ARTICLE

FROM NARRATIVE IN PRINT TO NARRATIVE IN PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the paradigm shift from analysing the biblical narratives in a modern print medium to the exploration of biblical narratives as witnesses to oral performances in an ancient oral/aural medium. Our modern print medium assumes a single author writing a fixed text to be read in private and in silence by individual readers. The ancient Mediterranean media world presumes the ethos of a predominantly oral culture, a strong role for memory, the activity of scribes writing on scrolls, and performances to communal audiences. All these factors work to shape communal identity. The article then offers examples from the Gospel of Mark of various features of an oral performance, how oral performances may have generated a rhetorical impact, and how we might use insights from such studies to reinterpret Mark in an oral ethos.

Keywords: biblical narrative; communal audience; delivery; emotions; memory; oral ethos; performance; print medium; rhetorical impact; scrolls; story world

PART 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE CRITICISM

Biblical performance criticism is the study of the oral telling of traditions in the biblical world. It seeks to re-imagine ancient Israel and the early church as predominantly oral and memory cultures, to construct scenarios of ancient performances as means to interpret anew the traditions of the Bible, to reconsider the disciplines we use to study the Bible so as to take account of orality, and to develop steps in a process of performance analysis of biblical texts. Biblical performance criticism is quite eclectic and takes a variety of forms.

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What follows is an overview of performance criticism as a contrast to narrative criticism as it has been used to study narrative in print (for more detail, see Rhoads 2015; Rhoads and Dewey 2014). The essay uses examples from the Gospel of Mark as a performance in an ancient context. In this essay the pertinent time period under consideration is the first and early second century. The article[1] therefore, examines the paradigm shift from analysing the biblical narratives in a modern print medium to the exploration of biblical narratives as witnesses to oral performances in an ancient oral/aural medium.

NARRATIVE CRITICISM

Narrative criticism is a foundational discipline for performance criticism. Narrative criticism studies the New Testament writings, especially the Gospels, as stories of whole cloth.

In contrast to source and redaction criticism, which fragmented the Gospels in search of history, narrative criticism has appreciated the coherence of the final form of each Gospel as a whole—overall plot, characters, settings, consistent standards of judgment, and literary strategies by which each Gospel is composed, along with the story's rhetorical impact (Powell 1990; Resseguie 2005; Rhoads 2004b, 63–94; Rhoads 2011, 107–124; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie 2012).

A key to narrative criticism is the concept of the *story world*. The point is not only that there is a coherent sequence of literary features and plot developments, but rather that together these narrative features create a story world that the reader enters into and experiences. As such, rather than being simply a vehicle for transmitting a message, a Gospel has value as a story in its own right capable of affecting the minds and hearts of its readers.

For contemporary readers to understand the story world of a Gospel, they must be familiar with the historical time period and location in which that Gospel was written. In other words, the story world of a Gospel can only be interpreted faithfully in the context of the society, culture, and historical circumstances of the first century. Familiarity with this background knowledge is different from reconstructing history from the text. Rather, it is making use of knowledge of the period to understand the story world.

Narrative criticism has been recognised as a major advance in biblical studies. So where is the problem? The difficulty with narrative criticism, along with biblical studies in general, is that scholars have most often interpreted the Gospels with the

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media assumptions of contemporary print culture (Kelber 1983; Kelber 2013). Here is a diagram that reflects the assumptions of a modern print culture.

Single author >>fixed text>>silent reader alone and in private

In narrative criticism a print medium mentality assumes that there was a single author who composed in the act of writing a manuscript for readers and that, in that task, the author had access to written traditions (such as writings considered to be Scriptures) for quotation and allusion. I have used the term inter-*text*-uality to refer to these relationships. I have assumed an original written manuscript that was intended to be fixed so that it could be copied accurately and subsequently read silently in private or read aloud to a group. This "autograph" copy functioned like a first printing from a press, except that, in antiquity, the text became "corrupted" in the course of being copied by hand. Text critics work from numerous later extant copies to attempt to reconstruct the text of *the* original manuscript (now lost), which in turn serves as the basis for our narrative analysis (for a critique of this approach, see Parker 1997 and Botha 2007).

Furthermore, scholars have frequently had a picture of the ancient world that involves other assumptions true of a print medium, namely that education was available to much of the population, that most people could read at some level, and that manuscripts were inexpensive and widely accessible. In light of this common picture, biblical critics have tended to assume that the ancient experience of reading aloud to a group differed only slightly from the modern experience of an individual reading or studying the text silently and in private. Hence, it seemed appropriate to study biblical stories with the assumptions of a print culture.

However, the more we have learned about ancient media, the more we have come to realise that our modern print assumptions are anachronistic and problematic for ancient texts. The challenge, then, is to embrace a new paradigm of orality and performance (Rhoads and Dewey 2014).

PERFORMANCE CRITICISM

This challenge has led to the development of performance critical tools to analyse ancient texts and traditions with a fresh set of assumptions that reflect ancient media (Shiner 2003; Rhoads 2006; Hearon and Ruge-Jones 2009; Rhoads 2013; Rodriguez 2014; Rhoads 2016). The word performance is an encompassing term that refers to formal and informal presentations of traditions given from memory or read aloud by lectors, presumably in lively ways. Performance covers many genres: storytelling, orations, epistles, wisdom sayings, and apocalyptic traditions, among others. In this article, I am using the Gospel of Mark as a case study. Therefore, the relevant genre of ancient performances to be considered is that of storytelling.

