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The function of the Magnificat in its narrative setting: An affective analysis

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Abstract

In analysing conspicuous poetry placed in narrative contexts of the Old Testament, James Watts states that authors used the inset poetry to achieve certain distinguishable effects. Generally, inset poetry in the Bible does not have an impact on the narrative plot, so they likely have other purposes. Watts contends that inset poetry serves to "actualize" accompanying stories, interpreting them, and making them more real by involving the audience in the emotional components of the story. Using Watts's theory of actualization, this study will examine the Magnificat as inset poetry, demonstrating how the affective components function to actualize the preceding narrative (Lk 1:1–45).

Keywords

emotions; Magnificat; New Testament hymns; poetry

This study will examine the Magnificat[1] (Luke 1:46-55) based on James Watts's proposal that inset poetry[2] in narrative settings function to actualize the stories they accompany.[3] Actualization through inset poetry

1 I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for the *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* for their suggestions and comments.

2 The Magnificat is hybrid in the sense that it has features of some psalms of praise in the canonical Psalter. However, it is not as well-structured or built with the same amount of parallelism, making it more like some of the hymnic compositions of late pre-Christian Jewish literature found in 1 Maccabees, the Qumran Thanksgiving Psalms, or Qumran War Scroll.

3 James W. Watts, "'This Song': Conspicuous Poetry in Hebrew Prose," in *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose,* eds. Johannes C. de Moor and Wilfred G. E. Watson, Alter

involves interpreting the accompanying narratives and making them more real by involving the implied audience[4] in the emotional components of the story. To my knowledge, no study focuses specifically on this type of examination of the Magnificat.[5] I will proceed in three steps. First, I will describe James Watts's view of the purpose of inset poetry. Second, I will explicate the affective components of the first strophe of the Magnificat, demonstrating how they function to actualize the preceding narrative (Lk 1:1–45). The affective components include the vocabulary, the allusions to Israel›s sacred texts, and the rhythm, Finally, I will similarly examine the second strophe.

The function of inset hymns

In analysing conspicuous poetry placed in narrative contexts of the Old Testament, James Watts states that authors used the inset poetry to "achieve certain distinguishable effects."[6] Generally, inset poetry in the Bible does not have an impact on the narrative plot, so they likely have other purposes.[7] A theory proposed by Watts is that the poems serve to actualize the narratives they accompany, making them more real for listeners by involving them in the emotions of the moment.[8] Watts claims the reason authors placed inset poems into the mouths of characters was that it allowed the writers to expand the "affective impact of their stories

Orient und Altes Testament 42 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 352.

4 The audience Luke is attempting to persuade. The recipients of his Gospel.

5 Using Watts's study on inset poetry in the Hebrew Bible, Scot Becker examines the Magnificat as it functions to encourage participation by listeners. Becker argues that listeners can actualize Mary's prayer as their own prayer. The direct speech makes it easy for a listener to reuse her words, seeing themselves in continuity with the Israel of the Lukan story ("The Magnificat Among the Biblical Narrative-Set Psalms," in *Exegetical Studies*, vol. 2 of *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality,* eds. H. Daniel Zacharias and Craig A. Evans, The Library of New Testament Studies [New York: T&T Clark, 2009], 60–73). This study builds on Becker's work, providing a more robust examination of the techniques employed to engage the audience.

6 Watts, "This Song," 345. Some of the passages that Watts identified as inset Psalms are: 1 Ex 15:1–18; Deut 32: 1–43; Jdg 5; 1 Sam 2:1–10; 2 Sam 22; Isa 38: 9–20; Jonah 2:3–10; Dan 2:20–23; Luke 1:46–55, 68–79, 2:29–32.

