

## ***Rhetorical Criticism in Old Testament Studies***

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*Rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies—indeed, in biblical studies in general—had its origins in a self-conscious way in 1968, when James Muilenburg issued his now-famous call to go beyond form criticism and focus upon the unique features of a text. Since then, biblical rhetorical criticisms have flourished. However, in Old Testament studies, rhetorical criticism has tended to be primarily a literary concern, with emphasis upon stylistics. Classical and contemporary rhetorical criticisms are very different, however. These focus particularly upon the suasive aspects of spoken discourse. This paper reviews the history of rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies and in the field of speech and rhetoric, comparing and contrasting approaches. It then issues a call to biblical scholars to practice a truly "rhetorical" criticism, based upon speech and persuasion.*

*Key words: Rhetorical criticism, Old Testament, rhetoric, speech, persuasion*

A recent essay by W. Wuellner entitled "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" asked where the discipline of rhetorical criticism was leading biblical studies and answered that it was pointing the way to a synchronic reading of texts that "makes us appreciate the practical, the political, the powerful, the playful, and the delightful aspects of religious texts." In particular, it promised to lead biblical exegetes "out of the ghetto of an estheticizing preoccupation with biblical stylistics which has remained for centuries formalized, and functionless, and contextless." A new rhetorical criticism was highlighted, one that

I have profited in this essay from discussions with J. Kenneth Kuntz, Jared J. Jackson, Robert L. Scott, James L. Boyce, G. Michael Hagan, Michael A. Bullmore, and Mark Roberts.

"approaches all literature, including inspired or canonical biblical literature, as *social* discourse."<sup>1</sup>

Wuellner is a New Testament scholar, and rhetorical studies have flourished in that field; however, in Old Testament studies, the situation has been somewhat different. The present essay asks a question logically prior to Wuellner's: What is the nature of the "rhetorical criticism" that has been practiced in Old Testament studies in the last two and one-half decades? The answer suggested is that it has been primarily a literary and stylistic exercise; it is somewhat removed from what is called "rhetorical criticism" by those who study rhetoric in its theoretical or practical aspects. Foundational to the latter is the study of the means of persuasion—usually in speech, but expanded recently to include nonverbal items and social settings—whereas this dimension has been all but lacking in Old Testament "rhetorical" criticism.

Therefore, a call for more methodological self-awareness is made here, whereby Old Testament rhetorical critical studies would focus more specifically upon the various means of persuasion in Old Testament texts. The essay first surveys rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies, and then in the general fields concerned with the study of rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> Finally, it points to the differences between the two and suggests some fruitful avenues for Old Testament rhetorical criticism to pursue in order to claim validity as a true "rhetorical" criticism.

#### RHETORICAL CRITICISM IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

The discipline of rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies—indeed, in biblical studies in general—had its origins in a self-conscious way in December 1968, when a call to it was issued by J. Muilenburg in his now-famous SBL Presidential address.<sup>3</sup> As he defined it, rhetorical criticism was to be interested primarily

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.<sup>4</sup>

1. W. Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *CBQ* 49 (1987) 448-63, esp. 462-63.

2. In this essay, the term "rhetoric" refers to the art (or means) of persuasion, and "rhetorical criticism" to the study of that art. When the biblical discipline is in view, the term "rhetorical criticism" is modified to reflect this.

3. J. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969) 1-18.

4. *Ibid.*, 8.

This method was nothing new for Muilenburg, as he had been engaged in it for most of his career. Likewise, there had been many others over the years who had taken the same approach but who had not called themselves rhetorical critics.

Nevertheless, impetus for a discipline within Old Testament studies self-consciously calling itself rhetorical criticism began with Muilenburg. In the next decade, more methodological and programmatic treatments followed.<sup>5</sup> In addition, that decade, and especially the 1980s, saw the beginning and exponential growth of the application of this method in both Old Testament and New Testament studies.<sup>6</sup> A Rhetorical Criticism section in the annual SBL meetings was established, and it has flourished.

The primary interest of Old Testament rhetorical criticism has been in the patterns at the synchronic level of a text—its surface structure—as well as the substance or content of its strategic seams, words, motifs. As it has been practiced by a majority to date, it operates on several levels. It always has been a useful tool on the level of individual texts (i.e., microstructure); however, now larger units of text also are the subjects of investigation (i.e., macrostructure).

This concern with structures of texts is not the "structural analysis" practiced by French structuralists, however. The latter (*analyse structurale*) concerns itself, at one pole of language expression, with the surface structures of (holistic) texts, but at the other pole, it also is much interested in the deep structures below these surface manifestations, and with many layers of structure in between the two poles. Its interest in the codification of the deep structures in languages takes it into linguistic studies in ways that those focusing upon surface structures (*analyse structurelle*) do not. It is as much a way of thinking about reality as a discipline, and, as such, it is used

5. D. Greenwood, "Rhetorical Criticism and Formgeschichte: Some Methodological Considerations," *JBL* 89 (1970) 418-26; B. W. Anderson, "The New Frontier of Rhetorical Criticism," *Rhetorical Criticism* (ed. J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974) ix-xviii; M. J. Kessler, "A Methodological Setting for Rhetorical Criticism," *Semiotics* 4 (1974) 22-36, reprinted in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOTSup 19; ed. D. J. A. Clines, D. M. Gunn, and A. J. Hauser; Sheffield, JSOT, 1982) 1-19; Kessler, "An Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: Prolegomena," *Semiotics* 7 (1980) 1-27; I. M. Kikawada, "Some Proposals for the Definition of Rhetorical Criticism," *Semiotics* 7 (1977) 67-91; R. J. Clifford, "Rhetorical Criticism in the Exegesis of Hebrew Poetry" (SBLSP; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980) 17-28; Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?"