Performance criticism seeks to reconstruct the dynamics of ancient societies as predominantly oral cultures and to reconceive the New Testament (biblical) writings as witnesses to oral performances within those cultures. This re-conception does not depict

a divide between ancient writings and ancient performances—there were complex and dynamic interactions between ancient writings and ancient oral performances. Rather, this re-conception reflects a fundamental shift from modern silent reading of print to vocal sound in ancient oral performances. This shift involves not just vocal sound but embodied performance. Performances were embodied in a time and place by a performer with a participating audience. Performance criticism shifts the centre of gravity from ancient manuscripts to the ancient performance events to which biblical manuscripts bear witness.

With regard to studying the gospel narratives, it is important to point out that narrative criticism and performance criticism are not opposites. They both deal with narratives. As such, the move from narrative criticism to performance criticism is a shift from narrative as a modern experience in the silent, individual reading of print to narrative as an experience by the public audience of an ancient performance. In other words, the shift is not from narrative to performance but from narrative in modern print to narrative in ancient performance. As such, the shift is a transition to a different medium. Therefore, one asks: How is the Gospel of Mark experienced as a performance? What does it mean to study Mark's narrative as a performance? And how is this different from studying the narrative in a modern print medium?

As noted above, performance criticism envisions ancient societies as predominantly oral cultures (Achtemeier 1988; Ong 1982; Kelber 1983; Niditch 1996). Scholars generally view ancient Mediterranean cultures as pre-industrial agrarian societies with strong urban centres (Rohrbaugh 1993)..Two to three per cent of the people were wealthy and powerful elites, with some merchants and retainers serving the elites. There was no middle class. About 90 per cent of the populace were peasants. Seven or eight per cent were on the boundaries of society due to illness, disability, or impurity. Studies in the last few decades have shown that for the most part literacy rates mirrored this class configuration, with literacy mostly limited to the elites and some of their retainers, often slaves (Harris 2004; Hezser 2001; but see Johnson 2010; Hurtado 2014). Many scholars now argue that the educational system was for elites only, and not the general populace, and that in families and in public, traditions were passed on predominantly from memory by word of mouth. In contrast to the elites, for example, most early Palestinian Jewish communities had few or no manuscript scrolls. On average, it is likely that as few as five per cent of the overall population could read or write at all, and even then with varying degrees of facility. Literacy rates and skills varied from place to place, particularly in urban (higher) and rural (lower) areas and between males (higher) and females (lower). *All*, including elites, were steeped in orality.

Given this picture of society, we can imagine that the earliest followers of Jesus in the first century, who came predominantly from the lower classes, were embedded in this traditional oral culture; and they experienced the Gospels as oral storytelling. For first-century Christians, a Gospel was not experienced as writing on a scroll, but as a story in performance. Overwhelmingly, the Gospels were experienced as performance events.

ANCIENT MEDIA MODEL

Proponents of performance criticism argue that the media model of the ancient world contrasts with the modern print model in four interrelated and interwoven dynamics: oral speech, memory, scribing/scrolls, and performance (Boomershine 1989; Loubser 2012; Kelber 2013). These dynamics occur in diverse and complex interrelationships at any given time, in any given ancient culture, and for any given performance event. Here is a brief profile of the four dynamics of an ancient media model:

Orality

In predominantly oral cultures most traditional knowledge and values were shared during face-to-face social communications. In this context speech, even ordinary language, was formulated so as to be powerful and memorable—through emotional appeal, with sayings, parables, wisdom, stories, and orations, all of which made use of alliteration, assonance, parallelism, chiastic ordering, and so on. In addition, social interactions involved the whole person, voice and body, such that oral communication events could be subtle, nuanced, and yet rich in meaning. Words were also considered to have power; they constituted speech-acts. We now need to take what we have learned from narrative criticism about “literary devices” and reconceive them as “speech arts” in an oral medium.

Memory

Ancient Mediterranean societies, even small groups of elites, were memorial cultures more than they were manuscript cultures (Carruthers 1990; Horsley, Draper, and Foley 2006; Kelber 2013; Thatcher 2014). Memory was more important than writing as the repository of tradition. Ancient writing did not replace memory; it aided memory. Men and women with gifts of memory stood out. Ancients cultivated natural memory. Compositions were structured to facilitate the memory of both the performer and the audience. Performers developed technologies using layouts of rooms in a house or images of animals to recall sequences of lengthy compositions (Yates 1996). Memory was one of the five key components of the curriculum of classical rhetoric (Olbricht 1997; Reynolds 2013).

Many scholars of antiquity are convinced that some ancients were indeed able to recite *lengthy* compositions such as Homer for example, from memory (Carruthers 1990). It would not have been unusual for a storyteller to recount a Gospel from memory, a performance of which would have taken between two hours (Mark and John) and four hours (Matthew and Luke). There are, therefore, good reasons to think that in the first century, at their inception, the Gospels were told in their entirety, either through memory or by being read aloud by lectors. Only later into the second century, were they divided into sections for presentation in worship—which, even so, did not bring an end to their performances as a whole.

