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Re-telling the Word Rhetorically: The Example of Shadreck Wame, a Chewa Itinerant Evangelist

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Abstract: This study presents a rhetorical analysis of Shadreck Wame, a popular Malawian revival preacher. After an overview of the “rhetorical setting” in which these vernacular sermons were preached in the 1990s, ten “oral-rhetorical techniques” that characterize Wame’s preaching style are identified, based on a corpus of nearly 50 of his Chewa-language sermons that I recorded from radio broadcasts in the 1990s. These features are then illustrated in selections from a specific sermon that Evangelist Wame preached in 1997 in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. In particular, his situationally-influenced “re-tellings,” or paraphrases, of a familiar biblical text, Christ’s Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Luke 20:9-18), are identified and elaborated upon in footnotes. I conclude this description of a popular preacher’s dynamic, contextualized homiletical style with a number of applications to contemporary communicators in Africa. Both the content and the methodology of this analysis may be significant for comparative purposes when teaching sermonic technique in different, especially non-Western, sociocultural settings.

Keywords: homiletics, contextual theology, Christianity in Africa, rhetorical analysis, Chichewa discourse, popular preaching

Introduction: The Rhetorical Setting

Some years ago, I collected sermon examples of a number of popular Chewa radio preachers in an effort to analyze the salient aspects of their oratorical structure and style.¹ My research, both formal (analytical) and informal (anecdotal), revealed that one of the most effective and popular sermon presenters (at the time) was Shadreck Wame, a Chewa itinerant evangelist.² In my published study, I explained and exemplified Wame’s homiletical technique, in particular, ten rhetorical-hortatory features that distinguished the

¹ Wendland, “Preaching.” I tape recorded about 100 Chewa sermons, ranging in length from about 15 minutes to over 30. A selection of 40 of the best of these (in my opinion) were transcribed and translated with the assistance of students at the seminary where I teach. “Chewa” (technically chiChewa, also known as Nyanja and Nyasa) is regularly spoken by some 15-20 million people as a first or second language in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.

² In a recent interview he states: “My name is Shadreck Jonas Wame, a Malawian citizen born in October 1940. I come from Mwanzalamba village, Traditional Authority Kambalame in Salima. I am married with five children, attended a CCAP [Church of Central Africa Presbyterian] catechumen class in 1960 and got baptized in 1962 before being ordained a church elder two years later.” (Chimpweya, “Who is Evangelist Shadreck Wame?”) At the age of 76, Wame continues to carry on an active evangelistic preaching ministry.

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inductive discourse style of his public sermons from that of other preachers.³ In the present work, I narrow the focus to illustrate the specific manner in which Wame frequently dramatically re-tells and hermeneutically embellishes a specific biblical text (pericope) that he normally weaves together with other passages within a particular sermon. My study thus deals with the immediate oral “interpretation” of a written portion of Scripture in the same language—in this case, a rather literal vernacular translation that does not communicate easily, sometimes not even correctly, on its own.

By thus orally “performing” the Scriptures, this contemporary lay-preacher is effectively reversing the assumed direction of composition of the biblical text, which in the original event normally involved the transformation of an essentially *vocal* mode of communication into the ancient documents when they were preserved in *writing*.⁴ In the case at hand then, we have a media shift from the *written* text (vernacular translation) to an *oral-aural* re-expression of the original message. Due to their vibrant mode of presentation, many popular African preachers also act as one-person dramatist-performers who typically duplicate the style of traditional oral narrators, on the one hand, and contemporary Christian drama groups on the other.⁵

Local audiences—more specifically, congregations of worship—both expect and appreciate such personal text-mediation. This is *not* because there is no published Chewa Bible for preachers to directly refer to (in this case), but because an lively oratorical re-telling, rather than an explicit citation or reading, of the text is a much more natural mode of communication in a largely oral-aural society that has a long history and a still vigorous tradition of various verbal art forms. Arguably, this strategy is also greatly preferred, as noted, due to the predominantly literal and generally difficult-to-understand vernacular Bible version that Wame is accustomed to access. This translation, the *Buku Lopatulika* (BL; “Set-apart Book”)⁶ presents a published Scripture message that literally begs for a greater or lesser measure of oral interpretation—including clarification, amplification, explanation, etc.

I begin this investigation with a summary of Evangelist Wame’s distinctive preaching style in terms of ten rhetorical-performative techniques that he expertly demonstrates in his sermons, normally in conjunction with one another. I then, for the most part, allow him to speak for himself by presenting (in English back-translation) several pertinent, Scripture-mediated sections of a long sermon (1.3 hours!) that he delivered in dramatic fashion, based on the “Parable of the Wicked Tenants” (Luke 20:9-19, among several other passages). I will interact only indirectly by providing some explanatory footnotes to elucidate certain prominent aspects of Wame’s forcefully rendered, audience-engaging, and medium-sensitive homiletical technique, which is not always clearly, or even correctly represented in an English print translation.⁷

This description might serve as a contemporary “case study” that documents the dynamic live contextualization, or interactive localization, of the Scriptures for a particular Christian consumer group in a specific communal setting of message transmission. It thus also illustrates an indigenous mode of communication and model of hermeneutics that modern message conveyers, including Bible translators and all those who interpret the Scriptures today, whether in formal or informal settings, might carefully

³ For additional background information on Wame and his preaching style in relation to some of his contemporaries, see Wendland, “Preaching,” ch. 1 (“What do the revival preachers preach about?”). I offer a comparative critique of this inductive homiletical method in ch. 5 (“Summary and assessment: Induction—some pros and cons”). Since at the outset of this study, my seminary students and I quickly identified Evangelist Wame as undoubtedly the most dynamic preacher in the entire corpus and someone who displayed a very distinctive “African” style, I did not make an effort to document the names of other preachers whom we had recordings of. I had decided, probably wrongly, that if I ever used excerpts of their sermons in comparison with Wame’s in some sort of published study, I would not indicate their names—to avoid possible misunderstanding and hard feelings.

⁴ See Loubser, “Media Texture”, especially chap. 4, “Application of Media Criticism,” with special reference to Luke 9:51-56; also Maxey, “New Paradigm”, especially chap. 4, “Literacy and Orality in Relation to the New Testament”.

