Reflecting on the rhetoric of biblical rhetorical critics*

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ABSTRACT

Biblical rhetorical critics find themselves incarcerated within what can be called the supplementary tradition of rhetoric. As such, biblical rhetorical criticism has not yet liberated itself from its foundationalist or objectivist moorings. In this paper it is argued that in the production of knowledge, the focus has shifted from the demands of the object of interpretation to the demands required by the purpose of enquiry. From the perspective of the rhetoric of enquiry, certain conditions are specified for the formulation of interpretive strategies.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the sixties, an awareness has developed that the field of knowledge production has been mapped by various ‘turns’. Apparently Rorty has shown the way by directing to the ‘linguistic turn’, to be followed by the ‘interpretive’, the ‘rhetorical’, the ‘disciplinary’, and the ‘critical’ turns. As a way to mark a shift in the preoccupation with knowledge, it seems to demarcate a space, create an environment which can be reached only by taking an alternative route. Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman (1991:1) indicate that just as the ‘epistemological turn’ that has preceded the linguistic turn signified a turning away from metaphysical questions, the linguistic turn, developing from the beginning of this century, required a turning away from a preoccupation with the foundations of knowledge and the knowing subject, leading to a critique of representation (cf Angus & Langsdorf 1993:14). The ‘rhetorical turn’ requires that the rhetoricity of inquiry be taken into account and the interpretive turn, generated by the interpretive practices of the humanities problematises the act of interpretation itself. It would be possible to point to various similarities in all these ‘turns’ and also

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to those aspects that differentiate them. However, although all of these turns each maps an area in its own right, they all have in common a departure from what can be called a foundationalistic or objectivistic production of knowledge. Related to this turning away from foundationalism, is also the insistence on the creative potentialities of language. Taken together all these turns insist that the ways and means of enquiry or knowledge production have significantly changed and that change itself has become a permanent feature of processes of enquiry.

However, in the midst of all these turns Schüssler Fiorenza criticises biblical scholarship and biblical rhetorical critics in particular for making only a half turn. She argues that biblical rhetorical critics have not emerged from the ‘empiricist positivist’ philosophical paradigm which has plagued the humanities for such a long time. She writes (1996:32): ‘(T) (rhetorical criticism in biblical studies) has not developed critical epistemological discourses and a hermeneutics of suspicion but instead has sought to validate its disciplinary practices in and through the logos of positivist or empiricist science that occludes its own rhetoricity’. Instead of developing a critical rhetoric of enquiry aware of its own politicality, biblical rhetorical critics have sought safe refuge in ancient technologies of meaning. She indicates that this is not a problem restricted to the area of biblical rhetorical criticism or biblical interpretation only, but is also inherent in the ‘linguistic turn’ itself. Following Terence Ball she indicates that although the ‘linguistic turn’ has critiqued representationalism, it has neither followed through with an insistence on the politicality of communication processes, nor has it emphasised conceptual change. A better description would consequently be a ‘linguistic half-turn’ (1996:46). Subtly Schüssler Fiorenza subverts the metaphor of ‘mapping’ and ‘turning’ by changing its point of reference. Instead of an indication of direction, turning refers to dancing; motion replaces direction; spatiality is substituted by a celebration of the ludic. To see turning in terms of dancing ‘suggests an image of interpretation as forward movement and spiraling repetition, stepping in place, turning over and changing of venue in which discrete methodological approaches become moving steps and artful configurations’ (51). According to Schüssler Fiorenza a critical rhetoric of enquiry can be realised by recognising and engaging feminist biblical criticism.

It is possible to look at various dimensions of Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique, but the question I would like to address is the legitimacy of the way in which we practise rhetorical criticism at this time. In this paper I want to argue that the legitimacy of a biblical rhetorical criticism which continues within a foundationalist or objectivistic philosophy of meaning, has become problematic. The objective is not to provide a model for interpretation; as a matter of fact, it will become clear that the articulation of interpretive models has to happen in cooperation; the objective is rather to delineate certain conditions that need to be taken into account in the formulation of a variety of models for interpretation. In the first part of the paper I will indicate that Schüssler Fiorenza is correct; biblical rhetorical criticism has entrenched itself within
an objectivistic philosophy of meaning and despite its link with rhetoric and despite several voices that have encouraged a move away from this paradigm, has not yet moved. The self-reflecting questions biblical rhetorical critics need to ask is when an interpretation can be depicted as rhetorical and if we are indeed practising rhetorical criticism.

Owing to a changing context of knowledge production, biblical rhetorical critics can no longer continue knowledge production within a foundationalistic paradigm, but are in a favourable position to qualitatively change the manner in which knowledge is produced. In considering the 'interpretive turn', Rorty (1991:79–80) argues that the philosophical debate should be modulated from a methodico-ontological to an ethico-political key. That means that enquiry should no longer be conducted in a mode that satisfies simply the demands of the 'object', but should conduct itself in a mode that satisfies the demands of the purpose a particular enquiry is to serve. Fish (1989:485) is quick to support with: ‘...the fortunes of rhetorical man (sic) are on the upswing, as in discipline after discipline there is evidence of what has been called the interpretive turn, the realization (at least for those it seizes) that the given of any field of activity—including the facts it commands, the procedures it trusts in, and the values it expresses and extends—are socially and politically constructed, are fashioned by man (sic) rather than delivered by God or nature.’ The focus consequently shifts not only to an interactional procedure for the production of knowledge, but the production of alternative types of knowledges owing to the interpretive turn is anticipated.

What is needed is that the production of knowledge be recontextualised. Owing to their exposure to rhetorical traditions, biblical rhetorical critics are in the unique position of being able to pioneer this kind of activity within studies that concern themselves with religion. However, this does not seem to be the case. In the following section, this claim will be further elaborated.

2 THE 'MAPPING' OF BIBLICAL RHETORICAL CRITICISM

2.1 The heterogeneity of biblical rhetorical criticism

Generalisation concerning any field of knowledge has today become a very dangerous practice and the field of rhetorical interpretations of the Bible is no exception. A wide diversity among biblical rhetorical critics can be discerned. It would also be possible to demarcate a few positions within the field of current biblical rhetorical criticism and different interpretations have already emerged. In 1992 Stamps delineates three positions, namely a literary critical and linguistic approach, infused by Muilenberg, Wilder and Funk, a historical critical approach stimulated by Betz and an eclectic, all-inclusive approach, adopted by Wuellner (1992:269–270). In 1995 his demarcation looks a bit different, although three positions can again be discerned. The predominant position is assigned to a historically based perspective, which can
be divided into the ‘Betz-Mitchell’ and ‘Kennedy-Watson’ schools. Where the former analyses a text as a piece of ancient Hellenistic rhetoric with the objective to reconstruct the original historical situation, the latter integrates the text within the classical rhetorical schemes of ancient rhetorical terminology. Both these approaches are historically oriented and ‘originality’ functions as the objective of both. Wuellner occupies a distinct position again with his re-invention of rhetoric into a socio-ideological practice. A third perspective is called a ‘hybrid’ approach which combines classical and modern rhetorical categories (cf Stamps 1995:135-141). Another classification can be derived from Craffert (1996). To a large extent he follows the 1992 version of Stamps, with an emphasis on a historical position, reflected in the use of ancient classical rhetorical categories and a literary, seen as ‘modern rhetorical theory’, but he assigns ‘socio-rhetorical criticism’ its own position. It would be possible to point to several problems in these various demarcations, such as the omission of feminist rhetorical criticism (confirming Schüssler Fiorenza’s allegation) or the easy manner in which all users of either ancient rhetorical categories or modern theories of rhetoric are positioned together and linked with either a historical or a literary approach (which is in itself an interpretive strategy in need of subversion). The point is rather to recognise the difficulty of generalisation. Yet, despite problems involved in generalising about this field, it seems as if we are experiencing difficulties in liberating ourselves from a foundationalistic or objectivistic philosophy of meaning. It is this claim that now has to be investigated. I will first provide a brief indication of what I understand by foundationalism and since this has been dealt with elsewhere also (cf Vorster 1998a; Vorster 1998b), brevity will be the objective and summarising the practice. I argue that rhetorical critical practice as such does not liberate from or prevent the pervading and persisting influences of a foundationalist epistemology. I will then illustrate a few popular foundationalistic topoi present in the interpretive discourses created by biblical rhetorical critics.