Scribing and Scrolls

Ancient writing and scrolls were not the same as modern print. Scribes wrote in a cross-legged position or sitting on a stool. A papyrus roll was draped over the lap. Scribes wrote mostly from dictation or memory rather than copying from one manuscript to another (Small 1997). Early Christian scribes were probably not professional scribes (Parker 1997). Also, they would have been willing to change what they were writing; partly because at least in the first century they did not regard what they were scribing as scripture. In addition, scribes made changes as performers did, by editing and adapting what they wrote to time and circumstance.

The writing on scrolls in itself would not automatically have made public reading an easy task (for a contrasting position see Johnson 2010; Hurtado 2014). Scrolls were not easy to handle while telling a story. Furthermore, the script on Greek scrolls of this period was comprised of columns of lines in a continuous sequence of upper case letters without break—no spaces between words, no sentences or paragraphs, no punctuation, no lower case letters, and no chapter and verse designations. The syllable was the basic unit of sound. The scrolls provided a written record of syllabic sounds to be recycled back into sound, thus aiding the memory in preparation for a performance. Readers/performers would need to sound out the syllables in order to know what was being said, much as we hum the notes when we "read" a musical score. For all but the highly trained, it must have been difficult to keep or recover one's place. Hence, one would have to know the content virtually by memory so as to make a public reading lively and meaningful (Botha 2012b). It is reasonable to imagine therefore, that the Gospel of Mark for example, was composed in mind and memory and most often performed from memory without the aid of a scroll (Foley 1988; Foley 1995; Wire 2011; Dewey 2013a). It was probably put in writing through oral dictation to a scribe.

Performance

Performance criticism encourages us to think of the text of the Gospel of Mark as a document that was derived from and meant for performance, somewhat like a script for a play or a musical score. Those who study drama consider it critical to their analysis to study not only the scripts but also to experience performances. Musicologists do not limit their study of music to poring silently over musical scores. They experience performances as a basis for interpretation, understanding, and implied impact (cf. Small 1998). In the same manner, those of us who appreciate the Gospels as narratives should no longer be content simply to read and study them silently. Rather, we now need to incorporate the experience of performances (our own and those of others) along with the study of performances of the Gospels as part of our efforts to understand their meaning and impact.

By acting out the story the performer brings the story world of a Gospel to life in space and time and seeks to draw the communal audience into that world so as to have

a particular impact on them. Performances in the first century would have differed in style, depending on the size of the audience and the location. If done in a public square or marketplace, the performance would likely have been louder and more dramatic. If performed for a small group in the limited space of a house church, a performance might have been more subdued and intimate. Whether performed from memory or read out aloud, from what we know from descriptions in rhetorical handbooks, public and private performances alike were animated and sparked emotions. And audiences participated actively in the performances with comments, gestures of approval, and emotional responses such as weeping and laughing (Shiner 2003).

PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNAL IDENTITY

Performance events were related to the collective memory and the communal identity of the audience (Kirk and Thatcher 2005; Horsley 2013a; Kelber 2013; Thatcher 2014). Informal teaching and formal performances of community traditions were the primary means by which defined ethnic groups in a predominantly oral culture taught, reinforced, modified, or even subverted their customs, values, history, and beliefs. The collective memories were sometimes passed on faithfully, with little change, to reinforce cherished values and beliefs. At other times the traditions were transformed and reshaped in order to revitalise the community or to address new challenges. Performances in such ever-changing contexts made the traditions into a living body of memory in the community.

Based on an understanding of performance as a complex media event, how can we visualise performances? Performances may be described as follows:

Composer/performer >>Performances [by memory or lively reading]>> Communal audience

Composers

In performance criticism, we recognise that the composer of Mark was already immersed in oral traditions about Jesus. We therefore, prefer the term "composer" or "performer" to that of "author"—because the compositions were created in and for oral performances. Because of the prevalence of oral traditions and the paucity of manuscripts, the composer of Mark also likely drew from oral knowledge of the writings of Scripture rather than directly from the writings themselves.

Performances

In performance criticism we imagine a fluid performance as well as a fluid text. Many performance critics contend that the Gospel of Mark was composed and re-composed as it was re-performed from memory by performers, sometimes even by people who were not literate. Some upper-class depictions of orators on vases of the time show orators holding a closed scroll in the left hand, leaving the right hand free for gestures. The

performers who used a manuscript to read publicly would also have relied heavily on memory. A lector would be limited in their gestures and movements because they would need both hands to manage the scroll (Nasselqvist 2014).

In telling from memory or even reading from a scroll, performers may have aimed to be faithful to the traditions about Jesus. Many factors of orality would have served to stabilise the performances of Mark, such as a tightly woven narrative with speech arts and memory arts embedded in the story. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that performers did not aim for rote memorisation or verbatim repetition because with each performance the performer changed, the audiences changed, the context changed, and the [intended] impact of a performance also changed. Performers adapted the material in order to have a persuasive impact on the audience before them. A Gospel may have been performed repeatedly by the originating composer, revised and adapted, then re-composed, refined, and adapted by other performers—addressing the diverse situations of particular audiences (Dewey 2013a). Furthermore, scribes interacted with performances and functioned with flexibility like performers—hence, divergences in manuscripts would also have contributed to variability in the performance history (Carr 2005; Parker 1997; Person 1998).