⁵ Wendland, “Sewero”. The dramatic radio plays studied in this book, which often dramatize (with varying degrees of adaptation, embellishment, and contextualization) well-known Bible stories, follow in the ancient tradition of medieval English “mystery plays,” which focused on the Gospel accounts of Christ (see Wendland, “Sewero”, 287-289).

⁶ Unfortunately, the verb *-patulika* can also mean “set-aside”! This Bible was first published in 1922 by the British and Foreign Bible Society; it was slightly revised in 1966 by the Bible Society of Malawi.

⁷ The original Chewa text of these selected cited portions (transcribed from a cassette recording of the entire sermon, broadcast on SW radio) is available in Wendland, “Preaching,” 271-294.

examine and learn from. The sermons of Shadreck Wame (and many popular preachers) illustrate a expertly domesticated translation technique as well as an effectively targeted re-telling method that could well provide a pattern, for example, for annotating a vernacular Bible translation, for preparing vernacular pastoral resources (e.g., preaching study guides and background materials), for creating effective audio-visual and electronic media sermon productions, and most naturally, for teaching an indigenous oratorical technique to African seminarians or pastors-in-training.

Ten Rhetorical-Oratorical Techniques

“Rhetoric” may be defined as the art and technique of *persuasion* (Aristotle), or somewhat more broadly, as the ability to *communicate* effectively (Quintilian)—that is, to accomplish one’s purpose when speaking. Classical Greco-Roman rhetorical theory posited five “canons,” or aspects, of textual composition and presentation: invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), style (*elocutio*), memory (*memoria*), and pronunciation (*pronunciatio*).⁸ “Invention” concerns the choice of appropriate proofs and topics to best support the case or issue being presented, whether orally or in writing. “Arrangement” focuses on the compositional structure of the discourse in terms of its principal ordered constituents or stages of the argument. Matters of “style” relate to the specifics of how a particular speech is put together in a persuasive manner through the use of devices such as repetition, figuration, marked syntactic movements, and distinctive diction.

The two final canons of ancient rhetorical criticism were distinguished, though these are not often dealt with in modern expositions of the subject.⁹ “Memory,” as the term itself suggests, deals with the strategies used to commit a speech to memory, e.g., by topical or spatial association along with different mnemonic devices. “Pronunciation” then has to do with the actual oral presentation itself, that is, how one’s manipulation of pitch, pauses, gestures, facial expressions and overall appearance (including dress) may be employed to give concrete audible and visual expression to certain important semantic and pragmatic elements within the speech as it is being publicly delivered. Obviously, the dimensions of memory and pronunciation are of crucial consideration in the “oral interpretation” and articulation of Scripture in any setting, and they apply with equal importance to my investigation of the sermonic style of Shadreck Wame.

As a preview for my presentation of an illustrative sample text, I summarize below the overall compositional character of Wame’s oral-aural technique that pertain to the fusion of *style* and *pronunciation* as they are reflected ten specific rhetorical-oratorical features, which naturally overlap to a certain degree or combine in varied proportions during and actual performance.¹⁰

1. **Narrative Preference:** African preachers like to tell stories to illustrate the major themes and topics of their sermons, and Wame is a past master of this method—using narrative texts from the Bible itself (as will be shown below), from Chewa oral tradition (e.g., folktales), current events (available from the local press), as well as personal accounts and fictitious stories of his own creation.
2. **Personal Exemplification:** Like many of his contemporaries,¹¹ Wame does not hesitate to inject himself—personal anecdotes and references to his own life history—into his sermons, often in the form of a phonologically marked “aside,” thus contributing to the generation of a positive, engaging “ethos” (appealing emotive evaluation) in relation to his audience.
3. **Traditional Allusion:** This category has reference in general to Chewa beliefs, customs, and their way-

⁸ For further details on Greco-Roman rhetorical principles and procedures, see Wendland, “Rhetorical Analysis”, 173-176.

⁹ “Memory and delivery will not concern us here” (Murphy, “Reasoning & Rhetoric”, 63).

¹⁰ These are of course my own abstractions, derived from my tape-recorded (and transcribed) corpus of Wame sermons as well as discussions with my seminary students. My collection includes another fifty sermons presented by other Chewa radio preachers and evangelists (from Zambia as well as Malawi) for use as a “control” group and thus to serve as the basis for a comparative study of individual rhetorical-oratorical technique. Evangelist Wame’s personal reflections of his methods of sermon content selection (invention), organization (arrangement), and memory (delivery) are documented in Wendland, “Preaching”, 246-251.

¹¹ For example, Evangelist Naise Nachiye (see Wendland, “Preaching”, 19—footnote 19).

of-life, but in particular to the rich store of “wisdom literature” (or orature) that is available in ancient oral art forms, such as, proverbs (in particular), wise sayings, riddles, and allusions to the “moral” of well-known traditional narratives.

