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A Parable Frame-up and Its Audacious Reframing

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Citing the difficulties of establishing a unity between parable and frame in Luke 18.1–8, this article argues that Luke has significant themes of justice and social transformation that could be used to frame the parable of the audacious widow (18.2–5). In the antecedent source of Luke's widow tradition, the widow is characteristically without a voice in her community. Ironically, Luke has effectively silenced the story's prophetic voice for justice with the parable's frame. However, the parable can find its voice through alternative framing within the gospel, for example, the Magnificat. If the parable (vv. 2–5) has independent force within the same community of the gospel's production, what possible tensions does a widely acknowledged dissonance in vv. 1–8 reflect at its point of production? What implications might these tensions have for subsequent parable interpretation?

Introduction

Luke's parable of an audacious widow (18.2–5) has clear resonances with the gospel's themes of inclusion and justice for liminal ambiguous persons. However, a widely recognized and ineluctable dissonance exists between the parable and its immediate frame (vv. 1, 6–8), which effectively silences the parable's dramatic implications.[1] This article claims that the frequently acknowledged dissonance between parable and frame in Luke 18.1–8 suggests that the parable (vv. 2–5) can yield alternative interpretations to the one offered by the frame (vv. 1, 6–8). The aim of this article is to demonstrate that while Luke has

1 Dissonance in Luke 18.1–8 is apparent from the disparate readings of the relationship between parable and frame. The major variations are as follows: (i) there is an original unity between parable and frame; (ii) the parable is original, but the framing interpretation is secondary; (iii) the parable, encompassing v. 6, is original, but the frame (vv. 1, 7–8) is Lukan; (iv) v. 8b is a later redaction of v. 8, whether the parable (vv. 2–5 or 2–6) and frame (vv. 6–8 or 7–8) belong to pre-Lukan tradition or not; (v) the parable and frame are both created by Luke; (vi) the origins of the parable and frame are separate and unknown. S. Curkpatrick, 'Dissonance in Luke 18:1–8', *JBL* 121 (2002) 107–21.

constructed a first literary interpretation of the parable, Luke's reading need not determine all subsequent readings.[2] The article suggests that within the gospel there is an abundance of material on the themes of just, inclusive relationships that can create alternative, integral readings of the parable, for example from Luke's Magnificat (1.47–55). This thesis suggests a literary rhetorical method of reconfiguring parables by reframing them from within gospel narrative *per se*, hence an emphasis on rhetorical effect within the narrative, rather than historical critical findings. This method is based on two assumptions: first, that it is possible for a parable not to have been framed effectively within its immediate literary context; and second, that a parable can be reframed alternatively within a gospel, consistent with the rhetorical and theological impetus of that gospel. This method is specifically applied by demonstrating that while Luke provides an interpretation of 18.2–5 that has effectively eclipsed the widow's quest for justice, the parable nevertheless appears to be framed more effectively by the theological impetus of Luke's widow tradition, and the textures of reversal in the Magnificat. A significant issue for parable research that this article addresses is the capacity to generate other readings for a parable from within a gospel context, suggesting that while parables may have been framed with less than adequate effect in the composition of a gospel narrative (the issue of dissonance between parables and their frames), and resisting their extraction from gospel narrative, parables can be reframed alternatively within the same gospel.[3] In this way, parables may be examined for their hypothetical use within gospel communities, in which their framing is assumed to have been a contested issue in gospel production, in some instances being framed effectively, but in other cases generating perpetual dissonance in ensuing interpretation.

2 Some of Luke's parable framings are ineluctably ambiguous. Ambiguity is notable in the framing (16.8b–13) of the parable of the unjust steward (16.1–8a), in which Luke offers several interpretative proposals, and to a lesser degree in the framing of the parable of the good Samaritan (10.30–5) with its two possibilities of neighbour: Who is my neighbour? (10.29) and Who do you suppose was a neighbour? (10.36). Further, Luke's interpretation (16.27–31) of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16.19–26) mitigates the clear reversal impetus of this parable.

3 Culler points out that the concept of 'framing' is preferable to speaking of context, because it connotes active framing, or even a 'frame-up', somewhat akin to the role framing has in 'determining, setting off the object or event as art'. J. Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988) xiv. 'A frame is a "frame-[u]p"' (Y. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary–Theoretical Perspective* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996] 185. The tension between a parable and its frame is described by Aichele as a relationship between text and meta-text. The frame as meta-text asserts interpretative control over the text, the parable. G. Aichele, *Jesus Framed: Biblical Limits* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 75–98.

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Luke's widow tradition and the widow parable

Luke frequently alludes to a widow tradition in which the God of Israel is designated the protector of widows, along with orphans and sojourners.[4] This tradition is as powerful as the Exodus memory that was upheld as the defining reason for Yahweh's protection.[5] The image of the widow in biblical tradition is loaded with connotations of justice and injustice.[6] On the one hand, widows are exposed to unscrupulous persons; on the other, they serve as a prophetic image of Yahweh's passion for justice.[7] The widow was a desperate and tragic figure. She was subject to injustice, and silenced in recourse to justice, with no one to speak for her.[8] The stranger, the widow and the orphan lacked the 'economic and legal security' of 'an Israelite family'.[9] The widow was therefore exposed to exploitation in a number of forms. Exploitation by the law was possible, when the widow had no male to represent her, and she was unlikely to be able to deal in bribes.