It is difficult to say how much or how little freedom performers and scribes took with the Gospel of Mark as it was passed along. Consider how freely Matthew and Luke recomposed and incorporated Mark. In any case, our extant texts of Mark's Gospel represent diverse traditions in a much larger pool of oral stories and sayings of Jesus.

Communal audiences

Unlike contemporary audiences where people who gather for a play or a film do not know each other, audiences of Gospel performances would most likely have been a community of believers or people from the same village or a section of a city. This communal experience would have been very different from the experience of an individual reading a printed Gospel alone and in silence (de Waal 2015; Shiner 2003).

In seeking to make concrete these dynamics, one of the goals of performance criticism is to construct possible "performance scenarios" as a basis for understanding the potential meanings of each Gospel in performance and its potential impacts on specific communities (Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie 2011; Rhoads et. al. 2012, 146–151; Rhoads 2015). Elements of performance events include: the social location and role of a performer, the composition being performed, the dynamics of its performance, the make-up of the audience and their participation in the performance event, the potential responses of the audience after the performance, the physical location of the performance, the cultural ethos and resonances of their traditions, the issues faced by the community, and the historical context. *And*, we use all that we have learned from narrative criticism and transpose it into orality, where some things about narrative criticism are reinforced and amplified, some fade into the background, others are changed, and in a fundamental sense, everything is different. We now turn to examples of these issues.

PART 2: FROM NARRATIVE AS PRINT TO NARRATIVE AS PERFORMANCE: EXAMPLES FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The illustrative discussion that follows makes use of the Markan Gospel. We concentrate on a narrative text for the sake of expediency. The New Testament epistles have been studied extensively in this regard (Botha 1993; Loubser 2012, 87–98; Oestreich 2016).

PERFORMANCE CRITICISM OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK: OVERVIEW

Before discussing specific instances in which performance criticism of an oral Mark differs from the narrative analysis of Mark in print, it will help to give an overview of performance critical studies of the Gospel of Mark.

There have been several full-scale performance critical studies of Mark. Richard Swanson was the first to explore Mark's performative potential in *Provoking the Gospel of Mark* (2005). In *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark*, Whitney Shiner gave a thorough analysis from many ancient sources of the rhetorical dynamics that can shape our understanding of how the Gospel of Mark was performed: emotion, delivery, memorisation, gesture, and movement, as well as the audience (2003). In *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance*, Antoinette Wire argues (2010) that Mark was composed by a series of performers over several decades, each of whom made distinctive contributions to the developing story (Horsley 2013b; Horsley 2013c; Horsley 2013d). Richard Horsley provides an overall analysis of Mark, based on how it might be heard by a Judean audience in interaction with the traditions of Israel, in *Hearing the Whole Story* (2001).

In articles and book chapters a number of studies have dealt with the interaction between the oral and written dynamics of Mark. Werner Kelber argues that the written medium of Mark differed sharply in its meaning and effect from the oral medium of Mark upon which the written Mark was based (Kelber 1983; Thatcher 2008). In subsequent articles, Kelber revised and refined his earlier thesis (2013). Other authors such as Richard Horsley have challenged Kelber's early views and have argued for a priority of the oral dynamics of Mark in performance (Horsley 2015).

Kelber has also worked with the oral dynamics of Mark in relation to the traditions of Israel with which an audience would be familiar. Horsley has drawn on the work of John Miles Foley to demonstrate the ways in which references or allusions to events in Israel's history would have conjured up the whole scenario of the event from which they came (Horsley 2013). Botha (2012c) and Kathy Maxwell (2014) have also explored Mark's use of Judean traditions in an ethos of orality.

Several studies have dealt with the distinctly oral features of Mark's choice of language. In *The Oral Ethos of the Early Church*, Joanna Dewey collected a number of articles depicting the interweaving patterns that serve to structure Mark's story orally

and deal with the interpretive implications (2013a). James Maxey has shown the power dynamics of language in Mark as speech-acts (2010; cf. Upton 2006). Lee and Scott (2009, 199–224) proposed sound mapping as a way to explore the oral impact on a listening audience, with a treatment of the Markan crucifixion scene as one of their case studies.

The idea that performance criticism developed from and effectively draws upon and transforms narrative criticism, as this article argues, is evident in many instances. Consider Kelly Iverson's edited collection titled *From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate* (2014a). David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie revised their narrative analysis in *Mark as Story* to reflect a holistic approach to Mark in performance (2011; 2004a). Ruge-Jones (2009) has shown the distinct nature of the role of the Markan narrator in performance criticism in distinction from narrative criticism. Hearon (2010a; 2014) and Iverson (2011) have each explored characterisation in the performance of Mark. Iverson (2010) also analysed the dynamics of the messianic secret in the performance of Mark. Furthermore, Iverson (2013) analysed the manner in which humour works with a gathered audience in contrast to the experience of someone reading silently and alone.