1 It would at this stage be possible to identify the following schools within biblical rhetorical criticism and since Stamps has provided founders I will follow suit. Besides the ‘Kennedy-Watson’, ‘Betz-Mitchell’ Greco-Roman rhetorical critics, and the modern rhetoric school which I will hesitantly assign to Wuellner, it would be possible also to point to feminist rhetorical criticism, headed by Schüssler Fiorenza, the socio-rhetorical critical school with Robbins as patron and the emerging Reed & Porter school with an emphasis on the role linguistics may play in rhetorical analysis.

2 For example: even within a particular tradition of biblical rhetorical criticism, generalisation is dangerous. Although it would be possible to indicate definite objectivistic tendencies within the proposal made by Robbins (1996), there are also at other levels indications of an attempt to move away from this philosophy of meaning. In general, the former is suggested by the centrality of the text; the latter by aspects such as the attempt to create an alternative terminology, the insistence on interdisciplinary conversation, the acknowledgement of the effects of the text, as well as the ideological in the interpretation of the text.
2.2 Objectivism/foundationalism

Foundationalism or objectivism is a philosophy of meaning that has pervaded philosophical thought for centuries (Lakoff 1987; cf also Johnson 1987). It is a philosophy of order, of rules, of natural laws, of stability and certainty. Owing to its successful institutionalisation in the modern university, its terminologies have determined scientific thought to such an extent as to become the natural foundations upon which the academy functions. As a metaphysics it assumes an independent, structured, complete and correct reality, which consists of objects, events and relations. Each entity of reality has certain properties of which some may be designated as essential and others as accidental. The distinction between essential and accidental properties introduces another concept, namely categorisation, since it is via the essential properties that entities can be correctly categorised. These form the distinctive features of each and every entity. Since categories are made up of the essential properties of entities they acquire in themselves objective status. These real entities can be known through symbols, but they require that symbols correspond or represent them as closely as possible. Meaning is concretised in one way only, namely through a correspondence to the things of reality and since meaning is disclosed to the extent symbols correspond to reality, symbolisation becomes semantically evaluable—it becomes possible to distinguish between correct and incorrect, true or false. Knowledge production functions uni-directional, that is from an object of reality to the observer. To put it a bit differently: the object poses certain requirements for the production of meaning.

As meaning is centred in the object, distance is assumed between the enquirer and the object of study. Conditional to the production of objective knowledge is the disinterestedness of the enquirer. For that reason various constraints have to be imposed on the enquirer. Prelli (1989:48–50) illustrates how Robert Merton proposed certain institutional norms constraining scientific ethos. It is important to note how all these constraints cooperate to exclude the interests of the enquirer. Both the requirements of universalism and communality demand that knowledge has to be subjected to pre-established, impersonal criteria and must not be a personal possession. Self-interest may only be realised in the satisfaction with work done and the prestige it could bring. Organised skepticism requires that scientists suspend judgement ‘in order to scrutinize beliefs critically against empirical and logical criteria of judgement’ (:49). Originality becomes a requirement to advance scientific discovery and humility has to keep the originalists in check.

In the gap between subject and object we find the dubious and ambiguous world of value-laden symbols, more specifically language. Language has to convey knowledge from the knowable to the knower but since language belongs to the world of the apparent, the world of signs and the illusionary, it can be distortional instead of informational; instead of closing the gap it can cause a rift. Since language can in itself be contingent, value-laden, emotional, political and subjective, a distinc-
tion has to be made between a more ideal form of language and everyday language, hence the distinctions between normal language versus deviant language, natural language versus scientific language, ordinary language versus literary language, informational versus persuasive, everyday versus academic, scholarly or professional. In all of these dichotomies concerned with language, a hierarchy between purified and non-purified language can be established and the more purified a particular use of language can be, the higher its esteem. For that reason the metaphorical, analogical, narratival and political have to make room for the acronymical, the statistical, the numerical, the measurable, the calculable and the formulaic (Zalk & Gordon-Kelter 1992:5; Vorster 1998a:7). The objective becomes the construction of a reliable, accurate, representing language. Such is the power of an independent reality which can be known via language, that referential language seems to be assigned a higher status than any other type of linguistic utterance. Fish (1980:198–199) indicates that the notion of a constative language 'strives to be accountable to the real or objective world'. He writes: 'It is to constatives—to acts of referring, describing, and stating—that one puts the question "Is it true or false?" in which true and false are understood to be absolute judgments, made independently of any particular set of circumstances'.

At a later stage he also (1989:475) illustrates how the desire to 'construct a language from which all perspectival bias...has been eliminated' has 'generated a succession of efforts', that 'have sometimes taken as model the notations of mathematics, at other times the operations of logic, and more recently the purely formal calculations of a digital computer. He refers to several examples, such as Chomsky's "competence" model of language' and the Habermasian ideal speech situation and concludes as follows: 'the impulse behind the effort is always the same: to establish a form of communication that escapes partiality and aids us in first determining and then affirming what is absolutely and objectively true, a form of communication that in its structure and operations is the very antithesis of rhetoric, of passionate partisan discourse'. It is then also from this background that the insistence on scientific method, as specialist and purified language, arose. To ensure objectivity methodological procedures have to be followed. Not only does method provide a neutral language, according to objectivism, but it also ensures that the criteria of universalism and communality within the circle of scientists are met.

Owing to an on-going, explicit, critique of foundationalism or objectivism since the late sixties, various new and different forms of foundationalism or objectivism have emerged. An example may be found in the notion of perspectivism. Granted the influence of context on interpretation, thereby apparently moving beyond foundationalism, perspectivism advocates that a difference in perspective will yield a different interpretation. However, assuming that critics operate from the same perspective it would be possible to perceive the same real properties of an object. While the objectivist solves his/her problem with subjectivity, a real object with real
properties is assumed (cf Whitson & Poulakos 1993:133). Whitson and Poulakos (1993:133), following cues from Nietzsche, also attempt to expose intersubjectivism as another form of objectivism. When the possibility of objective knowledge production from social interaction is assumed, agreement or consensus serves as the ground for truth. Perhaps another more appropriate example is when it is acknowledged that our realities are symbolically constructed; yet the possibility to know what these symbolic constructions are and how they operate is maintained. Although it is acknowledged that we can deal only with symbolic worlds, that we do not have anything beside that, the ‘object’ has now become the symbolic world and the possibility to objectively know the symbolic world ‘out there’ is still maintained.

2.3 Objectivism and biblical rhetorical critics

The question we now need to address is to what extent objectivistic tendencies can be found in the way biblical rhetorical critics operate. Amador (1997:53) writes:

A great deal of effort, perhaps an overwhelming majority of it, is being directed in what Wilhelm Wuellner has called the pursuit of the rhetoric in the biblical text. By this is meant a critical rhetorical analysis identifying specific strategies, forms, tropes, figures, and structures said to be argumentatively at work in the text. It is usually conducted, though not always, with the express purpose of helping to describe argumentative “intention” or “effect”, especially in order to help reconstruct the historical and social circumstances which gave rise to the rhetorical performance.