4. **Dramatic Delivery:** To be effective, an African preacher normally has to present portions (at least) of his sermon in a phonologically energetic manner—that is, through the oratorically-controlled use of paralinguistic qualities like volume, stress, pitch, tempo, pause, vowel elongation, vocal mimicry (of different “speakers”), personal reactions (e.g., exclamations, interjections, mock crying, even laughter), and intonational modulations to convey connotative overtones such as anger, sorrow, joy, fear, urgency, excitement, frustration, and disappointment. This frequently takes the form of direct discourse (quoted speech) and simulated dialogue with the audience (with Wame representing both “speakers”), or certain real or imaginary members/groups within it.
5. **Affective Appeal:** Closely related to the preceding device is the preacher’s efforts, whether obvious or indirect (including the use of humor), to influence the feelings, attitudes, values, and concerns of his listening audience so that they harmonize (or contrast) with either the expressed viewpoint of some character from Scripture, or his own perspective and opinion regarding some prominent biblical (Christian) teaching, a text-related thematic point, or consequent personal life-application.
6. **Evocative Description:** As part of his sermon narrative, instruction, exhortation, appeal, or whatever, Wame normally includes certain instances of vivid description whereby he arouses feelings that pertain to the five external senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch), as well as those that affect the hearer’s bodily sensations (e.g., heat, cold, pain, comfort, panic, etc.) so that these impressions correspond with or complement the overall “atmosphere” that he is seeking to evoke during his presentation.
7. **Strategic Reiteration:** This is one of the most noticeable features of Wame’s preaching, namely, the many different ways in which he says the same thing, whether some minor motif or his main theme, through the use of exact repetition, partial restatement, or synonymous paraphrase as a means of emphasis as well as a signal that he is beginning a new section of his sermon (by first reviewing the old).
8. **Verbal Intensification:** A number of the features already mentioned—phonological overlay, syntactic deformation, lexical embellishment—are often combined or concentrated at particular points in the sermon to create a special emotive effect (degrees of attraction or repulsion) or to highlight one of its main themes or sub-themes, as Wame effectively “stage-manages” his dramatic presentation from beginning to end in order to keep his listeners psychologically engaged at all times.
9. **Idiomatic Figuration:** This category includes all of the different figures of speech (from the word to sentence level) and other types of idiomatic and local (Chewa) colloquial diction that helps Wame to verbally identify with the ordinary “man-on-the-street”—or more specifically, to portray a certain biblical or fictive character, male or female (including representative churchly “types”) within some internal narrative segment.
10. **Audience Involvement:** This final stylistic category is a composite in the sense that it comprises the use of a variety of the previously mentioned devices along with direct personal appeals, asides (topical digressions), questions (both real and rhetorical), rebukes, ironic praise, expressions of “call-and-response” (e.g., *aleluyaaah—aaameni!*), and prayer or song (hymn) inserts in order to encourage his listeners both to remain actively absorbed in his sermon’s development and also to facilitate their understanding of what he wants to teach them or encourage them to do (or not to do). As he thus creatively interprets and expands upon his chosen biblical texts, Shadreck Wame exemplifies the best of audience-engaging “participatory” preaching.

How do all these devices (and associated stylistic features too numerous to mention) actually sound in the performance of preaching? I cannot come close to duplicating the interest, impact, appeal, or charisma of a live sermon or even an audio recording of one; however, in the following section I offer a greatly diminished representation of what a Wame sermon is like through a rather literal translation of a selected extract. The aim is to exemplify his spontaneous interpretive technique and to suggest, at least in part, how this down-to-earth preacher dynamically re-presents a specific biblical text, thereby dramatizing the scriptures to contemporize and make them live in the hearing and minds of his Christian congregation.

Wame in Action: Demonstrating Oral-Rhetorical Scripture Re-interpretation

Evangelist Wame entitled this lengthy sermon, “The Duty of a Christian” (*Udindo wa Mkhristu*); it was preached in March of 1997 before a large crowd in Lilongwe,¹² Malawi on the occasion of the 105th anniversary celebration of the Zambezi Evangelical Church in Malawi. As is often his homiletical procedure, Wame included several primary Scripture texts as the basis for his sermon—in this case, Job 38:1-6, Psalm 116:12, and Luke 20:9-19.

In this illustration, I will deal only with the last Bible passage, namely, its reading and then Wame’s most elaborative re-telling of it.¹³ I have normalized the format of the opening translation of this passage, cited from the block-column style of the old Chewa Bible (BL), in order to render it more readable. In contrast, I have formatted the subsequent translation from Wame’s actual sermon in terms of “utterance units,” based on aural variations in his intonation, discourse markers, and major pause breaks. The numbers in brackets refer to one of the ten dramatic-rhetorical features that was listed in the preceding section, which is being exemplified at that point in the discourse; I have indicated only a representative sample of these.

...And we go also to Luke, chapter twenty—the book of Luke, chapter twenty, and I will begin at verse nine. [The section heading is]: “Parable of the tillers of a garden of grapes.” Verse nine:

And he [Jesus] began to speak this parable (lit. ‘comparison’ *fanizo*) to the people: “A person owned a garden of grapes (*munda wa mphesa*), and he lent it out to tillers, and he went to another land, and¹⁴ he spent a long time there.¹⁵ And at the season of fruit,¹⁶ he sent his slave¹⁷ to the gardeners [to ask them] to give him¹⁸ [some] fruit of that garden. The gardeners beat him and sent him back without giving him anything.

And he again sent another slave, and they¹⁹ beat him up too, and mocked him, and sent him back without giving him anything.

And he again sent another, the third, and him too they stabbed²⁰ and threw him outside [the garden].

¹² I recorded this sermon on cassette tape several weeks later when it was broadcast on TransWorld Radio (shortwave); the text thus suffers from my lack of access to a visual representation of Wame’s non-verbal gestures and facial expressions, etc. I could readily imagine these features, however, having witnessed Wame in action on a number of occasions during a live sermonic performance.

¹³ A sequence of three dots indicates where I have broken off from the original sermon transcription to jump to a section further along (in the interest of space). Words in brackets are clearly implied in the Chewa version; those in parentheses give my explanatory comments and sometimes also citations of key expressions from the original Chewa text. In my original transcription and translation, I capitalized words that were spoken with greater volume and I used reduplicated vowels to indicate syllable lengthening; however, in the present version I will simply underline stressed words but will not indicate those that were prolonged for emphasis. In addition to the speech pauses suggested by normal punctuation marks, short dashes indicate a more deliberate/dramatic pause point or a “false start,” while a long dash indicates a point of quickened tempo or a run-on phrase/clause/sentence.

¹⁴ The conjunction “and” (*ndipo* ‘and then’) represents the Greek *kai*, which is reproduced in a correspondent manner, probably following the KJV text; thus, the BL version is often referred to as the “*Ndipo* Bible”! Although this is stylistically unnatural in written Chewa (cf. BY), it is often duplicated in Wame’s discourse.

¹⁵ Wame appears to have modified the BL text here in the interest of clarity. The original reads: “A person [man] tilled/hoed a garden of vines/grapes” (*mphesa* can refer to either or both). As in the case of the original NT Greek, this literal rendering does not seem (sound) accurate since the person being referred to here is clearly the garden’s owner (cf. v. 13), who would have had his laborers doing the actual field work.

¹⁶ The new Chewa version, *Buku Loyera* (BY, “Holy Book”; Bible Society of Malawi, 1997) translates “When the season for harvesting (lit. ‘breaking off’) the fruit had arrived...”

¹⁷ In Chewa, the literal “slave” (for *δοῦλος*) does not sound appropriate; BY has “his laborer.”

¹⁸ BY uses a verb that conveys a more polite request for the “giving” involved, i.e., something that is due.

