Rhetorical Criticism: History, Purpose, and Method

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Duane Watson writes, "There has always been limited classical rhetorical criticism of the New Testament."[1] Janet Fairweather writes that Chrysostom's commentary on Galatians contains "rhetorical criticism of a quality which deserves the attention of modern readers."[2] Wilhelm Wuellner says, "The liberal arts and exegesis were first brought together in the Greek East in Adrian's *Eisagoge* in the first half of the 5th century. In the Latin West we have first the late 4th century *Liber regularum* of the Donatist Tyconius which Augustine used extensively and refers to in his *De doctrina christiana* (III 30-56). Then Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* whose influence extends to the Venerable Bede's *De schematibus et tropis Sacrae Scripturae.*"[3] However, Watson says that this use of rhetoric "has almost always pertained to stylistic matters, especially figures of speech and thought, and matters of genre and form."[4] "Melanchthon…wrote rhetorical commentaries on Romans and Galatians utilizing classical conventions of invention, arrangement, and style, as well as more modern conceptions of these….

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[1] Duane F. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter* (SBLDS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 4.

[2] Janet Fairweather, "The Epistle to the Galatians and Classical Rhetoric," *TynBul* 45 (1994): 1.

[3] Wilhelm Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics: From 'Truth and Method' to 'Truth and Power'" (*Scriptura* S 3 (1989): 3. Watson notes that "Augustine analyzed the rhetorical style of the biblical writers, especially Paul, in Book IV of his work *On Christian Doctrine,* and the Venerable Bede in his *De schematibus et tropis* analyzed figures and tropes in both Testaments" (*Invention,* 4).

[4] Ibid. Wuellner calls the limitation of rhetoric to stylistics "the fragmentation of rhetoric," and notes that it "manifests itself already in Augustine's theory and practice" ("Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 3).

Erasmus…provided rhetorical analyses of 1 and 2 Corinthians…. Calvin…besides noting

rhetorical features (particularly stylistic) throughout his commentaries on the New

Testament, gives a rhetorical analysis of Romans."[5] Wuellner says that "the late 16th

century witnesses a veritable explosion of publications on both rhetorics and

hermeneutics of Scripture."[6]

Wilhelm Wuellner notes that the focus was on stylistics: "Rhetoric continued to play

a crucial role in the interpretation of the Bible, whether as part of the traditional *lectio*

divina, or as part of the *via moderna* cultivated by the emerging European universities

beginning in the 12th century. One of the developments that affected sacred and secular

hermeneutics was the virtual identification of poetics and rhetorics in the Renaissance."[7]

Thomas Olbricht writes, "Puritan scholars embraced particularly the grammar,

rhetoric and logic of Peter Ramus…. The biblical scholars of the era borrowed from these

insights, structuring commentaries according to the dictates of the Ramian logical

divisions and subdivisions. Beginning in 1730, interest in oratory and rhetoric returned to

the classical traditions, especially the Ciceronian."[8] Ramus reinforced the identification of

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[5] Duane F. Watson and Alan J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 102-3. For a detailed study of Melanchthon's use of rhetorical criticism, see Carl Joachim Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 8-16, 99-177.

[6] Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 11, citing Deborah Shuger, "Morris Croll, Flacius Illyricus, and the Origin of Anti-Ciceronianism," *Rhetorica* 3 (1985): 280.

[7] Wilhelm Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism and Its Theory in Culture-Critical Perspective: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11,"in *Text and Interpretation: New Approaches in the Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Petzer; NTTS 15; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 173; see also Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 3-10.

[8] Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Flowering of Rhetorical Criticism in America," in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 80. The Ramian version of "rhetoric" was spartan. "Ramus went beyond Aristotle in his suspicion of rhetoric, limiting its role to ornamentation" (Don H. Compier, *What Is Rhetorical Theology?: Textual Practice and Public Discourse* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999], 13). In a culture that disliked ornamentation, speakers would have to avoid it if they wanted to be

rhetoric with stylistic concerns.[9]

Folker Siegert writes that Johann Bengel's notes were "based on a masterful knowledge of rhetoric"; his *Gnomon* (1742) had the subtitle "from the natural (or inherent) strength of the words."[10] In 1753, Robert Lowth published his lectures on parallelism in OT poetry.[11] Jack Lundbom notes that classical rhetoric "experienced an earlier revival in the mid-18th century, when, for the first time, the works of Cicero and Quintilian became widely available and new textbooks on rhetorical theory and practice were written."[12] Watson writes, "Germany became the center of rhetorical analysis of the New Testament in the late 18th to early 20th centuries. Important in this stream of tradition is Karl Ludwig Bauer's massive study of Paul's use of classical rhetorical techniques."[13] Olbricht notes that Johann Ernesti started (or revived) a trend of stylistic studies.[14] English scholars included John Jebb and Thomas Boys.[15]

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persuasive.

[9] "The extraordinary influence of Ramus hindered, and to a large extent actually destroyed, the tradition of classical rhetoric" (Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning," in *The Great Ideas Today, 1970* [trans. E. Griffin-Collart and O. Bird; Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1970], 274). Ramus had a friend named Omer Talon who wrote two books on rhetoric, limiting rhetoric to stylistics (ibid.).

[10] Folker Siegert, *Argumentation bei Paulus: Gezeigt an Röm 9-11* (WUNT 34; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 9; my translation of Siegert's translation of the original Latin subtitle. Bengel "stressed the power, hence applicability and efficacy, inherent in the language and rhetoric of the Bible" (Wuellner, "Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 13).

[11] Roland Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric* (JSOTSup 256; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 44. Meynet notes that similar ideas about parallelisms had been published by Christian Schöttgen in 1733 (ibid., 53-54). These were analyses of structure, not of rhetorical effects. Meynet's own view of "rhetorical analysis" concentrates more on structure than on rhetoric. Meynet credits Bengel with the discovery of chiasms or concentric structures (ibid., 60).

[12] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (2nd ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), xx.

[13] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 103, referring to Karl Ludwig Bauer, *Rhetoricae Paullinae, vel, Quid oratium sit in oratione Pauli* (Halle, Germany: Impensis Orphanotrophei, 1782); bibliographic data from WorldCat.

[14] Thomas H. Olbricht, "An Aristotelian Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 221. Wuellner also

The emphasis continued to be on style. Lundbom writes: "The 19th century also witnessed a specialization of disciplines that truncated rhetoric to the point that it became associated primarily with *belles-lettres.* Its emphasis was now largely on correctness, style, and the aesthetic appreciation of literature."[16] Rhetorical studies were also done by Royaards, Wilke, Blass, Norden, Heinrici, König, Weiss, Bultmann, Windisch, and Bullinger.[17] "Since this outpouring at the turn of the century, the rhetoric of the New Testament has received only limited treatment."[18]

The decline in rhetorical studies may have been caused by the limited usefulness of stylistic studies. Wuellner writes, "With the rise of historical (= scientific or modern) criticism, rhetoric became marginalised to the point of near extinction or at least increasing irrelevance, in contrast to its fifteen hundred year-long central importance to

mentions Bartholomew Westheimer (1551) and Joseph Weissenbach (1789) ("Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 14-15); he notes that Wettstein and Ernesti had been professors of rhetoric (ibid., 18).

[15] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 104, and Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 65-126, 129-30. Wuellner mentions earlier English works by John Prideaux (1659) and Robert Boyle (1668) ("Hermeneutics and Rhetorics," 15). Meynet notes that in 1820, Jebb applied Lowth's observations to the NT, and identified chiasms (*Rhetorical Analysis,* 88). An 1854 work by John Forbes is noted in John W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg, 1981), 248.

[16] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xx.

[17] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 103-4. Meynet mentions more obscure scholars: Charles Souvay in 1911 and George Gray in 1915; both worked with OT poetics (Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 131-36). He says that Bullinger's questionable literary structures "discredited the discipline for a full generation" (ibid., 130, n. 39, quoting from Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980]*,* xix).

[18] Watson, *Invention,* 5. On page 6 he notes an article in 1931, a book in 1942, and isolated articles from 1953, 1958 and 1962. To his list we can add Walter A. Jennrich, "Rhetoric in the New Testament: The Diction in *Romans* and *Hebrews,*" *CTM* 20 (1949): 518-31. Dean Anderson notes an article in 1926 and a different article by Jennrich in 1949 (R. Dean Anderson, Jr., *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* [rev. ed.; Leuven: Peeters, 1999], 21). Building on Jennrich's *CTM* article is Wilhelm C. Linss, "Logical Terminology in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *CTM* 37 (1966): 365-69. Meynet mentions French works by Marcel Jousse in 1925 and Albert Condamin in 1933, several studies on chiasm by Nils Lund in the 1930s and 1940s, and Albert Vanhoye's structural analysis of Hebrews in 1963 (Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 136-165). Both Watson and Meynet noted Nils Wilhelm Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study in Formgeschichte* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).

exegesis."[19] Lundbom gives the same assessment: "Style, that darling of the Renaissance,

dominated rhetorical instruction in other American colleges and universities through the

end of the 19th century, with the result that by 1900 rhetoric found itself in sharp

decline."[20] Watson also: "New Testament studies became isolated from rhetoric"—

perhaps because "rhetoric was truncated and had come to be understood as mere style or

ornament."[21]

However, Lundbom notes there were the seeds of revival among secular scholars:

> The beginnings of [modern] rhetorical criticism belong to a revival of
> classical rhetoric that took place in American colleges and universities between
> 1900 and 1925, a time, ironically enough, when an older rhetorical movement in
> many of the same institutions had only recently died out…. Cornell in the 1920s
> was the center of this new interest in classical rhetoric and became the place
> where rhetorical criticism was born…. It was Herbert Wichelns' highly
> influential essay, 'The Literary Criticism of Oratory,' [1925] which defined
> 'rhetorical criticism' and mapped out its agenda…. Wichelns was after a
> speech's persuasive quality.[22]

This eventually filtered into biblical studies through James Muilenburg, an OT

scholar who had some background in classics and literature.[23]

Muilenburg

After several decades of neglect among biblical scholars, rhetorical criticism received

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[19] Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 174.

[20] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxi.

[21] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism, 105.*

[22] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xix, xxi-xxii. In 1965, for example, Edwin Black published a book with the title *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: MacMillan, 1965).

[23] Muilenburg was a teaching instructor in English composition for three years while he studied for his master of arts degree, according to Jared Judd Jackson, "Muilenburg, James (1896-1974)," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 599. His bachelor's degree was in classical languages (email from alumni@hope.edu on 18 Sept. 2002). His master of arts degree was in English history (University of Nebraska—Lincoln, library catalog, n.p. [cited 19 Sept. 2002]. Online: http://iris.unl.edu/ search/ X?SEARCH=muilenburg+thesis&SORT=A&l=&b=&s=&m=&Da=&Db=. After writing a dissertation in early church literature, he studied under Hermann Gunkel and went into OT studies. His first book was a

some revivifying publicity in 1968, when Muilenburg described the need for it and named the discipline in his SBL presidential address.[24] Muilenburg's speech helped provide definition, direction and impetus for this approach to the Scriptures. His students provided a nucleus of practitioners of this approach, particularly for the OT, and other scholars joined in. Rhetorical studies for the NT were stimulated especially by H. D. Betz with a lecture on Galatians in 1974 followed by a commentary in 1979.[25]

However, what Muilenburg called rhetorical criticism was not exactly the same as what secular literary critics called rhetorical criticism,[26] and when biblical scholars became interested in "rhetorical criticism," some did not limit themselves to Muilenburg's definition.

Muilenburg began by praising form criticism, which had been pioneered by Hermann Gunkel. He described what Gunkel had done: "The magnitude of his contribution to biblical scholarship is to be explained in part by the fact that historical criticism had come to an impasse, chiefly because of the excesses of source analysis.… Gunkel never repudiated this method...but rather averred that it was insufficient for answering the most

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high school textbook on the Bible as literature (Jackson, "Muilenburg," 600).

[24] Subsequently published as James A. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969) 1-18. "Others…were doing structural work on the biblical text without calling it rhetorical *per se*" (Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxvii). Watson points out that Amos Wilder had published a book on biblical rhetoric in 1964, Robert Funk one in 1966, and Edwin Judge an important article in 1968. But Muilenburg's address had the most influence. See Watson, *Invention,* 3.

[25] Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 1, referring to Hans Dieter Betz, "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, *NTS* 21 (1975): 353-79 and idem, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

[26] "Compared with rhetorical criticism practiced in the universities, however, the Muilenburg program appears somewhat narrow.... [It is] perceived by many as being little more than an exercise in textual description" (Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxviii). Roth speaks of "the terminological difficulty introduced by Muilenburg into HB interpretation," noting especially the use by others of classical rhetorical systems (W. M. W. Roth, "Rhetorical Criticism, Hebrew Bible," *DBI* 2:397). Classical rhetoric can be limited to stylistics (as it often was before Muilenburg), but modern scholars who use it usually include more, as discussed below.

pressing and natural queries of the reader."[27] Gunkel's move set a precedent for what

Muilenburg wished to do, for he saw form criticism itself as having come to an impasse.

He did not want to repudiate it, but to say that it was inadequate for the questions he

brought to the text. Muilenburg said:

> The circumspect scholar will not fail to supplement his form-critical analysis with a careful inspection of the literary unit in its precise and unique formulation. He will not be completely bound by the traditional elements and motifs of the literary genre; his task will not be completed until he has taken full account of the features which lie beyond the spectrum of the genre.[28]

In other words, the critic will look not only the ways in which a passage is similar to

others, but also the way that it is unique, the way that it deviates from the "form." After

the form has been determined, "there still remains the task of discerning the actuality of

the particular text."[29] Roy Melugin summarized it well: "A given text is almost invariably

a mixture of the typical and the unique.... Good exegesis, then, will study both the typical

and the unique."[30]

Muilenburg noted some precedents for the type of analysis he advocated: "The field

of stylistics or aesthetic criticism is flourishing today, and the literature that has gathered

about it is impressive. Perhaps its foremost representative is Alonzo [*sic*]

Schökel...*Estudios de Poetica Hebraea* (1963)."[31] He noted that ancient scholars such as

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[27] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism," 1-2.

[28] Ibid., 7.

[29] Ibid., 18.

[30] Roy F. Melugin, "Muilenburg, Form Criticism, and Theological Exegesis," in *Encounter With the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Semeia Supplement 8, ed. M.J. Buss; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 94.

[31] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism," 7. The correct name is Luis Alonso-Schökel. Muilenburg also mentioned 16 others as being interested in stylistic matters. Muilenburg himself had emphasized literary style in his commentary on Second Isaiah (James Muilenburg, "Introduction" and "Exegesis" for Isaiah 40-66, in *The Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 5 [ed. G. A. Buttrick; New York: Abingdon, 1956], 381-418, 422-773). Lundbom writes, "Muilenburg names a method he had been using for 45 years or more, and in this sense 'rhetorical

Jerome and the rabbis were often attentive "with matters of style."[32] Although

Muilenburg used the word *stylistics* for these previous scholars, he was for some reason

not satisfied with this term:

> The aspect of all these works which seems to me most fruitful and
> rewarding I should prefer to designate by a term other than stylistics. What I am
> interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary
> composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the
> fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the
> many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered
> into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the
> methodology as rhetorical criticism.[33]

Muilenburg stated three main interests: literary composition, structural patterns, and

literary devices, all three of which concerned the way in which a passage was written. He

did not explain why these three did not fit well under the term *stylistics,*[34] nor did he

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criticism' was not new. The name was new" (Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxvi).

