts the promise of the angel, and this seems to introduce a model for people's response to God's miraculous intervention in the affairs of the world. Other stories, like Zaccheus' change of heart, distribution of half of his wealth to the poor and fourfold restoration of all he

has defrauded (Lk. 19.1-10), exhibit fully this kind of rhetoric in Luke and Acts. The view is that changes of heart produce salvation. Thirdly, 'reversal rhetoric' is prominent in Mary's speech (York 1991). In the past, God 'has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those who have been humiliated; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away' (Lk. 1.52-53). God is overturning, and promises further to overturn, the world, and specifically the social order. Esler considers this to be revolutionist rhetoric, but we will need to return to this below. The 'reversal' rhetoric may be utopian or reformist rather than revolutionist in the context of Lukan thaumaturgical and conversionist rhetoric that brings salvation to people in the world (1.69, 71, 77).

Let us deepen this initial perception of the social response to the work in the text with analysis of common social and cultural topics in the text—kinship, honor and shame, limited good, purity codes, patron-client relations and hospitality codes—what David B. Gowler calls 'cultural scripts'. These common topics have been the special domain of New Testament social scientific critics for more than a decade (Malina 1981; Elliott 1986; Elliott 1993; Neyrey 1991) and they can help us to make the analysis more precise.

The concern about 'humiliation' (*tapeinōsis*) in Lk. 1.26-56 especially concerns kinship, honor and shame. The narrative leaves the ascribed family status of Mary unstated, in contrast to that of Elizabeth, who was 'of the daughters of Aaron' (Lk. 1.5). Mary's honor is embedded in her betrothal to a man 'of the house of David' (Lk. 1.27). Her humiliation derives from pregnancy before marriage has occurred (Lk. 1.34, 48a). But God has removed this humiliation by communicating honor through the angel Gabriel beforehand and through the responses of the honored Elizabeth to her pregnancy. When the angel Gabriel comes to Mary in her private chambers, however, the speech on the lips of the angel attributes fear to Mary. Malina and Rohrbaugh, gendering both God and Gabriel as male in their reading of this text, evoke a social situation in which a man encounters a young woman and threatens her virginity. In their view, the male angel has persuaded her to consent to be overpowered by the Holy Spirit, the Most High. They comment as follows (1992: 289):

Notice how readily Mary gives in when 'cornered' by the angel. While obviously no lust is involved in this case, the scenario still points to traditional Mediterranean urgency to keep women duly encompassed. And Mary's answer in this difficult situation is: 'Let it be with me according to your word' (v. 38). What this means in typical Mediterranean fashion is: 'As you like!'

Serious questions are being raised in current interpretation about this kind of male gendering of biblical texts (Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes 1993). Both traditional and nontraditional readers have implicitly, if not explicitly, gendered God as male in relation to Mary. Malina and Rohrbaugh's reading is highly similar to Schaberg's reading in gendering Gabriel as well as God as male. This is, without a doubt, one of the most explosive issues of our time. The gendering of both God and Gabriel as male takes us to the heart of ideology. Would it be possible for us to read this text in such a manner that neither God nor Gabriel are gendered as male in relation to Mary? The work of Brenner, van Dijk-Hemmes and Troost promises to give us such a reading in the near future. Let us look more closely at the text itself to see the nature of the social and cultural topics in it.

When the angel Gabriel first told Mary this visit meant that she was being favored by God with conception and birth of a special son, she protested that she had no man (1.34). Here, then, the text explicitly evokes the traditional perception that a woman becomes pregnant only as the result of the presence of a man. When the angel draws an analogy between the honorable conception of her barren kinswoman Elizabeth and her own impending conception, Mary believes the angel's word of promise to her (1.36-38). We lack comparison of the argumentation the angel uses to persuade Mary with argumentation by gods who visit virgins in Mediterranean antiquity. But we should not be surprised to find similar strategies of persuasion. The angel has confronted Mary with powerful words and she has been persuaded by them. The 'central' concern for a woman in this situation in Mediterranean antiquity is honor, and the powers have provided for her honor. This appears to be the primary reason for her praise of God: God has shown regard for the humiliation of this maidservant; from now on, all generations will call her blessed—instead of a dishonorable woman (1.48).