4 The covenant and prophetic tradition announces Yahweh's help and protection for widows: Exod 22.22–3; Deut 10.17–19; 14.28–9; 24.17–22; 26.12–13; 27.19; Job 22.9–11; 24.3; Pss 68.5, 6a; 94.1–7; 146.9; Prov 15.25; Isa 1.17, 23; 10.1–2; Jer 7.5–7; 22.3; 49.11; Ezek 22.6–7; Zech 7.8–12. W. R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 225.

5 B. B. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989) 181. Frymer-Kensky argues that the need to legislate for the care of widows and orphans betrays an unwitting critique of patriarchy, that being the lack of equal status and privilege that could deny women, especially widows, access to inherited resources and property acquisition. T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Deuteronomy', *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. C. Newson and S. Ringe; London: SPCK/Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 54.

6 Lam 1.1. J. Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993) 867; 'distressed widows' are noted by Spencer in Gen 41.33–8; Exod 18.1–27; Num 11.1–35; 27.15–23; Deut 1.10–17. F. S. Spencer, 'Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1–7', *CBQ* 56 (1994) 717 n. 6.

7 Nolland, *Luke*, 871. The failure of justice also implies the possibility of prophetic rebuke toward those who perpetrate such injustice; or perhaps an announcement that an amelioration of great duress is about to occur (e.g. the stories of Elijah and the widow of Zaraphath, and Ruth and Naomi, depict situations in which an amelioration of duress occurs, 1 Kgs 17.8–24; Ruth 1–4). Certainly the widow, prophetic protest against injustice, and salvation are closely linked in the Hebrew LXX tradition. The widow, the orphan and the sojourner are grouped together in more than half the references to widows in biblical texts, mostly in the Psalms. For example, in Ps 94.4–7 wickedness is denounced as a violation of weaker members of society – widow, sojourner, and orphan. A recurring feature in the Psalms is the recital of the deeds of Yahweh as one who defends the orphan and widow. P. Hiebert, '"Whence Shall Help Come to Me?": The Biblical Widow', *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. P. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 126 (Hiebert cites Pss 146.9 and 68.5–6).

8 T. K. Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke–Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 232; B. Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 9.

9 Seim, *The Double Message*, 233 n. 146.

Exploitation by the unscrupulous was possible when there was no fear of retribution.[10]

Luke uses the word χήρα (widow) more than any other NT writing, with several references to widows not found elsewhere in the gospel traditions.[11] It is difficult to ascertain the precise status of the widow in Luke's time; however, the tradition on which Luke draws to depict widows in his gospel, like many of his themes, is primarily from the LXX. This tradition is rich with images of injustice and prophetic protest. Although the precise status of widows in the writer's community is inaccessible, the very citation of the Hebrew–LXX widow tradition gives a certain content to this gospel's images of the χήρα. Luke evokes a tradition in which the widow is faced with the precarious vicissitudes of life, vulnerable to the whims of powerful but unjust others, and he uses widows as an image of the poor and the marginalized. Widows are therefore proper recipients of care and justice in Luke's community. Luke presents the χήρα as a vulnerable person, exposed to social and legal exploitation, yet at the same time an example of faith and strength.[12] Widow status is also indicative of a degree of autonomy from patriarchal structures.[13] This appears to be so in the parable of a widow who personifies an audacious challenge to a judge's authority (18.2–5). The parable is consistent with the prophetic quest for justice to which Luke alludes through the prism of widows drawn from the LXX tradition,[14] a quest which might challenge the unjust practices of some in Luke's immediate community.

10 The image of the desolate widow also serves as a metaphor of desolation and prophetic lament and warning to the people (Lam 1.1–2a; Isa 47.8b–9, cited in V. H. Matthew and D. C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250–587 BCE* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993] 132–41); also G. Stählin, 'χήρα', *TDNT* 9, citing Exod 22.22–3; Jer 18.21. A widow was even sometimes considered the inevitable recipient of retribution for her husband's sins if he died prematurely. This was compounded by theological stigma, a reproach that was applied metaphorically to the nation when punished ('the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more', Isa 54.4c). Thurston, *The Widows*, 13.

11 Freed notes the following statistics for χήρα: Luke (9); Acts (3); 1 Tim (7). E. D. Freed, 'The Parable of the Judge and the Widow (Luke 18:1–8)', *NTS* 33 (1987) 44. See also T. K. Seim, 'The Gospel of Luke', *Searching the Scriptures. Volume One: A Feminist Introduction* (ed. E. Schüssler Fiorenza; Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1993) 757.

12 Seim, *The Double Message*, 243, 242 n. 145.

13 Ibid., 258; also Stählin, 'χήρα', 450–1.

14 LXX allusions in relation to Luke 18.1–8 are noted by Freed, 'The Parable of the Judge and the Widow', 38, 56. Several commentators have found antecedent images to Luke's audacious widow in Sirach. J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to Saint Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1930/1960) 222; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (Philadelphia/London: Trinity Press International, 1990) 636; J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997) 638; L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991) 269; Nolland, *Luke*, 869; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984) 279; H. Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus* (San Francisco and London: Harper and Row/Geoffrey Chapman, 1983/1986) 219–20; also Scott, *Parable*, 185; M. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*.