6. This essay primarily focuses upon rhetorical criticism in studies of the Hebrew Bible. On rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies, see B. L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?"; idem, "Rhetorical Criticism and its Theory in Culture-Critical Perspective: The Narrative Rhetoric of John 11," *Text and Interpretation* (ed. P. J. Hartin and J. H. Heltzer; Leiden: Brill, 1991) 171-85, esp. 171.

in a broad spectrum of disciplines, not just in literary or biblical studies.<sup>7</sup>

Rather, the structural concern of Old Testament rhetorical criticism is more strictly a literary concern with surface structures. It is closer to aspects of the Prague School structuralism than it is to French structuralism. Among other things, the Prague School was particularly concerned with surface structures and their functions, and thus it had a more purely literary interest than structuralism of the French variety.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the literary interest of Old Testament rhetorical criticism is 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.

The modern rhetorician W. R. Winterowd has proposed a *modus operandi* for rhetorical and literary criticism in which he lists ten categories as a basis for his work.<sup>9</sup> Of these ten, a full eight are concerned with synchronic, literary concerns, such as stance, form, style, and the like. The only two diachronic concerns are authorship and setting ("circumstance"), which are well treated by source, historical, and form criticisms in biblical studies.

7. See the following introductory surveys by biblical scholars: D. Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); V. K. Robbins, "Structuralism in Biblical Interpretation and Theology," *Thomist* 42 (1978) 349-72; A. C. Thiselton, "Structuralism and Biblical Studies: Method or Ideology?" *ExpTim* 89/11 (1978) 329-35; C. E. Armerding, "Structural Analysis," *Themelios* 4 (1979) 96-104. See also such collections as R. Barthes et al., *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis: Interpretational Essays* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974); A. M. Johnson, Jr., ed. and trans., *Structuralism and Biblical Hermeneutics: A Collection of Essays* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1979); and the pages of *Semeia*. Standard general introductions may be found in M. Lane, ed., *Introduction to Structuralism* (New York: Basic, 1970); and R. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Full bibliographies may be found in J. M. Miller, *French Structuralism: A Multi-Disciplinary Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1981); and L. Orr, *Semiotic and Structuralist Analyses of Fiction: An Introduction and a Survey of Applications* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1987).

8. For short introductions to this approach, see Paul L. Garvin, "The Prague School of Linguistics," *Linguistics Today* (ed. A. A. Hill; New York: Basic, 1969) 229-38; B. Trnka et al., "Prague Structural Linguistics," *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics* (ed. J. Vachek; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964) 468-80; H. Kucera, "The Czech Contribution to Modern Linguistics," *The Czechoslovak Contribution to World Culture* (ed. M. Rechcigl, Jr.; The Hague: Mouton, 1964) 93-104. See also S. Segert, "Prague Structuralism in American Biblical Scholarship: Performance and Potential," *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (Freedman Festschrift; ed. C. L. Myers and M. O'Connor; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983) 697-708, and the bibliography of standard surveys on p. 697.

9. W. R. Winterowd, *Rhetoric: A Synthesis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) 180-96.

Thus, there was a justifiable logic in M. Kessler's early call for rhetorical criticism to act as the new home for literary criticism in biblical studies, to "serve as a suitable rubric for the kind of biblical criticism which deals with the literary analysis of the Massoretic text."<sup>10</sup> It has not been concerned specifically with the *Vorgeschichte* of the text—which is the province of source and tradition criticism, as well as aspects of J. Sanders's canonical criticism—or with the *Nachgeschichte* of it—which is the province of much of B. Childs's canonical criticism.<sup>11</sup>

In light of the recapture in biblical studies of the term "literary criticism" by truly literary concerns (see below), there is now considerable justification for refocusing the terrain covered by "rhetorical criticism" in biblical studies, particularly in Old Testament studies.

## CLASSICAL AND MODERN RHETORICAL CRITICISM

### *Introduction*

Although rhetorical criticism in biblical studies only emerged in 1968 as a fully self-conscious discipline, the study of rhetoric has stood as a proud discipline of its own since the time of Aristotle and even before. Whereas Old Testament rhetorical criticism has concentrated upon the structures (and, to some extent, the contents) of written texts of all lengths and genres, studied synchronically, the study of rhetoric elsewhere has focused upon two distinctive aspects of communication. First, and fundamentally, it is interested in *persuasion*. Second, for the most part, it has been interested in the suatory elements of *spoken discourse*.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, in focusing upon suatory discourse, rhetorical criticism has focused upon more than just the text itself. Aristotle's definition is foundational: "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."<sup>13</sup> He went on to identify the three elements in persuasion furnished by the spoken word: it is most effectively accomplished (1) by a speaker of good personal character; (2) by reception of the words by a hearer (or an audience) who is in a positive frame of mind (the causing or

10. Kessler, "Methodological Setting," 10.

11. J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

12. Although recently, the purview of rhetorical criticism has been expanded to include nonverbal communication and situations (see below).

13. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (New York: Random House, 1954) 1355b, lines 26-27.

producing of which is part of the rhetor's task); and (3) by the speech itself and its suasive arguments.<sup>14</sup>

### *Rhetoric as Persuasion*

E. P. J. Corbett has noted that rhetoric in the classical tradition was a *practical* art (along with politics and ethics), as distinct from the speculative arts (such as metaphysics and mathematics), or the productive arts (such as poetics and carpentry).<sup>15</sup> As such, it was more concerned with the process of speaking than with its product. That is, it emphasized the optimum *ways* of achieving certain ends, studying and using the set of principles or prudential techniques by which humans sought to persuade each other.<sup>16</sup> There are three categories of persuasive discourse identified in the classical tradition: (1) political or deliberative discourse; (2) forensic or judicial discourse; and (3) epideictic or ceremonial discourse.<sup>17</sup>

The focus upon persuasion essentially has remained paradigmatic in the field until the present day, and Aristotle has retained his position as the source from which all discussions proceed. Some references from modern rhetorical works serve to illustrate this point. For example, D. Bryant, in an important article, stated that Aristotle's theory has enjoyed "unequalled scientific eminence in its field" (with the expected refinements and additions over time), and that "now as then [it] must stand as the broad background for any sensible rhetorical system." After noting some problems in definitions or uses of the term "rhetoric," he advanced his own definition: "the *rationale of informative and suasive discourse*."<sup>18</sup> He also emphasized its practical

14. *Ibid.*, 1356a.

15. E. P. J. Corbett, ed., *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) xi.

16. Rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies has not been particularly concerned with either the *process* of producing discourse (but rather the end product) or the practicality of it.

17. Corbett, *Rhetorical Analyses of Literary Works*, xii. See also G. A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 6-27; *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 19-20. Of these three categories of persuasive discourse, Old Testament rhetorical studies have not focused self-consciously upon any of them, but at least the latter two genres can be found in the Bible, and, ultimately, all three may be found in all such discourse, as Kennedy points out (*New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 6-7).

18. D. C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39 (1953) 401-24, esp. 404 (emphasis Bryant). Bryant was criticized for his definition, especially his emphasis solely upon discourse, but he later defended the essential thrust of that limitation, in "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," *Rediviva*, "Rhetorical Dimensions in Criticism" (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973) 3-23.

nature, stressing that it is mainly concerned with *effecting* a condition, rather than with discovering or testing one.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, J. Andrews defined rhetoric as "persuasive public discourse," and he quoted H. Wichelns's similar emphasis on its concern with effect, rather than with permanence or beauty.<sup>20</sup> D. Ehninger also made this point about suasive discourse, and he distinguished suasive, informative, or evaluative discourse from that which "seeks to please, elevate, or depict."<sup>21</sup> K. K. Campbell made the same distinction, and she also focused heavily upon the social context and audience of speeches.<sup>22</sup> A contemporary textbook has defined rhetoric similarly as "the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols."<sup>23</sup>

In a similar vein, G. E. Bigelow focused upon the distinctions between rhetoric and the poetic.<sup>24</sup> He defined rhetoric to be oratory, or the art of persuasion, and the poetic to be poetry, including other belle-lettristic discourse such as novels or short stories.<sup>25</sup> In terms of motive, rhetoric's is more self-consciously put forth (i.e., the desire to persuade), whereas the poetic's is more likely to be "innate, spontaneous, involuntary." The poetic's primary function is to give aesthetic pleasure or to express or exhibit, rather than to persuade or communicate. Its audience and occasion are less specific than rhetoric's;<sup>26</sup> its medium is usually in verse, with more figures of speech; and its subject matter is less concerned with facts as they are than with facts as they should be ("idealized facts").<sup>27</sup>

### *Rhetoric as Speech*

Aristotle's focus upon *spoken* suasive discourse also can be seen in almost all of these modern definitions of rhetoric and examples of rhetorical criticism. Indeed, this emphasis upon speech has been a

19. Bryant, "Rhetoric," 411-12.

20. J. R. Andrews, *The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1983) 4, 6.

21. D. Ehninger, "On Systems of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968) 131-44, esp. 131 (reprinted in D. Ehninger, ed., *Contemporary Rhetoric* [Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1972] 49-59).

22. K. K. Campbell, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1972) 1-12, 19-21.

23. B. L. Brock, R. L. Scott, and J. W. Chesebro, *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective* (3rd ed.; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 14.

24. G. E. Bigelow, "Distinguishing Rhetoric from Poetic Discourse," *Southern Speech Journal* 19 (1953) 83-97; see also A. C. Baird, who made most of the same points (*Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry* [New York: Ronald, 1965] 184-97).

25. Bigelow, "Distinguishing Rhetoric from Poetic Discourse," 83, n. 1.

26. On this, see also C. C. Arnold, "Oral Rhetoric, Rhetoric, and Literature," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968) 191-210.