If there is one point of agreement among biblical rhetorical critics, it is the concern with what happens in the text. To put it a bit differently: the concern is with formal features in the text. The question is whether this insistence on what happens in the text is not exactly where objectivism reveals its profound influence. Various assumptions underlie current rhetorical practice with its insistence on the text itself. Firstly, the text is assumed to have discrete elements (or properties) that have to be discovered. Secondly, it is assumed that these discrete elements can not only be carefully and accurately demarcated, but they do inherently have some kind of clarity, rendering them identifiable. Thirdly, it is assumed that these elements have a stability of meaning providing them with a clarity and specificity across numerous contextual changes and centuries. Fourthly, it is assumed that these formal features or discrete elements is in such a basic sense part of human linguistic structure that they can be seen as general or universal, because if there were no possibility of generality it would not have been possible for twentieth century critics to recognise

3 Cf Thuren (1997:451-453) who laments the lack of historical evidence in the text of Jude. It seems that formal features in the text that would have counted for historical evidence can be ‘explicit information about the identity of the partners in communication, the date, location, or the type of exigency at hand’ (451). But would the presence of these formal features have provided us with ‘historical meaning’?
them. Fifthly, in the case of those properties that could be deemed historical, it is assumed that a close word-thought-thing relationship exists, since it is only possible to explore historical meaning if some kind of stability in this relationship can be postulated. Finally, it is assumed that meaning exists, independent from the knower, in the knowable. It would be possible to construe even a few more of these assumptions on which the centredness of the text within biblical rhetorical circles flourishes, but the point is that by centring meaning within the text, even though that may be multiple meaning, objectivism infuses interpretation. The text becomes some kind of container, containing meaning, whether this be historical meaning or literary. As object, the text becomes subject, demanding that its properties be discovered, analysed and described. The authority for interpretation is located in the text itself; the text exerts its control on the interpretive process by formal constraints.

Related to this tendency is the belief in what we can call a minimalist information principle. This is the belief that a distinction can be made between informative and less informative language, or between propositional language and deviant language. What is deviant, is obviously also rhetorical. Propositional language consists of referent and predicate, relating the reader to some kind of reality. This type of language is considered to be more neutral. From this principle also develops the distinction that is usually made between historical and rhetorical, as if everything that is seen as historical is also not rhetorical. Thuren (1997) provides an interesting example. He argues against traditional historical interpretations of the epistle of Jude which, according to him, have too easily inferred historical information from the letter. He consequently proposes that the historical situation be 'de-rhetorized' (456) and using Greco-Roman rhetorical categories he points to several elements signifying the rhetoricity of the text. To a certain extent the analysis is ironic, because despite Thuren's intention to 'arrive at a text-based, credible view of the original situation and message of Jude' (464), he has to acknowledge (to his credit!) that the historical knowledge gained is rather vague. The problem here is the assumption that once rhetoricities have been removed we will be left with a core, whether that represents literary or historical meaning.

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4 An example can be found in the way biblical rhetorical critics use the notion of 'rhetorical situation'. Biblical rhetorical critics follow Kennedy (1984), who followed Bitzer (1968) in a rather slavish manner. As an analytical category, the notion of rhetorical situation is constituted by objective or factual entities, such as very factual persons, objects and relations all presenting a very factual exigence. The speaker, in such a rhetorical situation, 'will be found to face one overriding rhetorical problem' (1984:36). All the components of the rhetorical situation are presented as objective matters of fact, revealing an adherence to an objectivistic philosophy of meaning or what Vatz (1973) has called a 'realist philosophy of meaning'. As a matter of fact, within such a description of the rhetorical situation, very little difference can be detected between the historical situation of historical criticism and a rhetorical situation. For that reason rhetorical situation has merely become a renaming, a relabelling of the historical situation (cf also Stamps 1993:193).
A second objectivistic tendency surfaces in the consistent desire and need for method. The fear for unbridled subjectivity necessitates the articulation of a purified observational, neutral language. This fear is not something unique among biblical rhetorical critics, but stems from biblical enquiry as such, where the belief that rigorous methodology will ensure the true meaning of the text, has become common place. Rhetoric is therefore generally seen as an area that offers methodologies for New Testament studies. This is especially the case when it is referred to as ‘criticism’, or an ‘approach’ or when it is seen as something that can be ‘applied’. Although the notion of methodology has had to endure a barrage of attacks since the onslaught of post-modernism, the problem is not with method as such, but rather with the status assigned to method and to the over-achieving claims usually made in the name of method.

Method creates the illusion of the possibility of distance between ‘subject’ and ‘object’; it is the manner in which neutral knowledge can be produced. Matlock (1997:140) writes: ‘The closing of the hermeneutical gap is to be accomplished by the methodical, scientific separation of fact from value, which spells out to a rigorous “two-stage” method, moving from the descriptive to the normative, what it meant to what it means, the original meaning to the subsequent significance. The programme is promoted by a combination of scientistic rhetoric of purity of method, the ethical rhetoric of honesty of conviction, and the clinical rhetoric of keeping “the facts” free from the contamination of value’. In this ‘biblical studies two step’, method is usually seen as the analytical step, the step that is to ensure objectivity. A few examples should suffice.

Although Trible (1994) exhibits an acute awareness of the interpretational problems, Muilenberg’s slogan, formulated as ‘proper articulation of form yields proper articulation of meaning’, is regarded as basis for interpretation. Displaying an uneasiness with the notion of ‘proper’ it is replaced by the rhetorically more appropriate ‘appropriate’, which is then elaborated as ‘to develop readings that account for all elements of form-content as they “yield” meaning’. However, despite the fact that a claim for ‘all elements’ is made, and despite her sensitivity for the problem of interpretation, the reading proposed is formalistic. Rhetorical criticism’s specific distinctive feature lies in the determination of structure and according to Trible ‘structure presents the ipsissima verba of the text. It shows the patterns of rela-

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5 Trible does not follow Muilenberg in a slavish manner and she does not make totalitarian claims for the ‘Muilenberg rubric’ owing to the multiplicity of meaning. As a matter of fact, she quite clearly indicates that ‘those who seek one [a comprehensive system] misunderstand the rhetorical enterprise’ (:101). But it is exactly because of her sensitivity for the problem of meaning that I have selected her as an example. Despite decentering the Muilenberg rubric by proposing it as providing ‘guidance’ and ‘perspective’ and finding it useful because it ‘allows for, indeed requires, intuition and play’ objectivistic tendencies seem to obscure these intentions.
tionships residing in the very words, phrases, sentences, and larger units' (:92). Method seems to provide access to the insides of the 'object'. In an analysis of Jonah 3:5–10 the author of this writing produces no reason why the Ninevites so readily believe in God, and Trible indicates that this gap has provided a field day for 'outlandish readings'. In presenting a particular reading, Trible comments: 'No method supports such unbridled fantasy' (:232).6 The formulation is telling. Not only is the methodical linked to the foundational (it can support, substantiate, uphold), but it is also seen as that neutralising agency, preventing us from that which all academics fear, 'fantasy'.

Fournier (1997) again suggests that multiple criteria must be used, because '[a]n analysis of structure based only on one criterion is liable to be inaccurate while an analysis based on several criteria should provide more reliable results' (:49). The problem is again, not with the use of criteria as such, but with what we expect of them. In Fournier's case, more criteria are assumed to provide us with a more accurate reading. The formulation is again revealing. She writes: 'when several elements are used, one series serves to control the conclusions and correct the possible errors of interpretation' (:50). Methodology is invested with the power to control and to correct and it prevents one from following the seductive, erroneous power of interpretation. Her quantitative requirements are followed by the requirement of a '[r]igor in the use of criteria',7 confirming the assumption of neutrality in methodical jargon.

The terminologies of ancient Greco-Roman rhetoricians have provided biblical rhetorical critics with yet another form of method. Despite the earlier use of Greco-Roman categories by Betz, Kennedy (1984:3) describes rhetorical criticism as an additional tool to be added to the already existing package of historical criticism and he proposes the 'outlines of a rigorous methodology' (:4). Its instrumentality or first step in the 'two step' can also be seen in the frequent reference to its 'application'. It would be possible to divide the practitioners within this group as ranging from a minimalist to a maximalist position. Although some would use Greco-Roman rhetoric as a tool for the understanding of biblical material, the application possibilities range from an attempt to acquire a feeling for the cultural world in which biblical writings were produced, to the very positive attempt to establish a relationship between Greco-Roman rhetoric and biblical material, exposing to what extent classical rhetorical categories can be found in biblical material. Among the latter group would also be those who find in the Greco-Roman rhetorical categories universal applicability (cf Kennedy 1984). Although both these positions are histori-

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6 For a more detailed analysis of the particular passage and problem see :180–183.
7 One of the possibilities of meaning for the lexeme 'rigorous' is 'severely accurate' as in rigorous bookkeeping or as in mathematical language where 'the validity of each step has to be made explicit' (cf Collins 1994:1002).
ally based and although it seems to me as if objectivistic operations are at work in both these positions, the maximalist position seems to align itself more clearly within the objectivistic tradition.

