

Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation from its Beginnings to the Present

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As the twentieth century ends and the third millennium begins, socio-rhetorical interpretation has become a multi-dimensional approach to texts guided by a multi-dimensional hermeneutic.¹ Rather than being another method for interpreting texts, socio-rhetorical interpretation is an interpretive analytic – an approach that evaluates and reorients its strategies as it engages in multi-faceted dialogue with the texts and other phenomena that come within its purview.² The approach does not claim to be comprehensive. Rather, the claim is that the approach uses the insights of sociolinguistics, semiotics and ethnography in an interactionist mode that sets ancient, modern and post-modern systems of thought in energetic dialogue with one another.

At present, three major essays and the results of a multiple review session at the 1997 SBL meeting have been published on socio-rhetorical interpretation,³ in addition to various book reviews. Yet recently another dimension of the approach has begun to appear. Guided by the metaphor of a text as a tapestry rather than a site of windows and mirrors, socio-rhetorical interpretation has begun to focus not only on multiple textures of a text but also on multiple discourses that interweave with one another within those textures.⁴ The interweaving of multiple textures and discourses within a text creates an

¹ The two foundational books for socio-rhetorical interpretation are V. K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996) 108-18 and *idem*, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 58-63. For the socio-rhetorical Web site: <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/SRI/index.html>. Where essays exist on the Web, the footnote will include the URL.

For a programmatic description of the goals, *idem*, 'The Present and Future of Rhetorical Analysis', in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSS 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 24-52, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/future/future24.html>.

² Robbins, *Tapestry*, 11-13; *idem*, 'The Present and Future', 25-33.

³ V. K. Robbins, 'Introduction to the Paperback Edition', in *idem*, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) xix-xliv; D. B. Gowler, 'The Development of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism', in *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 3; New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 1-35, <http://www.chowan.edu/acadp/Religion/pubs/chapter.htm>; H. J. B. Combrink, 1999. 'The Challenge Of Making and Redrawing Boundaries : A Perspective on Socio-Rhetorical Criticism', *Nederduits Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* (forthcoming); D. F. Watson, ed., 'Vernon Robbins's Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: A Review', *JSNT* 70 (1998) 69-115 [A review by R. A. Culpepper, M. E. Dean, and G. D. Newby, with response by V. K. Robbins and dialogue between Robbins and the reviewers].

⁴ Robbins, *Tapestry*, 18-24; *idem*, 'The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse', *Scriptura* 59 (1996) 353-62, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/dialect/dialect353.html>.

environment in which signification, meanings and meaning effects interact with one another in ways that no one method can display. Only an approach that is highly programmatic, complexly variegated and readily adaptable can begin to engage and exhibit the rich world that texts bring into the life of humans as they live, work, struggle, suffer, die, celebrate and commemorate together.

While other essays have focused in various ways on socio-rhetorical interpretation, the goal with this essay is to describe the current state of socio-rhetorical interpretation through the medium of almost all the bibliography that socio-rhetorical interpretation has produced to the present. The essay begins with a short history of the emergence of the approach to the point where it received the name of socio-rhetorical interpretation. The next step in the essay explores the emergence of the focus on multiple textures of a text. The third step introduces various hermeneutics that people have used to activate social and rhetorical strategies of interpretation and to explain the difference between a socio-rhetorical hermeneutic and a literary, historical or social-scientific hermeneutic. The essay ends with a discussion of the interest in multiple discourses that has emerged only recently, and of what this interest promises for future socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation.

Initial Socio-Rhetorical Studies

Socio-rhetorical interpretation began with analysis and interpretation of social and cultural dynamics in written works. The first sustained socio-rhetorical study was an analysis of the relation of the we-passages in Acts to ancient Mediterranean sea voyages.⁵ As I observed in a later study, ‘This study in 1975 revealed that traveling in a boat on the sea with other people created a social environment that made it natural for some authors in antiquity to use first-person plural “we” for literary accounts of sea voyages’.⁶ This common social environment became a well-known cultural phenomenon in Mediterranean literature. In a recent article, Dennis R. MacDonald emphasizes that the cultural intertexture of the sea voyages in Acts goes back to Homer’s *Odyssey*, and he argues that Acts is reconfiguring basic scenes in that widely-known tradition.⁷ Other interpreters have been so intent on historical intertexture in the sea voyages in Acts that they have missed the broad social and cultural intertexture of the accounts.⁸ Robbins’s

⁵ V. K. Robbins, ‘The We-Passages in Acts and Ancient Sea Voyages’, *BR* 20 (1975) 5-18; *idem.*, ‘By Land and By Sea: A Study in Acts 13-28’, *SBLSP* 15 (1976) 381-96; *idem.*, ‘By Land and By Sea: The We-Passages and Ancient Sea Voyages’, in *Perspectives on Luke-Acts*. (ed. C. H. Talbert; Perspectives in Religious Studies; Special Studies Series, No. 5; Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press and Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 215-42.

⁶ V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Pbk edition; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) xix.

⁷ D. R. MacDonald, ‘The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul’, *NTS* 45 (1999) 88-107; cf. C. H. Talbert and J. H. Hayes, ‘A Theology of Sea Storms in Luke-Acts’, *SBLSP* 34 (1995) 321-36.

