

appropriate adaptation of inquiry to the situational constraints, to the dialectic conflict and interaction of values, attitudes, beliefs, and purposes that interplay at specific times for specific audiences.<sup>62</sup> Heuristics function more effectively with those minds that are well informed. Speech communication as a discipline ought to continue to view itself in the liberal arts tradition. A widely informed liberally educated student with a facility for rhetorical invention is the paradigm for the flexible problem solver needed throughout society.

#### SUMMARY

Uniting wisdom and eloquence has

<sup>62</sup> David Fractenberg, "Invention and the Prospect of a Dialectical Rhetoric," paper presented at the 1979 Speech Communication Association Convention, San Antonio.

been a concern throughout the history of rhetorical theory and pedagogy. Classical theory strongly emphasized invention, but the historic dissociation of invention from rhetoric resulted in the decline of the discipline and continues to affect the pedagogy of speech communication. A renewed concern with rhetorical invention emphasizes the primacy of substance in discourse and will enhance both pedagogy and theory by complementing speech communication's concern with eloquence. Rhetorical invention provides the opportunity to link grand theory to the practical concerns of composing, problem solving, and decision making across disciplines. Such a connection offers wide-ranging potential for speech communication to assist other disciplines in the common concern for advancing human understanding.

## BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN STEWART

*Editor*

### RHETORIC AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM

Vernon K. Robbins and John H. Patton

MANY recent developments in biblical criticism relate directly to issues in rhetorical theory and criticism. Biblical critics employ various types of rhetorical analyses for the purpose of explicating the nature and function of metaphor, form, and structure in the creation of meaning. Investigations of genres and patterns by biblical scholars have resulted in fresh understandings of proverb, oracle, psalm, song, parable, narrative, and myth as structures of meaning. Their refinements and elaborations contribute additional evidence for the rhetorical significance of language and provide new dimensions for interpreting the relationship of language to history and meaning. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from Booth, biblical critics are developing an attitude of "methodological pluralism" which reflects "more a way of living with variety than of subduing it."<sup>1</sup> This pluralistic attitude could prove especially useful to rhetorical theorists and critics in their efforts to describe and apply frameworks that

illuminate rhetorical dimensions of language.

This essay explores recent works in biblical criticism in order to (1) disclose ways in which biblical criticism addresses fundamental rhetorical issues, (2) describe the importance of particular contributions to the understanding of rhetorical forms, and (3) trace the implications of biblical criticism for interpreting the nature and structure of meaning. These purposes are pursued in sections dealing with the formative impulses within rhetorical analysis of biblical texts, philosophical refinements in the application of literary methods, and the use of rhetorical analysis in a pluralistic context. The overall purpose is to suggest that biblical critics are active participants in the current quest for methodological refinement, philosophical formulation, and mediation between practice and theory in the investigation of language, speech, text, and meaning.

#### FORMATIVE IMPULSES

James Muilenburg almost single-handedly introduced the phrase "rhetorical criticism" into twentieth century interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in North America and the United Kingdom. His article on Hebrew rhetoric in

*Mr. Robbins is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and the Classics and Director of the Program in Religious Studies, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Mr. Patton is Associate Professor of Speech, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.*

<sup>1</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 3.

1953<sup>2</sup> and his commentary on Second Isaiah in 1956<sup>3</sup> give primary attention to stylistic and rhetorical devices in prophetic literature while exploring the semantic and aesthetic dimensions of these phenomena. In his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968, he sounded a call to interpreters to employ rhetorical criticism as a means to go beyond form criticism to interpret the variety, versatility, and artistry in Hebrew literature. Citing earlier scholarship by Bishop Lowth (1753), Gottfried Herder (1772-1783), Eduard König (1900), and Eduard Sievers (1901-1907); and praising more recent scholarship by Umberto Cassuto, W. F. Albright, Frank M. Cross, D. N. Freedman, and especially Alonzo Schökel, he emphasized the importance of perceiving each literary unit as "an indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation."<sup>4</sup> Observing that "The repeated words or lines do not appear haphazardly or fortuitously, but rather in rhetorically significant collocations," he ended the address with reference to T. S. Eliot's description of a poem as a raid on the inarticulate and suggested that Hebrew literature be understood, if the reader is willing, as "a raid on the ultimate."<sup>5</sup>

The impact of Muilenburg's clarion call became evident in 1974 when a volume of essays entitled *Rhetorical*