In the use of Greco-Roman rhetorical terminology, the rhetorical critical act becomes the identification and labelling of parts of discourse. Classical rhetorical terminology functions as the locus of authority for the so-called 'correct' identification or labelling of textual elements. For that reason it is also regarded as foundational (cf also Robbins 1997:25), and its foundational status for the understanding of New Testament writings can be seen in the way classical rhetorical sources are shuffled around in order to establish a hierarchical order. Anderson (1996) for example, argues that a distinction be made between philosophical and school rhetoric and denies the 'applicability' of philosophical rhetoric, especially the rhetoric of Aristotle (particularly popular among New Testament rhetorical critics) to the writings of Paul. In both positions the operating assumption seems to prompt the question: to what extent does a particular writing or writings reflect or represent Greco-Roman rhetoric? To the extent that Greco-Roman rhetorical terminology has become foundational, this mode of interpretation approximates representationalism. As historically based, the objective is to find in biblical writings reflections of Greco-Roman rhetoric. In searching to position 'ancient rhetorical theory' Anderson (1996:27) writes: 'Does ancient rhetoric supply us with specific forms, patterns of argumentation, and proofs that show up in the New Testament and therefore help us understand its rhetoric in its own historical setting?' And Watson (1997:408) claims: 'It [rhetorical analysis] can identify the functional value of epistolary units within the whole letter according to a well-defined system and serve as a guide to cautiously assign weight to epistolary formulae and transitions...'. Classical rhetorical terminology therefore seems to enable the rhetorical critic to identify certain patterns, forms, figures in the text. To put it a bit differently: the object displays certain properties that relate to the categories furnished by classical rhetorical terminology. Owing to their conventionality, these categories, functioning as the collective space of various occurrences of properties, have in themselves become objectified, fixed and rigid. We have seen that meaning in a objectivistic frame of reference is constituted by the correspondence between symbols and the objects of reality. If more accuracy is the objective of analysis, closer correspondence between symbols and objects of reality can be expected. Since Greco-Roman rhetoric seems to function as foundational categories for interpretation of some biblical rhetorical critics, it is to be expected

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8 Robbins (1997:25) requires as conditional to the construction of an interpretive analytics a 'substantive facility with the skills, knowledge and insights in the range of ancient literature...'. Why this requirement is made and why it is particularly specified is not clear, especially in the light of Robbins' socio-rhetorical position and proposal, which really does not presuppose a 'substantive' knowledge of Greco-Roman terminologies.
that the objective would be to establish as close as possible correspondence between elements in biblical writings and Greco-Roman categories. And it is this determination for more accuracy in meaning that has kept the use of Greco-Roman rhetorical terminology alive. Stamps (1995:135) summarises why there has been a resurgence in rhetorical criticism since the 1960s: 'In this sense, ancient rhetorical theory and practice becomes another way to supposedly reconstruct in a more accurate manner the meaning and intent of the New Testament documents'.

2.4 Biblical rhetorical criticism as supplemental

Biblical rhetorical criticism as method and its predominant adherence to Greco-Roman rhetorical categories introduce us to another aspect, namely that of its supplementary nature. Not only does rhetorical criticism serve as a method subjected to the questions and problems of biblical writings as such, but Stamps (1992:272) has indicated that the historical paradigm still reigns supreme in 'the guild of New Testament studies' (cf also Stamps 1995:135). Not only has rhetorical criticism been linked to authorial intention, the historical situation of letters and argumentative patterns, but also to questions of integrity and authenticity. By latching upon the rhetorical handbooks and exercises to furnish it with a methodological vocabulary, it has associated itself with what can be called the supplementary tradition of rhetoric. Regarding rhetorical criticism as method subservient to the biblical sciences and specifically to a particular tradition of interpretation within the biblical sciences relegates this practice to the supplementary, to the traditional role of the explicit rhetorical tradition.

Various questions arise. If rhetoric is seen as supplementary, the concern is then whether the rhetorical terminology can respond to the questions and problems posed by a dominant terminology and if this is impossible, what is the point in pursuing this kind of criticism any longer? If rhetoric is seen as supplementary, rhetorical interpretation need not proceed any further than being a method based on the rhetorical lexicon derived from classical and modern rhetoric. If, however, it is not simply supplementary but if the possibility exists that rhetorical terminology can also generate knowledge, can also function as catalyst, is it then not also possible that disciplinary structures can be expanded, that questions and problems, saturated by decades of research, can be put aside to turn to new dimensions of knowledge? If that be the case, can rhetoric not be constitutive of disciplines of specialised, substantive subjects? To put it a bit differently again: is it not possible to recontextualise studies concerned with the Bible within the context of rhetoric itself? Why should it be the other way round? These questions are related to one another. If it is possible to move beyond the terminological incarceration of the supplementary tradition, would it then not also be possible to appreciate enquiry in other so-called subdisciplines as rhetorical? To what extent should an interpretation avail itself of the rhetorical lexicon, whether in its traditional, classical or modern manifestations, to be called a
rhetorical interpretation? Can and should rhetorical interpretation only be restricted to those practitioners that use rhetorical terminology? It is in this respect that attention should be paid to Gaonkar's (1990) views on supplementarity.

Gaonkar argues that an 'adequate understanding of the rhetoric of the human sciences is possible only when we have an adequate grasp of the logic of supplementarity within which rhetoric is habitually caught' (1990:361). Interpreting Gaonkar a bit, it would be possible to find this supplementarity both in a diachronic and synchronic sense. Diachronically the supplementary tradition refers to a history of rhetoric that has its origins in the Platonic struggle with the sophists. Aristotle's 'compensatory move' towards rhetoric creates the distinction between the sophistic and rhetoric, repressing and relegating the sophistic to the realm of the supplemental. This became the hidden tradition, whereas the manifest history of rhetoric is taken forward by the explicit formulation and dissemination of rhetorical handbooks in antiquity, the middle ages and modern times. Kenneth Burke is granted the status of a recovery or rediscovery of the hidden and repressed sophistic tradition. In a synchronic sense the problem of supplementarity concerns the question to what extent rhetoric succeeds in establishing its presence in the discourse of other disciplines. According to Gaonkar one has to make a distinction between an explicit and implicit rhetorical turn. The explicit refers to studies where rhetoric is explicitly used as a critical and an interpretive method. To a certain extent rhetoric functions parasitically because it exists by virtue of other disciplines. However, it is also possible to discern traces of rhetorical critical activity irrespective of whether use is made of a canon of rhetorical terminology. Writers may be intent on exposing the rhetorical strategies of specialised discourses without recourse to rhetorical terminology. This could be termed the implicit rhetorical turn. Whereas the explicit rhetorical tradition uses rhetorical terminology out of practical necessity (354), the implicit tradition is a 'largely theoretical and epistemological enterprise'. Gaonkar suggests that both the hidden history of the rhetorical tradition, as well as the implicit rhetorical turn exude a seductiveness that could lure away from the manifest historical tradition and explicit rhetorical turn. Although Gaonkar strongly encourages that the logic of supplementarity be taken into account if we wish to understand rhetoric's role within the realm of the human sciences, he also refers us to a tradition where a 'rhetorical consciousness' (362) has allowed for the rhetorical analyses of discourses without recourse to traditional rhetorical lexicon.