7 Watts, "This Song," 353.

8 Watts, "This Song," 352.

without compromising the objective attitude of the narrators."[9] Typically these poems are located at the climax of the plot to provide thematic commentary.[10] Watts goes on to contend that since reading in the ancient world usually involved reading out loud, the shift in genre from story to poem may have invited participation by the audience.[11] Watts compares the function of these hymns to "Broadway-style musical theatre."[12] He writes that, unlike prose dialogue, which is spoken between characters and passively observed by the audience, the songs are often performed facing the spectators and addressed to them, establishing a more direct relationship between actors and the audience.[13]

Maurice Gilbert has analysed Wisdom of Solomon 9 as an inset Psalm between the narratives of chapters 7–8 and chapter 10 using the work of Jean-Pierre Sonnet.[14] Sonnet proposes five functions of inset poetry in a biblical narrative.[15] All these functions are evident to some degree in the Magnificat. First, inset poetry serves to connect with and be relevant to the reader by extending the time span of the events being described into the distant future (cf. Lk 1:48). Second, inset poetry stresses the divine activity more than prose, conveying the transcendence of God's action and the speaker's experience of communion with God. This often leads to

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9 Watts, "This Song," 348, 352.

10 Watts, "This Song," 354.

11 Watts, "This Song," 346.

12 James W. Watts, "Song and the Ancient Reader." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 22, no.1 (Spring 1995): 139. In the St. Matthew Passion and the St. John Passion Oratorios composed by J.S. Bach, the soloist, in the role of a narrator, sings excerpts of scripture from the Gospels. The choir (one could say the congregation) responds to the events sung by the narrator. This analogy is more fitting than the "Broadway-style music theater" comparison Watts used to describe the function of poetry within a narrative plot. (I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer for the Stellenbosch Theological Journal for this insight. All mistakes are my own).

13 Watts, "Song and the Ancient Reader," 139–140.

14 Maurice Gilbert, "Wisdom 9, an "Inset Psalm," in *On Wings of Prayer: Sources of Jewish Worship: Essays in Honor of Professor Stefan C. Reif on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Nuria Calduch-Benages, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 75–80.

15 Jean-Pierre Sonnet, "'C'est moi qui, pour YHWH, c'est moi qui veut chanter' (Jg 5,3). La poésie lyrique au sein d'un récit biblique," in *Analyse narrative et Bible. Deuxième colloque international du RRENAB, Louvain-la-Neuve, avril 2004,* eds. Camille Focant and André Wénin, Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium 191 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 373–387. As noted by Gilbert ("Wisdom 9," 76–79).

expressions of gratitude for the divine action (cf. Lk 1:46–47). Third, the activity of God is intensified in the poetry in comparison with prose, which tends to maintain the suspense (cf. Lk 1:51–52). Fourth, poetry indirectly introduces themes that are to appear later in the narrative.[16] Finally, inset poetry in narrative allows the character fuller expression of his or her interior emotions, which is not as common in prose (cf. Lk 1:46–47).

Specifically discussing the hymns in the infancy narratives, David Garland states that they poetically interpret what is going on in the story and directly engage the audience to join in the celebration.[17] However, Garland does not explain how this works. What follows is an affective analysis of the Magnificat, appraising how the emotions invoked in the song help the Lukan audience to interpret the preceding narrative in Luke 1:1–45, while also identifying the methods used by the author to gain audience involvement.

Affective analysis of the first strophe: vocabulary, allusions, and rhythm

For purposes of this essay, I refer to the author of the Magnificat as Mary, aware there is debate on the origin of the hymn.[18] I will examine Mary's song based on a division of the composition into two major strophes (Luke 1:46b–50; 1:51–55).[19] Even though Luke does not use any of the more common Greek words indicating that Mary sang her lyrics (e.g. ᾄδω, ᾠδή,

16 E.g., Luke 1:52–53 introduces the reversal of conditions theme, which for example appears in Luke 6:20–22.

17 David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2011), 120.

18 Three main theories have been suggested for the hymn's origin: Mary, the evangelist Luke, or a pre-Lukan hymn. Of these, the last seems the most likely. It is hard to understand why Mary or Luke would have composed a song that does not mention the incarnation. More specifically, with the strong Jewish flavour of the hymn, lacking any Christological themes, the song was probably from a non-Christian pious Jewish community. Perhaps this community was being oppressed and waiting their vindication by God as reflected in some of the language of the poem. See Darrell L. Bock for a summary of the various proposed origins of the hymn (*Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50,* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994], 142–145).