27. Bigelow, "Distinguishing Rhetoric from Poetic Discourse," 89-97.

central concern of rhetoricians until recently: it precipitated the formation in 1915 of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking (today the Speech Communication Association).<sup>28</sup> This represented a conscious break between departments of literature or English on the one hand, and departments of speech on the other.<sup>29</sup> It has been the latter who have seen themselves as rhetoricians whereas the former see themselves as literary critics.

Traditionally, rhetoricians have maintained both elements of Aristotle's emphasis—persuasion and speech—in their considerations, attempting to avoid some of the extremes that may be reached if persuasion alone remains the defining element of rhetoric. Thus Bryant, arguing against some of the overly broad extensions of its scope that had been advanced in his day, maintained that it was not to be identified with *anything* that persuades—such as guns, gold, pictures, colors, traffic lights, elephants, donkeys, illuminated bottles of whiskey, or animated packs of cigarettes—but rather limited to this traditional province of (spoken) discourse.<sup>30</sup>

The distinction between spoken and written discourse is not hard and fast, of course, since most speeches also were written, either prior to or following delivery (or both, resulting in very different versions at times). The crucial element of rhetoric thus was taken by Bryant to be "the rationale of informative and suatory discourse *both spoken and written*."<sup>31</sup> It is true that some such discourse has never been uttered in a speech, and only exists in written form, but rhetorical criticism as a discipline still has been generally concerned with spoken discourse, although, in recent years, the discipline has moved more in the direction proposed by Bryant.<sup>32</sup>

H. Wichelns, in an influential programmatic essay in 1925, addressed the question of the relationship between rhetorical and literary criticism.<sup>33</sup> He maintained that literature, which studies carefully crafted, finished works, emphasizes aesthetic excellence and perma-

28. Its formation is described in J. M. O'Neill, "The National Association," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915) 51-58.

29. See C. E. Lyons, "The English-Public Speaking Situation," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915) 44-50; J. A. Winans, "Speech," *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 9 (1923) 223-30. Lyons mentions articles by O'Neill on the subject of "The Dividing Line Between Departments of English and Public Speaking," which he cites as being in "the *Review*," but I have been unable to locate these ("The English-Public Speaking Situation," 44).

30. Bryant, "Rhetoric," 405.

31. *Ibid.*, 407; emphasis added.

32. See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

33. H. A. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," *The Rhetorical Idiom* (Wichelns Festschrift; ed. D. C. Bryant; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958) 5-42.

nence; whereas rhetoric, which studies (often) less polished or more situation-bound "texts" (i.e., speeches), emphasizes effect.<sup>34</sup> Literary criticism is broader than rhetoric in its concern with permanent values, but narrower (1) in minimizing attention to the influences of the period in which its text was produced; (2) in usually not interpreting in light of the author's intent and situation; and (3) in universalizing or generalizing from limited, situation-bound speeches.<sup>35</sup> Wichelns spent a good portion of his essay laying out the types of literary criticism that had been applied to oratory: (1) that which focused upon biography of the speaker; (2) that which ignored biography and focused upon the speech itself; and (3) that which combined the two.<sup>36</sup> He argued for this third option, and this no doubt accounts for the trace of polemic that can be discerned in his analysis. Wichelns's distinctions between literature and rhetoric are still generally accepted today among rhetoricians.<sup>37</sup>

### *Approaches to Rhetoric*

*Traditional Approaches.* Rhetoric in the classical tradition was divided into five components, first laid forth in Cornificius's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, published in 86 B.C., and developed also by Cicero.<sup>38</sup> The first is the *inventio*, which is concerned with finding arguments and amassing materials. It is the research stage of the project. Second is the *collocutio* (or *dispositio*), which is concerned with the arrangement and organization of the material gathered. Third is the *elocutio*, or stylistics, concerned with word choices, arrangement, etc. Fourth is the *memoria*, or the committing of speeches to memory. This has long been the least important of the five, especially since most speeches were written at some point. Fifth is the *pronuntiatio*, or delivery, concerned with vocal utterances and body movements.

Although these categories have lost these specific labels and the boundaries have been blurred somewhat, they still form the basis for contemporary discussions that can be termed "neo-Aristotelian," and the broad outlines still obtain.<sup>39</sup> In modern rhetorical study of

34. Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory," 34-35.

35. *Ibid.*, 39.

36. *Ibid.*, 8-24.

37. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 25.

38. On these, see Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 33-39; Baird, *Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 14-16; and the definitive works by G. A. Kennedy (*The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972] 103-48; *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980] 96-99).

39. Baird, *Rhetoric: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 16.

ancient discourses—such as those found in biblical texts—the primary focus must of necessity be upon the first three categories, since the fourth and fifth primarily are concerned with the oral aspects, which are now not recoverable.<sup>40</sup>

The neo-Aristotelian approach is a broad category, covering the range of interest from study of the *orator* only to study of the *work* only, but in all its approaches it retains a significant interest in the orator, a "speaker orientation."