⁸ E.g., H. J. Cadbury, ‘We and I Passages in Luke-Acts’, *NTS* 3 (1956) 128-32; J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 35-53; *idem.*, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 16-22; Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 66-7; C. J. Hemer, ‘First Person Narrative in Acts 27-28’, *TB* 36 (1985) 79-109; S. E. Porter, ‘The “We” Passages’, in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 2, *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman*

1975 study was an initial interpretation of social and cultural intertexture among the sea voyages in Acts and other Mediterranean accounts of sea voyages.⁹

The second sustained socio-rhetorical analysis concerned the teaching-learning cycle in the Gospel of Mark. The first steps of this appeared in studies of Jesus' calling of his disciples and of repetitive-progressive summoning in the Gospel of Mark.¹⁰ The full-scale study of these phenomena in Mark, which appeared in 1984, appealed to the works of Kenneth Burke and the *progymnasmata* for analysis of rhetorical repetition and progression. It also appealed to the works of Clifford Geertz, William Bascom, Roger D. Abrahams, Roger M. Keesing, Theodore R. Sarbin and Vernon L. Allen for social, cultural and social-psychological analysis.¹¹ This study revealed evidence of a Mediterranean teaching-learning cycle in Plato's *Dialogues*, Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, ancient comedy, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*, the Abraham story, the Moses story, the Elijah-Elisha story, the Israelite prophets, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and rabbinic literature. Subsequent studies have built on the analysis and interpretation in this book.¹²

Additional socio-rhetorical studies between 1983 and 1991 focused on Luke-Acts,¹³ pronouncement stories, miracle stories and sayings.¹⁴ During the same period of

Setting (ed. D. W. J. Gill and C. Gempf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 545-74; J. M. Gilchrist, 'The Historicity of Paul's Shipwreck', *JSNT* 61 (1996) 29-51; and C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (ICCONT; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, forthcoming).

⁹ For social and cultural intertexture, see Robbins, *Tapestry*, 108-18; *idem*, *Exploring*, 58-63.

¹⁰ V. K. Robbins, 'Summons and Outline in Mark: The Three-Step Progression', *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981) 97-114 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 119-35 = *The Composition of Mark's Gospel: Selected Studies from Novum Testamentum* (compiled by D. E. Orton; Brill's Readers in Biblical Studies 3; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 103-20; *idem*, 'Mark I.14-20: An Interpretation at the Intersection of Jewish and Graeco-Roman Traditions', *NTS* 28 (1982) 220-36 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 137-54.

¹¹ V. K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984; paperback edition, 1992).

¹² M. Sawicki, *The Gospel in History: Portrait of a Teaching Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1988; *idem*, *Seeing the Lord: Resurrection and Early Christian Practices* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 51-76; B. L. Melbourne, *Slow to Understand: The Disciples in Synoptic Perspective* (Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America, 1988); M. N. Beavis, *Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4.11-12* (JSNTSup 33; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989); V. K. Robbins, 'Interpreting the Gospel of Mark as a Jewish Document in a Graeco-Roman World', in *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism* (ed. P. V. M. Flesher; Lanham, New York; London: University Press of America, 1990) 47-72 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 219-42; J. T. Dillon, *Jesus As a Teacher: A Multidisciplinary Case Study* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1995).

¹³ V. K. Robbins, 'Prefaces in Greco-Roman Biography and Luke-Acts', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, Vol. 2 (1978) 193-207 = *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 6 (1979) 94-108; *idem*, 'The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts', in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 305-32; *idem*, 'Luke-Acts: A Mixed Population Seeks a Home in the Roman Empire', in *Images of Empire* (ed. L. Alexander. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 202-21; *idem*, 'A Socio-Rhetorical Look at the Work of John Knox on Luke-Acts', in *Cadbury, Knox, and Talbert: American Contributions to the Study of Acts* (ed. M. C. Parsons and J. B. Tyson; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 91-105.

time, specific discussions of rhetorical interpretation and specific strategies of analysis using insights from classical rhetorical treatises on the *chreia* and its elaboration appeared.¹⁵ In 1993, Willi Braun completed a Ph.D. dissertation that included a substantive socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation of Luke 14, and it appeared in the SNTS monograph series in 1995.¹⁶ In 1994 David B. Gowler, who had independently developed a socio-narratological approach to New Testament literature,¹⁷ wrote a programmatic essay on the development of socio-rhetorical interpretation showing the manner in which it developed out of literary, rhetorical, social and cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁸ These studies were precursors to the organization of socio-rhetorical interpretation on the basis of multiple textures of signification, meanings and meaning effects in texts.

¹⁴ V. K. Robbins, 'Pronouncement Stories and Jesus' Blessing of the Children: A Rhetorical Approach', *SBLSP* 21 (1982) 407-30 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 155-84 = *Semeia* 29 (1983) 43-74, plus responses; *idem*, 'Pragmatic Relations as a Criterion for Authentic Sayings', *Forum* 1.3 (1985) 35-63; *idem*, 'The Woman who Touched Jesus' Garment: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Synoptic Accounts', *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987) 502-15 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 185-200; *idem*, 'Rhetorical argument about lamps and light in early Christian gospels', in *Context, Festschrift til Peder Johan Borgen*. (ed. P. W. Böckman and R. E. Kristiansen; Relieff 24; Universitetet i Trondheim: Tapir, 1987) 177-95 = *idem*, *New Boundaries*, 201-17; *idem*, 'Pronouncement Stories from a Rhetorical Perspective', *Forum* 4.2 (1988) 3-32; *idem*, 'Beelzebul Controversy in Mark and Luke: Rhetorical and Social Analysis', *Forum* 7.3-4 (1991) 261-77.