19 For a defence of this structure see John Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20,* Word Biblical Commentary 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 64. For other suggested structures and their

ψάλλω, ψαλμός, ὑμνέω, ὕμνος), writers recognized that speech, especially when pronounced in the resonant and rhythmical way that orators and actors used, had all the properties of song. In this sense, Mary's words can be called a song. The words: song, hymn, praise, canticle, and poem will be used interchangeably in this study to refer to the Magnificat.

The process of identifying the affective content of a text begins with locating any words or phrases whose content is implicitly or explicitly affective. Explicit affective language is present in the term ἠγαλλίασεν (rejoiced exceedingly). Joy is an emotion that consists of a pleasant feeling and the belief that there exists a positive state of affairs. These feelings can find expression in poetry, elated vocabulary, gestures, dance, celebration, humour, music, laughter, song, and gratitude. For Mary, her joy finds expression in poetry and elevated vocabulary.

Another explicit emotive term is Ἰδοὺ ("behold"; Luke 1:48b), often functioning to make a speech livelier.[20] Mary's expression "For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (ESV) interjects her poem with an air of excitement. Roger Van Otterloo contends that Ἰδοὺ indicates Mary's surprise that such an ordinary girl as her would be so honored to be the recipient of future benedictions.[21]

More implicit vocabulary of emotions that underscore the level of passion in the Magnificat are the phrases ἡ ψυχή μου (Luke 1:46b; my soul) and τὸ πνεῦμά μου (my spirit; Luke1: 47). "My soul" and "my spirit" are the subjects which offer praise to God. Often commentators claim that these phrases are Hebrew surrogates for "I" (citing for example, Gen 27:4, 25; Ps 34:1–3).[22] While this is true, it overlooks the important fact that in

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proponents see Samuel Terrien, *The Magnificat: Musicians as Biblical Interpreters (*New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 6–7.

20 François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50,* Hermeneia – a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002], 61. See the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (2010), s.v. "ἰδού."

21 Roger Van Otterloo, "Towards and Understanding of 'Lo' and 'Behold': Functions of Ἰδοὺ and ἴδε in the Greek New Testament." *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 2 (1988): 54.

22 E.g. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 366.

ancient Near Eastern cultures, the ψυχή (soul) was the place of feeling. Its prominent meaning in Greek tragedy was that faculty in human nature which feels and reacts to sensations and emotions.[23] For example, in *Hippolytus* (159–60), the chorus inquires if the queen's soul (ψυχά) is in grief over her misfortunes. Here the term refers to the emotional self. In Matthew12:18 the ψυχή of God takes good pleasure in his servant. Also, when accused of being drunk, Hannah replies that she is pouring out her ψυχήν (soul) before the Lord (1 Sam 1:15 LXX). In Matthew 26:38, Jesus's soul [ψυχή] is deeply grieved.[24] Similarly, the term "spirit" (πνεῦμά) like ψυχή, in contrast to the intellectual νοῦς ("mind"), designates the affective faculty of a person (e.g. Ps 106:33 (105:33 LXX); Dan 2:3 LXX; Acts 17:16). By stating that the source of Mary's joy originates from her πνεῦμά and ψυχή, the very core of her emotional center, Luke's audience is made aware of the depth of her passion. As Euripides asserted in *Suppliant Women* (180–183), if a poet wants to convey joy to his audience, he must feel joy himself.

Further conveying the joyful nature of Mary's hymn is the possibility that the Septuagint version of Isaiah 61:10 stands in the background of Mary's rejoicing.[25] Isaiah 61:10 has "ἀγαλλιάσθω ἡ ψυχή μου ἐπὶ τῷ κυρίῳ" which is similar to Luke 1:46 (ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ). Additional support that Mary alludes to Isaiah 61:10 is reinforced by a couple other factors related to the wider context of Isaiah 61.[26] First, Isaiah 61 describes that God's people will experience a restorative reversal, creating thematic echoes with Mary's song (see esp. Isa 61:1–7; cf. Lk 1:48, 51–53). Second, Isaiah 61 also specifically highlights joy as an appropriate response to and/or outcome of such a reversal (see esp. 61:7, εὐφροσύνη). This is an affective parallel with the Magnificat (cf. Lk 1:47). A final reason for understanding

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23 William B. Stanford, *Greek Tragedy, and the Emotions: An Introductory Study.* Routledge Revivals (1983 repr., New York: Routledge, 2014), 21–22.