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With images of a *tardy judge* and *seeking justice*, Luke's parable recalls the familiar pattern of *widow* juxtaposed with *injustice*. The parable depicts a widow audaciously securing potential justice from a powerful, self-interested judge.[15] The widow is an expression of powerlessness, even otherness, in the Hebrew prophetic tradition.[16] The corrupt judge is a quintessential expression of systemic oppression. Further, the widow of Luke's parable champions the cause of Yahweh, by taking responsibility for justice. She personifies the prophetic protest in the face of the systemic injustice that has perpetuated her plight. Hence, the prophetic announcement of Yahweh's protection of widows is extended by this parable – but Luke's framing of the story has virtually eclipsed the widow's prophetic voice for justice. In Luke's antecedent widow tradition, the widow is without status or a voice in her community. Ironically, Luke has silenced the story of such a widow by the parable's frame. However, the parable's voice will not be silenced, as indeed the widow of the story will not be silenced.

While Luke has constructed a first literary interpretation (vv. 1, 6–8) of the parable, it need not be the only one, even within Luke's community. Luke's reading cannot determine all subsequent readings of the parable. Within this gospel there are multiple images of justice and transformation of people's social status from which to create alternative readings of the parable that have a high degree of congruence with Lukan themes.

Luke's Magnificat as an interpretative theme for 18.2–5

By resisting claims for the unity of the parable and its problematic interpretation in Luke 18.1–8, alternative possibilities for interpreting vv. 2–5 are no longer framed out of view. For example, striking parallels exist between the parable and the egalitarian themes found in the Magnificat (1.47–55) which Luke

(Sheffield: JSOT, 1989) 2.659–60; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978) 673; J. Lieu, *The Gospel of Luke* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1997) 139. Certainly, in Sir 35.14–18 Luke has all the ingredients necessary for the parable and frame of Luke 18.1–8.

15 For Via, 'the widow's vindication is only suggested, not described as having happened'. D. O. Via, 'The Parable of the Unjust Judge: A Metaphor of the Unrealized Self', *Semiology and Parables: Exploration of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism for Exegesis* (ed. D. Patte; Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1976) 8.

16 Levinas refers to widow, orphan and sojourner as 'the other' of Hebrew tradition: Exod 22.21; Deut 10.18; 24.17, 19–21; 26.12; 27.19; Isa 1.17; 9.16; 10.2; Jer 7.6; 22.3; Ezek 22.7; Zech 7.10; Mal 3.5; Pss 68.6; 109.9; 146.9; Lam 5.3. E. Levinas, 'Time and the Other', *The Levinas Reader* (trans. R. A. Cohen; ed. S. Hand; Oxford and Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 56 n. 22. Kristeva notes that widows are equated with foreigners in Hebrew-Jewish imperatives to justice for the other. J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (trans. L. S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University, 1991) 68.

has not engaged. The Magnificat's vision of justice for the downtrodden is carried forward by the parable in defiant protest at, and resistance to, injustice. Indeed, nowhere in teaching unique to Luke is the ethos of the Magnificat so strikingly depicted. Has Luke mitigated this congruence and framed the parable in a direction that eclipses the parable's resonances with the Magnificat? Both the parable and the Magnificat revolve around a vulnerable, liminal woman.[17] However, Luke has effectively silenced the demand for justice in the parable, and thereby silenced the most effective witness to, and expression of, the Magnificat's vision of justice in this gospel. The parable reiterates the liberation theme signalled in the Magnificat, with its challenge to human power matrices, and found again in Luke's Jesus, who announces the just, inclusive community of God (Luke 1.47–55 correlates with teaching such as Luke 4.18–19; 6.20–6; 7.36–50; 14.12–24; 15.1–2, 11–32; 16.19–31; 19.8–9; 20.46–7).[18]

> He has dispersed the haughty in the thoughts of their hearts
> He has pulled down powerful ones from their thrones
> and elevated the humble
> The hungry he has filled with good things
> and sent away the rich empty. (Luke 1.52–3)

The parable itself (18.2–5) resonates with the Magnificat's egalitarian vision, yet Luke's framing of the parable (vv. 1, 6–8) eclipses this parallel vision, as the table opposite makes clear.

The parallels between the egalitarian vision of the Magnificat and an affront to the powerful in the parable of the audacious widow are compelling. While the widow is a fictive character, continuity exists among literary characters, because all characters in narrative, real or fictional, are entities belonging to a narrative world.[19] The speaker of the Magnificat is also a narrative character who articulates a narrative perspective similar to that demonstrated by the widow in the parable. The resonance between these two characters of Luke's narrative creativity is also

17 Ringe refers to the widow as 'tenacious', and only one of two women in Luke depicted as proactive, not passive. Generally, Luke portrays women as passive and voiceless. S. H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995) 10–12. Also J. Schaberg, 'Luke', *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 275–92.

18 Schuler notes a continuity between the Magnificat, Luke's Nazareth Sermon (4.16b–30), and the Sermon on the Plain (6.20–7.1). P. L. Schuler, 'Luke 1–2', *SBL Seminar Papers* (1992) 90. For Lieu, the Magnificat has its roots in God's 'covenant faithfulness' and favour toward the '*anawim*' ('the humble or poor') who are oppressed by the arrogant (Pss 34.6–10, 18–22; 37.10–11; 69.32–6; 74.18–21). Lieu, *Luke*, 11. Similarly, for Brown the Magnificat has its source in the 'Jewish Christian *Anawim*'. R. E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977) 350–5.