¹⁵ V. K. Robbins, 'Rhetoric and Biblical Criticism', with J. H. Patton, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980) 327-37; *idem*, 'Picking Up the Fragments: From Crossan's Analysis to Rhetorical Analysis', *Forum* 1.2 (1985) 31-64; *idem*, 'The Chreia', in *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament* (ed. D. E. Aune; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 1-23; *idem*, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels*, with B. L. Mack. Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1989; *idem*, 'A Socio-Rhetorical Response: Contexts of Interaction and Forms of Exhortation', *Semeia* 50 (1990) 261-71; *idem*, 'Writing as a Rhetorical Act in Plutarch and the Gospels', in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. D. F. Watson; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 157-86; *idem*, 'From New Criticism and the New Hermeneutic to Poststructuralism: Twentieth Century Hermeneutics', with R. Detweiler, in *Reading The Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (ed. S. Prickett; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 225-80; *idem*, 'Apophthegm', in *ABD* (1992) 1:307-9; *idem*, 'Form Criticism: New Testament', in *ABD* (1992) 2:841-44; *idem*, 'Introduction: Using Rhetorical Discussions of the Chreia to Interpret Pronouncement Stories', *Semeia* 64 (1993) vii-xvii; *idem*, 'Paradigms in Homer, Pindar, the Tragedians, and the New Testament', with Ø. Andersen, *Semeia* 64. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 3-31; *idem*, 'Biblical Sources for Pronouncement Stories in the Gospels', with M. Dean-Otting, *Semeia* 64 (1993) 95-115.

¹⁶ W. Braun, *The Use of Mediterranean Banquet Traditions in Luke 14:1-14* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1993); *idem*, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (SNTSMS 85; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ D. B. Gowler, "Characterization in Luke: A Socio-Narratological Approach," *BTB* 19:2 (1989) 54-62; *idem*, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1991); *idem*, "Hospitality and Characterization in Luke 11:37-54: A Socio-Narratological Approach," *Semeia* 64 (1993) 213-51.

¹⁸ Gowler, 'The Development of Socio-Rhetorical Criticism'.

The Emergence of Multi-Texture Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation

The paperback edition of Robbins's *Jesus the Teacher*, which appeared in 1992, contained an introduction that launched the organization of socio-rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation according to inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.¹⁹ Then Robbins displayed how this multi-textural approach could work in essays on the Woman who Anointed Jesus and on the Magnificat.²⁰ In 1993, Wesley H. Wachob produced the first full-length Ph.D. dissertation containing multi-textural socio-rhetorical analysis, working in detail on James 2:1-13, and this study appeared as a published book in 1999.²¹ Subsequently, many insights in this work were incorporated into Luke Timothy Johnson's commentary on the epistle of James,²² and Wachob and Johnson co-authored a socio-rhetorical essay on sayings of Jesus in James.²³ Russell B. Sisson produced the second multi-textural Ph.D. dissertation on a New Testament text in 1994, working on 1 Corinthians 9, and subsequently he has produced a socio-rhetorical essay on the Sermon on the Mount.²⁴ In 1996, Robbins produced two book-length presentations of socio-rhetorical interpretation, organized according to textures of a text. To display the approach, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* explored 1 Corinthians 9 from the perspective of inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.²⁵ Sisson's earlier work contributed significantly to the sections presenting the socio-rhetorical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9. Mark 15 served as the sample text throughout *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, and insights from two previous publications by Robbins, some of which appeared in Raymond E. Brown's *The Death of the Messiah*,²⁶ contributed to the sections interpreting this chapter of the second Gospel.²⁷ *Exploring* included the addition of sacred texture to the four textures included in *Tapestry*.²⁸

¹⁹ V. K. Robbins, 'Introduction to the Paperback Edition', in *idem*, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) xix-xliv.

²⁰ V. K. Robbins, 'Using a Socio-Rhetorical Poetics to Develop a Unified Method: The Woman who Anointed Jesus as a Test Case', *SBLSP* 31 (1992) 302-19; *idem*, 'Socio-Rhetorical Criticism: Mary, Elizabeth, and the Magnificat as a Test Case', in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (ed. E. S. Malbon and E. V. McKnight; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 164-209.

²¹ W. H. Wachob, "'The Rich in Faith" and "The Poor in Spirit": The Socio-Rhetorical Function of a Saying of Jesus in the Epistle of James' (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1993); subsequently published as *idem*, *The Voice of Jesus and the Social Rhetoric of James* (SNTSMS 106; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

²² L. T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB 37A; New York: Doubleday, 1995).

²³ W. H. Wachob and L. T. Johnson, 'The Sayings of Jesus in the Letter of James', in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 431-50.