Biblical rhetorical critics have to a large extent availed themselves of the manifest and explicit tradition of rhetoric or to put it differently, our interpretations have been prompted by the supplemental tradition of rhetoric. That means rhetorical criticism within biblical circles happens by virtue of the biblical disciplines and does not exist as an analytic act separate of the substances of these subjects. To put it a bit differently: rhetorical terminology does not encompass biblical studies at this stage.

Various consequences arise. By linking itself with the supplementary tradition and conducting itself within the subservient mode, the power of the current dis-
ciplinary structure is maintained and enhanced. Stamps points our attention to the fact that the self subjugating act of rhetorical criticism 'protects the guild which then permits a value judgment to be made from the stance of continuing and enduring dominance' (1992:272). This is exactly also what ails Schüssler Fiorenza as we have seen. The questions and problems raised within rhetorical criticism are the questions and problems raised within the discipline. And 'discipline' is the appropriate word here—criticism has to take place within the space demarcated and maintained by disciplinary structure and it has to take place in the codes specified by the discipline. It stands to reason that the emergence of different types of knowledge becomes extremely problematic, because it is measured by the fixed standards and criteria of the discipline. Furthermore, if the bureaucratic hierarchy infusing the disciplinary structure is taken into account, it clarifies why so many studies seem to leave the impression of 'I have heard that before somewhere'. The point is, however, to be aware of a repressive quality concealed where supplementarity is at stake. That does not mean that the supplementary tradition as such should be discarded, because the inventional dimension which was part of the explicit rhetorical tradition, requires in itself that the structuredness and its accompanying relations of power to our realities should be taken into account. The terminological use of the explicit rhetorical tradition will have to be recontextualised within a context where a sensitivity for interaction has been cultivated and where the problems of interpretation have been considered.

Owing to spatialisation and encodification as two operative mechanisms in supplementarity, it becomes extremely difficult to conduct a conversation across the boundaries, whether those be cultural or academic. The implication is, that although lip service may be paid to pluralism and interdisciplinarity, both the problems articulated and the articulation of them may sound as if voiced in a foreign language. The underlying assumption of uniqueness and the absolute power foisted upon that which is regarded as unique establishes distance and creates the impression of untouchability. Although power relations may be kept centralised and stable within the disciplinary structure by opting for supplementarity, the possibility of expanding into new regions becomes restricted.

Finally, it becomes clear from the arguments of Gaonkar that rhetoric also persists, and very forcefully at that, in an implicit fashion, that is, in a way that does not avail itself of the terminologies of rhetoric itself and does not restrict itself to the methodological, but functions rather in a subversive, undermining exposing manner. Although Gaonkar also cautions against not taking the supplementary into account, it seems that in cases such as biblical studies where the supplementary dominates, it has become quite important to take note of the implicit rhetorical tradition. Our concern at the moment seems to be the merging of methodologies, such as the case is with socio-rhetoric, but is this really necessary and should we not rather be looking for ways in which the various current terminologies available in biblical studies can
be shared? It is quite possible that studies within the social-scientific paradigm can be found that are more rhetorical in their approach than the kind of structuralist and authorial oriented approaches we find within the realm of rhetorical criticism.

3 TOWARDS A RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION

I have indicated that biblical rhetorical criticism, or at least a dominant segment of biblical rhetorical criticism is firmly lodged within a foundationalistic tradition. In the next section I argue that we need to dislodge biblical rhetorical criticism from this supplementary tradition and I will outline the conditions which need to be taken into consideration if biblical rhetorical criticism is to align itself with a rhetoric that proceeds from an interactional philosophy of meaning. In the perceived struggle between philosophy and rhetoric, dating from the controversies between Plato and the sophists, rhetoric has consistently been associated with untruth, the lie, concealment, opinion, probability, uncertainty, subjectivity, the emotional, passions, the illusionary, the contingent, practical, contextual, whereas philosophy has been associated with truths, certainties, accuracies, objectivity, rationality, facts and universality. To an extent this struggle is perhaps more perceived than real, but for the sake of argument, it seems that a recovery of rhetoric should also entail a restoration of rhetoric to that of which it has been accused of.

3.1 Recognising the symbolicity of the rhetorical act

If our objective is to dislodge foundationalist rhetorical interpretation, the symbolicity of the rhetorical act has to be considered. This introduces us again to the relationship between language and reality. The problem of the relationship between language and reality is as old as rhetoric itself—and the negative quality assigned to language arose from this distinction. Peters and Rothenbuhler (1989:11-16) indicate how this dichotomy contributed to a distrust of communication and provide us with a brief survey of its development. Although their portrayal of the origins of the distrust may perhaps be in need of further elaboration, they do make some interesting observations, such as the very pronounced influence Judaism has had on Western thought as expressed in their aversion to icons. They claim that ‘(T)he great innovation of Judaism was to form a religion not based on the worship of images but of a reality deeper and beyond them’ (Peters & Rothenbuhler 1989:13, referring to J-J Goux). Behind Plato’s rejection of rhetoric lies not only the pursuit of an all encompassing underlying reality of universal and eternal ‘forms’, but also the problems brought about by the transition from orality to literacy. Not only does writing contribute to the world of images, of signs and icons, but its function to preserve creates the impression or image of immediacy, thereby contributing to the world of the apparent, since the original knower, the centred self need not live any longer (cf Lentz 1982:60). Although the sophists were his chief adversaries, they too were
caught in the web created by the dichotomy between language and reality and despite pointing out the dilemma (to a certain extent) they confirmed the distrust in the linguistic world. Gorgias, for example, argues that humankind is subjected to the dilemma of not being able to represent reality other than in a deceptive or violent form—that is, if reality exists (Gronbeck 1979:29-30). Besides Plato's and Judaism's negative attitudes towards images, a major influence was also exerted by empiricist criticism, fuelled by Cartesianism. Their insistence on the observation of natural phenomena, the importance of the sensational in the perceptual process and the institutionalisation of the natural versus invention casted the symbolic into the netherworlds of illusion and deceit (Peters & Rothenbuhler 1989:14). However, this problematic relationship between language and reality only exists where a prior decision has already been made about the independence of reality; it exists only where this dichotomy between appearance and reality is constructed and where it forces discourse into terminologies appropriately created for these phenomena.

The rhetorical tradition has, however, also been infused with another view on language, namely language as a function of symbolic action (Burke 1966). As such, language functions as symbolic system par excellence. But as symbolic action, the creative potential of language is emphasised. Language is not simply a vehicle for information, a mode of representation, but language acts, it does something. This is valid even of those utterances usually seen as informational or referential. According to Burke, there is something inherently non-representational about the symbolic act, because the symbol calls into reality, that 'what is-not'. Furthermore, if the possibilities of paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic arrangement in language usage is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that there can actually be no representation of reality and that any attempt at the sanitisation of language such as the creation of an ideal type or the postulation of propositions and assertives are more likely to be situated in the ambitious desires of the objectivist than in language itself.

It would be possible to argue that it is precisely because language is a function of symbolic action, and because language has taken a leading role in the processes of human symbolisation, that it has been seen as 'deceptive' or 'violent' distortions of reality. It is exactly because of its potential to call into existence what is-not, that has fuelled every attempt to cleanse, purify and sanitise linguistic utterances. Fish (1989:478) goes further and indicates that the struggle between philosophy and rhetoric, between two modes of cognitive behaviour can be assigned to the ambition to purify language. He writes (477): 'The idea is that such a language, purged of ambiguity, redundancy, and indirection, will be an appropriate instrument for the registering of an independent reality, and that if men (sic) will only submit themselves to that language and remain within the structure of its stipulated definitions and exclusions, they will be incapable of formulating and expressing wayward, subjective thoughts and will cease to be danger either to themselves or those who hearken to them.' And he concludes that 'the quarrel between philosophy and
rhetoric, survives every sea change in the history of Western thought, continually presenting us with the (skewed) choice between the plain unvarnished truth straightforwardly presented and the powerful but insidious appeal of "fine language," language that has transgressed the limits of representation and substituted its own forms for the forms of reality" (:478).