Wichelns's essay sounded the keynote for neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism. A major work in that tradition was by L. Thonssen and A. C. Baird, which J. M. Sproule characterized as a powerful "re-statement of critical orthodoxy."<sup>41</sup> According to Thonssen and Baird, the ideal critical study focused upon the oratory of individual speeches, the life and career of a speaker, or even a rhetorical movement in history. The neo-Aristotelian approach dominated rhetorical criticism in the early and middle twentieth-century to the point of being paradigmatic. It has lost ground to other approaches since then, but it has undergone somewhat of a revival in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

"*New*" *Rhetorical Approaches*. Reactions to the neo-Aristotelian approach have set in, however, both in terms of methods and of assumptions. The field has diversified dramatically, with a wide variety of approaches now pursued seriously. For a time, two nontraditional approaches dominated: the "experiential" approach and the "New Rhetoric(s)" approach.<sup>43</sup>

The "experiential" school appeared as an identifiable movement in the 1960s, introduced especially by E. Black's influential work.<sup>44</sup> The reasons for this reaction were several. For one thing, no one could do all the things that Aristotle (and Wichelns) advocated as the ideal; rhetorical critics often focused only upon one portion of the task,

40. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 13-14.

41. L. Thonssen and A. C. Baird, *Speech Criticism* (New York: Ronald, 1948; 2d ed. with W. W. Braden, 1970); J. M. Sproule, "The New Managerial Rhetoric and the Old Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988) 468-86, esp. 478.

42. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 29-30.

43. In the first edition of Brock, Scott, and Chesebro's *Methods* (by Brock and Scott, 1972), they highlighted but three schools: the "traditional," "experiential," and "New Rhetorics" perspectives. Campbell's standard analysis of the schools of rhetorical criticism also analyzed the field in terms of these three (*Critiques*, 24-38).

44. See Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 85-95; and E. Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: MacMillan, 1965); in his "Author's Foreword" to a reprinted edition ([Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978] ix-xv), Black reemphasized and clarified his vision of rhetorical criticism as a personally expressive endeavor not to be systematized.

which tended to reduce the usefulness of the approach. Second, society was not seen as being as stable as the traditionalists saw it; many rhetorical critics now argued that cultural forces and changes must be dealt with in any rhetorical analysis. Third, many critics argued that attention should be focused not only upon the speaker or the speech, but also upon the critic, as interpreter. Fourth, the interaction of speaker, audience, and context became important. Eclecticism in method, which influenced choices of approaches and elements of analysis, was a hallmark of this approach. Recently, rhetoricians following this approach have emphasized as well that rhetoric is a "way of knowing" (i.e., epistemic), that reality is seen as "intersubjective rather than objective," that a certain reality is created by knowing rhetorically.<sup>45</sup>

A second set of nontraditional approaches was for a time called the "New Rhetoric(s)." It encompassed such a wide range of approaches that it was not especially helpful to refer to it as a "school," however.<sup>46</sup> In very broad outline, two common themes have been identified in these: they have rejected (1) the heavy speaker orientation of traditional rhetoric; and (2) the heavy focus upon the critic of the experiential approach.<sup>47</sup>

One school of the New Rhetoric was that of C. Perelman.<sup>48</sup> His approach was more philosophical than most traditional or modern rhetorical critical works, devoting much attention to investigations of knowledge and reasoning, but within the framework of the social interactions in which argumentation takes place. This included attention to the audience as an integral part of the argumentation. His work has not generally engaged discussions of rhetorical criticism in this country, however, nor has it been noted in the mainstream of discussions here.<sup>49</sup>

45. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 92-93.

46. Ibid.; Campbell, *Critiques*, 24-38.

47. Brock and Scott, *Methods* (2d ed., 1980) 267-76, esp. 267.

48. See especially C. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969). Cf. the essays in the Perelman Festschrift, "La Nouvelle Rhétorique. The New Rhetoric. Essays en hommage à Chaim Perelman," (*Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 33 (1979) 1-342, and the reviews by P. D. Brandes, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959) 86 (review of the French edition); C. C. Arnold, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970) 87-92; and R. D. Dearin, "The Philosophical Basis of Chaim Perelman's Theory of Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 55 (1969) 213-24.

49. He is not considered at all in such standard texts as Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, or S. K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland, 1989), or in such surveys as J. W. Chesebro and C. D. Hamsher, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Message-Centered Procedure," *Speech Teacher* 22 (1973) 282-90, and Chesebro and Hamsher, "Contemporary Rhetorical Theory and Criticism: Dimensions of the New Rhetoric," *Speech Monographs* 42 (1975) 311-34. This degree of

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the new rhetorical approaches has been their vastly expanded view of the enterprise of rhetorical criticism. Despite Bryant's resistance, the field today very explicitly has been broadened to include almost any form of nonverbal communication, but still maintaining its interest in persuasion.<sup>50</sup> This is illustrated by the following:

The critic becomes rhetorical to the extent that he studies his subject in terms of its suatory potential or persuasive effect. So identified, rhetorical criticism may be applied to *any* human act, process, product, or artifact which, in the critic's view, may formulate, sustain, or modify attention, perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors.<sup>51</sup>

This has been accompanied by an emphasis upon humans as psychological and sociological beings, and not primarily as rational ones. In this way, rhetorical study has focused upon concerns thought to be more central to what humans truly are, since the affections and persuasive strategies are seen as intrinsic to human nature.<sup>52</sup> Among the emphases here is a "message-centered perspective," which focuses upon the discourse or "text" itself (rather than on speaker or critic) and often includes close textual analysis focusing upon stylistic choices alongside the substance of discourses.<sup>53</sup>

This expansion of the rhetorical enterprise is demonstrated by the new categories by which it is described. One standard work has abandoned the label "New Rhetorics," noting that it has fallen into disuse, in favor of detailing some of its major component

insularity also is noted by Perelman himself ("The New Rhetoric and the Rhetoricians: Remembrances and Comments," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 [1984] 188-96).