²⁴ R. B. Sisson, 'The Apostle as Athlete: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 9' (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1994); *idem*, 'Voices of Authority in the Sermon on the Mount', *SBLSP* 36 (1997) 551-66.

²⁵ Robbins, *Tapestry*.

²⁶ R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 1:873-7, 1461-2.

²⁷ Robbins, *Exploring*, incorporating insights from *idem*, 'The Crucifixion and the Speech of Jesus', *Forum* 4.1 (1988) 33-46; *idem*, 'The Reversed Contextualization of Psalm 22 in the

The best current examples of integrated multi-textural interpretation can be found in the works of David A. deSilva.²⁹ These studies regularly observe where different textures converge with one another in a text, and the interpretation proceeds on the basis of the convergences. H. J. B. Combrink, in turn, has written a series of essays that assess socio-rhetorical interpretation in the present climate of NT interpretation, probes the Gospel of Matthew from a socio-rhetorical perspective, and enacts a multi-textural approach in an analysis of religious dynamics in the new South Africa.³⁰ During this period of time, Robbins has produced additional socio-rhetorical studies of various kinds.³¹ In addition to the Ph.D. dissertations of Braun, Wachob and Sisson, four additional socio-rhetorical dissertations were produced by 1997.³² Then recently two

Markan Crucifixion: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis', in *The Four Gospels 1992. Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, volume 2 (ed. F. van Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, J. Verheyden; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992) 1161-83.

²⁸ Robbins, *Exploring*, 120-31.

²⁹ D. A. DeSilva, *Despising Shame: The Social Function of the Rhetoric of Honor and Dishonor in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (SBLDS 152; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); *idem*, 'The Noble Contest: Honor, Shame, and the Rhetorical Strategy of 4 Maccabees', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13 (1995) 31-57; *idem*, 'The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Honor, Shame, and the Maintenance of the Values of a Minority Culture', *CBQ* 58 (1996) 433-55; *idem*, 'Investigating Honor Discourse: Guidelines from Classical Rhetoricians', *SBLSP* 36 (1997) 491-525; *idem*, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John', *JSNT* 71 (1998) 79-110; *idem*, 'The Persuasive Strategy of the Apocalypse: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6-13', *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 785-806; *idem*, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and the New Testament*. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); *idem*, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) forthcoming; *idem*, 'Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation', *Tyndale Bulletin*, (1999) forthcoming; *idem*, 'A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6-13', *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999) forthcoming; *idem*, 'Fourth Ezra: Maintaining Jewish Cultural Values through Apocalyptic Rhetoric', in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. G. Carey and L. G. Bloomquist; St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press), 1999, forthcoming.

³⁰ H. J. B. Combrink, 'Reference and Rhetoric in the Gospel of Matthew' (*Scriptura* 40 (1992) 1-17; *idem*, 'n Retoriese benadering tot die Nuwe Testament', *Skrif en Kerk* 14,2 (1993) 146-62; *idem*, 'The Rhetoric of the Church in the Transition from the Old to the New South Africa: Socio-Rhetorical Criticism and Ecclesiastical Rhetoric', *Neotestamentica* 32 (1999) forthcoming; *idem*, 'The Challenge Of Making and Redrawing Boundaries'.

³¹ V. K. Robbins, 'A Male Reads a Feminist Reading: The Dialogical Nature of Pippin's Power', *Semeia* 59 (1992) 211-17; *idem*, 'Rhetoric and Culture: Exploring Types of Cultural Rhetoric in a Text', *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 443-63; *idem*, *New Boundaries in Old Territory: Forms and Social Rhetoric in Mark* (ed. D. B. Gowler; New York, Bern, Frankfurt am Main, Paris: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994); *idem*, 'The Ritual of Reading and Reading a Text as a Ritual: Observations on Mieke Bal's *Death & Dissymmetry*', in *In Good Company: Essays in Honor of Robert Detweiler* (ed. D. Jasper and M. Ledbetter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 385-401; *idem*, 'Divine Dialogue and the Lord's Prayer: Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Sacred Texts', *Dialogue* 28 (1994) 117-46; *idem*, 'Foreword', in John G. Cook, *The Structure and Persuasive Power of Mark: A Linguistic Approach* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) xiii-xvii.

³² M. R. Huie-Jolly, 'The Son Enthroned in Conflict: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of John 5.17-23' (Ph.D. diss., University of Otago, New Zealand, 1994); E. Adams, 'Constructing the World:

more full-scale multi-textural dissertations have been written, one by H. Stephen Brown on two second-century Christian martyr texts and another by Thomas J. Bell on two medieval musical sequences attributed to Peter Abelard.³³ Also recently, Jon Ma Asgeirsson has produced a series of studies on the Gospel of Thomas that contain significant socio-rhetorical dimensions.³⁴ During the 1990s, other people also have produced studies that contain significant use of socio-rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation.³⁵ It also has been exciting to see the use of socio-rhetorical interpretation

An Exegetical and Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Paul's Uses of κόσμος and κτίσις (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 1994); O. M. Hendricks, Jr., 'A Discourse of Domination: A Socio-Rhetorical Study of the Meaning of "Ioudaios" in the Fourth Gospel' (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1995); R. S. Ascough, *Voluntary Associations and Community Formation: Paul's Macedonian Communities in Context* (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael's College, 1997).