19 For example, Tolbert has noted variegations in narrative portrayal. M.-A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989) 90–126.

Magnificat (1.47–55)	**Parable (18.2–5)**	**Parable frame (18.1, 6–8)**
1a. The Magnificat articulates a challenge to the powerful, and hope for the powerless.	1b. A powerless widow overcomes a powerful judge.	1c. The judge is analogous to God, who will *even more so* respond to persistent petitioning of the faithful.
2a. An ambiguous, liminal woman speaks of righteousness that will prevail against haughty arrogance.	2b. A widow without advocacy, an ambiguous, liminal woman, pursues justice on her own, and in doing so demonstrates the nature of justice.	2c. God will vindicate the elect, even as the unjust judge eventually decides to vindicate the widow. From justice and widow in the parable, the frame moves to eschatological vindication.
3a. The Magnificat articulates an inversion of status, with the powerful brought low and the lowly raised up.	3b. The one without status, a widow, brings dishonour to the one with status, a judge (as a defamation [ὑπωπιάζῃ] of character, v. 5).	3c. The judge, not the widow, becomes the focus of the parable, as retrospectively the frame turns the judge (as an allegorical contrast to God) into the central character of the parable.
4a. The Magnificat signals tangible social change, which is a pervasive theme of the gospel narrative (Luke's beatitudes and woes [6.20–6] depict tangible transformation).	4b. The widow challenges social expectations and images of patriarchal society.	4c. The widow's impetus is virtually silenced by the judge who becomes the nominated source of the parable's teaching (v. 6).
5a. The Magnificat is a vision of egalitarian community, just relationships and social transformation.	5b. The parable is dense with egalitarian sensibilities toward just relationships appropriate to Luke's community.	5c. The parable's frame eclipses the egalitarian and justice themes as an allegory of persistent prayer, in the hope of (uncertain) eschatological vindication (v. 8b).

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an implicit source of dissonance between the parable and its frame. Luke's frame eclipses a paradigmatic character of the gospel's vision of just, inclusive community in which the liminal and powerless assume dignity.[20] This parable's resonance with major themes of the gospel casts doubt over the appropriateness of Luke's framing interpretation of the parable. The parable's surplus of meaning is evident in the extraordinary actions of the widow, given the widow's status as a powerless and voiceless individual. The parable depicts and therefore says more than its immediate frame (vv. 1, 6–8) allows. However, the frame has dominated interpretations of the parable to such a degree that this surplus is rarely engaged without attempting to ameliorate the difficult juxtaposition of the existing parable and frame. The frame has largely eclipsed the central image of the parable – the powerless overcoming the powerful, the voiceless overcoming the guardian of legal discourse, in an expression of justice that is appropriate to Luke's community. Yet a clear resonance exists between the parable and the gospel's themes of inclusion and justice for the marginalized. Enduring dissonance exists between the parable and its immediate frame, which is an inherent risk of framing parables. Within the larger context of this gospel, the parable is encompassed by Luke's teaching on daily discipleship that is expressed through a just, inclusive, compassionate community, an alternative eschatological horizon from which to interpret the parable.[21] The presence of the reign of God in the believing community's midst is signalled in Luke 17.20–1.[22]

The voice of the voiceless

Luke's audacious widow not only has parallels with the Magnificat and its vision of a just community; the parable evokes the same spirit of protest that

20 Green refers to 'status reversal', 'status transposition' and 'counter cultural' community. J. B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 9–12, 15–16, 86, 119–21; *idem*, *The Gospel of Luke*, 100.

21 Individuals daily face eschatological crisis. J. R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 205, 204–8; J. Drury, *Tradition and Design in Luke's Gospel: A Study in Early Christian Historiography* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976) 113.

22 In reference to 'the kingdom of God is among you', Johnson (*Luke*, 363) argues for 'among you' instead of 'within you' (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν, 17.21b). Lieu (*Luke*, 136) suggests that context suggests 'among you' is most appropriate. Maddox notes a 'duality' between present reality and future occurrence in Luke's use of 'kingdom of God', but with the emphasis more on the present (in the ministry of Jesus and its reception) than the future. Good news to the poor is eschatological, and realized in sharing resources with the poor, which is most evident in Luke's beatitudes and woes (6.20–6). R. Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke–Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 132, 105–6. R. C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke–Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 1. The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 64. Lieu (*Luke*, 136) suggests that a distinction exists in Luke between the kingdom of God and 'the coming Son of Man', which is evident in 'audience … imagery and language'.

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generates the Magnificat. Luke does not exploit this pertinent connection to further the theme of justice and the vision of the Magnificat. He appears to have overlooked a tradition in which the widow is also, paradoxically, a liminal voice for justice, a teacher of righteousness in the antecedent sources from which Luke has sketched the gospel's widows.[23] She is a reminder of the community's responsibility to ensure that justice occurs. The widow, who lives precariously in the liminal space between righteousness and unrighteousness in the community, is acutely aware of the meaning of justice. There are paradigmatic widows such as Ruth and Naomi, whose words and actions become an indelible memory as pedagogy toward righteousness. Judith is a widow who delivers her people.[24] In this image, however, the widow is not voiceless, even though this is the experience of most widows. The widow constantly reminds her community of righteousness appropriate to covenant loyalty.[25] She evokes a memory in which the widow shows the way of justice and reminds people of righteousness.