24 For other examples where ψυχή references the emotional centre of a person see John 12:27, Acts 2:27 and Hebrews 10:38.

25 Julie Nicole Newberry also noted the connection to Isaiah 61:10 ("You Will Have Joy and Gladness: A Narrative Analysis of the Conditions that Lead to Lukan Joy" [Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2020], 248).

26 These factors are noted by Newberry, 'You Will Have Joy," 248.

that Mary is alluding to Isaiah 61:10 is that the same chapter of the book (Isa 61:1–2) is quoted at some length later in Luke's Gospel (Lk 4:18).

In addition to the parallel with Isaiah 61:10 the Magnificat contains several other echoes from Israel's sacred texts.[27] Nearly every expression by Mary has an Old Testament parallel.[28] During highly emotional occasions, biblical figures often quoted Scripture. For example, in Luke 23:46, Jesus cries out with a loud voice, saying "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Ps 31:5, [Ps 30:6 LXX], NRSV). In another example, in one of the early church's fervent prayers (Acts 4:24–30), they recite Psalm 2:1.[29] It is likely that those in the Lukan audience hearing Mary's words would have understood her use of Scripture as typical for expressing passionate feelings.

Beyond the terminology related to joyful emotions and the plethora of references to joy-themed Israelite texts, there also are several structural and phonetic elements that aid in expressing various feelings. Rhythm can be exploited by a writer for its emotional affect. Rhythm can be emotionally affective by direct action.[30] Some examples of direct effects are the use of a long rhythmic line to express caution, calmness or melancholy, and lines with fewer meters for eagerness, agitation, and excitement.[31]

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27 Gen 29:32; Deut 10:21; 1 Sam 1:11, 2:1–2, 7–8; 2 Sam 22:51; Pss 25:5 (LXX), 35:9, 89:13, 98:3, 103:17, 107:9, 111:9, 113:7; Job 12:19; Isa 41:8–9; Ezek 21:31 (26); Mic 7:20; Zeph 3:17. See also 1QM XIV 10–11; Sir 10:14; Pss. Sol. 10:4, 13:11; 4 Ezra 9:45. See Raymond Brown for more details (*The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, 2nd ed.* Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1993], 358–360).

28 While there are not direct quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the Magnificat, studies of the methods of education in the first century Mediterranean world suggest that the emphasis on memorizing texts combined with the inherent difficulties involved in checking citations in scrolls, perhaps led to the construction of texts without deep concern about precise citation from the Scriptures (David, M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* [New York: Oxford University, 2005], 230–231).

29 See also Matthew 27:46 (Ps 22:1 [21:2 LXX]).

30 Stanford, *Greek Tragedy*, 65.

31 Stanford, *Greek Tragedy*, 63.

Robert Tannehill has noted a rhythm present in the lines of the poem that is marked by small sense units, which include a major word and its adjuncts.[32] A noun, a verb, or a participle forms the core of a foot (one rhythmic unit) and the conjunctions, articles, prepositions, and generally the personal pronouns attach themselves to these more important words. It is natural to bring this meter out by reading rhythmically. A line is normally a complete sentence, and the small units rhythmically correspond to those in parallel lines even when they do not correspond in meaning. I will use Tannehill's marked accents in the discussion that follows.

(46b) Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχή μου τὸν κύριον,

(47) καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρί μου,

(48) ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ.

ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,

(49) ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός.

καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ,

(50) καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.