³³ H. S. Brown, *The Martyrs on Trial: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Second Century Christian Court Narrative* (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1999); T. J. Bell, *The Paraclete Abbey Bridal Tapestry: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Peter Abelard's Sequences Virgines castae and Epithalamica* (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999).

³⁴ J. M. Asgeirsson, 'Arguments and Audience(s) in the Gospel of Thomas (Part I)', *SBLSP* 36 (1997) 47-85; *idem*, 'Arguments and Audience(s) in the Gospel of Thomas (Part II)', *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 325-42; *idem*, *Doublets and Strata: Towards a Rhetorical Approach to the Gospel of Thomas* (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1998); *idem*, 'The *Chria* as Principle and Source for Learning Literary Composition', in *Alexander's Revenge* (ed. J. M. Asgeirsson and N. van Deusen; Leuven: Peeters, 1998) forthcoming.

³⁵ B. K. Blount, 'A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Simon of Cyrene: Mark 15:21 and Its Parallels', *Semeia* 64 (1993) 171-98; I. Czachesz, 'Socio-Rhetorical Exegesis of Acts 9:1-30', *Communio Viatorum* (Praha) 37 (1995) 5-32; J. D. Hester, 'Socio-Rhetorical Criticism and the Parable of the Tenants', *JSNT* 45 (1992) 27-57; M. R. Huie-Jolly, 'Like Father, Like Son, Absolute Case, Mythic Authority: Constructing Ideology in John 5:17-23', *SBLSP* 36 (1997) 567-95; J. S. Jensen, 'Retorisk kritik: Om en ny vej i evangelieforskningen', *Dansk teologisk tidsskrift* 55 (1992) 262-79; ET: 'Rhetorical Criticism: On a New Way in Gospel Research'; T. C. Penner, 'Narrative as Persuasion: Epideictic Rhetoric and Scribal Amplification in the Stephen Episode in Acts', *SBLSP* 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 352-67; *idem*, 'The Epistle of James in Current Research', *Currents in Biblical Research* (1999) forthcoming; W. E. Arnal, 'Gendered Couplets in Q and Legal Formulations: From Rhetoric to Social History' *JBL* 116 (1997) 75-94; W. Braun, 'Social-rhetorical Interests: Context', in *Whose Historical Jesus?* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1997) 93-95; A. J. Batten, 'Patience Breeds Wisdom: Q 6:40 in Context' *CBQ* 60 (1998) 641-56; G. A. van den Heever, 'Finding Data in Unexpected Places (Or: From Text Linguistics to Socio-Rhetoric). A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of John's Gospel', *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 2:649-76; *idem*, 'From the Texture of Texts to a Christian Utopia. The Case of John's Gospel', in *Rhetoric and Scripture: Essays from the 1998 Florence Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) forthcoming; J. M. Cottrill, 'A Christological Contradistinction in the Gospel of Matthew' (Master's thesis, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1999); J. S. Kloppenborg, 'Patronage Avoidance in James', *Hervormde theologiese studies* (forthcoming); *idem*, 'The People behind the Document', in *idem*, *The History and the Setting of the Sayings Gospel Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) forthcoming.

beyond the confines of Jewish and Christian texts in Islamic texts, with the studies of Gordon D. Newby.³⁶

Socio-Rhetorical Hermeneutics Versus Other Kinds of Hermeneutics

As various interpreters have begun to integrate social and rhetorical strategies of interpretation during the 1990s, it has become obvious that different hermeneutics guide interpreters in different ways.³⁷ One obvious mode is a historical or historical-theological hermeneutic. Randall C. Webber perhaps was the first person to use the term socio-rhetorical in a context guided by a dominantly historical hermeneutic.³⁸ After him, Ben Witherington has produced four commentaries that use social and rhetorical strategies of interpretation within a historical-theological hermeneutic.³⁹

John H. Elliott began in the 1980s with a historical hermeneutic influenced by sociological and rhetorical strategies of analysis and interpretation, and during the 1990s he has nurtured these strategies in ways that are more directly social-scientific in nature.⁴⁰ Beginning in 1988, many publications by Jerome H. Neyrey exhibited an integration of social-scientific exegesis with rhetorical analysis and interpretation, and in some instances his strategies have become explicitly socio-rhetorical.⁴¹ During this period of

³⁶ G. D. Newby, 'Qur'anic Texture: A Review of Vernon Robbins's *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* and *Exploring the Texture of Texts*', *JSNT* 70 (1998) 93-100; *idem*, 'Folded Time: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Qur'anic and Early Islamic Apocalyptic Discourse', forthcoming.

³⁷ J. Botha, *Subject to Whose Authority? Multiple Readings of Romans 13* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 4; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); V. K. Robbins, 'Socio-Rhetorical Hermeneutics and Commentary', in *EPI TO AYTO. Essays in honour of Petr Pokorny* (ed. J. Mrazek, R. Dvorakova, and S. Brodsky; Praha-Trebenice, Czech Republic: Mlyn, 1998) 284-97, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/commentary/commentary284.html>; *idem*, 'Historical, Literary, Linguistic, Cultural, and Artistic Intertextuality: A Response', *Semeia* 80 (1999) 299-303, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/response/response291.html>.