Recognising the impenetrability of language as a means to provide access to reality, implies a change in assumptions. As a matter of fact, the possibility to 'know' has become problematic and an independent existing 'meaning' cannot be assumed. According to Whitson and Poulakos (1993) note should be taken of what Nietzsche has said. Nietzsche challenges the epistemic tradition within rhetoric to move beyond its lip service to the possibility of a knowable reality. The function of signification (symbolisation) is not to represent or refer, but to cope with chaos. The rhetorical act produces 'signs that function not as truth but as beautiful veils masking the chaos in which people live' (Poulakos 1993:136). Via language appearances are summoned into existence and these appearances should not be seen as in opposition to reality; to human beings they are reality (:137). Language intervenes in the sensational process to produce images enabling human beings to live their lives. Knowledge is consequently the product of the 'tropological operation of language' (:140). If knowledge can no longer be seen as the product of the representational but rather as the outcome of the tropological, reality as symbolic is what we have. Lyons (1994:448) writes: 'All we are left with are images, and opinions that we create about the world which are unreliable and subject to change'. Furthermore, since processes of symbolisation are contextually contingent, what we have are multiple symbolic worlds. The questions that emerge from within the rhetorical tradition are consequently not questions striving for representation, or questions suggesting the ideal for objectivity, or striving towards comprehensivity, but questions concerned with the ways and means life is made survivable via signification/symbolisation; it is concerned with the questions about how and why we construct symbolic realities; it is concerned with the extent to which our 'masking' and 'veiling' succeed in creating effective illusions to cope with the chaos into which we were thrown.

Various implications for biblical rhetorical critics follow. Perhaps the first should be a move away from a critical activity exclusively focused on the production of the accurate meaning of the text. In the light of the persistent search for a method that could provide more accurate meaning, it needs to be emphasised that even the striving towards more objectivity reveals an entrenchment in objectivism. If biblical rhetorical criticism is to be dislodged from a supplementary tradition and if it is intent on taking symbolicity in early Christianity and in its later developments seriously, the effects of early Christianity's writings shift into focus—not simply what they meant, but what they have done or what they have neglected to do. For example: Amador (1997:53) encourages that the shift be made away from the rhetoric in the Bible to the rhetoric of the Bible. And he specifies this as the 'Bible's silent impact
upon culture'. To put it a bit differently: the Bible has played no minor role in the formation of cultures, in the creation of presuppositions and world-views and in the subjection and oppression of opposing discourses. The persuasive (and in some cases coercive) role of the Bible not only pertains to early Christianity, nor does it only pertain to Western culture. Biblical rhetorical critics can contribute by researching the infusion of biblical values into the cultures of the world.9

Related to the previous point—if symbolicity as such shifts into focus instead of the tyranny of the text, it also becomes possible to extend biblical rhetorical criticism to the study of Christian art's rhetoricity, that is the performativity and power mechanisms, the strategies involved when biblical motifs are recontextualised. Cheryl Exum (1998:260) writes: 'What happens to Bible stories and Bible characters in their literary and artistic afterlives?...What kind of cultural afterlives do they give to biblical characters? And the question is not simply one of what the representations seek to do but of what effect they have on their readers and viewers.'10

Recognising the impossibility of achieving objectivity and recognising our deliverance to a world of images, simultaneously opens the possibility of conversation across disciplinary boundaries, because this recognition has already dawned on many other disciplines. Cheryl Exum refers to the ways in which artists and art historians have appropriated biblical symbols and adds that with the changing views on the university and the concomitant emerging of 'cultural studies', this trend is likely to increase in momentum. She writes (1998:260): 'One does not expect artists, writers or musicians to turn to biblical criticism for inspiration, but biblical scholars do have something to offer the wider worlds of art, literature and music.'

Recognising the symbolicity of the rhetorical act also implies recognising the symbolicity of the interpretive act. Neither method, nor theory or interpretation escapes the deceptive qualities of language and no design of criteria, not even quantifiable criteria (contra Porter & Reed 1998) will provide a more accurate extraction of meaning. Once the possibilities of a structured, independent reality and a representing language have been forsaken and once the symbolicity of the interpretive act has been conceded, no ultimate criterion exists or can be created to measure; in the world of interpretation the 'buck stops nowhere'. The realisation that the interpretation is a constructive and creative act, that the terms we create are not filters or

9 Clines (1997) has done exactly this by conducting research into the recipience of the Bible and biblical material in a demarcated area in the United Kingdom, exploring the effects of the Bible in culture, the public and its position and status in the church. Although Clines would probably not see himself as a biblical rhetorical critic, it would be possible to see this publication as an example of the implicit rhetorical tradition at work within biblical studies.

10 Cf in this regard also Meyer (1997) in which he illustrates how use is made of the crucified figure of Christ. He indicates how the aesthetic artefact (symbol) is invested with power associated with the authority it probably had in an earlier context and how its effects contribute to the shaping of public opinion.
screens, but rather catalysts, makes interpretation a permanent problem. The question now becomes, 'how is rhetoric possible?'; how do we, via interpretation construct or contribute to our worlds of symbols and images? The concern is not whether an interpretation is true or false, but the concern is now the formulation and articulation of strategies. With the term ‘strategy’ an indication is given of the non-neutrality of reading and writing, the act of design, the politicality of interpretation. In response to the question 'how rhetoric is possible', various options are open to us.

One possibility would be to study the argumentation of biblical scholars, such as, favourite topoi and their effectiveness. Why a certain topos has been selected and how it relates to its academic readers, how it differs from community to community, how it articulates the value-system of a particular community, are all questions pertaining to the field of the biblical rhetorical critic. The traditional history of investigation with its somewhat arbitrary association of traditions and ideas can now be rewritten taking the strategic character of interpretation into consideration and relating this to the variety of situations. Besides a self-reflexive approach to our own types of argumentation, interpretation no longer needs to resort only to argumentation, but can also experiment with other forms of interacting, such as the writing of stories. Finally, in responding to the question 'how rhetoric is possible', biblical rhetorical critics have to concern themselves with the problem of interaction with society. Do the strategies we formulate engage our communities? And if they do, in what way? What are the possibilities of creating interpretive strategies that could contribute to social transformation? In what way do our strategies expose and subvert oppressive systems in which the Bible itself may play a role?

3.2 Rhetorical inquiry as persuasion

Implicit in the notion of 'strategy' is the act of persuasion. It is almost impossible to speak of rhetoric or rhetorical inquiry and not to raise the issue of persuasion in the discussion. Although rhetorical theorists may in one way or the other wish to 'soften' the notion of persuasion, it is never discarded from rhetorical inquiry.

Burke (1969:49–50) indicates how persuasion in some way or the other manifests in the rhetorical proposals of Isocrates, Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine. And although Burke himself expands the notion of persuasion with that of identification, persuasion does not disappear from the horizon. As a matter of fact, it would be possible to regard the Burkeian notion of 'identification' as conditional for persuasion; the degree of consubstantiability or identification determines the type of persuasion. Burke (:43) locates rhetoric as the 'essential function of language' and specifies this function as 'the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols'. Even if 'cooperation' may be the objec-

11 Burke (1969:43) defines rhetoric as follows: 'For rhetoric is not rooted in any past condition of
tive, in this instance it is brought about, caused by 'inducing'. He concludes (:46), 'So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ("consubstantiality") and communication.... But, in given instances, one or another of these elements may serve best for extending a line of analysis in some particular direction'. Although not to be seen in a genealogical sense there seems to be a kind of similarity between Nietzsche's 'masking' or 'veiling' of chaos and the assumption on which Burke proposes 'identification' as an expansion of the range of rhetoric. Rhetoric seems to be prompted by 'division' and is as such compensatory to division. If it were not for division, there would not have been any need for rhetoric (:22; also :45). To put it a bit differently: Burke seems to be completely at home within the rhetorical tradition, by assuming its necessity from the 'oppositional' (cf also :44). However, he also indicates that persuasion presupposes the human agent as free, because where freedom has been taken away, rhetoric has likewise become unnecessary (:50).