The result of this analysis suggests an inner relation between thaumaturgy and conversion: Mary will encounter a miracle just like Elizabeth has experienced a miracle; acceptance of this miracle requires a deep change of heart on behalf of Mary. Mary's first response to Gabriel was

that she had no man, therefore she could not imagine how she could have a son (1.34). The answer of the angel persuades her to change her mind and accept the possibility (1.35-37), and Elizabeth's statements affirm her new point of view (1.42-45). Thus, argumentation that features honor and kinship confirms and deepens our understanding of the centrality of thaumaturgy and conversion in the discourse. But what about the reversal of the powerful and the lowly in Mary's Magnificat? Let us turn to cultural alliances and conflicts to deepen our understanding of this discourse.

A beginning framework for investigating cultural interaction in a text emerges in the distinction sociologists of culture make between dominant culture, subculture, contraculture, counterculture and liminal culture. On the one hand, a cultural system has its own set of premises and rationales (Peacock 1986: 35). On the other hand, every cultural system is comprised of multiple 'local cultures' (Geertz 1983). Local cultures interact with other local cultures, either by dominating or embedding themselves in another culture. Each culture develops its own premises and rationales within this context of domination and/or embedding.

The rhetorics of dominant culture, subculture, counterculture, contraculture and liminal culture are a factor in producing these cultures, and in turn these cultures generate these kinds of rhetoric. The relation of rhetoric to culture and culture to rhetoric, then, is reciprocal. What kind of culture rhetoric is at work in Lk. 1.26-56? To pursue this issue it is necessary to have definitions of these types of culture rhetoric (Robbins 1993b).

(a) *Dominant culture rhetoric* adopts a point of view according to which its own system of attitudes, values, dispositions and norms are supported by social structures vested with power to impose its goals on people in a significantly broad territorial region.

(b) *Subculture rhetoric* imitates the attitudes, values, dispositions and norms of dominant culture rhetoric, and it claims to enact them better than members of dominant status.

Ethnic subculture rhetoric is a particular kind of subculture rhetoric. It has origins in a language different from the languages in the dominant culture, and it attempts to preserve and perpetuate an 'old system' in a dominant cultural system in which it now exists, either because a significant number of people from this ethnic culture have moved into a new cultural environment or because a new cultural system is now imposing itself on it (Roberts 1978; Gordon 1970).

(c) *Counterculture rhetoric* is a 'heretical' intra-cultural phenomenon that articulates a *constructive* image of a better way of life in a context of 'rejection of *explicit* and *mutable* characteristics' of the dominant or subculture rhetoric to which it is responding (Roberts 1978: 114). It is not simply a reaction formation to another form of culture, but it builds on a supporting ideology that provides a relatively self-sufficient system of action (Roberts 1978: 121; Roberts 1976; Yinger 1982).

(d) *Contraculture rhetoric* is 'groupculture' rhetoric that is deeply embedded in another form of culture to which it is a reaction formation. It asserts 'more negative than positive ideas' (Roberts 1978: 124, citing Bouvard 1975: 119) in a context where its positive ideas are simply pre-supposed and come from the culture to which it is reacting. It often is possible to predict the behavior and values evoked by contraculture rhetoric if one knows the values evoked by the culture to which it is reacting, since the values are simply inverted (Roberts 1978: 123-24; Yinger 1960: 629; Stark 1967: 141, 153; Ellens 1971).

(e) *Liminal culture rhetoric* is 'disjunctive and multiaccental' speech that evokes a cultural space 'outside the sentence'. It uses cacophonous, syncopated sounds and articulations in 'heterogeneous and messy array' to evoke a possibility of 'enunciation' and 'identity'. It is a liberating strategy 'articulated at the liminal edge of identity' to create the possibility for an emergent cultural identity (Bhaba 1992: 443-45).