(46b) Magnifies does my soul the Lord,

(47) and rejoiced[33] exceedingly did my spirit in God my Saviour,

(48) for he has looked kindly on the lowliness of his servant,

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32 Robert C. Tannehill, "The Magnificat as Poem." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 269–270. Another fruitful approach to the Magnificat would be to employ the method of scansion, organizing its lines into feet of stressed and unstressed syllables and showing the major pauses. Barbara Eckman has applied this to the hymn in Philippians 2:6–11 ("A Quantitative Metrical Analysis of the Philippians Hymn." *New Testament Studies* 26, no. 2 (January 1980): 258–266).

33 Various proposals have been submitted for the use of the aorist ἠγαλλίασεν. For example, Hugo Méndez argues that the poet has introduced an aorist in the parallel couplets, fearing that an excess of identical elements will create an uninteresting repetition ("Semitic Poetic Techniques in the Magnificat: Luke 1:46–47, 55." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 564). François Bovon understands the verb tenses to represent an actual past and present reality. So, Mary's present praise (μεγαλύνει) draws on past joy (ἠγαλλίασεν, aorist) (Lk 1:60).

for behold, from now on, I will be blessed by all generations.

(49) For he has done for me great things the Mighty One,

and holy is his name.

(50) His mercy is from generation to generation for all who fear him.[34]

The lines of the first strophe primarily exhibit a pattern of three rhythmic feet per line. I will discuss the divergency from this pattern later in the study. In addition to the repeating three beat rhythm, the first two lines are set in synonymous parallelism (Lk 1:46–47).[35] Here the repetition of similar words and phrases (my soul/my spirit, magnifies/rejoiced, Lord/God) and the redundancy in the grammatical form (verb/first person singular noun/phrase referencing God) in part provides the two verses with a certain rhythm. Parallelism can also be characterized as rhythm of thought, the balancing of ideas in a structured or systematic way.[36] If the listeners of Luke's Gospel had not understood the meaning of the words of Mary's song, they still would have heard the rhythm generated by the rhythmic sense units and the parallelism, allowing them to embody the feelings characterized by the pattern. Research into the cognitive effects of rhythm suggests that "rhythmic patterns lock in motor responses at the neurological level, and usually produce emotions below the level of consciousness."[37] As Bruce McConachie states, embodied rhythms involve much more than toe tapping, but that may be one outward expression

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34 My translation.

35 True parallelism, traditionally called "synonymous parallelism," is a twofold statement of a single idea or concept that employs near synonymous or related vocabulary in a symmetrical fashion. "Synthetic parallelism" is a structure in which the second line supplements the first. Antithetic parallelism is identified when parallel statements are placed in opposition to one another.

36 G.P. Luttikhuizen, "The Poetic Character of Revelation 4 and 5," in *Early Christian Poetry*, eds. J. Den Boeft, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 16.

37 Bruce A. McConachie, *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 68. Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg say that repetitive auditory stimulation, under proper conditions, can drive neuronal rhythms in the brain, leading to the production of an intense pleasurable and ineffable experience (*The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*, Theology and the Sciences, ed. Kevin J. Sharpe [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], 89–90).

of the complex neurological and physical response.[38] Rhythm also has the potential to bind actor and spectator together. Oliver Sacks states that rhythm turns listeners into participants, makes listening active and motoric, and synchronizes the brains and minds of all who participate.[39] It is very difficult to remain detached, to resist being drawn into the rhythm of chanting or singing.

Along with moving the listener from a passive to active role, Pseudo-Longinus notes another feature of rhythm. In discussing the sublime or that which produces exalted language and has the effect of being dignified and filled with grandeur, he points to the aural effects of rhythm ([*Subl.*] 39–42). The rhythms of the first strophe intensify the expression of Mary's joy and gives this part of the poem a feeling of gravitas.[40] While the tone of the praise is joyful, with bursts of excitement (Lk 1:48b and 49b), it is also respectful, restful, and dignified. Alfred Plummer has rightly observed that based on the text, Mary's expression is described as calmer and more majestic than Elizabeth's words.[41] Luke tells us that Mary spoke (εἶπεν; Luke 1:46) her praise. In contrast, Elizabeth's blessing on Mary was "sounded out in great shout" (ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλῃ; Lk 1:42). Mary's hymn is expressed calmly – still exuberant, but under control.