Several studies have focused on the ancient audiences of Mark. Ruge-Jones (2014) seeks to see what we can learn by distinguishing actual audiences from the audiences of Jesus depicted in the story world. Boomershine (2011; 2014) has argued that our understanding of the rhetoric of Mark changes when we consider the impact of a story when the performer has all the characters in the story address the audience directly as the object of their dialogue. As a basis for interpreting Mark, Rhoads et al. (2011) developed an imagined performance scenario of an audience in a village in Palestine experiencing the Gospel of Mark just after the Roman-Judean War of 66 to 70 CE.

Most recently, Thomas Boomershine, in *The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's Passion-Resurrection Narrative* (2015), has produced a full-scale performance commentary on the passion-resurrection narrative in Mark, dealing with sound patterns, characters, traditions, audience, performance characteristics, and much more. Given the number of sessions and papers presented at academic societies that deal with performance criticism, along with a website devoted to it and the Biblical Performance Criticism series at Wipf and Stock Press, there is little doubt that a steady stream of books and essays will continue to take the discipline forward in relation to Mark's Gospel.

EXAMPLES FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK

What follows are reflections on some dynamics of the Gospel of Mark in performance as distinguished from an analysis of the study of Mark as a printed text to be read in silence and in private. As a literary work, the Gospel of Mark is a narrative in print. As a performance, Mark is a story in motion—it is an event. The distinct genre is storytelling.

In this analysis we are dealing with the telling of Mark as a story, not as theatre or rhetorical oratory, even though we can learn much about storytelling from these other genres.

The Performance Brings the Story to Life in the Here and Now

The performer is not just reciting the story. The performer is a storyteller who in many ways is also *at the same time* acting out the story in the course of telling it. This means that in storytelling, the past time and past space of the story world are collapsed into the present time and space of the "stage" as the storyteller is acting it out (Iverson 2014b). It is precisely this collapsing, this telescoping of the events in the story world, with the actions before a live audience that explains how a performance gives the story a sense of immediacy, a sense for the audience that the "there and then" becomes the "here and now."

This immediacy includes settings, plot events, and characters. As such, there is a correlation between the *settings* in the story world and locations in the performance space. For example, when the performer says that Jesus went to Capernaum in the story world, this is a stage direction for the performer to make some movement in the performance space. The same correlation is true for *events* in the unfolding plot of the story. When the story describes an action in the story world, such as Jesus laying his hands on someone for healing or Judas kissing Jesus, this evokes at the same time a gesture from the performer to help the audience imagine it. Also, the performer brings each *character* to life in the present time of the performance by portraying the dialogue and actions as if the performer *were* the character in that moment when the character in the story world is speaking or acting. Thus, when the performer tells us that in the story world a suppliant pleads with Jesus or that a demon screams, this then is also a direction for the performer to say the suppliant's line as a plea and to express the demon's voice loudly. Characters become "real people" in the performance space; they are not merely functions of a plot (Hearon 2014).

The Performer Draws the Audience into the Story World

In storytelling the performer involves the audience in the performance space (Shiner 2003, 143– 152, 171–190). This is different from a theatrical play where there is an imaginary "fourth wall" in the front of the stage area that separates the action on stage from the audience. The audience observes and is not part of the play. By contrast, in storytelling the performer addresses the audience directly as if there were no fourth wall, so that the audience is encompassed in the performance space. The performer can raise the fourth wall when engaging in characterisations by projecting one character talking to another imagined character "on stage." Or the performer can breach this imaginary fourth wall selectively even when enacting a character on stage. For example, when the performer takes the role of the character of John the Baptist, "John" can address

the audience directly as though the audience members were the crowds who had come for baptism (Mark 1:7–8). Or consider the end of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse, where Jesus says, "And what I say to you [the four disciples] I say to all: Keep awake" (Mark 13:37). Here, the performer as "Jesus" may turn from addressing the imagined disciples on stage to address the audience directly.

In these ways, in addition to being encompassed in the story space, the audience becomes part of the *story world* by playing the role of the imagined characters who are being addressed by one "character" or another (Boomershine 2014). The performer may even move among the audience addressing this or that person as a suppliant or this or that group in the audience as disciples or Pharisees. This dynamic relationship between performer and audience brings a change to our ways of thinking about the rhetorical impact of the Gospel, because it makes us consider an audience when an audience includes both supporters and opponents of the Jesus movement.

STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

The techniques for telling and acting out a story make it lively and real. The performance arts of antiquity (and modernity) all serve this purpose. Many of these arts relate to the use of the voice—*inflection,* which is relevant to how every line is delivered—*volume* as when Jesus gave a loud cry from the cross (15:37)—*pace of performing*, such as saying slowly the first and last words of the Gospel (1:1; 16:8) or saying Jesus' agonising prayer at Gethsemane (14:36)—*pitch,* as when Jairus pleads with Jesus to heal his dying daughter (5:23)—and *voice characterisations* to distinguish the different figures in the story. Other performance arts involve the body—that is, *gestures* as when Jesus puts his fingers in a deaf man's ears (7:31) and *posture,* as when Jesus looks up to heaven when praying over the bread (6:41). *Facial expressions* feature prominently in ancient and modern performance arts—for example, scowls made by opponents of Jesus when accusing him, a look of puzzlement expressed by the disciples, or eye messages as when the storyteller displays the crowds being agog in amazement over Jesus performing healings. Drawing mainly from rhetorical handbooks and other ancient literature, as well as artistic representations in antiquity, we know some things about what these arts were and how they may have been expressed in antiquity (Aldrete 1999; Shiner 2003, 127–142).