If we analyze the text that features Mary and Elizabeth from the perspective of culture rhetoric, we begin to test the dynamics of revolutionist rhetoric in relation to reformist and utopian rhetoric. The angel Gabriel represents the power of God, and the speech of the angel represents a form of dominant culture rhetoric. After Mary accepts Gabriel's promise to her she speaks about the nature of God's power in terms of making the mighty low and the low mighty. Is Mary simply amplifying the dominant culture rhetoric Gabriel has introduced to her, or is this a different kind of culture rhetoric? Let us remain in touch with the topics that concern the social response to the world in the discourse as we pursue this issue. Does Mary's discourse introduce a revolutionist vision in which God's power 'destroys' the present evil world, a utopian vision in which God's power 'replaces' the present social structures and powerful people with a new kind of structure and role for leaders, or a reformist vision in which God's power 'changes' something within the present system to make it function benevolently?

The answer to this question must come from the overall rhetoric of

Luke and Acts. For this reason, it is important to embed Lk. 1:26-56 in the discourse of both volumes. In a recent study of the social location of the implied author of this two volume work, I drew the conclusion that

the thought of the implied author is located in the midst of the activities of adult Jews and Romans who have certain kinds of power in cities and villages throughout the Mediterranean world from Rome to Jerusalem... The arena of socialization reveals an upwardlooking use of technology toward Roman officials with political power. Jewish officials, however, are considered equal in social status and rank... Thus, the thought of the implied author is located socially in a place where it seems advantageous, and perhaps necessary, to tell 'these foreign affairs' to people slightly higher in social rank who read Greek and appreciate a people who strive to be devout, righteous, and lettered... Accepting a position of subordination, Christians speak with politeness and care upwards to those who dominate the system. Yet, bolstered by God's sanctioning of their diversity and by their ideology of 'at homeness' in the Roman empire, they not only tell their story to those above but engage in vigorous and continued confrontation with those from whom they claim their Jewish heritage and those with whom they enjoy the benefits of Greco-Roman culture (Robbins 1991a: 331-32).

The exchanges among the angel Gabriel, Mary and Elizabeth exhibit a subset of these dynamics. The angel Gabriel represents the power and will of God in much the same way that King Agrippa represents the power and will of the emperor (Acts 25.13-26.32), thus they both use dominant culture rhetoric. When the angel Gabriel speaks to Mary, he uses command and 'name dropping' characteristic of representatives of hierarchical structures. He is fully authorized by dominant power and he fills his discourse with the authorities that stand behind him as he works.

Since both Gabriel who represents God and King Agrippa who represents the emperor use dominant culture rhetoric, there is an inner tension in the discourse of Luke-Acts. Do two dominant cultures stand in unmitigated opposition in Luke-Acts, or does the dominant rhetoric of one of the cultures accept a subordinate position in relation to the other? It seems clear from the relation of the discourse in the prefaces to the discourse in the speeches of Paul in Acts that representatives of Christianity accept a subordinate role to the emperor and his representatives (Robbins 1979). The discourse in Luke-Acts adopts a position according to which people like Theophilus and King Agrippa are likely to view the story of Christianity as a matter of 'foreign affairs', but it challenges such a view by embedding the affairs of Christianity within

the affairs of the emperor and his representatives. When a decree of the emperor creates a movement of people whereby Jesus of Nazareth is born in the city of David (Lk. 2.1-5), the stage is set for a cooperative relation between the power of the emperor and the power of God throughout the story. As the story progresses, events among early followers of Jesus work symbiotically with power structures within the Roman empire to create a story in which power that travels from Rome to Jerusalem creates the environment for Christianity to travel from Jerusalem to Rome (Robbins 1991b: 218-21). In this context, representatives of Christianity adopt subcultural rhetoric as they converse with representatives of the emperor.