Despite the fact verses 46b and 47 exhibit synonymous parallelism, the second statement is not a simple repetition of the first. Verse 47 interprets the content of the first line: the "Lord" (κύριος) is God, who is Mary's saviour. The reason for Mary's praise is marked in verses 48a and 49a with the conjunction ὅτι (for) – God, her saviour, has looked favourably on her lowliness and done great things for her. There are several views as to the exact nature of Mary's salvation. For Darrell Bock, the entire hymn lays out the nature of deliverance as eschatological reversal and fulfilled promises

38 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 68.

39 Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 244–245.

40 Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 85.

41 Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke,* International Critical Commentary, ed. Alfred Plummer (1902; repr., New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 30.

to Israel.[42] Based on the term ταπείνωσιν (lowliness; Lk 1:48), some see her salvific joy as a reference to the reversal of her barrenness (cf. Gen 16:11, 29:31–32; 1 Sam 1:11) or a reversal of her social or economic status.[43] It is noteworthy that Mary came from a culture in which virginity was valued primarily for its future fertility potential. [44] Mary was in a state of lowliness in the sense that she "had no husband," and was a virgin (Lk 1:27). So, if virginity was considered a "low estate," then Mary's joy stems from the elevation by God through miraculous fertility.[45] Despite these views on the motives for Mary's joyful praise, Mathias Nygaard is correct to note that the title "saviour" for God, indicates both Mary's need for salvation and where that salvation can be found.[46] This part of the song models ancient Jewish hymns that were sung by people, thanking God for saving them given their weaknesses.[47]

In the closing lines of the first strophe, verse 49b has only two rhythmic feet, causing Mary's acknowledgement of God's holiness to be more animated and spoken with a faster tempo than the previous lines that have more stresses. In contrast, verse 50 contains four feet, a single long clause, slowing down the tempo.[48] The expansion of the rhythm causes the listener to focus more on the content. Here the content is important for the audience because the mercy shown to Mary can be also experienced by those who revere God and recognize his sovereignty. The canticle's praise has moved from the personal level to a more corporate one – the events Mary is celebrating have universal relevance.

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42 Bock, *Luke*, 150–151.

43 See Bovon, *Luke*, 60–61.

44 Kindalee Pfremmer De Long, *Surprised by God: Praise Responses in the Narrative of Luke-Acts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 167–168.

45 De Long, *Surprised by God,* 168.

46 Mathias Nygaard, *Prayer in the Gospels: A Theological Exegesis of the Ideal Pray-er,* Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 114.

47 Herman Hendrickx, *Infancy Narratives*, Studies in the Synoptic Gospels (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 80.

48 Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, T&T Clark Biblical Languages (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 11.

Conclusion to the affective analysis of the first strophe

The first strophe is characterized by vocabulary communicating a deep passionate joy and excitement. Much of the language has been acquired from Israel's joyful sacred texts. Pseudo-Longinus felt that true emotive words naturally elevate a listener, filling them with joy and pride, giving them the sense that the words heard were one's own words ([*Subl.*] 7.2).[49]

The tempo of the first strophe provides the poem with a calm, respectful, and dignified tone – one fitting for talking about the divine. Mary's joy-filled and dignified expression conveys proper piety that is to be exemplified by those hearing the words. The Magnificat's rhythms also help make the listener's words their own. Poetic rhythm can have the same effect as the rhythmic beat of music.[50] It involves the audience more fully in the experience of hearing. They respond not only with their mind but also with their feelings and body – rhythm invites the whole person to step into its meaning.[51]

Affective analysis of the second strophe: vocabulary, allusions, and rhythm

The second strophe portrays intense conflict.

(51) Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν

(52) καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινούς,

(53) πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς.

(54) ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,

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49 Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius, *Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, and W. Rhys Roberts, rev. Donald A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library 199 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1995), 179.

50 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 270.