[32] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism," 8.

[33] Ibid. This definition has been the foundation for many further discussions of this field.

[34] Despite Muilenburg's wish, later scholars have categorized his work as stylistics:

- "Muilenburg saw rhetorical criticism as a form of literary criticism that dealt with stylistics" (Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 23).
- "This shift in study to the unique features in a given text goes to the heart of rhetorical criticism as it was conceived by Muilenburg, for it gives rise to the study of stylistics of composition in Hebrew prose and poetry" (Thomas B. Dozeman, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism: OT Rhetorical Criticism," *ABD* 5:713-15).
- "Since Muilenburg's appeal for a renewed interest in stylistics, there have been a spate of studies...." (John S. Kselman, "Design and Structure in Hebrew Poetry," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1980* [SBLSP 18; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980], 1).
- "Muilenburg's notion of rhetoric was limited to matters of style" (Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* [GBSNT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 13).
- "Muilenburg especially focused upon stylistics with additional attention to structure" (Thomas H. Olbricht, "Introduction," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* [ed. A. Ericksson et al.; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002], 3.
- "Muilenburg's use of the term 'rhetorical criticism' to refer to *stylistic* analysis reflected the very reduction that had helped signal rhetoric's eclipse in earlier centuries" (Patricia K. Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* [rev. ed.; ed. S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999], 160).
- "The history of rhetoric has shown that the reduction of rhetoric to poetics has been but one of the ways

explain why he chose the term *rhetoric.* This was a problem, for the word *rhetoric* could

include more than structural matters. Aristotle had defined rhetoric as "the faculty of

observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."[35] As we will see below,

this interest in persuasion was taken up by some modern rhetorical critics, and this

interest tends to focus not so much on literary devices and structure, but on the *purpose*

for which the literary devices are used.

Focus often on stylistics

Many rhetorical critics focus on stylistics. Some of them object to this

characterization, so I will provide some evidence for it from my own observations and the

opinions of other scholars. Howard writes, "Rhetorical criticism has tended to be

primarily a literary concern, with emphasis upon stylistics."[36] Kennedy says, "To many

biblical scholars rhetoric probably means style."[37] Even among secular rhetorical studies,

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of getting and keeping rhetorics restrained and degenerate. The same tendency reappears today in the Muilenburg legacy of reducing rhetorical criticism to stylistics or literary criticism" (Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 179).

- "Muilenburg's exercise of what he termed 'rhetorical criticism'…is clearly very stylistic or form-centered in nature" (Ernst R. Wendland, "Aspects of Rhetorical Analysis Applied to New Testament Texts," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches* [ed. Anthony J. Blasi et al.; Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002], 177).

[35] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.1.2, translated by W. Rhys Roberts, n.p. [cited 30 Aug. 2004]. Online: http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html). Another translation puts it this way: It is "the detection of the persuasive aspects of each matter" (Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* [trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred; New York: Penguin, 1991], 70. Quintilian notes that there are other means of persuasion, and "others besides orators persuade by speaking," and he eventually proposes "that oratory is the science of speaking well" (*The Instituto Oratoria of Quintilian, With an English Translation* [trans. Harold E. Butler; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1921), 2:305, 17; *Instituto* 2.15.9, 11, 38). Nevertheless, his discussion presumes that orators wish to persuade. Lauri Thurén offers a broad definition: "Rhetorics seeks to study what is the purpose of any discourse and which means are used to this end" (*Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Peter with Special Regard to Ambiguous Expressions* [Åbo: Åbo Academy, 1990], 43. Ruth Majercik gives a more generic definition: "Rhetoric is the art of composition by which language is made descriptive, interpretive, or persuasive" ("Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism," *ABD* 5:712).

[36] David M. Howard, "Rhetorical Criticism in Old Testament Studies," *BBR* 4 (1994) 87.

[37] George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 3. Lundbom writes, "Rhetorical criticism in the Muilenburg

this has often been true. In the Middle Ages, for example, "rhetoricians amassed lengthy lists of stylistic devices...which led to a view of rhetoric as chiefly ornamental."[38] This led to a reduced interest in rhetoric, since it was not logical or scientific.[39]

Nevertheless, many biblical critics limited their rhetorical criticism to stylistic concerns. Muilenburg had set an agenda and an example that focused on style. In his speech, he mentioned three concerns: composition, structure, and literary devices.[40] In his commentary on Isaiah, he demonstrated a concern for structure and literary devices.[41] Following are some typical comments that show his insight and attention to detail:

> The stylistic unity of the opening poem lies in the imperatives; that of the second poem lies in the interrogatives.… The poem proper is composed of nine strophes, grouped in triads.… The climax falls in each case upon the third member of the triad.… The Hebrew poet is fond of repeating key words at the beginning of strophes.… The threefold occurrence in a single strophe is a common stylistic device.… The strophe is a model of literary form and style.… The style is measured, quiet, terse, pregnant, and concentrated.… It is characteristic of the poet to end his poems with brief quotations.[42]

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tradition is therefore perceived by many as being little more than an exercise in textual description—perceptive and sensitive description, to be sure, especially when the master was at work—but textual description all the same" (Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, xxviii). Lundbom notes that Muilenburg went "beyond textual description by showing an interest in discerning the author's intent, development of thought, and meaning. But his agenda is still too limited for rhetorical critics with classical and modern interests. This is due more to the unique circumstances under which OT rhetorical criticism is forced to operate than to narrow scholarly interests on the part of Muilenburg" (ibid., xxx). Those circumstances include the lack of information about speaker, audience and situation except for what we can infer from the text (ibid., xxix)—circumstances that are true for some NT documents as well.

[38] Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 156.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Watson and Hauser say that Muilenburg did not intend to restrict rhetorical criticism to stylistics, but they admit that this is the way observers have perceived the results (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 18 n. 31). They argue that rhetorical criticism should include the impact on the audience, a concern that Muilenburg did not mention.

[41] His introduction, for example, includes eight pages for a discussion of style, but no section for the overall message, or what the poet wanted people to do in response to his messages. Such things were discussed in various sections of the commentary, but were not gathered into a distinct section for the introduction, as stylistic matters were. Muilenburg began each section of the commentary with an analysis of structure, particularly the number of strophes and the meter, with comments about repetition or other devices.

[42] Muilenburg, "Isaiah," *IB* 5:434, 447-48, 451, 460-61, 463, 474. This is just a small sample; stylistic

However, Muilenburg did not comment on how the stylistic devices supported the purpose of the passage. His analysis of style and his analysis of meaning rarely met.

Similarly, Kenneth Kuntz gives a detailed commentary on the stylistic features of Isaiah 51:1-16,[43] but it seems to me that his analysis is a series of disconnected observations. At each verse, he notes the literary devices, then goes to the next verse. He says little about how these devices fit together, how they would help the original readers, or how they help us understand the passage. They remain a series of stylistic observations—a list of devices without much attention to how one verse relates to another to achieve a purpose.[44]

Need more than stylistics

Lundbom says, "Sad to say, much current rhetorical criticism of the Bible is…simply random and subjective reflections producing little or no yield."[45] Patricia Tull says, "As important as stylistic analysis is for attending to particulars, it does not sufficiently account for all that texts *do* and come to mean."[46] Wuellner notes the tendency of

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comments can be found on most pages. His literary analysis provides a substantial foundation for further study.

[43] J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Contribution of Rhetorical Criticism to Understanding Isaiah 51:1-16," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature.* JSOTS 19 (ed. David J. A. Clines et al.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 140-171. I use Kuntz as an example, but similar things could be said about other scholars using a stylistic-focused rhetorical criticism. For a NT example, see David Alan Black, "Hebrews 1:1-4: A Study in Discourse Analysis" (*WTJ* 49 (1987): 175-94. He identifies numerous style and rhetorical devices, but says little about how such features help convey the meaning to the original recipients, or how it helps our exegesis.

[44] He says that the poet's "intense lyricism vividly conveys his assurance of impending salvation" (Kuntz, "Contribution," 165)—but he does not say how the lyrics convey the assurance any better than prose could have. His conclusion is only one paragraph—an abrupt ending with some generalities. This suggests that the details have not been synthesized; they remain as scattered bits of data. Although Kuntz mentions Israel's calling as one of the main purposes of the passage, he does not develop the thought. He seems unconcerned about the purpose of the passage, illustrating an emphasis on style and a neglect of function.

[45] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxxii.

[46] Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 175.

rhetorical critics to have a "preoccupation with biblical stylistics which has remained for centuries formalized, and functionless, and contextless."[47] Howard writes, "Too often the analysis is merely a cataloguing of the 'rhetorical devices' found in a text"—without asking what those devices are *for*. "As such, it is merely concerned with stylistics."[48] Fox gives an illustration of people who liked style but ignored meaning:

> Ezekiel himself emphatically rejects an aesthetic or strictly literary approach to his prophecy as trivial and irrelevant. God tells him that his fellow countrymen flock to hear his words "...but they will not obey them, for they treat (them as) love-songs (?) [*sic*] in their mouths, while their hearts are set on nothing but gain. To them you are just a singer of love-songs who has a sweet voice and plays skillfully; they hear your words, but will not obey them" (33:31-32). Ezekiel's artistry was drawing crowds.[49]

The people liked Ezekiel's style, but were neglecting his message. Stylistic critics today may be neglecting the message in a different way—overlooking the purpose of the message. Fox says, "If the formal structures that the critic claims to discover are indeed rhetorically effective, he should show not only that they exist but *what* they do and *how*

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[47] Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 462. The word "contextless" describes my feeling that Kuntz's article would be little different if he treated six verses from six different biblical books. It would be some interesting observations about Hebrew poetry style, but with little done to tie the elements together. The word "functionless" is also apt, since little consideration is given to the function of the devices.

    Richard Clifford also illustrates the tendency of some rhetorical critics to neglect function. He mentions the Biblisher Kommentar and the Hermeneia series, which have sections for text, form, setting, interpretation, and aim. He then says, "'Interpretation' and 'aim' ought to be reserved for the study of how this text uniquely shapes the conventions of the genre and adds its own *novum*" (Richard J. Clifford, "Rhetorical Criticism in the Exegesis of Hebrew Poetry," in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1980* [SBLSP 18; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980], 18). But this definition of "aim" has the wrong focus. The aim of the passage is to convey a message, not to shape a genre. The genre is a tool, not the purpose. It is shaped only to serve a goal. Clifford's definition focuses on technique, not the message.

[48] Howard, 103. Esler notes that it does little good to label a feature with a Greek word if we do not also note how it functions in the text (*Galatians,* 18).

[49] Michael V. Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision of the Valley of the Bones," *HUCA* 51 (1980): 2, n. 4.

they work."[50]

   Function is sometimes neglected in NT rhetorical studies, too. Olbricht comments

that structural studies "have not been strong on relating rhetorical observations to Paul's

theology so as to ascertain why he proceeded as he did. Only to a modest extent have

these studies helped us to comprehend better the text's power."[51] Eugene Botha writes,

"A mere listing or enumeration of different features contributes very little to

understanding a particular document or passage."[52] He comments on one scholar's work,

"How the identification of this feature enhances the exegesis is, unfortunately, not

indicated."[53] Anderson writes, "It is very easy to label a particular passage or

argument…by some Greek technical term, but unless rhetorical theory enables us to say

something relevant concerning its *use* and *function* at that point, our analysis is pretty

worthless…. It is the *effect* of such figures, both stylistically and argumentatively, that is

important."[54]

   Wuellner laments the tendency of rhetorical criticism to be reduced to stylistics and

rhetorical devices. "Reduced to concerns of style, with the artistry of textual disposition

and textual structure, rhetorical criticism has become indistinguishable from literary

criticism, as is evident in the works of two leading literary critics: L. Alonso-Schökel and

R. Alter."[55] Howard writes, "The literary interest of Old Testament rhetorical criticism is

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[50] Ibid., 3.

[51] Olbricht, "Aristotelian," 219.

[52] J. Eugene Botha, "Style in the New Testament: The Need for Serious Reconsideration," *JSNT* 43 (1991): 76.

[53] Ibid. For a similar comment, see also Stanley E. Porter, "Paul of Tarsus and His Letters," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 578, n. 112.

[54] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 41, 71 n. 121.

[55] Wuellner, "Where Is," 451-2. Further evidence for the overlap between rhetorical and literary criticism can be seen in Trible's comment that Alter's literary analyses "reflected" rhetorical criticism, and that

such that many of the papers in the SBL Rhetorical Criticism section are virtually

indistinguishable in terms of method from those in the SBL literary or narrative sections

or groups."[56] Jeffrey Arthurs writes, "In general… Muilenburg's brand of 'rhetorical'

criticism should be included with the literary criticisms."[57]

Whether or not rhetorical critics *intend* to concentrate on stylistics, many people[58]

perceive from the results that the focus has been stylistics—a description of literary

features, verse by verse. Patrick and Scult characterize Muilenburg's paper as a call "for

revival of an older form of analysis, frequently termed 'stylistic criticism.'"[59] Similarly,

Black identifies Muilenburg's proposal as "the study of the characteristic linguistic and

structural features of a particular text in its present form.… For Muilenburg, 'rhetoric' is

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"Rhetoric occupied a significant place in [Meir] Sternberg's poetics.… He gave attention to…persuasive communication" (Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 76-77). Roth says that if rhetorical criticism is defined by an interest in literary features, then Alter's two books are also important contributions (Roth, "Rhetorical Criticism," 397).

[56] Howard, "Rhetorical Criticism," 90. Tull groups them all in the same field when she writes, "Studies of the stylistic, aesthetic features of biblical texts proliferated very rapidly and came to be known variously as literary criticism, narrative criticism, poetics, and, especially among followers of Muilenburg, rhetorical criticism" ("Rhetorical Criticism," 159). Here, she equates Muilenburg-style rhetorical criticism with a study of style and aesthetics. Some rhetorical critics deny that Muilenburg and his followers focused on style to the neglect of function, but when I look at the results, I see primarily style, and so do many other observers.

Dozeman writes that OT rhetorical criticism moved from its origin in form criticism, where it served as a focus on the particularities of a text, to "under the umbrella of literary criticism" ("Rhetoric," 5:714). If it is to be distinct from literary criticism, as I argue below, it should include persuasion as well as stylistics.

[57] Jeffrey Dean Arthurs, "Biblical Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism: Augmenting the Grammatical/ Historical Approach" (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 1992), 9.

[58] I have quoted several of these observers, and some who say that rhetorical criticism *should* go beyond stylistics — beyond the kind of work that Muilenburg did. Childs criticizes Muilenburg's commentary for being too attentive to literary aesthetics to the neglect of the theological message (Brevard Childs, *Old Testament Books for Pastor and Teacher* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977], 73. Brueggemann says that rhetorical criticism is "too enamored of style to notice speech as a means and source of power" ("At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire," *JBL* 101 (1991), 19. Trible drew my attention to these quotes (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 106, 52).