The dominant culture rhetoric Gabriel uses with Mary, then, stands in an ethnic subcultural relation to the dominant culture rhetoric King Agrippa uses with Paul. After Mary's encounter, she takes the initiative to go alone to the honored, no longer barren, woman Elizabeth, much like Paul goes to synagogues in cities in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. When Mary speaks in the presence of Elizabeth, she speaks a high form of Jewish rhetoric, a form containing the poetic qualities of royal Davidic and classical prophetic speech. At the highpoint of Mary's speech, however, she speaks a rhetoric of reversal: those who are powerful will be made low, and those who live in humiliation will be exalted (Lk. 1.52). In other words, while speaking the highest level of this ethnic subculture rhetoric, Mary introduces a contracultural phenomenon in her rhetoric—a phenomenon that 'inverts' some aspect of another cultural system. Whose culture is Mary's speech inverting, and what is she inverting in that culture? Is Mary's rhetoric counter-cultural rather than contracultural? In other words, are the inversions part of an overall positive vision, or does her speech emphasize more negative than positive things?

The strategy of the narrative is to present a form of dominant Jewish culture rhetoric primarily on the lips of Pharisees (Moxnes 1988; Gowler 1989; Gowler 1991; Gowler 1993). In these contexts, Lukan discourse regularly presents itself as Jewish contraculture rhetoric. This rhetoric claims to represent Jewish tradition authentically by inverting certain behaviors in dominant Jewish culture. From the perspective of dominant Jewish culture rhetoric as Lukan discourse presents it, Christian discourse is a 'dishonorable' tradition. But Lukan discourse also presents sources of power within Jewish tradition investing this 'dishonorable' tradition with honor. In other words, Lukan discourse claims that

Christianity does not reject the central values of Jewish tradition; it simply inverts objectional dominant Jewish culture thought and behavior. The Gospel of Luke, then, embeds Mary's rhetoric in a narrative context that inverts hierarchies within its own presentation of dominant Jewish culture rhetoric, and Mary herself embodies an inversion of 'dishonored' and 'honored' traditions in dominant Jewish tradition. She asserts that God authorizes the honoring of her dishonor, and in other parts of the narrative God authorizes the honor of Jesus, Stephen and Paul, who also represent 'dishonorable' traditions within dominant Jewish culture rhetoric as Lukan discourse presents it.

But now let us pursue the relation of Mary's rhetoric to Roman culture. When the angel speaks to Mary, the language is Greek and Mary responds in Greek. Even the greeting of the angel is Greek, *chaire* (1.28), rather than Hebrew, *shalôm*. Mary's rhetoric, then, uses the *lingua franca* of the dominant culture and is emboldened by it. Moreover, when Mary praises God, she uses high level Jewish hymnic verse that incorporates a form of reasoning and confirmation of its reasoning that reaches upward toward a subcultural form of Hellenistic-Roman argumentation. Mary's rhetoric reaches up in social status, like the narratorial voice reaches up toward Theophilus in the preface (Lk. 1.1-4; Robbins 1979; 1991a: 321-23). The hierarchical structure of the social order seems not to be in contention, but only the benevolence of those who hold positions of power in that structure. This rhetoric, then, seems not to reject 'explicit and mutable characteristics' of Roman culture, which claims peace, salvation and benevolence as central values. Rather, Mary's rhetoric has a subcultural relation to Roman culture—her discourse claims that God fulfils central values of Roman culture better than the kingdom of the emperor does. In the end, the discourse of Luke and Acts perpetuates a contracultural Jewish rhetoric as an ethnic subcultural form of Roman culture. How close is Mary's speech to dishonored virgins who bore the heroes, gods and goddesses of Mediterranean culture? Only future investigation, analysis and interpretation can tell us. New Testament interpreters have not yet confronted the issue and explored it.

Returning to the social response in the discourse, then, the issue is whether the discourse perceives evil to be present in the people or in the structures that run society. Mary's rhetoric evokes an image of changing the people in power: God will remove those who now have power and put the lowly in those positions. Mary does not assert that the structures

of power themselves should be changed but only the people who have the power. Nor does Mary claim that God will destroy the people who have the power—God will depose and scatter them. This means that her discourse probably is not appropriately described as revolutionist, which would imply destruction of both the structures of the social order and the powerful people who run it. Nor does the discourse appear to be utopian, where an entirely new social system will replace the present one. Rather, Mary's discourse is reformist, with an emphasis on changing the people in power. When Lukan discourse embeds this reformist vision in thaumaturgical, conversionist discourse, the vision is significant reform indeed. As God's thaumaturgic powers raise the lowly to positions of power, the vision is that God's conversionist powers change the hearts of the honored ones to goals of benevolence and mercy. The changes in the social order, then, will occur as leaders use power structures to 'show mercy' and to 'fill the hungry with good things'. Mary's discourse, then, shows no desire that hierarchical power structures be taken away. She simply has her own view of how those who hold the positions of power should embody the thaumaturgical and conversionist powers of God.