*Criticism*<sup>6</sup> appeared in his honor. The volume begins with an essay by Bernhard W. Anderson on "The New Frontier of Rhetorical Criticism,"<sup>7</sup> contains fifteen articles that display the fruitfulness of detailed rhetorical analysis of Hebrew texts, and ends with a bibliography of Muilenburg's essays and reviews.<sup>8</sup> The attention to rhetorical and stylistic devices emerges in the use of such terms as quantitative balance, chiasmus, introversion, inclusion, linear progression, broken symmetry, irony system,<sup>9</sup> strophic divisions, key words,<sup>10</sup> the "better" saying, the numerical saying, the admonition clause, the admonitory address, the "blessing" formula, the rhetorical question, and the simile.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the essays reveal a sensitivity to the details of literary units that enhances the reader's understanding of the rhythm, drama, suspense, and beauty of Hebrew Bible literature.

In New Testament study, the father of rhetorical analysis is unquestionably Amos N. Wilder, Hollis Professor, Emeritus, of Harvard Divinity School. Rhetorical scholars are familiar with his *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* in which he emphasized "not so much . . . what the early Christians said as how they said it"<sup>12</sup> by illuminating specific forms and

<sup>2</sup> Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler, eds., *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 1 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> The essay is subtitled "A Tribute to James Muilenburg."

<sup>4</sup> One of the essays, by Norman K. Gottwald, concerns nomadic origins of the patriarchs and the "nomadic ideal" rather than rhetorical analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac M. Kikawada, "The Shape of Genesis 11:1-9," in Jackson and Kessler, pp. 18-32.

<sup>6</sup> A. David Ritterspach, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Song of Hannah," in *ibid.*, pp. 68-74.

<sup>7</sup> J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel—Their Rhetorical, Thematic, and Formal Dimensions," in *ibid.*, pp. 186-222.

<sup>8</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric:*

genres. His underlying assumption is that the concept of form could not be limited to external style or ornamentation, a virtual echo of the general orientation of I. A. Richards on metaphor and Kenneth Burke on symbol. Instead, Wilder articulated a holistic notion of form traced to the New Testament terms "*(morphē, schēma, eikhōn)*," which "usually refer not to the external appearance but to the total reality of the person or thing in question" (p. 25). On this basis he argued that "in all genuine artifacts, including language-forms, shape and substance are inseparable and mutually determinative" (p. 25). This observation opened the way for awareness of the rhetorical quality of the biblical structures of dialogue, story, parable, and poem. The rhetorical quality of biblical forms entails consideration of patterns of consciousness and culture or "the life-orientation that produced them" (p. 25), as well as attention to "particular social patterns" (p. 26) which govern and constrain the use of forms. From this vantage point form becomes the vital ingredient which discloses, on the one hand, the categories of knowledge and belief, what Alfred Schutz might label the life-world of rhetors and audiences, within which meaning is constituted. On the other hand, form also reveals the historical conditions or exigences that generate and sustain particular practices of dialogue, narration, epistle, and poem.

The most immediate results of Wilder's influence emerged in *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* by Robert W. Funk.<sup>13</sup> This book com-

*The Language of the Gospel* (1964; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 2. This same book was published as *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language*

pares the parable and the letter (epistle), two major forms in early Christian literature, by means of insights from Wilder and the works of such people as Philip Wheelwright, Owen Barfield, and Ian Ramsey. Funk argued that the parables function like metaphors and the letters function like oral conversation. As extended metaphors, parables modify tradition by taking a thing "out of its customary context" and putting it "into an alien (to the everyday mentality) context" (p. 139). Although the "thing" in its new context is unusual, the practice of putting "things" in new contexts is not unusual in language. People regularly use metaphoric speech to communicate dimensions of meaning that are lost when language closes either by means of habit (custom) or by means of prescription (e.g., scientific language). The purpose of metaphoric speech, Funk suggested, is to shatter "the conventions of predication in the interests of a new vision, one which grasps the 'thing' in relation to a new 'field,' and thus in relation to a fresh experience of reality" (p. 139).