The images of 'corrupt judge' and 'seeking justice' ensure that Luke's widow resonates with the rich intertextual weave of *widow* and *justice* in one of Luke's main sources, the LXX. A widow is a provocative liminal presence in Hebrew narrative, contesting, through the voice of the prophets, the unjust power and wealth matrices of society. Intertextually, the audacious widow of Luke's parable belongs to this tradition, and is not passive and silent but active and disputative as a liminal presence in the narrative. The audacious widow is an ambiguous liminal teacher of justice and righteousness. In narrative terms, then, Luke's widow is a provocative liminal presence in this gospel. In the story, her actions demonstrate the nature of just relationships to those in the community who neglect or resist the call to true discipleship (11.42). Her audacious quest for justice is a pedagogical example delineating the vision of the Magnificat, of the way of just prayer and hope in a world in which many are without advocacy. Luke has seemingly overlooked the paradoxical image of a widow without advocacy being a liminal advocate for, and teacher of, righteousness in the community. In doing so he has eclipsed, or framed out of view, the prophetic, pedagogical role of the widow. A frame is an arbitrary limit on what we are supposed to see, hiding other factors from our view. The framing interpretation and lesson is to be articulated by the

23 Matthew and Benjamin, *Social World*, 132–41.

24 Ibid.,133, 138, 132–41. See Jdt 8.1–36 for Judith's status as widow and righteous leader among the people. 'Judith ... is more than a spokeswoman or representative of the Anawim; she is the *personification* of oppressed Judaism.' Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, 360 n. 61.

25 Covenant loyalty is expressed in communal righteousness (Exod 22.21–2; Deut 10.12–22; 14.28–9; 24.19–22; 27.19). In Luke, '[d]oing justice for widows becomes shorthand for covenantal loyalty among the prophets'. Johnson (*Luke*, 269) cites Mal 3.5; Isa 1.17, 23; 10.2; Jer 5.28 LXX; 7.6; 22.3; Ezek 22.7; Ps 93.6. Scott (*Parable*, 180) notes that *widow* 'in Israel's heritage is a value term demanding response'.

widow's adversary instead: 'And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says"' (v. 6), effectively making the judge the spokesperson for the parable's teaching impetus.

Assuming the role of Yahweh

The parable of the audacious widow not only resonates with, but also extends the vision and imagery of, the Magnificat in the widow's unrelenting confrontation with the judge. Elevation of the powerless by God ('the Mighty One', ὁ δυνατός) in the Magnificat is extended in the parable by a woman's active attrition against the powerful. In the widow tradition that Luke evokes, Yahweh is designated protector and vindicator of widows. The widow of Luke's parable takes Yahweh's responsibility into her own hands. Like the prophets, she champions the cause of justice. While the image of passionate justice and altruistic compassion for widow, orphan and stranger occurs in the covenant, prophetic tradition, this prophetic appeal to compassion for widows and justice for the powerless indicates an inverse reality. Justice and compassion were in fact denied to those on the fringes of society whose rights and dignity were easily exploited. It was necessary to call on Yahweh's care, because few ensured there was justice for the weak and resources for the poor. The equation of Yahweh as protector and widow as powerless was made by the prophetic tradition precisely because, in reality, the equation was not being made in the community (Isa 1.15–17).

In Luke's parable, the widow does not wait for Yahweh to execute justice. She takes the issue into her own hands. She is not helpless before the prevailing injustices of her society. She cannot wait passively and hope for Yahweh's intervention, nor can she depend on the prophetic rhetoric of Yahweh's vindication. The parable affirms the Magnificat's vision of the powerless overcoming the powerful, and dramatically compounds this inversion by installing it through an image of audacious challenge. The judge's resolution to render justice is achieved ultimately, not by prophetic rhetoric in the face of indifference, but by the widow's determination.[26] Her own audacious attrition creates the possibility for vindication. This widow evokes the Magnificat's imagery of 'the powerful being brought down, and the powerless being raised up' (Luke 1.52), and extends it with a striking image of a powerless widow challenging a powerful judge – which is nothing less than a 'slap in the face' (18.5 n NRSV) for the haughty

26 For Via, the introduction of a judge implies a particular direction of the story. Within Israel's tradition of justice, a judge is expected to carry out justice (citing 2 Chron 19.5–7) ('Unjust Judge', 8–9, 13–14). However, the judge does not do this. Neither is the intention to give justice to the widow a return to this mandate, occurring as it does out of convenience and not altruism.

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magistrate.[27] The image of a powerless widow overcoming a powerful judge is also consistent with the general tenor of Luke's creative framing of several parables unique to this gospel, which depict the nature of reversal, or status transformation, for ambiguous, marginal people (7.41–2 [36–50]; 10.29–36; 14.7–11; 14.16–24 [12–24]; 16.19–26; 18.2–5, 9–14).