Ideological Texture: Every Theology Has a Politics

Exploration of the ideological texture of a text focuses on self-interests. What and whose self-interests are being negotiated in this text? If the dominant voices in the text persuade people to act according to their premises, who will gain and who will lose? What will be gained and what will be lost (Elliott 1993: 119-21; Eagleton 1991; McGowan 1991)?

These questions move into the realm of ideology, point of view and theology. And here the motto is that every theology has a politics. Ideology is 'an integrated system of beliefs, assumptions and values, not necessarily true or false, which reflects the needs and interests of a group or class at a particular time in history' (Davis 1975: 14). This integrated system proceeds from the need to understand, to interpret to self and others, to justify, and to control one's place in the world. Ideologies are shaped by specific views of reality shared by groups—specific perspectives on the world, society and people, and on the limitations and potentialities of human existence. Inasmuch as all religious groupings and movements have specific collective needs, interests and objectives that they seek to relate to ultimate sacred norms and

principles—in Christianity, to the will and action of God as revealed in Jesus Christ—all religious movements, including early Christianity, develop ideological positions and perspectives (Elliott 1981: 268; Elliott 1993: 51-53; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985; Schüssler Fiorenza 1992).

Who, we must ask, is benefitting by having Mary speak as she does in the Magnificat? Who is benefitting by having Mary speak out about raising the lowly up to power and driving the powerful away empty-handed? Whose ideology is being advanced, for whose benefit, by Mary's dialogue with the angel and Elizabeth and by the argumentation in the Magnificat? Let us approach the issue from three angles: (a) the voices of the narrator and the angel, (b) the dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth and (c) the monologue by Mary to God.

The narratorial voice throughout Luke and Acts presents a case for Christianity as a healing, peace-loving group of people who encounter conflict when Jewish leaders attempt to run them out, imprison or kill them. This narratorial voice presents a case for certain Christian leaders throughout the Mediterranean world from Ethiopia throughout Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece and Rome. The rhetoric of Luke and Acts offers a certain group of Christian leaders the benefit of a bi-cultural founder and leader. Simultaneously, Jesus functions both as a messiah, who launches high level contraculture rhetoric against established Jewish leaders, and as a Hellenistic-Roman benefactor-savior who engages in high artisan, low elite subculture rhetoric that challenges all leaders. Social identity is at stake for Christians. From a social perspective, Christians look to an outsider like subversive troublemakers. The narratorial voice, with the voices of characters embedded in it, argues the case that all the troubles Christians have arise with Jewish leaders who are proud, greedy and lovers of money. Jesus and his followers, in contrast, enact humility and benevolence.

Social and political benefits are at stake in Luke and Acts, and wherever its narratorial rhetoric is successful Christians will attain positive social identity and will receive accompanying political benefits. Material benefits also are at stake. Of key importance are the resources in cities throughout the Mediterranean world, the location of storing and distributing of grain supplies and the like (Robbins 1991a). If Christians can be Roman citizens, as the converted Pharisee Paul is, then Christians have the right to receive a portion of the grain dole and other services of the cities. Individual benefits also are at stake. Christian leaders, both

individually and in pairs, receive the right to travel freely throughout the empire, entering regions, villages and cities at will.