In contrast, the letter, as written conversation, "is almost as flexible as oral speech itself" (p. 248, quoting from Wilder, p. 39). It contains "on every page the marks of oral expression: imagined dialogue, accusation and defense, queries, exclamations, oaths, and the challenge 'not so much to understand the written words but to listen and behold'" (p. 248, quoting Wilder, p. 23). The challenge for the analyst is at least twofold: (1) to identify the mode of discourse in which the author is speaking by means of written discourse and (2) to identify the flow of thought, the architecture of the section

in *The New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> James Muilenburg, "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 1 (1953), 97-111.

<sup>3</sup> James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah: Chs. 40-66," *The Interpreter's Bible*, V (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 381-773.

<sup>4</sup> James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 88 (1969), 9. For detailed references to the literature, see pp. 7-8, and Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Muilenburg, "Form," pp. 17 and 18.

within the architecture of the entire letter.

Funk analyzed 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 as an example of identifying the mode of discourse and the structure of the flow of thought. In the passage, Paul talks about his previous speaking to the congregation at Corinth in order to establish contact with their present speaking so that he may communicate more successfully what he now wishes to speak. In this mode, where he talks directly about speech, Paul moves through a structured pattern designed to impose a framework of understanding that will persuade them to accept his position: "Paul begins with the evident (the strife among them), reflects upon his own proclamation to them, then draws near their language home in particularly biting and stringent criticism" (p. 301). By this means the letter, as structured speech, establishes a framework of understanding that may move a listener to a new insight in a manner related to, but structured differently from, the parable as metaphor.<sup>14</sup>

During the year after the appearance of Funk's book, Dan O. Via, Jr., produced a book on *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*.<sup>15</sup> Gathering insights from Wilder, Funk, and Wheelwright, and emphasizing points of view formulated by Eliseo Vivas, Murray Krieger, Northrup Frye, and others, he argued that the parables of Jesus are aesthetic objects in which "the element of the extraordinary does not point directly to God, but being fused into the story—into the aesthetic mingling of the realistic and the surpris-

<sup>14</sup> For the extension of Funk's work on the letter form in the New Testament, see N. A. Dahl, "Letter," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 538-41.

<sup>15</sup> Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

ing—it suggests that everyday existence is crossed by the problematical, contingent, and unpredictable" (p. 106). Via applied his insights to parables with substantial narrative components and observed phenomena such as the recognition scene, irony, and the picaresque mode in an analysis of five parables that contain a tragic plot and three that contain a comic plot (pp. 110-76). Though this work embeds rhetorical-literary analysis in extended theological discourse, its success with a form central to New Testament literature, i.e., the parables of Jesus, challenged interpreters to employ rhetorical-literary analysis to attain a more complete explication of early Christian texts.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL ELABORATION AND EXTENDED APPLICATION

The interest in rhetorical analysis that began during the 1960's spawned philosophical elaborations and detailed applications to biblical texts during the 1970's. In 1969, Wilder amplified his rhetorical understanding of biblical forms in *The New Voice: Religion, Literature, Hermeneutics*.<sup>16</sup> In his concern to define the origin and function of biblical narrative, Wilder turned to dimensions of the Hebrew worldview as the historical grounding and phenomenological context of narrative form. In that light he observed that

the ancient patterns of rehearsal in the Bible—these genealogies of heaven and earth, these paradigms of the human family, these vicissitudes of a pilgrim people through ancient economies, these records of conscience in the making, these annals of man's generic passions, his wrestlings with the angel, the pride and miscarriage of his works and many inventions—

<sup>16</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *The New Voice: Religion, Literature, Hermeneutics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

we can say that these ancient rehearsals may be recognized in some sort as the archetypal molds of our own histories and fabrications. (p. 53)

Here the narrative form becomes a vehicle by means of which a level of timeless knowledge is created and conveyed. Moreover, Wilder affirmed that narrative form provides insight into the meaning of being human in particular situations. He asked, "What special aspect of our human reality discloses itself in the universal impulse to tell stories? We answer immediately: Our sense of temporality and succession. . . . The story, the fable, the myth assume a context, an order of some kind. They impose a graph upon chaos or nescience. They carve out a lighted space, a *zu-Hause*, in the darkness" (p. 56).

In another chapter Wilder turned to symbols, archetypes, and myth or mythopoetic power in biblical texts. He stressed the continuity of myth from Hebrew archetype through Judaism and Christianity because it serves to provide "valid world-representation and dramatization of existence" (p. 102). Part of the significance of myth as a rhetorical form is precisely its persistent, enduring quality. In Wilder's words, "we have a prime example here of the stubbornness of social symbol through cultural change, its timebinding character, and the way in which it provides coherence to human society" (p. 107). The mythical motif of "the birth of the Divine Child" is cited as an example of mythic structure connected to prior folklore, cosmological drama, and "actual events in the Roman provinces" (p. 110) recurrent and meaningful at a variety of levels.