Luke does not develop the widow's quest for justice, but only uses the images associated with this widow for teaching about perseverance in prayer and eschatological vindication. The widow demonstrates dramatically what is rhetorically and metaphorically attributed to Yahweh by the covenant prophetic tradition.[28] She is vocal while those who can give prophetic voice to her plight are silent. She

27 Various interpretations are given to the aggressive tone of ὑπωπιάζῃ (18.5, διά γε τὸ παρέχειν μοι κόπον τὴν χήραν ταύτην ἐκδικήσω αὐτήν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς τέλος ἐρχομένη ὑπωπιάζῃ με). The etymology of ὑπωπιάζω is consistently equated with the imagery of boxing – 'to strike someone on the face (under the eyes) in such a way that he gets a "black eye" and is disfigured as a result'. K. Weiss, 'ὑπωπιάζω,' *TDNT* 8.590. M. Zerwick and M. Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the New Testament* (unabridged, rev. edn; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981) 253; W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1957) 856, citing Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.11.15, p. 1413a, 20; Plut., *Mor.* 921f.; Diog. L. 6, 89. Hence, ὑπωπιάζῃ is interpreted as 'wear me out', 'blacken my eye', as an image from boxing. Marshall, *Luke*, 673; Donahue, *Parable*, 182–3; C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke*, 638; Scott, *Parable*, 185; K. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke* (combined edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976/1980) 136; Nolland, *Luke*, 868; J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke: X–XXIV* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1985) 1179. On ὑπωπιάζῃ as defamation of character, Fitzmyer suggests 'to blacken the face' (i.e. besmirch my character) (*Luke*, 1179). Also for defamation of character: Marshall, *Luke*, 673; Hendrickx, *Parables*, 222; Nolland, *Luke*, 868. Derrett opts for 'disgrace'. J. D. M. Derrett, 'Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Unjust Judge', *NTS* 18 (1972) 190; Johnson concurs with the image of 'damage to reputation' (*Luke*, 270).

28 McKenna equates God with the widow in her challenge to the judge to see justice prevail. M. McKenna, *Parables: The Arrows of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994) 104–12. Hendrickx points out that the defence of widows in *OT* contexts occurs without delay, whereas the coming of justice to the parable's widow is tardy, this widow being less fortunate than they (*Parables*, 224). However, contrary to Hendrickx, this overlooks the rhetorical nature of such prophetic statements. The frequent reference to God as the source of justice in the Hebrew tradition breaks down in the parable. Whatever is claimed by interpreters for God as the one who vindicates widows, it is the widow in this parable who brings about justice. Johnson (*Luke*, 269) notes the curse of Deut 27.19 should justice not be given to widow, orphaned and sojourner, such justice being a 'shorthand' signature of 'covenantal loyalty' (Mal 3.5; Isa 1.17, 23; 10.2; Jer 5.28 [LXX]; 7.6; 22.3; Ezek 22.7; Ps 93.6). The failure of obligation is to be met by God who will judge in favour of the widow denied justice. Yet the divine commitment to redressing injustice is not met by God in the parable, at least not explicitly, as is promised in the frame (vv. 7–8). The parable's widow brings a crisis for the judge through her own confrontational actions. According to Scott, 'the parable bypasses the implied metaphor of God as a just judge in favour of the widow's action' (*Parable*, 187).

is vocal while God is seemingly silent. In her plight and her audacious resolution, this widow has undertaken no less a role than that of Yahweh, prophetically ascribed defender of widows in their defencelessness. The parable contains an irony in which the widow becomes the champion of her own cause for justice while the Lord, the advocate of widows, of those without a voice, is himself mute.

The interpretative tradition set in progress by Luke's interpretation of the parable neglects this extraordinary transformation of roles. Instead, the widow is often described pejoratively as an example of 'nagging God',[29] while the judge, not the widow, is central to any interpretative engagement with the parable. The parable's dissonance with the immediate frame might indicate that this widow's adversary is not the unjust judge, but the writer's complicit silence with him. Having almost eclipsed the parable's widow, a liminal teacher of justice, the frame constructs an allegory of parousia, prayer, and future vindication of the elect from the risen Lord's instruction to heed the judge's exhortation (18.6, Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ κύριος Ἀκούσατε τί ὁ κριτὴς τῆς ἀδικίας λέγει). Luke has not engaged alternative interpretative possibilities for this widow within the scope and creativity of the gospel's themes, especially those signalled by the Magnificat. His reading or framing silences the voice of an extraordinary parable of attrition and potential justice. He has effectively achieved in the frame what the judge could not achieve in the parable, inadvertently and effectively silencing the widow's voice, and thereby silencing a demonstrative expression of the vision of the Magnificat. Perhaps, then, it could be argued that Luke's framing, and not the judge, is the widow's greatest adversity.

An interpretation of the parable is not here being resisted. Rather, what can be resisted is the idea that the parable is to be read with Luke's particular interpretation as its only or even most congruent reading. While the Magnificat presents an alternative interpretative prism for the parable, it is not the only one, much less the 'original' one. What is apparent, however, is that an alternative, more adequate frame for the parable, derived from significant themes in Luke, is possible. First, the character of Luke's interpretative work (1.1–4) allows for such a possibility; and second, the parable tradition is a site of tensions over interpretation.

29 In their interpretation of the widow's aggressive and continual coming, culminating in the judge's fear of being 'slapped in the face' (ὑπωπιάζῃ), several commentators refer to the widow's courageous actions using the pejorative image of 'nagging'. J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963) 122; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1179; Schweizer, *According to Luke*, 279; Marshall, *Luke*, 670–1; Scott refers to the widow as 'pestering' (*Parable*, 187); Tannehill thinks the widow is 'brash' an '"uppity" woman' who will keep 'battering' the judge (*Luke*, 264).