This is the overall context in which the voice of the narrator and the voice of the angel function in Luke 1. According to the narratorial voice, the God of the Jews, whom the angel calls 'Most High' and 'Lord God', initiates Mary's pregnancy through the agency of the power of God and the 'Holy Spirit' (1.32, 35). When it is made clear to Mary that this pregnancy outside of marriage will bring her honor through her prestigious son, she accepts the action in the obedient mode of a client responding to a powerful patron. Mary cannot refuse God's offer; she accepts the role of an obedient servant/client and expresses gratitude that she will be held in honor by all people. The rhetorical effect is to claim that Christians are specially favored with the benefits of the patron God of the Jews. This God works contraculturally within Jewish tradition, at times creating human situations that are traditionally dishonorable in order to bring honor to certain dishonored people. God's activity presupposes and advances hierarchical structures within a patriarchal ideology, yet it inverts certain dishonored conditions within the context of those structures. In Luke 1, God advances the ideology of patrilineal honor in the form of prestigious sons who have political power (1.32-33) and holy status (1.35). But God also offers an inversion of weak and powerful, hungry and well-fed (1.51-53). Patrilineal hierarchy remains in place, but there is reform within it.

This ideology among first-century Christians proved to be highly successful. On the one hand, this kind of rhetoric presents a willingness to accept the patronage system within Hellenistic-Roman culture and work within it. Luke and Acts, therefore, share much of the ideology of a document like Plutarch's *Alexander*, which challenges patrons to be generous. Yet, Luke and Acts are reformist within that system. They activate reformist practices by means of contraculture rhetoric against Jewish leaders. In other words, through aggressive criticism of Jewish leaders, Lukan discourse calls for reform within the established political system of patronage and the centralized economic system of distribution (Rohrbaugh 1984; Rohrbaugh 1987; Rohrbaugh 1991; Moxnes 1988; Esler 1987; Braun 1993). This Christian discourse, then, calls for selected reform at the expense of established Jewish leaders. The people who will benefit present themselves as leaders of an ethnic subculture that fulfills the highest claims of dominant Roman government, namely salvation (*sōtēria*) and peace.

The dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth features the mothers of the founders of the Christian movement supporting one another in a manner that overturns the usual competition that accompanies the births of specially endowed sons who are potential rivals over power and leadership. The 'honorable' tradition of barren women characteristically contains rivalry between kinswomen. The dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth engages this rivalry and reconfigures it. When Elizabeth became pregnant, she said the Lord had looked upon her to take away her reproach 'among men' (Lk. 1.25). She tells Mary, in contrast, that she, Mary, is blessed 'among women' (Lk. 1.42). Mary rephrases Elizabeth's statement to claim: 'all generations will call me blessed' (Lk. 1.48b).

The exchange between Mary and Elizabeth reverberates with Israelite traditions of rivalry among women in a context where they are trying to win the special place of favor from their husbands. Leah speaks of 'being called blessed' in a context of desperation after she has been unsuccessful in getting her husband Jacob to love her. Leah had hoped that her bearing of Reuben for Jacob would cause him to love her (Gen. 29.32). But this did not happen. Leah's rivalry with Rachel over Jacob's love continued as Rachel gave her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob and she had two sons, Dan and Naphtali (Gen. 20.3-8). Leah in turn gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, and she bore Jacob two sons, Gad and Asher (Gen. 30.9-13). The name Asher means 'happy, blessed'. Leah called him Asher, because, as she said, 'the women will call me *asher*' (in Greek, *makaria*, Gen. 30.13). With this statement Leah gave up on removing the reproach from 'her man'. Instead, she looked to women, who would look at her and 'call her *makaria* happy, blessed'. Mary's rationale for her joy in the Magnificat captures the dynamics of this tradition and reconfigures them. When she asserts that 'all generations will call me blessed' (Lk. 1.48b), she is embodying the rivalries of the past and the hopes for the future. If men and women can honor each other as God takes away their reproach and manifests powers of mercy and benevolence, then both the people and the social order may receive God's promises from the past.