In addition, Wilder also supplied an insightful treatment of the role of myth in times of crisis or social discontinuity. He explored the ways in which "a new mythical impulse" is engaged by the urgencies of situations involving "the

loss of roots, the faded myth, anomie," and circumstances of "conflict with social authority and establishment" (p. 112). The processes of rhetorical invention are thus connected simultaneously to the changing details of Hebrew/Christian cultic life and to the recurring, ultimate categories that become the frameworks for interpretation and meaning. By stressing the survival of myth and mythic impulse in these ways, Wilder underscored the rhetorical potential of myth and gave the critic an expansive and dynamic framework based on textual analysis. Moreover, the tracing of mythic form in biblical materials is supported here by textual documentation. It is not merely another view offered as speculation.

The year after the appearance of *The New Voice*, William A. Beardslee's *Literary Criticism of the New Testament*<sup>17</sup> extended rhetorical and literary analysis to the proverb and the apocalypse form. Observing the manner in which the compressed form of the proverb compels insight, Beardslee noted the frequency of tension and reversal in the New Testament proverb. He pursued these features in the macarism, or beatitude, and concluded that the eschatological mythology present within the thought of Jesus and the earliest Christians manifested itself in the "pointed reversal of popular standards which valued strength, self-assertiveness, and prudence." Nevertheless, he observed, "the sphere of operation toward which the beatitudes are directed is the same as that of popular wisdom, despite their reversal of its standards. They deal with the

<sup>17</sup> William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970). See, also, Norman R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

concrete realities of man among men, and not with some 'heavenly' world" (p. 38). Through this analysis Beardslee interrelated the "persistent eschatological myth" of Hebrew culture with the semantic tension common to proverbial speech in all cultures.

In contrast to the proverb, which is persistently moderated by the operation of semantic tension in the concrete world of proverbial speech, "apocalyptic as a form embodies a profound thirst for total presence. 'All' is one of the great governing apocalyptic words" (p. 53). Indeed, Beardslee suggested, not only proverb but also religious narrative is usually "content to ward off chaos by periodic re-presentation of the life-giving reality." In contrast, "apocalyptic narrative is unsatisfied with so partial and never-ending a resolution and thirsts for the total victory, the all-inclusive transformation of reality" (p. 53). In other words, the Hebrew myth of the end-time, which is restrained by proverbial wisdom and historiographical ordering both in Judaism and in Christianity, is allowed to dominate in apocalyptic narrative. Instead of limiting the narrative to "our" group, "the kingdoms of the world" become the subject matter. Instead of concentrating on present realities that result from past events and experiences, "the end of all things" takes center stage. Within this context, mythic structure conquers metaphor and simile to express the "reversal of reality as presently experienced" and to present "a vision of the total victory of life and order over the destructive forces" (p. 54). While "original religious symbolism identifies chaos and formlessness with death and the struggle to impose order upon chaos with life," "the apocalyptic thirst for totality" considers order, rather than chaos, to be the source of evil and oppression (p. 54). There-

fore, "the total presence of ultimate reality will mean a dissolution of order, a presence of pure spontaneity" (p. 55). For this reason, the book of Revelation is

open to the "world" far more deeply than any other New Testament book, namely in the sensuousness of its symbolism. In the original meaning of "aesthetic," the meaning referring to the physical impact of sensation, this is a profoundly aesthetic book. Sexual symbolism appears directly and explicitly. . . . The impact of color, sound, taste, odor, and physical contact is richly communicated both in the visions of struggle and in the visions of total presence. (p. 61)

This vision of spontaneity, of victory, of complete transformation creates the context for the truly aesthetic, that dimension of life least constrained by the logic of predication, the insistence upon ideological clarity, and the love of routine and order.