¹⁹ The BY specifies “the gardeners” since the subject reference marker in Chewa is ambiguous and could be either 3rd person singular or plural.

²⁰ The BY more accurately translates “wounded him [badly—implied]” (Greek: *τραυματίζω*).

And the garden owner said, ‘What will I do? And now²¹ I will send my child,²² whom I love very much. Perhaps they will show him some respect.’

But those gardeners, when they saw him [coming], they told one another, ‘This is the owner²³ who will inherit (lit. ‘enter’) the house. Let us kill him so that the whole inheritance will be ours!’ And so they threw him outside the garden and killed him.

Now what should the garden owner do? He will arrive and will destroy those gardeners and give [the]²⁴ garden to some others.

And when they heard [this], they said,²⁵ ‘Do not speak like that!’²⁶

Verse seventeen²⁷—‘But he [Jesus]²⁸ looked at them carefully and said, ‘What is this that was written,²⁹ ‘The rock which the house-builders rejected, this very one became the corner stone (lit. ‘the stone at the corner’).’ And everyone who falls upon this rock will be smashed; but³⁰ he upon whom it falls, it will kill.’

And the group of great (i.e., ‘high’) priests³¹ kept trying to grab him with their hands³² at that very time. And they feared the people because they perceived that he spoke about them in this parable.’³³ ... [major text break]

[Here’s] a warning:³⁴ [The] words that we have read here (i.e., from the Scripture text of Luke

20) [are] painful words that are paining me in the heart (*kundisautsa mumtima*). [2, 5]³⁵

Here we read in Luke chapter twenty, especially beginning at verse nine and ending in verse nineteen- - here we read the parable of the gardeners (i.e., tenants).

When the Lord Jesus was preaching the Good News (lit. ‘Good Message’) and he presented this parable, he is³⁶ with his disciples. [1]

And Jesus stood up—he says, ‘A certain man had a garden (i.e., a plot of land used to farm crops)—he began a commercial farm (*anatsekula esiteti*, lit. ‘he opened up an

21 Wame adds this *ndipo* on his own, perhaps for rhythmic reasons; it is not present in the BL text.

22 In the Chewa text (both BL and BY), it is ambiguous as to the age of this ‘child,’ and whether it is male or female; however, in a Bantu setting, as in the original, a male would be assumed.

23 Wame adds the designation ‘owner’ (*mwini*) to the BL translation to make the crucial implication clearer that the garden’s owner and ‘heir’ is being referred to, even though the concept is still rather difficult to grasp both linguistically and culturally—that is, the notion of one person, a son, ‘inheriting’ a plot of land or a farm in matrilineal, matrilocal Chewa society. BY is socially more appropriate by rendering ‘he is the one to whom he [the father] will leave this wealth [upon death].’

24 Chewa does not have a ‘direct article’ but can indicate its function in other ways, usually by means of a demonstrative pronominal form (as found in BY, but not BL).

25 Pronominal references in the literal BL version are often very difficult to follow, since as already noted, idiomatic Chewa discourse employs other devices, including the repeated use of nominal referents, as in the BY version: ‘When those (distant reference, i.e., those mentioned in v. 9) people heard these very things, they said...’

26 The BY employs a more deferential and respectful way of saying this to Jesus (*Ai, m’satero*), in contrast to BL’s more demanding expression (*Musatero iai!*). But in this case, a more accurate rendering for the Greek (Μὴ γένοιτο) would be the NET’s ‘May this never happen!’ – the people thus recognizing the dire implication and import of Jesus’ parable.

27 Wame adds this reference so as to key his listeners in to where he is in the Scripture passage that he is reading.

28 The nominal referent ‘Jesus’ is included in BY.

29 The BY clarifies: ‘So now, what is the meaning of the Scriptures which say...’

30 The BY indicates that a *contrast* is not involved in this A–B parallel saying (as implied in the BL being read by Wame) by repeating the same subject ‘everyone’ and using the simple linking conjunction ‘and.’

31 Wame leaves out the reference to the ‘scribes’ as found in the BL version that he is reading—perhaps not to complicate the text with too many groups of people.

32 BL follows the literal Greek ‘lay hands on him’ – BY simply has ‘grab’ (equivalent to ‘arrest’ in this context).

33 BY employs the idiomatic phrase ‘Jesus killed them with this parable’—i.e., he defeated them (implicitly) by his parabolic argument.

34 A stylistic lexical feature of Wame’s sermons is his reference to ‘warning’ (*chenjezo*) as a verbal signal to listeners that he is beginning a new major section of his discourse.

35 As already noted, the numbers in brackets refer to the ten specific stylistic-rhetorical techniques that were identified earlier.

36 Use of the present tense creates a sense of immediacy—Wame is about to evoke the biblical scene in the minds of his audience.

“estate”).³⁷ [3]

For someone to begin such a [large] farm (*esiteti*) is not a game at all (*si masewero, ayi* ‘not games, no’ – i.e., a great deal of labor and expense is involved). [5]

Money was spent—[for] tractors (*mathalakitala*) to uproot trees—tractors for plowing up the soil, for making furrows (lit., ‘rows’)—with laborers everywhere!

Money was spent—to buy brand new hoes [and] sickles.³⁸

He spent a lot of wealth³⁹—right up until that garden (i.e., several fields) was finished.

So he prepared furrows [for planting] and was waiting for the rain to fall so he could plant—and all his seed was ready (*leede*)! [6]

As you know [10], [at such] an estate [you can] see maize, see rice, see groundnuts, see millet—seeds of all sorts—it was all ready! [7]

Then a message (lit. ‘words’) [came, saying] “O king!”⁴⁰ [4]—just as the very time for planting drew near and the rains were approaching⁴¹—all of a sudden (*mwadzidzidzi!* – a dramatic ideophone) he set off on a journey.

And [on] that journey he travelled to a country very far away.

And there where he went - - he arrived when the time [for planting] was already way past finished (*nthawi yothaita*), [so] he could not start (lit. ‘open’) another garden.

He could not begin another “estate” since he arrived when the time was already past finished—[when] his colleagues (i.e., other farmers) had already completed [their] plowing.⁴² [7]

Since this king was so good-hearted (*yabwino mtima*), his heart (*mtima wake*)⁴³ pained him (i.e., this is *flashback* to before he left on his long journey).