[59] Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (JSOTSup 82; Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 12. They write that later rhetorical critics failed to "encounter texts in their concrete particularity" due to the "limitation of rhetorical criticism in Biblical studies to stylistic analysis" (ibid.).

virtually synonymous with 'literary artistry.'"[60]

Like morphology and grammar, literary devices are worth studying, but they are not an end in themselves—they are a means to an end.[61] Yehoshua Gitay writes, "Style is a tool for achieving effective communication and must be studied as an integral part of the message and the rhetorical situation of a given text; the study of style is never an end in itself."[62] Biblical studies normally go beyond structural descriptions to explore function and meaning. It is not wrong to appreciate the aesthetics of poetry for its own sake, but I want to go further—I want to know what the text is trying to accomplish. Stylistics has reached for me the point that form criticism had for Muilenburg: It is inadequate for the questions that I bring to the text—namely, what does it mean, and how does it convey that meaning? The text has a purpose, and a study of the text ought to try to understand the way it goes about that purpose.

Focus on function

Numerous rhetorical critics have noted the need for a consideration of function:

- Lundbom writes, "Rhetorical criticism goes beyond the simple identifying and cataloguing of figures; it wants to know how figures function in discourse."[63]

- Wuellner writes that stylistic techniques should be seen "as means to an end, and

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[60] C. Clifton Black II, "Keeping up with Recent Studies VXI. Rhetorical Criticism and Biblical Interpretation," *ET* 100 (1989) 253-54. Black says that this "too narrow" and he praises Kennedy's approach not only for including persuasion but also for its "more painstaking" methodology (254-55).

[61] Some literary devices may be exclusively aesthetic, but such a conclusion should be reached only after an effort to understand how they might contribute to the argument. Aesthetics may assist persuasion by increasing the readers' respect for the author, their trust in the author's knowledge, or their desire to please the author. Fairweather notes that rhetorical sophistication "gives the speaker a psychological advantage" over audiences that did not have such training ("The Epistle to the Galatians," 241).

[62] Yehoshua Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (ed. S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 146.

[63] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxiv.

not as merely formal, decorative features."[64]

- Alan Hauser writes that a literary analysis "provides a basis for discussing the message of the text and the impact it had on its audience."[65]

- Thurén writes, "The purpose of searching for stylistic devices in the text is to see how do they function in their rhetorical situation…. The ultimate goal for a style analysis is to learn about the basic purpose of the text."[66]

- Watson notes, "There has been a move beyond description of rhetorical features to analysis of their function in a text."[67]

- Benjamin Fiore says: "The method ought to identify not only the rhetorical elements and structure but also their function in the flow of argumentation."[68]

Lundbom lists four main characteristics of good rhetorical criticism: 1) It is a method for analyzing existing communication, not a technique manual for future speakers. 2) It is concerned with structure and persuasion, not just style. 3) It goes beyond a list of figures—"it wants to know how figures *function* in discourse." 4) It focuses on the audience, "beginning with the original audience."[69]

Kennedy, after extensive study of classical rhetoric, defines rhetoric as "that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purposes." [70] Stylistic devices are to be viewed for how they contribute to that purpose. "If rhetorical criticism...is to be useful it must embrace more than style…. The ultimate goal of

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[64] Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 177.

[65] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 4. Hauser writes, "Studying stylistic devices used in a text is a necessary factor in complete literary analysis, but hardly a sufficient factor…. Studying stylistics alone would isolate the rhetorical critic from the dynamic life of the text" (ibid., 18, n. 31).

[66] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 48-49. See also idem, "The General New Testament Writings," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 588.

[67] Duane F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles Since 1978," *CR: BS* 5 (1997): 202.

[68] Benjamin Fiore, "Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism: NT Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism," *ABD* 5:718.

[69] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxiii-xxiv, italics in the original. The audience can also include subsequent audiences. As Patrick and Scult note, we do not always know when a text was written. Nevertheless, "these texts have remained profoundly persuasive for over 2000 years…. The Biblical texts achieved canonical status…because they were persuasive enough to be heard as speaking truths beyond their own time and place" (*Rhetoric,* 45-46, 25).

rhetorical analysis, briefly put, is the discovery of the author's intent and of how that is transmitted through a text to an audience."[71]

However, is it legitimate to seek the author's intent? Dozeman says that many interpreters "reject any claims that the interpreter could uncover an author's intention."[72] Thurén is willing to seek the intent not of the author, but of the text:

> Rhetorical criticism takes historical information seriously, but instead of being [merely] descriptive it seeks to penetrate the intention of the text…. Its main objective is not to reconstruct the original, historical, real readers or the real author…, but to focus on the text as a more or less independent argumentative entity. It is interested in the situation of the text for the sake of argumentation.[73]

Does an inanimate text have an "intent"? Perhaps "meaning" would be a better word. A text does not have unlimited meanings; it can be used to eliminate some readings as spurious or mistaken. Paul Noble (arguing primarily against reader-response theories) describes how a text may refute some readings as erroneous: "Anyone who comes to Genesis with questions about, say, quantum field theory or the life of Julius Caesar will not receive any sensible answers; but to admit even this much already makes some concessions to objectivism—namely, that the text has sufficient independent 'thereness' to refute at least these attempted interpretations."[74] The communication may not be

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[70] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 3.

[71] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 12.

[72] Dozeman, "Rhetoric," 5:714. He calls these scholars, perhaps inaccurately, the "Muilenburg School."

[73] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy*, 55. It is necessary to focus on the text when the author is not known, when multiple authors and editors may be involved, or when the text is the only window that we have into the author's thinking. In such cases, "the author" is a cipher for "inferred author." The author's intent is equated with the message of the text.

[74] Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 239. Compier makes a similar point: "To use an extreme example, no one claiming to find a discussion of nuclear arms in the *Institutes* has much hope of persuading most conceivable audiences" (*Rhetorical Theology,* 31. He concludes, "If we are to make any sense of written statements, then, I know of no way of avoiding the attribution of intentions"—even though he acknowledge

perfect, but it does communicate something. Noble argues that the legitimacy of a meaning can be tested against a text, and scholars can come to conclusions as to whether one reading makes better sense than another. Yet there may be more than one reading that makes sense—and, he notes, "literary approaches…can be of considerable assistance in discovering" legitimate meanings.[75]

Noble's observations are correct, but do not distinguish between author and text. For many rhetorical analyses, a distinction is not essential, for the author is not known, and Thurén's approach is all that we can achieve. Often, our only information about the author is the text, so when we discuss the intent of the author, we are discussing the intent of the author *as implied by the text.* We have to assume that the text accurately reflects the intent of the author. We want to understand how the text achieves its purpose, and in order to do that we need to discern the goal or purpose or intent of the text.

Rhetorical criticism focuses our attention on the text, not the history of religious beliefs, not the use of traditional genres, not the redaction history of the text. Rather, it continually tells us to ask, What does the text say, and how does it go about saying it?

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it is impossible to be completely certain (ibid., 27). E. D. Hirsch has been a noted defender of authorial intent, but Noble observes that "over the years Hirsch has become increasingly isolated, and in 'Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted' (*Critical Inquiry* 2 (1986), 627-30) he substantially modifies his original position" (*The Canonical Approach,* 190, n. 9). Esler argues, "The origins of sensitivity to the intentional fallacy lie in the rejection of approaches to the meaning of literary works tied to the biography of the author…. The 'intentional fallacy'…has little application to the…interpretations adopted by many New Testament critics for whom history matters" (*Galatians,* 20). He argues that modern interpreters should "do our best to listen to others" rather than silencing their voices to create new meanings for ourselves. "There are ethical dimensions to this choice" (ibid., 25).

[75] Ibid., 369. Arthurs also argues for the validity of seeking authorial intent, but notes four caveats: "(1) No one can know with certainty the full range of what motivates another person, especially (as in the case of biblical literature) when authors do not provide complete statements of their intentions. (2) Authors may be unaware of their own intentions. (3) The achieved product (i.e., the final text) may differ from the author's conscious intent (see John 11:50-51). (4) For many biblical texts, scholars have only hypotheses concerning authorship" (Arthurs, "Biblical Interpretation," 187). He also chooses to focus on "the text as the locus of meaning…assuming that the author's rhetorical intent is embodied in those words" (ibid.).

What is it trying to do, and how does it attempt that? As Kennedy says, this method comes closer than others in explaining what most Bible students want explained in the text: its message.[76]

The purpose: persuasion

Some rhetorical critics summarize the "purpose" of the text with the word *persuasion:* the author wants to persuade the readers of a truth or persuade them to do something. Wuellner goes so far as to say, "Rhetorical criticism comes into focus primarily on *one* issue: The text's potential to persuade."[77] As noted earlier, Aristotle defined rhetoric as a study of methods of persuasion.[78] Rhetorical criticism therefore studies how the text attempts to persuade the audience. In biblical books, the authors wanted the audience to believe what they were writing, and, often, to respond in certain ways. They used various methods to support that goal, to persuade the audience, and rhetorical criticism studies those methods. Tull writes that many biblical scholars "have begun to direct attention to the hortatory nature of much of the Bible—that is, its effort to persuade audiences, not merely to appreciate the aesthetic power of its language but, even more importantly, to act and think according to its norms."[79]

The study of the methods of persuasion is a legitimate interest for biblical scholars, and it should be called rhetoric, for that is it is called among secular literary critics. Indeed, rhetorical criticism *should* include a study of persuasion, for otherwise it would be literary analysis, without any need for the name "rhetorical."[80] So from this point on,

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[76] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 159.
[77] Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 178.
[78] See footnote 28.
[79] Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 160.
[80] Literary criticism *sometimes* comments on how style helps convey meaning. Tull praises Meir Sternberg

when I use the term *rhetorical criticism,* I mean a study that *includes* methods of persuasion and is not just a list of stylistic devices. Style is only one of several components of persuasion.[81]

The interest in persuasion involves a disciplined attempt to identify the major purpose and meaning of a passage—an essential aspect of biblical studies—and the thought that went into its formulation. Howard argues that critics need to give more attention to persuasion:

> Old Testament rhetorical critics would benefit greatly from self-consciously focusing upon the speeches and other discourses in the Bible with an eye to discerning the means of persuasion practiced…. We may note here the point that *all* religious writing may be seen as "rhetorical" in the sense that it attempts to change behavior (and to convince). In that sense, the entire Bible is rhetorical, and biblical rhetorical critics can study the arguments of any biblical author to discern the means of persuasion used.[82]

Howard writes that for most secular scholars of rhetoric, "the study of the means of persuasion" is "foundational."[83] Dozeman writes that "recent discussion of rhetorical criticism has sought to expand the scope of the method beyond a descriptive study of stylistics, in order to probe the persuasive power of texts to influence action or practice."[84] Watson writes, "Of particular note is the work of Chaim Perelman and L.

(a narrative critic) for his "literary virtuosity in [his] intricate assessment of the *aims* and *effects* of narrative details" ("Rhetorical Criticism," 162, italics added). However, rhetorical criticism is designed to query the function of style, that is, to connect it to the meaning of the passage.

[81] Persuasion also involves logic and the audience's attitude toward the speaker. In studying stylistic devices, literary critics are studying some of the *means* of persuasion, even if they are not studying them *as* a means of persuasion.

[82] Howard, "Rhetorical Criticism," 103.

[83] Ibid., 88. He also notes that "this dimension has been all but lacking in Old Testament 'rhetorical' criticism." "Muilenburg and most of his followers have not paid attention to the suasive or oral aspects of the biblical literature in the way that rhetoricians focus on these" (ibid., 102). Gitay writes, "Muilenburg's approach is an expression of stylistic-formalist awareness rather than a systematic study of early Hebrew rhetoric, the biblical art of persuasion" ("Rhetorical Criticism," 136).

[84] Dozeman, "Rhetoric," 5:715. Note that he characterized previous studies as stylistics.

Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La Nouvelle Rhétorique: Traité l'Argumentation* [1958; ET 1969],

which conceptualizes rhetoric as argumentation and persuasion (not just style)."[85] Trible

comments on the "new" rhetoric of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca: "This rhetoric

actually revived the old rhetoric of Aristotelian thought; it focused on persuasion and its

means."[86]

The interest in persuasion not only has classical and modern support, it is a broader

concept that *includes* the discipline of stylistics and sociological interests. The stylistics

are seen not just for their artistry, but also for their purpose, and the interest in persuasion

requires that the interpreter study the historical and sociological setting carefully. Philip

Esler writes, "Context and rhetoric are closely linked, since the speaker (or writer) must

carefully align his or her communication with the nature and setting of the problem at

hand to have any hope of persuading the audience to a particular point of view."[87] This

brings us to another concern of rhetorical criticism — the audience. Persuasion involves

an effect on an audience.

Effect on the audience

Watson's description of rhetorical criticism ends with a concern for the *significance*

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[85] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 106. Trible notes: "Though Perelman is often cited with the first name Chaim…Olbrechts-Tyteca remains hidden through the capital letter 'L,' rather than revealed through the first name Luci [*sic*]" (Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 56, n. 3). The correct spelling is Lucie.

[86] Ibid., 55-56. The new rhetoric of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca also led to an increased interest in the audience, the sociological situation, and the way that language is used sociologically. However, Thurén notes, "Despite a sound theoretical basis the New Rhetoric pays in practice little attention to the persuasive aspect…. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca even see persuasion as a fallacy in argumentation (1969:111)" (Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 54, n. 54). Actually, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca do not call persuasion a fallacy; they note that an *ad hominem* argument can persuade some people even when it is not suited for everyone. See Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969), 111. Some potential for misunderstanding arises because their book, as the subtitle indicates, focuses on argumentation, and argumentation is only one of the means of persuasion.

[87] Philip F. Esler, *Galatians* (New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1998), 58.

of the rhetorical devices—especially their effect on the audience: "Close examination of composition is an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the movement of the author's thought, intent, and message, and to determine how the rhetoric would be experienced by the audience."[88] Alexandre says that that scholars "who have devoted themselves to the theory of rhetoric in modern times…emphasize above all the concept of audience."[89] Lundbom writes that rhetorical criticism focuses on the audience, "beginning with the original audience and extending up to current audiences."[90] Thurén adds this important qualification: "Although this method does not necessarily provide us with accurate historical facts about the addressees, the *author's* picture of them is certainly reflected in the way he operates in the text."[91]

Thomas Sloan states, "The mark of modern rhetoric…is its shift of focus to the auditor or reader…. A concern for audience, for intention, and for structure is…the mark of modern rhetoric."[92] Herbert Wichelns, a secular literary critic, distinguishes literary and rhetorical criticism: Literary criticism focuses on ahistorical features of the text, whereas rhetorical criticism "requires a description of the speaker's audience…. The effect of the discourse on its immediate hearers is not to be ignored."[93] He says that rhetorical criticism "is not concerned with…beauty. It is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communication to a specific audience, and holds its business to be the

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[88] Duane F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," *ISBE* 4:182.

[89] Alexandre, *Rhetorical Argumentation,* 28.

[90] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxiv.

[91] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 56. n. 62. Just as Thurén equates the author with the implied author (ibid., 55), here he equates the audience with the audience *implied by the text.* The author may be targeting a certain group within the actual audience, but from the text itself we may be unable to determine whether other people are present.

[92] Thomas O. Sloan, "Rhetoric in Literature," *Encyclopædia Britannica Macropædia* (15th ed.) 15:798.