The Hebrew Bible's counterpart to Beardslee's approach to New Testament texts did not appear until 1977 with the publication of David Robertson's *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*.<sup>18</sup> Robertson selected the Exodus story, the book of Job, Psalm 90, and selections from the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel to show that the Bible is part of the corpus of world literature which "can be viewed as authored by the human race as a means of practicing how to live, of finding what will suffice to make our lives meaningful and valuable" (p. 15). Accepting Northrup Frye's definition of a comedy as "a work in which the hero is in the end incorporated into the society to which he properly belongs" and a tragedy as "a work in which the hero is in the end cast out of the society to which he properly belongs" (p. 16),

<sup>18</sup> David Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

Robertson compared Exodus 1-15 with Euripides' *The Bacchae*. His analysis of plot, the agon, and the denouement of both works suggests that *The Bacchae* is a tragedy inviting ambiguity, ambivalence, and irony while Exodus 1-15 is a comedy (pp. 16-29). Then, given his interest in literature as "a means of practicing how to live," Robertson praised *The Bacchae* as a work that calls forth adult emotions and teaches adult lessons, and derided Exodus (and the Gospel of Mark) as a work that calls forth childlike emotions and teaches childlike lessons because it is unable to admit irony and ambiguity. Next, he analyzed the book of Job as a didactic folk tale filled with tension, disharmony, and ambiguity. Suggesting that irony "pervades the entire book and provides the decisive key to understanding its complicated theme" (p. 34), Robertson analyzed the dialogues with the conclusion that "God is the object of an ironic joke" (p. 54). Turning to Psalm 90, he compared this "hymn of complaint" with Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," praising both works for their recognition of the inaccessibility of forces that can make life essentially different and their acceptance of those devices that help humanity to accept life with calm and resolve. Finally, he analyzed a few selections from prophetic books to suggest that the prophets are poets who carry on the tradition of the word that creates and re-creates when it becomes event.

Unfortunately, Robertson's book is flawed by personal biases that produce an occasional vendetta or imbalance. Even if his view that Exodus is dominated by childlike values is accurate (and some may wish to question this conclusion), he was certainly wrong that the Gospel of Mark contains no irony, ambiguity, or tension. Robertson's

overly Christianized interpretation of the prophets also creates more problems than it solves. His conclusions recall previous eras of scholarship that were damaged either by overzealous loyalty or hostility to the biblical text. Fortunately, the majority of scholars now engaged in literary and rhetorical analysis of biblical texts are guided by an evenhandedness that characterizes a mature discipline.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1970's, rhetorical and literary analysis became ever more prominent in biblical studies. In 1975, Sallie TeSelle's *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*<sup>20</sup> appeared, and the next year saw Norman Perrin's *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation*.<sup>21</sup> In addition to influence from the well-known literary critics and philosophers of language and literature, both these studies are indebted to Paul Ricoeur, French philosopher of language who accepted the John Nuveen professorship at the University of Chicago a few years after Paul Tillich's death. With references to Ricoeur's *Symbolism of Evil* and various articles,<sup>22</sup> the new studies interrelate the rhetorical-philosophical insights of Wilder with the linguistic-philosophical insights of Ricoeur.

Undoubtedly the most mature, disciplined, and sensitive rhetorical-literary analyses of biblical texts during the

<sup>19</sup> See D. Robertson, "Literature, the Bible as," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), pp. 547-51.

<sup>20</sup> Sallie McHague TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon, 1976). Also, see John Dominic Crossan, ed., "Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia*, 4 (1975).

1970's are Robert C. Tannehill's *The Sword of His Mouth*<sup>23</sup> and Phyllis Tribble's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.<sup>24</sup> Both interpreters were directly influenced by Muilenburg's work and by critics and philosophers of language and literature such as Max Black, Cleanth Brooks, Kenneth Burke, Northrup Frye, Murray Krieger, Suzanne Langer, Walter Ong, I. A. Richards, and Philip Wheelwright. Also, both cite the works of Amos N. Wilder and Paul Ricoeur.