[He said to himself:]⁴⁴ “I am leaving to go to a country far away—just look, I’ve taken great pains on my garden, opening up an “estate”—I’ve spent a great deal of wealth [on it].

So now that I’m going away, is this garden of mine going to be destroyed?

Have I expended my strength [on it] for nothing (*pachabee*)!?” [5]... [*minor text break*]

And so the king went to that land far away.

Since he arrived there when the time [for planting] was over, he did not begin a new garden plot.

And when the time of - - for harvesting arrived—the time for eating [fresh] maize, the time when many other things have ripened [3, 6]—the king was seized by a great longing (*chifundo chidamugwira* – ‘pity/longing grabbed him’) there in that far-away land.

[He said to himself:] “I want some roasted maize!” A great longing had seized him.

³⁷ As is his custom, Wame immediately contextualizes the biblical (Lukan) account so that it harmonizes with a present-day rural (or urban) setting in Malawi. In this case, he calls up the image of one of the large, well-managed (and productive) agricultural farming schemes for which the country is well-known in the entire sub-region.

³⁸ The basic hand-tools, “hoes” and “sickles,” depict a humorous (ironic) contrast with the reference to “tractors” in the preceding utterance.

³⁹ Wame uses the more inclusive word “wealth” (*chuma*) instead of the expected specific term “money” (*ndalama*) for dramatic effect.

⁴⁰ Wame does not reveal what the message was, but the intonation of his voice on the vocative indicates that it was very urgent.

⁴¹ Allusion is made to the seasonal rains (*nyengo ya mvula, dzinja*), which begin in late November/early December and last until the end of March/early April—after which the long “dry season” (*chilimwe*) begins.

⁴² The chiasmic [A-B=B'-A'] semantic arrangement manifested in these last two iterative sentence may be an oral, discourse-level signal that one major narrative unit has come to an end while another is about to begin. It is interesting to observe all the local-color details and additional plot motivations that Wame injects into his retelling of Christ’s parable. The rhetorical purpose—in addition to remaining true to the ancient Chewa storytelling tradition—is the same as the Master in the original event—namely, to draw the audience into the account and encourage them to emotively identify with the good-hearted king/estate owner as the central crisis is invoked.

⁴³ The juxtaposition of the key figurative term “heart” (*mtima*) in contrastive senses illustrates Wame’s idiomatic verbal style.

⁴⁴ This segment of “internal speech” is signaled non-verbally by a shift in intonation. Wame’s narrative “characters” often “talk to themselves” in this way in an aside that the audience “hears” but no one else on the dramatic stage.

“I want a few toasted groundnuts!” A great longing had seized him. [7, 8]
 So he said, “I can do nothing else—I will send my servant.
 He can go and request a single cob of maize from those people to whom I left the garden.
 [I have] a great longing—I will roast [it]!” [4]⁴⁵

So he summoned his servants (lit. ‘slaves’ as in BL) and sent one of them.
 And when he arrived there,⁴⁶ they greeted him [saying], “*E-eeh!* (exclamation of surprise),
 mister, what can we do for you?—Is everything alright (*N’kwabwino*)?
 And he said, “Pardon me, great elders (*Pepani, akuluakulu* – a deferential, honorific expression),
 I don’t mean to be rude (i.e., when I ask you this)- - -
 But the king who gave you this garden has sent me to ask you to please give him [out of your]
 mercy a single maize cob to roast back there [at home].”⁴⁷
 [They replied:] “What (*Chiaaani!*) are you saying!?”
 [The servant said:] “Just a single maize cob [in your] mercy so that he might roast [it].”
 [They said again:] “What?!?” Immediately after saying “What!?”—they said (i.e., before giving
 the servant another chance to reply), “Shut-up! (*Shat-apu!*)”⁴⁸
 [We’re telling] you—you (i.e., now speaking indirectly to the king), just eat away (i.e., enjoy
 yourself) [there], while we must trouble ourselves laboring for you here!”
 [They shout:] “Stomp him to the ground! (*M’pondeeeeni!*) Grab him! (*M’gwireeeeni!*)” [4, 8]
 Immediately they began to chase him (i.e., the king’s messenger)—[They caught him] POOW!
 (*PHAA!* – an ideophone designating a blow to the body)—they beat him up. [5]
 But [by] the grace of God (*chisomo cha Mulungu*)⁴⁹ he escaped.

He [the servant] arrived before the king, all covered with dust—WHITE! (*MBUU!* – ideophone),
 and he said, “O King, I almost died [back there]!”
 [The king replied:] “Why—what happened?”
 He [servant] replied, “They say that you are just eating well [here],⁵⁰ *a-aah!* (exclamation)- - -
 they say, while they are troubling themselves even to the point of suffering on account of
 [all] their hoeing [in your fields]!”
 They say that we are simply eating well [here] while they are the ones who are being troubled
 with the work [you give them].” [7]

⁴⁵ The reiteration evident in this section is rhythmically cadenced so as to audibly attract and pull the audience along as Wame underscores the rising tension of his elaborated biblical plot.

⁴⁶ As in a traditional Chewa oral narrative (*nthano*), explicit descriptive details and personal references (such as names or explicit noun phrases) are often left implicit and up to the imagination of the audience to fill in.

⁴⁷ The term “mercy” (*chifundo*) is the same Chewa word that was rendered “great longing” above. Thus, in order to satisfy the king’s “longing,” the tenants would have to show him a little “mercy,” which is of course a great understatement since it was the king who had supplied them with their prepared fields in the first place, all ready to plant. When the servant requests “a single cob of maize,” it represents another instance of depreciating or reducing the implied force of the statement, here a request, as a verbal form of respect. In fact, the king wanted more than just a single ear of maize to roast—he was indirectly demanding an appropriate amount of pay-back for the use of his fields. This is another instance of the subtle idiomatic nuances that permeate the many little internal dialogues of Wame’s sermons. In his dramatic presentation of this exchange, he realistically plays all the speaking parts himself (normally only two individuals or spokespersons on stage at once, but sometimes more). He identifies each one with the diction and intonation that is natural for each role (including the voice of “God”) in the interpersonal situation that is being portrayed. At times, the dialogue develops so thick and fast that we find a quote within a quote or one merged with another (see below). There is also a great deal of internal speech, when a character thinks aloud to him/herself.