51 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 270.

(55) καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

(51) He has displayed [52]the strength of his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

(52) He has toppled the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

(53) the ones hungering, he has filled with good things, and the wealthy ones he sent away empty.

(54) He has helped Israel, his servant in remembrance of his mercy,

(55) just as he spoke to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.[53]

The intensity of the second strophe is in part the result of strong verbs of action, which take the initial position in the three lines of verses 51 and 52a (Ἐποίησεν [displayed], διεσκόρπισεν [scattered], καθεῖλεν [toppled]). In these lines both the conjunctions and the articles are eliminated, giving even greater prominence to the action verbs.[54] Further, the phrase κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ (the strength of his arm) is used elsewhere to refer to God's war-like activity against Israel's enemies.[55] All these factors give the second strophe a militant tone that are characteristic of victory songs vocalized following a war triumph.[56] The victory song tradition is

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52 There is debate about how the aorist verbs are to be understood. Suggested options include: 1) they are pointing to the immediate past (events in the plot), 2) more distant past history, 3) gnomic attestations of God's usual conduct, 4) ingressive aorists, signalling the beginning of eschatological events, 5) or they are influenced by the prophetic perfect in Hebrew, and thus, are pictures of the future (Bovon, *Lk 1*, *64*). My view is that they are describing more distant history, affirming that God can do the same mighty acts in the future.

53 My translation.

54 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 273.

55 E.g. Ex 6:6; 15:16; Deut 4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 9:29, 26:8; 2 Kgs 17:36; Pss 77:15, 89:10; 98:1; Jer 32:21; Ezek 20:34.

56 Some scholars who have noted the militant tone in the Magnificat include: David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988), 126–149; Stephen Hultgren, "4Q521 and Luke's Magnificat and Benedictus," in *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament*, ed. Florentino García Martínez (Leiden: Brill,

associated with Israelite women, arising out of the ancient Near Eastern custom of women greeting their victorious armies with songs and dances (e.g. Exod 15:20–21; Jdg 5: 1–31; 1 Sam 18:6–7; 2 Sam 1:20).[57] Victories by inferior Israelite forces, attributed to God, were mostly intoned by females[58] greeting the victors, either human or divine.[59] It was also women's role to spread the good news of triumph (e.g. Ps 68:11–12).[60]

In the second strophe of the poem, the words are also more graphic than the first. According to Pseudo-Longinus, this is achieved using "visualizations" (φαντασίαι). For Longinus, φαντασίαι describes passages where the writer has been inspired by strong emotion to the point that he visualizes what he wishes to describe and then brings it vividly before the eyes of the audience ([*Subl.*] 15). Demetrius stated that ἐνάργεια, the art of vivid expression, the ability to bring about what is said before the eyes of the audience, can be achieved in part, using harsh sounding letters (*Eloc.* 208–209). Thus, in verses 51 and 52 it may be intentional that Luke has used guttural kh (ch) sounds in the words which describe God's forceful actions (κράτος, βραχίονι, διεσκόρπισεν, καρδίας, καθεῖλεν).[61]

2009), 119–132; J. Massyngberde Ford, "Zealotism and the Lukan Infancy Narratives," Novum Testamentum 18(4, October 1976):280–292; Amanda C. Miller, *Rumors of Resistance: Status Reversals and Hidden Transcripts in the Gospel of Luke* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2014), esp. 89–132. The following songs are listed together as those that focus on singing the praises of the divine warrior after victory. They are generically similar on the basis of content, setting, motifs and language (e.g. Num 21:27–30; Exod 15; Jdg 5; Pss 18, 21, 24, 29, 47, 68, 76, 96, 97, 98, 114, 124, 125; Hab 3). These references are noted by Tremper Longman III ("Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 3 (September 1984):274. For additional support for the militant tone in the infancy narratives see David Seal, who argues that the angelic announcement to the shepherds (Lk 2:13–14), is cast in the form of a military acclamation by the divine army ("Communication in the Lukan Birth Narrative (Lk 2:1–20)." *Southeastern Theological Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 33–50).