The Role of the Narrator

In print the narrator is effaced (as a third person omniscient narrator) so that the reader can focus on the story, with little awareness of the role the narrator is playing. By contrast, in performance, the narrator is embodied. As such, the narrator is never effaced, but is always present as the performer telling the story. The performer assumes the role of the narrator, as though witnessing the events being depicted (Ruge-Jones 2009).

Although many of the traits of the narrator that give authority to the narrator when the story is being read silently in print are also present in performance, the effects are different. For example, the omniscience of a literary narrator becomes qualified as the extensive but limited knowledge of a human narrating (Ruge-Jones 2009). Furthermore, in performance, the authority of the narrator is also affected by the audience's personal knowledge of the performer—for example, his or her social location and the integrity of the performer in the eyes of the audience: Is the performer a follower of Jesus who embodies the values and dynamics of the story? The authority of the performer is also established by the quality of the performance—if the performer performs poorly, his or her performance will clearly diminish the effect of the Gospel story (Rhoads 2016; Ruge-Jones 2014).

Performance as Interpretation

We usually think of interpretation as commentary on a written text. However, in acting out the Gospel each performance *is* an interpretation. With print an individual reader uses his or her imagination to picture the story and then comments on its meaning for others. By contrast, the performer as narrator guides the imagination of the audience directly in verbal and visual ways to convey meaning and cause an impact.

As such, performance both limits and expands interpretation. On the one hand, performance limits interpretations because in a performance the performer has to make interpretive choices about how to deliver every line and act out every scene. By presenting one way of understanding the story, these choices exclude other interpretive choices. For example, the choice to portray the disciples as ultimate failures in following Jesus precludes their portrayal as ultimately faithful. On the other hand, multiple performances expand interpretations because the narrative can be performed in many different ways. Mainly, however, performance expands and amplifies interpretation because it is in a different medium.

The Performer Employs Interpretive Techniques in Telling the Story

The performer infers from the story itself what choices to make in performance. For example, we learned from narrative criticism a rich plethora of ways in which the narrator of the Gospel of Mark uses what we have termed "literary" devices to engage the reader—repetition, verbal threads, series of three, riddles, questions, type scenes with variation, irony, summaries. In performance, these features are still very much in play; and a performer can shape and magnify the effect of them in sound. For example, the storyteller can help to clarify the allegorical meaning of the parables by enunciating each item of the allegory. Or the storyteller can go to the same place on the stage space to show a connection between three events in a series, such as the three passion predictions.

Or questions can be posed by the storyteller in different ways to reflect questions that are accusatory, that reveal ignorance, imply chiding, or are rhetorical, expecting no answer. Raising the eyebrows can suggest irony in the manner in which Jesus rebukes his disciples. The emphatic repetition of the same instructions to the disciples in the sequential feeding stories can elicit humour and reinforce the denseness of the disciples.

Furthermore, owing to the development of "sound mapping," we can now see where the performer was meant to make pauses and transitions (Lee and Scott 2009; Nasselqvist 2014). The units of meaning are ordered to provide breaks for breathing and pauses for transitions. These patterns of sound in performance also offer clues to the listening audience about how to follow the narrative line. For example, Lee and Scott (2009, 199–224) show that the parameters of the crucifixion scene can be determined by coherent and distinctive sound structures (15:24– 41), which alert the performer where to pause before moving on to the empty tomb scene and guiding the audience to bring closure to one scene before entering into the next. Furthermore, from sound mapping we can see how the sound effects of certain words and phrases can mimic the action being described. For example, the taunting of Jesus at the cross is punctuated by hissing and spitting sounds in the language (Lee and Scott 2009, 206). The performer can make such action-sounds emphatic and powerful. Also, the performer can emphasise the euphony of certain sayings as a means to fix the words in memory—such as the chiastic structure involved in sayings such as "For those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life . . . will save it" (8:35). These various patterns of sound provide new ways to grasp better both meaning and rhetorical impact alike.

Delivery as a Technique to Convey Meaning

How a line is delivered is integral to the meaning of that line. A silent reader of literature does not consciously have to make a decision about delivery, but a performer does. For example, if Jesus tells the disciples, "Don't you understand yet?" (8:21), the performer *must* choose to deliver that line in such a way that it will express whether Jesus is pleading, impatient, angry, disparaging, sarcastic, disappointed, or frustrated. The choice of the delivery technique will determine how the whole Gospel of Mark is understood, including the characterisation of Jesus, and whether the disciples in the story world are discredited or not. In addition to the voice, the performer's entire body conveys the delivery. Gestures, facial expressions, eye movement, body position are not add-ons but integral parts of the dynamics that determine meaning and impact in a performance.

The performer looks for clues in the story to infer what range of choices may be available to express meaning and rhetorical impact by delivery. Because every line of an entire Gospel is expressed aloud and is embodied, the performer must choose what the distinctive delivery will be for each and every line. Imagining how a line can be delivered in different ways is a critical means to take into account the diversity of

meanings and the potential impacts that different performers may have expressed in performance (for example, Pelias 1992).