What does this mean for interpretation in this paper? It means, on the one hand, that Mary's assertion holds the potential for evoking a sense of rivalry between herself and Elizabeth. Rivalry between 'knowing only the baptism of John' and 'knowing the way of God' as taught by Jesus is well-known in the Lukan narrative (Acts 18.24-26), and readers could

expect rivalry between the mothers of John and Jesus. The narrator implies, on the other hand, that there is no rivalry; in the context of the narration, Mary appears to be trying to overcome a division between receiving honor among men and among women. The narrator may also be trying to overcome this division by featuring Simeon's blessing of both Mary and Joseph (Lk. 2.34) followed by Anna's thanks to God and interpretation of the redemption Jesus brings to Jerusalem (Lk. 2.38).

The overall rhetoric of the interchange between Mary and Elizabeth, then, suggests an attempt to remove rivalry between the mothers of the specially honored sons who stand at the beginning of the story of Christianity. In contrast to the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah, Hannah and Penninah, Mary takes her body to Elizabeth, and together they celebrate and honor their pregnant bodies. The rhetoric of Lukan discourse is to claim that Christians perpetuate a culture of the body, impregnated by the Holy Spirit, that overcomes rivalry, division and hatred. Christians confront other people with their bodies for the purpose of overcoming hatred, healing illness, enacting forgiveness and calling for generosity without expectation of return.

Mary's monologue to God in the presence of Elizabeth offers additional social and individual benefits to Christian women. When Elizabeth says that 'all women' will call Mary blessed and Mary asserts that she herself will be called blessed by 'all generations', there is a special claim of honor for women both among Christian men and among Christian women. This is ambiguous honor, to be sure, since the primary base of it is honor from men. Mary's hymnlike speech emulates the tongue of David, which, of course, befits a woman betrothed to a man 'of the House of David'. Her body is forced to perpetuate dominant Jewish tradition in a dishonorable manner that is declared honorable by a God who maintains patrilineal tradition. Mary upholds the male line of tradition, and through her appropriate consent and expression of gratitude she receives honor. In other words, Mary receives honor in the great tradition in which men protect the reputation of 'their women'.

But does Mary's voice say something more? Does anyone hear, or notice, her initial cry that she will become pregnant without a man? She has no real choice in the matter. From the perspective of patriarchal tradition, this is God's doing and Mary is fortunate, blessed, the mother of the messiah. What about Mary's perspective? She says she has been afflicted, dishonored. Why? Not because she is barren and wants a child, but because she is with child outside a marriage contract. If someone,

benevolent or otherwise, decides she is to have a son, is that to be her station in life?

We need an ethnography of virgins in Mediterranean culture in order to explore the further nuances of Mary's speech to God. So far we do not have a comprehensive study of virgins in Mediterranean society and their speech to gods. What would the implications be for a virgin to speak like Mary speaks? Through the help of Mieke Bal, we are coming closer to an understanding of virgins in Israelite tradition (1988b: 41-93). In her study, Bal distinguishes between *na'arah* (young girl), *'almah* (mostly already married woman before her first pregnancy), and *bethulah* (a woman confronted with the passage from young girl to almost married woman). What does it mean for a woman who is going through this transitional phase of insecurity and danger in a patriarchal society to speak of being humiliated, of having God show regard for her humiliation, and of having a conviction that from now on all generations will call her blessed? New Testament interpreters have yet to gather the data and programmatically address this issue.

Male interpreters regularly celebrate Mary's speech as liberating for her and for all who are poor in social, political or economic status. Victor Turner, however, shows that rituals of announcement and enactment of reversal by those of lower status support and reaffirm the hierarchical system that is in place. People of higher status, if they are wise, permit, indeed encourage, those of lower status to speak out and enact their frustrations in a context of reversal. The key is to establish boundaries, either spatially or temporally, for these announcements and enactments. In other words, those in power establish a clear definition of these people as a subculture or counterculture with an important but limited function in society *or* they designate a period of time during the year when the lower classes celebrate a reversal whereby they experience power and humiliate those of higher status.

The enactment of reversal, either within a subculture or within a designated time period, strengthens the ideology of hierarchy, the necessity of having powerful people over weak people. The weak have their momentary experience of being powerful or they have their limited social domain in which to perform their powerful acts. Either strategy allows and encourages the weak to turn their energy toward the work of service, and perhaps reconciliation, which is welcomed by the established hierarchy.