57 The reference to Judges 5 includes a male singer in addition to a female.

58 References to victory songs that do not specifically name women as the singers are Numbers 21:14–15, 27–30.

59 Carol Meyers, "Mother to Muse: An Archaeomusicological Study of Women's Performance in Ancient Israel," in *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam, 12-13 May 1997,* eds. Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten, Studies in Theology and Religion (Leiderdorp: Deo, 1999), 72.

60 Mark S. Smith, "Warfare Song as Warrior Ritual," in *Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts,* eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 18 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 169.

61 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 273.

Along with the militant vocabulary, the second strophe exhibits its own rhythmic pattern. Tannehill states, when verbs reoccur in the same position, a kind of rhythm of clauses develops, even though the clauses may vary somewhat in length.[62] The rhythm of the lines is accented by pairs of rhyming words.[63] Thus, θρόνων and ἀγαθῶν at the ends of verses 52a and 53a, respectively, rhyme, while the same is true for ταπεινούς and κενούς at the ends of verses 52b and 53b. Verses 52 and 53 are also forceful because each contain strong antithetic parallelism and together, they are structured in a chiastic form to emphasize God's dramatic reversal of fortunes.[64]

A He has toppled the powerful

B and lifted up the lowly

B' the ones hungering he has filled with good things

A' and the wealthy ones he sent away empty.

In verse 55 there is a single long clause, much longer than verse 54b, making it more significant. This longer line slows the poem's pace slightly, giving it added weight.[65] Depending on one's assessment of the sentence structure in verse 55, the long clause underscores either God's eternal promise or his everlasting faithfulness.[66]

Conclusion to the affective analysis of the second strophe

The animated, graphic, forceful, dramatic, and militant mode of presentation of the triumphant divine warrior in the second half of the poem, may have had the effect of creating a sense of awe in the spectators. By putting the work of the divine warrior on display, it allows the listeners

62 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 268.

63 Mary Catherine Nolan, OP, "The Magnificat, Canticle of a Liberated People: A Hermeneutical Study of Luke 1:46–55. Investigating the World Behind the Text by Exegesis; The World in Front of the Text by Interpretive Inquiry" (Ph.D. diss., University of Dayton, 1995), 27.

64 The chiasm is noted by John T. Carroll (*Luke: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster, 2012], 51).

65 Tannehill, "The Magnificat," 271.

66 See Bovon, for an explanation of the two options (*Luke 1*, 63).

to celebrate in the victory.[67] Regardless of one's view on the aorist verbs in these verses,[68] by reading them in the past tense it lets the listener view the events as having occurred. Therefore, as past events, they are fitting for festive commemoration. The performance of a victory song has the potential to merge Mary's joy with the performer's and the audience's, creating a community of shared celebrants.

Summary and conclusion

Using emotive words and phrases, allusions to Israel's celebratory texts, parallelism, and other rhythmic patterns, the Magnificat interprets the previously narrated two miraculous pregnancies. The familial joy over the news is expected but, the scope of the divine triumph expressed in the song in terms of both the magnitude of its accomplishments and the reach of those who will be affected by these achievements goes well beyond the families of Mary and Elizabeth. As Herman Hendrickx has noted, the Magnificat is one of the most revolutionary documents.[69] It describes a moral victory (scattered the proud; Luke 1:51), a political triumph (toppled kings from their thrones; Lk 1:52),[70] a social revolution (reduced the mighty and exalted the lowly; Lk 1:52), and finally, an economic victory (filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty; Lk 1:53) God desires and carries out this comprehensive overthrow because injustice prevails in all these realms. The birth announcements of both John and Jesus signifies the end of many privileges and oppressions.[71] For many this is a celebration of magnitude. Mary models the authentic response to divine grace and mercy: communal, joyful, reverent praise and confident proclamation in the ultimate triumph of God.

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67 William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 56.

68 See footnote 52.

69 Hendrickx, *Infancy*, 84.

70 The political revolution was not noted by Hendrickx.

71 Bovon, *Luke 1*, 63.

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