A feminist perspective offered by Foss and Griffin (1995) challenges the notion of persuasion as the interactional goal of rhetoric and proposes an invitational rhetoric that substitutes persuasion with invitation. According to them, such a rhetoric neither operates from the assumption that human beings 'are on earth to alter the "environment and to influence the social affairs" of others' (:2), nor does it desire 'control and domination' (:3). A rhetoric of persuasion is seen as hierarchical, asserting its own superiority and imposing itself on others with the demand of change. A rhetoric of invitation on the other hand, operates from the assumption of the immanent value of all living beings, acknowledging the self-determination of human beings to make their own choices (:4). It is conditioned by safety that 'creates a feeling of security and a freedom from danger for the audience' (:10), by value that allows for a radical alterity (:11) and freedom that does not place restrictions on an interaction and that allows a space for others to develop and choose from alternatives (:12).

The proposal by Foss and Griffen, is in its main tenets however, not convincing, because it does not escape the configurations that accompany the notion of persuasion. This is also to an extent acknowledged when persuasion is maintained as a possibility, albeit then a backdoor associated with control and domination. Besides persuasion as a possibility, the proposal itself can and should be seen as a request for change. That being said, the debate concerning rhetoric as persuasion cannot be ignored in the construction of rhetorical interpretation.

Why do we need to pay attention to the notion of persuasion? Firstly, retaining the notion of persuasion, prevents the possibility of a return to neutral, objectivistic,
non-partisan discourse without an agenda. Besides the fact that an offering of a perspective may be seen as a form of persuasion, there is no reason why it should not also be subjected to the suspicion which accompanies rhetoric. It is exactly the acknowledgement that symbolic interaction involves persuasion which has contributed significantly to the cracking of foundations.

Secondly, the debate concerning a rhetoric of persuasion and its role in interpretation suggests that degrees of persuasion should be recognised. Burke’s expression, ‘war is a disease of cooperation’ indicates the extent to which the boundaries of persuasion can be extended. It reminds us that an effect of persuasion, cooperation, may go wrong. All totalitarian discourses, such as that of bureaucracy, also constitute this category. Although persuasion may amount to a sharing, it may also incline to the coercive. It is exactly the purpose of the rhetorical critic not only to identify the degree of persuasion prompting discourses, but in the process of identification also to expose or subvert. For example: despite the fact that it would be quite possible to view narrative as argumentation temporalised and spatialised, it does not persuade in the same way as argumentation. A letter, simply by virtue of being discourse that addresses directly, may, despite various politeness strategies, be quite coercive. As a matter of fact, it would be quite possible to recognise different degrees of persuasiveness even among sets of politeness strategies. A further example: religious discourses are inclined to the totalitarian, even though they may be in narrative form. It belongs to the objectives of the rhetorical critic concerned with religious discourses to establish the closure effected by the degree of persuasiveness.

Thirdly, recognising degrees of persuasion implies that a rhetorical interpretation can hardly forsake the notion of power. Even in an innocent sounding invitation to share a perspective, the possibility of sharing has been opened by someone who has assumed a superior position and who has assumed that the perspective is worthwhile for others to share. Lyons (1994:449) argues for a position that moves from persuasion to subversion and writes: ‘In this understanding of rhetoric as subversion the contention is that if the locus of rhetoric is opinion and subject to change then rhetorical cognition should be understood as a quest for meaning that is marked by power-play and competition. Rhetoric...becomes equated with the power-play in and for meaning: that is the infinite repetition of the construction, reversal, and construction of various “truths”.’

Keeping the persuasive objective of rhetoric in mind not only prevents biblical rhetorical critics from returning to the pretence of neutral discourse, but it also introduces the consciousness of power in the creation of strategies and an awareness that the discourse to be created has to be and will be ‘addressed’. Even though we may prefer to ‘soften’ persuasion to cooperation or critical cooperation, designing interpretive strategies means designing persuasive strategies and presupposes the possibility of actualising power. On the one hand this points again to a sphere that should be subjected to criticism, namely the reasons why one interpretation is con-
sidered more persuasive than another. Why, for example, has rhetorical criticism as practised by feminist rhetorical critics in the biblical tradition been ignored by biblical rhetorical critics, even to the extent that it is not even mentioned in surveys of biblical rhetorical criticism? (cf Stamps 1992; 1995). What are the factors contributing to the power of persuasion and how are they realised in practice? On the other hand, biblical rhetorical critics are reminded that the invention of strategies serves the question ‘how persuasion is possible’. As such it again moves the interpreter beyond the text to the world in which the interpreter is confronted with its impact or lack of impact.

3.3 The contextuality of the interpretive act

Once abstract, extracted theory and neutralising method, compelling the interpretive act to discover and excavate whatever object is being investigated are abolished in the production of knowledge, the context of the interpreter becomes the point of departure for any interpretive act. In representing Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions*, Fish (1989:488) writes: ‘Whatever reports a particular language (natural or artificial) offers us will be the report on the world as it is seen from within some particular situation; there is no other aperspectival way to see and no language other than a situated-dependent language—an interested, rhetorical language—in which to report’. Fish continues to indicate that it is the drive to escape a contextuality that determines interpretation which lies behind the anti-rhetorical impetus in all its various manifestations, such as the search for a universally valid set of conditions that could satisfy a general theory of speech acts (cf :499). The problem is, however, that there is no escape from the contextual determinedness of our interpretations, because interpretation has to take place in ‘rhetorical’ language, has to take place with symbols firmly embedded in values. It follows then that any rhetorical interpretive act is conditioned and formed by its context. As such it becomes important to determine the context in which interpretation takes place. The determination of its context is a highly problematic affair though and we need to pay some attention to it.

As far back as 1975 Fish coined the phrase *interpretive communities* to solve the problem of the tension between the demands of the text (as object) and the demands of the reader (as subject). The problem revolves basically around the question as to where meaning resides. Should the text be seen as producer of meaning or should the reader be regarded as the authority for meaning? Does the text contain formal features, which can be taken as interpretive principles, or does the reader create certain interpretive strategies with which to read the text? According to Fish the notion of interpretive communities solves this problem, by shifting the authority for the production of meaning to the interpretive community. Neither text, nor interpreter functions independently, but the text is product of the interpretive strategies created by the interpretive community. The interpretive community are constituted by those who ‘share interpretive strategies, not for reading but for writing texts, for
constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than is usually assumed, the other way around' (1980:14; cf also 171).

Does the notion of interpretive community then provide us with some kind of stability, an authority that could create and establish interpretive strategies? Is it possible to determine the constituent elements of such an interpretive community? Fish himself denies that the interpretive community provides any kind of stability, finding the only stability in the 'that' of the deployment of interpretive strategies (1980:172). There are also other problems with the notion of 'interpretive community'. It seems that the demarcation of such an interpretive community is subject to the same process of interpretation that is suggested for texts. That means that the interpretive community is also a product of interpretation and the constituent elements of such a community derive their constitutive potential from the prior act of interpretation. Furthermore, interpretive communities do not live in a vacuum—they form part and parcel of larger, continuously shifting configurations of meaning. Although Fish is probably not unaware of this, it sometimes feels when reading Fish as if interpretive communities are seen in a rather one-dimensional sense existing as circles of readers next to each other. However, the interpretive strategies designed by interpretive communities, are conditioned by these larger configurations of meaning, that are continuously in processes of change. For that very reason social customs and habits, conventionalities, values and norms, infiltrate our interpretive strategies and function to prompt the construction of the very contexts we interpret. Despite the fact that they may appear 'natural' or 'factual' to us and furnish us with a particular kind of terminology, they are designed. Hence the persistent and often unperceived problem of ethnocentricism.