³⁸ R. C. Webber, "'Why Were the Heathen so Arrogant?': The Socio-Rhetorical Strategy of Acts 3-4", *BTB* 22 (1992) 19-25.

³⁹ B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); *idem*, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi: The letter of Paul to the Philippians* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994); *idem*, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); *idem*, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

⁴⁰ J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), with a new subtitle: *A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* in the paperback edition, 1992; *idem*, 'The Epistle of James in Rhetorical and Social Scientific Perspective: Holiness-Wholeness and Patterns of Replication' (*BTB* 23 (1993) 71-81; *idem*, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (GBS, NT Series; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

⁴¹ J. H. Neyrey, *An Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social-Science Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); *idem*, *2 Peter and Jude* (AB37C; New York: Doubleday, 1993); *idem*, 'Josephus' Vita and the Encomium: A Native Model of Personality', *JSJ* 25,2 (1994) 177-

time, Robbins participated actively in the Context Group, which uses a social-scientific hermeneutic to guide its work, and he has produced two essays that explicitly use aspects of social-scientific analysis and interpretation.⁴² In addition, Robbins incorporated many insights and interpretive strategies from the works of Bruce J. Malina in *Tapestry* and *Exploring*.⁴³

A noticeable alternative to a social-scientific hermeneutic during the 1980s was a literary hermeneutic. Robert C. Tannehill developed a literary hermeneutic during the 1970s that was deeply rhetorical in nature, and his approach was deeply influential on socio-rhetorical interpretation. After explicit dialogue between Tannehill and members of the Context Group during the early 1990s, in 1996 Tannehill produced a socio-literary commentary on the Gospel of Luke that contains significant socio-rhetorical dimensions.⁴⁴ One of the people with which Tannehill had dialogue was Richard L. Rohrbaugh, a member of the Context Group, who integrated social-scientific exegesis with literary readings that were essentially rhetorical interpretations during the 1990s.⁴⁵ Some interpreters, in contrast to Tannehill and Rohrbaugh, have interacted appreciatively but critically with socio-rhetorical interpretation from the perspective of a literary or a social-scientific hermeneutic.⁴⁶ Robbins has written an essay on the relationship between social-scientific and literary hermeneutics, from the perspective of a socio-rhetorical

206; *idem*, 'What's Wrong With This Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space', *BTB* 24 (1994) 77-91; *idem*, 'Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family and Loss of Honor: A Cultural Interpretation of the Original Four Makarisms', in *Modelling Early Christianity. Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995) 139-58; *idem*, 'The Footwashing in John 13:6-11; Transformation Ritual or Ceremony?' in *The Social World of the First Christians. Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks* (ed. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 198-213; *idem*, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality*. With Bruce Malina (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1996); *idem*, 'The Trials (Forensic) and Tribulations (Honor Challenges) of Jesus: John 7 in Social Science Perspective', *BTB* 26 (1996) 107-24; *idem*, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); *idem*, 'Questions, Chreiai, and Challenges to Honor. The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark's Gospel', *CBQ* 60 (1998) 657-81.

⁴² V. K. Robbins, 'The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts', in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. J. H. Neyrey; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 305-32; *idem*, 'Beelzebul Controversy in Mark and Luke: Rhetorical and Social Analysis', *Forum* 7.3-4 (1991) 261-77.

⁴³ Robbins, *Tapestry*, 159-66; *idem*, *Exploring*, 30-31, 75-86, 100-1, 107.

⁴⁴ R. C. Tannehill, *Gospel of Luke* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

⁴⁵ R. L. Rohrbaugh, 'A Peasant Reading of the Parable of the Talents: A Text of Terror?', *BTB* 23 (1993) 32-9; *idem*, 'A Dysfunctional Family and its Neighbors: Luke 15:11-32', in *Perspectives on the Parables: Images of Jesus in his Contemporary Setting* (ed. V. G. Shillington; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997); *idem*, 'Legitimizing Sonship: A Test of Honor: A Social Science Study of Luke 4:1-30', in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995) 183-97.

⁴⁶ M. Ledbetter, 'Telling the Other Story: A Literary Response to Socio-Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament', *Semeia* 64 (1993) 289-301; P. F. Craffert, 'Relations Between Social-Scientific, Literary, and Rhetorical Interpretations of Texts', *BTB* 26 (1996) 45-55; R. A. Culpepper, 'Mapping the Textures of New Testament Criticism: A Response to Socio-Rhetorical Criticism,' *JSNT* 70 (1998) 71-7.

hermeneutic.⁴⁷ L. Gregory Bloomquist, in turn, has written a series of studies that probe the inner nature of socio-rhetorical interpretation in the context of sociological, philosophical, and theological systems of thought and practice.⁴⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza activated a political hermeneutic in a direct criticism of socio-rhetorical interpretation in her address at the first South African Rhetorical Conference in 1994.⁴⁹ Robbins responded in the Florence Conference in 1998, analyzing the oppositional rhetoric Fiorenza used in the address and recommending ways the discussion could move forward using socio-rhetorical strategies of dialogue and discussion.⁵⁰ Priscilla Geisterfer Nyvlt also has written a substantive response to Fiorenza's essay from the perspective of feminist criticism.⁵¹ David Hester Amador has written a full-length critical assessment of socio-rhetorical interpretation, as well as other modes of rhetorical interpretation, in a book that has just appeared.⁵²

The Emergence of Multi-Discourse Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation

The latest phase of socio-rhetorical analysis and interpretation concerns different kinds of discourse within earliest Christianity and the Mediterranean world. Robbins's initial attention to differences between miracle and wisdom discourse appeared in the publication of his lecture at the 1993 annual *Exegetiska dagen* at the University of

⁴⁷ V. K. Robbins, 'Social-Scientific Criticism and Literary Studies: Prospects for Cooperation in Biblical Interpretation', in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in Its Context* (ed. P. F. Esler; London: Routledge, 1995) 274-89.