[93] Herbert A. Wichelns, "Some Differences between Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians* (ed. R. F. Howes; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961),

analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his hearers."[94]

This definition focuses on author *intent;* in contrast, Patrick and Scult focus more on the

effect of the text on the audience:

> Rhetorical criticism, as it developed from Muilenburg's ideas and those of his students, did not quite add up to a fully developed method of interpretation which integrated the language of the text itself with its subsequent effect on audiences. What was needed was a fuller understanding of rhetoric as the way a text manages its relationship with its audiences—an understanding which grows out of the ancient and modern traditions of rhetoric and hermeneutics.… The 'rhetoric' in rhetorical criticism must be broadened to its fullest range in the classical tradition, namely, as the means by which a text establishes and manages its relationship to its audience in order to achieve a particular effect.[95]

Hauser gives a definition of rhetorical criticism that includes both style and function,

including the effect on the audience:

> Rhetorical criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses our knowledge of the conventions of literary composition practiced in ancient Israel and its environment to discover and analyze the particular literary artistry found in a specific unit of Old Testament text. This analysis then provides a basis for discussing the message of the text and the impact it had on its audience.… A rhetorical critic will basically do two things in studying a text: analyze the literary features of the text, to the maximum extent possible, from the perspective of literary style discernible in the works of ancient Israelite writers; and articulate the impact of the literary unit on its audience.[96]

Unlike reader-response criticism, which reports the response of modern readers,

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[94] Herbert Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," in *Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking, in Honor of James Albert Winans* (ed. A. M. Drummond; New York: The Century Co., 1925; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 209. Lundbom (who alerted me to this quote) says that "Wichelns was after a speech's persuasive quality.… the key term is really *audience,* and by audience Wichelns meant the original audience, not the subsequent reader" (ibid.).

[95] Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric,* 8, 12.

[96] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 4. This definition does not include the intent of the author, but it is historically rooted by insisting on a comparative analysis of ancient texts and a concern for the original audience.

rhetorical criticism focuses on the effect on *ancient* readers.[97] Thus rhetorical criticism

must always be historically rooted, with careful attention to the historical setting and the

genre.[98] It should not be separated from historical and form criticism.[99] When we try to

understand how the text would have affected the ancient audience, we must work to

understand that ancient audience.[100] Classen notes that exegetes should not only try to

find out the author's background and intent, but also "the circumstances of the

addressees, their situation, their problems and their feelings."[101] We see the readers not as

passive recipients of a speech, but as thinking people who are able to interact with the

text and choose whether to respond to the message.[102] We include psychological and

sociological factors in the way the message is presented as well as how it might be

received. As Kennedy notes, rhetorical criticism attempts to discern how a work "would

be perceived by an audience of near contemporaries."[103] Watson says, "It is a historical

enterprise standing between ahistorical literary criticism and historical criticism."[104]

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[97] "A rhetorical perspective is highly compatible with the g/h [grammatico-historical] method because both are grounded in examination of language, culture, and the speaker-audience relationship" (Arthurs, "Biblical Interpretation," 201).

[98] "In distinction from methods that bracket historical setting, this form of rhetorical criticism draws attention to the contexts in which texts arose and were read" (Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 161). "Methods that bracket historical setting" could include literary criticism as well as a rhetorical criticism that focuses on stylistics.

[99] Michael V. Fox gives four reasons that literary and historical approaches should not be separated:
> "(1) an eclectic approach provides more tools for interpretation, and we need them all….
> (2) Literary-historical criticism respects the text as a *means of communication*….
> (3) Aesthetic clarity can be enhanced by recovering artistry obscured by later accretions….
> (4) There is currently a special social imperative to integrate literary history into the literary study of the Bible. Powerful religio-political interests are attempting to impose an anachronistic reading of biblical texts on the public school curriculum" ("On Reading Redaction," in idem, *The Redaction of the Books of Esther* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 144-46).

[100] Fox, "On Reading," 144-46.

[101] Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 47.

[102] Wuellner, "Where Is," 461.

[103] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 4. Kennedy also includes the author's intent.

[104] Duane F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism: New Testament," *DBI* 2:400.

Gitay emphasizes the importance of understanding the audience: "The goal of sound rhetorical criticism is to study the conditions which make an effective communication possible. The major principle of effective communication is the reader's expectations."[105] It involves a study of how people think and come to conclusions: "Rhetorical analysis reveals the speaker's strategy of appealing to or mastering the audience's mind."[106] The modern interpreter must even consider the kinds of literature and ideas the audience had been exposed to before, whether supporting or conflicting. The original audience was sometimes critical and difficult to persuade.[107] Indeed, an attempt to persuade usually implies some resistance. Fox notes that a study of effectiveness must include the setting:

> The effectiveness of a particular prophecy did not derive from that utterance alone. Factors external to the discourse in question would bear strongly upon its effectiveness. These include the weight of the prophet's entire career, the theological and social contexts of the prophecy, which predisposed the audience to a certain attentiveness (or not receptiveness) to prophecy as such, and the prophet's prior accuracy in prediction.[108]

Kennedy also distinguishes literary criticism from rhetorical criticism in that the latter seeks the intent of the biblical writer and the effect on the original audience: "My goal...is the more historical one of reading the Bible as it would be read by an early Christian" (*New Testament,* 5).

[105] Yehoshua Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Prophetic Discourse," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. Duane F. Watson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 14. Gitay applied Kennedy's approach to OT studies.

[106] Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," in McKenzie and Haynes, 136.

[107] I am indebted to Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 163, for this observation. She notes the importance of intertextuality, of exploring the interconnections among texts, including the way that previous texts affect the nuances of a word. She credits Mikhail Bakhtin for pointing out that a reader may protest against a text, bring additional insights to it, call other texts to mind, and have additional influences other than the text. The reader is active, not the passive receptor of a monologue (ibid., 167).

[108] Fox, "On Reading Redaction," 4-5. Fox illustrates his method with his analysis of Ezek 37, suggesting a possible function for the "irrational" claims of the text and how they might serve to win the audience to Ezekiel's view. He concludes by reviewing how the literary devices could serve to persuade the audience (p. 15). His focus is not on literary devices, but on the way in which the text attempts to get an idea across to the audience. Allen notes that Fox "has played down the value of formal structural analysis, in a desire to focus on the persuasive force of discourse and thus to align Old Testament rhetorical criticism with the extra-biblical discipline [i.e., secular rhetorical criticism]" (Leslie C. Allen, "Structure, Tradition and Redaction in Ezekiel's Death Valley Vision," in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* [ed. P. R. Davies and D. J. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993], 128.

Fox says, "Rhetorical criticism should focus on the analysis and evaluation of the suasive force of discourse rather than on its formal literary features or structure."[109] That is, the analysis should focus on the analysis, not the raw data. The critic must not only identify parallelism, repetitions, chiasms, etc., but also attempt to ascertain how they might function psychologically and sociologically. This is inevitably subjective, but still an essential part of understanding a biblical text. Even stylistics involves some subjectivity.[110]

Some critics speak of the intent of the author or text, some of persuasion, some of effect on the audience. Though there are differences in these foci, they overlap a great deal. There may be significant differences between an author's intent and the audience's response (e.g., the author wanted the people to repent, but they did not repent), but it is through an analysis of the structure, strategy and style of the text that we can speculate what the author was hoping for and whether it was achieved.

There is often substantial overlap between the apparent intention of the text and the probable effect on the audience, so an analysis that focuses one can also suggest much about the other. In a few cases we are told how people responded to the message (e.g., by burning the scroll, Jer 36:21-27), and we can see that there was a difference between the

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[109] Fox, "On Reading Redaction," 1. Fox noted that the original listeners could not appreciate all the literary details—but Allen rightly notes that "in is present form Ezek. 37.1-14 functions as a literary text, which permits rereading and so appreciation of fine points" (Allen, "Structure," 128). Thus the text has both rhetorical and literary features that are worthy of study.

Kennedy notes that in antiquity, the Bible was more often heard than read, and that it was written and edited with that in mind, thus it retained an oral quality as well as a literary quality (*New Testament,* 5, 37).

[110] Lundbom writes, "The charge then sometimes made about there being too much subjectivity in Muilenburg's method is not entirely groundless" (*Jeremiah,* xxxii). He offers numerous methodological suggestions that can verify or refute the subjective impressions (ibid., xxxiii-xlii). Trible also offers useful practical guidelines (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 101-6). She notes that "subjectivity characterizes all biblical

author's intent and the actual response. In some cases we may judge an argument weak and unlikely to persuade the audience—e.g., "the author seems to want the people to do such-and-such, but an important and obvious objection is not addressed."[111] We might even judge that an argument would be persuasive for one audience but not another, and in such cases we generally conclude that the text was not designed for the more resistant group. Such conclusions must be based on the evidence of the text and its probable historical context. In most cases (since we are working with implied authors and implied audiences) we have to assume that the author was competently addressing the concerns of the audience.

Method

As recently as 1999, Watson noted that rhetorical critics are "currently occupied with the refinement of methodology."[112] This chapter is my contribution to the discussion. Wuellner noted that "neither Muilenburg nor his school worked with an identifiable model of rhetorical criticism, though pleas were made that the practice of rhetorical criticism needed a methodology."[113] Trible wrote, "Muilenburg never developed a comprehensive statement of rhetorical criticism. He worked by intuition; he shared evolving perceptions; he did not construct a system."[114]

Kennedy offered a methodology based on classical rhetoric.[115] Black went so far as

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methods.… Methods do not produce 'objective' findings" (ibid., 231).

[111] In making such a judgment, we are admitting that the author had an intent that is at least somewhat discernable.

[112] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," *DBI* 2:400; also Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 109.

[113] Wuellner, "Where Is," 451. Watson and Hauser more charitably say that Muilenburg "laid down a rudimentary methodology" (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 107)

[114] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 52.

[115] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 33-38. Wuellner paraphrases these steps in his article ("Where Is," 455-58), as does Black ("Keeping up," 254-55), Fiore ("Rhetoric," 717), and Watson and Hauser (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 110-111). Roth ("Rhetorical Criticism,"398) has the same steps, citing Wuellner but not

to say, "Kennedy's primary contribution is methodological: the presentation of a distinctive manner of exegesis that is lucid and systematic, far more painstaking than Muilenburg's proposal, and insightfully undergirded by classical erudition…. Kennedy's method both invites new ways of pondering old questions and opens modern eyes to neglected dimensions of ancient literature."[116] However, other scholars have promoted other "rhetorical" perspectives, each with its own methods. Trible lists five perspectives for rhetoric: the traditional focus on persuasion, the sociological perspective, the experiential, the dramaturgical, and the postmodern.[117] However, the last three "methods" are so poorly defined that they do not offer much hope for reproducible results. As Black says, "In most of these studies, the interpretive tactics and exegetical implications have not yet come completely into focus."[118] I will examine the more "traditional" approach to rhetorical criticism, starting with Kennedy, and then look at a sociological approach.

Kennedy describes five stages of analysis. The first stage is defining the *rhetorical unit,* the amount of text to be studied.[119] This may be an entire book of the Bible, or a section within a book. Lundbom notes that "analysis that pays little or no attention to literary units will not pass for rhetorical criticism and ends up being a throw-back to precritical study of the Bible."[120]

Rhetorical criticism generally treats the text as we have it, rather than separating it

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Kennedy. Hauser gives a more detailed description of how one goes about these steps (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 9-14).

[116] Black, "Keeping up," 255. Kennedy has been instrumental not only in method, but also in championing the interest in persuasion.

[117] Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 58-60.

[118] Black, "Keeping up," 256.

[119] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 33, italics in the original.

[120] Lundbom, *Jeremiah,* xxxiv.

into hypothetical sources, fragments, and interpolations.[121] Classen writes, "The most obvious approach seems to be always to regard a text as a unit, assuming that it has a unity, and only when this turns out to be impossible to try to explain why this seems impossible and for which reasons several elements seem to have been put together or why something is missing."[122] As Classen notes, rhetorical criticism can be applied to a hypothetical reconstruction. For example, if we suspect a verse to be a later interpolation, we could analyze the way the passage communicates without it, and then with it. If the argument seems to work better without it than with it, then rhetorical criticism could be used in support of judgments about redaction. This would necessitate a concerted effort to understand the passage *with* the verse, as well as without. As an example of rhetorical criticism being used to investigate literary history, Watson uses it to evaluate the literary dependence between Jude and 2 Peter.[123] Regardless of its redaction history, however, the end result of a text's history is still a text, notes Paul Beauchamp, and it "begs to be treated as a finished product."[124]

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[121] Form criticism tended to divide, and was often more a tool of historical analysis than an effort to understand the text. Muilenburg, however, often argued for the unity of a passage based on consistency of rhetorical style and argument ("Isaiah 40-66," 5:475, 477, 505, 528, 553, 567, 583, 659, and many other places).

Similarly, Allen notes that although Psalm 132 contains earlier material, we cannot reconstruct the argument of that earlier material, for the psalmist has selected only the parts congenial to his purpose. Whatever the original meaning was, it has been put into a new context, and we can study the text only as it is (Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* [WBC21; Dallas: Word, 1983] 207).

[122] Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 46, n. 3.

[123] Watson, *Invention,* 163-88. Patrick and Scult use rhetorical criticism to analyze the contribution of P and J material in Genesis 1-3 (Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric,* 103-25). Muilenburg occasionally argues that a passage is a gloss or is in the wrong place (Muilenburg, "Isaiah 40-66," 5:518, 561, 564, 576, etc.).

[124] Paul Beauchamp, Preface to Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis,* 11-12. Trible, on the other hand, argues that rhetorical criticism has a commitment to "final form" and cannot be used to support any transpositions. She argues that Jonah 4:5 would make better sense if it came after 3:4, but then argues against the transposition (Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 118-119). This is apparently on ideological grounds, for she writes, "Though accepting the logic of the argument for transposition, this interpretation holds fast to the final form of the text. It maintains that 4:5 fits a tendency throughout the story to delay information" (ibid., 206). She claims

Kennedy's second stage of rhetorical criticism is discerning the *rhetorical situation.* This includes the cause of the text, the reason it was written, the mood of the audience, the mood of the author, and their social values. This is subjective, speculative, and complex, but crucial for understanding the rhetoric. The "situation" includes other explanations of the same events, other answers to the same questions, etc. Kennedy observes that "this roughly corresponds to the *Sitz im Leben* of form criticism…. The critic needs to ask of what this audience consists, what the audience expects in the situation, and how the speaker or writer manipulates these expectations…. Plato asserts that a true philosophical orator must know the souls of his audience."[125]

Third, "in many rhetorical situations the speakers will be found to face one overriding *rhetorical problem.* His audience is perhaps already prejudiced against him and not disposed to listen to anything he may say; or the audience may not perceive him as having the authority to advance the claims he wishes to make; or what he wishes to say is very complicated and thus hard to follow, or so totally different from what the audience expects that they will not immediately entertain the possibility of its truth."[126] Tull notes that the attempt to persuade usually implies the existence of some resistance, i.e., a

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the delay "strengthens the rhetoric through surprise" (ibid., 222), but she offers no substantiating evidence. She claims that it "requires the reader to reread" (ibid.), even though this might render the message inaccessible to most people. Similarly, she refuses to question whether chapter 2 is a later addition (ibid., 161), even though it would be a useful exercise to compare the rhetorical effectiveness of the book with the psalm, and the book without it. Such a comparison could highlight what the chapter actually contributes to the book. This ideological commitment is apparently Trible's own, not a necessary part of rhetorical criticism itself, and it may even be counterproductive, for if a rhetorical critic argues for unity, others may suspect that the conclusion has been determined by the ideology, not the analysis.