50. The vanguard of this approach can be found in the essays in the Report of the Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism, collected in *The Prospect of Rhetoric: Report of the National Development Project* (L. F. Bitzer and E. Black, eds.; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971); cf. Bryant, "Rhetoric," 405.

51. Bitzer and Black, *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, 220 (emphasis added).

52. See, among many others, the following analyses of the new rhetorics: M. Steinmann, Jr., *New Rhetorics* (New York: Scribner's, 1967); D. Ehninger, "On Rhetoric and Rhetorics," *Western Speech* 31 (1967) 242-49; Ehninger, "On Systems of Rhetoric"; several of the essays in T. R. Nilsen, ed., *Essays on Rhetorical Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1968); E. E. White, "Prospectus for the Future: Changing Continuity," *Speech Teacher* 23 (1974) 139-43; Chesebro and Hamsher, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Message-Centered Procedure"; and especially Chesebro and Hamsher, "Contemporary Rhetorical Theory and Criticism: Dimensions of the New Rhetoric"; and M. C. Leff, "In Search of Ariadne's Thread: A Review of the Recent Literature on Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 29 (1978) 73-91.

53. Chesebro and Hamsher, "Rhetorical Criticism: A Message-Centered Procedure"; and "Contemporary Rhetorical Theory and Criticism," 313-18. See also Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 287; and S. E. Lucas, "The Schism in Rhetorical Scholarship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67 (1981) 1-20, esp. 6.

strands: the "dramaturgial," "sociological," and "postmodern" perspectives.<sup>54</sup> Within the dramaturgial perspective, the authors classify three separate approaches (the dramatistic, fantasy theme, and narrative approaches); within the sociological perspective, they identify four (the sociolinguistic, generic, social movement, and feminist approaches); within the postmodern perspective, they identify two (the constructionist and deconstructionist approaches).

Similarly, another recent work identifies eight approaches: three that feature context (neo-Aristotelian, generic, and feminist approaches), two that feature message (metaphoric and narrative approaches), and three that feature rhetoric (fantasy-theme, pentadic, and cluster criticism).<sup>55</sup>

A common thread that runs through all these approaches, divergent as they are, is still an attention to various means of persuasion or of influencing thought or action.<sup>56</sup>

## RHETORICAL CRITICISM AND OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES: A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

### *Preliminary Considerations*

Two points should be clear from the above. First, rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies, on the one hand, and general rhetorical criticism (classical and otherwise), on the other, both are well-established, flourishing disciplines, contributing much to the understanding of texts of various sorts.

Second, it should be clear that the practice of these two disciplines is different in focus and emphasis, despite the similarities in their labels. For the most part, Old Testament "rhetorical criticism" has been only tangentially related to the "rhetorical criticism" of departments of speech or rhetoric. The intersection occurs at the place where the latter do close readings of texts or else in those few cases where Old Testament rhetorical studies actually focus upon the persuasive and/or oratorical aspects of biblical texts.

Otherwise, Old Testament rhetorical criticism has been more properly a literary enterprise, its methodology more akin to the approaches found within Prague structuralism, Anglo-American formalism (or "New Criticism"), or Russian formalism. These three schools all have been relatively independent of each other, but a

54. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 172-74.

55. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*.

56. Brock, Scott, and Chesebro, *Methods*, 14; Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 4.

common concern is their emphasis upon the forms and surface structures of texts.<sup>57</sup>

A few scholars of the Old Testament indeed have been aware of persuasion as the primary focus of rhetoric, especially in the last decade, such as T. Boomershine, M. Fox, Y. Gitay, E. Lewin, J. Lundbom, and M. Sternberg. These scholars have self-consciously studied the means of persuasion in biblical speeches and other texts. Naturally enough, their work clusters in the prophetic corpus, since the prophets tended to speak in discrete oracles, and a primary concern of theirs was persuasion (or conviction).<sup>58</sup>

57. On Prague-School structuralism, see above, Garvin, "Prague School"; Trnka, "Prague Structural Linguistics"; Kucera, "The Czech Contribution"; Segert, "Prague Structuralism." Anglo-American Formalism arose as a reaction to the excesses of social and biographical criticism prevalent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its paramount concern was the text as a work of art, with a distinct, self-contained entity, one where the meaning lay in the text itself, in the "ordering, relation, structuring, and development of the work's component parts" (W. K. Gordon, ed., *Literature in Critical Perspectives* [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968] 164). It has been the most influential and widespread of the twentieth century critical movements in the English speaking world, although its influence has waned somewhat in recent decades. Short introductions and bibliography for this movement may be found in, *inter alia*, W. S. Scott, *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism* (New York: MacMillan, 1962) 179-244; Gordon, *Literature in Critical Perspectives*, 163-66; Kessler, "An Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible," 5-11; for fuller discussion, see N. Chandra, *New Criticism: An Appraisal* (Delhi: Doaba House, 1979); and especially R. Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, vol. 5: *English Criticism: 1900-1950*, vol. 6: *American Criticism: 1900-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). That this approach is similar to that of many rhetoricians is illustrated by C. Brooks and R. P. Warren's *Modern Rhetoric* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949); Brooks and Warren were central figures in the American formalist movement.