⁴⁸ English loanwords and calques (loan translations) like this (*Shat-aapu!*) punctuate Wame’s dialogues, adding a realistic dimension (i.e., how people speak on the street) as well as a touch of humor, emotion, and/or emphasis to what is being said.

⁴⁹ The Chewa word *chisomo* was used in the old Bible [BL] to render “grace,” but it really means “good luck” or “attractive attribute” (a quality that is humanly derived or self-focused), which is obviously not the best way to express the biblical concept. But people have become used to term after long usage—perhaps even with the correct associated sense. The new translation [BY] uses an idiomatic verbal phrase, *kukomera mtima* “to favor [someone] in the heart” to convey this crucial notion.

⁵⁰ “Eating [well]” is a figurative reference to someone who is well-off and living a life of ease.

The king did not believe [this, and said], “You are lying—you are lying!”
The king did not believe [his servant and said], “I’m going to send your fellow [servant]!”... [text break:
the king sends two more servants, with increasingly worse results]

The king did not believe [the third servant and said], “I will send my—my—my (*wanga, wanga, waaaanga!*) very own son.

Because they think that you [servants] are robbers—because this son of mine they know - -
 [Then] they will realize—they will know for sure- - [saying] that, ‘*Eeh!* true-true! [8] They
 [the king’s servants] were telling the truth!
 Is not this his son who is coming this way?’ [6]
 Yes, I’m going to send my son!”

So the king sent his son.

As soon as the son came into view—all the tenants (*matenanti*) said, “Do you see that child (i.e.,
 the king’s son)⁵¹ coming right over there?”⁵²

[Others] replied, “Yes! He is the child of the king!”

“This very child⁵³—when the king dies, then this garden will belong to him!

What we can do now to get this garden- - let’s us kill the son (lit. ‘that child’)!
 Let’s stab him—hard! (ideophone *PHOO!*) Finish! (*basi!*)—the garden will be ours!

Do you see this garden—this fertile garden (*munda wa chondeee*)—do you see this garden, this
 garden of crops [ready] for harvest?

Should this boy take [all this]?—Let’s kill him so that the garden is ours!” [4, 5, 7]⁵⁴

The son (lit. ‘that child’) arrived [and said], “Pardon me, great elders, I don’t wish to be rude,
 [but] my father has sent me—he [only] desires a single cob of maize- - ”⁵⁵

E-eeeh! (exclamation)—he didn’t even finish [speaking]—[they stabbed him] in the neck
*PHOOO!*⁵⁶

The son cried out, “You’ve wounded me!

[The servants shouted:] “Shut up! You (pl., i.e., including his father) are the ones who are just
 eating away while we are being troubled here with all [your] work!”

[The stabbed him again] *PHOOO!*—until they killed that boy (lit. ‘child’) and threw [his corpse]
 out into the bush.⁵⁷ [4, 5, 6]

Later the king heard the message [saying], “Your son (lit. ‘child’) has gone away!” (*wapitaaa!* –
 a euphemism for death). [5]

51 The explicit term for “son” is *mwana wamwamuna*, lit. ‘male child’, and as long as the referent is known, age does not matter nor is it specified. If a person’s “child” is known to be a male, then the shortened reference *mwana* is normally used. Thus, the “Son of God” is rendered as *Mwana wa Mulungu* “[the] Child of God.”

52 Wame’s use of intonation and demonstrative pronouns conjures up the scene in the imagination of the audience.

53 This sentence illustrates “constituent focus” when a noun (phrase) expressing known information is fronted for emphasis. It is another instance of Wame’s idiomatic verbal style—which is quite distinct from that of the Chewa Bible translation which he regularly cites.

54 The rising excitement of the tenants’ diabolical plot is dramatically evoked phonologically by Wame’s effective iterative rhythm and vocal modulations.

55 The king’s son is overly deferential in his address to his recalcitrant servants—that is, according to human standards of social discourse. His style of speech indicates that this is no ordinary “son.”

56 The notion of violent stabbing is conveyed entirely by the sensory-evocative ideophone.

57 I.e., like an animal carcass. This would be the height of insulting behavior—not to give someone a proper burial. These rogues were so callous and disrespectful that they did not even fear the boy’s potentially avenging spirit. Even an accused “witch-sorcerer” (*mfiti*) is (grudgingly) afforded that last rite of passage, which is intended to promote unity in the community in such a time of crisis. However, in this case, the heartless actions of the tenants demonstrate how far they had alienated themselves from their long-suffering benefactor.

My, but the king was suffering now in his heart.
 [He exclaimed:] “They’ve killed my son!?”
 [His servants reply:] “Yes!”
 “A-aaah! (exclamation) [have they gone so far as] to kill my son!?” [8]
 “Yes, they have murdered the boy!”

Why did that king not believe [the reports]?⁵⁸ [10]
 The first [servant] was thrown out [of the garden], and he didn’t believe it.
 The second [servant] was thrown out, and he didn’t believe it.
 The third [servant] was thrown out, and he didn’t believe it. [7]
 Finally—they killed his son—and [still] he did not believe [that this could have happened]! [8]

“[Have they gone so far as] to kill my son!?” [7]
 They said, “Yes, the boy has gone away.”⁵⁹
 Why did he [the king] not believe [what had happened]? [10] There are three things - -⁶⁰
 “[On account of] a single cob of maize could they kill my son!?”
 [On account of] a single cob of maize could they beat [you servants] up!?
 You [must be] lying- - Get going- -!!⁶¹
 A-aah! Just who were those fellows!? (*ivo aja* – the negative connotation here is conveyed by intonation, word order, and the specific demonstrative pronoun).
 I myself picked them up (an idiom, i.e., I gave them a chance to prosper on their own)—and now they begrudge me a single cob of maize!? [5, 9]
 You [must be] lying- - Get going- -!!” [7]
 The king did not believe it!
 “[On account of] a single cob of maize??—Mmm, I don’t believe it!
 Who were those fellows!? (i.e., how could they treat me like this?)—I don’t believe it!
 The garden is mine—I don’t believe it!” [5, 7]

Now when the king heard that his son (lit. ‘child’) was dead, he spoke these words:
 “If the [garden] owner himself goes [there], what do you think that he’s going to do to those laborers?”⁶²
 [It will be] a disaster (*ngozi*)—a disaster [indeed]!
 And the final words that he [Jesus] speaks are [these]:
 “Every person who stumbles on this rock will be crushed, and he upon whom the rock falls will be killed!”