[125] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 34-35.

[126] Ibid., 36. By saying that this occurs in "many rhetorical situations," but by italicizing *rhetorical problem,* Kennedy sends mixed signals on whether this is a distinct step or an acknowledgement of the complexity of the situation. Wuellner includes the rhetorical problem as part of the situation (Wuellner, "Where Is," 455-56).

rhetorical problem, but it is often a challenge to ascertain what the problem was.[127]

The fourth step in Kennedy's method is to describe the structure of the passage as a strategy for the communicative purpose: "Consider the *arrangement of material* in the text: what subdivisions it falls into, what the persuasive effect of these parts seems to be, and how they work together—or fail to do so—to some unified purpose in meeting the rhetorical situation. In order to do this he will need to engage in line-by-line analysis of the argument, including its assumptions, its topics, and its formal features, such as enthymemes, and of the *devices of style,* seeking to define their function in context."[128]

The fifth step is putting it all together—estimating the effectiveness of the passage for the situation and purpose.[129] This step also serves to put the pieces into a cohesive whole, rather than leaving them as fragments or disconnected steps of a methodology. For example, the critic may ask, Have I explained *how* the structure supports the message? How do the words and the style work together to affect the audience in their situation? As Kennedy acknowledges, this may entail a revision of earlier steps: "These stages are set forth…as a sequence, but it is better to view them as a circular process, for the detailed analysis of later stages may in fact reveal aspects of the rhetorical problem or a definition of the species or stasis which was not obvious on first approaching a passage."[130]

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[127] "The disputed rhetorical environment surrounding many biblical texts, especially in the Hebrew scriptures, is difficult for us to perceive because we no longer have access to many of the voices to which these texts were responding" (Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism," 168).

[128] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 37. Kennedy did not number his steps. In describing Kennedy's steps, both Black and Wuellner list "invention and style" as a separate step, perhaps because Kennedy italicized *devices of style,* as he did for various steps (Black, "Keeping up," 255, and Wuellner, "Where Is," 457). But Kennedy described the analysis of style as part of the analysis of arrangement, not a step to be done after the analysis of arrangement. Whether style is numbered as a distinct step or not, it is something that should be considered.

[129] Thurén faults Kennedy for not giving enough attention to audience interaction with the message (Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 68), but Kennedy's last step would include this.

[130] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 33.

To summarize, Kennedy describes these steps:

1) Determine the rhetorical unit

2) Define the rhetorical situation

3) Describe the rhetorical problem, if any

4) Consider the arrangement of material

5) Review the success of the passage in meeting the situation.

Watson describes Kennedy's steps with a few more details:

1) Determine the rhetorical unit

2) Analyze the rhetorical situation

3) Determine the species of rhetoric, the question, and the stasis

4) Analyze invention, arrangement, and style

6) Evaluate rhetorical effectiveness.[131]

One problem with this sequence is that in most biblical literature, we can discern the

situation (step 2) only by analyzing the question dealt with in the text (step 3)—we must

determine the primary question or purpose of the text *before* we can describe the

situation. Lauri Thurén recognizes this when he includes the *goal* or purpose of the text

within the rhetorical situation.[132] His next concern is to analyze "the means utilized in a

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[131] Watson, *Invention,* 8-28, or Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 110-11. Kennedy mentioned *stasis theory* and *species of rhetoric* in the paragraph after *rhetorical problem* (Kennedy, *New Testament,* 36). In his description of the "Greco-Roman model" of rhetorical criticism, Wendland combines Kennedy's third step with Watson's third step: "the specific problem, question, or issue (*stasis*) under consideration along with the particular manner (*species*) of rhetoric that has been chosen to present it" ("Aspects of Rhetorical Analysis," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches* [ed. A. J. Blasi et al.; Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2002], 173).

Anderson summarizes Kennedy's steps, but also notes that "the division into five seems to differ with each attempt" (*Ancient Rhetorical,* 28, citing Wuellner and Watson in particular). Wuellner seems to include the rhetorical problem with the rhetorical situation (step 2); his third step is to identify the arrangement, or the strategy of the response, and the fourth step is identification of stylistic techniques (Wuellner, "Where Is," 456-7)

[132] "When studying a literary object rhetorical criticism first tries to determine what kind of situation the author appears to have in mind, i.e. which are, according to his assumption, the audience's attitudes, values, and needs in the specific situation that invites him to give a speech or produce a text. The central objective of rhetorical criticism is to understand what the author seems to want to do in relation to these attitudes and

text in order to achieve the goal of the discourse. These means include both the total

strategy of the text and the techniques used to serve this strategy"—that is, the invention

of arguments, their arrangement, and how stylistic devices help achieve the goal.[133] In

effect, Thurén presents a two-step method: determine the goal, and analyze the method of

achieving that goal.[134] He later describes a more detailed five-step method, which

improves upon Kennedy and Watson:

1) Define the rhetorical unit. "If we begin by defining the units, such an analysis can

   only be preliminary and suggestive."[135]

2) Identify the rhetorical situation. "The first step in identifying the rhetorical

   situation of a text is to determine into which *rhetorical genus* the text can be

   classified…. We are actually surveying what *type of response* from the audience

   the text is designed to produce…. The forensic genre is used when the speaker

   wants to judge past events, the deliberative genre when he wants to elicit a

   decision about some expedient action to be taken in the near future, and the

   epideictic to consolidate or diminish assent to some value, to praise or blame

   something."[136] One should also ascertain the status (stasis), or the main issue of

   the text, the main angle of the argument. But the most important part of the

   rhetorical situation, Thurén says, "is to create a picture of the audience which is

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values, what is his goal. All these questions are included in the *rhetorical situation*…. The rhetorical
situation consists of the picture of the audience which the author seems to presuppose*"* (Thurén, *Rhetorical
Strategy*, 43, 70).

[133] Ibid.

[134] "The two main concerns of rhetorical criticism…are the identification of the rhetorical situation and the
techniques used in order to meet the challenge thereof" (ibid., 68).

[135] Ibid., 69-70.

[136] Ibid., 72. Thurén here includes the determination of genre as part of the way in which we can ascertain
what the rhetorical situation was. Contra Watson, this is the way that I believe Kennedy should be
understood.

implied in the text, to distinguish its premises and expectations."[137]

3) Examine the rhetorical disposition, "discerning different parts of the text and identifying their envisioned convincing and persuasive effects." This is not just a study of the structure, Thurén cautions, for it must acknowledge that the rhetorical situation changes from one part of the text to another, since the text itself is affecting the audience. "The author's appeal modifies the implies addressees' thoughts."[138] The introduction affects the audience's attitude toward the author, the explanation of one point affects the way that another will be received, etc. "At the end of the text the author has, as a result of his argumentation, a different implied audience in front of him."[139] Because of the changing situation, "the function of the techniques and arguments is largely determined by their position in the text."

4) Analyze the rhetorical devices and style, asking "the function of particular devices of style in their interactive context, what attitudes they should evoke in the audience, how do they contribute to the interaction desired by the author."[140] These techniques then help us see the author's view of the situation.

5) Last, consider the synchronic whole, "to what degree it meets, as a unit, the rhetorical exigency."[141]

Based on Kennedy, Watson, and Thurén, I propose the following steps, viewing them as a circular process in which later steps may necessitate revision of earlier

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[137] Ibid., 74.
[138] Ibid., 75.
[139] Ibid., 75-76.
[140] Ibid., 77.
[141] Ibid., 78.

conclusions:

1) Determine the rhetorical unit: What is the text?[142]

2) Determine the question: What is the text trying to communicate?[143] How is it

    attempting to influence the audience?

3) Determine the situation: What were the circumstances that might have prompted

    the author to write the text? How might the original setting aid or hinder the

    message? Where did the author and audience agree and disagree?

4) Determine the strategy

    a)   Invention: What arguments are used, and what assumptions do they make?

    b)   Arrangement: What is the structure, and the species of rhetoric?[144]

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[142] The rhetorical unit is often decided in advance, but may be modified after further analysis, particularly if one is studying a portion of a larger text.

[143] In other words, what problem is the author addressing? However, I have avoided the word "problem" because Kennedy uses it for factors in the setting that make persuasion difficult, not for the question the author is trying to address.

[144] As I argued in the previous chapter, there is little value in labeling the text as one of the three classical species. At best, the label cannot be assigned until after the function and arrangement have been analyzed.

Unlike Watson, I do not include any role for stasis. Kennedy writes, "Stasis theory is exceedingly complex, and discussion of it probably should not be undertaken by a student before extensive reading in the rhetorical sources" (Kennedy, *New Testament,* 36). He also notes, "Ordinarily deliberative and epideictic do not exhibit stasis in the strict sense" (quoted in George M. Foster, "Development of Rhetorical Stasis for Deliberative Speaking" [Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1971], 31). Quintilian wrote, "I do not consider that *bases* [Butler's translation of *status,* the Latin equivalent of *stasis*] are sufficiently determined by these categories, nor that the latter cover every possible kind of topic…. For there will be found to be many topics that are not covered by these categories" (*Instituto* 3.6.28; Butler p. 423). It seems dubious for modern interpreters to try to press all arguments into the categories given in classical textbooks, when not even Quintilian would do that.

Anderson goes further when he writes, "The intricate details of στάσις doctrine and its use to pinpoint the precise issue at stake is [*sic*] of little relevance to Paul's letters. Discussion of στάσις doctrine in the treatises is invariably specifically related to the kind of complex (legal) questions arising in the courts. In this respect, the lists of specific τόποι which are provided for the various ςτάσεις are also of little help. Such τόποι are directly related to judicial disputes and have little in common with the kinds of subjects dealt with in the letters of Paul [or other NT documents]" (Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 103).

Aristotle noted only four types of deliberative stasis—whether it is possible, good, expedient, or important. Lee S. Hultzén argues that efforts "to extend the [stasis] system by simple analogy to deliberative questions" is "unsuccessful" ("Status in Deliberative Analysis," in *The Rhetorical Idiom: Essays in Rhetoric, Oratory, Language, and Drama* [ed. Donald C. Bryant; New York: Russell & Russell, 1966], 97).

c) Style: What literary devices are used, and how do they contribute to the purpose of the text?

5) Evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy for the situation.

Vernon Robbins has described a different methodology for "socio-rhetorical criticism," focusing on five aspects of the text: "(a) inner texture; (b) inter-texture; (c) social and cultural texture; (d) ideological texture; and (e) sacred texture."[145] Inner texture, he explains, involves "the repetition of particular words, the creation of beginnings and endings, alternation of speech and storytelling, particular ways in which the words present arguments, and the particular 'feel' or aesthetic of the text"[146]—in other words, stylistic matters. Under inter-texture, Robbins includes the rhetorical situation, including the text's references to previous literature and language, cultural customs and values, and history. Social and cultural texture "concerns the capacities of the text to support social reform, withdrawal, or opposition and to evoke cultural perceptions of dominance, subordinance, difference, or exclusion."[147] This would include the text's attempts to persuade or influence the audience. Ideological texture involves the way that the author and readers "position themselves in relation to other individuals and groups.[148] This would overlap what Robbins calls the social texture, and would overlap as well with the sacred texture, which asks how humans relate with the divine.

Robbins presents some helpful questions for clarifying the setting and purpose of a

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He offers a method to apply stasis to deliberative questions, but the result is so far removed from classical stasis theory that there is little reason to force the analysis into this grid. As I will argue below, enthymeme analysis is a better tool for examining the argument in more detail.

[145] Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

text, but his method is designed more for a study of the sociology than it is the text.[149]

With a preliminary understanding of the text, we can explore the sociological questions that Robbins highlights—e.g., Is the text attempting to shape culture, ideology, and/or the readers' relationship with the divine? This question is another way of asking how the text is attempting to influence or persuade the audience, and it can shed light on the purpose of the text. Likewise, a consideration of ideology and group membership may be important in understanding the social dynamics that helped or hindered the communicative purpose.

The goal of rhetorical criticism is not to aim for an ideology of the author and audience,[150] but to focus on the text, particularly the way the text achieves its purpose within its situation. Some circularity is inevitable, for the text is our window into the situation, and then that hypothetical situation (including the ideology of the author and audience) is used as the basis for better understanding how the text would work in such a situation. It is after we grasp the complexity of the situation (including its sociological dynamics) that we can better appreciate the way that stylistic details contribute to the message. For that reason I prefer the sequence of steps I proposed above, while retaining Robbins' concerns as helpful supplementary considerations.

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[148] Ibid., 4.

[149] Robbins calls his approach socio-rhetorical rather than rhetorical, signaling his interest in sociology and acknowledging the role that rhetoric plays in social systems. He writes, "A primary goal of socio-rhetorical interpretation is to integrate the study of religion as a humanistic discipline, a theological discipline, and a social-scientific discipline" (Vernon K. Robbins, "Socio-Rhetorical Hermeneutics and Commentary," in *Epi to Auto: Studies in Honour of Petr Pokorny on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* [ed. J. Mrazek et al.; Praha-Trebenice, Czech Republic: Mlyn, 1998], 288). Available on the internet at http://www.emory.edu/college/religion/faculty/robbins/commentary/commentary284.html; accessed 20 Aug 2004. Since Robbins's goals are different than mine, his methodology is not suited for my purpose, although he raises questions that are helpful in any rhetorical analysis.

[150] The ideology of the author and audience may be interesting and useful, but when it is the primary research goal, it is better described as a sociological study, not rhetorical criticism.

The importance of classical rhetoric

Thurén identifies two methodological questions that should be addressed: "A typical view of rhetorics contains two types of obstacle which prevent an effective use of rhetorical criticism: rhetorics is seen either as pure stylistics, whether positively or pejoratively understood, or as strictly bound to Greco-Roman school rhetoric."[151] I have already argued that rhetorical criticism should analyze the methods of persuasion, not just list stylistic devices, and I have described a methodology appropriate for that purpose. Now I will address whether rhetorical criticism of the NT should use modern rhetorical approaches, or whether it should use only the rhetorical theories of the ancient world.

Watson asks, "Can the canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric be used to interpret *all* genres which intend to persuade?"[152] Some interpreters, without necessarily making this claim, nevertheless evaluate NT materials with classical patterns *as if* that is the only appropriate method. Black writes that some scholars tend "to press oracles or letters into elaborate rhetorical schemes of organization (from *proem* to *epilogos*),"[153] as if those were the only correct way to analyze them. However, Watson writes:

> Many interpreters consider rhetorical analysis of the NT solely using Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions to be too limited.… Ancient rhetoric does not

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[151] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 47.

[152] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 111, italics added. Bruce Malina divides rhetorical critics into two camps on this question: "The label 'rhetorical criticism' in biblical studies covers two entirely and radically distinct types of behavior. The one is historical criticism, deriving from historically oriented scholars who use ancient rhetoric as a comparative matrix for understanding New Testament writings (e.g. Wuellner, Betz). The other is literary criticism of a contemporary sort, deriving from scholars steeped in modern literary criticism and applying that criticism to the New Testament" (Bruce J. Malina, "Rhetorical Criticism and Social-Scientific Criticism: Why Won't Romanticism Leave Us Alone?" in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* [ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 131; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996], 84.