However, whatever the persistent problems of the notion of interpretive communities may be, it creates an awareness of the radical destabilisation the various 'turns' have brought. Various implications relevant for biblical rhetorical critics follow and since we have become used to the term 'rhetorical situation', this will be used as point of departure.

Firstly, from the very inception of rhetorical criticism within biblical circles, the notion of the rhetorical situation has played a decisive role in the process of interpretation. We have seen however, that rhetorical situation simply replaced historical situation. It was seen as something 'out there', independent and away from the interpreter. Taking the notion of 'interpretive communities' into consideration, the notion of rhetorical situation should be expanded to include the context of the interpreter and this has to become part of the process of interpretation.

Secondly, just as the interpretive community itself can be seen as the product of the interpretive strategies, the academic rhetorical situation can be seen as the product of rhetorical strategies. Such a formulation puts rhetorical strategies into focus, but it would be possible to formulate the rhetorical situation in terms of interaction.
As such the rhetorical situation comes into existence in the interaction between the rhetorical critic, conventionalities and the audience via rhetorical strategies. It is a construct, forms part of the persuasive process and is not something to be addressed and not something prior to the rhetorical act of interpretation. As such it does not have any properties independent from interpretation. None of the categories we use to describe the rhetorical situation can be seen as a locus of meaning. The rhetorical critic is decentred, because s/he is part of a tradition; the self of the rhetorical critic has discursively been formed; not only does the critic conform to an institutionalised role, but the body has even been formed into a person that performs in a particular manner in a very intimate and personal sense by symbolic interaction. Despite the shift in focus to the audience or readers of our discourses, they too cannot be seen as a locus where the demands of meaning are formulated and met. Not only are they also subject to received discursive practices, but democratisation, globalisation and the onslaught of technology produced completely heterogeneous audiences. If students may be singled out for a moment as a particular instance, it quickly becomes clear that they are no longer predominantly constituted by white males of the upper classes, but the boundaries of gender, race, class and economy have been abolished. Each of the various types of students brings its own values, ethos, culture and purposes to the classroom rendering a construction of the rhetorical situation impossible (cf in this regard Joseph 1995). It is in this respect that the ‘even if’ strategy should be seriously considered!

It should be borne in mind, that ‘academic’ rhetorical situations have always been created or constructed—they have just simply never been recognised nor have their catalytic possibilities been exploited. The point here is that instead of ignoring such a situation or consciously shifting it aside as a prolegomenon to interpretation, as something that has to be rushed over so that the real stuff can be addressed, the construction of the ‘academic’ rhetorical situation should be seen as an integral part of the process of interpretation. So, even if the rhetorical situation is a ‘construct’ formulated by our own interpretive strategies, even if every traditional element of the rhetorical situation can be destabilised and given that pluralism has significantly contributed to this process, the argument is that its construction should consciously become part and parcel of the interpretive act.

12 It would be necessary to make finer distinctions. For example: the audience can be seen as comprised of those that are directly concerned and interested, those that are not interested but could be affected, those that may not be interested, but can be considered a ‘power’, such as the hierarchies within the University, the wider public, et cetera.

13 The notion of ‘person’ as an analytical category for interpretation has received much attention during recent years and needs to be taken into consideration in any formulation of interpretive strategies. However, its complexity requires a more extensive treatment than this article would allow.
Thirdly, if the rhetorical situation is part and parcel of the process of interpretation, we need to ask ourselves why are we doing what we are doing? This applies not only to the approaches we adopt, but also to the material we study. Part of rhetorical interpretation is to substantiate why the study of a particular discourse should be continued or maintained, why affiliated discourses should or should not be included. Within an objectivistic paradigm of meaning with a structured independent reality that has to be dissected, it makes sense to focus exclusively on discrete elements, but in an interactional paradigm 'things' come into existence in interaction and their coming into existence is in itself a performative act creating, destroying or modifying numerous other relations. Becoming aware of this continuous changing flow of meaning precludes stabilising the study of a particular discourse, as well as a particular way of studying it. Reasons must be worked out why an inquiry has to take place.

Fourthly, in the construction of the 'academic' rhetorical situation and prompted by the question 'why', the classical principles of appropriateness and timeliness are activated. The requirement of timeliness is an expression of the kairos principle, whereas appropriateness expresses the principle of to prepon. Kairos is concerned with the problem of time in relation to communication. The question is whether 'now is the time to speak'. The notion of 'opportune moment' shifts into focus (Poulakos 1983:38-41). The to prepon principle functions complementary to the kairos, but the focus is less on the timeliness of the communication and more on the situation, the scene and the relationship between communication and situation. Poulakos (1983:41) distinguishes between the two principles in the following manner: 'In distinction to kairos, which focuses on man's (sic) sense of time, to prepon emphasizes his (sic) sense of propriety'.

Fifthly, and this could be seen as a summarising point—the construction of the academic rhetorical situation has to satisfy what Readings (1996) has called a 'network of obligations'. Taking the preceding aspects into account, the question of value is raised when the academic rhetorical situation is taken into account. Value should not here be seen in an economic sense, but rather in terms of accountability—it is determined within a network of obligations. Various nodal points can be discerned on this network and maybe we can subsume them all under the notion of 'the other'. The 'other' comprises various constitutuents, of which only two will be

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14 For example: it could (and should) be asked in Third World countries with high unemployment figures, unskilled labour, illiteracy, international debt, escalating criminality, not only whether there is any sense in determining the integrity of the letter to the Philippians, but also whether the study of the New Testament itself can be legitimised. Recently a vice-chancellor of one of South Africa's universities presented a paper in which a scathing attack on the continued existence of Biblical Studies was made on the grounds of unemployment and unskilled labour (Mzamane 1998:2-3). The issue becomes moral: is it fair to teach others how to interpret the Bible when no employment can be gained with such a qualification?
emphasised. Firstly, seen from whatever perspective, the writings of Judaeo-Christianity are seen as religious. In the formulation of interpretive strategies the interaction with other disciplines has not only become unavoidable, but should consciously be advocated. This is required both because of institutional changes as well as emerging pluralism. Although the histories of many universities originated from denominational involvement and were consciously built upon Christian values, this is no longer the case. Globalisation, techno-economic rationality, democracy and a changing university culture made it possible for students of diverse religious affiliations to enter the institution of the university. And they carry with them their own systems of value, their own cultures, that should not only be recognised but consciously integrated into institutional legitimacy. Religious studies has made us aware of the variety of religious traditions, of which Judaeo-Christianity should be seen as one among the others. In the articulation of interpretive strategies the conversation with colleagues in religious studies has become necessary. Secondly, rhetoric serves civic discourse. This has been the case since the days of the sophists. As such the formulation of interpretive strategies has to take into account its impact on the public. This may include religious communities, but should be seen also in a wider sense. An issue is not the propagation of biblical values; as a matter of fact, the biblical rhetorical critic may find it necessary to subvert biblical values in order to contribute to the creation of civic discourse.

4 Conclusion

It has been argued and indicated that biblical rhetorical criticism still locates itself within an objectivistic philosophy of meaning. As such it is unable to become aware of its own politicality. By locating itself within the supplementary tradition of rhetoric, it assumes the role of method and responds to the questions of the biblical sciences. Though this might be exactly what some biblical rhetorical critics intend for rhetorical criticism, it can be questioned whether this is the appropriate rhetorical tradition to locate ourselves in. It has been suggested that an interactional philosophy of meaning aligns us with a different tradition, often vaguely referred to as that of sophism. By opting for the supplementary tradition of rhetoric various possibilities for the production of alternative knowledges are left aside. It has been indicated that if we are to move beyond an objectivistic philosophy of meaning, various conditions should be taken into account. These conditions not only function within rhetorical traditions, but also enable us to explore alternative possibilities for the production of knowledge. However, in responding to these conditions, the politicality of interpretation is a consistent companion. The question of interpretation should no longer be only the accuracy of meaning, but rather the types of rhetorics we will be able to produce in order to mask and to veil the chaos of our realities.
WORKS CONSULTED


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