⁵⁸ Wame, the preacher-narrator, steps into the parable at this point to make a personal observation, as it were, that simply highlights the incongruity of the scene—even the apparent naiveté of the merciful king. This aside continues for the next four sentences; then there is a brief return to the parable for a plaintive quote from the distraught king, after which Wame’s parenthetical remarks to the audience continue.

⁵⁹ An *inclusio* (“the child has gone away”) serves to mark the boundaries of this narrative sub-section/scene.

⁶⁰ Wame gets rather cryptic here—he inserts himself once again into the parable with an explanation. The “three things” apparently refer to three main reasons why this murder should not have occurred, and why the king did not believe what had happened: a) the garden/farm belonged to the king; b) he requested a minimal amount of return in the form of produce; and c) he had finally sent his most credible and authoritative representative to make his request—his own son, the future heir of the garden. In the following lines Wame goes on to deliver a poignant semi-soliloquy—one that is realistically jumbled to reflect the king’s agitated state of mind, as he mulls over these tragic events within earshot of his good servants. He cannot bring himself to believe that the tenants to whom he had been so good could now be this ungrateful, foolish, and cruel as to murder his only son—when all he had asked for was a measly cob of new maize to roast for himself!

⁶¹ As a reflection of his agitated state of mind (as portrayed by the preacher), it is not clear what the last phrase is referring to—but most likely, that the king wants them to go find out the truth of this perplexing matter.

⁶² Wame now concludes his elaborative re-telling of Christ’s parable by making it virtually coincide with the Lukan account. The king’s words in the parable are creatively merged with those of Christ’s closing comment (Lk. 20:15-16).

Those are the words that we have read here—those are the words that we’ve read.⁶³ [7]
 These words may puzzle us (lit. ‘cause our minds to revolve’).
 Now I want to reveal [their meaning]:⁶⁴
 That king is God.⁶⁵
 God is a rich king—a king who lacks nothing—that is God.
 That big garden is this world here.
 Those laborers are you! [10]
 The [king’s] servants are pastors and evangelists.
 The [king’s] son (lit. ‘child) is Jesus.
 That is the [simple] meaning. . . .⁶⁶

The Word [of God] says, “As soon as the owner [of that garden] comes, what will he do to those [wicked] workers?”
 When the Master (*Bwana*), what will he do to those workers!? [7, 10]
 [It will be a] disaster (*ngoziiii!*)!⁶⁷ [4, 5]
 Meaning that when Jesus comes and you are continuing to behave as you do now, how are things going to end [for you]!?
 Disaster!!
 Now the Word of God says, “Everyone who falls upon that rock will be crushed—whoever that rock falls upon will be killed.”⁶⁸ [6]

Here is the meaning:

You who are offended by [the call to give] an offering [to the church]—that is, when Jesus⁶⁹ calls for an offering, you get offended—you are [in effect] becoming offended at (i.e., tripping over)⁷⁰ the [divine] rock, because that rock is Jesus! [9, 10]
 When you read the Word of God [in] First Corinthians ten [verse] four, it says: “The people of Israel drank water coming out of a [large] rock (*thanthwe*) in the wilderness, and that

63 Wame thus identifies his contextualized re-telling with the words of the biblical text (i.e., the BL translation). The ancient figurative account (the parable) and its setting—a dispute with the Jewish religious leaders—has been seamlessly transported in a dramatic shift of cognitive frames (or “mental spaces”) to the present day and the occasion of Wame’s sermon to a large church congregation in Malawi.

64 Wame treats the parable as an allegory as he continues to localize it for a contemporary Christian audience. His adaptive didactic and hortatory comments extend for two paragraphs here (about 3 minutes)—then they are broken off as he moves to a new topic, only to be resumed again later in this same sermon. This homiletical style is typical of the inductive non-Western preacher—adopting a resourcefully repetitive, spiral-type discourse development, as a selection of associated topics and issues are circulated around a central sermon theme and selection of core scripture passages.

65 As Wame moves to his explanation and application of the parable to his audience, he begins in a calm, didactic manner—but after this opening paragraph, he resumes his more typical dynamic phonological style.

66 I will jump a large portion of the sermon to a point near the end where he resumes his reference to the parable of Luke 20 in his concluding words of exhortation to the congregation present.

67 An emphatic one word dramatic utterance that links back to his earlier discussion of this climactic portion of the parable.

68 The medial contrastive “but” (*koma*) in the BL version that Wame read at the beginning of his sermon is now corrected by him. No contrast is implied either in the Greek of Luke 20:18 or the OT passage alluded to in Isaiah 8:14. The ‘A’ and ‘B’ lines of this parallelistic proverb are intended to be synonymous. In other words, whether one (stumbles and) falls on the rock, or the rock falls on that person, the negative outcome will be the same. In this case, the positive Messianic image of the “capstone” (*γωνία*) in Lk. 20:17 (cf. Isa. 28:16) has been transformed in this context into a punitive instrument of judgment—a “stone/rock” (*λίθος*) (cf. Lk. 2:34).

69 In Wame’s transformed application, Jesus (the “child/son”) becomes the “king” of the original parable, while the king’s request for a portion of the harvest becomes an “offering” to support the Lord’s work (“church”).