[153] Black, "Keeping up," 255. Watson notes several other scholars who have used classical rhetoric to analyze NT documents: F. Church, W. Wuellner, C. Robbins, W. Kurz, and K. Donfried (Watson, *Invention,* 6-7).

address all theoretical, practical, and philosophical questions posed by speech…
. This approach assumes that the NT authors were familiar with rhetoric either
from formal education or through interaction with oral and written Hellenistic
culture, which was permeated with rhetorical practice.[154]

However, Hellenistic culture was not the only influence on NT writers; their methods
of explanation and exhortation may also be influenced by ancient Hebrew patterns.[155]
Moreover, even if the NT writers had studied Greek rhetoric, they would not necessarily
be using those patterns in the letters they wrote. Just as Hebrew writers modified Hebrew
forms/genres to suit their purposes, and Greek writers *adapted* rhetorical forms,[156] so the

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[154] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," 2:400. See Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 120, 124 for a discussion of whether Paul would have studied rhetoric.

[155] Wendland includes a section on Semitic or rabbinic rhetoric. He notes the following methods used by Jesus: an authoritative demeanor, prophetic style, use of the wisdom tradition, dialogue, people-related imagery and figures of speech, audience involvement, and poetic devices ("Aspects," 179-81).

Meynet asserts that the NT writings "do not obey the rules of Graeco-Roman rhetoric, but the specific laws of Hebraic rhetoric" (*Rhetorical Analysis,* 21-22), and he consequently concentrates on chiastic structures, sometimes forcing the text into a mold that it does not seem to fit. Here is one result of his overemphasis on chiasms: "The reader will have no doubt noticed that the figure of the Our Father strangely mirrors the shape of the seven-branched candelabra" (ibid., 27), but he makes no attempt to explain the significance of this claim—probably because it has none. My criticism of an exclusively Semitic rhetoric is similar to my criticism of an exclusively Greco-Roman rhetoric: both artificially limit the investigation. Maynet later admits, "I do not deny the possibility of a Greek influence…but for now, I will limit myself to studying the texts solely from the point of view of Hebrew rhetoric" (ibid., 176).

The identification and interpretation of chiasms is extremely subjective. John Welch, for example, says that Lund's pioneering analysis of the Sermon on the Mount "lacks convincing data where it is needed most, namely at the middle of his proposed chiastic units" (*Chiasmus in Antiquity,* 236). Yet Welch's chiastic outline of the Sermon does not seem to be much of an improvement. In a later work, Welch notes that "many proposed chiasms are impressive and interesting; others appear to be contrived or unremarkable" ("Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," in *Chiasmus Bibliography* [ed. John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay; Provo: Research Press, 1999], 172). Welch offers some criteria in an attempt to reduce (not eliminate) the subjectivity inherent in the study of chiasms.

[156] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 112. I document this point further because some critics still ignore it:

- "Rhetorical handbooks, particularly the later ones, will list the rules for each genre and the sorts of things each example should contain. When it actually comes to literary composition however, these outlines and rules are often disregarded" (Richard A. Burridge, "Biography," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 372).

- "The writers of manuals on rhetoric, though aware of the great variety of speeches required by the realities of life, nevertheless did venture to construe a standard structure, at the same time allowing for flexibility in its application.… The handbooks of rhetoric recommend to a speaker to use his own

biblical writers could adapt basic patterns to suit their purposes. As Black notes, "Biblical documents appear to be mixtures of many genres, blithely compounded by their authors from an enormous range of literary and oral components…. While rhetorical models may function as heuristic guides, particular texts often resist preset patterns."[157] Therefore Watson is correct when he writes, "Restrictive reliance upon the rhetorical handbooks can lead to an imbalanced view of the New Testament documents."[158] Olbricht agrees: "Texts must be scrutinized for their own distinctive features and means of proof rather than forced into a formalized straight jacket of ancient rhetoric."[159]

But in favor of Greco-Roman rhetoric, Kennedy claims that

> Rhetoric is...a universal phenomenon which is conditioned by basic workings of the human mind and heart and by the nature of all human society. Aristotle's objective in writing his *Rhetoric* was not to describe Greek rhetoric, but to describe this universal facet of human communication…. It is perfectly possible to utilize the categories of Aristotelian rhetoric to study speech in

judgment to assess a situation and an audience and to decide what to say and how to put it" (Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 26, 46).

- Olbricht notes that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* "is not a precise compendium of rules… Aristotle argued that rhetoric is an art… We can never expect assured or consensus results" ("Aristotelian Analysis," 222-23). "Quintilian, as well as the rest of the ancient rhetoricians, held that rules are always situational. Based on their perspective it seems dangerous to be adamant in rhetorical criticism as to the rules that pertain to a specific text" (Thomas H. Olbricht, "Delivery and Memory," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 165).

- "For ancient Greek and Roman theorists rhetoric was a very flexible art. Thus, to perceive rhetoric as a fixed system is non-historical. Such a view may be partly due to the ancient authors' presentation of rhetoric, but e.g. Quintilian explicitly rejects it. Instead, he claims that an orator must be very flexible when adapting rhetorical rules to different situations" (Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 51).

- Übelacker, citing Quintilian, argues that the guidelines given in the ancient rhetorical manuals could be handled freely. "Die Rhetorik war ja kein einheitliches System" (Walter G. Übelacker, *Der Hebräerbrief als Appell. I. Untersuchungen zu* exordium, narratio, *und* postscriptum *(Hebr 1-2 und 13,22-25)* [ConBNT 21; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell: 1989], 65).

- Wilhelm Wuellner also notes "the frequent discrepancy between the theorists and the practicioners" ("Arrangement," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 57).

[157] Black, "Keeping up," 257, 255.

[158] Watson and Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 112.

[159] Olbricht, "Introduction,"6.

> China, India, Africa, and elsewhere…. What is unique about Greek rhetoric, and what makes it useful for criticism, is the degree to which it was conceptualized…. In understanding how their rhetoric worked we have little choice but to employ the concepts and terms of the Greeks.[160]

In other words, people in all cultures seek to persuade in one way or another, but our terminology about persuasion is based on the Greek model because they were the ones who first analyzed persuasion, and they analyzed it well. Their categories are useful for most of what we see around the world. We can use Greek names for their argumentation, just as we do for their poetic structures and figures of speech.

However, we must be open to the possibility that writers used devices and approaches that have no Greek counterparts. It is *possible* to analyze everything with the classical Greek model, but it is also possible that other models may offer additional insights. Nothing in Kennedy's methodology requires literature to be conformed to classical models. Rather, the focus is more general: on the way in which the text seeks to affect the audience. Classical models may provide a useful starting point, but they are not the last word in methods of persuasion. For biblical studies, our question is, How does this text persuade an audience?—and we should be open to the possibility that scholars have learned at least a little about persuasion since the ancients.

Esler writes, "While ancient rhetorical theory is often sufficient for reading the biblical texts, it is sometimes helpful to introduce insights from 'the new rhetoric.'"[161] Anderson argues that we could build on the work of Aristotle, "but would we not then be better off refining that system and using the benefits of modern research in creating a universal grammar of rhetoric? Is this not in fact what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca

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[160] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 10-11.
[161] Esler, *Galatians,* 17.

have attempted in their *New Rhetoric*? This would seem to be a much better *universal*

tool than a Greek 'system' written c. 2000 years ago."[162] Classen writes, "There is no

good reason to maintain that a text could and should be examined only according to

categories known (or possibly known) to the author concerned."[163]

Thurén argues, "Rhetorical features in the New Testament…should be analysed with

the best means available, whether ancient or modern…. In general rhetoric, the choice

between alternatives depends on the goal pursued, and a combination is often

advisable."[164] Übelacker is of the opinion that the Greco-Roman handbooks should not be

used as the standard by which NT writers are to be judged.[165] Anderson concludes:

"Analysis of argumentative patterns is probably better approached via modern rhetorical

theory. Modern rhetorical textbooks will often provide a better system for analysing

argumentative patterns that those of ancient rhetorical theory."[166]

Classical models were designed primarily for judicial situations, legislative

deliberation, and public ceremonies.[167] They were not designed to cover didactic

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[162] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 31.

[163] Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 5.

[164] Thurén, *Argument and Theology,* 34.

[165] "Nicht ratsam ist es daher u. E., nur gewisse antike Rhetorikhandbücher zum Maßstab zu erheben, an dem z. B. Paulus zu messen sei" (Übelacker, *Hebräerbrief,* 65).

[166] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 103. Watson writes that rhetorical criticism by classical canons "was a fine beginning for the revival of the art of rhetorical criticism of the New Testament…. However, it is well understood that the field of New Testament needs to move beyond it in order fully to utilize all that rhetorical criticism has to offer interpretation. Kennedy's methodology can and should be enhanced by comparison of the rhetoric of the New Testament with more than the systematized conventions enumerated in rhetorical handbooks. Comparison should be made with actual speeches and written works of a highly rhetorical nature. These works illustrate the peculiarities of rhetoric necessitated by the contingencies of public rhetorical practice and the rhetorical situations addressed. This alerts the interpreter to features peculiar to the New Testament and allows literature that shares these peculiar rhetorical features to illuminate interpretation" (Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 177-78).

[167] Quintilian observed, "The old writers of text-books [including Aristotle] only included those kinds of oratory which were most in vogue" and he noted that Anaximenes categorized seven types of speeches (*Institutio* 3.4.5-9; Butler p. 393-95).

occasions[168] (such as the lectures in which rhetoric was taught), religious exhortations, or

letters.[169] Stanley Stowers writes, "Letter writing remained only on the fringes of formal

rhetorical education throughout antiquity. It was never integrated into the rhetorical

systems and thus does not appear in the standard handbooks. This means there were never

any detailed systematic rules for letters."[170] Stanley Porter says, "There is little if any

theoretical justification in the ancient handbooks for application of the formal categories

of the species and arrangement of rhetoric to the writing and analysis of the Pauline

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[168] Melanchthon invented the *didacticum* genus rather than categorize Galatians as judicial, deliberative, or epideictic (Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 11). Kennedy acknowledges that "the basic divisions of a speech recognized by the handbooks apply best to judicial oratory" (George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece,* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963], 11)—implying that other speech types have more deviations from the "recommended" patterns. Further complicating the use of classical patterns is that "Rhetors were expected to *hide* the standard outline when crafting a speech, and to produce a composition that would appear to unfold naturally" (Mack, *Rhetoric*, 32, italics added). "The best orator disguises his knowledge of the theory…he alters accepted patterns and adjusts them to the particular case and his special intention" (Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 27). Thus a well-crafted speech might not fit any outline very well.

[169] "Manuals on letter-writing…differ substantially from handbooks on rhetoric in content and structure…. A letter is a letter and cannot be expected to have the structure of a speech, though in parts it may be compatible" (Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 6, 17). After his analysis of Titus, Classen concludes, "the author has structured this letter in a very carefully considered manner; in doing so he has followed not the precepts of any handbook, but the requirements of the subject matter" (ibid., 66). Esler is correct when he says, "Given the pervasive influences of rhetoric in the Graeco-Roman world someone writing a letter in a context similar to one of the three standard rhetorical occasions would tend to adopt, at least in a broad sense, features appropriate to the occasion" (*Galatians,* 61). But problems arise when someone assumes that a NT letter must fall within one of those three occasions, when most letters address several needs.

[170] Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (LEC 5; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). David E. Aune writes, "Early Christian letters tend to resist rigid classification, either in terms of the three main types of oratory or in terms of the many categories listed by the epistolary theorists" (*The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* [LEC 8; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987], 203. Malherbe notes that rhetorical manuals did not discuss letter writing until the fourth century, and then only in an appendix. "Its relegation to an appendix shows that it does not properly belong in a discussion of rhetoric" (Abraham Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* [SBLSBS 19; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988], 3).

Reed, although acknowledging that "letter writing was at least partially influenced by rhetorical conventions," says: "The epistolary theorists say nothing about arranging letters according to this standard rhetorical convention…. There is no inherent one-to-one correspondence between the epistolary opening, body, and closing and the exordium, narratio, confirmatio, and peroratio. In fact, epistolary conventions used in actual letters seem to resist a dispositio classification" (Jeffrey T. Reed, "The Epistle," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 179-181).

letters."[171] Philip Esler concludes that "the lack of a formal relationship between rhetoric and epistolography renders it an exercise of dubious value to enquire whether Galatians is judicial *per se*…or deliberative *per se.*"[172] These categories were not designed to fit all letters.

Since the ancient manuals of rhetoric were not designed for analyzing letters or religious writings, it does not make sense to insist that Greco-Roman rhetoric be the only or even the primary pattern for NT rhetorical criticism. The fact that it *can* be useful does not mean that it is the most useful analytical tool. Robert Jewett writes, "I believe that the New Rhetoric and closely associated linguistic theories offer a more comprehensive grasp of epistolary communication."[173] Olbricht says, "We are helped little by simply superimposing the categories of classical rhetoric upon these documents."[174] Although some methods of persuasion may remain the same, we should also expect to find some differences when we look at other speaking situations and written communication, such as letters or narratives. The rhetoric of religion is also different than the rhetoric of the

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[171] Stanley E. Porter, "Paul of Tarsus and His Letters," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. *idem.;* Leiden: Brill, 1997], 567. One epistolary manual listed 41 types of letters (Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary,* 5). This suggests that it is not necessary to categorize letters into only three species of rhetoric. Letters sometimes use rhetorical theory, but sometimes they may not. If the epistolary situation matched one of the three 'typical' rhetorical situations, similar methods would be likely. Cicero (a prolific letter-writer) advises his students to practice rhetoric by writing: "Writing is said to be the best and most excellent modeler and teacher of oratory" (*De Oratore* 1.33). And Quintilian said that "in writing [are] the foundations of eloquence (10.3.3.). I am indebted to Compier, *Rhetorical Theology,* 9 for these two references.

[172] Esler, *Galatians*, 59. However, he adds: "It is certainly worthwhile to investigate whether, as a functional matter, the letter is primarily apologetic, being concerned with Paul's status, especially as an apostle, or primarily deliberative, as interested in persuading his audience to, or dissuading them from, some course of action of viewpoint" (ibid.).

[173] Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millennarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986)*,* 64.

[174] Olbricht, "Flowering," 102.

courtroom.[175] For these reasons, Kennedy writes,

> To what extent is an awareness of the conventions of different literary forms essential for valid rhetorical criticism? The answer seems to be that it can be helpful, but that it is not fundamental…. An awareness of genre (*genos*) may, however, contribute to an understanding of the rhetorical situation, especially the author's perception of his audience, and it may explain the presence of various features in the work…. In general, identification of genre is not a crucial factor in understanding how rhetoric actually works in units of the New Testament.[176]

The classical writers (who were writing manuals for speakers) focused on the speaker, not the audience's perceptions. Anderson identifies this as a methodological problem when he notes that the rhetorical "treatises were written in order to aid an orator in the *preparation* of speeches, and were *not* designed as an *analytical* tool for speeches already written."[177] Thurén notes that "ancient rhetoric *per se* offers no method for analyzing a discourse; it was designed to produce it. Modern rhetorics, on the other hand, while adopting some renewed insights from ancient rhetoric, has an objective which is more descriptive and analytical…. [It] has a more adequate perception of the discourse itself, and explains many features of a discourse in more accurate terms."[178] Further, the classical rhetors overlooked some techniques—for example, they did not analyze irony.[179]

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[175] "There is a distinctive rhetoric of religion. It can be found in many cultures, East and West, and at the heart of it lies authoritative proclamation, not rational persuasion. Those who accept religious teachings generally do so because of their perception of certain qualities in the person who utters them and because of their intuitive response to the message. Absolute demands, deliberate rejection of worldly reason, sometimes paradoxes or even obscurity, become a persuasive factor in the enunciation of a new religious message" (Kennedy, *New Testament,* 6). Despite the use of such techniques, however, religious rhetoric may at times present reasons and use logic.