⁴⁸ L. G. Bloomquist, 'Rhetorical Analysis and Sociological Analysis in Historical Jesus Research', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9.2 (1997) 139-54; *idem*, 'The Rhetoric of the Historical Jesus', in *Whose Historical Jesus?* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 7; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1997) 98-117; *idem*, 'Methodological Considerations in the Determination of the Social Context of Cynic Rhetorical Practice: Implications for our Present Studies of the Jesus Traditions', in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference* (JSNTSS 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 200-31; *idem*, 'Patristic Reception of a Lukan Healing Account: A Contribution to a Socio-Rhetorical Response to Willi Braun's *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14*', in *Healing in Religion and Society, From Hippocrates to the Puritans* (ed. S. Muir and J. K. Coyle; Studies in Religion and Society 43; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) 105-34; *idem*, 'A Possible Direction for Providing Programmatic Correlation of Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Analysis', in *Essays from the Florence Conference on the Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture* (JSNTSS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, forthcoming).

⁴⁹ E. S. Fiorenza, 'Challenging the Rhetorical Half-Turn: Feminist and Rhetorical Biblical Criticism', in *Rhetoric, Scripture & Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSS 131; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 28-53.

⁵⁰ V. K. Robbins, 'The Rhetorical Full-Turn in Biblical Interpretation: Reconfiguring Rhetorical-Political Criticism', in *Rhetoric and Scripture: Essays from the 1998 Florence Conference* (ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht; JSNTSS; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) forthcoming.

⁵¹ Priscilla Geisterfer Nyvlt, 'Consciousness as the Heartbeat of Critical Feminist Interpretation: The Cooperative Language of Liberation in Rhetorical Criticism', written for L. B. Bloomquist's THO 6318, Interpretation of Biblical Text, St. Paul University, 1999.

⁵² J. D. H. Amador, *Academic Constraints in Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction to a Rhetoric of Power* (JSNTSS 174; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

Uppsala.⁵³ This means that attention to multiple textures in early Christian discourse began to emerge prior to the publication of the books that presented the multi-textural approach in 1996. In 1996, Robbins delivered a lecture on the dialectical nature of multiple early Christian discourses at the second annual South African Rhetorical Conference at the University of Stellenbosch.⁵⁴ Robbins's listing of oppositional discourse as one of these types has changed. Opposition is characteristic of every kind of discourse, but different strategies and dynamics of opposition exist in different discourses. Thus, Robbins now sees five kinds of socio-rhetorical modes of discourse within earliest Christianity: wisdom, apocalyptic, miracle, suffering-death-resurrection, and pre-creation. Each form of discourse has its own kind of oppositional strategies. Also in 1996 Robbins published an article on the game-like nature of the wisdom discourse in the Epistle of James, using insights from the anthropologist Bradd Shore.⁵⁵ As Robbins began to analyze wisdom discourse more extensively in Q and the Gospel of Thomas, socio-rhetorical analysis of enthymemes began to become more prominent.⁵⁶ The result was a conclusion that enthymemes work with social, cultural, ideological and theological topics and values, using some as a context for reconfiguring others. L. Gregory Bloomquist has argued in an unpublished paper that enthymemes work especially at a cognitive-psychological level.⁵⁷

In 1999, Robbins turned to apocalyptic discourse and produced an essay on Mark 13 that contains a significant amount of socio-rhetorical analysis of its enthymemic texture in a context that interprets the passage as transferring the holy from the Jerusalem temple to the bodies of Jesus' disciples.⁵⁸ Bloomquist also has produced socio-rhetorical studies of apocalyptic discourse.⁵⁹ During 1999, Newby, who began socio-rhetorical

⁵³ V. K. Robbins, 'Interpreting Miracle Culture and Parable Culture in Mark 4-11', *SEA* 59 (1994) 59-81.

⁵⁴ Robbins, 'The Dialectical Nature'.

⁵⁵ V. K. Robbins, 'Making Christian Culture in the Epistle of James', *Scriptura* 59 (1996) 341-51. <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/James/James341.html>; B. Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵⁶ Robbins, 'The Present and Future', 33-40; *idem*, 'Rhetorical Composition and Sources in the Gospel of Thomas', *SBLSP* 36 (1997) 86-114, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/composition/composition86.html>; *idem*, 'Enthymemic Texture in the Gospel of Thomas', *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 343-66, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/enthymeme/enthymeme343.html>; *idem*, 'From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1-13', in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson* (ed. R. P. Thompson and T. E. Phillips; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998) 191-214, <http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/Theology/theology191.html>.