Conclusion

Socio-rhetorical criticism suggests that we need to look carefully outside many of the boundaries within which we customarily interpret the Magnificat. I am aware that I, like others, speak from within a bounded context. My approach to this text is socially located, as is anyone else's approach. I consider it important, however, to establish clear boundaries for the purpose of programmatic analysis. But then I consider it essential to subject those boundaries to analysis and criticism and to look through and beyond those boundaries for additional insight, even if those insights explode and reconfigure insights I had within that other context of analysis and interpretation. This, for me, is the nature of language, whether it is oral or written. Since different sets of boundaries establish different contexts for meanings, language signifies complexly interwoven textures of signification that appear only when analysis explores language from the perspective of multiple contexts. Socio-rhetorical criticism invites the interpreter to establish more than one set of boundaries for interpretation because multiple interpretations will bring into sight, sound and feeling aspects of oral and written discourse that otherwise will remain hidden.

Mikhail Bakhtin observed that speech is a social possession, and for this reason much, in fact most, of our speech comes from other people. He speaks, then, of many voices in our speech, *heteroglossia*. Exploration of Lk. 1.26-56 from the perspective of multiple contexts reveals that 'each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read' (Kristeva 1986: 37). 'Intertextuality' is the current term for this observation that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 1986: 37; Kristeva 1974; Bakhtin 1981; Draisma 1989; Robbins 1992c). Intertextuality is not, therefore, limited to explicit presentation of other texts as second or third level narration (as Acts 2.26). Speaking, writing and reading are social acts. This means that social meanings surround the words at all times. A speaker, writer and reader play with boundaries they themselves establish and transgress for their own purposes. The interplay between boundaries and transgressions of boundaries, then, is the very nature of communication. If one person tries to keep someone's voice out, another is likely to let it in.

When Mary refers to her 'humiliation', she uses a word that can

connote a wide range of meanings, and the question is what range of meanings any reader entertains for the signs in the text. At this point, the text is extremely vulnerable; an interpreter must remember that every sign should be viewed 'as an active component of speech, or text, or sign, modified and transformed in meaning by variable social tones, valuations, and connotations it condenses within itself in specific social conditions' (Wuellner 1989: 43). Since the community that uses language is a heterogeneous society, Mary's 'humiliation' is 'a focus of struggle and contradiction. It is not simply a matter of asking "what [this] sign means"...but of investigating its varied history', since 'conflicting groups, classes, individuals, and discourses' contend with each other for its meaning (Wuellner 1989: 43).

John York (1991) has analyzed the manner in which Jesus picks up and embellishes the language of reversal Mary introduces in the Magnificat. This means that Mary does not have the last word in Luke. Her male son, Jesus, picks up and reconfigures Mary's language in the beatitudes, parables and sayings. When, in Lk. 11.27-28, a woman in the crowd tries to restore the importance of Mary by saying to Jesus, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!', Jesus replies, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!' Mary does not have the last word with the language she uses in the Magnificat. In Lukan discourse, her male son takes over her language and determines much of her future by his use of it. Who is the narrator who speaks in this way, and what is the narratorial voice trying to achieve by this refiguring of Mary's language in the narrative? The reader is asked to believe that Mary speaks in the Gospel of Luke, but does she? She tries to speak, and it may be possible to recover a voice that has been trying desperately to speak but cannot because it is continually drowned out by men's voices, my own included. In Lukan discourse, Mary seeks solace from another woman, going to Elizabeth who is an honored, no longer barren, woman. In this context, she finally directs her speech to God. As she argues her case, she expresses her gratitude to God for declaring her pregnancy outside of marriage to be honorable and continues with an embellishment that appeals to the God who reforms traditions of patronage so that particular forms of dishonor are removed within them. In this manner, Mary becomes the mother of a Christian discourse that envisions the possibility of winning its way in the Roman Empire through aggressive speech against established Jewish leaders that contains implications for reform within actual practices of

patrons, patronesses, leaders and members of all ranks within Christianity—be they Jewish, Roman, Phrygian or Lycaonian.

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