[176] Ibid., 30-31, 33. Watson and Hauser question this latter sentence in particular (*Rhetorical Criticism,* 111), and so does Black ("Keeping up," 257). I would say that if a genre can be identified, it is very helpful, but it is not always possible to identify, and therefore not essential to ascertaining how a text is attempting to persuade an audience. Note also that Kennedy, trained in the classics, does not expect everything to be poured into a classical mold.

[177] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 104.

[178] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 52-53.

[179] Olbricht, "Introduction," 3. Nor do they identify chiasm as a technique. R. Dean Anderson Jr. does not

So we cannot assume that classical models provide a complete system. They do not answer all our questions, even though they are a useful starting point.

Anderson identifies some further problems with using ancient rhetoric: "A fundamental question concerns the most appropriate sources for determining the kind of school rhetoric taught in the first century AD…. It is important to clearly distinguish between the rhetorical theory of philosophers and school rhetoric. In this respect, for example, it will be shown that a treatise such as Aristotle's is *not* a helpful source for our purposes."[180] Thurén writes, "Aristotle's theses cannot be used as a description of the mainstream ancient way of reasoning. On the contrary, he acquired his reputation by presenting novel and radical opinions."[181] Wuellner notes, "There never existed a uniform or unified system of classical rhetoric…. 'Classical' rhetoric and its legacy consisted of a wide diversity of theories and practices."[182] Anderson lists seven ways in which Aristotle's work does not describe first-century practice.[183] Nevertheless, some rhetorical critics have used the Aristotelian model as *the* model for rhetorical criticism. There is no need to limit "classical" rhetoric to Aristotle alone, and in the same way there is no need to limit "rhetoric," or rhetorical criticism, to classical rhetoric alone.

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list chiasm in his *Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000). Rowe gives an example of chiasm from Hippolytus, but it is in parts of speech rather than in words (Galen O. Rowe, "Style," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 137).

[180] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 32. Aristotle's work "had relatively little direct influence on the classical tradition" because it was lost for many years (George A. Kennedy, "Historical Survey of Rhetoric," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 23.

[181] Lauri Thurén, "Is There Biblical Argumentation?" in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (ed. A. Eriksson, T. H. Olbricht, and W. Übelacker; Emory Studies in Early Christianity 8; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 81.

[182] Wuellner, "Rhetorical Criticism," 172.

[183] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 47-48. More useful for NT rhetoric is Demetrius, *de Elocutione,* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (ibid., 55, 96). Kennedy calls *Rhetorica ad Herennium* "the most convenient

In summary, although Greco-Roman rhetoric may be useful, NT rhetorical criticism should not limit itself to the patterns of ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric. Rather, the insights of modern rhetorical theorists may also be used to gain an understanding of how a text attempts to meet its rhetorical situation. Our basic question remains the same: How does this text try to persuade the audience? What is it trying to say, and how does it go about saying it? We use any tool, whether ancient or modern, to help us understand how the text functions.

Argumentation

An important tool of modern rhetorical criticism is argumentation theory. *The New Rhetoric,* the influential book by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, has the subtitle "A Treatise on Argumentation." Another helpful theory of argumentation is that of Stephen Toulmin.[184] Anderson goes so far as to say that NT rhetorical scholars "have tended to emphasise rhetoric in terms of argumentation."[185] This focus on the rational component of persuasion may be an attempt to counterbalance the tendency of some rhetorical critics to concentrate on style.[186]

Aristotle wrote that there are three components of persuasion: *ethos, pathos,* and

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introduction to classical rhetorical theory" (Kennedy, "Historical Survey," 24).

[184] Stephen Edelston Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), popularized and updated in Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke and Allan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (2nd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1984). Summaries of Toulmin's work are in Sonja K. Foss et al., *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (3rd ed.; Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 2002), 117-53, and Nancey C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 3-42. Frans H. van Eemeren critiques Perelman and Toulmin in his "Argumentation Theory: An Overview of Approaches and Research Themes," pp. 9-26 in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (ed. A. Eriksson, T. H. Olbricht, and W. Übelacker; Emory Studies in Early Christianity 8; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002).

[185] Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical,* 23. This might be true for those who use modern rhetoric, but would not be true for those who restrict themselves to classical models.

[186] "Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest that a new approach to rhetoric is needed because traditional rhetoric emphasizes matters of style at the expense of matters of rationality" (Foss et al., *Contemporary Perspectives*, 85).

logos,[187] which correspond to 1) the reputation of the speaker, or the way in which the audience's attitude toward the speaker can change during the message, 2) the mood of the audience, and the way that the speaker can change the mood during the message, and 3) the rational part of the message, the facts and implications that are brought out in the message, which would also take into consideration the facts (or misunderstandings) the audience had before the message began. Thus part of a persuasive message (often the introduction) might be only tangentially related to the main purpose—it is designed instead to increase the audience's confidence in the speaker, and thus improve their willingness to listen to the discussion of the main issue. Vocabulary and style may influence audience emotions toward the author and the topic. Alan Mitchell says, "Every rhetorical venture seeks to persuade the audience on the basis of something more than mere logic…. The speaker is persuasive…because in the meeting between speaker and audience there is a recognition of truth, compelling as much for the *way* the speaker articulates it as for what is said."[188]

Argumentation theory, although it does not leave emotion completely out of the picture, tends to focus on a rational analysis of the message.[189] Argumentation theory

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[187] Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1.2. This three-part formula came from Plato, *Gorgias* .

[188] Alan C. Mitchell, "The Use of πρέπειν and Rhetorical Propriety in Hebrews 2:10," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 687, italics added.

[189] "Despite the rhetorical features in Perelman's theory, it deals only with cognitive argumentation, not persuasion. In persuasion, convincing techniques and strategies…do not suffice; the critical factors are, according to classical rhetoric, *ethos* and *pathos*…These are to a great extent ignored by Perelman" (Lauri Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis* [JSNTSup 114; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995], 40). He also notes that "some forms of persuasion have little to do with even implicit argumentation (cf. e.g. the persuasive force of repetition…)…. It is necessary to add the volitional, emotional aspect to the argumentation analysis, that is, to ask what kind of emotions the author attempts to provoke in order to elicit assent " (ibid., 50, 54).

Thurén tries to limit "persuasion" to volitional matters, and uses "argumentation" for cognitive matters (ibid., 50). But this goes against the common use of the words—it is quite acceptable to say in English that I want to persuade people that love is more important than mercy. There may or may not be a volitional

acknowledges that people rarely use formal logic in making day-to-day decisions, but there is a process of presenting and evaluating data. Compier writes: "In human affairs decisions must usually be made before all the facts are in, in an inescapable and perpetual state of imperfect knowledge. Rhetoric offers a technique by which persons can argue their way toward a mutually agreed upon course of action based on probability, not certainty, and 'informed opinion,' not 'scientific demonstration.'"[190] Evidence is given, claims are made, warrants may be given as rationale, qualifications may be noted, and uncertainties acknowledged.[191] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca list numerous methods that people use to support their conclusions: the rule of justice, arguments by comparison, the argument of direction, argument from authority, illustration, model, analogy, and many others.[192]

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consequence of that comparison; my goal is simply that people agree with my opinion. Further, since it is sometimes difficult to discern whether there is a volitional implication for a cognitive statement, it is not essential nor helpful to limit the word persuasion to volition. Aristotle included epideictic speeches, which do not involve volition or action, in his study of the art of persuasion.

If a distinction between argument and persuasion must be sought, common usage provides one: An argument is an *attempt* to persuade; the word *persuasion* implies some success. Further, argumentation is only one of several methods of attempting persuasion; others include emotion, threat, and reward. Euripides gives a good illustration of the persuasive force of reward: "With mortals, gold outweighs a thousand arguments" (Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays* [trans. Philip Vellacott; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963], 46, line 966).

Van Eemeren et al. try to restrict argumentation to the realm of the rational, putting statements and reasons "before a rational judge" (*Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*, 5). But this is prescriptive, not descriptive. In actual practice arguments are sometimes irrational, and those who try to analyze argumentation must work with a broader definition. "It should not be taken for granted that anyone who puts forward an argument is automatically involved in an attempt to logically derive the conclusion from the premises" (ibid., 19).

[190] Compier, *Rhetorical Theology, 10.*

[191] This informal description is based on Toulmin's work. Good summaries of his theory are in Foss, *Contemporary Perspectives,* 117-53 and van Eemeren *et al.*, *Fundamentals,* 129-60. Mack summarizes arguments as stating a position, giving a reason, and lining up proofs (*Rhetoric,* 38). Speakers do not always use the same order.

[192] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 185-410. These are descriptive of what speakers actually use; they are not prescriptive. For each type of argumentation, Siegert gives an example from the Septuagint (*Argumentation,* 23-84).

Arguments usually do not follow rigorous logic—they appeal to experience, generalities and probabilities. They do not even state all the facts. Compier writes, "Any writer assumes that his or her readers could read between the lines; the author did not need to state all the presuppositions and implicit knowledge held in common with contemporary readers."[193] For that reason, an argument that is effective with one audience is not necessarily effective with another, since a different audience may have different presuppositions and knowledge. Argumentation theory must consequently consider the audience as an essential component of the argument—it is the audience that must supply part of the data and often supply the rationale between data and conclusions.[194] Alexandre writes that rhetorical critics "emphasize above all the concept of audience, since they realize that rhetorical argumentation, in order to be effective, not only implies principles and premises accepted by the listener but must also adapt itself to the listener and his already-existing convictions."[195]

Thurén writes, "One of the most fruitful, but also difficult tasks, is to reveal hidden, implicit elements in an argumentative structure…. We shall ask which basic information he omits, supposing that the addressees are familiar with it, and furthermore, what kind of statements he chooses as a starting-point for his argumentation taking their agreement for granted."[196] An argument with unstated elements is called an *enthymeme*—a structure I examine in more detail in chapter 8. The importance of enthymeme analysis is this: If the argument would be valid only if a particular concept is included, then the rhetorical critic

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[193] Compier, *Rhetorical Theology,* xx. "The argumentation process begins with premises the audience accepts" (Foss, Foss, and Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives,* 90).

[194] "The audience itself helps to produce the evidence by which it is persuaded" (Alexandre, *Rhetorical Argumentation,* 43). Or rather, it produces the rationale by which the evidence is linked to the conclusion.

[195] Ibid., 28-29.

concludes that the audience probably had that concept, or at least that the author believed that the audience had it.[197] An audience with that concept is the audience *implied* by the text. The author *may* have been completely mistaken, but the author is likely to know the audience better than the modern critic does. An analysis of enthymemes seeks to identify those unstated elements, and by doing so, it can help us understand the audience.

But this analysis is not a comprehensive analysis of the rhetoric. Persuasion uses both logic and emotion—not only objective arguments but also subjective appeals to *ethos* and *pathos.* Since people are influenced by their emotions, any study of "the means of persuasion" must include the speaker's attempts to influence the audience's emotions. Aristotle's trio of *ethos, pathos,* and *logos* remains a helpful grid for modern rhetorical critics. Even if the modern critic thinks that emotional appeals are improper, substandard, or unethical, they should be included in any study of the persuasive force of a message, just as the analysis must also include substandard logic when it is present. As we look at style, structure, and logic, we must remain aware of the nonrational dimensions of persuasion.[198]

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[196] Thurén, *Rhetorical Strategy,* 85, 56.

[197] Van Eemeren gives this principle for analyzing the author: "The goal should be…to determine (1) to which proposition in the context and situation concerned the speaker or writer can be held committed to that not only (2) makes the underlying argument of the argumentation valid, but also (3) adds something informative to the explicit argumentation" (van Eemeren, "Argumentation Theory," 20). Van Eemeren wants argumentation to be more logical than it often is, but his principle is correct: If we can make the argument logically valid by supplying a certain premise, then we give the author and audience the benefit of the doubt by attributing that premise to them, unless we have reason otherwise.

[198] Wuellner says that stylistics can help us keep the nonrational in mind ("Where Is," 461). Watson argues that rhetorical criticism can also help modern speakers: "By providing knowledge of how a text was composed in order to be persuasive in its own period, rhetorical criticism enables the interpreter to understand better how a text functioned in its historical context and…to express the message of a text so that it can be persuasive to its contemporary audience" (Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," 4:182).

Appendix A: Rhetorical criticism of Hebrews

Rhetorical criticism has been applied to Hebrews in a number of studies. Some are
studies of specific sections in Hebrews,[199] but others are of the entire work. Notable
among the latter are dissertations by Daniel Buck, Ronald Davis and Lee Maxey,
commentaries by David DeSilva and Craig Koester, and monographs by Paolo Garuti,
George Guthrie, Keijo Nissilä, and Walter Übelacker.[200] Although several older works

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[199] On chapter 1, see Black, "Hebrews 1:1-14."

On chapter 2, see Mitchell, "The Use of πρέπειν."

On chapter 4, see David A. DeSilva, "Entering God's Rest: Eschatology and the Socio-Rhetorical
Strategy of Hebrews," *TJ*[2] 21 (2000): 25-43.

On chapter 6, see Andries H. Snyman, "Hebrews 6.4-6: From a Semiotic Discourse Perspective," pp.
354-68 in *Discourse Analysis and the New Testament: Approaches and Results* (ed. S. E. Porter and J. T.
Reed; JSNTSS 170; SNTG 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999) and David R. Worley, "Fleeing to Two
Immutable Things, God's Oath-Taking and Oath-Witnessing: The Use of Litigant Oath in Hebrews 6:12-
20," *RQ* 36 (1994): 223-36.

On chapter 7, see Timothy W. Seid, "The Rhetorical Form of the Melchizedek/Christ Comparison in
Hebrews 7" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1996) and idem, "Synkrisis in Hebrews 7: The Rhetorical
Structure and Strategy," pp. 322-47 in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996
Malibu Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and D. L. Stamps; JSNTSup 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic,
1999).

On chapters 8-10, see Harold W. Attridge, "The Uses of Antithesis in Hebrews 8-10," *HTR* 79 (1986):
1-9.

On chapter 10, see Karen Jobes, "The Function of *paronomasia* in Hebrews 10:5-7," *TJ* 13 (1992):
181-91, and idem, "Rhetorical Achievement in the Hebrews 10 'Misquote' of Psalm 40," *Bib* 72 (1991):
387-96.

On chapter 11, see Alan D. Bulley, "Death and Rhetoric in the Hebrews 'Hymn to Faith'," *SR* 25
(1996): 409-23, Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of
Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon: Mercer, 1988), idem, "The Rhetorical Composition of Hebrews 11,"
JBL 107 (1988): 257-73, and Merland Ray Miller, "What Is the Literary Form of Hebrews 11?," *JETS* 29
(1986): 411-17.