⁵⁷ L. G. Bloomquist, 'The Place of Enthymemes in New Testament Study: Status Quaestiones', unpublished paper written for special meetings of the Socio-Rhetorical Group at the SBL/AAR, San Francisco, November, 1997.

⁵⁸ V. K. Robbins, 'The Rhetorical Ritual of Apocalyptic Discourse in Mark 13', in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. G. Carey and L. G. Bloomquist; St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999) forthcoming.

⁵⁹ L. G. Bloomquist, 'Rhetorical Argumentation and the Culture of Apocalyptic: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of Lk.21,' in *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture: Essays from the 1996 Malibu Conference* (JSNTSS 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 173-209;

analysis in the Quran in 1997, also produced an essay on apocalyptic discourse in Surahs 2, 10, and 18 of the Quran.⁶⁰ Ironically perhaps, the best multi-discourse socio-rhetorical interpretation to date exists in a final exam on Acts 1:1-11, written by a college student at Emory University.⁶¹

An additional, important feature of socio-rhetorical interpretation is its interest in the orality of texts.⁶² Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret E. Dean have developed this aspect of the approach into a special area of investigation with its own strategies of analysis and interpretation.⁶³

Conclusion

Two additional interests beyond multi-discourse analysis and interpretation are emerging at present in socio-rhetorical commentary. First, narrational texture is beginning to exhibit two important dimensions in early Christian discourse.⁶⁴ On the one hand, epic story consisting of narrational summaries of or reference to great moments in the past emerges out of narrational texture. On the other hand, individual episodes emerge out of narrational texture. Different kinds of epic stories and episodes emerge out of narrational texture, depending on the kind of discourse early Christians were generating. A characterization of the nature of the five major epic stories that emerge out of the major discourses must await another context. A brief characterization of the kinds of episodes that emerge out of the discourses is as follows. Parables and example stories based on analogy emerge out of wisdom discourse, past and future scenes that invite symbolic imagery generated by present episodes dominated by speech and vision emerge out of apocalyptic discourse, historical-biographical-mythical stories focused on divine

idem, 'Methodological Criteria for the Determination of Apocalyptic Rhetoric', in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. G. Carey and L. G. Bloomquist; St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press), 1999, forthcoming.

⁶⁰ G. D. Newby, 'Folded Time'.

⁶¹ Rebecca A. Messerli, 'Multi-Discourse Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Acts 1:1-11', URL forthcoming.

⁶² V. K. Robbins, 'Foxes, Birds, Burials & Furrows', in B. L. Mack and V. K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1989) 70-74; *idem*, 'Progymnastic Rhetorical Composition and Pre-Gospel Traditions: A New Approach', in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (ed. C. Focant; BETL 110; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993) 116-31; *idem*, *Tapestry*, 106-8, 121-4, *idem*, *Exploring*, 40-62; *idem*, 'Oral, Rhetorical, and Literary Cultures: A Response', *Semeia* 65 (1994) 75-91.

⁶³ B. B. Scott and M. E. Dean, 'A Sound Map of the Sermon on the Mount', *SBLSP* 32 (1993) 672-725 = *Treasures Old and New: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies* (ed. D. Bauer and M. A. Powell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); *idem*, 'A Sound Map of Mark 7:1-23', unpublished paper presented for the Rhetoric and New Testament Section, SBL Annual meeting, 1994; M. E. Dean, 'The Grammar of Sound in Greek Texts: Toward a Method for Mapping the Echoes of Speech in Writing', *Australian Biblical Review* 44 (1996) 53-70; *idem*, 'Elements of a Sound Map', unpublished paper presented to the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media Group, SBL, November 1996; *idem*, 'Textured Criticism', *JSNT* 70 (1998) 95-115.

⁶⁴ V. K. Robbins, 'Narrative in Ancient Rhetoric and Rhetoric in Ancient Narrative', *SBLSP* 35 (1996) 368-84.

power emerge out of miracle discourse, historical-biographical-mythical stories focused on holiness emerge out of suffering-death-resurrection discourse, and reconfiguration of wisdom, miracle, and suffering-death-resurrection discourse into signs that reveal the working of the divine emerge out of pre-creation discourse.

A second dimension that is emerging is emotional-psychological texture. Bloomquist has observed the importance of the emotions in many enthymemes in the NT.⁶⁵ Initial probes suggest there is a somewhat different configuration of a particular emotion (like 'fear') as well as a different constellation of dominant emotions in each of the five major early Christian discourses. At present, therefore, socio-rhetorical interpretation is moving into multi-discourse commentary, with special interest both in the kinds of epic story and episodes that exist in each discourse and in the constellation and configuration of emotions in each discourse.

⁶⁵ Bloomquist, 'The Place of Enthymemes'.

First, that interpretation strives to present its object in its best possible light. Second, that interpretation is essentially genre-dependent. And third, that there are certain constraints which determine the limits of possible interpretations of a given object. A discussion of this third point will be postponed to the next chapter. Here I will be concerned with the former two, beginning with the question of why the best? Why should every interpretation of an object or text strive to present it in its best possible light? One who expects a detailed, argumentative answer to this crucial quest