Russian formalism is similar in many ways to Anglo-American formalism, although the two schools developed independently. Standard introductions to this approach include L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); S. Bann and J. Bowlt, eds., *Russian Formalism: A Collection of Articles and Texts in Translation* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1973); P. N. Medvedev /M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (The Goucher College Series; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and especially V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine* (3rd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

A standard theoretical work that illustrates the similarities among the three approaches is R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature* (3rd ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1956). Two works comparing Russian formalism with the other two approaches are E. M. Thompson, *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism: A Comparative Study* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971); and J. Striedter, *Literary Structure, Evolution, and Value: Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism Reconsidered* (Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 38; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). A convenient survey that compares all three schools, along with other approaches, is Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

58. See especially J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (SBLDS 18; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975); T. E. Boomershine, "The Structure of

Despite trenchant studies such as these, the majority of Old Testament studies from a rhetorical-critical perspective have been more properly literary studies with formalist or structuralist affinities, largely or entirely indebted—either self-consciously or unconsciously—to literary studies and techniques. Most are closely akin to the literary approaches that have exploded onto the scene in Old and New Testament studies.

The situation is much different in New Testament studies. Here, perhaps because of the clear presence of many speeches or because of the clear suasive nature of much of the epistolary genre, many New Testament scholars have pursued what is more properly true "rhetorical criticism" in the classical tradition. G. Kennedy provided valuable background in his earlier works, and he has come recently to address the New Testament itself from a classical rhetorical perspective; many others are doing so, as well.<sup>59</sup> And, many are going beyond classical rhetoric to incorporate many of the "new" rhetorical approaches discussed above.<sup>60</sup>

The reason for the relative paucity of truly "rhetorical" approaches in Old Testament studies is undoubtedly because the origins

Narrative Rhetoric in Genesis 2-3," *Semeia* 18 (1980) 113-29; M. V. Fox, "The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision of the Valley of the Bones," *HUCA* 51 (1980) 1-15; Y. Gitay, "A Study of Amos's Art of Speech: A Rhetorical Analysis of Amos 3:1-15," *CBQ* 42 (1980) 293-309; Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40-48* (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981); M. Sternberg, "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall," *HUCA* 54 (1983) 45-82; and E. D. Lewin, "Arguing for Authority: A Rhetorical Study of Jeremiah 1.4-19 and 20.7-18," *JSOT* 32 (1985) 105-19. Note also that M. Kessler early on was aware of the (nonbiblical) fields of rhetorical and literary criticisms, and of the similarities and differences between the two ("Methodological Setting"; "An Introduction to Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible"). Finally, see A. Scult, *The Rhetoric of the Pentateuch: An Analysis of the Argument for the Hebrew Concept of God* (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1975; cited in A. Scult, M. C. McGee, and J. K. Kuntz, "Genesis and Power: An Analysis of the Biblical Story of Creation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 [1986] 130, n. 6).

59. On the former, see Kennedy's works, *Greek Rhetoric, New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, *Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World*, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); on the latter, see his *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*.

60. See the valuable survey by Wuellner ("Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?") for New Testament scholars pursuing both traditional and new rhetorical approaches. Wuellner himself advances proposals for biblical rhetorical criticism that are particularly indebted to Kennedy and Perelman (representatives of both classical and new rhetorical criticism), although he is conversant with the entire terrain of rhetorical criticism, both within and outside of biblical studies. See also Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*. In Robbins and Patton's survey, the larger number of examples are from New Testament studies, as well (V. K. Robbins and J. H. Patton, "Rhetoric and Biblical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 [1980] 327-37).

of Old Testament rhetorical criticism are rooted, as noted above, in Old Testament studies itself; the discipline emerged as an outgrowth of form criticism. Muilenburg and most of those following him did not set out self-consciously to bridge the gap between biblical studies and rhetorical or literary criticism in the ways that, say, D. Patte (French structuralism), R. Alter (modern literary criticism), or N. Gottwald (modern sociological and Marxist theory), and a host of others are doing in their respective fields. J. Jackson, a student of Muilenburg, has noted that Muilenburg began his career as an English scholar and only later turned his attention to biblical studies, but Jackson concurs that he "did not consciously introduce methodologies from outside biblical studies, [but rather] he utilized his extraordinary sensitivity to the sounds of language and the genius of poetry in his 'listening' to the Bible."<sup>61</sup> 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 upon these in their studies.

The imprecision and the need for continuing definition and refinement of terms in Old Testament rhetorical criticism is typical of any young discipline. From one perspective, this need not be a problem. For example, R. Scott notes that it should be no surprise that the term "rhetorical criticism" is being appropriated in a new field, since those in his field (of speech communication and "rhetorical criticism" proper) "do not, after all, *own* the phenomena nor the vocabulary."<sup>62</sup> From another perspective, however, there *is* value in establishing some precision in how terms are used. For example, there was some confusion in Old Testament studies for a time concerning the term "literary criticism," since it originally signified the type of "source" criticism developed in its classical form by Wellhausen, and later it came to signify holistic analysis of texts.<sup>63</sup> Today the former generally is termed "source criticism," and "literary criticism" usually is reserved for the latter.