[200] Daniel E. Buck, "The Rhetorical Arrangement and Function of OT Citations in the Book of Hebrews:
Uncovering Their Role in the Paraenetic Discourse of Access" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological
Seminary, 2002).

Ronald Eugene Davis, "The Function of Old Testament Texts in the Structure of Hebrews: A Rhetorical
Analysis" (Ph.D. diss.; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994).

David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle 'to the
Hebrews'* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Paolo Garuti, *Alle origini dell'omiletica Cristiana. La lettera agli Ebrei: Note di analisi retorica* (SBFAn
38; Jerusalem: Franciscan, 1995). As Watson writes, "We can only hope that an English translation of
this important work in Italian will be made" (Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 186).

George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1994; repr. Grand

made some use of Greek rhetorical terms,[201] the works I cite above use rhetoric as an

analytic tool throughout Hebrews. Numerous smaller studies have also been published.[202]

I will explore the rhetoric of Hebrews in more detail in a later chapter. Here, I want

Rapids: Baker: 1998).

Craig R. Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

Lee Zachary Maxey, "The Rhetoric of Response: A Classical Rhetorical Reading of Hebrews 10:32-12:13" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2002).

Keijo Nissilä, *Das Hohepriestermotiv im Hebräerbrief: Eine Exegetische Untersuchung* (Schriften der finnischen exegetischen Gesellschaft; Helsinki: Oy Liiton Kirjapaino, 1979).

Übelacker, *Der Hebräerbrief.*

[201] "Placing Hebrews within the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition has had a long history in Europe which often goes unnoted, but set the agenda for modern study. Von Soden (1899:11) proposed that Hebrews was judicial rhetoric…. Spicq (1952: I, 38) proposed that Hebrews was a homily organized on the basis of the rhetorical arrangement outlined in Aristotle" (Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 182). Guthrie likewise notes that Hemmingsen, von Soden, Haering, and Windisch "perceive the book of Hebrews as structured according to patterns in ancient Greek oratory" (Guthrie, *Structure,* 30). Rhetorical terms can also be seen in Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).

[202] Harold W. Attridge, "Paraenesis in a Homily (λόγος παρακλήσεως): The Possible Location of, and Socialization in, the 'Epistle to the Hebrews'," *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211-26.

C. Clifton Black II, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills," *HTR* 81 (1988): 1-18.

David Alan Black, "Literary Artistry in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 7 (1994): 43-52.

C. F. Evans, *The Theology of Rhetoric: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 1988).

Seán Freyne, "Reading Hebrews and Revelation Intertextually," pp. 83-93 in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (ed. Sipke Draisma; Kampen: Kok, 1989).

Jennrich, "Rhetoric."

Darryl L. Jones, "The Sermon as 'Art' of Resistance: A Comparative Analysis of the Rhetorics of the African-American Slave Preacher and the Preacher to the Hebrews," *Semeia* 79 (1997): 11-26.

Craig R. Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 103-23.

Barnabas Lindars, "The Rhetorical Structure of Hebrews," *NTS* 35 (1989): 382-406.

Linss, "Logical Terminology."

Frank J. Matera, "Moral Exhortation: The Relation between Moral Exhortation and Doctrinal Exposition in the Letter to the Hebrews," *TJT* 10 (1994): 169-82.

Thomas H. Olbricht, "Hebrews as Amplification," pp. 375-87 in *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

Victor C. Pfitzner, "The Rhetoric of Hebrews: Paradigm for Preaching," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 27 (1993): 3-12.

Steven K. Stanley, "The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives," *TynB* 45 (1994): 245-71.

James Swetnam, "On the Literary Genre of the 'Epistle' to the Hebrews," *NovT* 11 (1969): 261-69.

John R. Walters, "The Rhetorical Arrangement of Hebrews," *ATJ* 51/2 (1996): 59-70.

Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984):

to address a preliminary matter—the classification of Hebrews into a rhetorical genre.

Aristotle described three categories of speech: the judicial, the deliberative, and the

epideictic. In general, these ask the audience to (respectively) decide about what someone

else did in the past, decide what the audience is to do in the future, and praise a person or

reinforce a value that the audience currently holds.[203] The genre or purpose often

influences the style. Watson writes: "Epideictic usually employs amplification to stir

emotion rather than arguments to effect proof. Deliberative chiefly relies upon ethos and

examples and comparison of examples; whereas judicial is characterized by the use of

enthymeme."[204] How has Hebrews been evaluated in these categories?

Watson reports that "Von Soden (1899: 11) proposed that Hebrews was judicial

rhetoric," but this opinion has been abandoned.[205] Some commentators classify Hebrews

as epideictic, and some as deliberative. This reflects the commentators' view on the

situation and purpose of Hebrews: If the audience is seen as simply apathetic and

lethargic, then Hebrews is epideictic, designed to strengthen their faith and keep them

where they are. If the audience is drifting away and they need to change their behavior,

then Hebrews is judged to be deliberative. Pfitzner states that "Hebrews conforms more

closely to epideictic oratory."[206] Seid "classifies Hebrews as a written speech of

encomium (epideictic rhetoric) belonging to the genre of *synkrisis*."[207] Aune also calls

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177-99.

[203] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.3. A concise summary is in Kennedy, *New Testament,* 19-20.

[204] Watson, *Invention, Arrangement,* 19. Kennedy gives this definition: "Epideictic is perhaps best regarded as including any discourse, oral or written, that does not aim at a specific action or decision but seeks to enhance knowledge, understanding, or belief" (*New Testament,* 45).

[205] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 182. William Lane writes, "no one today would follow von Soden in identifying Hebrews with forensic rhetoric" (*Hebrews 1-8* [WBC 47A; Dallas: Word, 1991], lxxvii.

[206] Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 21.

[207] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 195.

Hebrews epideictic.[208] However, "Nissilä…classifies Hebrews as a speech conforming to the conventions of ancient deliberative rhetoric…. Übelacker…also argues that Hebrews is deliberative rhetoric."[209] Garuti, Lindars and Maxey also categorize Hebrews as deliberative.[210]

Several commentators choose both epideictic and deliberative. "Attridge argues that Hebrews is mainly an epideictic oration with some deliberative elements…. The purpose of Hebrews is to keep the audience faithful to the Jesus tradition and values and commitments."[211] "DeSilva…classifies the letter as deliberative rhetoric which relies upon epideictic rhetoric. Which species of rhetoric dominates depends in part upon the hearer."[212] Thurén says, "Rhetorically the text can be divided into *epideictic* and *deliberative* passages."[213] Olbricht says: "Hebrews best conforms to the epideictic genre

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[208] Aune, *New Testament,* 212.

[209] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 182-83

[210] Garuti, *Alle origini,* 200; Lindars, "Rhetorical Structure," 383; and Maxey, "Rhetoric of Response," 125.
    Garuti writes, "From the rhetorical point of view, Hebrews belongs to the deliberative kind: the audience is not invited to judge a person or to receive an encomium of a hero or a virtue. Much less it must judge the ability of the orator, which was often the case in epideictic speeches. The audience must instead decide about their behavior…the opportunity to join or continue in the new salvific economy" (*Alle origini,* 200, my translation).
    Maxey writes, "Hebrews as a whole is deliberative rhetoric. Deliberatively, Hebrews is paraenetic discourse (παράκλησις)…. That Hebrews is paraenesis is established by the following: (1) the extensive use of exhortation/advice, both positive and negative (e.g [*sic*] 2:1-4; 3-4); (2) the extensive use of historical examples and chreiai; (3) the call to imitate/not to imitate known examples (12:15-16; 13:7); (4) the presence of synkrisis or comparison (e.g [*sic*] chs. 7-10); (5) the call to remember/not to forget particular information or the presence of familiar information (e.g. 10:32-24; 11:32-38; 12:4-6, 16-17), the presence of a virtue/vice list (ch. 13)" (ibid.). He also argues that 10:32-12:13 is a deliberative "speech" embedded within Hebrews (ibid., 126-27, 455).

[211] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews," 183.

[212] Ibid., 186. Stowers observes, "It is difficult to fit the literature of the hortatory tradition completely into either epideictic or deliberative, i.e. advising, rhetoric. When advice calls for a specific course of action it is deliberative; when it only seeks to increase adherence to a value or to cultivate a character trait it is epideictic" (*Letter-Writing,* 107). Since an audience could include some people who held the value and others who did not, the same exhortation could be epideictic to one and deliberative to the other.

[213] Lauri Thurén, "The General New Testament Writings," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.-A.D. 400* [ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 590. Buck says that Thurén

in its superstructure even though the body of the argument may be conceived as

deliberative."[214] Marie Isaacs writes, "Parts of its paraenetic sections could be classified

as deliberative, since they are aimed at leading the readers to take some paths of action

and to avoid others. In other respects, it conforms more closely to epideictic speech…in

its exposition largely seeks to reinforce already established Christian convictions."[215]

This mixture of genres is not unusual. Aristotle advised people to praise what they

advocate, and to advocate the praiseworthy.[216] *Rhetorica ad Herennium* notes that

epideictic "is only seldom employed by itself independently," but epideictic praise is

often used in sections of judicial and deliberative speeches.[217] Fairweather notes that

"Chrysostom was familiar with the theory of what was known as 'figured' rhetoric, in

which a positive delight was taken in the notion that discourse could simultaneously fulfil

several functions."[218] Watson writes, "Quintilian makes it clear that the threefold division

is arbitrary and there are numerous gradations of each of the three styles (12.10.66-68)….

All three species of rhetoric rely on the others, each often temporarily using the other."[219]

Kennedy notes that "any one speech may involve deliberative, judicial, and epideictic

"applies the elements of deliberative rhetoric to the body of the letter…while viewing the framework as epideictic" (Buck, "Rhetorical Arrangement," 80, n. 94).

[214] Olbricht, "Hebrews," 378.

[215] Marie E. Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Reading the New Testament Series; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 16.

[216] "Praise and counsels have a common aspect; for what you might suggest in counseling becomes encomium by a change in the phrase…. Accordingly, if you desire to praise, look what you would suggest; if you desire to suggest, look what you would praise" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.9.35-36; trans. J. H. Freese; online at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0060&layout=&loc=1.9; accessed 20 Aug 2004. Similarly, Quintilian wrote that "panegyric [epideictic] is akin to deliberative oratory inasmuch as the same things are usually praised in the former as are advised in the latter" (*Instituto* 3.7.28; Butler p. 479).

[217] Anon., *Rhet. Her.* 3.8.15 (Caplan, LCL).

[218] Fairweather, "The Epistle to the Galatians," 6.

[219] Watson, *Invention*, 10, 24 n. 225, citing *Rhet. ad Alex.* 5.1427b.31ff and Quint., *Inst.* 3.4.11, 16.

elements."[220] Some orators would deliberately use one genre to accomplish the purpose of

a different genre.[221] Black writes,

> The distinction between judicial, deliberative, and epideictic discourse is not hard and fast. Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.4.16) admits that the lines between the different species of rhetoric are sometimes blurred: like judicial rhetoric, deliberative discourse often inquires about the past (ibid., 3.8.6), and both species are frequently colored by epideictic concerns (ibid., 3.7.28; 3.8.15). In both theory and practice, the identification of the species of rhetoric affords a relative, not an absolute, indication of the primary intentions of a speech."[222]

Several facts suggest that categorizing Hebrews into a rhetorical genre is an exercise

of dubious value:

- The three-part scheme was not designed to cover letters, didactic or religious messages.
- The scheme was designed to guide the creation of messages, not to analyze the results.
- Genres were flexible, often mixed, and could be used outside of their primary purpose.[223]
- The rhetoric of Hebrews may be influenced by Jewish tradition as well as Greek styles.
- The evident lack of agreement among scholars as to which genre Hebrews is.[224]

Lane concludes, "Hebrews cannot be forced into the mold of a classical speech."[225]

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[220] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 45.

[221] Ibid., 44.

[222] Black, "Rhetorical Form," 5, n. 17.

[223] "The classifications were heuristic, not definitive" (Mack, *Rhetoric,* 35). "Greek rhetorical practice was, and always had been, more flexible than is suggested by the rigid divisions drawn by most ancient theorists, for the sake of pedagogic clarity, between the principal types of oration" (Fairweather, "The Epistle to the Galatians," 23).

[224] "The debate as to whether *Hebrews* represents deliberative or epideictic rhetoric shows, this author cannot so easily be pigeon-holed" (Robert P. Gordon, *Hebrews* [Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 22). What Porter says about Philippians is true for Hebrews as well: "The wide diversity among those who treat the entire letter throws into serious question any claim that ancient rhetorical analysis can arrive at an objective estimation of structure…. This should make any interpreter cautious about claims made for rhetorical analysis" ("Paul," 555, 61).

[225] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8,* lxxix.

Guthrie says it well: "Hebrews is not easily categorized according to any one speech form of ancient Greek rhetoric…. While the speech forms in the classical handbooks were crafted in the judicial and political spheres, the book of Hebrews has the characteristics of the hellenistic synagogue homily. This form, while containing a wide range of rhetorical features described in the Greek handbooks, can not be forced into the mold of a classical speech. Rather, the author's means of argument follow the rhetorical and exegetical skills of the rabbis."[226] And what Olbricht says about another letter applies as well to Hebrews: "Must we force 1 Thessalonians into one of the categories, regardless? In the spirit of Aristotle, I think not; rather, we should add a genre."[227]

Further, Kennedy admits, "In general, identification of genre is not a crucial factor in understanding how rhetoric actually works in units of the New Testament."[228] Jerry Sumney observes, "Since invention was versatile, identifying the rhetorical species is not as useful for helping us understand the flow of an argument as is identifying the stasis."[229] The purpose of a written work must be ascertained before a genre can be assigned; hence the genre is more of a label at the end of a process, rather than a help toward anything else.[230] Assigning a genre is a NT version of form criticism, which Muilenburg found inadequate. As Classen says, "A term alone does not really assist one in understanding the letter's intention or any of its details."[231] Malina agrees: "To mark off a pattern still does

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[226] Guthrie, *Structure,* 32. Koester reports that Garuti also argues against classifying Hebrews in a classical genre (Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric," 104, n. 6).

[227] Olbricht, "Aristotelian Analysis," 225-26.

[228] Kennedy, *New Testament,* 33.

[229] Jerry L. Sumney, "The Argument of Colossians," in Eriksson et al., 339.

[230] The structures suggested for each genre were suggestions, not formulas that must be followed. Hence ascertaining a genre is at best a vague hint about structure. Buck argues that since the author showed considerable freedom in the way he quoted the OT, he could be similarly creative with any use of Greco-Roman rhetorical patterns (Buck, "Rhetorical Arrangement," 95, n. 135).

[231] Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism,* 23.

not yield information about the meaning of the pattern."[232] Watson concludes, "Making Hebrews conform to the typical elements of arrangement now seems forced…. There is a move beyond simplistic labeling of a New Testament letter as one of the three rhetorical species. It is recognized that these letters are mixed letters, that is, they use all three species of rhetoric."[233] In summary, Hebrews should be analyzed on its own terms, not forced into a mold it may not fit.

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[232] Malina, "Rhetorical Criticism," 97.
[233] Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism of Hebrews,"187, 201.