EMOTIONS AS INTEGRAL TO MEANING AND IMPACT

Expressing emotions is a critical way of expressing meaning and rhetoric. Ancient rhetoricians believed that stirring emotions was the most powerful way of transforming an audience—through shock, anger, amazement, fear, hope, laughter, and more. Just as every spoken line is delivered with voice and body, in the same manner, every line carries an emotional affect at some level, be it a strong expression or a subtle range of tones. For example, the dominant motif of fear in Mark can be shown by the performer with voice and body across the range of characters, including the disciples, the different authority figures, as well as Jesus at Gethsemane, and culminating in the women running away from the tomb in terror. The emotions in the story are crucial to conveying an interpretation of the story—what they are, how they are expressed, how they persuade, and how they invite commitment.

How do emotions work? In performance we do not just read *about* the demons' fear of Jesus—we *experience* their terror acted out before us. Or, in regard to the mockery of Jesus at the cross in Mark, Whitney Shiner remarks that "When I read the mockery silently, I usually think of the cleverness of Mark's irony. When I perform it, I think about how nasty the mockery is" (2003, 182). Even a storyteller's stunned silence after the recounting of Jesus' death can convey emotions of shock and sorrow.

Emotional Catharsis

A narrative critic can chart the emotions referred to and implied by a Gospel story. But what is significant here is not just a matter of identifying a series of disparate emotions, but discerning the cumulative impact of a sequence of similar or different emotions. Some literary critics divide the Gospel into two halves—the first half dealing with miracles and the second half dealing with suffering, considering whether the two parts are unrelated or contradict each other. By contrast in performance, the second half builds on the first, for it is only after an audience has the repeated experience of the emotion of amazement at Jesus doing one astounding work of power after another in the first half of Mark that the audience is prepared to accept and be emotionally impacted by the tragic events of his suffering in the second half of Mark (Dewey 2013e, 123– 124). Another example involves the crucifixion scene—after experiencing vicariously Jesus' agitation in Gethsemane, his subsequent abandonment and humiliation, and his poignant cry of lament in the crucifixion, the real-life audience will be better prepared to go through such an experience in their own lives. A series of emotions can create a catharsis, especially if a community experiences the performance together and especially given the immediacy of the performed events in the here and now. An emotional catharsis evoked

by performance was likely a profound means to engender transformation, commitment, and action in shaping new Christian communities.

Mark's Communal Audiences

Mark may have been composed to address different audiences. After all, the whole point was for the disciples to spread the Gospel to all the Gentile nations. At one occasion or another, the audience may have consisted of a small group in a house church after a meal, in a synagogue, or at an urban tenement. Or it may have consisted of a larger group of disparate people in the town centre, a public hall, or an open area in or between villages. Most likely, there would have been a mix of people. For example, in a village square in Palestine there may have been Judeans, gentiles, males, females, peasants, craftsmen, expendables, some authority figures, the sick and the disabled, people considered unclean, and so on. This variability invites multiple faithful interpretations, based on different scenarios of performer, audience, and context (Rhoads 2015). For example, a performance to peasant men and women with various ailments would have emphasised compassion and hope through identification of the audience with the peasant figures in the story who come to Jesus with ailments. If authorities were present, especially near the time of the Roman-Judean War, a performance might have put into stark relief the issues at stake in Jesus' conflict with Judean and Roman leaders. A performer may have been oppositional or deferential toward authorities present at the performance.

Audience Participation

We know from ancient sources that audiences contributed actively to performances. A silent reader is mainly receptive. The silent reader negotiates meaning but does not change the words on a page. The responses of an actual audience can affect the words of the performer or the way lines are delivered. A performer might have shortened or lengthened what was performed depending on the interest of an audience. We cannot speak about performances, therefore, without talking about the involvement of audiences.

Communal audiences react differently than individual readers. Shiner (2003, 143–152) points out that communal responses can be infectious. People laugh out loud together. They may applaud or cheer. They may vocally express joy over a healing or gasp in amazement at a miracle. Ancient positive responses might have included cheering, clapping, foot stomping, standing, laughter, or weeping. Negative responses might have included shouts of disapproval, covering the ears, or even walking out. Individuals may have been emboldened by the group responses to speak out an individual response. Humour was designed to elicit laughter. For example, the denseness of the disciples in Mark is a set-up for humour. Iverson shows how the disciples' dialogue in the third boat scene elicits audience laughter by contrasting the disciples' previous experience of feeding crowds twice before with very little bread (and even now having a loaf with them) over against their words, "We have no bread" (8:14–16). And Jesus

replies, “Don’t you understand yet!” (8:21) (Iverson 2013). Overall, unless silence was particularly appropriate to a certain scene, it was considered an insult not to give overt verbal and physical reactions to a performance.