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Reinterpreting Luke from Luke

Luke's invitation to creative interpretation of the Jesus tradition implies that 'reframing' the parable in the face of dissonance in Luke 18.1–8 is legitimate. Luke encompasses a dialectical, pastoral relationship between tradition and contemporary praxis as reinterpretation and 'word of God', and this 'reinterpretation of tradition' is indicative of Luke's freedom to reinterpret Scripture according to contemporary pastoral challenges in the community.[30] This reinterpretation is primarily focused on just relationships and sharing resources with the poor.[31] This pastoral need to reinterpret tradition can also include the reframing of Luke's parable. Luke's invitation to pedagogical teaching for the community could necessitate the parable of the audacious widow becoming a paradigm of justice. Further, focusing on the resonance between parable and gospel may enable a parable to impinge on the interpretative trajectories of an existing frame in a radically different way. For example, could the widow's audacity be an alternative model of prayer compatible with Luke's theme of justice?[32] Is the widow a demonstrative example of faith in irrepressible righteousness, which is not easy to find (18.7–8)? Certainly, the diverse readings of some parables from one gospel to another imply that any particular interpretative reading, including a first literary interpretation, is a reading that can be reconfigured in new contexts.[33] Luke has proposed an interpretation, but this interpretation cannot constrain the parable to this particular reading, given the themes and content of the gospel. This accounts for the

30 Trainor suggests that Luke is explicitly interpretative in the face of contemporary challenges (prologue), establishing a hermeneutic for further interpretation in the face of new challenges. M. Trainor, *According to Luke: Insights for Contemporary Pastoral Practice* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1992) 86, 22–3, 111–12. Fitzmyer notes that Luke's use of the LXX, both as a source of tradition and as Luke's own appropriation and reinterpretation of the tradition, indicates the writer's perception of 'word of God', as these texts are interpreted as being fulfilled in the phenomenon of Jesus' ministry (24.46–7) and the believing community. J. Fitzmyer, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Luke–Acts', *SBL Seminar Papers* (1992) 535–8.

31 Trainor, *Luke*, 16, 19–20, 28–30, 52–3, 59, 82, 126, 136.

32 According to Levinas, prayer is inseparable from justice and responsibility toward 'the other' in Torah. E. Levinas, 'Prayer Without Demand', trans. S. Richmond, *The Levinas Reader*, 231–4. Lieu connects the yearning for final vindication (salvation) with the yearning for justice in society (*Luke*, 140).

33 M.-A. Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 15–31. Even those readings of parables that have sought to eliminate traces of allegory as secondary are always contingent on some form of context hypothesis, whatever claims might be made for the intention of an author or text. Culler points out that 'meaning is context bound – a function of relations within or between texts – but that context itself is boundless: there will always be new contextual possibilities that can be adduced, so that the thing we cannot do is set limits.' J. Culler, 'In Defence of Overinterpretation', *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*: *Umberto Eco with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, Christine Brooke-Rose* (ed. S. Collini; Cambridge: CUP, 1992) 120–1.

well-documented difficulties concerning the unity of the parable. Luke's trajectory of interpretation has turned the judge, not the widow, into the central spokesperson of the parable as a negative analogy of God. However, this does not appear to be an optimum framing of the parable, given Luke's pervasive themes of justice and his inclusion of the marginalized. Luke has ample ingredients for alternative possible interpretations.

Luke's themes of just, inclusive community, which employ parables to develop these themes for discipleship, are often pitched in the context of human conflict with caricatured opponents of his teaching. Luke 18.2–5 demonstrates the kind of stark contrast in characterization that occurs in Luke. The theological tenor, ethical character, and praxis of the community are focused in images of social change, which demonstrate the nature of appropriate discipleship. Luke's unique parables are catalysts for these rhetorical movements in the narrative, compounding the images of justice and inclusiveness. The protagonists of several parables experience a transformation of their marginalized status, having been isolated or repulsed by Luke's antagonist characters (7.41–2 [36–50]; 10.25–37; 14.7–11, 12–24; 15.1–2, 11–32; 16.14–15, 19–31; 18.2–5, 9–14). Luke's unique story parables are framed against a backdrop of such theological conflict. That other feasible possibilities exist for Luke 18.2–5 is also evident in the use of parables for theological instruction. These parables, framed as they are, provide opportunities for the community to eavesdrop on Luke's theology of the reign of God in their midst, through the soliloquies of the parables' characters.[34] Luke's use of soliloquy or 'interior monologue' often occurs in the face of personal crisis and decision-making in the context of ethical decisions with social implications.[35] Interior monologues enhance the parables' capacity to address issues of ethics and justice within the familiar thoughts and emotions articulated by their characters. In Luke's soliloquies, dimensions of the reign of God are disclosed and destinies are decided. Negative characteristics of leadership, status and wealth are also disclosed through the artistry of caricature and soliloquy.

In Luke 18.2–5, the judge to whom the risen Lord asks the community to listen (v. 6) is portrayed as a negative caricature of justice who acts out of self-interest. The parable of the audacious widow is a paradigmatic image of the most pervasive social themes in Luke's gospel, despite the immediate framing of this parable.

34 Several of Luke's parables have soliloquies (12.16–20; 15.11–32; 16.1–8a; 18.2–5, 9–14), revealing the complex motives of individuals rather than stereotyped attitudes belonging to groups. J. Drury, *The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory* (London: SPCK, 1985) 115; Donahue, *Parable*, 126, 204.