### *A Methodological Proposal*

The proposal to be made here, then, is as follows: now that the term "literary criticism" signifies this truly literary concern, it well would behoove the discipline of Old Testament rhetorical criticism to re-define itself in terms of speech and (especially) persuasion, taking

61. J. J. Jackson, personal communication, January 23, 1985. The point is also noted by Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" 451.

62. R. L. Scott, personal communication, January 16, 1985 (emphasis Scott).

63. See N. Habel who develops the former (*Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971]), and D. Robertson who presents the latter (*The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977]).

into account the fundamental meaning of the label "rhetorical."<sup>64</sup> It need not—indeed, probably it should not—understand itself as a purely literary study, since it no longer needs to function as the locus of literary studies within the broad range of biblical studies.<sup>65</sup> "Rhetorical" critics of biblical texts who actually do purely literary analysis would now do well to call themselves what they in fact are: literary critics.

If this were done, then the way would be opened for Old Testament rhetorical critics to reclaim the true foci of the long-standing rhetorical tradition: speech and (especially) persuasion. While this has been done to some small degree in Old Testament studies, there is much room for such a refocusing. Old Testament rhetorical critics would benefit greatly from self-consciously focusing upon the speeches and other discourse in the Bible with an eye to discerning the means of persuasion practiced, bringing to bear insights from the study of rhetoric, which has long been known as "rhetorical criticism." And, under the broader understandings of rhetoric that focus upon *any* means of persuasion (verbal or nonverbal), Old Testament rhetorical critics who care to focus their efforts in this direction have an even wider field of study at their disposal.

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).<sup>66</sup> 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. Indeed, this is close to what most Old Testament rhetorical critics already have been doing; however, often the analysis is done without any sense that the means of persuasion used by an author is what is being (or could be) analyzed. Too often the analysis is merely a cataloguing of the "rhetorical devices" found in a text. As such, it is merely concerned with stylistics,<sup>67</sup> leading to disparagements such as Wuellner's, quoted at the outset.

A true "rhetorical" criticism offers much promise for Old Testament studies in elucidating new information from old texts. Scholars have used a variety of methodologies on almost every portion of the

64. My rhetorician colleague Michael A. Bullmore rightly points out that rhetorical criticism has recently moved to emphasize persuasion of all types, not just in speech and writing and he suggests that "verbal persuasion" (encompassing both) is the proper focus of study. Although this is true, we may still point to the validity of studying one type of persuasive discourse, namely, that expressed in speech.

65. The suggestion here is thus *contra* Kessler's early proposal, since now the terminology is clearer than it was when he first advanced his suggestion.

66. So also Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 6-7.

67. Indeed, A. Vater specifically equated stylistics with rhetorical criticism ("A Plague on Both Our Houses": Form- and Rhetorical-Critical Observations on Exodus 7-11," *Art and Meaning* (Clines, Gunn, and Hauser, eds., 62).

Bible, but self-conscious rhetorical studies focusing upon the persuasive aspects of speeches and other discourse, on nonverbal media, and even on entire books or works of single authors in the Bible would open up many new areas for fruitful study. It is to be hoped that Old Testament rhetorical critics vigorously would pursue such endeavors, with the sensitivity to detail that they always have shown, but with a new methodological self-consciousness to accompany it.

### CONCLUSION

This essay has surveyed the field of rhetorical criticism as it has been practiced in the last two decades among Old Testament scholars, as well as the discipline called rhetorical criticism by students of speech communication and rhetoric. The latter discipline is concerned primarily with the means of persuasion, usually as expressed orally, whereas the former is primarily a literary exercise. In order for Old Testament rhetorical critics truly to reflect the label of their discipline, it has been proposed here that they devote special attention to the suasive aspects of biblical texts, especially biblical discourse.

One final point is in order. We must emphasize that it is no denigration whatsoever of the actual work done by Muilenburg or many Old Testament "rhetorical" critics after him to say that they have operated under a somewhat misleading label. On the contrary, most of their work has been extremely helpful in elucidating the meanings of biblical texts. The point here is simply that a refinement and re-focusing of the terminology and the approach is in order, and that a rich, relatively unexplored field of study presents itself to Old Testament scholars under the rubric of "rhetorical criticism," properly understood.<sup>68</sup>

68. This essay was completed in its present form in 1991. A variety of circumstances has prevented its submission for publication for more than two years. In the meantime, rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies has maintained a "stylistics" emphasis among some: see the recent work by D. K. Berry, *The Psalms and their Readers: Interpretive Strategies for Psalm 18* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), esp. 81-103. More and more, however, the discipline has moved in the directions argued for in this essay: see especially the important work of D. Patrick and A. Scult (*Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* [Sheffield: Almond, 1990]). This work does for rhetorical criticism in Old Testament studies what Kennedy's work does in New Testament studies. See also the following: R. K. Duke, *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), which is a truly "rhetorical" work, studying as it does the means of persuasion used by the Chronicler; and G. E. Davies, *Israel in Egypt: Reading in Exodus 1-2* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), esp. 47-55. A forthcoming work will deal comprehensively with the entire field: A. J. Hauser and D. F. Watson, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).