Tannehill analyzed seventeen selections from the New Testament with the sensitivity, control, and creativity of a full-fledged literary critic analyzing modern poetry. Emphasizing the importance of the "surface structure" of texts, he sought to explain "the rich and subtle meanings" that result from "delicate interactions and modifications" of words (p. 33). Through attentiveness to "highlighting structure" (p. 33), symbol, antithesis, and semantic tension (p. 53), he explicated sayings and clusters of sayings ranging from two to thirty-four lines long. Tannehill concentrated on the interaction of form and content, pattern, and tension, and interpreted each passage on the basis of its intricate detail. Only twice did he use generic categories, the "focal instance" (pp. 67-77) and the "antithetical aphorism" (pp. 88-101), because of his conviction that "much of the language of the New Testament, and much of our language, does not fit into specific and clear genres but only into general ones, which arouse only vague and general expectations" (p. 4). His interpretation of sayings and clusters of sayings pro-

vides an example of rhetorical and literary analysis unsurpassed in current New Testament criticism. The work responds to aesthetic dimensions of texts rarely explicated in detail by the New Testament exegete.<sup>25</sup>

Phyllis Tribble's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* is a study with parallel sensitivity to Hebrew Bible texts. Using the term "rhetorical criticism" to describe her analytical method, she perceived the biblical text as "a literary creation with an interlocking structure of words and motifs" (p. 8). The clue for her study, she suggested, lies in a metaphor found in Genesis 1:27:

And God created humankind in his image;  
in the image of God created he him;  
male and female created he them.

The vehicle of this metaphor, she explained, is "male and female," and the tenor of the metaphor is "the image of God" (p. 17). Perceiving metaphor as the language of semantic motion that moves from the better known to the lesser known, from the concrete to the abstract, from the standard to the figurative, she followed the journey of this metaphor through the Hebrew Bible. Tribble began with passages from the prophets and Job, turned to the creation and Garden of Eden story in Genesis 2-3, which she called "A Love Story Gone Awry," then to Song of Songs, which she called "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," and last of all to the Book of Ruth, which she termed "A Human Comedy." Throughout, the work is characterized by sensitivity to figurative language, structural symmetry, semantic dissonance, movement and counter-movement, integration and disintegration, irony, clarity, and design.

<sup>25</sup> See, also, Robert C. Tannehill, "Tension in Synoptic Sayings and Stories," *Interpretation*, 34 (April 1980), 138-50.

During the 1970's, therefore, the formative impulses of an earlier decade began to show evidence of deep, nurturing roots. Awareness of rhetorical and aesthetic nuances of meaning within forms and structures led gradually to the production of books on biblical texts containing sustained analysis guided by disciplined, sensitive, creative, and informative procedures. That dimension of literature by which language escapes itself to produce meaning beyond the banal, the unambiguous, and the conventional has begun to attract interpreters with the patience, the sensitivity, and the will to seek it without subduing it, to give it order without killing it.

#### RHETORICAL ANALYSIS IN A PLURALISTIC CONTEXT

During the 1970's various forms of rhetorical, structural, and literary analysis gained ground in biblical studies as in most areas of literary study.<sup>26</sup> The presence of a variety of methods began to suggest to interpreters that multiple interpretations of texts were advantageous for illuminating various levels of meaning and various dimensions of reality. Once again Amos Wilder joined the effort, emphasizing the multidimensional role of imagination, insight, and meaning. In *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*,<sup>27</sup> he posited imagination "as a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration; all remembering, realizing, and anticipating; all faith, hope, and love" (p. 2). This view rests upon a perspective running throughout his writings—that

imagination is central to the process of creating forms and generating meaning—and is consistent with a rhetorical understanding of language. Further, it suggests that, because of their imaginative quality, rhetorical forms prompt a special kind of knowledge, remembrance, and celebration. In this regard Wilder's work provides a provocative answer to the question that occupies many contemporary rhetorical scholars, "What is genuinely rhetorical knowledge?"

In keeping with his view, Wilder warned against limited versions of form that may exclude larger structures of meaning. Citing the debate in biblical studies over myth and parable, he objected to the claim that the study of parable as "the earliest speech of Galilee" should be separated from the mythological categories of the Gospels. In contrast, he contended that Jesus' "parables alone, even with the life of action which framed them, would have been ambiguous without the prior mythical horizon of the Kingdom of God as he announced it, so also evoking the basic orientation of his people" (p. 77). Wilder's point is that sensitivity to imagination will not allow the critic to be satisfied with what he termed "a diminished perspective" (p. 77). His approach posits an analysis of rhetorical form accounting for the linguistic and phenomenological connections among inventive processes, historical conditions, and ontological categories. In that sense the relevance of Wilder's conceptions for rhetorical scholars may be best reflected in his recommendation: "We must always seek those ultimate world-pictures and stories which best answer to the total experience of mankind" (p. 80). As a result of his emphasis on the interrelation of immediate and ultimate aspects of human experience, Wilder

<sup>26</sup> For a recent survey of structural analysis in biblical criticism, see Vernon K. Robbins, "Structuralism in Biblical Interpretation and Theology," *Thomist*, 42 (July 1978), 349-72.