35 P. Sellew, 'Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke', *JBL* 111 (1992) 239–41. In the biblical tradition of soliloquy, characters are presented as a 'divided self'. M. Niehoff, 'Do Biblical Characters Talk to Themselves?: Narrative Modes of Representing Inner Speech in Early Biblical Fiction', *JBL* 111 (1992) 577.

What could be more relevant to Luke's images of justice and its neglect than this politically pointed parable?

Parable as a site of tensions over interpretation

In this article I have argued that Luke has framed the parable of the audacious widow (18.2–5) to less than adequate effect, and suggested that a more likely framing can be found with the Magnificat, in continuity with Luke's use of the widow tradition. It remains to examine the hermeneutical implications of this suggestion.

It is possible for a parable and its frame to have their source in the same literary context and community. Parables peculiar to Luke are precisely that, peculiar to Luke's gospel, with any alternative source always being a hypothetical construction. Dissonance between parable and gospel framing need not be ascribed to separate sources (which remains inaccessible beyond hypotheses), but could indicate a different site of production in the one community. Even if it were anterior, being stitched into a gospel narrative in a particular interpretative way, a parable can clash with the immediate context in which it is embedded, creating dissonance. This raises several questions in relation to parable theory, particularly about the relationship between parable and gospel in the synoptic gospels. If this particular parable has either been created or preserved within a community of gospel tradition, what possible communal tensions does the widely acknowledged dissonance in Luke 18.1–8 reflect at its point of production?[36] Do parables represent alternative sites of social and theological tension in the same writing, with textual tensions and aporias betraying competing discourses and rhetoric at the point of gospel production?[37] Does the parable itself (vv. 2–5) reflect a site of contest over disparity in communal resources and access to just decisions? Does the frame (vv. 1, 6–8) reflect Luke's amelioration of more confrontational solutions to problems in the community, the social volatility of the widow parable being

36 In the context of Luke's parable and frame, the question remains: Why does the unjust judge dominate the interpretative tradition of the parable, a tradition which Luke's framing rhetoric appears to have begun? Why is the widow's provocative voice and 'otherness' displaced, even eclipsed, in the interpretative tradition?

37 One must look at the rhetorical framing of the parable for hints of determinative reading, and at the interpretative tradition for clues to these questions, for 'those readings come to belong to the text; they are interwoven into it. In consequence the text is to be defined as the history of its various readings.' R. Bernasconi, 'No More Stories, Good or Bad: De Man's Criticisms of Derrida on Rousseau', *Derrida: A Critical Reader* (ed. D. Wood; Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) 147. The suppression of otherness also belongs to the history of the text's production and remains a source of dissonance within it. See D. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM, 1988) 66–81; *idem*, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis/SCM, 1994) 68–70.

softened by its framing? Do the acknowledged dissonances between many parables and their gospel frames betray otherness in these texts, and therefore otherness in the production of any text?[38] These questions involve imagining a variety of contexts for the production of a gospel as a phenomenon of a gospel community in tension at various points in its theology and expressions of kerygma. Such tensions may also reflect issues over access to power, resources and discourse. A parable framing is a production of meaning; a parable can be a site of resistance to appropriation. Both phenomena, production of meaning and resistance to appropriation, belong to gospel communities. The quest for meaning exists in tension with alterity (otherness). Appropriation of the unfamiliar in order to frame meaning is met with resistance to assimilation by its other. These are necessary challenges to the way we read any parable today.

Imagining appropriate contexts for integral interpretation will always be hypothetical, framed out of diverse factors. There are important ethical implications here. First, the explicit recognition that positing a context is an interpretation that keeps interpretative presuppositions, methods, and selection of interpretative criteria under scrutiny is ethical in keeping interpretative engagement with texts open to alternative readings. Second, an interpretative framing is an explicit recognition that imagination is inseparable from the task of interpretation. Imagining the dynamics that might exist in the dissonance created by existing frames is an ethical responsibility. It is ethical in the act of imagining possibilities for, and being invitational toward, the other, in this instance the other of Luke's parable interpretation. Existing frames may be contested by the parables they seek to make transparent. Finally, Luke's invitation to creative interpretation generates a possibility of reframing the parable of the audacious widow with his justice themes. The parable can be read through the prism of several synthetic reading possibilities. Indeed, the legitimacy of a parable generating alternative readings from its wider literary context undercuts the claim for definitive readings or framings, even in Luke's framing.[39] An interpretative reframing of Luke 18.2–5 by the Magnificat is a good example of this dynamic. Instead of extracting a parable from a gospel context because its framing is incorrigibly dissonant, this interpretative approach assumes that a parable's theological, social, or political impetus may have been resisted at one point of gospel production, but

38 A text can be shown to contest its own explicit claims, indicating the precarious control an author has over a text. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatri C. Spivak; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1974/1976) 144–64. Therefore, the attempt to frame a text (parable) with an interpretation (frame) can meet with incorrigible dissonance, even if both parable and frame come from the same writer.

39 Narrative context extends the effect of a parable, and therefore the range of its interpretation (Tolbert, *Parables*, 52–4). Hence, the extended context may sustain more adequate interpretations than the immediate frame, *pace* the thesis of this article.

is nevertheless affirmed in other parts of the same writing, suggesting the diversity and contentious character of such contexts of literary production. The parable of the audacious widow, with its challenge to status quo values in the widow's protest against injustice, her uncanny triumph over the judge, and the parable's framing dissonances, suggests this thesis.

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