One way to study audience participation is to identify those places in the storytelling that seem to call for a response by an audience. Shiner refers to “applause lines” as triggers for audience response (2003, 153–170). I prefer “response lines” since the responses included many more reactions than simply applause. The performer will play to these cues for audience response, much as a stand-up comedian will set up the audience for a line designed to bring laughter. Or much as a United States (US) president in a State of the Union address will deliver lines designed to elicit cheering, clapping, and standing to show support for what has been said. We need to pay attention to response lines as a basis for interpretation. And we need to develop criteria to identify possible triggers in a script for response, such as language that is rhythmic or grating, climaxes in the narrative such as when Jesus verbally defeats opponents, places where the crowds in the story respond with expressions of amazement over a healing, or at moments of extreme pathos, as when Jesus agonises at Gethsemane. The experience of performing to an actual audience in a modern language is also a means to identify where some response triggers are to be found. Through the embodiment of a saying or by means of pauses or when building to a climax, the performer can elicit audience responses at these trigger points. Of course, ancient audiences may also have intruded with questions or raised objections. Performers would no doubt know how to handle hecklers. Mark’s Gospel may have been composed to anticipate audience resistance to the story through the articulations of misunderstandings by the disciples and through the objections of the Pharisees.

Audience in Historical and Cultural Context

Audiences experienced a performance in their own historical context and in light of their own communal traditions. Hence, they did not experience it in a vacuum. They had local cultural mores, religious traditions, and specific historical circumstances. We need to imagine how the performer drew on the traditions of Israel and the traditions about Jesus to create an “echo chamber”, wherein the story could speak to the audience’s particular context—affirming the customs and traditions they already knew or challenging them (Foley 1995; Horsley 2013a; Kelber 2013; Maxwell 2014). References in the Gospel to historical figures, traditional place names, stories that were analogues for events in Israel’s past, as well as quotations, allusions, and sayings—all of these conjured up associations with Israel’s history. In performance to an audience who knew these traditions aurally, these details served as metonymic references (a partial reference invokes memory of the whole) that led hearers to recall entire events with which they were familiar from the experiences of hearing stories from scripture and tradition. Horsley gives an example of how the sea crossings in Mark would evoke the memory of the exodus event as a whole (Horsley 2001, 64). In addition, the story proffered

associations with the circumstances of the audience's immediate historical context—for example, Jesus' references to persecution, the entrance to Jerusalem, the predictions about the destruction of the Temple, and the crucifixion by the Roman soldiers—all served as indirect commentary on the Roman-Judean War. We can also imagine how the story may have played out in the communal audience *after* a performance of the Gospel, including conversation with the performer, as the community sought to deal with the impact and implications of the performance on their community. All these efforts at constructing a performance scenario make the imagination so much more concrete as a basis for interpreting the story.

Rhetorical Impacts on Audiences

Performance shifts the centre of gravity from a focus on meaning to a focus on rhetorical impact. Rhetorical analysis seeks to articulate the overall purpose and effect that the Gospel of Mark may have had on a particular ancient community.

A performer is acutely aware that the story is an act of communication. The performer is speaking the words directly to an audience in order to have an impact on them. Furthermore, in performance the focus is on how the story shapes or transforms not just an individual, but a *community*. In reader-response criticism, we have looked for responses of individual readers. Now we need to imagine how these Gospels in performance may have generated communal impacts and evoked communal responses in actual audiences.

The whole point of rhetoric is to persuade. But rhetorical impact is so much more than simply being persuaded to accept a particular point of view. It involves transformation through insight, emotion, new perceptions, changing relationships, subverting core values and instilling others, creating community, fostering commitments, provoking action, or engendering courage in the face of persecution. What are the potential goals of the performance of this Gospel in particular? And how does the performer accomplish them? The performer decides consciously (or perhaps unconsciously) what he or she determines ought to be the overall impact of the Gospel and then performs each line and episode in a manner that would lead the audience towards that experience.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTUS FOR PERFORMANCE CRITICISM

Unlike other biblical disciplines, performance criticism takes seriously the predominantly oral nature of the cultural ethos of early Christianity. In so doing it seeks to reimagine our extant texts as witnesses to performance events, thereby rethinking the experience of the Gospel and other New Testament compositions by the first Christians. To make such a transition requires reconceiving traditional disciplines and introducing new ones. The resulting benefits, in our understanding of the meaning and rhetorical impacts of texts such as the Gospel of Mark, are multiplying rapidly.

Performance criticism is still in its infancy as a discipline. While promising beginnings have been made, the full implications are yet to unfold. We are learning a great deal about the dynamics and ethos of oral cultures in general, as well as the oral/aural Mediterranean cultures of the first century in particular, including the many ways in which orality was interfacing and interrelating with writing and scrolls. We are exploring ancient genres in orality and seeking to discern the dynamics of performances by memory and performances by lectors. We are discerning the oral traces in the text with such techniques as sound mapping. We are constructing possible performance scenarios that give us concrete imaginative contexts for performances of the documents we have. We are doing contemporary performances in Greek and in translation as means to get in touch with the dynamics and sounds of performance.

Performance criticism is an exciting adventure in the field of biblical studies. It is important that we recognise it as a paradigm shift so that we embrace its revolutionary nature and grasp the changes it requires of us. Everything is different because it is all immersed in a new medium. As such, performance criticism calls forth from us fresh methods, new information, and a great stretch of the imagination.

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Online Resources

“Biblical Performance Criticism.” http://www.biblicalperformancecriticism.org.

“Orality, Print Culture, and Biblical Interpretation.” A documentary written, directed, filmed, and produced by Eugene Botha: http://youtu.be/ullfpF-YcoM.