<sup>27</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth*, Semela Supplements 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>24</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality: Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

supplied the foundation for a complex and comprehensive understanding of rhetorical form. His work enables the critic to view form as significant because it unites consciousness, history, and ultimacy in demonstrable patterns of meaning.

Since 1973, John Dominic Crossan, following first the insights of Wilder and then those of Ricoeur, has been attempting to communicate the multi-varied dimensions of literature and language to biblical interpreters. Crossan's book *In Parables*<sup>28</sup> contains extracts from poems by Wallace Stevens, W. H. Auden, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, Dilys Laing, William Butler Yeats, and others, which he used to reach beyond the field of biblical studies to grasp levels of meaning usually ignored within biblical exegesis. His *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges*<sup>29</sup> shows a "thirst for multiple sensitivity" in the interpretation of Jesus' teaching as he worked through five variations in an attempt to point to aspects of meaning within parables and sayings: (1) comedy and transcendence, (2) form and parody, (3) paradox and parable, (4) time and finitude, (5) person and persona. With an interest ranging from Einstein's theory of relativity, through Russian formalism and French structuralism, to Jorge Luis Borges and comic eschatology, Crossan sought to demonstrate with freedom, creativity, and imagina-

tion the relation of any literature to world literature and to all levels of meaning. Crossan has continued this approach in two subsequent books, and Robert W. Funk has also joined in this activity.<sup>30</sup> In their own way, they represent an awareness and interest in a wide range of methods spawned during the 1970's, a range clearly demonstrated in biblical studies by the essays in *The Poetics of Faith: Essays Offered to Amos Niven Wilder*.<sup>31</sup> The rhetorical scholar who would like to see the range of the discussion in biblical studies that concerns rhetorical and literary analysis in its many forms should consult these volumes as well as the other issues of *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism*.

In this context, one additional publication wants mention. Mary Ann Tolbert's *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations*<sup>32</sup> sets forth two models of interpretation—a semiotic model and a rhetorical model—and interrelates them by means of Wheelwright's analysis of epiphora and diaphora and Max Black's analysis of a "web of relationships." Distinguishing between "tenor" and "vehicle" in metaphor in accord with Tribble's analysis of Hebrew Bible texts and interrelating two forms of analysis in accord with Ricoeur's insights in *The Conflict of Interpretations*<sup>33</sup> and various articles, Tolbert produced an informative, multiple analysis of the parable of the prodigal son. Undoubtedly this work represents a product characteristic of the

future in biblical studies. As in the field of rhetorical and literary analysis, so in the field of biblical studies, the structures of meaning have blossomed in multidimensional form, and methods of analysis are being formulated to harvest a bountiful, richly textured crop.

#### CONCLUSION

This essay has been written to suggest the significant overlap that now exists between biblical studies and rhetorical scholarship. Biblical scholars have been applying insights from the disciplines of rhetorical and literary analysis at an increasing pace during the last decade, and they intend to learn much more from these disciplines. For this reason, a significant body of data, arising from extensive application to biblical texts, is ready at hand as a resource for the rhetorical critic. If rhetorical critics have been hesitant to use biblical texts in a secular discipline, they should be aware that the maturity of method in biblical studies makes this hesitancy ever more unnecessary. Studies of biblical literature by modern biblical critics are steadily making a rich and significant portion of the heritage of the Western world available to the disciplines of humanistic scholarship. This essay, an interdisciplinary effort by a rhetorical and a biblical critic, intends to suggest that increased mutual interest can be beneficial for rhetorical scholarship as well as biblical scholarship in the years to come.

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<sup>28</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

<sup>29</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *Raid on the Articulate: Comic Eschatology in Jesus and Borges* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); see, also, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, Il.: Argus Communications, 1975); *Finding is the First Act: Trouve Folktales and Jesus' Treasure Parable*, *Semeia* Supplements, 9 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); and *Cliffs of Fall* (New York: Seabury, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Jesus as Precursor*, *Semeia* Supplements, 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> William A. Beardslee, ed., *The Poetics of Faith: Essays Offered to Amos Niven Wilder*, Parts 1-2, *Semeia*, 12-13 (1978).

<sup>32</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974).