70 Here Wame introduces a thematically significant play on words in Chichewa: The verb *-khumudwa* can mean either “trip over [something]” or, in an extended sense, to “become offended [over]” somebody or something.

rock was Jesus.⁷¹
 [In] hymn [number] 102 we say (i.e., sing), ‘Within that rock that is split apart, let me hide myself completely!’—now that rock is Jesus!”⁷² [2, 3]
 If you are offended by [having to give] an offering, then you are like a person who is running along, trips on a stone, and falls down hard! (BAAA! – an ideophone). [1, 10]
 Will that turn out (lit. ‘finish’) well [for that person]—will it turn out OK?
 If a person trips on a rock (*mwala*), does it turn out well!? [7]
No! He gets hurt badly (*amavulala moooiiipaa!!*)—because [he’s fallen] on a [big] rock (*thanthwe*)! [4, 5, 6]⁷³
 But is your fall down on sand (*mchenga*), well (*ayi* – lit., ‘no’), you simply brush off the dirt (i.e., sand)—[but] on a rock, it is very bad!
Anyone who trips on this Rock—meaning Jesus—he will get hurt!
Don’t trip on an offering—you will get hurt—you have fallen down on a [big] rock!!
 But [the Bible] also says that when that [big] Rock comes, it/he will grind him up [into flour] (*lidzamsinja*)!⁷⁴—meaning that at the [second] coming of the Lord Jesus (*Ambuye Yesu*), he will fall upon you [and destroy you]!! [4, 5, 6, 8]
 Therefore, do not become offended at [the call for giving] an offering—do not become offended at an offering!! . . . (*the sermon continues to the end*)

Retelling the Word Rhetorically: Some Implications and Potential Applications

What can we learn from a study such as this—based on an original vernacular text that has been severely diminished or compromised with respect to sight, sound, and hence also sense? Several concluding thoughts of possible relevance come to mind,⁷⁵ which may hopefully lead to further investigation in the field of oral interpretation and discussion regarding the various related issues that this paper has touched upon.

- a) Oral interpreters, translation specialists, and communication analysts, both sacred and secular, must be prepared to carry out *extensive research* in the broad field of TL traditional oral as well as modern written genres (perhaps involving some significant text collection in the field) before they can become sensitized enough stylistically and structurally (with regard to genre) to offer constructive critical comments on matters pertaining to the spontaneous interpretation and/or adaptation of socially significant texts.⁷⁶
- b) The macro- and micro-structural features and literary/oratorical (artistic and rhetorical) stylistics of TL *texts of recognized excellence* need to be given special attention during the ongoing analysis and

71 This reference illustrates the typical Chewa evangelistic preacher’s associative (*midrashic*) sermon style, where a key term in one scripture passage can elicit another passage in which that same term or expression is used, either with the same sense, a modified understanding, or perhaps even a quite different meaning (now used figuratively perhaps)—as long as it fits under the sermon’s main theme.

72 A reference to the well-known hymn (also in the old Chewa Presbyterian hymnal being referred to by Wame) “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me.”

73 Wame picks up the pace here and intensifies the suprasegmental qualities of his speech, as he seeks to engage his audience more closely in the hortatory argument that he is developing.

74 Here Wame adopts a more precise meaning of the original Greek verb *λικμάω*—that is, ‘to pound to flour [in a mortar]’, instead of repeating the general word used in the BL, “to kill (*-pha*) him.”

75 These are simply suggestive pointers and might be more fully considered on the basis of the complete Wame study (Wendland, “Preaching”) and others like it from various language-people groups and socio-cultural settings.

76 I am not suggesting that all practicing translators or oral interpreters must carry out such research in order to be successful in their work. They may already be very skillful communicators. However, in order to better teach and mentor new practitioners or to constructively critique colleagues in the craft (whether this be Bible translation or oral interpretation), a more extensive background knowledge is essential regarding what is available on the local oral-literary scene and how to effectively evaluate relative stylistic quality and compositional excellence.

- assessment process, since works of demonstrable quality, based on comparative studies, are not always taken into sufficient consideration when teaching or carrying out some kind of oral or written discourse evaluation work.
- c) On the other hand, comprehensive *Skopos-based, project research* should be conducted also with a view towards carefully ascertaining a specific target group's expressed *opinions* and *desires* in conjunction with their actual documented *needs* and in relation to all existing “publishing” *options* for a given text genre and translation type via the various available media.
- d) The *ten oratorical techniques* or categories described and illustrated in the Wame study constitute just one possible way of organizing the transcribed content of his sermons with respect to his macro- and micro-stylistic inventory, that is, according to its prominent artistic forms and rhetorical functions; this analytical scheme may (must) be readily modified, whether slightly or substantially, when applied to a different corpus of texts or group of oral interpreter-performers and method of recording the performances.
- e) Verbal communication—via whatever mode and medium—must be investigated in relation to all of the relevant cognitive “*frames of reference*” (conceptual/worldview, socio-cultural, communicational, organizational, and textual) that might apply to a given community-based project and its stated organizational “brief,” especially when complex cases involving primary (original) and derived (translated, interpreted) texts are concerned.⁷⁷
- f) The results of such comparative research into oral interpretation might be applied in the *formal and informal training* of Bible translators and (extemporaneous) interpreters with respect to inductively exemplifying potential problem areas that often arise when seeking to correctly understand the Scriptures, and then to convey them *meaningfully* in one's mother-tongue, including the option of providing paratextual explanatory and contextualizing notes.
- g) Finally, the ongoing relevance of the often neglected *radio medium* within the scope of such translation-interpretation oriented and audience-focused research should not be overlooked or ignored because this mode of message transmission is often a rich source of readily available, artistically creative, and rhetorically dynamic instances of performances by unrecognized as well as renowned oral communicators and interpreters of the Scriptures (Wendland 2005:259).

The last word on “applied,” communicative rhetoric comes from Evangelist Wame himself, as he reflects upon his homiletical style:

“A preacher [interpreter] must learn how to imitate a skilled hunter (*mleje*), who thoroughly knows the individual characteristics of his weapons (*zida zake*), the various types of game (*nyama*) he will be hunting, where he must strike (*kulasa*) for the best results, and the [proper] method of stalking (*kusakira*) each one so as to outsmart it. [To accomplish this] one of the main things for the preacher keep in mind is to ‘lower his [level of] knowledge’ (*kutsitsa nzeru*) so that he does not preach over the heads [of his people/audience] and hence completely miss their hearts with his message.”⁷⁸

Shadreck Wame was not only a preacher and oral interpreter of the Word—he made the Scriptures come alive and intensely personal in the living presence of his listening audiences.

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⁷⁷ Cf. Hill, “Bible at the Crossroads”; Maxey, “New Paradigm”; Wendland, “Conceptual Frames”.

⁷⁸ Wendland, “Preaching”, 247. On the contemporary state of the church, Mr. Wame recently commented: “The prophetic ministry should enlighten people of the coming of Jesus Christ according to 1 John 4 and not always talking about prosperity. Most prophets today are busy with the message of prosperity and not salvation which is dangerous to unsaved souls”. Chimpweya, “Who is Evangelist Shadreck Wame?”

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